TESTIMONIES ABOUT JESUS

John 5:31-47
Key Verse 5:36

“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.”

Jesus had performed an outstanding miracle by healing a man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. The man was steeped in fatalism because of his paralysis, both mental and physical. He had no holy desire to get well or to glorify God. Jesus said to this hopeless man, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk,” and the man got up and began to walk. What a wonderful healing! What authority Jesus’ word had! But the religious leaders were upset that Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath. Jesus did his best to explain to them that he healed the man out of his desire to please his Father God. But they twisted his words to make it seem that he was blaspheming against God. They were crooked men and men of unbelief. Jesus should have given up on them, and left them to rot like the whitewashed tombs that they were. Jesus is not like other men, however. Jesus really wanted to help these miserable men out of their unbelief until they might take hold of the promise of eternal life. Today’s passage is Jesus’ sincere effort to help these men believe through introducing several testimonies about Jesus. Through this passage, we can understand better the nature of belief, and what kind of attitude we must have towards the testimonies God has given us. Especially, we learn from Jesus to make every effort to live in order to receive praise from God!

I. Testimony that Jesus came from God (31-40)

First, John’s testimony (31-35). Jesus gave the religious leaders the promise of God in 5:24, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” It was Jesus’ shepherd heart to embrace the religious leaders and bring them under
the tender mercy of God. Otherwise, they would face God’s inescapable judgment (30). Still, Jesus understood that the religious leaders were slaves of their unbelief. If their hearts were pure, they could have heard God’s truth in what Jesus said, and just believed. But they were too puffed up by their knowledge of Jewish law and tradition to listen to Jesus’ words. Jesus did not accuse them of being proud. Instead, he humbled himself, and pointed to the objective testimony on his behalf. Look at verse 31-33. “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth.” The religious leaders had gone out to John to listen to his testimony from God. What did John tell them?

First of all, John told the religious leaders that Jesus is the Son of God. John 1:26-27 reads, “I baptize with water,’ John replied, ‘but among you stands one you do not know. He is the One who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’” The religious leaders were alarmed by John’s popularity and powerful message. But he was not the one they needed to pay attention to. When John saw Jesus, he declared, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” John had come precisely for the reason of making Jesus known to God’s people as their Savior. He said in John 1:34, “I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”

Second of all, John testified that Jesus came from heaven. John was sent by God to testify concerning Jesus. But he did not consider himself a witness of heavenly things. John 1:8-9 say, “He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” Jesus himself called John a lamp that burned and gave light for a time. His witness was of the earth. But John’s testimony about Jesus was that he was the true light. Jesus was not a second hand witness or source. He spoke as one who is from above. John 3:31-33 says, “The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs
to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful.” John testified that Jesus is the unique witness to men of God and heaven and the way to eternal life.

Look at verse 34. “Not that I accept human testimony, but I mention it that you may be saved.” In this one short verse, Jesus puts human testimony about others in its proper perspective. Testimony is evidence for the sake of establishing historical truth. It is finite and incomplete. But it can still point to the truth, when considered carefully. Jesus did not depend on what others said about him. He knew himself and the mission he had received from God. But the religious leaders were blinded by their self-righteousness and political minds. John’s testimony was God’s grace to them so that they might see the truth, repent and believe. Each of us has a testimony regarding Jesus’ salvation work in our lives. When we testify clearly what Jesus did and that he came from God, others can come to have life even through us. Look at verse 35. “John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.” The religious leaders heard John’s testimony. But they only enjoyed his testimony as if they were hearing an unusually good lecturer, or reading a fine book. They did not take his testimony to heart or change their mind because he spoke the truth. Their superficial attitude toward John’s testimony made them confused and hard-hearted, when they could have experienced true salvation. It is important to consider carefully the testimony of others. It is important to be a truth-seeker and not a spectator when it comes to our spiritual life.

Second, the Father’s work (36). Look at verse 36. “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.” Jesus points the religious leaders to the weightier testimony of his messianic ministry. Many even among the Jewish religious leaders had noticed Jesus’ miraculous signs, and came to Jesus to pay their respect. But Jesus was not emphasizing the number or quality of the miraculous signs that he had done. He said, “the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing.”
Jesus was not running a medical clinic or welfare office. Jesus was carrying out the world salvation work of God. Jesus had to finish the world salvation work by offering himself on the cross as the Lamb of God. It was not easy at all for Jesus to devote himself fully to carrying out God’s will for world salvation. He prayed on Gethsemane the night of his arrest, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me. Yet not my will, but yours be done.” Jesus was in anguish of soul because of the suffering he would face on the cross. Still, Jesus had a decision to finish the Father’s work. He was on the cross. He was thirsty from having lost most of his blood through the wounds on his head and back, and the nails through his hands and feet. Jesus waited until the time was right. Then he asked for a drink. Finally, he shouted, “It is finished,” and then he breathed his last and gave up his spirit. Jesus shed his blood on the cross for the sin of the world in obedience to his Father’s command. It is the best testimony of God’s saving love for sinful mankind. It is the evidence that Jesus came not on his own, but was sent by the Father to bring us eternal life.

