

Jesus and the Scriptures

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 16th of January 2000.

The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled Jesus and the Scriptures and is from John chapter 5 verses 30 to 47.

And so we're up to chapter 5. Let me pray that God will help us to understand and apply this word in our lives. God, we thank you that in the Scriptures you have revealed eternal life for us.

Help us to seek it, that we may bring you glory. Amen. The jury is out.

It is heard incriminating evidence against the person accused. It is heard incriminating evidence by the deceased person's widow and by the racially prejudiced mother of the person killed.

[1 : 15] And also it's heard incriminating evidence from the defendant who admitted that he had held back information, initially at least.

The jury's out. The person accused is a Japanese-American on trial for murder. Allegedly, he killed a fisherman in the fog in the North Pacific.

And it seems that the motive was to gain land that had been contested for some years between his family and the deceased person's family.

The jury has heard the evidence. How's it going to react? What evidence is going to count for it as it makes its decision?

So the jury is out. But there's a twist. A local journalist knows something, has discovered something, almost accidentally, about this case.

[2 : 20] And his evidence would mean that the man would surely be acquitted. The dilemma is, will he come forward with that evidence or not?

The dilemma is because he loves the wife of the accused man, a former girlfriend of his whom he still loves. So what's he going to do?

Well, he does come forward. The judge dismisses the case. The man is acquitted, rightly. But in a sense, the tables are turned.

The Japanese-American accused of murder is clearly innocent. But the people who are guilty are those whose prejudice has come to the fore.

Some witnesses, some who gave evidence, some on the jury, and some in the village and in the courtroom. That is, some people have alleged that this man is guilty, and yet by the end of the case, when it's clear that he's not, not only is he acquitted, but in a sense, the tables informally are turned.

[3 : 33] And we see the guilty who are racially prejudiced, bigoted, selfish, selfish, and so on. Presumably blind to what has been the truth.

And meanwhile, outside the courtroom through all of this drama, just so that you know what the story is I'm referring to, snow keeps falling on cedars.

Another jury is out, an informal jury this time. A man has acted illegally, it is alleged. On the Sabbath day, no less, he's healed a man who's been lame for 38 years.

There's no doubt that he's done it. There are dozens of witnesses. And it's clear to everybody that the man really had been lame for all that time. And now is, indeed without doubt, healed.

But not only that, not only is it alleged that this man has broken the Sabbath law, one of the Ten Commandments, no less, but also he is alleging to be on an equal par with God himself.

[4 : 53] That breaks the first, if not the first two, of the Ten Commandments as well. In Old Testament law, this man deserves death.

In the situation in which he lives, under Roman rule in Judea in the first century AD, Jews were unable to put him to death. Nonetheless, this informal jury is plotting to work out how to kill him. The story I'm referring to, of course, is the first half of John chapter 5. It is the background for tonight's reading. In response to those events, Jesus, who is, in a sense, informally, I guess, the

accused man, gives his evidence for his innocence.

He refers to five pieces of evidence in the passage before us tonight. And the question becomes, I suppose, how will this kosher kangaroo court respond to this evidence?

Before the first piece of evidence, though, the accused man acknowledges that his own witness is inadmissible evidence in such a court. If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true, he says in verse 31.

[6 : 26] Partly, he's putting aside his own evidence because he's wanting to point to the evidence of others. He refers in the next verse to the fact that there is another who testifies on my behalf and I know that his testimony to me is true.

But also, Jesus acknowledges, for that is the one accused, of course, that you need more than one witness, two or more witnesses, for a case to stand up in court in Old Testament law.

So then, he's got his evidence, he's got more than one witness, and he proceeds to refer to them.

Firstly, is the witness of John the Baptist. Jesus says in verse 33, you sent messengers to John, the Baptist that is, and he testified to the truth.

Not that I accept such human testimony, 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.

The events to which this refer occurred in John chapter 1. John was baptizing, the Jewish authorities didn't like the commotion that was being caused and the popularity that he attracted and so they sent people to him to find out who he was and what he was doing and why he was doing what he was doing and on which authority.

