

## “Jesus Indicts the Jews for Their Unbelief”

John 5:30-47

As we have seen from our studies thus far – Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath of the man crippled for 38 years has set up a confrontation with the Jewish leadership. By the time we get to 5:18 the Jews have increased their resolve to kill Jesus because of His claims to be equal with God – His claim to be God (cf. John 1:1-4, 14).

In His response Jesus begins by validating His inferred claim to be equal with God and on mission with His Father. In that context, His discourse is divided into two parts. The first we have already addressed in our previous two visits to this passage. In 5:19-29 Jesus declares that He is given authority to do the things that only God is able to do – only God has authority to do – namely to be granted to have life *in Himself* to give life to whom He desires. He has the authority, by the simple power of His word – to speak spiritual life to those who are dead and to one day – by the authority in the sound of His voice – to call the dead out of the grave (cf. John 11:25-26). In addition the Father has given Jesus sole authority to judge in the last day (cf. 5:22-23, 27). ***These are incredible claims or declarations by Jesus to be God!! You will notice as we continue in John’s gospel that these didn’t lessen the tension and the resolve of the Jews to kill Jesus – they actually paved the way to the cross – these were the things that got Jesus crucified AND His followers/disciples since (10:25-30, 33; 19:7)!***

**Note:** The second part of this discourse goes beyond Jesus’ claims to deity to His authentication of those claims by the use of authoritative witnesses. My understanding of what is taking place here is that Jesus is not presented unarguable “evidence” for His claims to be “God.” He is calling authoritative witnesses to testify on His behalf – the argument will end when we stand before Him in that day in all of His unveiled glory (cf. Philippians 2:5-11).

So - in John 5:31-47 Jesus, having made some significant claims or declarations about Himself, calls “witnesses” or brings “testimony” from recognized and authoritative sources that His claims are true. In the same context those called to testify to Jesus’ claims will serve to bear witness against the unbelief of the Jewish leaders. Jesus will pronounce several indictments against the Jews for ***not believing*** in Jesus – for ***rejecting*** who He declares Himself to be based on the strength of irrefutable testimony that Jesus is indeed who He claims to be – His claims are legitimate!! Before we walk through these indictments I want to consider two things which are important for our understanding and the personal application we must make to our own lives.

- **First** – I want to warn against the tendency we have to look outside of ourselves to those who have rejected Jesus to see these failings in others with whom we are at odds. Though these words are spoken to the Jewish leadership – religious Jews – they are actually words which apply to all unbelief across religious, ethnic, race, time and generational boundaries – even across the boundaries within a given culture and time which are marked by political and societal

distinctions. They are universally applicable to unbelief because they reflect universal tendency of the fallen nature of mankind to reject God!

- **Second** – Ahead of our review of these indictments – I want to warn against our tendency to hear and adopt only the language of judgment. We have an innate difficulty loving rightly and dispensing grace rightly in the face of clear injustice and the not so veiled hatred toward Jesus and His church. I tend easily to “love compromising,” “grace forgetting” and self-righteous anger when I see the horrible things that are taking place in culture. *Before we can rightly hear Jesus’ indictment of the Jews and even begin to adopt His language in right gospel terms – we must first reflect on His heart for the very ones He is here indicting.*

With those caveats/cautions in place – let’s consider the indictments of Jesus against His accusers/crucifiers – those He calls to bear witness against their unbelief. These are not unlike those we/all will face in that day!!

**Note:** That being said – the Jews of all people should have recognized Jesus and believed in Him! What stood in their way?

***Jesus Calls as Witness John the Baptist*** – (cf. 5:31-35; also 1:6-9, 19-34)

- John the Baptist has a level of credibility among the Jewish people and was admittedly sent by the Father to announce/bear witness to Jesus’ claim to be Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Son of God (cf. 5:33, 35; 1:6-9, 19-27, 29-31, 32-34).

- The testimony of men/man is important in calling others to salvation. Men are called to testify of their “experience” of salvation in Jesus – of fellowship or relationship with the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit. (cf. 5:34; 1 John 1:1-4; also 10:40-44).

