

John on Jesus - Proving Jesus

Sign Title: Proving Jesus

September 9, 2012

Good morning Faith Church. For those of you who are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are working our way through the Gospel of John. This morning we are at John 5:31.

Last week, we began a new part of John. Instead of a story about Jesus' interaction with people, Jesus taught us about his relationship to God the Father. We learned that God the Father and God the Son are both God. God the Father delegated to God the Son his authority to raise the dead and to judge the dead. Why did God the Father do this? God the Father's desire is that everyone honor Jesus Christ, God the Son.

Jesus made some huge claims. To the Jews, he is either a complete lunatic that should be locked in a rubber room and watched by men in white coats or he is an evil, deceptive, self-absorbed liar. Of course, the other option is always a possibility. He was actually telling the truth.

As we put our finger in the text, remember the situation. The Jews formally accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath law. They were stunned by his response: Since God the Father doesn't have to keep the Sabbath, neither does God the Son. That was not the answer the Jews expected.

Since Jesus was formally accused of violating the Sabbath, Jesus then formally defended his claim to be the son of God. For those of you interested in law, this section of John follows the pattern of ancient Jewish legal arguments. The way their law operated is you were not as concerned about proving

innocence or guilt through evidences. This was prior to DNA testing. In this day, you were focused on witnesses. The legal case hung on the character and reliability of the witnesses that testified.

Let's put our finger in the text at John 5:31 where we begin reading God's Word.

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. John 5:31 (ESV)

Jesus started by acknowledging the Jewish law. In Jewish law, you needed at least two or more witnesses to establish a case.

"A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established." Deuteronomy 19:15 (ESV)

When Jesus said that his testimony was not true, that didn't mean he was lying. It simply meant that according to Jewish law, to prove something true, you needed two or more witnesses. As God, Jesus could testify about himself, and that would be enough. In this case, he lowered himself to the standards of the Jewish legal system. Jesus brought forward four witnesses to prove his claim to be the son of God. Let's put our finger in the text and see how this unfolds.

The first witness, John the Baptist

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. John 5:33–35 (ESV)

The first witness Jesus called to the stand was John the Baptist. We studied him earlier in this series. He was insanely popular. He was the first prophet for the Jewish people in 400 years. Everybody went camping in the

woods to hear John the Baptist preach. They loved his preaching. They were convicted by his preaching. The Jewish people universally believed John the Baptist was a prophet from God. What did John the Baptist say about Jesus?

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’” John 1:29–30 (ESV)

“And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” John 1:34 (ESV)

Jesus simply said, “If you are bananas for John the Baptist, he was bananas for me. In fact, he claimed I am the son of God. He was the first witness.”

From the perspective of Jewish law, John the Baptist’s witness was strong evidence. Remember, they would examine the character of the witness. Was John the Baptist known for shading the truth? Was he known as afraid to speak the truth? Absolutely not! John the Baptist was known for telling the truth, even when it hurt. He was the only guy with enough guts to publicly tell Herod he needed to repent of sleeping with his brother’s wife. John the Baptist died because he was not afraid to speak the truth. If John the Baptist said you were the son of God, you couldn’t get much better human testimony.

The second witness, Jesus’ works

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. John 5:36 (ESV)

Let’s take it up a notch. Bring in the second witness. The works he did. Jesus was doing things only God could do. Remember how this started, Jesus

instantly healed a man paralyzed for 38 years. That was a miracle from God; even Mayo Clinic can't touch that. Jesus turned water to wine with just a spoken word. These are the kinds of things only God can do. While these Jews didn't recognize his miracles as a witness to his divinity, many people recognized them. Nicodemus saw Jesus' miracles as proving Jesus' identity.

This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "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 (ESV)

Most of the people understood Jesus' miracles as proving his identity as the son of God.

Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" John 7:31 (ESV)

When I was a kid, I remember reading the miracle stories of Jesus and praying that God would do a miracle in my life. I remember one time putting a thumb tack on my bedroom floor with the point facing up. I told Jesus I had enough faith. I was going for a miracle. I walked on them asking for a miracle that they would not pierce my foot. Do you know what happened? My parents found me laying on my bed screaming with holes in my feet. Why didn't it work?