[7 : 52] And John made it clear that he was pointing to somebody else, Jesus no less, and that he merely was a witness to Jesus or a signpost to Jesus or a light, bearing light towards Jesus.

Not in a light in the sense that he's the source of light, the word that's used in verse 35, he's a burning and shining lamp, is derivative life, light. But in John's gospel, Jesus is the light.

John is bearing witness to the real light. These Jewish accusers of Jesus in this chapter have seen that evidence or heard that evidence from John the Baptist.

In fact, Jesus acknowledges that even his accusers, for a little time at least, somehow rejoiced in the light of John the Baptist. But Jesus does not depend on John the Baptist's witness.

That's the thrust of what he says in verse 34. Not that I accept human testimony because he's got better witness than this. But he started with a low card.

[8 : 57] He's building up to the trump card in his list of evidence. And still, in just referring to John, Jesus is hopeful that his accusers might even come to believe that evidence at least and be saved, as he says in verse 34.

The second piece of evidence is more important. It is what Jesus has done. But I have a testimony greater than John's, he says in verse 36.

The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.

He's just healed a man who's been lame for 38 years. That is not any run-of-the-mill everyday sort of event. Not many people go around healing people who've been lame for 38 years.

Jesus is saying the very miracle that you have just seen me perform, he actually uses the present tense, I am doing, is a clear witness that there is a divine hand behind my work.

[10 : 13] It's not the first miracle, he's done several. John's already recorded the fact that he's changed water into wine in Cana, in Galilee. And we also know that in Jerusalem he performed various signs and now he's back in Jerusalem, the very place where he performed many signs that John hasn't recorded us, though he's told us that he's did many in public eye.

Not only that, Jesus also is drawing attention to his words because they're part of his work, his teaching about himself and what he's here for. This is not an ordinary person.

Jesus is saying the very things that I do, interpreted by the words that I speak, demonstrate that it is God who is bearing witness to me through my works.

It ought to be compelling evidence, but the Jews have not accepted it. But there is more. The third point of evidence, Jesus now plays his trump card, and the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf.

To what in particular he's referring, we're not sure. It could be the words that God spoke clearly and audibly from heaven at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist.

[11 : 37] You are my son, I am well pleased with you. Though those words are not recorded in John's gospel, they were publicly known. It could be that Jesus is referring more generally to things including his works, including the voice from heaven at his baptism, maybe including various other things that have been said about him and the scriptures that point to him.

But this is the trump card. It is God who gives witness to Jesus that God has sent him to this earth. But at this point, Jesus, who in a sense is informally on trial for who he claims to be and what he's done, now turns the tables and becomes the prosecutor.

He becomes the accuser of those who are around him, the Jewish leaders. He says in verse 37, second half, you have never heard his voice or seen his form and you do not have his word abiding in you because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

Now on its own, the beginning of that is not really an accusation of Jewish failure. You have never heard his voice or seen his form. That's true. They hadn't seen God nor had they heard his voice particularly unless we have an exception in Jesus' baptism.

Indeed, the only time really that the people of God generally have heard the voice of God was when on Mount Sinai God spoke the words of the Ten Commandments. Then and then alone was the voice of God audible to the whole people of God.

[13 : 26] But the people of God cringed back from that event and they said to Moses, we are too afraid to hear the voice of God directly and we certainly don't want to see him face to face as Moses did on Mount Sinai.

So Moses, we want you to be our mediator. We want you to go up the mountain and hear what God has to say and see God and then relay all of that to us. That wasn't an inappropriate response.

It was an appropriate response of fear to a holy God. God accepted what they had done. He actually approved of their caution in coming too close to him.

You can read about that in Exodus 20 onwards or Deuteronomy 5. It's a fair request. And so for the rest of the Old Testament that's what God did. When God spoke he spoke to Moses or after Moses to various prophets who as appropriate relayed the message to the kings or the people or to whomever it was addressed.

The Israelites who did on rare occasions respond faithfully to such words from God prove that they had in effect God's word abiding within them.

