

The Water and the Blood

Victory by Faith: Part 2

1 John 5:5-6a 1-11-2009

This passage (and this sermon) is designed for the purpose of fortifying your faith. It is a good message to listen to in times when doubts are creeping into your heart.

Excerpt

The object of that faith must be Christ, who is the only source of eternal life. If you can convince your soul of that, you are invincible in the warfare. You will be able to overcome greed, discontent, anger, unforgiveness, lying, worry, laziness, doubt, pride, gluttony, selfishness, lust, addiction – anything. We become captive to those sins because we think we can get some aspect of life from them (joy or safety or security or motivation or blessing – some aspect of abundant life). So if we really believe that Jesus Christ is the source of abundant life – the only source – then our hearts will gladly let go its grip on those things and prefer grace from God instead.

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1 John 5:5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. 6 This is the one who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9 We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 10 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Review

When you do something nice for someone, how do you know if that is really love? Sometimes when you show kindness to someone it is love; other times it is not. How do you know the difference? The answer is in 1 John 5:2 - Obedience to God. It is never love if it is disobedience to one of God's commands. In last week's passage John showed us the error of what I have heard called "catchword ethics." Catchword ethics is when you take some general principle in the Bible and use it to justify an act of disobedience. In this case the catchword is love. Everyone loves the word love. And everyone wants to assign their idea of love to God, and use it to justify their ethical system.

"It's OK for me to get a divorce, because God is loving and He does not want me to be unhappy for the rest of my life."

"It's OK for me to break this little biblical rule, because after all, God is a God of love."

"We shouldn't carry out church discipline, because that would be unloving."

"Instead of telling people the truth about Christ and sin and judgment, I'll just show them love." They take love, turn it into a catchword, and then use it to cancel out specific commands in the Bible. Another big catchword is "grace."

"We are under grace; therefore we do not have to obey God's commands."

"God would not send anyone to hell, because He is a God of grace."

"It is OK to have foul language or to love the world a little bit here and there, because God is not concerned about law – only grace."

There is no general principle in the Bible that makes disobedience OK. There is nothing in the character of God that winks at *any* kind of disobedience. I had another person contact me just this week and try to convince me that it is wrong to try to obey God. He said I was preaching the gospel of Jesus, which is all about law, and I should stop doing that and preach the gospel of Paul, which is about grace. Please, if anyone ever comes to you with a message that says you do not need to obey God's commands, reject that teacher and do not listen to another word. There are a lot of these people floating around, and they are wolves in sheep's clothing.

Jude 1:4 For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality

Where there is no obedience, faith is dead; it does not exist. Victory in our war against Satan is obedience to God. Disobedience is defeat.

And the only way to have real, sustained victory over a sin is by faith. John told us some amazing things in the last text we looked at about the importance and value of faith. It is a key passage with some crucially important principles. It is a passage that teaches us how to have victory in the Christian life. The way to have victory – the way to overcome that problem in your life that you have not been able to overcome – is by faith. It is the way to make God's commands that are currently hard for you and burdensome, delightful and desirable. Faith makes you invincible in the war against Satan. Everything you desperately want in the Christian life you can have through faith – and only through faith. And so that should make all of us ravenously hungry for greater faith. If faith has the power to change my desires so that these longings I have for the world would fade and my desire for spiritual things would increase, anything that has the power to do that in my life – I *want* it!

And now that John has made us desperate to increase our faith, in this passage he is going to help us do that. He is going to help us convince our hearts to believe the truth by showing us how absolutely bombproof the evidence is. John is now going to supply us with absolute, undeniable, irrefutable proof – proof beyond any reasonable doubt that the gospel is true, so that we can increase our faith. And what is that proof? - The testimony of God.

Intro

Do you realize that God has spoken to you? Sometimes people talk about what they plan on saying to God when they arrive in heaven. They say, “If I could speak to God face to face, this is what I would say...” And frankly, I am generally not all that interested in what people think they would say to God. I am a lot more interested in what God would say to them. If you had a conversation with God, the important question is not what you would say; the important question is what would God say? What would God say? Of all the things God has in His heart to say to you, what would He say first? What is most important? If He had to keep it to one sentence, what would it be?

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

That is another one of John’s amazing one-line summaries of the whole gospel. That is the gospel, and that is what God is testifying about. When God gives us this rock-solid proof, it is that sentence that He is proving. When you strive for greater faith, it is that sentence – or some corollary to that sentence, that you are striving to believe more.

So how is John going to build our faith? Starting in verse 6 he brings us all into a courtroom to hear some testimony. And this testimony is going to be so compelling that our hearts will be convinced, and we will have faith. Three witnesses are going to get up on the stand and testify.

Testimony builds faith

But before we hear the testimony we have to address the question of whether testimony is even the right approach. Because there are many who doubt - deny that it is. They say, “You can’t argue someone into faith. You can’t debate someone into the Kingdom. Faith is a supernatural, spiritual reality and so no amount of reasoning can take a dead heart and make it alive.”

And it is true – faith is a spiritual thing. But so is reasoning. Truth and logic are spiritual things. Is evidence, by itself, enough to generate faith in someone’s heart? No. But neither is it possible to have faith without evidence. It is not the whole pie but it is an essential ingredient.

Can you argue someone into the kingdom? It depends. It depends on what is missing in their heart. If someone has a hard heart that is unwilling to accept the truth, or unwilling to give up the world, then no – no amount of testimony or proof will convince them. But sometimes you get a person who is willing to accept the truth, but they just have not heard the evidence. And people like that do become Christians when they are presented with good arguments for the faith.

There is currently a big movement in Christianity known as the Emergent Church. And one of the hallmarks of that movement is the idea that “propositional truth” is a thing of the past. They say, “Truth is not a set of propositions; truth is a Person.” Or, “Truth is best communicated in a story – not in propositions.” Or sometimes they say, “We can’t expect everyone to think according to Western logic. Oriental people don’t use Western logic.”

I read several articles this week arguing against propositional truth. And I was amused at the fact that every point in every one of those articles was a proposition. The entire article was nothing but propositions. The argument against propositional truth is a self-refuting argument because they have to use propositions to argue against them.