I am not Jesus. The miracles done by Jesus were evidence that he is God. He was doing things only God can do. Why do miracles not happen all the time in answer to our prayers? We are not Jesus.

That doesn't mean God will never do miraculous things in our lives. Sometimes he does. The frequency of miracles in Jesus' life were there as proof that Jesus is God.

What is the moral of the story? Don't try walking on thumb tacks.

Miracles like we see in the life of Jesus were there as evidence that he is the son of God.

The third witness, the Father

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. John 5:37–38 (ESV)

What is this witness of God the Father? The Bible scholars are not clear.

There are two times when God the Father directly spoke identifying Jesus as God the Son. The first time was at his baptism.

...and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17 (ESV)

The second time was at his transfiguration.

He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Matthew 17:5 (ESV)

I have officiated at many baptism services. I have never had a voice from heaven tell me the person I baptized was the son of God. If that happens, trust me, I won't forget it.

The fourth witness, the Old Testament

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. John 5:39–40 (ESV)

The Old Testament is a fourth witness that proves Jesus is God, but most of the Jews didn't see it. Why not?

They had a faulty view of salvation. They believed if you studied the Torah hard enough and long enough, you gained eternal life. This is what Jesus meant

when he said they “search” the Scriptures because they thought they had eternal life in them. The word “search” is in the imperative. It means to diligently study. They literally thought that if they memorized the Torah, that was how they gained eternal life with God. Let me show you a quote from the great Rabbi Hillel that lived at the time of Jesus.

Whoso hath gained a good name, has gained it for himself. Whoso hath gained the words of the Torah, hath gained for himself life in the world to come. (Pirke Aboth 2:8)

These guys were doing their AWANA memory verses while chugging Red Bull. The more they learned, the more they had eternal life. Every day was a Bible Quizzing competition. Who could learn more Bible? Who could quote more Scripture? The better you were, the more God loved you? Here is the problem.

We are not saved by the Bible; we are saved by the God of the Bible.

They knew the Bible, but they didn’t know the God of the Bible. The Jews of Jesus’ day were not the only ones with this misunderstanding. There are many people today who trust in their knowledge of the Bible rather than the God of the Bible for eternity. There are people who are extremely intelligent. They know the Bible better than all of us, but they don’t know God.

Let me give you a modern example. One popular Bible commentator that many pastors use in their sermon preparations is the Scottish theologian William Barclay. His commentaries are detailed and engaging. I own some of his works. While he is a respected Bible scholar, he is not a Christian. He does not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. He does not believe in Jesus’ miracles. He does not

believe the feeding of the 5,000 actually took place. He flatly denies Jesus is the son of God.¹

Understand what this means. There are smart people who study the Bible but they do not know the God of the Bible, just like the Jews of Jesus' day. There is a difference between knowing the Bible and knowing the God of the Bible.

Why do some people know the Bible but not make the connection?

If we don't approach the Old Testament through Jesus, we will miss its message.

But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 2 Corinthians 3:14–16 (ESV)

Paul says that for the Jews, and I believe this is true for many people, there is a veil over their hearts when the Old Testament is read. They hear the words of the Bible but they do not understand them. It is only when people come to Christ, and ask Jesus to forgive their sins, that the veil is removed. When the veil is removed, the dead words of the Bible are recognized as the living words of God. All of a sudden, people start seeing and understanding Jesus, especially in the Old Testament Scriptures.

I thought about this for a while. I wish I was with these Jews to see what it looked like for them to find Jesus in their Old Testament. I wish I could see what happened when the veil was removed from their hearts. While I can't literally travel back 2,000 years, there is a book in the Bible that records what happened. It is the book of Acts. That book records the birth of the church and Christian

¹ <http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/681-the-enigmatic-william-barclay>

Jews telling other Jews where they found Jesus in their Old Testament. Let's flip through a little of Acts to see a few examples of where these first Christians saw Jesus in the Old Testament.