[14 : 41] But the point of Jesus' words here is an accusation. Because part of Moses' words a significant part really was that beyond Moses there would be another prophet or prophets like him.

That is mediators of God's word. People who perhaps like Moses saw God face to face and heard his voice directly and then relayed it to the people.

Indeed the very end of the story of Moses in the Old Testament at the end of the book of Deuteronomy acknowledges that to this day there has not been a prophet like Moses yet.

But there was a prediction earlier in the book of Deuteronomy that there would be one. Now what is being said here is that Jesus is that one he's come he's seen God and he's heard God.

He is the one promised by Moses himself to do exactly what the people of God wanted a prophet to do to hear God and see God and relay that back to them.

[15 : 53] And earlier in this chapter that's exactly what Jesus has said about himself. In verse 19 he says very truly I tell you the son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the father doing.

For whatever the father does the son does likewise. And then if you move down to verse 30 I can do nothing on my own as I hear I judge and my judgment is just because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Do you see what Jesus is claiming to do in those verses? To have seen God and to have heard God. Exactly the things that Moses did and exactly the things that the people wanted a mediator to do.

So Jesus is claiming to be exactly who Moses predicted would come and what the Jews actually wanted. By implication Jesus is saying you're not adherents of Moses.

Now Jesus has turned the tables on his listeners these Jewish leaders. They've informally judged him worthy of death. They were plotting to kill him back in verse 18.

[17 : 13] But the point is that Jesus alone having seen God and heard God he alone is qualified to judge.

that's his claim in verse 30. And to these Jewish leaders Jesus is saying you are in fact blind and deaf.

Not so much because you haven't seen God or heard God directly but because you haven't seen and heard the one whom God has sent.

The prophet like Moses in effect. so Jesus says at the end of verse 37 you have never heard his voice or seen his form true and you do not have his word abiding in you.

That's the accusation because you do not believe him whom he has sent. You don't believe me the prophet like Moses that Moses predicted would come.

[18:17] The fourth piece of witness and there is a sense of interrelationship between these are the scriptures. Verse 39 you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that testify on my behalf.

See there's another witness we've had John the Baptist we've had Jesus works we've had God himself the father and now the scriptures testify about Jesus the Old Testament Jesus is saying because that's the scriptures to which he refers he didn't have a New Testament then of course it's the Old Testament that testifies about Jesus despite their diligent study that's what it means at the beginning of verse 39 you search the scriptures that is they are studious they diligently study the Bible rigorously and carefully they fail to see that Jesus is the one to whom it points the Old Testament is the signpost or the map if you like to find Jesus in whom is eternal life and they've misread the map I remember some years ago taking some friends to a mutual friends place up in near Belgrave

I think it was and I'd looked at the map but I'd got it wrong and being a stubborn male I refused to be corrected by anybody or refused to look at the map again and so for an hour I drove around the Dandenong Hills enjoying the scenery with my friends getting anxious that we were running late and in the end I had to concede that I was hopelessly lost had no idea where I was going and we got the map out and they navigated for me and we got there very quickly I'm afraid to say they were female that's in effect what the Jews have done wrong with the Old Testament they failed to read it properly and in their stubbornness they refused to be corrected for reading it improperly it's not that they're ignorant it's really that they're stubborn to be corrected to where the map of the Old Testament is pointing to Jesus now there are some implications here for how we read the Old Testament I think because often Christians in practice put aside the Old Testament it's the New that talks about Jesus and the implications of his death and resurrection so really that should be what we read and there are many Christians who in practice are what in church history would be called Marcionites Marcion was a person in the second century AD who argued that the Bible for Christians ought to be nothing from the Old Testament and nothing in the New Testament which is clearly based on the Old Testament well there wasn't much left and even what he left in really to be fair was being inconsistent because I think if you take out everything from the new that depends on the old I don't think you're left with virtually anything at all in practice Christians are often like that the new but not the old but the old

