

## Three Strong Witnesses and One Reason for Rejection

John 5:30-47

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<sup>30</sup> “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.<sup>31</sup> If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.<sup>32</sup> There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.<sup>33</sup> You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.<sup>34</sup> Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.<sup>35</sup> He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.<sup>36</sup> But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.<sup>37</sup> And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen,<sup>38</sup> and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.<sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,<sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.<sup>41</sup> I do not receive glory from people.<sup>42</sup> But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.<sup>43</sup> I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.<sup>44</sup> How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?<sup>45</sup> Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope.<sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.<sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

– John 5:30-47, ESV

### Introduction: Why Do People Reject the Gospel?

Do you ever wonder why some people reject Jesus? Some people can know the truth, hear it clearly and walk away from Jesus in utter unbelief. Why? What makes someone reject the Son of God and the salvation that can only be found in Him? Well, in today's passage, we hear Jesus explain the core reason why the religious leaders in His day rejected Him, and it's a reason that still keeps many from truth faith in Him today.

Last week, we heard Jesus claim to be the Son of God who does the works of God and also the Son of Man who is give authority to rule and judge over all men. He taught that He has life in Himself and the power to give life to whom He wills because He is the Son of God and Son of Man and has been given all authority to judge by the Father. Jesus is now going to be calling forth His witnesses to support these rather bold and unprecedented claims. In the transition, Jesus re-asserts His submission to the Father's will: “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

Jesus is again re-connecting His judgment to the activity of God, just as He had done in verse 19: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.” Still, He is not backing down from His assertion that, as the Son of Man, He alone has been given the authority to judge all people.

### A. Three Strong Witnesses

To support His claims about His person, His authority and His work, Jesus now summons three strong witnesses to back up His words. He begins by saying, *“If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.”* – v. 31

If Jesus were the only One bearing witness about who He was and what He had been anointed to do as the Messiah, His testimony would not be valid. God had established the standard of multiple witnesses in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19:15, which says, *“Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”* And so Jesus summons two or three witnesses, two people and one set of actions, to validate His claims.

The first witness Jesus refers to is the only witness that Jesus says He Himself receives. He says, *“There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.”* (v. 32) Given the context, this is a clear reference to the Father, whose testimony is the focus of most of what Jesus says in this passage. But while Jesus introduces the testimony of His Father first, He takes a detour to discuss the testimony of John the Baptist first.

### **I. John the Baptist, vv. 33-35**

*“<sup>33</sup> You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. <sup>34</sup> Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. <sup>35</sup> He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.”* – vv. 33-35

“You sent to John” refers to the time when the Pharisees among the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem sent messengers to John to ask him if he was the Christ. At this time, John clearly denied that he was the Christ himself and he said that he was the voice in the wilderness referenced in Isaiah 40, who was sent ahead of the Messiah to prepare the way for Him. On the very next day after this encounter, John the Baptist saw Jesus in the crowd and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.”* (1:29-31)

So, John’s testimony to the truth was clear and strong. It’s interesting that Jesus says that He Himself does not need to receive the testimony of John. This is because Jesus is a higher authority than John was, so while Jesus received the approval of His Father as affirmation of His calling and authority, He did not receive John’s witness in the same way. Instead of John’s witness being for Jesus, it is really for the benefit of the people. So Jesus summons the witness of John the Baptist not for His own benefit, but *“so that you may be saved.”*

Jesus calls John *“a burning and shining lamp.”* This is probably a reference to Psalm 132, which says, in verses 17-19:

*Her priests I will clothe with salvation,  
and her saints will shout for joy.  
There I will make a horn to sprout for David;  
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.  
His enemies I will clothe with shame,  
but on him his crown will shine.*

John the Baptist was a priest and he was also the lamp the Lord had prepared for the anointed, which is the Hebrew *Mashiyach*, or Messiah.

Jesus' strong indictment of the people is that they were willing to rejoice in the light John brought "for a while." But they lost interest and lost patience. At the time Jesus is speaking here, John is most likely in prison. The lamp has been put away.

Do we lose patience with God's light? Do we get bored with His word, get tired of walking in His light? Do we set His light aside when it no longer tickles our fancy, no longer appeals to us?

## 2. The Works of Christ, v. 36

Jesus then says that, while John's light has been set aside, He has brought greater testimony to the people:

*"<sup>36</sup> But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me."* – v. 36

The works of Jesus are greater testimony than the words of John. On a purely human level, this makes sense. Jesus and John could have conspired together and John's testimony could have been fake. Generally speaking, John had great credibility with the people, but the skeptics among the leadership were not willing to just accept the word of John the Baptist, especially since so many of his words were so harshly critical of them.

