

Sermon 46, Witnesses to Life, 1 John 5:6-10

Proposition: The Spirit and the baptisms of water and blood testify to the identity of Jesus Christ and the life that's found in Him.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, you are alive. I'm not just talking physical life, though clearly you have that. I'm talking about spiritual life too. You are alive with an indestructible life this morning because you are united by faith to Jesus Christ. This faith is powerful enough to enable you to leave the world on one side and press on toward the better life that's found in Jesus. That is what we have seen so far in this final chapter of 1 John. Yet there's more. What we'll talk about this morning is the truth about Jesus' identity and the three witnesses to that truth. When you know who He really is, and you know the quality of the evidence regarding His identity, then you will actually integrate that truth within yourself. It will simply become part of you: Jesus is God's Son, and to know Him is life. So listen to the Spirit. Listen to the baptism of water and blood that Jesus underwent. And then you will know Him and know the life that's in Him.

I. The Truth, v. 6

The Bible is a book of history. It tells us what some ancient people did, mostly in Israel and Egypt and a little bit in Babylon and elsewhere in the Near East. It tells us how those people interacted with God and what He said to them. We tend to forget that this book was written at a particular time in history by particular people who lived in a particular place, a place rather far from where we live and where most of us have never even visited. Yet when we remember that, we know that this is first and foremost a history book — a history of God's dealings with His

people. And so what it tells us is the truth about God and His people. The Bible was breathed out by the Holy Spirit, who is the truth — and what He tells us is the truth.

A. Jesus, Baptized in Water and in Blood, v. 6a

The particular truth to which the Spirit primarily bears witness, and which John points out here, is that Jesus came by water and blood, not by water only. There has been much discussion about how to understand this claim, but the best view is that John was correcting people who taught that Jesus came by water only. Jesus didn't come by water only, the apostle insists. He came by water and blood!

What that means is that Jesus was not only baptized and thereby set apart to God's service (the particular task of saving the world); He also died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. When we understand "coming by water and blood" as referring to the two facets of His messianic work, the passage makes a lot of sense. The first part of His work was to be set apart by His Father to do the job. He was baptized in water to fulfill all righteousness, and it was there that the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove.

Now, this coming by water is a part of the Messiah everyone can get behind. Heretics have no problem with the coming by water, for it is a nice peaceful coming. In this coming, the Spirit descends. What's in view is washing, cleansing, making people's lives and morals better. Jesus being dedicated to God's service is something that we all ought to imitate. Most people don't have a problem with this side of the Messiah's work.

But Jesus didn't merely have a baptism of water, relating to getting the Spirit and becoming a better person. He also had a baptism of blood, a baptism that would be accomplished when He was nailed to a Roman cross and hung up on it until He was dead. In the water baptism, the Spirit came on Him. In the blood baptism, His body was breached and the Spirit leaked back out, spreading to the whole church. That's why when Jesus died, John records that He "handed over the Spirit." That's why the water came back out, along with blood, when that spear was stuck in His side. The water signifies the Holy Spirit, who flows out of Jesus' carcass only after His blood has been shed and His life given up to purchase our lives.

This side of Jesus' work isn't so pleasant. This is the side that John insists we believe in, though. This is the part that's not about ameliorating the human condition by a gradual cleansing. This is the part that's about death and destruction, blood and fire. This is about the reality that you and I deserve to die, and that we deserve to die in a completely gruesome and painful way. Only the death of Jesus in our place spares us. Only by His death can we live.

The water Messiah sounds nicer. The one who cleans us up, purifies our actions, makes us better and cleaner people — sure. That sounds great. But the one who burns us up, who makes us bleed in His service, who is not afraid to get hurt and die and to ask His servants to get hurt and die too? That's a tough sell.

Do you pursue both sides of Christ's messiahship in your life? Do you welcome both aspects of His ministry? Are you ready to die in your battle with sin? Would you really resist to the point of shedding blood? And, on the flip side, did the water of baptism do anything for you?

Do you live a Spirit-filled life? Is the Spirit really changing you gradually into the image of God's Son? You've had water baptism. Are you willing to undergo a baptism of blood too?

The truth is that Jesus came to earth, and that while He was here He not only was baptized in water but also in blood. We know that ultimately through a single source.

B. The Spirit, Testifying, v. 6b

That source is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who testifies to the truth that He anointed Jesus at His baptism and then went out from Him upon His death in order to anoint all of God's people throughout the world. Let's be real: Who else could know what the Spirit was doing? He is like the wind. You can't see Him moving. You can't detect His presence directly. There is no meter that tells you when God is in the room. And so we couldn't possibly know that He was with Jesus, and that He was then poured out on the whole church by means of Jesus' death, unless the Spirit Himself told us! How do we know that His testimony is correct? Because He is God and therefore He is the truth.

