

## Sermon- The Four Witnesses Who Testify To Jesus' Identity

Scripture: John 5: 31-47

Sunday, February 25, 2018

The last time I preached in John we looked at Jesus' astounding statement at the time that the reason he healed on the Sabbath was that he does what his Father in Heaven does and that He and His Father are both God. This claim as you can imagine was really a big and shocking especially for the Pharisees who were Scripture experts. In the last sermon I also pointed out that Jesus communicated His Divinity claim with an equally shock level of humility. But nevertheless the bigger the claim, the bigger the proof required right? So how does God Himself expect you to know how to discern the truth about Jesus or any other matter. That is what we are going to look at today.

Now Jesus presents his arguments like he was in a court of law. He argues very carefully and according to the standards and rules of Jewish law. So to start his argument, Jesus does something interesting. He says, if this was just himself making a claim for himself it would not be valid. Now Jesus is referring to his independent willful self. Now Jesus has already established earlier that He does not do anything according to his own independent willful self. He always does and says what His Heavenly Father wants him to do and say. But assuming that the Pharisees have not fully gotten how unwillful Jesus is, Jesus starts out by agreeing with the main assumption of the Pharisees. You cannot just testify about yourself in the court of law. In Jewish law in Deuteronomy chp 17 and verse 6, when it comes to the most critical cases involving the death penalty, the judge cannot just take one persons word. There has to be 2 or 3 witnesses to whatever is being alleged. Further bearing false witness was a violation of the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment. So it was unlikely that 2 or 3 people would be willing to violate the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment without being caught. That is why 2 or 3 witnesses were necessary to testify to an

important matter in court. So Jesus agrees with the Pharisees that you need multiple witnesses. And then he starts presenting his witnesses.

The first witness is the human witness of John the Baptist. Now John the Baptist was a person who when it comes to human beings was a bright light like few other human beings. He was considered one of the greatest prophets of all time even by the religious authorities and that is why they came to investigate him and ask him if he was, either the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet Moses said would come. And what did John the Baptist tell the Pharisees then. He told them that he came to point to Jesus. And they heard it. So let's get this out there. The first witness to the identity of Jesus was the most important prophet Israel has ever had and he was none other than John the Baptist.

Then Jesus tells the Pharisees, there is a second witness that is even more important than John. The things that I have taught and the miracles I have performed. If you were to consider the full body of Jesus' work what do you find. Well, Jesus through 57 parables taught about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, Jesus taught, was something of exceedingly great value. It is God' rule on earth. He taught that by His coming, the kingdom of God was actually inaugurated on earth. But he also taught that the kingdom of God is still to come in full. He taught about the values of the Kingdom of God and they are all values that are opposite to the world's values. This like "the first will be last", "the master must be the servant of the people under him", things like "the poor and the broken hearted being the ones who are blessed" that the meek ones will inherit the earth, the those make peace, not emperors who make war will be called the children of God. Jesus taught that God loves the world and sent him to save it from its sins. He taught that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength and to love your neighbor as he has loved us. So that is what Jesus taught.

But Jesus also did somethings to demonstrate his power. He healed sick people, he raised people from the dead, he walked on water, calmed storms with his words and fed thousands of hungry people by multiplying a handful of loaves and fish. Jesus also broke social circle norms by touching the lives of all kinds of outsiders. He also spoke truth to power. And going beyond what the Pharisees would have known in John chapter 5, Jesus Christ also lived a perfectly sinless life. Then he died on the cross a horrible death giving himself as a perfect sin offering for the whole world and demonstrated his ultimate power over death by returning to life on the third day. Then he rose again and sent his Holy spirit on all who believe so that they could continue a movement that would expand the kingdom of God on earth and prepare for his final return. So this is a quick summary of the entire body of Jesus' teachings, actions and miracles. And Jesus is telling them that everything that he did and said needs to be carefully evaluated because his works are the second witness to his true identity that needs to be considered.

But there is a third witness to Jesus identity. This is none other than God the Father himself. The Pharisees were told about when the heavenly Father speaks audibly at Jesus' baptism. In John chp 1 v 32 these are John the Baptizer's own words. He reports, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon Him. I didn't know he was the One, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, "The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit"". Then John adds, "I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God". This was the first time we hear the Father testify about Jesus. Now going beyond what the Pharisees in John 5 may have known, later in Jesus' ministry Jesus takes his three in his innermost circle, Peter James and John to what we now call the Mount of Transfiguration. There something amazing happens to Jesus. Jesus' whole body including all his garments start glowing with an intense bright white light. And there again the voice of the Father in heaven comes to the three disciples and he tells

them, “This is my Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him”. This was the second time his heavenly Father testified about Jesus. Then there was a third occasion at the end of Jesus ministry. This time Jesus had made his triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem at the start of his passion week. This is in John 12 and verse 23 onwards. Jesus was deeply troubled at this point because he knew what was coming. He was wrestling with even what to pray. Finally he prays, “Father bring glory to your name”. And when he says that, a voice replies from Heaven saying, “I have already brought glory to my name and I will do it again”. There was a whole crowd around Jesus at this time and this whole crowd heard these words. And Jesus tells the crowd. You know what, “the voice was for your benefit, not mine”. Three times in Jesus earthly ministry we hear the voice of the Father testifying to and speaking with Jesus. At the beginning, middle and end of his earthy ministry. The third witness to Jesus is none other than God the Father Himself.

