

Teaching Points

Last time we focused on Christ's claims to equality with God. These are amazing statements about His deity. He told the Jews that He's equal with God in nature, power, and authority. In other words - He is God! After declaring His divine nature in this way, Jesus then appealed to various witnesses that testified to the truthfulness of His claims. Tonight we're going to consider each of these witnesses.

Witness #1: John the Baptist.

We've already studied the work of John. Chapter 1 says of him, ***"This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light."*** (John 1:7-8).

Here in chapter 5 Jesus appeals to John's witness. Crowds gathered to hear John preach. This crowd that Jesus was currently preaching to had previously sent people to hear John's message (5:33). And what was it that John told them? ***"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*** (John 1:29).

Some of them were willing to receive John's preaching. They viewed him as a burning and shining lamp and were willing to rejoice in his light...for a time (5:35). John clearly pointed the crowds to Jesus - and they knew John was a preacher sent from God - so why were they opposing Christ now? **In this, John was a witness against the unbelieving Jews.**

Discussion Question: Many of the Jews viewed John as a messenger from God. How could they honor John and yet reject Jesus (the one John pointed to)?

Thoughts: *John was a popular preacher in the eyes of many of the Jews. Nevertheless, Jesus was a stone of offense and rock of stumbling (Isaiah 8:14, Romans 9:33, 1 Peter 2:8). In other words, the personal claims of Jesus were too much for many of the Jews to stomach. They thought He blasphemed when He claimed equality with God, they rejected His claims to be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and they refused to acknowledge the divine power of His miracles. All this reminds us that the message of Christ is offensive to unbelieving hearts. John already explained why this happens in 3:19, ***"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."****

Witness #2: The works of Christ.

This second witness is said to be even more powerful than John the Baptist's testimony. The works that Jesus performed were clear demonstrations of His divine nature. He not only ***"taught them as one having authority"*** (Matthew 7:29), He also ***"[did] among them the works which no one else did"*** (John 15:24). Nicodemus recognized the divine power at work in Christ, ***"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."*** (John 3:2).

As we've said in previous lessons, the miracles of Jesus recorded in John's gospel are "signs" that point to His true divine nature. Here in chapter 5 Jesus appeals to the clear testimony of these works as proof that He is equal with God - just like He said.

Witness #3: God the Father.

God the Father testified to Christ's person. What greater testimony can there be?! Perhaps this is a reference to the voice that spoke from heaven at Christ's baptism, ***"And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"*** (Matthew 3:17). This same voice spoke on two other occasions during Christ's earthly life - Matthew 17:5, John 12:28.

Jesus says that even though His Father had testified of Him the Jews did not recognize the message - ***"You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form."*** (5:37). Verse 38 states the reason for this, ***"...you do not have His word abiding in you..."*** The point is, these Jews weren't able to recognize Christ's being sent by the Father because they didn't believe the Scriptures. It's impossible to discern the work of God unless we look through the lens of His word. If you don't believe the word of God then you won't recognize the work of God in sending His Son.

Witness #4: The Scriptures.

The final witness in this section is the word of God. Jesus says plainly that the Scriptures testify of Him. He says that Moses wrote about Him. This is the exact same thing He says later on during His walk with some disciples on the road to Emmaus, ***"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."*** (Luke 24:27)

Here in John 5 Jesus claims to be the object of Old Testament prophecy and He rebukes the Jews for failing to receive Him as the one whom Scripture foretold. The reasoning is very simple - if the Jews truly embrace the message of Scripture, then how can they reject the one to whom all Scripture has testified? It's completely inconsistent to search the Scriptures for eternal life and then to reject Jesus and His claims. In this, the Jews stood guilty under the clear testimony of Scripture. Their sin was unbelief in Christ.

Discussion Question: How could the Jews have the Scriptures in their hands for generations, and then completely fail to embrace Jesus when He came?

Thoughts: *This is a humbling reminder that simply memorizing Scripture is not the same as believing the promises of God. Many Jews could recite large portions of the Old Testament - but they didn't respond in faith to God's Son when He came in the flesh. The tragedy here is to be so close to the message of the truth and yet come short of saving faith. Let it be a warning to us. Our faith is about knowing, loving, and obeying the living God - not just memorizing verses. Let's make sure we read our Bibles with the purpose of drawing close to the one who inspired the Scriptures. It's a living word that brings us into relationship with the living God!*

Prayer Focus

Let's say the same thing as God. As we pray, let's agree with the testimony of John the Baptist, the testimony of God the Father, the witness of Christ's miracles, and the testimony of Scripture. Let's express our faith in Christ by standing in agreement with all these witnesses.

Pray that our time in Scripture will not be empty religious performance. We don't want to merely read words and memorize passages. We want to know the God who wrote the words! Pray that our study of Scripture will be fruitful in this way.