

John 5.31-47 / COB / 04.06.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Wednesday morning, I found two cartons of eggs in the church refrigerator. I hope this is not cause for real concern. Perhaps I should bring a lacrosse stick, so I could catch the eggs and throw them back... Let's pray and hope it purifies your intentions...
- † LeeAnn and I were discussing the Bible this week, when she asked, why don't the religious leaders get it? Jesus has a heart for God, he is doing miracles and giving signs, but they don't believe... why? This is a great question to ask, and very timely, because today's passage is one of several in the Bible that address this question. Today, I hope you will discern several reasons why the religious leaders are struggling to believe in Jesus.
- † You can turn to John 5.31, and while you are turning, let's review what's happening. Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the feasts. While there, he healed a disabled man and told him to get up, pick up his mat, and walk. This should have inspired great celebration, but it angered the religious leaders to the point of persecuting Jesus, because they thought both Jesus and the healed man were breaking the Sabbath, which they took very seriously. Actually, according to God's revelation in the Old Testament, Jesus and the man had not done anything wrong, but they did break some man-made Sabbath rules.
 - So Jesus spoke to the religious leaders and told them that he was active on the Sabbath because God, his Father, was. The religious leaders correctly interpreted this to mean that Jesus was implying he was in some way equal with God, so they decided to kill him.
 - Jesus explained that he was the Son of God who did all things in unity with God the Father, that he was the prophesied Messiah and Son of Man to whom God the Father had allocated the right to rule, judge, and even give life in God's name. And Jesus said that as the Son of God, he could give spiritual life now to those who believed the revelation of God the Father and thus in the gospel of Christ.
 - None of this made the religious leaders feel any better about Jesus. Now we will hear the end of his speech. Let's see if we can understand why the religious leaders did not get who Jesus was.

[Slide 2: 5.31-32] John 5.31-32 [NET]: [Jesus says] "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies about me, and I know the testimony he testifies about me is true."

- † Sometimes these things sound better in Greek than in English. What Jesus is saying is, "If I were the only one saying I am the Son of God, then my claims would not be valid."
 - It would be like if I came in here as a charismatic leader and said I was the second coming of the Messiah, so follow me... would you drink the Coolade?
- † As we saw last week, Jesus had just argued that he could do nothing on his own, instead he did all things in unity with God the Father. Now he is elaborating on this.

- If all the burden for proving his claims came down to just his word, then those claims must be false. For, if Jesus does everything in unity with God the Father, then God the Father also should testify for him. Jesus says God the Father does testify for him and that testimony is true.
- Jesus will return to this theme in v.36. But first, he discusses John the Baptist.

[Slide 3: 5.33-35] John 5.33-35: [Jesus says] “You have sent to John [the Baptist], and he has testified to the truth. (I do not accept human testimony, but I say this so that you may be saved.) He was a lamp that was burning and shining, and you wanted to rejoice greatly for a short time in his light.”

- † Jesus says that John the Baptist testified to the truth. God lit him as a lamp, and he shined for Jesus. Oh that Jesus would be able to say the same about us someday!
 - We saw earlier, that John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Messiah-Savior. John the Baptist said he saw the Holy Spirit descend and remain on Jesus, just as God the Father had told him would happen with the Messiah.
 - John the Baptist identified Jesus with the one true God of Israel by applying to Jesus what had been applied to God in the Old Testament.
 - And speaking of Jesus as the savior, John the Baptist called Jesus the sacrificial lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- † Jesus does not need any testimony from people to validate him, since he is relying on the testimony of God the Father, but he reminds the religious leaders of John the Baptist’s testimony because they once were excited about this prophet’s teaching and ministry.
 - When John the Baptist first started calling for repentance and baptism, he created a sensation throughout the nation. The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, agrees with the biblical account that John the Baptist caused great excitement with his declaration that the Messiah was coming, such that there was great rejoicing in the land.
 - The gospel of John says large crowds of people from all over the country came out to the Jordan River to hear what John the Baptist had to say. And even some of the religious leaders were excited by John’s talk of the Messiah-savior coming soon.
 - But apparently, while some of the common people remained excited, the religious leaders became doubtful, especially once John the Baptist started pointing to Jesus. Jesus says that if they could remember how they felt when first listening to John the Baptist, they might even now be saved by listening to Jesus, for whom John the Baptist testified.

[Slide 4: 5.36] John 5.36: [Jesus says] “But I have a testimony greater than that from John. For the deeds that the Father has assigned me to complete– the deeds I am now doing– testify about me that the Father has sent me.”