In other words, there's no way around it. This Christian message is something that you have to take on faith. If you don't believe in gods, demons, and holy spirits, then you won't believe in the message about Jesus Christ and how He gave the Spirit. If you believe that everyone who wrote the Bible was lying, then you will not believe me when I tell you that it's all true. We'll return to this theme in v. 10. But for now, recognize that this book demands that you believe what it says. It requires your assent, not merely that you suspend your disbelief in order to enjoy a good story. If the Spirit is who He says He is, then He is the truth. There is no way to independently verify who the Spirit is. Such a thing is intrinsically impossible. The test has to have greater certainty than the thing being tested. But it would be impossible to devise or administer a test that held greater certainty than God Almighty. By definition, He is the absolute that relativizes all other things.

So you can either believe that the Spirit is the truth because He says so, or you can reject Him and say that your own ability to discern the truth is good enough. But again — if you believe in listening to eyewitnesses, then you should definitely pay attention to the witnesses who testify together that Jesus the anointed one underwent baptism with water and baptism with blood.

II. The Witnesses to the Truth, vv. 7-9

A. Who They Are, v. 7-8

There are three witnesses to Jesus. Two of them are His works — being baptized with water/baptizing with water, and being baptized with fire — and the third is His gift. The one who baptizes and gets baptized like this, and the one who can give the Holy Spirit as a free gift, is the long-awaited Messiah. He is the anointed one of God.

Hence John's listing of these witnesses, who testify to Jesus. He is not just telling us what we already know; he is presenting further reasons for us to believe the truths we have heard from the beginning. The reason is that Jesus' works and His gifts testify regarding His true identity.

1. The Spirit

The Spirit witnesses to Jesus by causing the Bible to be written. He witnesses to Jesus by filling the church. And above all, as we've talked about recently, He witnesses to Jesus by changing people from sinners into saints. That's how His witness works. Being God, He is true. And it is His testimony that shows the reality and meaning of the other two witnesses.

2. The Water

The water is the second witness. This is a shorter way of saying that Christ's baptism shows us that He is the one anointed by the Father to save the world. I mean, at the baptism God literally spoke from Heaven and said "This is my beloved Son" — a title not just of nature, but of office too (see all the references to the Son in the OT, especially in Pss. 2 and 89). The water of baptism tells us that Jesus Christ is the real deal. He's not a man with a messiah complex; He is the God-man and the real Messiah, anointed not by human activity but by God the Father.

3. The Blood

The final witness to Christ's status as the anointed one is His blood. Now this, brothers and sisters, is the one that John emphasizes. It wasn't just water. It was water *and blood*. Why does John emphasize it? Because that's not how the Messiah was supposed to come! The Anointed Son of God? Let's face it: We intuitively know that He is going to be a superhero beyond all superheroes. We know that He is not going to get hurt or die. We know that no power on earth or in heaven can touch omnipotence. In antiquity, it was known that Cretans were liars (a charge Paul repeats in his letter to Titus). One of the primary pieces of evidence for that claim was that there was a Tomb of Zeus on the island of Crete. Now, if anything is true of Zeus it's that he an immortal! The Cretans claimed he was dead, so they were obviously liars.

Brothers and sisters, we believe in the mortality of the Son of God. We don't number Him among the immortals. We claim that He is God equal with the Father. We say that He is of one substance with the Father and the Spirit, and that they cannot die. But then we turn around and say that Jesus died. In fact, it's our core claim. Without that claim, there is no Christianity.

How does the blood witness to His Messiahship? It says something about the task of an anointed one. It tells us something about the kind of world He was sent to. That world is our world, and it's a world full of people on death row. The only way to save them was to die in their place. What kind of king's son does that? Who would go to a world full of criminals, all of whom were justly condemned to death, and decide that He would rather die so that they could all live? We would call that madness. We would say that no one in His right mind would do that. I certainly wouldn't do it. They're criminals! Let them die. But the blood says something different. The blood tells us about a Messiah who came from God and then took the death that we should have suffered. It tells us that Jesus stood condemned in the place where we should have stood condemned. It tells us that we are not good people, but saved people. It tells us the price of Heaven. It was a price we could never afford.

Brothers and sisters, the blood testifies. The blood tells us what sort of Savior we have. The blood tells us what kind of people we are. And the blood tells us how much He loves us.

B. Why They Matter, v. 9

But John doesn't stop there. He tells us more about the witnesses — not only their identity, but also why we should listen to them. What is so important about these witnesses?

1. Human Testimony Is Persuasive, v. 9a

First of all, human testimony is persuasive. We believe all kinds of things that trustworthy people told us at one time or another. I believe that the desk I'm writing this at is made of oak, because I think somebody told me that many years ago. I believe that Gillette has just over 30,000 people living in it, because Wikipedia says so. I believe that light travels at 186,000 miles per second, because really smart people have devised ways to measure that. You believe those things, and many more. Why? Because you find human testimony persuasive.