**However**, Jesus makes it clear that the testimony of humans is not “decisive” in authenticating the claims He is making. Jesus now appeals to the ultimate, final and authoritative “testimony” or “witness” of the Father – the very One Who sent Him. His appeal to the “witness” of the Father serves to both authenticate the claims Jesus makes about Himself and the righteous judgment He pronounces against the unbelief of the Jewish leaders (cf. 5:30).

***Jesus Appeals to the Ultimate, Final and Authoritative “Testimony” or “Witness” of the Father Who Sent Him*** – (cf. 5:36-37a; also 11:40-44; Note: ***Luke 3:21-22***) – Jesus expands on this by identifying the two ways in which the Father bears witness about the Son – **1**. He testifies to Jesus’ identity and mission by the works He has given Jesus to do AND **2**. He testifies to Jesus’ identity and mission by the Scripture or by His Word.

- **The Works** - The Father testifies to who Jesus is and to the truth that He did indeed send Jesus by the “works” He gave for Jesus to do/complete. It is these very “works” themselves which testify that the Father sent Jesus (cf. 5:36-38). These works in John’s gospel include the miraculous signs – the water into wine (2:1-11; also the Temple cleansing – 2:12-22); the signs

He did at Passover (cf. 2:23-25); the healing of the royal official's son (4:43-54); the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda which occasioned this discourse (5:1-8). This is the ongoing gospel work of the Father in which the Son participates/shares (cf. John 5:16-18).

**Hence**, Jesus' work is the heart transforming and life giving work of the gospel. It is the work of atonement/redemption, salvation, reconciliation, restoration to relationship with the Father – to know God which is eternal life.

- **The Scripture** - In addition – the Father telegraphed what He intended to do for centuries in the very Scriptures these Jews studied and committed to memory. The Scriptures – (read Old Testament) – speak of Jesus (cf. 5:37-39, 45-47; also Hebrews 1:1-3 – the author of Hebrews unpacks this very truth).

**There is “life” to be found in the Scriptures because they speak of ME** – I am the Lord and giver of life - Jesus (cf. John 3:16; 5:21, 24, 26; **11:25-26; 14:6; 1 John 5:9-12; also Peter's “witness” – Acts 2:14-37 – v.36; 3:6, 11-26 – vv.6, 15).**

The assumption is that if you actually heard His words and were familiar with His image and if His word actually lived in you – then you would've believed. It seems clear the “witnesses” given of Jesus are not seeking to “prove” Jesus' claims to be valid as much as to “testify” and hold them/us accountable to those claims. All along there is the implication that their unbelief goes far beyond argument and proof. It goes right to the condition of the human heart.

On the face of it – none of this makes any sense – ***Why reject Him and why so violently?*** If Jesus is the Creator, who by the power of His voice called into existence that which was not; if He is the One in Whom was life – He spoke and life was brought into being outside of Himself; if He became like unto His creation and walked among us in order to fix all that is wrong – hatred, war, jealousy, greed, privation/poverty, injustice, disease, suffering and death; if He came to destroy disease, suffering, the decay of aging, even death itself and to replace it with life that will never experience decay again – if He came to give Himself to us in perfect and absolutely soul satisfying joy, to fill our every breath, our every heartbeat with the fullness of His joy – if every miracle of compassion and healing point to that work finished – with promise – ***then why would anyone not believe and rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory?***

They somehow had done what we see so often done in this western world of Christianity – people are collectors of knowledge. We think big thoughts and write papers and journal articles and books about the things we “know.” We honor those who accumulate biblical “wisdom” and speak powerfully by reading their books and following them - quoting them and studying what they have written. Yet somehow, like the Jews, we never “hear” the voice of God which echoes/booms through those ancient texts with the promises of the gospel (good news) of this Jesus. We/They never see His “visage” or recognize His form so that we/they do not long for Him to come nor do they recognize Him when He does show up (cf. John 1:10-13, 14, 18; 12:44-45; 14:6-11). ***Contrast this with Simeon and Anna (cf. Luke 2:25-38) or Paul as he faced life's***

*end* (cf. **2 Timothy 4:6-8**). Because that is true – the Word of God which they study and commit to memory does not “live” or “abide” in them (cf. 5:38; 15:9-11, 23-25).

