

John 5:30-47

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[0 : 00] 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 true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth, not that the testimony that I received 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. 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.

[1 : 08] 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.

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?

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you, Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Thank you. I was staying with a friend just a few days ago.

[2 : 24] We were celebrating his 94th birthday. I know, I know. If you have friends that are turning 94, you're old. Evidently, I am getting old.

But nevertheless, this friend of mine, when he was younger, attended Oxford, and then was called up to serve in World War II, and upon his return, went on to Cambridge.

While at Oxford, he was studying literature, and his tutor, his advisor, as it were, for his undergraduate studies, was a professor, a don by the name of Clive Staples Lewis.

We know this man as C.S. Lewis. At any rate, I was in my friend's home, and just outside his room, there is a handwritten note to him from this famed, now writer, of the Narnia Chronicles and things of that nature.

And it was simply inviting him by name to wine and coffee at 8.15 p.m. on the Tuesday, the day, of course, which he was writing, was on the Sunday, January 2, 1944.

[3 : 44] That's as close as I'll ever get to the literary giant C.S. Lewis. What was interesting, though, is Lewis is also the writer of another book, which I read some time ago, and this week was remembering it, called *God in the Dock*.

God in the Dock. I suppose, having refreshed my memory on it, that the dock is some Britishism that's related to the field of law, and it signifies being shut up into a witness box.

You're on trial. You're the accused. You're the defendant. The title of the book says, *God in the Dock*. I mention it at the opening because the premise of the book is perfect in the way it frames the text before us today.

Listen to the premise of the book in Lewis' own words. Quote, The ancient man approached God, or even the gods, as the accused person approaches the judge.

For the modern man, the roles are quite reversed. We are the judge. God is in the dock. We are quite a kindly judge.

[5 : 17] If God should have a reasonable defense for being the God who permits things in life like war or poverty or disease, we are ready to listen to it.

The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that we are on the bench, says Lewis, and God is in the dock.

I think that's pretty well said. When you think about you and me and our family and our friends and our neighbors, if we think about God at all, we tend to think of him in terms or her or it along the lines of making an assessment of how well this purported God is really doing.

In other words, from the vantage point of we are the ones who are assessing God, God is not making an assessment of us.

He is the accused or the defendant, and we can, in our mind, be the accuser or the prosecuting attorney.

[6 : 33] I'm not really sure how that works, but normally, when we wake up and think about God, most of us think, yes, and if he is there, I plan on having a long talk with him.

You see, God has some things to explain. Well, that perfectly frames these verses that were read. Jesus, according to the writer of the gospel, back in verse 18 of the same chapter, had been speaking in such a way that people got the point, through his identification as the heir, and God as the father, that he called himself to be God.

Back at 118, not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was calling God his father, making himself equal with God. And so now Jesus is in the predicament that Lewis writes about concerning God.

If he is God, believe me, by verse 30, he's in the dock. And when you picture it that way, it's a fascinating text. You're looking at verse 30 of Jesus, sitting on the witness stand, as the accused, who has to defend his notion that God is at work in and through him.

[7 : 54] And he's not a very convincing sound, in verse 30 and 31. He reads very much like one who would rather be anywhere else that day, but in court and having to testify.

He said, 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. And this phrase especially, if I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

It's as if he gets the problem. I'm having to speak words that would defend my claim that God is at work in and through me.

Indeed, I am the very word and work of God. But to do that, almost makes everything I say inadmissible. Which is why I love verse 32.

I mean, I hope you have your Bibles and bring them along, or these little books of John that we hand you week by week to think about. I know a phone can work, but this is one of these texts where the whole thing in view is easier, said the old man.

[9 : 15] What happens in verse 32, though, is extraordinary. Take a look at it. Jesus, the accused, or you could say, the harassed witness. Well, he's not quite harassed. He's, he's the perplexed witness who would rather not be a witness concerning his own stance.

He escapes the dock. He returns to the defendant's table. But rather than sitting behind the table next to his legal counsel, where you would expect him to be, by verse 32, you realize that Jesus is invoking in our country an element from the Sixth Amendment, and he's providing his own legal counsel.

By verse 32, he has squirmed out behind the bench of the defendant, and now he is going to call witnesses, knowing that his own witness would just be ridiculous to win the day.

And so he says, verse 32, there is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.

All right, so there's the biblical world, and then there's the, the American ideal, and then there's the founding of our country, and then there's the formulation of our constitution, and then there's that hurried moment where we collect the bill of rights, and then there's the concern of our day where we're all consumed with the First Amendment, or the Second Amendment, depending upon which state in the country you live in, and then all of a sudden we forget there was a Sixth Amendment, but Jesus seems to be invoking something like the privileges of the Sixth Amendment in our own system.

