

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Christ Calls Witnesses to the Stand John 5:30-38

Christians have been given a mission. We are to go and make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded us. This is our mission.

Are we pursuing that mission? Are we doing what we can to reach the lost? Are we doing what we can to build up the saints? If we are then we can be assured that we are following in the footsteps of Jesus, but if we are not then we should be willing to admit it.

It would be a wonderful thing if we all could be united in pursuing our mission as faithfully as Christ pursued His, but this certainly is not a given. This is why our study of the life of Christ and how He pursued His mission is so important. Hopefully it challenges us. Hopefully it challenges us to pursue our mission with the same energy that He pursued His mission.

This brings us back in our study of the Bethesda controversy in **John 5**. What have we considered so far?

We have considered the alleged *crime* in John 5:1-9. In these verses John details for us how Christ on the Sabbath healed a paralytic and told him to take up his bed and walk. What else have we considered?

We have considered the initial *investigation* in John 5:10-15. In these verses we see a group of certain religious Jews confronting the man who had been healed for carrying His bed on the Sabbath. Their investigation eventually led them to identify Christ as the one who had not only broken the Sabbath by healing the paralytic but also encouraged the paralytic to break the Sabbath as well. What else have we considered?

We have considered the decision to *prosecute* in John 5:16-18. These religious Jews after identifying Jesus as the one who healed the paralytic and who had encouraged him to take up His bed and walk were already, I believe, determined to punish Jesus. They had already come to the conclusion that He was a very real threat to their religious system. But when Christ responded to their initial approach with the words in **John 5:17**, "**My Father is working until now, and I myself am working**," they became even more determined to punish Jesus correctly believing that He had made Himself equal with God.

We are presently considering Christ's extensive defense against the religious Jews charge that He had been made *equal with God* (John 5:19-47). Christ's so-called defense is very intriguing because His defense appears designed to once again not diminish the hostility the Jews felt toward Him but rather only to increase it. It is intriguing because His so-called defense only takes Him step by step closer to the cross and the fulfillment of His mission. How does He begin this defense?

He begins this rather extended defense with a clear explanation of the *nature* of His equality with God (John 5:19-29). In **John 5:19-23** He emphasizes how He and His Father share the same nature, work, and honor concluding with a very hard-hitting statement of fact in **John 5:24**. In this verse He

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

tells them that if they would hear His words and believe Him who sent Him they would experience life.

He then goes on to reiterate what He has said in **John 5:19-24**, but this time He chooses to emphasize for them what they should expect if they choose not to hear His words and choose not to believe His Father in **John 5:25-29**. This particular section focuses on Christ as judge.

Through each section that we have covered up to this point in this Bethesda controversy we have seen a very decided march on the part of Christ toward Calvary. Through each section that we have covered in this Bethesda controversy we have seen a very purposed and concerted effort on the part of Christ to fulfill His mission.

And nothing will change as we will continue our study this weekend of Christ's extended defense in **John 5:19-47**. He will again do nothing to endear Himself to these religious Jews. He will continue to very unselfishly stoke the fires of hostility toward Him in His attempt to serve those in need of salvation. So, as He does this, what is the next step that He takes in His defense?

Jesus continues His rather extended defense by listing certain *witnesses* that should confirm for these Jews the validity of all that He has said (John 5:30-47). We will break this section into two parts. This week we will only consider the first part.

We are now ready to pick up the text at **John 5:30** and work our way down to **John 5:38**. Let me read this section of verses for you. **"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (31) If I alone bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true. (32) There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the testimony which He bears of Me is true. (33) You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. (34) But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. (35) He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. (36) "But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. (37) And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. (38) And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent."**

Let us first of all consider **John 5:30**. This verse transitions us from one major segment within Christ's defense to another. Let us begin by looking at how this verse is connected to the first major segment of Christ's defense. Let us consider how this verse is connected with His clear explanation of the nature of His equality with God in **John 5:19-29**.

Look at how **John 5:30** begins. It begins with the phrase, **"I can do nothing on my own initiative."** This phrase connects us back to the thought that Jesus shared with these religious Jews at the very beginning of this section in **John 5:19**.

Let me remind you of that phrase, **"The Son can do nothing of Himself"**. Jesus has been emphasizing this truth all the way from **verse 19** up to **verse 29**. He in effect has been telling them that if they have a beef about what He has been doing they really need to take their beef up with God. Why? They need to take up their beef with God because **"the Son can do nothing on His**

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

own" or in other words according to verse 30 "He can do nothing on His own initiative."

