

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Christ Calls Witnesses to the Stand**

**John 5:39-47**

#### **Part 2**

We have been given a mission. We as Christ's church 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. Hopefully we are pursuing this mission.

Hopefully we are seeking for opportunities to share the Gospel of Christ with those who we believe may not know Christ as their Lord and Savior. Hopefully we are seeking opportunities to minister to our brothers and sisters in Christ seeking to encourage them in their pursuit of holiness and conformity to all that the Scriptures teach.

I believe that our eagerness to pursue these very things depends upon us approaching our study of God's Word in a way that will allow us to see Christ. I believe that our eagerness to pursue these very things depends upon us approaching our study of God's Word in a way that we find ourselves being confronted with the person of Christ, not in an academic way but rather in a personal life changing way. This thought brings us back to **John 5** and our study of the Bethesda controversy. 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 determined to punish Jesus, 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 because He had made Himself equal with God.

This additional accusation by these religious Jews resulted in Christ defending Himself. The additional charge by these religious Jews that He had made Himself equal with God led Christ to make an extensive defense in John 5:19-47.

This so-called defense is not designed, as we have seen before, to diminish the hostility the Jews felt toward Him but rather only to increase it. He designed His defense in this way in order to move Himself closer to the cross and the fulfillment of His mission. How did He begin this extended defense?

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He begins this rather extended defense with a clear explanation of the nature of His equality with God (John 5:19-29).

Jesus then continued His rather extended defense by listing certain witnesses that should have confirmed for these Jews the validity of all that He has said (John 5:30-47).

The first witness that He calls to support His claims is the Father Himself (John 5:30-32).

The second witness that Jesus calls to support His claims is John the Baptist (John 5:33-35).

The third witness that Christ calls to support His claim are His works (John 5:36-38).

We are now ready to conclude Christ's very extensive defense as we look at the fourth and final witness that Christ's presents in order to support His rather spectacular claim that He in fact was equal with God.

Let us now read the passage that we will be considering this weekend. Let me read for you **John 5:39-47**. "**You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; (40) and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life. (41) I do not receive glory from men; (42) but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. (43) I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him. (44) How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? (45) Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. (46) For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. (47) But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"**

Through each section that we have up to this point covered in this Bethesda controversy we have seen a very purposed 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 again nothing will change this weekend as we conclude our study of **John 5**. And I would hope once more that our study of these final verses would encourage us to be as faithful in seeking to fulfill our mission, as Christ was faithful in seeking to fulfill His mission. Let us now consider the fourth witness.

The fourth witness that Christ called to support His claim was the *Scriptures* (John 5:39-47). Let us begin by looking at **John 5:39**. The verse begins with the words, "**You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life.**"

The Jews spent a lot of time studying God's Word. What does the verse tell us? "**You search the Scriptures.**" How much time did they spend searching the Scriptures? I would think we would have to conclude that they spent a great deal of time searching the Scriptures. Why would I say this?

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Let us continue to read the verse. **"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life."** Jesus does not say to them that they search the Scriptures in order that they might be pointed to the one who can bring them life. No, this is not what He says. Rather He says, **"You search the Scriptures, because you think that IN THEM you have eternal life."** They looked at the study of the Word as an end in itself and not a means to an end.

Certainly the Scriptures do speak of life eternal but the study of Scriptures does not confer it, as certain rabbis appear to have taught.

Hillel, a prominent rabbi who lived just prior to the birth of Christ, said the following: **"More flesh, more worms; More wealth, more care; More maidservants, more lewdness; More menservants, more thieving; More women, more witchcraft; More torah more life. Whoso hath gained a good name, has gained it for himself, whoso hath gained the words of the Torah, hath gained for himself life in the world to come."**

What a tragedy! These religious Jews were caught up in a works salvation. The religious Jews believed that the better they *knew* Old Testament Scriptures, the better chance they had of being saved (John 5:39). They believed that if they were not only able to recite large sections of Scripture but knew how many words and how many letters there were in those sections that somehow it moved them closer to salvation. Obviously they were wrong.

But there is something even more tragic about their error. Let us continue to read the verse. **"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of me."** These Jews studied the Scriptures, but they were unable to see the forest for the trees. In other words, for all their emphasis on the words of the Old Testament, they were unable to see what the Old Testament was pointing toward.