[10 : 58] If you're in the law school, you get it, the rest of us don't. But the Sixth Amendment is really important for all of us. I mean, where would we be without it?

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to have the assistance of counsel for his defense. That's a right that we have.

Praise God. And there are five distinct rights within that amendment. Let me just read them to you. The right to a counsel of choice.

You and I get to choose who we want to defend us. The right to appointed counsel. The right to conflict-free counsel. The effective assistance of counsel.

And fifth and finally, the one I think Jesus is hammering on long before we put it into our own language, the right to represent oneself. That's what Jesus does.

[11 : 57] In verses 32 through 44, he's become legal counsel to bring witnesses in hopes of convincing the juror, you, that his claim to be veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, or the way the church will later frame it in 1 Timothy 3, 16 or so, where God was made manifest in the flesh.

All that Christian dogma about, did Jesus really walk the earth as the person and presence of the divine?

Did he really secure the things for us that only God does? And is therefore he God? Jesus is now behind the bench. And look, look quickly.

He's going to bring four witnesses that go into the dock on his behalf. The first one's a character witness. It doesn't take long to take a look at it.

It's verse 33 and 4. You sent to John. And he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man.

[13 : 22] Like he's not, he's saying, it's not like I got to rely on John. But I'm bringing him forward as a witness that you may be saved. Notice verse 35. Striking.

Beautifully put. He was, that was John the Baptist, was a burning and shining lamp and you were willing to rejoice in him with his light for a while. In other words, he says, I've got John on the stand. John is the one who bore witness to me. I won't speak on my own behalf that God is upon me. But John did it. And here's the clincher for him as a defense attorney.

You liked John for a while. You thought he was credible. And if you thought him to be credible, well then I'll let him speak and hopefully he'll persuade you.

A wonderful character witness and an astute self-defender is Jesus. I don't know what you make of John the Baptist.

[14 : 29] But the data we have, both from Josephus and then mainly here in the records of the gospel accounts, he is the, he is just that.

He is the bright, shining lamp. He is the burning torch that had universal appeal, who called a spade a spade, who spoke truth to power, whose testimony was pure, who was free of the conflict of interest, who was willing to put himself aside that the one he bore testimony to would enter the stage.

Jesus says, if you doubt my claim that God is with me, let me remind you to go back and read about John the Baptist because the baptizer actually said some things that would lend credence to my disposition and my direction in life.

He's a character witness. But Jesus takes John the Baptist off the stand and notice who he puts on next. He calls, he calls a second witness, verse 36, but, but, in other words like, and now I call my second witness, the testimony that I have is actually greater than that of John.

Now the word there, greater, really means, I'm going to give you some weightier evidence. In other words, this is the defense attorney who's building his case from the bottom up. He didn't bring his biggest guns even at the beginning.

[16 : 06] He goes, John, as a character witness, is good, but there's something that's even weightier than that of John. And what is the witness? What is on the stand? What is it that speaks for Jesus? 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.

The works bear witness. Well, what are these works? Well, if you're new because you haven't been here in a bit, those of us who have been traveling in John for a couple of months, that is a book fair. Welcome to it. May they come in and read from this book this morning as well. What I love is Jerome Green, one of our percussionists, is up in the back.

They're going to go by. We're good. If you had fallen asleep, welcome back.

Welcome back. If you got lost in the message, like, man, I didn't come here to study law, well, then learn this. These works that Jesus is referring to are things like he turned the water into wine at the

wedding at Cana.

[17:31] In other words, he did this miraculous thing that signified God's promised kingdom blessings would arrive. or when he healed the official's son, which was the second sign where he actually indicated, you know, I'm able to bring life and I'm able to bring life to whomever I want, wherever I want, even when I'm not in proximity to them.

And then there's the one where we had the man at the pool where all of a sudden an incapacitated man for 38 years has been given a fresh start on life.

And what Jesus is saying is, if you don't want to take the witness of John, there's actually something that is a little more weighty for you to look at. The things that I'm doing everywhere I go, life is occurring.

People are starting over. People are enjoying the blessings of a kingdom relationship in which God is their father. But he's not done.

37 is to me, verse 37, the most interesting of all the witnesses. I'm not a lawyer and I don't really know what he's doing here other than he's trying to call a witness that he knows didn't show up.

[18:57] He's trying to bring into the testimony of the court an effort, an appeal to someone that had the defense counsel actually been able to get the person to show up and bear testimony, if he had come, it would have been a really powerful witness.