Now there is the most critical witness of all, because this is available to everybody. Jesus tells the Pharisees that the fourth witness is the Holy Scriptures themselves. Now you may be thinking that all the three witnesses Jesus have mentioned for us is part of the scriptural witness. In a way yes. But we have a much fuller version of scripture than the Pharisees had back then right. So when Jesus talks about scripture he is referring to what they had which was just the Old Testament. And even if you had just the Old Testament and you knew how to read it right it is full of Jesus references. In fact there are so many Jesus references that I am going to take you through an overview using four categories. This is important for your own study and if you have to explain it to someone else so listen carefully.

The first category of Jesus references are the Prophecies that point to Jesus. The main prophecies are found in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and all the Minor prophecies. How many prophecies point to Jesus? Well, just in the prophetic books, by a conservative count there are about 190 prophecies to Jesus. If you were to casually

search the internet you will get much higher numbers, between 350 and 400. But I want to caution you, they are counting everything that points to Jesus from Genesis to Malachi. What I am talking about are specifically prophecies of the coming Messiah. The second category of Jesus references are in the book of Moses dealing with the ceremonial laws. So for example when it talks about the sin offering, which was to be an unblemished male lamb. Well, the sin offering was to be an unblemished male lamb because it was pointing forward to the unblemished lamb of God who is Jesus Christ. So in Dueteronomy and Leviticus you have all those ceremonial laws about sin offerings and they are all pointing forward to Jesus. Besides these there is a third category. These are the literary allusions to Christ you find all over scripture but especially in the poetic books like the Psalms. Ps 22 is well known in which the phrases “my God my God why have you forsaken me” is quoted exactly by Jesus as he was dying on the cross. In fact there are 11 whole Psalms that are considered Messianic Psalms and beyond that there are literary allusions to Jesus in many other places. There is a final category of Jesus references in the Old Testament. This category is called the Historical Parallels. This is where an entire identity shaping historical event in scripture like the Passover, has embedded references to Christ in it. You see at the Passover, the angel of death passes over the homes over which the blood of the Passover lamb has been brushed on. This historical event was meant to parallel the future Christ event where the blood of Christ when it is applied to a home, causes the angel of death to Passover that home. So 4 categories of references to Jesus in the Old Testament. **Prophetic** references, the **ceremonial** laws, the **literary** allusions and even pivotal **historical** events. So if you are someone who knows your scripture and spends your life studying it you really have no excuse if you miss that many references and four different ways in which the entire Old Testament is pointing forward to Jesus.

So Jesus is reminding the Pharisees in our text today, that they need to discern who Jesus is, not because of some self proclaimed words, but because they have four big

witnesses to Jesus. The Baptist, Jesus' works, His heavenly Father's testimony and the Scripture themselves.

This nails it, in terms of Jesus' identity. But I believe God is communicating an even broader principle to us here. And the principle is this, when it comes to important information coming at you, how do you know if something is true? What is the discernment process you use? If you look at the case Jesus made today, what he is saying is that God does expect you to use a very careful 4 part discernment process for the most important things in your life.

What is that? Step one is asking, who are the people in your life that vouch for that particular truth. Are these the most credible, respected people you can find on the subject? If you have very wise and credible people endorsing a position, then it passes step 1 of the validation process. Step 2 is the logical consistency of the statement itself. That means, if you were to examine the information by itself, does it pass its own smell test. For example, people come up with these conspiracy theories like 911 was something the US government arranged to happen so that it could go and start a war on Islam. That idea is internally inconsistent because for that to be true, the US government would have had to recruit the terrorists to hijack the planes to fly into its own buildings. All so that it can go to war in some other part of the world which the US can do anytime anyway. Internally the 911 conspiracy theory does not make sense. The information coming at you when analysed by itself should have an internal coherence. The third step is, what does the Spirit of God residing in you tell you about this piece of information. Somewhere deep inside, the Holy Spirit will speak to you about this piece of information. This is the work of the Holy Spirit which is the testimony of God the Father. Listen to Him. Finally, how does that piece of information align with the rest of Scripture. Does scripture speak to this particular issue? If the issue is big enough and if we know our scripture well enough, you know that it will speak to whatever you are struggling with. If you understand the four-step validation process you can apply it to all

the important things in your life. And most of all, you can apply it to the most important question-Who is Jesus really. With the help of the four witnesses we can be sure of who Jesus is.

If you have discernment, you will not be deceived. Then you will have the belt of truth and remember the belt of truth is what keeps the rest of your armor together. So let us be discerning people because it takes discernment to fight the spiritual battles that lay ahead. Let us pray.