

I have compelling validation from my Father

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- [0 : 0 0] Good stuff. The song, that is. So we're in the third week of working through chapter 5 of John's Gospel, the biography of the life of Jesus.
- So I want to start this morning by recapping the flow. Catherine's already done that in part, so that's a really good help. So verses 1 to 17 of chapter 5, the most incredible miracle. The crowd saw before them a guy who had lain there hopelessly and pathetically for 38 years, instantly brought back to full muscle tone, complete joint range movement, and neuromuscular coordination.
- In other words, the guy went from being hopeless and pathetic to actually picking up his bed and walking away. The response of the Jewish leaders to that?
- Well, not as we might expect, delight for the man healed. Nor total amazement at the supernatural power of Jesus just demonstrated to them, and therefore a desire to understand them even more.
- Now the response? Rage. Murderous rage. All they could see was that once again, and he was making a habit of this, once again he broke the rules regarding the Sabbath.
- [1 : 3 8] He worked on the Sabbath. The rules which the Jewish religious leaders believed were essential to honouring God, essential to having acceptance and relationship with God, and ultimately essential to getting to heaven.
- But even worse than that, they knew and heard Jesus claiming to be equal with God.
- Utter blasphemy, they thought. And then verses 19 to 29, Jesus really, instead of backing off at their hatred and their rage, he's really into them.
- He challenges their unbelief. He spells out in particular and in great detail what it means for him to be equal with God. And he says that his total unity of nature, will, and purpose with the Father means it's impossible to honour God without also honouring the Lord Jesus.
- That would have just blown their heads out. And Jesus develops even more.
- [2 : 4 6] He said, well look, if that's hard for you to hear, listen to this. It's the Father. My Father has given me, says Jesus, the primary role in achieving his salvation purpose.
- That means giving life, giving acceptance and relationship and the guarantee of heaven on the one hand and on the other hand, also pronouncing judgment on anybody who dares to reject me, says Jesus.
- And so that brings us to the verses this morning, 30 to 47. Jesus has just made a big thing of him being the judge.
- And in these verses, I believe that Jesus is becoming even more aggressive in response to these Jewish religious leaders. Because he goes in these verses, I think, and exposes the nature of their unbelief.
- And verse 30 then is a bridge, like verse 18 was a bridge. Jesus says, I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is just.
- [3 : 5 4] Jesus has just explained to these guys the role of judge which his Father has given to him.

Now, I think, Jesus begins to speak as judge to these men. Jesus actually effectively now passes judgment on the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders.

He's restating in verse 30 his credentials as judge. Perfectly aligned with the Father's desires. You can go back and see that from verses 19 and 20. Perfectly aligned with his Father's desires, purpose, and standards.

His exposure and condemnation of their unbelief that follows in these verses is perfectly just. Perfectly correct.

Perfectly beyond argument or dispute. His verdict on their unbelief.

[4 : 58] Well, the first two-part verdict. Unbelief is not due to a lack of evidence or testimony to me, says Jesus. So Jesus cites four different categories of witness or testimony, sources of validation to him and his ministry, his mission as God's Savior and King.

Now, it's important just to stop here for a minute. It's not desperation that makes them cite these witnesses. It's not as if Jesus is just desperately trying to make somebody believe when he recognizes that nobody's really believing in him.

Now, it's not desperation at all. What he's doing is he's using conventional Jewish practice of establishing truth in a law court. You need two or three witnesses to establish the truth of a matter.

What Jesus is doing here is he's actually showing them logically and legally that they have no valid reason for their unbelief.

They stand guilty. Witness number one. Jesus' own testimony. Verse 31. If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true.

[6 : 14] Now, Jesus recognizes here, I think, that his own testimony, though quite legitimate, is not going to be adequate. Why not?

Because the Jewish religious leaders have already deemed him to be a fraud and a liar. So they're just going to dismiss anything he says. So he moves on.

And he talks about, verse 32, there's another who bears witness about me. Now, the text here is a little bit ambiguous. Most people take it to reference John the Baptist that follows.

I think it's actually a bigger picture than that. I think the other that he's talking about here is God the Father. And God the Father bears testimony to John through three agencies.

John the Baptist, miracles, and then the Scripture. And we'll see them as we work through them. So witness number two. John the Baptist.

[7 : 14] Now, John the Baptist was an exemplary witness. He was the sort of witness you would want in a court of law because he was from a priestly family. His father, Zachariah, was a priest.

And not only that, but he was recognized as a prophet. Twice in the early chapters, he's described as one who was sent from God. He was a prophet or a prophetic figure. And again, quoting this or citing this exemplary witness, Jesus wants to be no illusions.

He says, I don't need John as a witness. I'm not depending on John as a witness for validation of my ministry, says Jesus.