But he's almost saying, and for the third witness, well, I'm calling the witness that, well, he couldn't be here, but if he had been here, he'd have been really good because he's this kind of person.

That's what he's doing.

He says, and the Father who sent me himself has borne witness. It's not just the character witness of John the Baptist. The evidentiary witness of his works. It's the unseen witness of the Father.

He says, he bore witness. And notice verse 37, his voice you've never heard. Like, I can't actually introduce his testimony to you, but I heard him say it.

I mean, I got the whole deposition from him when I was in his presence, but it would be inadmissible. Or he says, you've never seen him. And I can't actually put him on the stand now for you to look at him.

[20:10] I mean, we're talking about God here. But he says, and you don't believe his word abiding in you for you do not believe the word of the one he sent. He's like, I could bring the Father. So here's what he's done.

This masterful movement in Jesus on getting himself out of the dock. Character witness, John the Baptist. Evidentiary testimony, his own works. The unseen absentee witness, that of the Father.

And then fourth, verse 39, documentary evidence, the scriptures themselves. Look at 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. He brings forward, the word scriptures here would be that kind of complete Jewish body of work of the law, the writings, and the prophets.

Now, I know it's not easy in our own system to bring a letter in, like a letter to the judge. You know, I didn't, you know, I'm writing an absentee letter and I sign it Epstein's mother and somehow it purports as actual evidence before the court.

[21:21] That's just hearsay. That kind of evidence doesn't stand in our own day. But if you're, if you were ever called to be an expert witness in a trial in our country and you, you were able to appeal to a journal that scientific studies were done and those journals and the studies where they were done and the conclusions that were made are by now, by the time that you're bringing them into the court, are now held to be generally true and we hold them together to be true, well then those are admissible.

That's what Jesus is doing. He's saying, I'm going to bring out to you now the law, the prophets, and the writings. Documentary evidence. And it's admissible because you hold these to be authoritative already.

There's a long history of you honoring these, believing in these, holding these, protecting the people through these. And notice what he says.

In them you think you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness about me. Now we've just got to stop there for a moment. This is an incredible claim.

I want to make three observations. The claim, first of all, the claim. Jesus' claim, isn't that every word in the Old Testament somehow can be threaded, it's like a needle all the way to who he is, but

that the message of the Old Testament, the things, there are things in the Old Testament conclusively and comprehensively that speak to him as the fulfillment of all that is promised. [22 : 57] in other words, Jesus is saying the Old Testament is documentary evidence that one would come fulfilling the promises of God and accomplish the life-giving work of the kingdom and give it to men and women.

That's the claim. In other words, let me put it to you this way, the way I think about it. The claim is that Jesus the Nazarene!

is the unifying interpretive center of the Old Testament scriptures according to those Old Testament scriptures. Now that's wild.

So let's move beyond his claim for a moment to what I would call our best and most honest critic. So take it back a while in the United States. I'm going to introduce you to a man by the name of James Barr. Very, very important figure on this kind of question.

[24 : 13] Is Jesus the unifying interpretive center of the scriptures according to the scriptures? Well, he said, I've listened to a number of, he didn't say, I'm paraphrasing, I've listened to a number of you fundamentalist Christian speakers and when I watch how you handle the Old Testament record, you're just brutalizing its historical record.

In fact, truth be told, you could give a rip about the history of the Old Testament. It is nothing more for you Bible-believing Christians than this foil through which you throw Jesus.

And you know, largely, his criticism was honest, direct, and right then and often right now. So he posits the question by way of principle, can you really find Jesus in the Old Testament without, his word, imposing him into the text?

And then he asks, but can this be done? Now this is where I think Barr moves from his operating principles in history to his dissatisfaction with Christians in their theologizing to perhaps opening the door to his mind that while the principle could be established, maybe somebody could show me Jesus without imposing Jesus from the text or on the text.

But can it be done? I think presuppositionally he thought, no, it can't really be done without just ripping up that whole Old Testament in weird ways, which Christians still do today.

[26 : 04] I wish I could talk with Barr, not because I'm a scholar, I'm not, but he wants us to take the Old Testament voices on its own terms.

And so do I. But on their own terms, don't those writers often articulate things that they viewed their message in light of something that was to be fulfilled?

In other words, their own terms meant that a lot of these prophets put their work in history and were anticipating a greater fulfillment along the line.

I just asked the question. And so I think Christians need to carefully hear the honest and well put criticism of denigrating the Scriptures to find Jesus.

But that's the work of the preacher. the preacher. But I think Jesus is saying I'm in there. They may have gotten to me a bad way, but I'm in there.

