

Identity on Trial

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Date: 15 November 2020

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this morning with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to John, John chapter 5.

And I'd like us to look at that whole section that we read together. But if we just read again at verse 30, John chapter 5 and verse 30, where Jesus says, I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. And so on.

You know, one of my favorite Christian films is the film called God's Not Dead. In fact, there are now three films. There's God's Not Dead 1, 2, and 3. And as you'd expect, each film, it presents to us the case, as the audience, that God's not dead, but he is alive. And, you know, I'd encourage you to watch these Christian films. They're very good. They're very American, but they're also very well done. But in the second film, in God's Not Dead 2, the story is of a Christian teacher who's being accused of evangelizing and proselytizing her pupils.

And the story, in many ways, it's so relevant to what's going on in our schools today. Because the schools in the film, they're clamping down on public prayers, on Christian teachers, and also on their influence upon children. And in the storyline, there's a Christian teacher who's put on trial for answering a question in her classroom about something Jesus said.

[1 : 48] But as the trial progresses, it develops from being a trial about Christian freedom to being a trial about the identity of Jesus Christ. Now, I don't want to say much more about the film because I'll spoil it for you. But all I will say is watch it for yourself. It's a brilliant film. Watch these God's Not Dead films. But, you know, as we come back to John chapter 5, we see that the same thing is actually happening here in this passage. Because the identity of Jesus is being put on trial.

At the beginning of the chapter, which we saw a couple of weeks ago, we met a man with an infirmity at the pool of Bethesda. And this man, we were told, he had wasted 38 years of his life waiting to be saved rather than wanting to be saved. And of course, when he wanted to be saved, Jesus commanded the man, take up your bed and walk. But instead of praising God for such a miracle, the religious police, that was the scribes and the Pharisees, they wanted to punish this man. But they also wanted to punish Jesus because salvation took place on the Sabbath. And the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious police, they said to the man who had been healed, they said, it is the Sabbath day and it's not lawful for you to take up your bed.

And because they believed that Jesus had broken the law, they came to Jesus and they made assertions, they made accusations. And they even had this desire for assassination. They wanted to kill him.

But as we saw last week, Jesus responded to the religious police with a sermon about the Son, where Jesus, he defended and declared his deity by asserting and affirming that he was more than just a good teacher with a good philosophy for life. He said that he's more than a moral example for people to imitate and emulate in their lives. He said that he's more than a prophet who came to foretell and foretell the message of God. Jesus, he proclaimed to the religious leaders that he is the Son of God and he has all authority in heaven and on earth. But now as we move into this concluding section of chapter 5, we see that it almost becomes like the scene of a courtroom. In fact, the language that's used in this section is actually courtroom language because we see from what's written there that Jesus speaks about judging. He speaks about witnessing and testifying and accusing and believing. It's all courtroom language. And what's remarkable is that like the film

God's not dead. The identity of Jesus here is being put on trial because Jesus, as we're told, he's accused by the religious police on two accounts. The accusations against the identity of Jesus are, as we read before in verse 18, he has broken the Sabbath and he has called God his Father, making himself equal with God. And in this courtroom scene, Jesus, he is the defendant.

[5 : 00] And his identity is on trial. Do you know what I find so interesting is that Jesus doesn't need a lawyer. Jesus doesn't need someone to represent him and stand on his behalf because he's already a lawyer. In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus is an advocate. He's the advocate with the Father. He's Jesus Christ, the righteous. Therefore, Jesus, he's representing himself in court. He's fighting his own case here. And he's defending his identity. He's defending his identity on trial. Jesus, he's already presented the evidence. We saw that last week in his sermon about the Son. But now in this section, Jesus, he calls three witnesses to stand and testify that his identity is true. And the jury, they must decide whether or not the identity of Jesus is true. And yes, my friend, you are the jury. As the writer of this gospel, John is presenting this section to you in such a way that you are the jury. You're the jury.

And as the jury, you must decide this morning whether or not the identity of Jesus is true. Because as we've said on a number of occasions in John's gospel, John wrote his gospel about making sure that we get the identity of Jesus right. Because if we get the identity of Jesus wrong, we'll misunderstand the gospel and we'll fail to see that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation.

And so in this courtroom scene, Jesus, he's standing, you could say, here as the defendant. And he's going to call three witnesses to stand and testify that his identity is true.