Third, the Scriptures (37-40). The Father himself had testified in the Scriptures that the Son would come to save his people from their sins. Isaiah 53:5 says, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” But it was God’s revealed will that the Son would not stay in the grave. Isaiah 53:11 and 12 say, “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life, and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” The Scriptures testify that the Son would bear the sins of the world, only to be raised to life for the sake of a living hope for all who believe in him.

The religious leaders knew this. They had studied the Scriptures diligently. But they had rejected this testimony as well. Look at verses 37-40. “And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice, nor seen his form, nor does his
word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures, because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” Here we can understand the nature of unbelief. The religious leaders did not believe, not because they did not hear the testimony God had given them. It was because they chose not to believe. They were men of deliberate unbelief. They had closed their ears not to hear, and their eyes not to see. Most of all, they had closed their hearts so that they would not be changed, even though they studied the Scriptures more diligently than a Ph.D. student. People make all kinds of excuses why they can’t believe in God or in Jesus as God’s Son. But that is what they are – excuses. The testimony of God is clear and true. Jesus came as God’s Son to die for our sins, and rise to life for our living hope in the kingdom of God. We must not close our ears or our hearts to the testimony in God’s word, and the testimony of our hearts. We must repent and believe, and come to Jesus to have life.

II. Praise from God

First, “You do not have the love of God” (41-44). After presenting the testimony in favor of himself, Jesus saw that the religious leaders were not inclined to consider this testimony or repent for their hard hearts. Jesus was very sorry. He did not need their praise or recognition. But they needed to be changed. They were men who had worked very hard to gain the position of religious leader. But it would do them no good if they remained as men of unbelief. Look at verses 41-42. “I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.” In these verses, Jesus identifies the religious leaders’ real problem. They had enough Bible knowledge. But they did not know the love of God. They did not practice the love of God. They did not love God or his word of life. Their hearts were not set on God or his kingdom above—they were set on the things of this world. Look at verses 43 and 44. “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”
Jesus did not say this because there was no hope for the religious leaders. In fact, John’s gospel uniquely points out how powerfully Jesus’ ministry among the religious leaders had worked, so that it was two of the religious leaders who buried Jesus’ body after his death on the cross. Instead, Jesus here challenges the religious leaders to change their life-direction.

The religious leaders had been sincere at first, trying to learn God’s law so that they might live according to his righteous decrees and have life. Gradually, however, they found that it was pretty difficult to maintain a right attitude towards God’s word. On the other hand, it was relatively easy to fool others into thinking, “he’s alright,” by maintaining appearances. And they discovered that everyone was in on the deal, like students who agree without words not to try too hard so that the teacher has to curve the exam grades. They substituted pleasing one another and maintaining an appearance of religion for a life-style that pleases God. Now Jesus urged them to think where such a lifestyle of appearances had brought them. They were no longer merely indifferent to God’s word. They had become enemies of God for the sake of maintaining appearances. Is that how they wanted to live? It was not too late. They had to repent, and come to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. They had to listen to him, and learn from him how to live a life of mission that pleases God. We too must listen to Jesus’ challenge. It is easy to go to the ministry with the most people, or where you get the most recognition and the least grief. But we must not be those who live for appearances. We must be those who seek to please God with our obedience to his word and world mission command. Most of all, we must be those who seek to learn from Jesus until the love of God fills our hearts and overflows as a testimony to others of God’s grace and mercy to sinners.

Second, “Believe what I say” (45-47). Look at verses 45-47. “But do not think that I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” The religious leaders tried to make a brave face before Jesus’ stinging rebuke. He was right,
but they stubbornly held on to their pride as Jews and keepers of the Law. Jesus took away their only hope. They thought that if they rejected Jesus, they still had Moses. It was not true. By rejecting Jesus, the fulfillment of the law, they were rejecting the law itself, and Moses who gave it. They had to believe what Jesus said, or stand condemned before the Almighty God.

In this passage, Jesus introduces the testimony that shows he was sent by God to fulfill God’s world salvation purpose. Jesus also sets the life-direction for those who would believe and have life. We must make every effort to please God ahead of ourselves or other men. We must make a clear decision to teach the Bible to others as one to one Bible teachers and shepherds, and give them God’s testimony that Jesus came from God as a matter of life and death.

5:36: “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.”