

The Spirit's Witness to Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 November 2009

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 00] I want to consider this under the heading, The Spirit's Witness to Jesus. Yes, I agree. By the way, it's a bit chilly. I don't know why that is, but it is.

The Spirit's Witness to Jesus. And we may just read again these three verses. This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ.

Not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. And these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood. And these three agree in one. Now, it's my intention under God's blessing to consider the witness of the Spirit to Jesus, and not to get snarled up in what we might call matters of textual differences and variations.

Verse 7 is notably a difficult and a contended verse. But to me, it speaks the truth anyway. And our proposal is to look at the threefold witness that's given us here through the Spirit of God.

[1 : 27] And it's a witness concerning the truth. Verse 6b, and the Spirit who bears witness, it's he who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

He is the Spirit of truth, in other words. Now, it's abundantly clear to you and me that through the modern media we've gathered, as perhaps never before, the damage caused by false witness, simply by lies, by deceptions.

We've had it, we've almost had our fill of it in recent months, of certain politicians conniving and scheming and bearing false witness, and then having to modify that witness craftily so as to avoid prosecution, and so on.

We see it in the financial institutions and those who profited at the expense of others, and the false witness of so much of what was done.

We see it in court cases again and again, the hurt and pain and long-term damage caused by false witness.

[2 : 51] They have to deviate from the truth. They modify it, they massage it so that it's comfortable for them, and it ceases to be the truth.

And John's concern in this letter, indeed in his Gospel too, has been to emphasize the difference between what is the true, the genuine, and what is false, what is not the real thing.

And he has also emphasized the truth over against error. We saw at the beginning of chapter 4, John saying, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, because there are many false, lying spirits.

And here in this passage, he underscores the importance of the truth and of receiving the truth from the Spirit of God.

He is the Spirit of truth and not of error. And his witness is a triune or a threefold witness, and we will consider this in a few moments.

[4 : 18] This witness is a mist for us. It's a mist for true faith. It's a mist that enables us to believe and to overcome by faith, to conquer all that is set against us by way of the world, the flesh, the sinful nature, and those stratagems of the evil one.

We need the truth. We need the witness of the truth to keep us on the right track, to keep us going on in the straight way. And this witness is an ever-present witness.

It's a confirming witness. It's a witness to our soul of the things freely given to us of God. And it's a witness we need. Notice what I said here.

It is an ever-present. The Spirit is always working. And that Spirit confirms to us the things that are freely given to us of God.

And I want us to reflect on this witness and to do so under four headings. And my reason for that is because it simplifies the thing.

[5 : 39] It's still really about a threefold witness, but it's easier to manage under four heads, as you'll see. But it's basically a witness to the incarnation, to the anointing and empowering, to the enabling, and to the resurrection of Jesus.

This is the line I'm taking. This is the line I'm taking. It's not the only line that can be taken. It's the line that I'm going to take and follow through. Because to me, these are crucial areas of the Spirit's witness.

The incarnation, the anointing, and the empowering of Jesus, the enabling of Jesus, and we'll look at that, and also the resurrection of Jesus.

The Spirit's witness to the divine messiahship of Jesus. First of all then, the Spirit's involvement in the incarnation.

The Spirit's involvement in the incarnation. Now you'll notice, and what I want you to notice is that I'm not imposing anything on the text, on the passage here.

[6 : 53] Notice what is said in verse 6. This is he who came. This is he who came. The one who has come. Now this is a key expression in the Bible that refers to the one who was to come.

The coming one. It's another turn of phrase for the Messiah. It's a turn of phrase that the prophets used about the coming one.

About the one who was promised and who would come. It's a one that the Jews still refer to, the unbelieving Jews I mean, who expect Messiah to come.

They still talk about him as the coming one. It's an expression that is loaded with meaning.

And John tells us this is he who came. The one who was promised has come. He is that one promised.

[8 : 04] He is the coming one who came. And he came in the name of the Lord. That's a great messianic expression. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And Jesus is that one. He came in the name of the Lord. He has come. And if you go back to basics and you remember when Mary was told how she would conceive and bear a son without the normal procreative process.

She was astonished. How can this be since I have not known a man? Luke 1.35 And she was told the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and his mighty energy would effect the conception of the Holy One in the Virgin.