***Jesus Indicts the Jewish Leaders for Their Willful Unbelief*** – (cf. 5:37-44; also **20:30-31**) – Jesus provides what appears to be several reasons for the unbelief of the Jews here. A careful look will show that the “reasons” Jesus gives for their unbelief are actually layers of the same willful rejection of Jesus.

1. - 5:37-38 –The most apparent reason – really a symptom of the root cause – is that they were oblivious to the things Jesus said and did (cf. John 11 & 12 – the Jews reaction to Jesus clear miraculous raising of Lazarus). They did not/could not accept the testimony given by the Father because they were “deaf” to His voice and “blind” to His glory (cf. **Luke 19:39-41**).

2. - 5:39-40 - They were “deaf” to His voice and “blind” to His glory because ***they didn’t “want to” believe***. The power of “human want” is massive!! It is the collection of desires designed to be made full in relationship with God AND lead us to pursue Him in love and worship. When those desires are corrupted as in the fall – they are unleashed in the hearts of fallen human beings and they drive us to incredible and horrific places (cf. Romans 1:18-32; Ephesians 4:17-19)!!

Cf. 5:39 – **They searched for life in the scriptures but they had no heart for God!!**

This insensitivity to God began as they read His Word with a closed heart – a heart with no interest in knowing or pursuing God in love, for the pleasure of relationship (cf. 5:39-40; contrast with Philippians 3:7ff). This is the very reason Jesus came – to make God known to us so that we might believe and “become” children of God – to make His Father our Father and us members of the family of God (cf. John 1:10-13; 14:1-6, 21, 23; 15:9-11; 17:1-3, 20-26; Ephesians 3:14-21).

***But why would they not “want to” believe? It makes no sense – or does it?***

3. - Jesus said they did not want to believe because they did not have the “love of God in (your) their hearts” (cf. 5:41-42). This is absurd right? These folks knew and memorized the Scripture and the Shema was central to the entire Jewish religion (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-6f). Of course they loved God – had the “love of God” in their hearts – they were Jews!! **The “love of self” left no room for the love of God – in fact it rejected God and drove Him out of the heart!!**

**At the “heart” of it all is the love of the praise of men – We want to be treated like a god – to be worshipped!!**

4. – 5:43-44 – They sought (read – “loved”) the praise of men and not the praise of God. Jesus proved His point by His declaration that they – unlike Him – pursued, accepted, even loved the praise of men and put no effort into obtaining the praise of God (cf. 5:41-44).

\*When you seek or love the praise of man you cannot believe!!

\*We seek the praise of men because we fancy ourselves to be gods. WE demand, we crave, we desire with all of our beings to receive worship. When you seek the glory or praise others will give ***there is no room for the love of God in the heart that seeks the praise of man*** - you do not, you cannot, seek the praise that comes from God.

\*Ironically – there is no room for truth or principle – for right and wrong or good and evil – only what is expedient. WE actually manipulate everything and everyone in order to receive human praise.

\*Sadly – we pursue what is temporary, superficial and ever changing at the expense of what is eternal, deep and unchanging!!

**Note:** The power of this “cultural revolt” is found in this very truth – You have no power or leverage over me if I have no love for the love/praise of man. You can take nothing from me if my love for Jesus compels me in life (cf. Philippians 1:20-21) – if my life (life as the context of knowing joy and fullness) and my hope is not here in this world of man and my identity and value is not found in man’s praise – but I am seated with Jesus in God – at the Father’s right hand. My identity is fixed in Him (cf. Colossians 3:1-4). My inheritance and the hope I have in Jesus is “kept” by my Father, in heaven for me – beyond the reach of this world (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-8).

- These are the very people Jesus loved – those chosen by God through whom Jesus would come – ***the chosen people of God! Jesus loved these very people with a love we cannot understand until we begin to experience it. That is no less true of the people among whom He has placed us to bear witness to that love!!*** Listen to Luke’s record of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem as He prepares to offer Himself up for the nation and the world (cf. Luke 19:37-44). Listen to His words of intercession spoken from the cross for His crucifiers (cf. Luke 20:34).

- Why did Jesus come? Consider His words in John 15:9-11; also John 10:10; 17:24-26; Matthew 25:21, 34 and Paul’s words in Ephesians 3:14-21. We dare not speak Jesus words of judgement on sin until we understand the depth of His love – lest we sound angry or self-righteous.