Regardless what people say are the current social trends, the fact is God uses propositions and logic, and therefore that is a good approach – period.

The object of faith – verse 5

The starting point for our faith is in verse 5, where John gives us the object of our faith. Faith in the wrong object is worthless. If I see a frozen lake and decide to walk on it, if that ice is paper-thin then I can believe with all my heart that it will hold me up, but it won’t. But if it is five feet thick then I can have all

kinds of doubts in my mind and it will still hold me up. All I need is enough faith to step out on it. You see the power comes not from the faith but from the object of faith. Faith in the wrong Jesus, wrong God, wrong religion – will do nothing to save you. It will give you no victory at all. That is why it is so important to learn Scripture. If you do not know what the truth is, you cannot believe it.

Many people in our culture think of faith as an end in itself. They have “faith” with no object. They say things like, “You have to believe – you can accomplish anything if you just believe.” But they never say what it is you are supposed to believe – they just have faith in faith.

But John tells us exactly what the object of our faith must be.

5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

And the object of that faith must be Christ. And there are two parts to faith – believing the truth about Him and trusting Him as a person. And what is the truth about Him? He is the Son of God, the only way to the Father, and the only source of eternal life. If you can convince your soul of that, you are invincible in the warfare. You will be able to overcome greed, discontent, anger, unforgiveness, lying, worry, laziness, doubt, pride, gluttony, selfishness, lust, addiction – anything. We become captive to those sins because we think we can get some aspect of life from them (joy or safety or security or motivation or blessing – some aspect of abundant life). So if we really believe that Jesus Christ is the source of abundant life – the only source – then our hearts will gladly let go its grip on those things and prefer grace from God instead.

The meaning of water and blood

OK, so we know the object of our faith, now we are ready to strengthen our faith. John is going to help us be convinced. So let’s take a look at this testimony that is so compelling.

6 This is the one who came through¹ water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come in² water only, but in water and blood.

What does it mean that Jesus came through water and blood? And why make a point that it was not just water – it was also blood? Why does he not say, “He did not come in blood only, but also in water”? Evidently the readers did not have any trouble with the water part, but needed to be reminded about the blood part.

The words, *through* and *in* are probably being used here in a very general way to simply mean, “In connection with.” Jesus was associated with water and with blood. And if we want to know what John means by “in water,” if you look up that Greek phrase³ you find that it occurs ten other times – mostly in John’s Gospel and every time it always refers to the same thing – John’s baptism. The word can mean *with*, and you see that repeatedly in the Gospel of John. John came baptizing with water.

So that is where the phrase itself takes us, and so the first place to look is at Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist. Could that be what John is referring to here? I think the answer is yes. If we take the water to refer to Jesus’ baptism and the blood to refer to His death, then you have the beginning and end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. It started with His baptism and went to His death. And it is hard to think of what else it could possibly refer to. Some have pointed to the water and blood that flowed from Jesus’ side, but it is hard to imagine how that would be proof of anything (other than the fact that Jesus’ had died), and 2) in what sense did Jesus come through that water and blood?

Others have said the water is believers’ baptism and blood refers to communion, but nowhere is communion referred to by blood alone, and there is nothing in the context that would call for a reference to

¹ Gr. *dia*. This word can mean *through* (in a spatial sense), *by means of*, *in connection with*, or *with*.

² Gr. *en*. This word can mean *in*, *by means of*, *in connection with*, *because of*, *with respect to*, *with*, or *according to the standard of*.

³ Either with the *en* or just with the Dative.

communion. So the best explanation is probably that the water refers to Jesus' baptism and the blood to His death.

And that would also explain why John says, "Not just the water, but also the blood." One thing we know about the heresy that was taught in the church John is writing to is that they believed the Christ spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism and left prior to His death. They could not imagine that the Christ could actually die, so they separated Jesus the man and Christ the spirit. And they said the two were joined from the baptism up to just before the crucifixion. They did not have any problem believing that Jesus was the Christ at the baptism – just not on the cross.

In fact, it may well have been that those teachers used the term "in water" or "through water" to refer to Jesus' baptism. So John takes their term and says – "That's true, but not just in water – also in blood." John throws a harsh word in alongside their word to get their attention.

The First Witness: the Water

OK, so let's take a look at how the water and blood testify about Jesus. Here we are in the courtroom, and you are the judge – evaluating whether the testimony is valid. Satan, the accuser who always attacks your faith, is there trying to persuade you that it is not valid. In verse 6 John calls his first witness to the stand – the water. What happened at Jesus' baptism? The baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ was one of the most astonishing and spectacular events that has ever occurred in human history.

Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

That phrase "tried to deter" is in the imperfect, which means John kept deterring Him, which means Jesus kept persisting as well. Jesus kept on saying, "Baptize Me," and John kept resisting. There were huge crowds there, and so it must have been quite a drama when John's cousin shows up to be baptized, and it turns into an argument.

Why did John argue about this? Why is he so reluctant – what is the problem? He was reluctant because he knew the meaning of his baptism. What was John's baptism? It was not the same as baptism today. When we get baptized it is a symbol of dying and rising with Christ, and being immersed into His Church. But none of that was in place yet before Jesus even started His public ministry. So what was John's baptism all about?

Mark 1:4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 19:4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.

Being baptized by John meant repenting of your sins. That is clear even from the context of Matthew 3. Look up at verse 1.

Matthew 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

11 I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

When you come to John to be baptized, you get down there in the water with him, confess your sins, repent of them, and then he dunks you down into the water as a statement of your repentance. So can you see why John is choking on this idea of baptizing Jesus?

John's whole life is devoted to convincing everyone that Jesus is the spotless, sinless, perfect Lamb of God. Baptizing Him with a baptism of repentance would ruin everything. If Jesus participates in a ritual connected with repentance, it will appear as though He is a common sinner just like everyone else.

Matthew 3:15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now;

This is an idiom. The meaning is something like, "What you are saying is true, but let it slide this time." Jesus acknowledged the validity of John's argument – what John was saying was right on, but Jesus wanted to do it anyway, and the reason why lies behind that word "now." It was important that Jesus be baptized at *this* moment, because something about *this* moment is very significant.