And so the first witness that Jesus calls to stand and testify is the witness of a forerunner. The witness of a forerunner. We'll look at verse 30 where we see this witness. Jesus says, I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge and my judgment is just because I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me. If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. There is another who bears witness about me. And I know that the testimony that he bears witness about me is true. You sent to John and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man. But I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. So as Jesus calls his first witness to stand and testify that his identity is true, the opening question that Jesus would have to ask his witness would be to state his name and state his relationship to the accused. And as his first witness, well, he would say, well, my name is John the Baptist and I'm the first cousin of Jesus. And I'm also his forerunner. Because you remember that John the Baptist, he's introduced to us in John's gospel as the forerunner of Jesus. Way back in chapter one, we're told that there was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a light. He came to bear witness about the light. Not that he was the light, but came to bear witness about the light. So John the Baptist, we're told, he was sent from God. He was an apostle from God. He was God's sent one. He was this unique figure who connected the Old Testament with the New Testament. In fact, John was the last Old Testament prophet. He was the last foreteller and foreteller before Jesus came. But John the Baptist, he was not only the last Old Testament prophet. He was also the first New Testament apostle because he was sent from God. He was God's sent one. That's what the word apostle means. And as the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist was sent in order to bear witness. He was sent to testify and give testimony to the light of Jesus Christ.

And that's what John the Baptist did. He witnessed and testified to the identity of Jesus Christ. But you know, then we see as this courtroom scene continues, Jesus asks his witness about the time when the religious police interviewed and investigated and interrogated John the Baptist.

[9 : 37] He says in verse 33, you sent to John and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. You know, Jesus, he was asking his witness on the stand. He was asking him the question, is it true that many people confused my identity with your identity? Is it true that many people thought that you were the Christ?

Because you remember back in chapter one, that the religious police, they all came to John the Baptist and they interviewed him and they investigated him and they interrogated him asking, who are you?

They asked him, who are you? And John the Baptist said, I'm not the Christ. And they asked him, well, what then? Are you Elijah? He said, I'm not Elijah. They said, are you the prophet? And he said, no.

So they said, who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? And you remember that John the Baptist, he witnessed and he testified to the religious police back then? I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord.

As the forerunner of the Christ, John the Baptist was sent in order to call the people to prepare to meet their King through faith and repentance. And that's what John the Baptist did. He preached and he proclaimed and he pointed to Jesus saying, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[11 : 15] And you know, the thing is, as a witness for the Christ, John the Baptist, he was someone who didn't want to draw attention to himself. He only wanted to draw attention to Jesus. That's why he said about Jesus. He must increase, but I must decrease. And it's because of his attitude of anonymity that Jesus went on to say about this witness of the forerunner. He went on to say in verse 35, he was a burning and shining lamp and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his lamp, in his light. Jesus says that John the Baptist was a bright and burning witness for Jesus. Because in many ways, he lived out the Sermon on the Mount. You remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, you are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand. And it gives light to all who are in the house. And then Jesus says, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good work and glorify your Father in heaven.

And as you know, my Christian friend, this not only applies to John the Baptist who's on the stand, it applies to every witness for Christ. Because like John the Baptist, we should possess the witness of a forerunner. We should have an attitude of anonymity. We should say of Jesus, he must increase.

And I must decrease. We should desire to be a bright and burning witness for Jesus Christ. We should point away from self and point to Jesus. And all we say about him, he is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. You know, we should confess, as someone once said, I'm just a nobody.

Trying to tell everybody all about somebody who can save anybody. And you know, as Christians, our witness for Jesus Christ is so important. You know, that's why Paul reminded the Christians in Philippi. He said to them, do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in this world. Paul called the Christians in Philippi to shine in the midst of darkness. And what Paul was reminding us is that as Christians, we are to love Jesus and look to Jesus and live for Jesus as bright and burning witnesses in this world. And so in this courtroom scene, the first witness that Jesus called to the stand to testify and witness about his identity was the witness of a forerunner. But then Jesus, he calls a second witness to stand and testify. He calls the witness of a father. The witness of a father. So we see the witness of a forerunner and the witness of a father. Look at verse 36. We're told, but the testimony that I have is greater than that of John.