But nevertheless, I will cite him, verse 34, as an assistance to you to believe. In other words, it's a concession to their unbelief.

Just trying to nudge them along a bit and get them over the line. Give them as much reason as possible to believe. And there's a concession because Jesus describes them here as a burning, shining light.

[8 : 23] In other words, John the Baptist is like a set of runway lights. So bright, illuminating the path all the way to Jesus.

So if anybody's going to help you believe, it will be John the Baptist. And the Jewish religious leaders recognized that John was a prophet sent by God.

In fact, initially in the early chapters, you can go back and check on it. Initially, they actually went to John because they knew he was a prophet. They knew he was doing something like prophets do, something unusual.

And so they went to John and asked, what is your word from the Lord? And from that point on, they knew jolly well that John's word from the Lord was that Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, God's Savior and King, was now with them.

And it was this Jesus that they knew. But, says Jesus, after initial delight from these Jewish religious leaders, the initial excitement that, wow, we've lived to see a fair dinkum prophet sent by the Lord.

[9 : 29] But after that initial delight, then the Jewish religious leaders just rejected both John and his message.

Choosing the darkness of their own understanding over a word from the Lord. Witness 3, verse 36. The works, or miracles as Jesus calls them. The testimony 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. Very simply, just look around.

You've just seen me heal this guy. Only God can do the sorts of things you've just seen me do. And that hasn't been an isolated case, says Jesus.

I've done other miracles. And every time it's the same message. Only God could do the things that you see me do. And not only that, but I think Jesus is picking up there a reference back to Isaiah.

[10 : 35] Isaiah was very, very much in the forefront of saying, look, Messiah is coming. Chapter 35, for instance. Messiah is coming. How will you recognize the age of Messiah?

You'll recognize it because the Messiah will come doing miraculous things. He will make the crippled to walk, the blind to see. The age of Messiah that Isaiah was talking about, says Jesus, it's here.

It's me. It's me. Jesus was doing what his father loved to do and had promised he would do.

As I said last week, move people from being spiritually dead to being life, full of life, true life. Fourth witness then.

Verse 37, 38, and 39. The witness of the father himself through his written word, the scripture. Now this would have been very confronting for the Jewish religious leaders.

[11 : 41] Because Jesus here recognizes their passion for scripture. There's no question about it. These guys loved the scripture. They loved memorizing it. They loved quoting it.

They thought they had something special that set them apart from all the other nations in the world because they had God's written word. And they luxuriated in it. Passionate about it, as I say.

And they believed that it would actually deliver them into eternal life. So one of the famous priests, Hillel, they taught that dutifully obeying all God's commandments, all God's rules, would actually earn them acceptance and relationship with God and therefore take them into the kingdom of God, which is what they were seeking, or what we would call the heaven.

But more than that, they said, if you want to improve the quality of life in heaven, then the way to do that is by memorizing and reciting scripture.

So the more you memorize and the more you're able to recite, then you'll get a payback in heaven with a better quality of life. So you can see why they were serious about learning scripture and being familiar with it.

[12 : 56] But then Jesus' king hits them by saying, listen, you guys, that's all very good, but you've missed the point. You've missed the whole point of God's scripture.

You've missed what's clear and obvious in God's storyline of salvation. And that is that people could never secure heaven on their own efforts. And that the scriptures consistently point to God's gracious provision of an alternative to performance.

And that is the grace of Jesus and the gospel. They've missed the most fundamental point of God's storyline, God's scripture.

They did not see Jesus. Why? Because they weren't looking for him. Why weren't they looking for him?

Because they didn't need him. They were totally committed to promoting their own agenda. Promoting their own pathway to salvation, which is do this, do these religious things, and you will have salvation.

[14 : 12] Memorize God's word, and you will have not only salvation, but a really top-notch quality of life in heaven. They were so busy promoting that, that they didn't see Jesus.

They didn't need Jesus. Even if it meant rejecting God's prophetic word, John the Baptist and all the other prophets before him. Even if it meant ignoring God's demonstrated word, the miracles all around them.

And even if it meant distorting God's written word, the very thing they profess to love and cherish. They would do all of that because they're so focused on their own agenda of salvation.

So Jesus declares, verse 37, and this is a damning comment to these Jewish religious leaders. Remember, these are the cream of the cream. Well, so-called, anyway.

Verse 37, Jesus declares that in spite of all their godly concerns, they'd never really heard, understood, believed, or delighted in God.

[15 : 26] Now, remember who he's speaking to. These are Jewish religious leaders. These are the guys that everybody looked up to as the models of godliness, the models of passion for the Lord. And Jesus says, there's nothing.

You've got nothing. In spite of such compelling evidence or testimony, which should have produced belief, their future remains the resurrection of judgment that we spoke about last week, verse 29.