And he would be called the Son of God in human nature. And John refers to him here as this is he who came.

And what we're doing here is we're using this to remind us of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the incarnation and his witness to it as the Spirit of Truth.

[9 : 35] The Spirit is witness to the virgin conception and birth of the Son of God. He who was to come and who came.

And my dear friends what we've got to do with this is to remind ourselves that we believe this doctrine we believe this truth we believe this reality not because we understand the science of it not because we understand the biology or the chemistry or the physiology or the genetics but because the witness of the Spirit of God is to it the witness of the Spirit of Truth who was directly involved in this mysterious business.

We believe it because of the Spirit of Truth's testimony. And it's important that we do that that we take that to ourselves.

So that's the first area that we've considered briefly. The second area is the Spirit's anointing and empowering of Jesus. Now what the Jordan you remember when Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized John wanted none of it.

John said I need to be baptized by you you don't need to be baptized for me. No, no, he wasn't going to do it. And Jesus said suffer it to be so now because it fulfills all righteousness.

[11 : 13] It's the right thing to do. I have to identify with those for whom I've come. And John did it. And no sooner had he baptized Jesus than the Spirit descended upon him in bodily form as like Adam.

you find it there in Matthew 3 you remember 16 and 17. And then there was heard that excellent voice from the excellent glory this is my beloved son.

And you see I think it was Augustine who said if you want the doctrine of the Trinity evidence for it go to the Jordan and it was this reference he had in mind.

Matthew 3 16 and 17. Go to the Jordan he said and there you have the Son of God and there you have the Spirit descending upon him for his official ministry is about to begin.

The Spirit anoints him and empowers him and the Father certifies it all. This is my beloved son. And here too you see you have a threefold heavenly witness.

[12:33] I said already we're not getting into the textual question about verse 7. What we're saying is the truth is therein contained. There is a threefold heavenly witness that is repeated often in scripture, often in the New Testament, the Gospels, and the Spirit bears witness.

Now this official anointing and empowering of Jesus the Messiah was a necessary part of his being in the form of a servant.

At one level he is the Son of God, the Eternal. At one level all authority is his, but in his self-emptying, in his making no account of himself, he becomes what he eternally was and he became man.

And part of becoming man as the Messiah, the servant, meant that he would not use what he could use. He relied upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and he is officially anointed, and he is officially empowered by that Spirit.

And he said himself in the little synagogue in Nazareth, when he read the scroll from Isaiah 61, the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, and so on.

[14:14] He saw the official ministry of the Holy Spirit coming upon him as it were, as a vital part of his being in the form of a servant and the Messiah.

He exercised himself in his ministry through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. That takes nothing away from the Son of God, it simply puts things in the way that God himself puts them.

He said himself, let me just illustrate this for a moment. There's a curious expression used in the Old Testament about the Spirit of God.

You'll find it in Exodus 31, 18. And the expression is the finger of God. And it's apparent that the finger of God is an expression for the Holy Spirit.

God is an God and the obvious reference is in Matthew 12, 28. Jesus is being accused of doing things by the power of the devil.

[15:28] And he warns those who are saying that. They're pretty close to the edge of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. And he says this, If I by the finger of God cast out devils, surely the kingdom of God has come nigh unto you.

That expression, if I by the finger of God. In other words, the Savior was conscious that this empowering of the Holy Spirit was part and parcel of his Messiahship.

You find again in Luke 11, 20. A similar reference. And it was Nicodemus, the rabbi, the chief, almost, he was maybe not the chief rabbi, but he certainly was a renowned teacher in Israel.

He recognized that no man could do what Jesus was doing, except God was with him in a meaningful way. And you see, the practical use of this to us is that we have through him, through Jesus, the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

I don't suppose you'll remember the sermon now, but we had a sermon on 1 John 2 and verse 20. You have an anointing from the Holy One and know all things.

[17:02] and the reference there was to the Holy Spirit, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the empowering, the equipping that we receive from Christ through the Spirit to live for Christ.

And that Spirit is the Spirit who bears witness to us, and that Spirit is the Spirit of truth whom, as Jesus says, the world cannot receive.

And I think we need to think more about his ministry to us, and in us, because it's that same Spirit who worked in the Saviour in his earthly ministry.

It's that same Spirit who works in us, and who witnesses to the truth, to the truth that Jesus was anointed for his Messiahship, his public ministry, I mean.