For the works that the father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the father has sent me. And the father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen. And you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You know, in a general conversation, when someone testifies to the truth of their statement, they sometimes use the phrase, as God is my witness. They'd say, as God is my witness. And whether their statement is true or not, they're using that phrase to invoke authority and authenticity to their testimony. They're saying, as God is my witness. But you know, as Jesus calls his second witness to stand and testify that his identity is true, he could say without any hesitation, God is my witness. And again, the opening question Jesus would ask his second witness is to state their name and state their relationship to the accused. And the second witness would say, well, I'm God the Father.

[15 : 47] Father, the accused is my only begotten Son. And you know, it's this relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son that John, as a gospel writer, he repeatedly emphasizes throughout his gospel. Because from the very outset of his gospel, John tells us that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

John says that in the very beginning, there was this unique and intimate relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son. Because in the beginning, Jesus was not only the Son of God, who was equal with the Father and co-eternal with the Father and begotten of the Father. In the beginning, we're told that they were face to face with one another. In the beginning, God the Father and God the Son were in this intimate and unique relationship. They were face to face with one another. But more than that, we're told that the Word who was with God and was God, He became flesh and He dwelt among us so that we might behold His glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Up until that point, John says, no one had ever seen God. But through the miracle of the incarnation, Jesus has made God known. And as John tells us, the reason God the Father made Jesus known is because God the Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. And you know, it's this unique relationship that existed between God the Father and Jesus the Son that John, he repeatedly draws attention to throughout His gospel. John explains the Father. He says that the Father loves the Son. The Father sent the Son. The Father knows the Son. The Father glorifies the Son. The Father has revealed the Son. The Father gives authority to the Son. The Father commands the Son. The Father's will is for sinners to look to the Son because the Father and the Son, he says, are one. And as one, they have one passion and one purpose, the salvation of the Son. The salvation of lost souls. And now standing as the accused, Jesus, he defends his identity by saying about the religious police. He says in verse 37,

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. Jesus asserts and affirms that the religious police, they've never heard the voice of the Father. They've never seen his form, and they don't abide in his word. And yet the truth was, there were many who did. There were many who heard the voice of the Father, saw his form, and abide in his word, because they were all at the baptism of Jesus. Do you remember it was at Jesus' baptism that the first witness that was on the stand, the witness of the forerunner, John the Baptist. It was as John the Baptist baptized Jesus that the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove.

And then there was the witness of the Father. The Father spoke from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And because of this, there were many there who heard the voice of the Father. They saw his form, and they abide in his word. But for the religious police, Jesus says, You do not, because you refuse to believe. And the religious police, they refuse to believe that Jesus is the Christ, simply because they were self-righteous. They were self-centered.

[19 : 53] They were self-obsessed, self-absorbed, self-seeking, and self-interested. They were selfish. And what was holding them back from trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation was nothing but self. Nothing but self.

And you know, my unconverted friend, is that what holds you back from following Jesus? Is self holding you back from following Jesus this morning? Is self getting in the way of following Jesus?

Do you know what Jesus says that you need to do with self? He said, Deny it. As Jesus said, If you want to be my disciple, you must deny self. Take up your cross and follow me.

But for the religious police, they refused to deny self. They refused to take up their cross, because in their heart, they were following someone else. They were following an Old Testament figure, whom they looked to and admired and held in high esteem. They were following Moses. They were following Moses. But what the religious police didn't realize is that Moses wasn't on their side. Moses wasn't their friend, because he was a friend of Jesus. And we see that because in this courtroom scene, the third and final witness Jesus calls to stand and testify that his identity is true, is the witness of a friend. The witness of a friend. So we've seen the witness of a forerunner, the witness of a father, and then the witness of a friend. The witness of a friend. Look at verse 39.

Jesus says, Again, Jesus, he opens with the question. He would have to ask his third witness. They would have to state their name and state their relationship to the accused. And this third witness would say, I am Moses. I am the man of God. I am a friend of Jesus. And you know, in my mind, when the religious police, when they heard Moses take the stand and say that he's a friend of Jesus, there would have been this gasp and outcry of objection. They would have objected to what he was saying because they would immediately think that Moses had been manipulated or bribed to testify against them. But the truth was, Moses was the witness of a friend. He was a friend of Jesus.

