

(3) A God given witness

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Date: 16 September 2007

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is John chapter 5, beginning to read at verse 30, which is on page 1074. Jesus 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.

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed 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 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. 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.

[1 : 20] 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.

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 name, 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. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

[2 : 29] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? Thanks Vicki very much indeed for reading for us. I would be grateful if we could keep our Bibles open at John chapter 5 on page 1074 as we look at it together.

Now the issue for us today is the evidence that Jesus Christ is God. Two weeks ago we started a new series of talks looking at these central chapters of John's Gospel, chapters 5 to 10.

And we've seen in John 5 over the last two weeks, the key claim that Jesus makes is that he is equal with God, and that he does God's work.

It's a claim that his enemies recognised all too clearly. If you just flick back a page to John chapter 5 verse 18, what do we see there?

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

[3 : 47] If you missed those last two talks, you might actually listen to them on the web. You may have seen the story in the papers last month about the former spy and MI5 whistleblower David Shaler, who revealed that he was in fact God.

He told Morpho News that Mary Magdalene's spirit had anointed him as Messiah. Well, I guess it may raise questions about MI5's recruitment policies, but it certainly makes the point, doesn't it, that at one level anyone can claim to be God, which is something that Jesus seems to recognise in verse 31.

As he says, if I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. Jesus freely admits that his claims on their own lack credibility.

That as someone who turns up and claims to be God, well, the first thing we might assume is that they are far from mentally stable. Now, Jesus did make the claim that he was equal with God.

We've seen that in John chapter 5. Those like Richard Dawkins, who say that Jesus never claimed to be God, simply have not understood the eyewitness accounts.

[5 : 12] And Jesus goes on in this passage we're looking at today to give us three powerful strands of evidence that he was indeed God in the flesh. Now, of course, many of us here this morning believe that already.

But remember, John is writing because he wants us to carry on believing it. The first century was very similar to the 21st century. A world of many gods, many religions, many paths equally claiming to speak the truth, to say that Jesus is God, that he alone is Lord, that as we've been hearing about this morning, one day every knee must bow to him.

That was not an easy thing to do. And similarly, if we are to keep on believing that, if we are to keep on proclaiming it and defending that truth in a gracious and loving way, then we need to be very clear ourselves on the evidence.

That is the world Jermaine will grow up in and in due course she too will need to be convinced of the evidence. But I guess there may be one or two others here this morning who don't believe that Jesus was God in the flesh, in which case it is a great morning to be at Grace Church as we look at the evidence, as we look at the evidence that Jesus himself presents us with, that he is indeed equal with God.

Well, as usual, we'll have a question time after the talk, so if you have any questions, then store them up to the end. But for the time being, perhaps we could turn to the outline of the talk on the back of the service sheet.

[6 : 50] And first of all, we're going to look at the evidence of John the Baptist. Have a look with me at verses 33 to 35. You sent to John, and he is born 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.

Now, it's easy to overlook John the Baptist simply because he was the forerunner of Jesus, the one who prepared the way for Jesus.

But that is precisely the point. So, 700 years before the birth of Jesus, God had said through the prophet Isaiah that he himself, that God himself, would come into the world, but that before he came, there would be a voice who would announce his coming.

I put it there on the outline for C, Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

[8 : 10] And then 300 years later, around 450 BC, again God spoke, this time through the prophet Malachi. He spoke again about his coming into the world.

It's on the outline, Malachi chapter 3, verse 1. Behold, I send my messenger, and he'll prepare the way before me. In other words, by the end of the Old Testament, the expectation was firmly established that God would come to his people, that God would come into the world, and there would be a forerunner, a voice, a messenger, who would announce his arrival.

Which is why, of course, when the messenger arrived, John the Baptist, he caused such a stir. Just turn back a few pages to John chapter 1.

John chapter 1, verses 19 to 23. And let's see what happened when John the Baptist arrived on the scene. And this is the testimony of John.

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who are you? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, what then, are you Elijah?

[9 : 29] He said, I am not. Are you the prophets? And he answered, no. So they said to him, who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?

He said, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord. As the prophet Isaiah said. God had said he had sent a messenger.

And now he is here. John, you see, was a great man in his own right. People thought he was one of the prophets, possibly even the Christ himself. But he pointed away from himself to Jesus.

Have a look on to chapter 1, verse 34. What is it he says about Jesus? Jesus. I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.

And as we've seen in John chapter 5, the Son of God is equal with God and does God's work. I can still remember the visit of the Prime Minister to our school.

[10 : 39] I think I was around 15 at the time. Of course, we'd known right from the start of term that she would be she. She would be coming. But it all seemed rather a long way off.

Until, that is, a member of her staff arrived a couple of weeks beforehand, which I guess was a fairly low-key affair, but no doubt words were exchanged with the bursar.