2. Divine Testimony Is Greater, v. 9b

But here's the thing: God's witness is greater. If the US Census Bureau is reliable in its count of how many people are inside our city, how much more reliable is the omniscient God when He tells us that He has sent His Son to save the world?

C. What They Say: This Is God's Son; Life Is In Him, vv. 9b, 11

So believe God's testimony. It is the testimony of the Spirit, repeated by the water and the blood. And what does it testify? It testifies that God gave us life, and that the life is found in Jesus Christ.

That's the testimony. Yes, that truth depends on what we were talking about earlier, that Jesus is the Son of God and the anointed one. But the aspect of it that John wants to bring out for us is the truth that we have eternal life as a gift from God. That, of course, is what he started this letter with — a reminder that eternal life was manifested. What is life? The text is referring to more than the ability to move around, reproduce, and nourish yourself. We are not merely talking biological life here (though that too is a creational gift from God through Christ). We are talking about spiritual life, the highest kind of life of which the human person is capable. Aristotle distinguished between the vegetable soul, and animal soul, and the rational soul. We certainly can see the difference between those three kinds of life in our everyday experience. The carrot plant is alive, but it is a lesser kind of life than the life surging through the veins of my pet cat. And the cat's life, in turn, is obviously not as rich or rational as the life my wife leads. Her rational life clearly outclasses the cat's animal life by even more than the cat's animal life outclasses the carrot's vegetable life. But John is talking about a kind of life that is as much superior to the rational life as the rational life is superior to the vegetable life. This is the kind of life that God has given to us by giving us His Son.

What can we say about this life?

First John gives us virtually no clues as to what is involved positively in having eternal life. However, there are a number of clues in the Fourth Gospel: to have eternal life means to have one's spiritual hunger and thirst satisfied (John 4:14; 6:35); to be raised up on the last day and to live forever (John 6:40, 51, 54); to have the light of life so that one does not walk in darkness (John 8:12); to have abundant life (John 10:10); to know the

only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent (John 17:3); and that, though we die, we will live (John 11:25).¹

Brothers and sisters, let me make two observations here. First, imagine asking the carrot to imagine the life of the rational soul. That's how close you and I are going to get to imagining the glories of eternal life as we will experience it with Jesus Christ and His Father in Heaven forever. But secondly, the overall thrust of the hints is clearly that eternal life is relational life. Just as we characterize the carrot as vegetable life, the cat as animal life, and the human person as rational life, so we would have to characterize the eternal life of which Jesus so often spoke as relational life. It is a life without loneliness, a life of total togetherness, knowledge, and exposure to those who love you inexpressibly. That is the eternal life we have been promised and are already beginning to enjoy together.

This life is found in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. In this present world, we fear exposure, not least because of our own sin. Being known completely sounds simultaneously thrilling and repulsive. I don't want to let anyone too close, because I know what they'll find! Brothers and sisters, that's part of why John insists that the life is in the Son of God and nowhere else. Who is the only one who can make you someone that others will delight to know and love? Who's the only one who can deal with your wretchedness? Who's the only one who can prevent you from sabotaging your relationships, from hiding your true self? Jesus Christ. Life is in Him by nature, for He got from His Father the gift of having life in Himself. Already He shared that life through the work of creation, when in the beginning He made man and gave rational life to him. But through His death and resurrection, He has bestowed on us the greater kind of life, the spiritual life which is intrinsically unable to end. Eternal life, relational life, is in Christ. And you will only know it so long as you are connected to Him. Let yourself be cut off from Him, and you are cut off from the life too. Just as vegetable life draws its power from the sun, so spiritual life draws its power from the Son. Put a plant in the dark long enough, and it will die. Put a Christian somewhere where he can no longer get in touch with Christ, and he too will die.

III. The Location of the Truth: Inside the Believer, v. 10

But brothers and sisters, part of the Christian message is that hostile forces can never place you out of Jesus's reach. There is no place where you will be cut off from Him permanently. Far from it. In fact, if you believe in Jesus you have the witness in yourself. That means that you have the Holy Spirit residing in you. You have internalized the witness to Jesus. Ultimately, what this means is that what you say about Him is no longer hearsay. It is your own direct experience. When I as a Christian tell you who Jesus is and what He's done, I have the witness in myself. I'm saying what I know because it's happened to me and inside me. I'm not telling you something I read in a book from long ago. Oh, yes, it's from a book that I learned that He died. But it's from experience that I know that He forgives sins, changes attitudes and behaviors, and grows the fruit of the Spirit in my life. I know it because I've seen it. I've been cleansed by the water of

¹Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Leicester: Apollos), 187.

baptism. I've drunk the wine through which He gives me His own blood. I've seen myself say and do things that I could never have said or done without the Holy Spirit's power.

The witness is in me. It's in you. The witness is ultimately the reality that we possess not merely vegetable, animal, and rational life, but relational life too. And we know that this is possible only because of what God did for us by giving His Son to us and for us.

Believe Him. Take Him into yourself. And you will live. Amen.