And then Jesus says something to John that puts an immediate end to this little disagreement.

15 ...it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

Jesus says that it is necessary for him and John to do this so that everything that is supposed to take place in Jesus' Messianic work will be fulfilled.

What was it that was so important to Jesus' work as Messiah?

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized...

Wait a minute – now it's over! In verse 15 he was discussing with John about it, and now in verse 16 it is already in the past. We missed it! In verse 15 He is debating with John, and in verse 16 He is soaking wet. In my Bible this section is titled, "The baptism of Jesus," but the baptism of Jesus is not even described!

What that tells us is the reason why this was so important had to do with what happened right after the baptism.

16 he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Imagine what that was like. Let's transport ourselves down to the Jordan and get a good spot on the bank so we can watch this. There you are, standing along the bank with the crowd. You just stepped out of the water. A little chill runs through you as you feel a little breeze. You are soaking wet, but you aren't going anywhere - you wouldn't miss this for the world. It seems all of Israel is coming. People are repenting of their sins and turning to God. You cannot believe that you were just baptized by John the Baptist himself!

Now a man comes that John knows. They are out there talking, and it is hard to hear over the sound of the river, but it looks like John is refusing to baptize him!

And yet this man seems totally unintimidated by this great prophet. In fact it looks like if anything the prophet is a bit intimidated by this man. Who *is* he? He can't be anyone very important - he came down the road from Galilee.

Oh, look! Now John *is* baptizing him. Jesus goes into the water, he goes under, John brings Him up...

17 At that moment heaven was opened

You look up, the clouds roll back, blue goes to the side, the blackness of outer space cracks open, and suddenly you find yourself one of the very few human beings who have ever gazed directly into heaven itself! The first thing you notice is the brilliant bright light. Heaven is always described the same way – brilliant, flashing spectacular jewels and precious stones – the light of the glory of God refracting through them with infinite beauty and colors beyond description. There is God’s awesome throne surrounded by four huge living creatures, 24 rulers on thrones, and countless millions of angels...

You are standing there, and you cannot believe your eyes. You wonder if it is just a vision, but you look around, and everyone sees it! And that is not all. Next something even more astounding happened – something that had never happened before and has never happened since.

17 and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

The Holy Spirit was actually incarnated. He took on some kind of body (Lk.3:22). We do not know what kind of body – perhaps like a bird’s body, but it descended right out of heaven like a dove would descend. Almighty God, the Holy Spirit, actually descended from heaven and landed on Jesus.

That was a pre-arranged sign.

John.1:33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'

Why a dove? A dove would remind those people of sacrifice. The poor were to sacrifice a spotless dove. It was a picture of purity and sinless perfection. The Holy Spirit of God is making a dramatic statement that Jesus is no sinner. He has NO blemish, NO spot, NO sin, NO guilt.

So you are standing there in awe and fear taking all this in. You see things that the Bible writers are at a loss to describe when they have seen glimpses of it in visions. Suddenly the Holy Spirit takes a bodily form and flies right down out of heaven, right into the earth’s atmosphere, and lands on that Man!

Unbelievable! And just when you think you are about to pass out from amazement, that is *still not all!* **At that moment** your senses are shattered by the most awesome voice your have ever heard.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

God Almighty speaks audibly from heaven! What was that voice like? Was it like being next to a loud speaker when you can feel the vibrations in your chest?

God the Father speaks and says, “In case you were wondering who this man is, He is My Son.” Some people have tried to make that mean Jesus is something less than God the Father. That is not what that term means. It means Jesus is essentially the same as God. Just like my children are made up of nothing but a piece of me and a piece of Tracy, so they are 100% human, so Jesus was 100% God. What is Jesus made out of - Deity. Jesus consists of the same stuff as the Father. Son of God means he is by nature God. That is not true of any other human being. We are God’s sons and daughters in a different sense. But the phrase THE Son of God means deity. That is why they tried to stone Jesus when He claimed to be the Son of God.

But God is not done.

This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well-pleased

“In case anyone is still confused – Jesus is not a common sinner. He is not any kind of sinner. He has not done anything wrong. I am nothing but pleased with Him.”

Abraham was a great man, but this did not happen to him. God never spoke from heaven and said this about Moses, or David, or Elijah. Only Jesus.

Finally the whole, amazing drama draws to a close. The voice stops, the heavens return to normal, the Holy Spirit is still remaining on Jesus though. And John the Baptist looks at Jesus and says, “On second thought, I guess the concern about You looking like a common sinner is a non-problem.” Thousands were being baptized, but this didn’t happen for any of them. They go under the water and nothing happens but a few ripples. Jesus goes under and all heaven breaks loose. Heaven opens, God the Spirit appears, and the Father speaks audibly from heaven!

Just as an aside – there is a good lesson in that for us. Do not ever disobey because you are afraid of how it will look! Sometimes we don’t want to obey God because we are afraid it will make God look bad because of some special circumstances. Do not ever worry about that – God can take care of how things look to people. We just need to obey.

Association with sinners

So the problem of Jesus looking like a sinner turned out to be a non-problem. But the question still remains - why this act associated with repentance? God could have spoken from heaven without Jesus participating in an act that would associate Him with sinners. So why the baptism?

Isaiah 3:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

12 he was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many

Every one of us is morally corrupted on the inside. The reason Jesus came to this earth was to live a perfect life and then bear the guilt of our corruption in our place – and then take the punishment we deserve so that we could be granted forgiveness – if we entrust our lives to Him.

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness

Jesus came to identify with sinners. In fact, Jesus’ baptism was actually a picture of his own death. Every time Jesus refers to his own personal baptism, He speaks of His death. When some disciples asked to sit on the right and left of Jesus in the Kingdom Jesus said,

Mark 10:38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

Luke 12:50 I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!

Jesus’ baptism in water by John was the symbol and picture of His identification with sinners, and His death on the cross was the reality of His identification with sinners.