And within a couple of days or so, litter had disappeared from the streets, rotten windows had been repainted, and we were all instructed in the most definite terms to make sure our ties didn't have breakfast all down the front of them and then our shoes were polished.

We were in no doubt that the very next person to arrive would be the Prime Minister herself. Well, can we see that in the same way John the Baptist serves as powerful evidence that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh?

After all, God said he would come, preceded by a messenger. Now that the messenger has arrived, we can be in no doubt that God himself has arrived also in the person of Jesus.

[11 : 53] The evidence of John the Baptist. But secondly, the evidence of Jesus' work. Have a look back in John 5 at verse 36.

But the testimony that I have given, sorry, I'll start again, 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.

The work that Jesus does shows that he is God. If you've been here for the last two weeks, you'll know that the work of God has been the key issue, if you like, in John chapter 5 so far as he healed a man on the Sabbath.

When asked to justify his actions, chapter 5 verse 17, Jesus replies, my Father is working until now and I too am working. What's more, last week we saw that Jesus does the work of God himself.

[13 : 01] That God has given him his work to do. He does the work of giving eternal life and of judging. Have a look at John 5 verse 21. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgments to the Son. giving eternal life, judging why they are the prerogatives of God alone.

And if we were to read on in John's Gospel, we would find Jesus feeding 5,000 people with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He walks on water. He instantly heals a man who has been blind since birth.

He raises from the dead a man who has been buried for four days. The point being that the very works that Jesus did, his miracles point to who he is.

It's why in John's Gospel they're called signs, because they direct us to the fact that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. There is simply no other conclusion that we can come to.

[14 : 15] There's a rather lovely story told about the 19th century artist Paul Dorey. He was travelling in a foreign country. He lost his passport and at a border crossing found himself confronted by a very suspicious immigration official.

I'm sorry, he said. I've lost my identification papers. But I can tell you I'm the artist Paul Dorey. Ah, said the border guard.

We'll soon see about that. So he gave him a piece of paper and a pen. Prove it, he said. Whereupon Dorey made a lightning sketch of some nearby travellers with such inimitable skill that the official could only say, there's no question about it.

You must indeed be Paul Dorey. where in the same way Jesus' work is indisputable evidence that he is God in the flesh.

You see, let me ask you a question. If you had been Jesus, how would you have convinced people that you were God?

[15 : 31] What would you have done? would you have performed even more astonishing miracles? Raising the dead is a fairly hard card to trump, is it not?

Would you have given better and more profound teaching than he did? Would you have lived a better life? Would you have made clearer claims? What would you have done if you had been Jesus?

It's hard, isn't it, to think of greater things, clearer things. You see, we cannot separate Jesus from his miracles. The only historical figure for whom there is any evidence at all in the New Testament documents is a supernatural figure doing the most astonishing things and making the most stupendous claims.

On a scale so prolific it has never been seen before or since. In the 19th and early 20th centuries a number of attempts were made by some theologians to kind of sift out all the sort of miraculous things in Jesus' life in the belief that underneath all of that you'd find the real Jesus, the real historical Jesus who they imagined was simply a kind of Jewish rabbi.

But it's now widely agreed that all of those attempts failed miserably because the only historical evidence we have is for a Jesus who did the most extraordinary miracles and made the most extraordinary claims.

[17 : 08] Now of course we are not like his claims we may prefer Jesus who was just a rabbi but all the evidence points to the fact that here was God in the flesh.

so the evidence of John the Baptist the evidence of Jesus' work thirdly the evidence of God's word have a look at verse 37 with me and the father who sent me has himself borne witness about me his voice you've never heard his form you've never seen and you do not have his word abiding in you for you do not believe the one whom he has sent you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness about me well Jesus is right isn't he verse 37 God doesn't address himself to us directly we don't hear his voice booming out to us across the skies nor have we ever seen him but God is revealed in the Bible in the scriptures as Jesus calls them and these scriptures verse 39 testify to who

Jesus is the Old Testament spoke about him we've seen some of that this morning all the promises made to Adam to Abraham to Moses to David they all point forward to him the predictions of the prophets the promise of an eternal king the promise of a suffering servant who will die for his people to bring their forgiveness for those who trust in him the promise of an eternal king who will rise to eternal life who on the final day will bring justice why it's all anticipated and foretold in the Old Testament they're all promises pointing to Jesus and they're fulfilled in him indeed verse 46 Moses the greatest Old Testament prophet wrote about Jesus he himself spoke of another prophet Jesus who would speak God's words and speak to God's people it's why studying an overview of the