Listen to the words of D.A. Carson, **"By predictive prophecy, by type, by revelatory event and by anticipatory statute, what we call the Old Testament is understood to point to Christ, His ministry, His teaching, His death and resurrection."** These religious Jews were continually looking at the window of the Old Testament, through which it was possible for the glory of Christ to be seen, but they never looked through the window, they only looked at the window.

Lynn and I just returned from visiting our daughter and son-in-law in Fairbanks Alaska. During the course of our stay with them we went to Denali National Park. The park spreads out from the base of Mount McKinley and covers over 6,000 square miles. While there, we decided to take a daylong bus trip into the park. But we did not take that trip in order to what? We did not take that trip in order to study the bus window. This is exactly what these religious Jews were doing when it came to their study of Old Testament Scriptures. Though the Jews studied the Old Testament, they were unable to see the very *person* who the Scriptures were designed to reveal (John 5:39).

Could something very similar happen to us? Of course it could. Just because you may say that you at some point in the past saw Christ through the window of God's Word and accepted Him as your Lord and Savior does not mean that you will continue to look at Christ through the window of God's Word. But if we want to become more and more like Christ this is exactly what we must do.

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What does **2 Corinthians 3:18** tell us? **"But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory."**

When we see Jesus through His Word for the very first time and embrace Him by faith as our Lord and Savior it should be the beginning of a life long bus trip where we continuously find ourselves looking out onto the glory of Christ through the study of His Word and find ourselves being transformed into His image. But unfortunately for many professed believers they will over the course of time fall back into the habit of focusing on the window rather than focusing on the glory that is revealed through the window. They are willing to look at the information that is given to them about Christ in the pages of the New Testament, but they are unwilling to personally encounter Him in the course of their study of God's Word. Their study, in other words, is simply an academic exercise.

What would cause people to choose to focus on the window rather on the glory that is revealed through the window? The next words that Christ shares with these religious Jews helps us to answer this question.

Let us now read **John 5:40**. **"And you are unwilling to come to Me."** The reason why these religious Jews were unable to see Christ in Old Testament was because they were *unwilling* to see Christ (John 5:40). We see Christ expressing the very same thought in **Luke 13:34** but in a much more visual form. Let me read the verse for you. **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!"**

Why can't people see Jesus in a personal way when they study the Scriptures? They don't want to see Jesus. This certainly was true for these religious Jews and this can also be true for many professing Christians. Why wouldn't people want to see Jesus? Because if people choose to personally see the glory of Christ through the window of God's Word, they will be compelled to bow before Him in humble submission.

Because the religious Jews were unwilling to *bow* to Christ, they were unwilling to come to Christ even if coming to Christ was the only way for them to have life (John 5:40). Let us read the remainder of **John 5:40**. **"And you are unwilling to come to me, that you may have life."**

This attitude is certainly worthy of rebuke. Therefore Jesus turns the table in John 5:41-47 and begins to *prosecute* His opponents. This was not unusual in Jewish courts. Unlike today, defendants did not simply prove their innocence and thus end the trial. Jewish trials worked to uncover the truth, and accusers who made false claims in court could find themselves subject to accusations and subject to serious jeopardy. Punishments they had hoped to inflict on their opponents now could turn back on them, and this is exactly what we will now see taking place.

Obviously these religious Jews and Christ were not in harmony with one another. Clearly these religious Jews and Jesus were clashing with one another. But why were they clashing? If you were to ask the religious Jews this question they certainly would not have given the same answer as Christ would have given.

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What might the Jews have answered? We get an indication of a possible answer they may have given in **John 5:41**.

Let us now read **John 5:41**. "**I do not receive glory from men.**" Why was there a clash between Jesus and these Jews? The Jews' answer to this question would probably have been, "Jesus is irked because we have charged Him with breaking the Sabbath and for implying that He is equal with God; if we had only praised Him because of what He did to the man at the Pool, He would have been satisfied."

Jesus in **John 5:41** seems to be responding to this unstated belief on the part of these religious Jews. Jesus in effect is telling these Jews that the clash they were now experiencing with Him had nothing to do with them not giving Him praise.

If this is not the reason for their conflict with one another then what was the reason? Jesus answers this question in the next verse.