This would not only apply to His healing of the paralytic but also to whatever happens to them or others in respect to the final judgment, which according to **John 5:27-29**, He has been given all authority to execute. This is why Jesus goes on to say in **John 5:30** that His judgment will be just. His whole life as a good Son, was all about doing His Father's will as He saw it and as He heard it. This is reinforced in the rest of the verse.

Let us continue to read the rest of the verse. "**I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.**" This is a wonderful summary statement of the first major segment in Christ's rather extensive defense. This is a wonderful summary statement of **John 5:19-29**. But how does **John 5:30** help us transition into the second major segment of Christ's defense?

The first major segment was done totally in the third person or in other words Christ's clarification of His relationship with God in **John 5:19-29** was done totally in the third person. Throughout this passage Jesus repeatedly refers to Himself as "**the Son**" or "**the Son of God**" or "**the Son of Man.**" But now in **verse 30** He makes a dramatic shift as He continues to press forward in His defense. He begins to speak of Himself in the first person. Let us read **John 5:30** one more time but this time let us note all the "first person" references to Christ, "**I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.**"

By changing from the third person to the first person in John 5:30 Christ in effect presents Himself before the court for examination. And as He presents Himself for that examination He recognizes the importance of having other witnesses.

The first witness that He calls to support His claims is the *Father* Himself (John 5:31-32).

Let me read for you **John 5:31**, "**If I alone bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true.**" What does Jesus mean when He says this? For those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament you might immediately think of **Numbers 35:30** which requires in capital cases that the testimony of one witness be corroborated by the testimony of at least two other witnesses. In other words, in the Old Testament a person could not be sentenced to death based on the testimony of a single person. But I don't believe that this is the basic meaning of what Christ is saying here.

Even though the testimony of a single witness in a capital crime might not be acceptable in an Old Testament judicial proceeding it certainly did not mean that the testimony of that sole witness was false. But this is exactly what Christ is saying here in **John 5:31**. Christ is saying that if He alone bears witness to Himself, His witness is not true. But how can this be? Let me answer this question for you. In John 5:31 I believe that Jesus is saying that if He bore witness of Himself without the corroborating witness of His *Father* then His witness would not be true.

Doesn't this make perfect sense? Christ had just said that He only speaks what He hears the Father speaking in **John 5:30**. This would mean that He and His Father should be saying the same thing. If they are not saying the same thing and if His Father is not corroborating what Christ is saying about Himself then of course Christ's testimony about Himself should be considered false.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

But of course this is not the case. In **John 5:32** Jesus makes it clear that He knows that He and His Father are saying the same thing and therefore He knows that what He is saying is true. Let me read this verse for you, "**There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the testimony which He bears of Me is true.**" Christ was making some incredible claims as He described His relationship with His Father in **John 5:19-29**, but He is not struggling in anyway with the truthfulness of those claims because those are the same claims that "another" or in other words "His Father" is making about Him as well.

As Christ presents Himself for examination He acknowledges the importance of witnesses, but as He does this He wants them to know that the only witness that He felt was absolutely necessary to assure Himself that everything that He had said was true was His own Father. Obviously this would not necessarily be well received by the Jewish leaders themselves. Jesus in effect was continuing to press forward in His mission. He was continuing His steady march to cross.

Even though He did not need anyone other than His Father to confirm the truthfulness of what He had been saying, obviously these Jews lacked His spiritual insight. Therefore Jesus proceeds to present other witnesses to confirm what He has said. Who was the next witness?

The second witness that Jesus calls to support His claims is *John* the Baptist (John 5:33-35). Let me read for you **John 5:33-35**. "**You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. (34) But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. (35) He was a lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for while in his light.**"

In **John 5:33**, Jesus reminds these Jews that they had sent a delegation out to John in order to question him. This interaction led John the Baptist to declare that Jesus, God's lamb, was in fact God's Son. You can read about this encounter in detail in **John 1:19-36**. This was information that certainly had been made available to these religious Jews and which would have corroborated what Jesus was saying about Himself here in **John 5**. But even though this was important testimony listen to what Christ says next.

Let us read **John 5:34** "**But the witness which I receive is not from man.**" Jesus, though introducing John the Baptist as a witness to the validity of His claims, reminds the Jews that He does not need such a witness to know that His claims are true. He does not need a human witness because He implies by His words that He has already received the witness of His Father. He is therefore once again pointing toward the unique relationship that He enjoys with His Father. Though they may need to consider human witnesses He reminds them that He doesn't.