Turn in your Bibles back to 1 John 5, as we leave the banks of the Jordan and come back into John’s courtroom. That was the testimony of the water. John says to the Judge, “I’m finished with this witness Your Honor.” And the Judge looks at Satan and says, “Do you have any questions for this witness?” And Satan says, “No! Just get him off the stand already!” And he is grumbling as he walks back to his seat – “*That wasn’t fair.* John called “the water” to the stand but that testimony was actually the testimony of God Himself! I never had a chance against that Witness.” But his grumbling is interrupted by your voice from the bench: “Next witness!” And John says, “I now call the blood to the stand.”

The Second Witness: The Blood

And at that point about ten different voices in the courtroom shout, “Objection!” There was applause and approval and a lot of “oohs” and “aahs” for the water’s testimony. But that same crowd does not want to hear anything from this next witness.

The baptism of Jesus was an amazing event. That is the kind of testimony we naturally like. Sometimes you hear people say, “Why didn’t God make it clearer? Why not just speak audibly from heaven or something?” Well, He did! The kind of testimony God gave at the baptism of Jesus is right up our alley. That is usually the kind of evidence we are looking for when we ask the question of whether someone is from God. So the pre-Gnostic false teachers of John’s day would have had no problem at all with that first witness.

But this next witness causes most of the people in the courtroom to turn their heads away in disgust. This witness is hideous and embarrassing. Some of you might remember the Re-Imagining Conference that took place in Minneapolis back in 1993. It was put on by several of the mainline Christian denominations, and the purpose was to re-imagine what Christianity would look like from a feminist perspective and one of the most prominent themes in that conference was how horrible the doctrine of the cross was. One of the main speakers was Virginia Mollenkott of the National Council of Churches. She said that the cross was "the ultimate in child abuse and a model of human child abuse" depicting "God as an abusive parent."⁴ Another speaker, Dolores Williams, professor at Union Theological Seminary said, "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses dripping blood and weird stuff."⁵ That is a seminary professor. The cross is ugly and gross and embarrassing, and it is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. If the writers of the New Testament were making up a religion there is no way in the world they would have their God suffer and die and describe that in graphic detail in their writings. The cross violates the sensitivities of just about everyone.

But John has called this witness to the stand, so let’s hear what he has to say. Now at this point I have to tell you it is hard to me to know how much of the testimony from this witness I should include. If we went over it all it would take several years of sermons. We would have to cover all the prophecies, eight chapters of Matthew, nine chapters of Mark and Luke, and ten chapters of John – plus large portions of the rest of each of the epistles. For now we will just look at a few little snippets.

The Lamb of God

One of the fascinating things about the death of Jesus was the timing of it. People started trying to kill Jesus as soon as He was born.

Herod the Great used his whole army to try to kill this one little baby, but failed.

They tried to throw Jesus off a cliff in Nazareth, but Jesus escaped.

In John 5:16 the Jewish leaders decided to kill Jesus, and when he claimed to be God they stepped up their efforts.

The attempts on His life became so obvious, that in John 7:25 some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?"

They tried to arrest Him, and failed.

In John 8 they tried to kill Him, but Jesus said “**My hour has not yet come**”

In John 10:30 they picked up stones to stone him and failed.

In John 11:53 the chief priests **plotted to take his life**. But they couldn’t, because His hour had not yet come. Nothing could happen outside of Jesus perfect timing.

Finally, in John 12:23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come.” It was all going to happen in Jesus’ timing – not theirs. In Matthew 26:2 Jesus told His disciples that the chief priests would kill Him right on Passover day, which was two days away. “In two days, on Passover day, they will kill Me.”

⁴ <http://www.watchman.org/rektop/reimagin.htm>

⁵ Ibid.

Then the next verse flashes across town. Right at the same time Jesus is saying that to His disciples the chief priests are in a meeting and they are beside themselves with anger. They have had more of him than they could possibly stand. In Matthew 26:4 they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. Verse 5 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people." For them anytime was a great time to kill Jesus – except this week. This is the one time when they didn't want to do it. They do not want a riot. Plus, if you got a guy claiming to be the sacrificial Lamb of Isaiah 53, the Lamb of God, the one to which the Passover pointed, the fulfillment of the picture of the entire sacrificial system, and He is going around announcing that you are going to crucify him on the Passover, the last thing you want to do is fulfill his prophesy. The whole point of the Passover is to picture salvation from God through the death of a spotless lamb. You do not want a character like Jesus to be killed on that day.

So they say, "Not during the week of the Passover feast." And DEFINITELY not on the Passover day itself! And across town at that very moment Jesus is saying, "two days from now – right on the Passover." Not only did it happen two days later on the day they vowed they would never do it, but the time of day that it happened is significant. In the Temple they had a morning sacrifice and an evening sacrifice. The morning one was at 9:00 and the evening one was at 3:00. That is when the lambs were slaughtered. According to Mark's Gospel they nailed Jesus to the cross at the third hour (Mk.15:25). The Jewish day started at 6:00, so the third hour is 9:00. It just happened to work out that this One who claimed to be the Lamb of God was crucified at the very hour of the morning sacrifice. The nails were being pounded into His hands at the very time the priests' knives were cutting the throats of the lambs in the Temple.

According to Luke's Gospel the conversion of the thief on the cross took place at the sixth hour (noon) – three hours before the evening sacrifice (Lk.23:44). But Jesus didn't die at noon.

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The Lamb of God was nailed to the cross in the hour of the morning sacrifice, and He breathed His last six hours later at the time of the evening sacrifice. If you are a phony, how do you get them to crucify you on the one day in the whole year they absolutely do not want to crucify you – the Passover? And how do you get it timed so you are nailed to the cross right at the morning sacrifice and breathe your last right at the evening sacrifice?

Other signs at Jesus' Death

That is just one of many signs at the crucifixion of Jesus. A couple others are mentioned in that same passage. The sky went dark for three hours in the middle of the day.

Jesus claimed to be the only way into the presence of God. And the moment He died, that huge, 60-foot high curtain that blocked off access to the dwelling place of God in the Temple was torn in half – from top to bottom.

Matthew 27:50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.