Jesus is the only one who fits in the blank.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him,

“ ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ ” (Psalm 16)

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. Acts 2:24–33 (ESV)

I want you to notice the quote in Acts 2 is from Psalm 16. It was written by King David hundreds of years before Christ. David talks about a guy who will not stay stuck in Hades. In this context, that is the realm of the dead. Not only will he not stay stuck in Hades, but his flesh will not rot. He will die but his body will not be stuck rotting in the grave. Who was David talking about? It couldn't be himself. David died, and his body rotted away. The lightbulb went on for these first century Jews that David was writing about Jesus hundreds of years before he arrived on the scene. He is the one whose body didn't rot in the grave. He is the only one who died but didn't stay stuck in the realm of the dead. It just gets better.

If we go further into Acts, we find Peter quoting another Psalm where only Jesus could fill in the blank.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” (Psalm 110)

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Acts 2:34–36 (ESV)

This passage quotes from Psalm 110. How many people are called Lord in Psalm 110? Two! One guy, who is God, says to another guy, who is God, sit at my right hand until I make everyone who is your enemy bow before you. In this Psalm, God is two persons. From what we learned last week, who is God the Father giving all authority to so everyone bows before him? God the Son. Here is Jesus in the Old Testament. The book of Acts is a virtual explosion of understanding for the early church as it realized Jesus is the one who fills in the blanks for all the passages in the Old Testament they didn't understand.

The key to understanding the Old Testament is to begin by coming to Christ, then Christ starts to fill in the blanks everywhere. Let me give you a few more examples.

Jesus is the Passover lamb.

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 1 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)

When the Jews left the land of Egypt, they were commanded to sacrifice a lamb the night before the plague of death came through town. The blood of that lamb was put on their doorposts. When the angel of death came through the

land of Egypt, he passed over the houses that had the blood of the sacrificed lamb on the door. Paul said the whole point of that event was to teach us that when Jesus' shed blood is applied to our lives, the angel of death passes over us. Rather than death being our bitter end, it is our better end.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29 (ESV)

Jesus is the one who took the Israelites out of Egypt.

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. Jude 5 (ESV)

Jesus is the one who was saving Israel in the Old Testament Exodus.

Jesus inspired the prophets to write about him.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10–12 (ESV)

The Spirit of Christ inspired the Old Testament prophets about what to write. When they wrote, they didn't understand everything they wrote. They realized the Spirit of Christ was telling them to write about sufferings and glories which would occur in the future. They knew they were writing about things yet to come.

The question is, "Why?" Why were the Jews refusing to come to Jesus? Jesus moved from talking about the witnesses that proved his identity to diagnosing their problem.

The problem is not with the evidence, it is with the heart.

I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? John 5:41–44 (ESV)

The problem with the Jews is they were more interested in the applause of their friends than the applause of God. The evidence is strong: John the Baptist, the miracles, the Father, the Old Testament. It was right in front of their eyes but they wouldn't believe it. Why did they reject the evidence? It was because of one thing: They had no courage. They were afraid to stand up in front of their friends and admit Jesus was right.

As a pastor, when I am preparing a sermon, there are two questions I ask myself: What do I want people to know? and What do I want people to do? This text is very clear about what God wants us to know. He wants us to know the witnesses are solid. Jesus is indeed the son of God. What does God want us to do? He wants us to be men and women of courage. We are not to live for the applause of our friends but be courageous and live for the applause of God, even when it hurts.

We live in a time when everything crowds into our time with God. Everything crowds into our time with church and family. To buck the system is costly. It may mean the loss of a varsity spot. It may mean others look at us weird because they don't understand our values or priorities. They don't understand that we are more interested in gaining the applause of Jesus.

Application

1. There is reliable evidence that Jesus is the Son of God.
2. Jesus is the missing piece of the Old Testament, not just the center piece of the New Testament.
3. Unbelief is a problem of the heart, not the facts. The evidence for Jesus being the son of God has satisfied the best minds in history. Examine the evidence yourself. Check out the character of the witnesses. Most importantly, check for whose applause you are living for.
4. Be men and women of courage. Live by the truth to gain the applause of God, more than the applause of those around us.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for submitting yourself to your father's will. You humbled yourself to take on flesh. You submitted to your father's will to die on a cross in our place for our sins. As a result of your submission to your father's will, your father has so delighted in you that he delegated all his authority to you. We worship you for saving us. We want to make a big deal about you.

As we look into another campus, we know it is only possible if you make it happen. We step forward in faith asking you would help make your name famous throughout our region.



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