Words can be faked, but the works of Jesus could not be. When Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, he said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." While Nicodemus might have been one of the few willing to admit that truth out loud, all the members of the Jewish leadership knew the same truth inside. They knew the implications of the mighty works of Jesus. The works of Jesus gave undeniable testimony that He had been sent by the Father.

## 3. The Father's Witness, vv. 37-47

But the Father didn't just empower Jesus to do works; He also bore direct witness Himself:

*"<sup>37</sup> And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, <sup>38</sup> and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. <sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,<sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. <sup>41</sup> I do not receive glory from people. <sup>42</sup> But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. <sup>43</sup> I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.<sup>44</sup> How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? <sup>45</sup> Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"* – vv. 37-47

How did the Father Himself testify? Well, Jesus affirms that they have never directly heard the Father's voice nor had they seen His form. The witness of the Father that Jesus highlights here is the word of God, the Scriptures which the Jewish leadership so highly prized and so carefully studied.

#### **a. You Must Have the Word Within**

The Jewish leadership did not benefit from the testimony of the Father in His word because they did not have His word abiding in them. They had it in their hands and on their lips but not in their hearts. When Jesus says, "*you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent,*" He means that the evidence that they do not have God's word abiding in them is shown clearly in the fact that they don't believe in the One whom God had sent. In other words, "It is clearly evident that you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe in the one whom he has sent."

Merely possessing a Bible and even reading it, studying it, memorizing it are all useless. The scribes and the Pharisees were known to have memorized large portions of the Scriptures, and some had even memorized the whole Torah, all of the Scriptures. The regular routine of a devout Jewish believer would include praying or singing through all the psalms every week, and almost all serious Jewish men had the psalms and the Pentateuch, or at least Deuteronomy, memorized. But none of this religious rigor and discipline did them any good because the word had never penetrated their hearts.

In Deuteronomy 30, God had told His people, "*the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.*" The problem the Pharisees and religious leaders had was that they had memorized that passage but still did not have the word in their hearts but only in their mouths. We'll deal with the underlying reason for this later. But the bottom line at this point is that they could not hear the witness of the Father because they did not have His word abiding in them.

#### **b. The Scriptures Bear Witness to Jesus**

*"<sup>39</sup>You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,<sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."* – vv. 39-40

Jesus then rebukes the religious leaders for being such diligent Bible scholars but missing the main point of the Bible. This is still the case for many Jewish scholars today, as well as for many liberal "Christian" scholars. They reject the idea that the Old Testament has anything to do with Jesus. The Apostle Paul was a highly trained Jewish scholar in the school of the Pharisees, and he trained under the great rabbi Gamaliel, one of the most prominent Jewish rabbis of all time. When Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus and revealed Himself to him, Paul went back to the Scriptures he knew so well, but now he saw Jesus everywhere. Soon, Paul was engaging Jewish rabbis in the Scriptures, showing them from the Torah that Jesus is the Messiah. Paul traveled around the Roman Empire, from Arabia and Damascus to modern-day Syria, Turkey, Greece, Italy and Spain. In city after city, he entered the synagogue and reasoned with them from the Torah, our Old Testament, demonstrating that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that His death and resurrection were the fulfillment of God's long-awaited plan of salvation for His people. Some believed, but most rejected him and the truth about Jesus.

So, what would Paul have shared? What did Jesus mean when He said that the Scriptures bear witness about Him? Well, the whole of the Scriptures do this, at several different levels . .