Though this might irritate them He does have a purpose beyond simply advancing His mission. Let us again look at **John 5:34** but this time we will read the entire verse. "**But the witness which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved.**"

This is interesting. Even though these religious Jews are incredibly angry with Jesus and want to kill Jesus His whole defense certainly is not designed to get Himself off the hook or simply to fulfill His mission but rather that they might participate in the blessing of His fulfilled mission when He

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

through His death on the cross atones not only for our sins but also for their sin. Was He hopeful that they might at the point in time that they would be saved? I would doubt it.

Let us go on to read **John 5:35**. "**He (referring to John the Baptist) was the lamp that was burning, and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.**" Though the religious Jews had at one time been enthusiastic about John the Baptist their spiritual interest in him had waned (John 5:35). How do we know that their interest in John the Baptist had waned? We know this because Jesus said they were only willing to rejoice "**for a while**" in his light.

This was not a positive commentary by Christ concerning these religious Jews. What good is it for us to be intrigued for a while by the light supplied to us through God's faithful servants only to turn away later in order to pursue our own personal agendas, which was the case here.

How would these religious Jews have responded to these words? I would doubt that they would have received these words well. I would think that it would have been quite obvious to them that Christ was not in any way commending them.

But even though Christ knew that these religious Jews were unable to see and hear the witness of His father and though Christ knew that these Jews had turned their backs on the light supplied to them by John the Baptist He continues to press on and supply for them another witness.

The third witness that Christ calls to support His claim are His works (John 5:36-38). Let me read this passage of scripture for you. "**But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. (37) And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. (38) " And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent."**

Let us look first at **John 5:36**. Notice that He says that the witness which I have is greater than that of John. What was the witness that Jesus had that was greater than the witness of John? Jesus tells the religious Jews that the works that the Father has given Him to do are a greater witness than the witness of John the Baptist. How could this be?

Let us begin by asking the question. What is Jesus referring to when He refers to the works that the Father has given Him? I would think that many of you might have immediately thought that Jesus was talking about miracles. If this is what you thought when Jesus referred to works then you might be missing the real thrust of what Jesus is saying.

When Jesus refers to works He is not referring to miracles. He is referring to the whole of His life because the whole of Christ's life is a perfect expression of what He sees His Father doing.

Listen to the words of Leon Morris commenting on this verse, "**God the Father is in the life that Jesus lived the whole of Jesus life, in His sinlessness, in His compassion, in His words of kindness, in all that He did. And because his whole life in all its variety showed forth God, it was all part of the witness borne to Jesus.**"

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Hopefully you now understand why the works of Christ would be considered by Christ to be greater than the witness of John. John's witness certainly very powerfully supported Christ's claims that He was equal with God having called Christ God's Son, but Christ's works being the perfect expression of His Father's life would certainly be a greater and more powerful witness to His equality with God than John's simple declaration.

This third witness, the witness of His works, then flows quite nicely into a very strong *rebuke* of His accusers in **John 5:37-38**.

Let me read for you **John 5:37**. "**And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me.**" What we have just learned in **John 5:36** about the works of Christ bearing witness is now stated in more personal terms. It is no longer the works bearing witness but is in fact the Father bearing witness to His Son in the life of His Son, or in other words in the works of His Son.

And how have they responded to His witness concerning His Son? Let us look again at **verse 37**. "**And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.**"

What a tragic statement. Other faithful Jews in the Old Testament had heard His voice: Noah heard His voice in **Genesis 7**, Abraham had heard His voice in **Genesis 12**, Moses had heard His voice in **Exodus 3** and in **Exodus 19** and that is not an exhaustive list of all that heard the voice of God in the Old Testament. Similarly others had seen His form: Abraham saw the Lord in the three men at the Oaks of Mamre in **Genesis 18**, Jacob wrestled with a visitor near Jabbok in Genesis 32, and the Lord is said to have spoken face to face with Moses in **Exodus 33**. They had ears to hear and eyes to see but not these religious Jews.

Then Jesus continues this thought into **John 5:38**. "**And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.**"

The Psalmist in **Psalm 119:11** declared, "**Thy word I have treasured in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.**" These religious Jews obviously did not enjoy the same relationship with the Lord or His Word. If these religious Jews like the Psalmist had treasured His words in their Hearts they would have believed Christ.

The only people who can say that they have the Word of God abiding in their hearts are those people who have embraced *Christ* as the Son of the living God.

CONCLUSION

But how can we know if we have embraced Christ as the Son of the living God? We can know that we have embraced Christ as the Son of the living God if we see ourselves walking in His footsteps. We can know that we have by faith embraced Christ if see ourselves like Christ seeking to fulfill our God given *mission*.