That's a sobering thought, isn't it? A shocking exposure. A shocking condemnation. They had every reason to believe, but they refused to believe.

They refused to believe the evidence. And so, verse 29, Jesus will be declaring as judge that your only thing you can consider as you look to the future is this resurrection to judgment.

And then Jesus continues to expose their unbelief with a second part of the verdict. So, unbelief is not due to a lack of evidence, but unbelief now, Jesus ramps up again.

[16 : 43] Unbelief is nurtured by unbelieving hearts and fixed mindset. Unbelief is not due to a fact. Now, John identifies, and it's buried in here, but I think this is an important point.

You can send an email to Rob if you don't, because my email's full up this week. So, John identifies and highlights the key distinction between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders.

And it's a key distinction at the point of heart motivation. Ultimately, self-interest explains their unbelief.

Let me try and demonstrate this. Look back to chapter 30. Sorry, look back to verse 30. So, Jesus says, the second part of that verse, which I skipped over, Jesus says, I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

Everything Jesus does is motivated by the desire of his heart to please his Father.

[17 : 55] Now, look at the sharp contrast that John gives us with these Jewish religious leaders, that Jesus makes with these religious leaders, verses 43 and 44. Verses 44, See, classic distinction in motivation.

These Jewish religious leaders, when it was all boiled down, when you get behind the facade of godliness, when it was all boiled down, they were motivated by desire for praise, for validation from people around them.

They weren't ultimately driven or motivated or desirous of pleasing the Lord. And that means practically, because their minds were so full of that, that there was no room to seek God's mind, no room to find God's pathway, because they were following their own preferences.

And Jesus says, not only that, but you happily gather people around you. You reject me, but then you'll happily gather people around you. On what basis? People that think the same way as you think and people that will affirm you in your presumed belief.

So you see, it feeds into itself, doesn't it? Their unbelief feeds into unbelief. Self-interest then nurtured self-love.

[19 : 34] Again, look back at chapter 20. Chapter 20, verse 20. Look back at verse 20. For the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

And Jesus responds in love to the father. There is a mutual love between the father and his son, which overflowed in Jesus' determination to honor and obey the father in all things, regardless of the cost to himself, even the cost that we'll see as the story unfolds, of going to the cross.

Again, look at the sharp contrast, verse 42. I do not receive glory from people, verse 42, but I know that you do not have the love of God within you.

You do not have the love of God within you. Now remember again, who he's speaking to? Jewish religious leaders, the top of the pile.

You do not have the love of God within you. These religious leaders were devoid of genuine love for God and his purposes.

[20 : 59] Their concern for scripture, their concern for godliness, their concern for honoring Moses, Jesus effectively said, well, it's all just an outside show. It's all show.

It's all image. There's no substance to it. There's nothing in your heart. There's nothing in your heart. Because in reality, they were into self-validation through their own efforts.

Verse 43 again. I have come in my Father's name and you do not receive me. They don't need Jesus because they validated themselves.

They refuse to welcome Jesus but embrace others who think as they do and affirm each other in the way that they demand. Even if it's shallow, and based on distortion of truth and lies.

So what Jesus is saying here, I think, is that their unbelieving response to Jesus was very much about self-protection. About avoidance of any suggestion or appearance of being wrong.

[22 : 05] Because remember, these guys knew jolly well what Jesus was saying. And the next step in their logic was, well, if Jesus is saying this and we're saying that, we can't both be right.

So what are we going to do about it? Answer? We get rid of Jesus. Now that's a conviction of unbelief, isn't it? If Jesus was, if what Jesus was saying was true, then what they've been teaching could not be true.

So these guys, when you dig into their unbelief, it's about a choice to protect their own traditions. It's a choice to find validation, to make validation of their teaching, their reputation, and their authority before the people more important than evidence or truth.

So they were not really concerned for God's honor at all. Though that was the image they created for themselves. Really? When all said and done, they were concerned for their own position, their own advancement. Friends, they were caught in a vicious cycle of unbelief.

Their commitment to their own thinking about what makes a person acceptable to God meant they didn't really engage with a compelling evidence brief for Jesus. In turn, this fed their unbelieving attitude as they encountered Jesus.

[23 : 34] And in turn, that allowed them to conclude that what they'd been thinking about Jesus all along was correct. And in turn, that gave them an increasing freedom because they were so convinced they were right.

They then felt they had the freedom to stop listening to God. Now notice, they stopped listening to God, but they didn't stop reading the scriptures. They still love scripture, God's written word, but instead of coming to it humbly, to be instructed by it and directed by it, they came to it as overlords becoming the interpreters of God's word according to their own understanding.