[23 : 24] And he was a friend of Jesus because long before the word became flesh, Moses saw and believed. Long before the baptism of Jesus, Moses heard the voice of the father. He saw his form and he abided in his word. Long before the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, Moses believed in the one whom the father would send. Moses was the witness of a friend because he saw Jesus in all the types and shadows of the Old Testament sacrifices. Moses saw Jesus as the great high priest. Moses saw Jesus as the one who would be the manna to come down from heaven. And you know, with Jesus' identity on trial, using Moses as a witness was a massive blow to the religious police here. Because as Jesus says, they had set their hope on Moses. Or more particularly, they had set their hope on the Mosaic law. The religious police had set their hope and based their whole salvation not upon Christ's obedience to the law on their behalf, but upon their obedience to the law. But as you know, my friend, our obedience to the law is impossible. None of us can keep the commandments. None of us can uphold the law of God. And as our

Bible affirms to us, we've all sinned and we've all fallen short of the glory of God. And by the works of the law, no one can be justified. And yet the wonder of salvation, the glory of the gospel is that Jesus Christ came into the world not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law. Jesus, my friend, he is our righteousness. And he came to live the life we couldn't live and die the death we deserved to die. But more than that, Jesus says that it's not only Moses who is his friend.

He says there are many others on the pages of the Old Testament who are his friend. Noah is his friend. Abraham was his friend. David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. They're all friends of Jesus.

And Jesus could have called any one of them to stand and testify that his identity is true. That's why Jesus goes on to say to the religious police, he says in verse 39, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

You're in defense of the accusations made against him. Jesus said to the religious police, he said to them, you read the Bible, you memorize the Bible, you know your Bible, thinking that by doing so that you'll be saved. But Jesus says what you fail to realize is that the whole Bible, the whole of the Old Testament, it witnesses and testifies about me. It witnesses and testifies about me.

[26 : 38] You know, it was David Murray, the professor of Old Testament theology in Grand Rapids. He actually used to be the minister in the Free Church Continuing in Stornoway. And you know, he wrote a brilliant book a few years ago, and I highly recommend it to you. It's a book called Jesus on Every Page. Jesus on Every Page.

And in the book, David Murray, he emphasizes the very point that Jesus is making here. That our Bible, it witnesses and testifies to the identity of Jesus Christ, because Jesus can be found on every page. Jesus is on every page. In fact, someone once said, the entire Bible is about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament says he's coming. The Gospels say he's here. The book of Acts proclaim him. The epistles explain him. And the book of Revelation says he's coming again. My friend, from Genesis right through to the book of Revelation, it's all about Jesus, because Jesus is on every page. And you know, it's with that, that Jesus, he brought his defense case to a close. Because in this courtroom scene, Jesus, he's challenging the religious police. He's saying to them, you can spend your life reading the Bible, memorizing the Bible, knowing the Bible, and still be lost. You can spend your life seeking to follow these disciplines and duties and yet fail to see that the Bible is all about me. You can spend your life searching the scriptures and never be saved. You know, it was actually these verses, in verses 39 and 40, which spoke to the young Sinclair Ferguson when he was only 14.

When Sinclair Ferguson was 14, or even before then, he was told that in order to become a Christian, he was to read the Bible every day. And so he did as he was told. He read the Bible day after day, year after year, after year, after year, for five long years. He read the Bible every single day from about the age of nine until the age of 14. But then one day he was reading John chapter 5.

And he came to these verses in verse 39, which read, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. And you know, when Sinclair Ferguson read those words of Jesus, he says that it was as if these words powerfully came off the page and awakened his heart.

[29 : 32] Because, you know, what Sinclair Ferguson says he came to discover was that it wasn't his religious and rigorous reading of the Bible that was going to save him, but a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, don't get me wrong. It's good to read the Bible. It's good to search the scriptures. It's good to be part of a Bible study. It's good to know the gospel. But, you know, religious and rigorous reading of the Bible, that's not what saves you. What saves you is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Do you know, my friend, I've met people who are unconverted, and they've told me that they always read their Bible. They always read their Bible even before they go to sleep at night.