- † John the Baptist was a good witness, but Jesus has greater ones. Jesus has been doing God the Father’s work.
 - His pure lifestyle, focus on God, teachings, and miraculous powers all speak of his identity as the one sent by God the Father.

- The deeds Jesus was doing were miraculous, showing the power of God; they were in fulfillment of scriptural prophecies, identifying him as the Messiah-Savior; they pointed to the redemptive work he would do on the cross as our sacrifice for sin; and they reflected the heart of God.
 - Simply looking at what Jesus was saying and doing, the religious leaders should have been able to see who he really was. There was a lot of revelation from God in the Old Testament about the coming Messiah and the deliverance he would offer, even more about the character of God.
- † Here's the problem they had, though: maybe Jesus seemed like a good man, even a prophet, who reflected God's character and had some power from God, but to identify himself as the Messiah and to say that he was divine like God, that negated all the good they might have seen in him.
- This is still an obstacle for many today: people want to believe Jesus is a good person or even a prophet, but they find it hard to believe he is the divine Son of God who chose to come to earth as a man or that he willingly died on the cross to miraculously take our penalty for our sins.
 - Yet, this is Jesus' testimony about himself, it is what John the Baptist testified, it is what the scriptures testify, so either Jesus is who he said... or he is a crazy liar and the Bible is false.

[Slide 5: 5.37-38] John 5.37-38: [Jesus says] "And the Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You people have never heard his voice nor seen his form at any time, nor do you have his word residing in you, because you do not believe the one whom he sent."

- † Jesus says God the Father has testified about him.
- When Jesus was conceived and born, God the Father testified by sending the angel Gabriel to identify this baby as the savior and Son of God.
 - When Jesus was baptized, God the Father testified directly, speaking from Heaven that Jesus was the beloved Son.
 - God testified through the Holy Spirit, who descended on Jesus at his baptism and then began bringing people to faith in Jesus' words and identity.
 - God testified through scripture, giving prophecies about the coming Messiah-savior, which Jesus fulfilled or gave miraculous signs pointing to a future fulfillment.
 - And God testified through contemporary spiritual leaders, like John the Baptist.
- † The religious leaders have not seen or heard the voice of God, but God has provided them with all this testimony, yet they are ignoring it. They ignore God the Father's revelation about the Son, about the Messiah, and thus Jesus concludes that they do not have God's word residing in them.
- Remember, Jesus had just healed a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. The evidence to support what Jesus is saying was before their eyes, but they chose to prosecute and persecute Jesus instead of rejoicing in his identity as the Messiah and Son of God and in the blessings he was bringing to people.

[Slide 6: 5.39-40] John 5.39-40: [Jesus says] "You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me, but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life."

- † The religious leaders did study the Old Testament scriptures thoroughly. They wanted to understand God's revelation, because they knew God had revealed the way to eternal life in them.
 - But if we learn the scriptures without understanding that they point to salvation by grace through faith in Christ, then we have missed the point. Like John the Baptist, the scriptures rightly understood point to Christ for deliverance, not themselves.
- † Some religious leaders taught that by following the Law closely, they could be righteous enough for God. But that is not what the Old Testament scriptures themselves teach!
 - Thus the religious leaders had a sense of security that they were right with God – remember they did not think they had to repent and get baptized as John the Baptist claimed – so they did not see their own need for the savior; but ironically, the scriptures all said they did have a need for a savior.
- † These same problems exist for many people today.
 - Some religious scholars spend their whole lives studying and teaching about the Bible, but never come to faith in Jesus. Some even consider themselves to be Christians, but they deny the Bible is God's revelation, they deny Jesus is the Son of God, they deny the miracles and the resurrection, they deny that Jesus accomplished anything on the cross. They see this in the Bible, but they don't believe. They enjoy the praise of people as experts, they get consulted on TV, quoted in the press, glorified on the internet, but they are spiritually dead, having never grasped their need for the light nor Jesus' identity as the light that gives life.
 - Other people believe in the Bible as revelation and even Jesus as the Son, but have a sense of entitlement. They think that they will go to Heaven because of being born into a religious family, because of the church to which they belong, because they are good enough, or some other aspect of who they are. These people also do not understand the scriptures.
- † Jesus says that if we understand the Old Testament scriptures, we will see that they testify to his identity and to our need to turn to him for salvation to spiritual life.
 - Those who really believed in God and in the Old Testament revelation from God were seeing Jesus for who he really was. But those who failed to believe in Jesus – no matter how knowledgeable they were about the Bible – were proving that they did not walk by faith in the light with God.
 - The Law should have convicted them of their sin and of their need for a Messiah-savior, but instead they became proud and legalistic.