And he was empowered for that public ministry. So we have the Spirit's witness to the incarnation, and indeed his involvement in it.

[18:11] We have the Spirit's witness in the anointing of Jesus, and the empowering of Jesus. And these things are to be received by us, and used, put to good use.

The third thing we want to consider is the Spirit's enabling of Jesus. And I'm making a distinction here between empowering and enabling.

And this enabling of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in his public ministry is seen most marvelously when he comes to the last hours of his earthly life on this side, or on the other side of resurrection. We see the Spirit's enabling of Jesus as he prepares himself to offer himself on the altar of Calvary. God's offering up Jesus. There is, of course, again, a threefold involvement and witness of God in the offering up of Jesus.

[19 : 34] We know, for example, that the Father is involved in it. We know that the Father, it specifically says, spared him not, but delivered him up for us.

So the Father is giving him over to this death on the cross. He's giving him as our ransom for us. He's giving him as our propitiation as we thought recently. He's giving him as the one who through his death makes us one with God when we receive him. But the Son of God gave himself too.

The Son of God laid himself upon the altar of Calvary. I lay down my life. I have the authority to lay it down. John chapter 10 he tells us that very unambiguously.

No one takes my life from me. I have the power to lay it down. So the Father is involved here and the Son is involved necessarily but the Spirit is also involved.

[20 : 49] The Spirit enables him. We're particularly indebted to the writer to the Hebrews for that information.

You find it in Hebrews 9 and verse 14. We're told concerning Christ in the offering of himself that it was through the eternal Spirit.

through the Holy Spirit. Not his own Spirit but the Holy Spirit the Spirit who had anointed him and empowered him enabled him to offer himself without blemish to God.

And my dear friends the Spirit brings home this witness to us of the of the triune of the threefold involvement of the persons of God in the offering of the Son of God on the altar of Calvary.

It was through the enabling of the Holy Spirit through the eternal Spirit he offered himself. And the thing is that this same Spirit who bears witness to what he enabled Christ to do sheds refreshing light on the subject.

[22 : 12] He takes the old truth and makes it new to our soul. He gives us angles on it that we never saw before. That's why it ought to be our great business not to tire of reading the Bible but to be stirred to really get in there to study to avail ourselves of the helps there are and of the ministry of the word to see more of Jesus and of the Father and of the Spirit.

Is the Spirit's delight to testify to these things and to make them clear to us to give us the real stuff of the saving power of these things?

This is only just a little cram as it were but it's an interesting one. John's own words in the gospel in chapter 19 and verses 33 to 34 the context is they've broken the soldiers have broken the legs of one thief and of another and they come to Jesus and they see that he's dead already but one soldier from his point of view drove his spear into the Savior's side and up into his heart and out from his side flowed blood and water.

Not blood only. Now of course there's a clinical reason for it. we're not dwelling on that just now but we're simply stating the reality. Out from his side flowed blood and water.

Not blood only but blood and water. This is John's testimony to what happened. He was there. He was the only male disciple that was there.

[24 : 18] And we're reminded you see in the death of the Savior and the blood that flowed out from his side that it's not all the bulls and goats on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain.

Nor indeed the water of purification that the Jews kept safely that contained you remember the ashes of the red heifer for purification.

It wasn't that water that could cleanse either and purify. But the work of Christ applied to us by the Spirit of God and the Spirit witnesses to that.

That Jesus came as is said here this is he who came by water and blood not by water only but by water and blood and it is the Spirit who bears witness because the Spirit is truth.

And the water and the blood remind us of the death of Christ of the nature of his death. And the Spirit bears witness to that.

[25 : 53] It is the only effective means of removing our guilt, our uncleanness, our stain of sin. And the Spirit who enabled him to offer himself once unrepeatably testifies to that.

And wonder of wonders, the Spirit applies that to our hearts. How do we know it's applied? We receive it, we believe it, we simply take him at his word.

We simply receive it as from the Lord. The Spirit bears witness, you see, he's impressing upon us, this is it, the deal is done, it's all of God, you contribute nothing to it, empty hands receive it.

We're saying that in the noon, yesterday afternoon at the preparatory service. It's empty hands, we receive the fullness of Christ and the significance of his death as purification, as propitiation, as God's appointed means of removing all our uncleanness and of giving us peace with God and we receive it all through faith.