And so the desire was to use scripture to achieve their own ends, their own advancement, their own honor, not God's honor, God's ends. And Jesus says to them, look, you guys, you make a big thing about Moses, well, I tell you now, that even now, Moses is standing up in heaven screaming at you guys that he does not want anything to do with you lot because you've got nothing really to do what he was teaching.

Moses will condemn you, says Jesus. So the big question this morning, as I wrap up, big question this morning, if you're not yet a believer in Jesus, that is, if you're not yet a believer in Jesus for your acceptance before God, and your place in heaven, the big question then is, are you yourself caught in a cycle, a vicious cycle of unbelief?

Is your commitment to not believing in Jesus controlling how you look at the evidence and form your conclusions? There's lots of evidence and research to show that the power of existing beliefs is more than adequate to do that very thing.

[25 : 42] So for instance, a first example I want to use, there's research done in, I think it was England a few years ago, that said that men will never change lines when they're waiting for the supermarket checkouts.

Now that's a profound piece of information, isn't it? But the reason why the men don't change the lines is very informative. That is, men will survey all the different lines and they'll make a decision as to which one's moving fastest.

They'll then get into that line and regardless what happens, that is, regardless of the evidence, they will stick in that line. Now women, by comparison, will jump lines more than once if they think the line down there is moving faster.

Now what's the driver? Well the research showed that men would rather suffer the consequences of making a wrong decision rather than be embarrassed to move lines and thereby admit to everybody around that they had made a wrong decision in the first place.

Now that's only some men, it wouldn't apply to me. Some men are pretty stupid. Present company accepted. Scarcely believable, isn't it?

[27 : 06] And yet that's this vicious cycle of unbelief. I think that's how some people deal with Jesus. As adults, they've lived their lives in a certain line and now to change lines and serve Jesus and honour Jesus and put their trust in him would be to admit that what they've been doing for the last 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years has been wrong and some men would choose to live with the consequences of their error rather than change for truth.

Some people, not just some men. My brother-in-law is a good example of this. He's a brilliant history teacher.

He's just retired. He loves examining historical sources and evidence for all sorts of great ones in history. I love history as well so we have terrific discussions.

He can speak authoritatively about pretty well any period in history. I can't. I'm very limited. He's a very proud man and what he's done over the years is validated himself through his own learning and achievement.

So he refuses, therefore, to give serious effort to examining the claims of Jesus. At that point, this brilliant history teacher has a closed or fixed mindset.

[28 : 34] Why? Because I believe for him to admit that his 60 years of self-validation was wrong.

Not only wrong, but worthless. He would have to do that if he gave Jesus serious consideration. And so what he does is he continues to use a childhood experience.

He went to a boarding school in England where it was a church boarding school and they beat him to within an inch of his life. And he's bitter about that. And rightly so.

But he uses, now this is a history teacher, he uses that childhood experience constantly to this very day as his excuse for not believing in Jesus.

See how it works? It's not logic or lack of compelling evidence, but his cycle of unbelief.

[29 : 34] It's his heart which is getting in the way of his unbelief. teaching scripture at Edwards Heights Primary School a few years ago. I was constantly amazed, I always got to teach years five and six, sorry, ten and eleven year old children.

And I was always constantly amazed that these children would hear, because they didn't have a Bible background, and I would teach them things from the gospel and just listen to them, totally reject it, and back their own beliefs.

That's ten year olds and eleven year olds. They would actually say to me, that's rubbish. The cycle of unbelief.

So I'll finish on this note. As you consider that cycle of unbelief, if you're not yet a believer here this morning, consider also what you're going to say on that resurrection day of judgment.

Well, Lord, I'm sorry, but I simply didn't know about Jesus. The Lord's going to say to you, well, that's just nonsense. I'm sorry, Lord, but the evidence was not that convincing.

[31 : 04] The Lord will say, well, that's just ridiculous. Well, Lord, the evidence was compelling, but I didn't want to change lines.

It was going to be embarrassing. The Lord will say, really? Or will you say, I was determined to be fair-minded when I heard about Jesus.

I realized I needed to read the Bible, to hear what it says about him, what he claims. I need to get it sorted out in terms of what he says about my life and life everlasting and how to deal with my sin and be accepted by the Lord.

And as I came to the Bible, I didn't initially believe it was true, but as I came to it and prepared to give myself in fair-minded thought to it, Lord, it just seemed to open up before me.

That, what started out as ill-defined, gradually became more clearly marked, and suddenly I was led to Jesus, and now I've made it all the way home to heaven.

[32 : 15] Thank you, Lord, for breaking through my cycle of unbelief and show me the runway lights that brought me all the way home to heaven. Let me pray.

Lord, help us to hear your word. Genuinely hear it. Because in the hearing of it, Lord, there will be belief. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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Amen.