

#20 – John 5:33-47

Need: To see the four witnesses that Jesus offered as verification of Himself and His mission.

Aim: To review and apply the witnesses and their testimony to our everyday experience.

Title: “4 Witnesses”

Prop: In Jn. 5:33-47, Jesus offered four witnesses concerning Himself and His mission in this life: **I. Witness of John – Jn. 5:33-35, II. Witness of Works – Jn. 5:36, III. Witness of the Father – Jn. 5:37-38, IV. Witness of Scripture – Jn. 5:39-47** all of which give us confidence that Jesus has the power, presence and ability to protect us and provide what we need and when we need it.

Intro: On occasion I have been called to give testimony at trial. I have been a character witness in divorce trials and at sentencing hearings. In divorce cases I always request that I must be subpoenaed to remove any sense of favoritism and avoid any future repercussions.

On other occasions people seek to use me for a character reference thinking that a pastor looks good on a job application form or an employment interview. I have been called to bear witness to character and personal observation and conduct. Many of these inquiries are now done over the phone or internet. I have even received requests from former members long since removed. One mother hounded me for a good reference for her son who had applied to a police academy. I hadn't seen her son in years and refused to be a character reference, a lot of time had passed and things and people change. I try to protect my reputation and am very careful

about who I recommend for a job or position. I must admit I have been burned more than once. Just the other day I got a call from a company from which man was seeking employment and used me as a reference. I had seen nor heard from this individual in two years!! So I just declined.

In our passage today Jesus used four character references to validate His person, mission and message. They were to serve as witnesses before Jesus' accusers from His time on this earth to present day.

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Transition: Let's begin today by considering the first witness, John the Baptist as found in verses 33-35.

I. Witness of John the Baptist – Jn. 5:33-35

A. Relationship Between Jesus and John

1. Cousins – The mothers of Jesus and John were sisters. Elizabeth was considerably older and had married a priest; she lived in Jerusalem and had no children. In her old age, according to God's promise, she became

pregnant and bore a son named John. He was ordained from conception to be the forerunner of Jesus. Mary also received a commission from God, though being a virgin she bore the Son of God, Jesus. John and Jesus were probably less than six months apart in age. They were cousins and probably knew each other from family gatherings and activities.

2. Adults – At some point, as a young man, John left home and spent a good deal of time living in the desert; he was probably a member of an extremist group of religious zealots called the Essenes. In protest to the corruption of the religious system in Jerusalem, this group separated themselves to give their full attention and efforts to holiness and purity. Growing up, John had a front row seat as his father faithfully served God as part of the corrupt religious system. The call of God was upon John and like a shooting star he came out of the wilderness to call Israel to repentance. He came in the power and presence of the Old Testament prophet Elijah as had been predicted.

After John had been preaching for about six months, Jesus burst upon the scene, having been a carpenter in the family business until the age of 30 or so. John was the first witness of who Jesus was and the mission for which He had been sent: **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”**

B. Mission Oriented (33-35)

1. Testimony of John (33) – Beginning in verse 33, Jesus bore witness that the Pharisees had sent their own representatives to investigate John when he was active on the border of the Judean desert, preaching the Good News about the coming of Messiah. He also issued a call for the nation to repent of their sin. When confronted by representatives of Jewish leaders, John told them point blank that he was not the Messiah but was sent to prepare the way. When Jesus showed up, John verified and bore witness that Jesus was the One promised from the Garden of Eden all through the Old Testament. After their sin, God promised Adam and Eve a Redeemer in Genesis 3:15.

2. Weak Testimony (34) – In verse 34, Jesus testified that what He said was not received from just one man as He recognized that John's witness was fleeting and weak. Jesus' message was not a waste of time, as it was His purpose that all would believe and be saved. John was just the lamp lighting the pathway. By this very nature as a man, his witness could be called into account and spun to turn it against him. Many, including some the religious leaders, were excited by John and his message, but at this point the issue was greater than that of John; Jesus claimed to be God.

Transition: If John's testimony and their acceptance of his message were not enough, Jesus' claim to be God caused Him to appeal to His miraculous works in verse 36.

II. Witness of Works – Jn. 5:35

A. Works of the Old Testament (35)

1. Proclivity – Old Testament miracles are sparse and used primarily for change in venue, such as the Exodus, the Ten Commandments, entering the Promise Land and other such special occasions. Old Testament revelation was followed by a period known as the 400 silent years, broken when God sent Gabriel to Zechariah while he was ministering in the temple.

Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, received a visitation from the messenger angel Gabriel.

2. Prominence of John The Baptist – John broke upon scene six months prior to Jesus beginning His ministry. John was the bridge between the Old Testament and its covenant of Law and Jesus with His covenant of grace.

B. Jesus' Works (36)

1. Greater Than John – In the first section of verse 36, Jesus presented the testimony of John as significant; He called him a lamp who verified the words of Jesus as being true: **“Behold the Lamb of God.”**

2. Testimony of Works – As great as John was, Jesus in the verse 36, offered the testimony of works: **“Don’t just believe Me, don’t just believe John, look at what I do and believe.”** Jesus zeroed in on the power of His authority and verified His words with miracles such as the world had never seen. They were undeniable manifestations of God’s power. **“Believe because of what I do!”** The miracles they saw were indisputable.

Transition: Witness one was John, witness two was the miracles of Jesus, witness three was His Heavenly Father in verses 37-38.