Even if they've been out on the town that night, when they come home, they'll still make sure that they read their Bible, even if they have to do it with one eye open. But they do it because their conscience tells them that if they died in their sleep, they would say to God on the day of judgment that the last thing they did before they entered eternity was read their Bible. But, you know, my friend, as Jesus is pointing out here, it's not religious and rigorous reading of the Bible that saves you.

What saves you is repentance of your sin. What saves you is a relationship with Jesus Christ. What saves you is loving and looking and living for Jesus Christ. What saves you is committing your life to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What saves you is denying self, taking up your cross and following after Jesus.

That's what saves you. What saves you is committing your life to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And so as this courtroom scene comes to a close, the court case must come to a conclusion as well.

[31 : 29] And in his defense, Jesus, he's called these three witnesses to stand and testify that his identity is true. He's called the witness of a forerunner, John the Baptist. He's called the witness of a father, and he's called the witness of a friend. But as we said earlier, John is making you the jury. And as the jury, you must decide whether or not the identity of Jesus is true. Because if the identity of Jesus is false, then, well, there's no substitute.

There's no one to stand on our behalf before God. If the identity of Jesus is false, there's no savior. There's no one to die for our sin. And if the identity of Jesus is false, then, well, there's no salvation at all. We are still in our sins. But my friend, if Jesus is who he says he is, and that's what the Bible affirms, then he is the Son of God. He is Lord. He is King of kings. And your responsibility this morning is to go on your knees and ask him to have mercy upon you.

My friend, Jesus is not a liar. He's not a lunatic. Jesus Christ is Lord. And as Lord, he is speaking to you this morning, reminding you that you must bow the knee before him and confess him as Lord in this life. Because the Bible assures you that you will do it in the next. You know, Paul tells us that on the last day, every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and in hell. And every tongue will confess about Jesus that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So you bow your knee this morning and you come to him confessing that he is your Lord and your Savior. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray together.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee that when we open our Bible, Jesus is able to be found on every page. That whether we are in the Old Testament with Noah, he is the ark in which we must run into. Whether we are there with Abraham, he is the ultimate sacrifice instead of Isaac.

[34 : 12] Whether we are there with Moses, he is the one who fulfilled the law in all its beauty and all its glory. Whether we find Jesus with David, he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Whether he stands beside Isaiah, he is the true prophet. He is the one who is coming into the world to proclaim himself as the Savior of sinners. And Lord, we give thanks that he is revealed to us in the, he is revealed there in the Gospels as the one who came to seek and to save the lost. He is proclaimed in the acts of the apostles by the early church. He is explained by thine own servants in all these epistles.

But yet, Lord, he is also presented to us as the one who was the lamb who was slain, who's sitting upon his throne in the book of Revelation. And Lord, our prayer is as it was for John, as he closed the canon of Scripture, that we would all pray, Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

That we would all be ready for his coming. That we would be confessing him as Lord. That we would be knowing him as King. That we would be loving him day by day in this world, knowing that in this world, here we have no continuing city. But for those who are in Christ, we await the one that is to come, a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Oh, Lord, go before us and we pray.

Bless us, we ask. For we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing the words of Psalm 68. Psalm 68, it's in the Scottish Psalter. We're singing from verse 17 down to the verse Mark 20.

Now, Psalm 68 is a psalm that reminds us that the Savior we are singing about is one who has ascended up on high. He has put all his enemies under his feet and he has brought victory and triumph for his people.

[36 : 19] He has won salvation for us. And for that reason, that we should praise him. So, Psalm 68 from verse 17. God's chariots twenty thousand are, thousands of angels strong, in his holy place. God is as in Mount Sinai, them among. Psalm 68, to God's praise.

God's chariots twenty thousand are, thousands of angels strong, His holy place. God is as in Mount Sinai, them among.

The cross, O Lord, most glorious, ascended upon high.

The cross, O Lord, most glorious, ascended upon high.

Prayin for them that God the Lord in which all of them might dwell.

[38 : 06] Blessed be the Lord who is to us of our salvation for, who, dearly with his benefits, has pleniously doth, Lord.

The all salvation is the God who is our God most strong.

And unto God the Lord from death the issues to belong.

We Love the ■ «A m■t galera.» Peaceí through, dearly with his companions. Jeff■■■ P sleep weeks after he has Samhain. bitten relatives to belong in a boy here when E.R.K.

det■■ Lake. Someone in the wanted hours over an hour saw the death