There was an earthquake so violent that it was causing rocks to split. If you were murdering someone who claimed to be the Son of God and when you did it the sky went black for three hours in the middle of the day followed by an earthquake, you think you would be a little nervous?

Maybe not. Maybe you can think of some natural explanations for those things. But how about what happened next?

52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

John's second witness, ugly as he appeared to be at first, is turning out to be a pretty compelling witness, isn't he? But that is still not all.

The resurrection

One of the questions I had when I was studying this is, if John is trying to give us testimony to strengthen our faith, why does he not mention the resurrection? And the answer may be that he wanted to focus on Jesus' death, because that is what was being doubted. As I said before, it was Jesus' death that was the stumbling block.

But we should also realize that when Scripture refers to the blood of Christ, most of the time the reference is to the entire event of Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension. They don't mention every part every time – they just use a single word sometimes to refer to the entire thing. Just like we do. When we put up a symbol of our faith we put up a cross. We don't also put up an empty tomb, but that does not mean we are excluding the resurrection. And there is no reason for us to imagine that John would exclude parts of Jesus' work. The suffering and the resurrection go together.

And the resurrection is the supreme proof of the claims of Jesus.

Act 17:30-31 God commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

Jesus claimed to be the great, eternal I AM of the Old Testament. And to prove it He said He would be crucified on the Passover day, and then on the third day the Father would raise Him from the dead. And that is exactly what happened. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day is something you can prove from history without assuming the Bible is the Word of God. Once you have seen the evidence, it is irrational to doubt the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It did happen, which means Jesus is who He claimed to be. Millions of very smart people have tried their hardest over the past 2000 years to come up with a reasonable alternative to explain the evidence in some other way, and no one has been able to do it yet.

The great majority of New Testament scholars are non-Christians who do not believe the resurrection took place. If you throw out all the scholars who do believe, and go only by the unbelievers who do not believe the Bible is the Word of God, even among them there is a consensus about certain facts surrounding the death of Jesus. The historically provable facts about which there is a consensus of agreement are these:

There was a man named Jesus who did live during the time the Bible claims He did and He was from Nazareth.

He claimed that He was the Son of God and that He would rise from the dead.

He was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time.

He was buried in the tomb of a rich man, and the tomb was guarded by Rome. On the third day that tomb was unexpectedly empty.

Initially not even His followers believed – even when they saw the empty tomb. Then something happened that convinced His disciples and thousands of other Jews and Gentiles that He rose from the dead and was alive.

They were so convinced that they were willing to die in great numbers for their belief.

How do the unbelieving scholars explain all these facts in a way that does not point to resurrection? There have been a lot of attempts, but none of the explanations have gathered anything close to a consensus of agreement among the other scholars, because none of them can be supported by the evidence. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ happened. There is more proof of that event than of any other ancient historical event. It is the most certain fact there is from ancient history.

“Any questions for this witness Satan?”

Sigh, “No...just get him off the stand.”

At this point the devil’s case is absolutely demolished. And he is thinking, “Wait a second – that witness was God too. It was God who did all those things at the crucifixion and resurrection!” And so Satan looks to you and says, “I would like to request that the defense rest its case.” And John says, “No, I am not ready to do that. I still have my star witness to call. This witness is the most compelling of all.”

Conclusion

I wish we could hear this Witness now, but I am afraid we are going to have to call a recess at this point just because we are out of time. Next time we will plan on picking it up with the third witness. For now let’s just close with this: Where is it in your Christian life where you are not being victorious? Aren’t you failing in that area because your heart is not convinced that Christ is the supreme source of life in that area? There is some aspect of abundant life that your heart wants, and thinks it can get better from some other source besides Christ. Use the testimony of witnesses #1 and 2 to persuade your heart to seek life from the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Benediction: Heb.10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

Devotionals

Day 1

The only way to have real, sustained victory over a sin is by faith. So now that John has made us desperate to increase our faith, in today's passage he is going to help us do that. He is going to help us convince our hearts to believe the truth by showing us how absolutely bombproof the evidence is. John is going to supply us this morning with absolute, undeniable, irrefutable proof – proof beyond any reasonable doubt that the gospel is true, so that we can increase our faith. And what is that proof? - The testimony of God.

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

That is another one of John's amazing one-line summaries of the whole gospel. That is the gospel, and that is what God is testifying about. When God gives us this rock-solid proof, it is that sentence that He is proving. When you strive for greater faith, it is that sentence – or some corollary to that sentence, that you are striving to believe more.

So how is John going to build our faith? Starting in verse 6 he brings us all into a courtroom to hear some testimony. And this testimony is going to be so compelling that our hearts will be convinced, and we will have faith. Three witnesses are going to get up on the stand and testify. Regardless what people say are the current social trends, the fact is God uses propositions and logic, and therefore that is a good approach – period.

The starting point for our faith is in verse 5, where John gives us the object of our faith. Faith in the wrong object is worthless. If I see a frozen lake and decide to walk on it, if that ice is paper-thin then I can believe with all my heart that it will hold me up, but it won't. But if it is five feet thick then I can have all kinds of doubts in my mind and it will still hold me up. All I need is enough faith to step out on it. You see the power comes not from the faith but from the object of faith. Faith in the wrong Jesus, wrong God, wrong religion – will do nothing to save you. It will give you no victory at all. That is why it is so important to learn Scripture. If you do not know what the truth is, you cannot believe it.

Many people in our culture think of faith as an end in itself. They have "faith" with no object. They say things like, "You have to believe – you can accomplish anything if you just believe." But they never say what it is you are supposed to believe – they just have faith in faith.

But John tells us exactly what the object of our faith must be.

5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

And the object of that faith must be Christ. And there are two parts to faith – believing the truth about Him and trusting Him as a person. And what is the truth about Him? He is the Son of God, the only way to the Father, and the only source of eternal life. If you can convince your soul of that, you are invincible in the warfare. You will be able to overcome greed, discontent, anger, unforgiveness, lying, worry, laziness, doubt, pride, gluttony, selfishness, lust, addiction – anything. We become captive to those sins because we think we can get some aspect of life from them (joy or safety or security or motivation or blessing – some

aspect of abundant life). So if we really believe that Jesus Christ is the source of abundant life – the only source, then our hearts will gladly let go its grip on those things and prefer grace from God instead.