III. Witness of the Father – Jn. 5:37-38

A. Credit Where Credit is Due (37)

1. Father’s Empowerment - Jesus gave credit to His Father as He empowered Jesus to do His will. In essence Jesus said: **“You have never seen God or heard His voice, but I have! He and I have a special relationship based in eternity!”**

2. Father Bears Witness - The Father bears witness to His Son and His work; He has borne witness to who He Jesus was and what He did.

Beginning with John’s testimony and the very works that Jesus did, Jesus issued the call was to believe! The religious could deny the first two witnesses but the greatest testimony was that of His Father.

2. Special Relationship (37) - Religion has nothing compared to what Jesus has. He experienced an ongoing, eternal, special relationship with the Father and He bore witness of Jesus and His mission. They wouldn't understand because they had not heard the Father's voice as He had, nor had they seen Him at any time; Jesus had. He was God in human flesh.

B. Condemnation (38)

1. No Faith – In verse 38, the Pharisees claimed to be doing God's work, but Jesus said if you don't believe in Him, you have no relationship with the Father: **“You do not have His word abiding in you.”** Why not? **“For you do not believe in Him who sent Me.”**

2. Rejection - To reject Jesus meant no relationship with the Father. Jesus was the physical manifestation of God in human flesh. God sent His Son into the world to die for the sin of mankind and to show people what God was like.

But they did not believe John's witness, nor the witness of the works Jesus did; and now they rejected the testimony of the very God they claimed to serve!!

Transition: The fourth and final witness had to do with prophecy in Old Testament scripture. Other than the works of Jesus, the other two testimonies were Jesus' own interpretation. The scriptures, along with

miracles were something tangible which could be studied at length concerning Jesus even in our day and age.

IV. The Witness of the Scriptures – Jn. 39-47

A. Misinterpretation (39-40)

1. In verses 39-40, Jesus identified the problem of the religious scholars. They searched the scriptures for any glimpse of the hope of eternal life. The Old Testament can be kind of sketchy and hard to understand, the scholars of the day had formed an elaborate system of works added to the Law of Moses by which they declared themselves righteous. However the Old Testament prophets spoke clearly of the coming of Messiah and His ultimate mission of dying for the sin of mankind and being raised from the dead. There are over 351 clear, fulfilled predictions about Jesus where He was to be born, His deity, mission, death and resurrection.

2. Jesus Reasoning (41-44) – In verses 41-44, Jesus exposed a person's tendency to seek glory and recognition from others. People need to worship something and can be easily deceived. Jesus' purpose was not to receive glory from His accusers; it didn't matter what they believed. But if someone else proclaims special knowledge counter to Jesus' words, there was no problem believing in them. The cults today bear witness to this issue.

I am continually amazed what people believe and then fabricate “evidence” to support what they believe. Jesus gave verifiable evidence, four substantial witnesses that what He said about Himself and His mission was true and from God; and still people won’t believe!

In verse 42 the end result of unbelief was that the love of God was not present in such a person. To know about God is not enough. It must penetrate the soul to its core and one must allow God’s Spirit to work, to change one’s heart. And it must be evident in our everyday life.

I can write hundreds of words declaring love for my wife. But what verifies my words is the way I treat her; I prove it by my actions.

B. Reviewing the Evidence (44-47)

1. Issue at Hand (44) – Jesus solidified His evidence with the bottom line of unbelief. Men give accolades to one another about fleeting things. For example over time when glory was given has now become ancient history and is forgotten. Sports are great example; as time passes on, people forget. God never forgets and what He gives us far outweighs what man can generate for each other.

There was a time in seminary at the graduation ceremony when I had to listen to accolades given to those whose academic records were laudable. But many of the men who sat beside me worked full-time jobs; and had

families to tend to. At great sacrifice, they had to let their grades and health slide just to put a roof over head and food on the table. They were not recognized for their sacrifice nor given credit from the school. I take great satisfaction that God knew and God rewarded. Man's recognition would have been nice, but God knew and He was pleased.

2. Accusation (45-46) – In light of the four witness offered, Jesus had no need to serve as prosecutor. Jews who appealed to the Law, the giver of the Law Moses will serve as judge, **“the one whom you always appealed to.”** The Law was not about works; its purpose was to move men to faith. But over the course of time any hope of eternal life was placed in one's ability to keep the Law in its entirety. Many people today are resting upon a series of **“good works.”** Paul says in Galatians that the Law was given as a tutor to lead us to Christ, not as a means to seek God's approval. No one except Jesus could ever keep the Law. So Moses will serve as the judge as the Jewish leaders appealed to him. The sentence of the Law will be imposed upon those who serve the Law. The penalty of failure is death.

The final blow was found in verse 46. Moses, to whom the Jews were clinging, wrote about Jesus. All manner of the sacrificial practice pointed to the One and final Sacrifice for sin, Jesus.

3. Failure – The final leg of Jesus’ discourse was added in the form of a question: **“But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”**

I understand that many so called believers verbalize faith saying the right words about accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior but there is no change in lifestyle. The passage today serves two purposes: **(1)** To those who don’t know Jesus and are considering their options John gave valid and true foundations for believing in Jesus. **(2)** This passage also gives me confidence that **“I have not believed in vain,”** as the Apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15. My faith is founded in the witness of John, the miracles of Jesus, the witness of my Heavenly Father, and finally the witness of the Word of God. And because I believe, He enables me, facilitates me in this life. I also know beyond a shadow of reasonable doubt that I have received the gift of the Holy Spirit who resides with me and gives me the hope of eternal life. What about your future?

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