[Slide 7: 5.41-44] John 5.41-44: [Jesus says] "I do not accept praise from people, but I know you, that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, if you accept praise from one another and don't seek the praise that comes from the only God?"

- † The form of the verb Jesus used when he said "I know you," indicates Jesus has always known them. He has known them since before their conception. He knows what is in their hearts and minds.
 - We have learned that sin can cloud our thinking and harden our hearts against God. These religious leaders did not have true love for God in their hearts. They were the kind of people that sought praise and honor from each other and from other people, rather than pursuing

praise from God. In other words, while they told themselves that they were studying scripture to become righteous in God's sight, really they were seeking social status, influence, religious authority, all the things people could bestow upon them.

- † Their desire for human affirmation made them vulnerable to false prophets, who would flatter them or say agreeable things, teach to tickle their ears instead of confront their hearts. Josephus reports that there actually were many false messiahs in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70.
- † Because their sin had prevented them from seeing clearly, these religious leaders could not recognize the true Messiah when he was standing before them, fulfilling numerous Old Testament prophecies, giving signs of his identity, doing public miracles, and teaching consistent with the character of God.

[Slide 8: 5.45-47] John 5.45-47: [Jesus says] "Do not suppose that I will accuse you before the Father. The one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what Moses wrote, how will you believe my words?"

- † This is ironic, right? To the religious leaders, Moses is one of the top two big heroes of the faith. Moses launched the nation, delivered the people out of Egypt, and received the Law from God; and some people in that day believed Moses would intercede for them at the final judgment.
 - These religious leaders study the writings of Moses all the time. But Jesus says it is Moses who accuses them of unrighteousness, because what Moses wrote points to the Messiah in whom they don't believe.
- † The Law was not the final revelation from God, it was not the solution God had to offer for sin. The Law was part of God's equipping of the nation of Israel to represent him. But while the Savior would come from Israel, the Law itself was not the savior, but a pointer to the savior.
 - The Law was supposed to help people seek the righteousness and salvation of God through the Messiah he would send. Moses will accuse these religious leaders of misusing the law, since they do not understand these things and do not recognize the Messiah God sent.
 - Since Jesus is the fulfillment of all preceding revelation, to disbelieve in him is compelling evidence that they did not have faith and understanding of the Old Testament, even though they studied it diligently.
- † Because they were not open to the true teaching of the Law of Moses, which they supposedly cherished, Jesus knows they are not open to the true teaching offered by him, whom they hate.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 9: Jesus]** The two distinct Christian holidays are Christmas and Easter. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the incarnation in which the divine Son of God came to earth to be born as one of us, so he could live as the only pure person and thus be a righteous representative for God and a worthy sacrifice for us.

- At Easter we celebrate that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and then was resurrected from the dead on the third day, a Sunday morning, to prove his identity as the Son of God, to prove the acceptance of his sacrifice by God the Father, and to prove his victory and power over sin and death.
- † Between Christmas and Easter this year, we have studied the first five chapters of the gospel of John, looking verse by verse at what God has revealed about Jesus. Here is what we have learned:
- Jesus is the Son of God come to earth as a man. The Son is fully God and distinct from the Father or the Spirit, but so in unity with them in will and essence that they together are one God, called Yahweh.
 - Jesus, as the Son, is the full revelation of God and the wisest teacher about God.
 - God the Father created the universe through the Son of God.
 - Jesus is the ultimate king in the line of David and prophetic Son of Man, whom God the Father has chosen to rule eternally with all authority in the universe.
 - Jesus is God the Father's chosen judge, who can give spiritual life now and who will resurrect all the dead and judge them at the end of time.
 - Jesus is the promised Messiah/Christ from the Old Testament, who would come to fulfill God's promises to Israel.
 - As the Messiah/Christ, Jesus is the savior who would be crucified and then exalted as prophesied, to bring new and eternal spiritual life through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit.
 - Jesus is spiritual light that offers life to people; he is the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world.
 - Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and brings the blessings of the New Covenant.
 - Jesus can do miracles, heal people of anything, even bring people back to life.
 - Jesus is the bridegroom to the church, sacrificially providing salvation, cleansing, and protection.
 - Jesus is the center for worship, the way to glorify God the Father who sent him.
- † **[Slide 10: salvation]** We also have seen how salvation depends entirely on Jesus, on his identity, his purity, his sacrifice on the cross, and his victorious resurrection.
- All God asks of us is to believe. Jesus said that those who responded in faith to his message about his identity and his offer of salvation through his sacrifice on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins would be born again by the Holy Spirit and receive eternal life. So the big question this Easter is... can you believe?
 - Let's pray...

[Slide 11: FOR COMMUNION]