1. **Direct Prophecy:** There are the direct prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, such as Micah 5:2, which indicates that He would be born in Bethel and Isaiah 9:1-2, which says that He would minister in Galilee and in the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali. In Genesis 49:8-10, Jacob prophesied that the ruler of God's people would be in the family line of Judah.
2. **Promises:** In addition to the prophecies, there are also covenant promises that testify to Jesus. The first one comes in Genesis 3:15, where God's promise comes in the form of a curse on the serpent and his seed. The promise is that the serpent would crush the heel of the seed of the woman, while the seed of woman would crush the head of the serpent. This is one of the clear indicators that salvation would come through the suffering of the Savior, which is one of the issues that caused the greatest problems for many Jewish scholars. More promises come to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15, where he is told that his offspring would bring God's blessing to the nations. This was actually another stumbling point for many of the Jewish scholars. They did not want their Messiah to suffer, and they also did not want Him to bring blessing to the Gentiles. God's covenant promises continue with the Davidic promise. David, of the family line of Judah, ruled over God's people and was told that one of his sons would be enthroned over God's people forever, in 2 Samuel 7. Matthew structures his genealogy of Jesus at the beginning of his Gospel to highlight the fact that Jesus fulfilled these covenant promises as the Son of Abraham and the Son of David.
3. **Typology:** Beyond the prophecies and the promises, the Scriptures also bear witness to Jesus in types. Typology is when a sign is given which is fulfilled later. Noah's Ark is a type of Christ, because all who took refuge in it were sheltered from God's judgment. The ark was battered by God's furious judgment storm, but those inside the ark were safe. The Passover Lamb was a type of Christ because its blood marked people as belonging to God and saved them from the wrath of God in the curse of the firstborn. Many other Old Testament types pointed to Christ, too, including the bronze serpent that Moses made and held up for the people to look to and be saved from God's judgment during the wilderness wanderings and the rock that Moses struck that gave water to refresh the people.
4. **Ceremonies:** Not only did God give His people prophecies, promises and types, but He also gave them ceremonies, including circumcision and the sacrificial system of the ceremonial law. All of these ceremonies testified to the people's ever-present sin and of their need for salvation and cleansing through the shedding of blood.
5. **Patterns:** And finally, there are patterns in Scripture that testify to Jesus. One of these is the pattern of God's people going down to Egypt before returning to the Promised Land. Abraham did this in Genesis and then the whole people of God did this at the end of Genesis and in Exodus. Another key pattern is that of suffering and glory and how suffering always comes first and then victory. This pattern is clear in David's life and is reflected in the Psalms, but it can also be seen in Abraham and in Moses.

We could spend much more time on all the ways in which the Old Testament points us to Christ, but we need to move on . . .

### **c. Those Who Reject Jesus Are Judged by Moses**

Jesus then says something very stunning to these religious leaders, these experts in the Law of Moses:

*“<sup>45</sup> Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” – vv. 45-47*

Not only do they not believe in Jesus because they never had God’s word abiding in them, but Moses himself will accuse them to the Father. Moses will accuse them not of rejecting Jesus but of rejecting his writings, for Moses wrote of Jesus. Not only do the Scriptures testify to Jesus, but if you read Moses and then reject Jesus, you’ve actually missed the whole point of what Moses wrote!

### **B. One Reason for Rejection**

Why would these professional Bible scholars, these experts in the Scriptures, be so blind and miss the whole point of what the Scriptures say? Why would they have God’s word on their lips but not in their hearts. Jesus explains this in verses 41-44.

*<sup>41</sup> I do not receive glory from people. <sup>42</sup> But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. <sup>43</sup> I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. <sup>44</sup> How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? - vv. 41-44*

#### **I. Jesus Does Not Receive Glory from People**

First, Jesus explains why it is that He is so unlike these other religious teachers, these other rabbis. He does not receive glory from people. Jesus is not working hard to get praise and attention and affirmation from people.

If Jesus had come eager to earn their praise, these religious leaders would have understood Him and accepted Him. They would have received Him if He had come “in his own name,” meaning, seeking His own earthly fame and status, as so many others had done. Many other false Messiahs had come along in the first century, and many of them were embraced readily, even though they came in their own name and did not do the testifying works that Jesus did.

#### **2. People Seek Glory from Other People**

And then Jesus gets to the very heart of their problem: *“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”*

These religious leaders were in the religion game for the glory, not the glory of God, but the glory they received from one another. They wanted approval from their peers and from the people. They wanted to outshine and outperform each other. If they could memorize the most Scripture and recite it with the most passion, they would receive the most praise.

Nothing gets us off track in our walk with the Lord more quickly than hypocrisy, mask-wearing, wanting to look better than we are, wanting to appear righteous in order to win the praise of others. We forget about loving God and living for His praise and instead we live to gain the approval and avoid the rejection of other people. Soon, our every religious activity is done only for the sake of being seen and praised by others, and underneath the mask we are dead. We are whitewashed tombs, or a cup that's only clean on the outside. We are made-up walking corpses, zombies in neckties, highly respectable and far from God.

This kind of peer pressure keeps many professing Christians faking their faith, but it also keeps many non-Christians from seeking the truth about Jesus and professing faith in Him. Muslims, Jews, secularists, academics and others will suppress the truth about Jesus and deny what is obvious and clear for one key reason: They're afraid of being rejected, being humiliated, being left out or left behind by the people whose opinions and praise they truly value.

To both hypocritical professing Christians and to Christ-rejecting unbelievers, Jesus says very clearly, "*How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*" This blunt judgment is a call for us to repent and plead with God to re-orient our lives on Him, that we might live for His glory, the glory that comes from the only God and that comes as a free gift through the salvation that is found only in Jesus.