And the Spirit, you see, witnesses to this. We, to quote Paul, writing to Titus, we are washed with the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

[27 : 38] Who could put it better than that? Titus 3, verse 5. We are washed by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

And you see, here again, there is a crucial witness to the heart of the saving message of Christ. And we are to simply receive it and know we've received it and be changed by the reception of it. And you see, and I think this is important to say, it's not just about receiving the data. We're inundated with data every day.

If you're an onliner, you're bombarded. The world wide web is a staggering source of information. Mind boggling. And those among us, and there are a few, who are pretty dab hand at give them a word and they're in there, type it in, epicamps.

[28 : 56] reams of information. And books, and articles, and the Bible too.

Reams of information. But my dear friends, it's not just about the information. information. It's not even just about important and true information on facts of history, even the history of the life of Jesus, the divine Messiah.

Because if it's only about the data, it won't be all that meaningful to us because of the passing of time. what makes it vital and vitalizing and energizing to us is the now witness of the Holy Spirit. You follow me here? To that truth. It is the present reality of it that what was done there on that old rugged cross means something to me today.

and it will always mean something to me throughout the ages of eternity. How come?

[30 : 17] Because the Spirit, the ever-present Spirit, keeps that witness fresh and refreshing and we need it.

Our time is whizzed on, I must not dwell on that more. The last thing, the Spirit and the resurrection of Jesus.

Now here again, it's true there's a three-fold witness necessarily, implicitly, because Jesus was involved in his own resurrection. He was active in it.

The resurrection and the life is what he called himself. I am. Not I will be, I may be, but I am. John 10, 25, and he makes it unambiguous there.

I am the resurrection and the life. I quoted in John 10, earlier on, about him saying, I have the power to lay down my life, and I left the other bit deliberately, and I have power to take it again.

[31 : 35] And we're using it now. I have power to take it again. He knew he had the legal right to do that, and the capacity to do that. But the resurrection is also the work of the Father.

You go to the book of Acts, and you can't miss that. The preaching of the Apostles, Acts 2, 24, 32, 1 Corinthians 6, 14, Paul tells us the same.

God both raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up by his power. And God there is quite unambiguously the Father.

You slew him, said Peter to the Jews, but God raised him, and it's clear it's the Father. So you have the son's own involvement, in the resurrection, and you have the Father's involvement.

It is the exceeding greatness of God's power at work, Ephesians 1, and verse 20, that raised up Christ, that will also raise us up.

[32 : 43] So says Paul to Ephesians. However, it can be said, and ought to be said, that the Holy Spirit was also operative in Christ's resurrection.

Paul, in beginning that wonderful letter to the Romans, says at the beginning there, in verse 4, that Christ was ordained to be the Son of God by power, or with power.

And then he says this, according to the Spirit of holiness, according to the work of the Spirit through the resurrection from the dead.

And there is clearly a link here between the resurrection of Christ and the operation of the Spirit in it. you find it again in Paul writing to the Romans in verse 11 of chapter 8.

And he says this, if the Spirit of the Father who raised Christ from the dead is in you, he also will give you life.

[33 : 57] He will quicken your mortal bodies. And then he says this, by his Spirit who dwells in you. And what is being said in Romans 8.

11 is simply this, that the Spirit who operated in the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit of the Father, will raise you too. That's what's being said. So there is the involvement of the Spirit of God in the resurrection of Christ.

Now to finish, we have this witness of the Spirit. It is a threefold witness, the Spirit, the water and the blood.

It is the witness of the triune God and we've sought to show that too. But that is a reminder to us of the ever present ministry and witness of the Holy Spirit.

And we are to seek that witness daily. We are to avail ourselves of his instruction, of his confirming witness. It's not all just about past events.

[35 : 14] It is about past events that have present and indeed permanent relevance and efficacy. ministry. And we want to know therefore the fresh and refreshing ministry and witness of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit who makes these things real and powerful and transforming to our lives. young or old, rich or poor, we want or ought to want his fresh and refreshing ministry.

Taking the things of the Father and of the Son and showing them to us and confirming them to us that we may most gladly receive them and be enabled by him to be witnesses to the truth as it is in Jesus.

Amen.