Day 2: The Water

6 This is the one who came through⁶ water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come in⁷ water only, but in water and blood.

Here we are in the courtroom, and you are the judge – evaluating whether the testimony is valid. Satan, the accuser who always attacks your faith, is there trying to persuade you that it is not valid. In verse 6 John calls his first witness to the stand – the water.

What happened at Jesus' baptism? The baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ was one of the most astonishing and spectacular events that has ever occurred in human history.

Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

That phrase “tried to deter” is in the imperfect, which means John kept deterring Him, which means Jesus kept persisting as well. Jesus kept on saying, “Baptize Me,” and John kept resisting. There were huge crowds there, and so it must have been quite a drama when John's cousin shows up to be baptized, and it turns into an argument.

Why did John argue about this? Why is he so reluctant – what is the problem? He was reluctant because he knew the meaning of his baptism. What was John's baptism? It was not the same as baptism today. When we get baptized it is a symbol of dying and rising with Christ, and being immersed into His Church. But none of that was in place yet before Jesus even started His public ministry. So what was John's baptism all about?

Mark 1:4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 19:4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.

Being baptized by John meant repenting of your sins. That is clear even from the context of Matthew 3. Look up at verse 1.

Matthew 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

11 I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

⁶ Gr. *dia*. This word can mean *through* (in a spatial sense), *by means of*, *in connection with*, or *with*.

⁷ Gr. *en*. This word can mean *in*, *by means of*, *in connection with*, *because of*, *with respect to*, *with*, or *according to the standard of*.

When you come to John to be baptized, you get down there in the water with him, confess your sins, repent of them, and then he dunks you down into the water as a statement of your repentance. So can you see why John is choking on this idea of baptizing Jesus?

John's whole life is devoted to convincing everyone that Jesus is the spotless, sinless, perfect Lamb of God. Baptizing Him with a baptism of repentance would ruin everything. If Jesus participates in a ritual connected with repentance, it will appear as though He is a common sinner just like everyone else.

Mt.3:15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now;

This is an idiom. The meaning is something like, "What you are saying is true, but let it slide this time." Jesus acknowledged the validity of John's argument – what John was saying was right on, but Jesus wanted to do it anyway, and the reason why lies behind that word "now." It was important that Jesus be baptized at *this* moment, because something about *this* moment is very significant.

And then Jesus says something to John that puts an immediate end to this little disagreement.

15 ...it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

Jesus says that it is necessary for him and John to do this so that everything that is supposed to take place in Jesus' Messianic work will be fulfilled.

What was it that was so important to Jesus' work as Messiah?

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized...

Wait a minute – now it's over! In verse 15 he was discussing with John about it, and now in verse 16 it is already in the past. We missed it! In verse 15 He is debating with John, and in verse 16 He is soaking wet. In my Bible this section is titled, "The baptism of Jesus," but the baptism of Jesus is not even described!

What that tells us is the reason why this was so important had to do with what happened right after the baptism.

16 he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Imagine what that was like. Let's transport ourselves down to the Jordan and get a good spot on the bank so we can watch this. There you are, standing along the bank with the crowd. You just stepped out of the water. A little chill runs through you as you feel a little breeze. You are soaking wet, but you are not going anywhere - you would not miss this for the world. All of Israel it seems is coming. People are repenting of their sins and turning to God. You cannot believe that you were just baptized by John the Baptist himself!

Now a man comes that John knows. They are out there talking, and it is hard to hear over the sound of the river, but it looks like John is refusing to baptize him!

And yet this man seems totally unintimidated by this great prophet. In fact it looks like if anything the prophet is a bit intimidated by this man. Who *is* he? He can't be anyone very important - he came down the road from Galilee.

Oh, look! Now John *is* baptizing him. Jesus goes into the water, he goes under, John brings Him up...

17 At that moment heaven was opened

You look up, the clouds roll back, blue goes to the side, the blackness of outer space cracks open, and suddenly you find yourself one of the very few human beings who have ever gazed directly into heaven itself! The first thing you notice is the brilliant bright light. Heaven is always described the same way – brilliant, flashing spectacular jewels and precious stones – the light of the glory of God refracting through them with infinite beauty and colors beyond description. There is God’s awesome throne surrounded by four huge living creatures, 24 rulers on thrones, and countless millions of angels...

You are standing there, and you cannot believe your eyes. You wonder if it is just a vision, but you look around, and everyone sees it! And that is not all. Next something even more astounding happened – something that had never happened before and has never happened since.

17 and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

The Holy Spirit was actually incarnated. He took on some kind of body (Lk.3:22). We do not know what kind of body – perhaps like a bird’s body, but it descended right out of heaven like a dove would descend. Almighty God, the Holy Spirit, actually descended from heaven and landed on Jesus.

That was a pre-arranged sign.

John 1:33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’

Why a dove? A dove would remind those people of sacrifice. The poor were to sacrifice a spotless dove. It was a picture of purity and sinless perfection. The Holy Spirit of God is making a dramatic statement that Jesus is no sinner. He has NO blemish, NO spot, NO sin, NO guilt.

So you are standing there in awe and fear taking all this in. You see things that the Bible writers are at a loss to describe when they have seen glimpses of it in visions. Suddenly the Holy Spirit takes a bodily form and flies right down out of heaven, right into the earth’s atmosphere, and lands on that Man!

Unbelievable! And just when you think you are about to pass out from amazement, that is *still not all!* **At that moment** your senses are shattered by the most awesome voice your have ever heard.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

God Almighty speaks audibly from heaven! What was that voice like? Was it like being next to a loud speaker when you can feel the vibrations in your chest?

God the Father speaks and says, “In case you were wondering who this man is, He’s My Son.” Some people have tried to make that mean Jesus is something less than God the Father. That is not what that term means. It means Jesus is essentially the same as God. Just like my children are made up of nothing but a piece of me and a piece of Tracy, so they are 100% human, so Jesus was 100% God. What is Jesus made out of - Deity. Jesus consists of the same stuff as the Father. Son of God means he is by nature God. That is not true of any other human being. We are God’s sons and daughters in a different sense. But the phrase THE Son of God means deity. That is why they tried to stone Jesus when He claimed to be the Son of God.