Bible this year in our small group Bible studies which we just started last Tuesday it's such a great thing to be doing because this is no academic exercise as we grasp the big picture so to speak of the whole Bible far from it we'll be encountering Jesus face to face as we grasp more clearly who he is and the work that he has come to do it promises to be a thrilling year as we do that together just going back for a moment to the visit of the Prime Minister to our school imagine for a moment that at the age of 15 I didn't have a clue what the Prime Minister looked like and so I said to one of our teachers can you tell me what does she look like and he replied well she'll arrive in a big car there'll be a motorcade with motorcycle outriders she'll have a big handbag she'll be wearing a blue suit and will speak in a slightly shrill voice and when

Mrs Thatcher arrived I wouldn't have been disappointed would I she'd have ticked all the boxes so to speak well in just the same way the Old Testament evidence the evidence of God's word for Jesus Christ is very compelling he ticks all the boxes he fits the exact description of what the Old Testament tells us God will do and be like when he comes into his world so then there is the evidence that Jesus is equal with God the evidence of John the Baptist the evidence of Jesus work and the evidence of God's word the Bible I hope we're encouraged by that I certainly have been this week looking at it it is not irrational to follow Jesus it doesn't fly in the face of the facts to follow Jesus quite the opposite it's it's why on the back of the Grace Church program that Christianity explore course which is mentioned there starting on Sunday the 7th of October is such a great course to come on if any of us are uncertain of the evidence for Jesus as we investigate the evidence over a period of seven weeks or so it's why that talk from

[21 : 39] Rico Tice in just a couple of weeks time where are you would be such a great talk to come along to or to invite others along to however of course the fact of the evidence nonetheless begs the question why is it given the evidence why is it that so many reject Jesus and his claims perhaps that's a question we've thought for ourselves perhaps we're looking in on the Christian faith so to speak and we're perhaps slightly put off by the fact that many people we know seem to reject Jesus and his claims but what's so interesting is it was exactly the same in Jesus own day we might have thought that faced with the extraordinary teaching of Jesus and the miracles that demonstrate that he was God in the flesh while we might have thought that everyone would see him and follow him and while many did others didn't well why was that well

Jesus gives us some of the reasons here in John chapter 5 put simply it is because people would not believe in him have a look at verses 39 and 40 where he puts it in terms of refusing to come to him have a look at verse 39 you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and if it's they that bear witness about me yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life I imagine the people Jesus was speaking to they knew their Old Testaments they diligently study the scriptures as Jesus says but they miss the whole point they refuse to see their need for eternal life they refuse to come to Jesus full life their study of the Bible is purely academic Jesus says or perhaps as a warning to one or two who perhaps have been investigating the

Christian faith for some time of the danger of the whole thing just becoming a kind of academic exercise to come to Jesus it sounds so extraordinary doesn't it we'll have a look at verse 41 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 people reject

Jesus because as Jesus puts it they don't love God isn't that very striking language from the lips of Jesus Christ himself Jesus says our attitude to him demonstrates our attitude to God no doubt those Jesus was talking to no doubt they love their ideas about God they love talking about him debating him but Jesus puts his finger on it when he says they do not love God perhaps they're happy to make up their ideas about God a God perhaps who is all tolerance who loves everyone for whom everything is right a God who is all things to all men who makes no demands of us and yet who is there whenever we need him but the thought of actually having to deal with God with a living God why that is far too threatening a prospect for them and so the question which

Jesus leaves us with at the end of our passage is there in verse 44 how can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God you see who do we look to for praise or glory as Jesus puts it Jesus warns us doesn't he that if we take our cue from what others think if we are ever wanting to look good in the eyes of other people then we will never put our trust in Jesus the litmus test of whether or not we want to please God is seen in whether we will trust his son Jesus the reason people don't believe him is not because of lack of evidence there's plenty of that it is according to Jesus a moral thing it is an unwillingness a refusal to come to him if we're far more interested in what others think of us if we're more concerned with being honoured by them colleagues friends family and so on we not come to

[27 : 08] Jesus and we need to remember that too don't we as Christians here today that yes it is important to encourage those we know friends family colleagues to consider the evidence for Jesus and we need to do that but evidence alone will not persuade people to follow Jesus it's an important reminder to me as well as presenting the evidence to friends we need to graciously expose the real reasons for unbelief and to pray that there would be that desire to come to Jesus and to trust in him regardless of what others think well why don't we pray together and then as I said at the beginning there'll be time for questions if anyone has a question if you believe Moses you would believe me for he wrote of me heavenly father we praise you very much for this plentiful good evidence that

Jesus Christ is equal with God God in the flesh doing the work of God thank you for the evidence of John the Baptist of the works of Jesus and the evidence too from the Old Testament we pray heavenly father we would be those who would grasp that evidence firmly for ourselves that you would increase our trust and confidence in Jesus and we see and we ask it for Jesus sake Amen