Let us read **John 5:42**. "**But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves.**" The reason why Jesus felt it necessary to prosecute these religious Jews was not because they had not praised Him, but rather because they did not love God (John 5:41-42).

Obviously, being religious and loving God is not necessarily the same thing. These Jews were religious, but they certainly did not love God. How did Jesus know this? Christ knew that they did not love God because they had not received Him even though He came in the name of His Father. Let us look at **John 5:43**. "**I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him.**" Coming in the name of the Father meant that in His coming He revealed His Father both in word and deed (John 5:43).

Even though this was true, these religious Jews did not receive Jesus because they did not love God. And because they did not love God they stubbornly rejected His Son. And they even did this in spite of the various witnesses listed in **John 5:31-40**. And of course their sin of rejecting the Son who had come in the name of His Father and validated by many credible witnesses is further compounded when they are very well prepared to receive those who come in their own name.

Let us continue to read **John 5:43**. "**I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him.**" This prophecy was fulfilled over and over again. One false messiah Theudas, and another Judas of Galilee are identified for us in **Acts 5:36-37**. Then came Barkochba (132-135 A.D.) whom one very distinguished Rabbi named Akiba called the "Star of David." There have been scores of others. The last one will be the Antichrist himself. All of these come in their own name. When Jesus says that these false christs come "in their own name," He means that these so-called false christs come without the proper credentials. They come without the witness of His Father, without the witness of John the Baptist, without the witness of their works, and without the witness of the Scriptures. But even though false christs come in their own name without the proper credentials those Jews who do not love God still are very inclined to receive them.

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Why would they reject Jesus who was the Christ while at the same time being inclined to receive others who falsely represent themselves as the Christ? What is the answer? They will reject Christ while being inclined to receive others because they do not love God. This is what we learned in **John 5:43**.

But this leads to another question. What needs to change for them in order for them to be open to receiving Christ, or in other words, what needs to change for them in order that they might believe in Him? Let us read **John 5:44**. "**How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?**" Those Jews who are inclined to receive false christs will continue to be so inclined as long as they love the praise of men more than they love the praise of God (John 5:44).

The words of Jesus here in **John 5:44** should remind us of the words of Paul in **Romans 2:28-29**. Let me read these words for you. "**For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. (29) But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.**"

Though these Jews might have prided themselves on knowing God, they neither loved Him nor sought His praise. For them the praise that they were truly seeking was the praise of men.

Jesus will now bring the prosecution of His accusers to a close in **John 5:45-47**. Let us begin by looking at **John 5:45**. Let me read this verse for you. "**Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.**"

Jesus points to Moses as an *accuser* of those Jews who refuse to receive Him as their Messiah (John 5:45). How ironic. The Jews had placed their hope in the very one which Jesus identifies in this verse as their accuser.

Why would Jesus choose to specifically identify Moses as their accuser? Let us read **John 5:46**. "**For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me.**" Did Moses in the first five books of the Old Testament actually refer to Christ? Absolutely! He referred to the coming Christ in **Genesis 3:15; 9:26; 22:18; 49:10; Numbers 24:17 and Deuteronomy 18:15-18**. But what Moses wrote about Christ is certainly not limited to these passages. The entire Pentateuch points forward to the coming of Christ, and definitely prepares the way for his arrival. If these Jews had in fact believed Moses as they claimed they did, then certainly they would have *believed* in the one whom He had written about (John 5:46). Obviously this was not something they were yet prepared to do.

Therefore Jesus finishes **John 5** with these final words in **John 5:47**. "**But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?**" The question that Jesus asked was unanswerable. Deny the truths contained in the Scriptures, and all is *lost*. The Jews needed this lesson, so do we today (John 5:47).



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### CONCLUSION

We have spent a great deal of time considering the truths contained in **John 5**. Have we only been studying the window or have we been able to look beyond the window of God's Word to see the glory of Christ?

Have you seen His love for this world? Have you seen His willingness to give Himself up without any regard for Himself and His own personal interests? Have you seen His unswerving commitment to the fulfillment of His God given mission?

If we truly love God and are truly seeking His praise rather than the praise of men, I am confident that something very special has happened as a result of our study. Hopefully we have been changed in many ways. Hopefully one of the ways we have been changed is in our growing devotion to fulfill our God given commission. Those who are able to look beyond the window of God's Word and see the glory of Christ will inevitably be *changed* into His likeness.