But God is not done.

This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well-pleased

“In case anyone is still confused – Jesus is not a common sinner. He is not any kind of sinner. He has not done anything wrong. I am nothing but pleased with Him.”

Abraham was a great man, but this did not happen to him. God never spoke from heaven and said this about Moses, or David, or Elijah. Only Jesus.

Finally the whole, amazing drama draws to a close. The voice stops, the heavens return to normal, the Holy Spirit is still remaining on Jesus though. And John the Baptist looks at Jesus and says, “On second thought, I guess the concern about You looking like a common sinner is a non-problem.” Thousands were being baptized, but this did not happen for any of them. They go under the water and nothing happens but a few ripples. Jesus goes under and all heaven breaks loose. Heaven opens, God the Spirit appears, and the Father speaks audibly from heaven!

Day 3

John hesitated to do what Jesus said because he was afraid it would make Jesus look bad. Do not ever disobey because you are afraid of how it will look! Sometimes we don't want to obey God because we are afraid it will make God look bad because of some special circumstances. Do not ever worry about that – God can take care of how things look to people. We just need to obey.

So the problem of Jesus looking like a sinner turned out to be a non-problem. But the question still remains - why this act associated with repentance? God could have spoken from heaven without Jesus participating in an act that would associate Him with sinners. So why the baptism?

Isa.53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

12 he was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many

Every one of us is morally corrupted on the inside. The reason Jesus came to this earth was to live a perfect life and then bear the guilt of our corruption in our place – and then take the punishment we deserve so that we could be granted forgiveness – if we entrust our lives to Him.

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness

Jesus came to identify with sinners. In fact, Jesus' baptism was actually a picture of his own death. Every time Jesus refers to his own personal baptism, He speaks of His death. When some disciples asked to sit on the right and left of Jesus in the Kingdom Jesus said,

Mark 10:38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

Luke. 2:50 I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!

Jesus' baptism in water by John was the symbol and picture of His identification with sinners, and His death on the cross was the reality of His identification with sinners.

Turn in your Bibles back to 1 John 5, as we leave the banks of the Jordan and come back into John's courtroom. That was the testimony of the water. John says to the Judge, "I am finished with this witness Your Honor." And the Judge looks at Satan and says, "Do you have any questions for this witness?" And Satan says, "No! Just get him off the stand already!" And he is grumbling as he walks back to his seat – "*That wasn't fair.* John called "the water" to the stand but that testimony was actually the testimony of God Himself! I never had a chance against that Witness." But his grumbling is interrupted by your voice from the bench: "Next witness!"

Day 4 The Blood

John says, "I now call the blood to the stand." And at that point about ten different voices in the courtroom shout, "Objection!" There was applause and approval and a lot of "oohs" and "aahs" for the water's testimony. But that same crowd does not want to hear anything from this next witness.

The baptism of Jesus was an amazing event. That is the kind of testimony we naturally like. Sometimes you hear people say, "Why didn't God make it more clear? Why not just speak audibly from heaven or something?" Well, He did! The kind of testimony God gave at the baptism of Jesus is right up our alley. That is usually the kind of evidence we are looking for when we ask the question of whether someone is from God. And so the pre-Gnostic false teachers of John's day would have had no problem at all with that first witness.

But this next witness causes most of the people in the courtroom to turn their heads away in disgust. This witness is hideous and embarrassing. Some of you might remember the Re-Imagining Conference that took place in Minneapolis back in 1993. It was put on by several of the mainline Christian denominations, and the purpose was to re-imagine what Christianity would look like from a feminist perspective. And one of the most prominent themes in that conference was how horrible the doctrine of the cross was. One of the main speakers was Virginia Mollenkott of the National Council of Churches. She said that the cross was "the ultimate in child abuse and a model of human child abuse" depicting "God as an abusive parent."⁸ Another speaker, Dolores Williams, professor at Union Theological Seminary said, "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses dripping blood and weird stuff."⁹ That is a seminary professor. The cross is ugly and gross and embarrassing, and it is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. If the writers of the New Testament were making up a religion there is no way in the world they would have their God suffer and die and describe that in graphic detail in their writings. The cross violates the sensitivities of just about everyone.

But John has called this witness to the stand, so let's hear what he has to say. Now at this point I have to tell you it is hard to me to know how much of the testimony from this witness I should include. If we went over it all it would take several years of sermons. We would have to cover all the prophecies, eight chapters of Matthew, nine chapters of Mark and Luke, and ten chapters of John – plus large portions of the rest of each of the epistles. All we have time for here is just a few little snippets.

One of the fascinating things about the death of Jesus was the timing of it. People started trying to kill Jesus as soon as He was born.

Herod the Great used his whole army to try to kill this one little baby, but failed.

They tried to throw Jesus off a cliff in Nazareth, but Jesus escaped.

In John 5:16 the Jewish leaders decided to kill Jesus, and when he claimed to be God they stepped up their efforts.

The attempts on His life became so obvious, that in John.7:25 some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?"

They tried to arrest Him, and failed.

In John 8 they tried to kill Him, but Jesus said "**My hour has not yet come**

In John 10:30 they picked up stones to stone him and failed.

In John 11:53 the chief priests **plotted to take his life.**

But they couldn't, because His hour had not yet come. Nothing could happen outside of Jesus perfect timing.

Finally, in John.12:23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come." It was all going to happen in Jesus' timing – not theirs. In Matthew 26:2 Jesus told His disciples that the chief priests would kill Him right on Passover day, which was two days away. "In two days, on Passover day, they will kill Me."

⁸ <http://www.watchman.org/rektop/reimagin.htm>

⁹ Ibid.