[27 : 15] Well, let me move one more step. His claim, good, healthy, honest criticism. How about middle road compromise? Let me give you another guy, Brevard Childs.

He's increasingly becoming popular in ways, particularly among people of my own ilk. Because Childs argues, oh yes, you can do Jesus from the Old Testament Scriptures. And how does he do it?

Childs says, these are two very different voices. That's his words, not mine. Two very different voices. The Old Testament voice, the New Testament voice.

But because the church has put these together through canon, because the church did canon, we're free to do it. So in other words, Childs says, yeah, you can do Jesus from the Old Testament, because the church gave you the operating rules to do Jesus.

But hear what I'm saying, hear what I think John is saying, hear what I think Jesus is articulating in distinction from the critic and the compromiser. Jesus is saying, to the best of my ability before you this morning, he is saying, I am the unifying interpretive center of the scriptures according to the scriptures.

[28 : 32] Contra Bar, who would not, I don't think, say he's the unifying interpretive center of the scriptures. Contra Childs, who would say, well, he may be, but not according to the scriptures.

It's according to the church. And so here is the audacity of the fourth and final witness. The scriptures themselves, divinely given, regardless of how you handle all the complexities and the

particularities and the problems.

The scriptures themselves are the very word of God given to us to reveal Jesus. He's the unifying interpretive center of it.

And he's the unifying interpretive center of it according to it. Now, why does Jesus introduce that witness? Because this was the witness they would have introduced for themselves.

They held this. They held Moses to be true. You may not, but they did. Anything they read in the prophetic discourse, in the writings, in the law, it was for them.

[29 : 46] Thus saith the Lord. They believed it. They held it. And Jesus is saying, I am now bringing to you the evidence of your own convictions and telling you they speak to me.

Well, look at the way it ends. And I'm almost done. Having started as the accused, Jesus ends up almost as the accuser.

He not only got himself out of the box, acted at his own legal counsel, introduced four witnesses, but now he has his own closing statement. Verse 42, but I know that you don't have the love of God within you.

Like, I know you're not going to, I know you jurors. I just brought you four really good pieces of work. I know you're not going to take it. I've come in my father's name.

You don't receive me. If another guy comes in his own name, you'll be more than happy to hear him. How can you believe when you receive glory from one another? You're always looking for praise from one another, yet here it is, I've tried to give you the glory and praise of God.

[31 : 01] Look at this, verse 45, stunning. do not think that I will accuse you to the father. There is one who accuses you, Moses, on whom you have set your hope.

For if you believe Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me, but if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? what earth shaking closing statement.

41 to 44, he turns to the jury and in a sense accuses them of ruling with impure motives.

But then he puts them in the place of the accused and then he says, but it won't be me who accuses you on the final day.

The very thing you're hoping in will do you in because it testified to me.

[32 : 06] Here's the lesson. Here's the lesson. What those are the words on hope. What are you setting your hope in for that moment when you get your chance to have your long talk with God?

What are you setting your hope in? How is it that when you see him you will be making an assessment of him rather than him making an assessment of you?

What do you really believe is going to allow you to put God in the dock? It may not be the scriptures as it was for them.

Maybe it's your morals. I'm a good person and because I'm good and I see a lot of not good I couldn't sing that song we walked in on today Lord you are good no not from me you say because you're good and God is not!

So is it really your morals? Well then your morals on the day of Christ will stand as testimony against you for who among us lives up to the standard of our own morals?

[33 : 27] Is it your mind? I'm banking on my logic and argumentation before God but who among us is not of a corrupt mind and who among us doesn't already know that we are often led astray to believe things that are wrong?

Is it going to be your experience? I had it rough and therefore I'm good and he's not. What about Jesus' experience?

Have you wrestled with his experience of rejection and the weight of the world and sin? I mean these are things for you and me to consider.

What are we putting our hope in? Is it in our own reasoning capacity? Our experiential life? Our own morality? The logic of our mind?

The truth of the text is this. Reject Jesus and he will not have to accuse you on that day. The very things you and I put our hope in will be sufficient enough for him to say from the bench depart depart.

[34 : 45] I never knew you. Or what he hopes to say enter into my everlasting rest where I'm forever on the throne and freed from the malleable malcontents of humanity that have rejected the wonder and the beauty and the glory and the forgiveness that comes to us in Christ.

What are you hoping in? Oh, there is a heaven.

according to the words of Jesus, there is a hell. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Embrace the life in Christ.

God, heavenly father, we have been reminded today that we're not all as big and powerful as we claim to say.

[36 : 20] So help us to listen to this record given to us by John and to receive his testimony before we see you face to face.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.