Then the next verse flashes across town. Right at the same time Jesus is saying that to His disciples the chief priests are in a meeting and they are beside themselves with anger. They have had more of him than they could possibly stand. In Matthew 26:4 they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. Verse 5 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people." For them anytime was a great time to kill Jesus – except this week. This is the one time when they did not want to do it. They do not want a riot. Plus, if you got a guy claiming to be the sacrificial Lamb of Isaiah 53, the Lamb of God, the one to which the Passover pointed, the fulfillment of the picture of the entire sacrificial system, and He is going around announcing that you are going to crucify him on the Passover, the last thing you want to do is fulfill his prophesy. The whole point of the Passover is to picture salvation from God through the death of a spotless lamb. You don't want a character like Jesus to be killed on that day.

So they say, "Not during the week of the Passover feast." And DEFINITELY not on the Passover day itself! And across town at that very moment Jesus is saying, "Two days from now – right on the Passover." Not only did it happen two days later on the day they vowed they would never do it, but the time of day that it happened is significant. In the Temple they had a morning sacrifice and an evening sacrifice. The morning one was at 9:00 and the evening one was at 3:00. That is when the lambs were slaughtered. According to Mark's Gospel they nailed Jesus to the cross at the third hour (Mk.15:25). The Jewish day started at 6:00, so the third hour is 9:00. It just happened to work out that this One who claimed to be the Lamb of God was crucified at the very hour of the morning sacrifice. The nails were being pounded into His hands at the very time the priests' knives were cutting the throats of the lambs in the Temple. According to Luke's Gospel the conversion of the thief on the cross took place at the sixth hour (noon) – three hours before the evening sacrifice (Lk.23:44). But Jesus didn't die at noon.

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The Lamb of God was nailed to the cross in the hour of the morning sacrifice, and He breathed His last six hours later at the time of the evening sacrifice. If you are a phony, how do you get them to crucify you on the one day in the whole year they absolutely don't want to crucify you – the Passover? And how do you get it timed so you're nailed to the cross right at the morning sacrifice and breathe your last right at the evening sacrifice?

That is just one of many signs at the crucifixion of Jesus. A couple others are mentioned in that same passage. The sky went dark for three hours in the middle of the day.

Jesus claimed to be the only way into the presence of God. And the moment He died, that huge, 60-foot high curtain that blocked off access to the dwelling place of God in the Temple was torn in half – from top to bottom.

Matthew 27:50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.

There was an earthquake so violent that it was causing rocks to split. If you were murdering someone who claimed to be the Son of God and when you did it the sky went black for hours in the middle of the day followed by an earthquake, you think you would be a little nervous?

Maybe not. Maybe you can think of some natural explanations for those things. But how about what happened next?

52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

John's second witness, ugly as he appeared to be at first, is turning out to be a pretty compelling witness, isn't he?

Day 5 Resurrection

One of the questions I had when I was studying this is, if John is trying to give us testimony to strengthen our faith, why does he not mention the resurrection? And the answer may be that he wanted to focus on Jesus' death, because that is what was being doubted. As I said before, it was Jesus' death that was the stumbling block.

But we should also realize that when Scripture refers to the blood of Christ, most of the time the reference is to the entire event of Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension. They do not mention every part every time – they just use a single word sometimes to refer to the entire thing, just like we do. When we put up a symbol of our faith we put up a cross. We don't also put up an empty tomb, but that does not mean we are excluding the resurrection. And there is no reason for us to imagine that John would exclude parts of Jesus' work. The suffering and the resurrection go together.

And the resurrection is the supreme proof of the claims of Jesus.

Act 17:30-31 God commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

Jesus claimed to be the great, eternal I AM of the Old Testament and to prove it He said He would be crucified on the Passover day, and then on the third day the Father would raise Him from the dead. And that is exactly what happened. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day is something you can prove from history without assuming the Bible is the Word of God. Once you have seen the evidence, it is irrational to doubt the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It did happen, which means Jesus is who He claimed to be. Millions of very smart people have tried their hardest over the past 2000 years to come up with a reasonable alternative to explain the evidence in some other way, and no one has been able to do it yet.

The great majority of New Testament scholars are non-Christians who do not believe the resurrection took place. If you throw out all the scholars who do believe, and go only by the unbelievers who do not believe the Bible is the Word of God, even among them there is a consensus about certain facts surrounding the death of Jesus. The historically provable facts about which there is a consensus of agreement are these:

There was a man named Jesus who did live during the time the Bible claims He did and He was from Nazareth.

He claimed that He was the Son of God and that He would rise from the dead.

He was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time.

He was buried in the tomb of a rich man, and the tomb was guarded by Rome. On the third day that tomb was unexpectedly empty.

Initially not even His followers believed – even when they saw the empty tomb. Then something happened that convinced His disciples and thousands of other Jews and Gentiles that He rose from the dead and was alive.

They were so convinced that they were willing to die in great numbers for their belief.

How do the unbelieving scholars explain all these facts in a way that does not point to resurrection? There have been a lot of attempts, but none of the explanations have gathered anything close to a consensus of agreement among the other scholars, because none of them can be supported by the evidence. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ happened. There is more proof of that event than of any other ancient historical event. It is the most certain fact there is from ancient history.

“Any questions for this witness, Satan?”

Sigh, “No...just get him off the stand.”

At this point the devil's case is absolutely demolished. And he is thinking, "Wait a second – that witness was God too. It was God who did all those things at the crucifixion and resurrection!" And so Satan looks to you and says, "I would like to request that the defense rest its case." And John says, "No, I am not ready to do that. I still have my star witness to call. This witness is the most compelling of all."

Next time we will plan on picking it up with the third witness. For now let's just close with this: Where is it in your Christian life where you are not being victorious? Aren't you failing in that area because your heart is not convinced that Christ is the supreme source of life in that area? There is some aspect of abundant life that your heart wants, and thinks it can get better from some other source besides Christ. Use the testimony of witnesses #1 and 2 to persuade your heart to seek life from the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Summary

The last passage showed the importance of faith, and this section seeks to build faith by producing evidence in the form of testimony. The object of faith is Christ as the source of life. The testimony of the water is the events surrounding Jesus' baptism (which the false teachers probably accepted). The testimony of the blood (which they didn't like) was the events surrounding the crucifixion/resurrection.