Jesus says is pointing to Jesus just as the new is based on Jesus he is the key to the whole of the scriptures and I must say as one who studied the Old Testament from time to time there are many Old Testament scholars who haven't a foggiest idea how to read the Old Testament sadly they never ever get anywhere close to Jesus in their studies of the Old Testament and sadly in some places they dominate the teaching and writing of Old Testament in part I think they exercise the same sort of failing as the Jews in this passage an arrogant and stubborn refusal to go where the Old Testament is pointing but why do the Jews here refuse they refuse as I've said not because of ignorance but because of what we might call pride or self glory there are two mutually compatible options in this passage either seeking the glory of

[22:54] God or seeking one's own glory it's put most clearly in verse 44 how can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God you see when you seek the glory of one another or another person for yourself you actually cut off the possibility of seeking the glory of God or the one whom God sends they're mutually exclusive ideas self-seeking glory blinds and deafens to the glory of God and to God's truth self-seeking glory leads to a hardened heart and unbelief and that is what Jesus is accusing these people of they are seeking their own glory not God's glory which is why they have not acknowledged whom he is despite the witness of

John the Baptist despite the witness of Jesus' works despite the testimony of God the Father and despite the witness of the scriptures they're blind deaf and stubborn because they seek their own glory and not God's hence as Jesus says they do not love God in verse 42 I know that you do not have the love of God in you if you seek your own glory then there is no way that you can love God with all your heart soul mind and strength in contrast Jesus seeks the Father's glory I do not accept glory from human beings he says in verse 41 verse 43 I have come in my Father's name and in other places in this chapter I've come to do exactly what God has revealed for me to do to do his works and so on the intriguing thing is that refusal to believe in God leads not so much to not believing in anything or rather believing in nothing but rather it really leads to believing in any old thing I think it was G.K.

Chesterton in a quote that made that point but I couldn't find the quote when we give up and society gives up and people give up believing in the God of the Bible then what happens is not that they're so much atheists that is they don't believe in any God but rather that they believe in anything and we see it today don't we the gullibility of our world is astonishing people mock Christians for their belief in God despite an overwhelming weight of evidence for God's existence and truth and yet the things that they believe in and nonsense that they believe in is amazing the people who go to Israel on the 31st of December because they believe that's the end of the world and God will come the people who've got crystals under their pillows because that's going to bring them closer to God the people who believe in reincarnation or all sorts of other mystic new age cultish sort of ideas which are just absolute nonsense but when people give up believing in God they'll believe in anything and that's what

Jesus is acknowledging here I think he says I have come in my father's name and you do not accept me if another comes in his own name you will accept him that is you give up belief in the real God you'll follow anyone who comes it's a sad indictment really not only of the people of Jesus day but of our own age as well they don't love the father because they love themselves they don't seek the glory of the father because they seek the glory of themselves and because they don't love the father or seek his glory then they're not going to accept the one whom he sends Jesus himself how can you believe when you accept glory from one another father and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God what is the glory that comes from God it's Jesus remember the words of the opening chapter of this gospel makes it very clear the word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and truth that's the glory that comes from the father it's Jesus

[27 : 34] Christ and if we love ourselves and seek our own glory we will never ever respond to right to Jesus Christ there's clearly a warning there for us the love of glory of other people or from other people is one of the most crippling things I think for Christian discipleship and Christian living we are always tempted into peer pressure we are always tempted to seek the popularity of others we crave other people's acceptance their love their interest their praise their concern and what it leads is to an insidious doing what pleases others but not a pleasing of God necessarily when we seek the glory of other people which we all do from time to time then we end up being controlled by their agenda and not by God be careful to seek God's glory in what you do do not seek the praise of others it's not often that the praise of others and the praise of

God coincide the final piece of evidence and this also is interrelated to the previous two comes from verse 45 onwards do not think that I will accuse you before the father your accuser is Moses on whom you have set your hope if you believed Moses you would believe me for he wrote about me but if you do not believe what he wrote how will you believe what I say in a sense it's just the extension of the previous bit of evidence about the evidence of the scriptures testifying to Jesus but here he personalizes it to Moses which implies the first five books of the Old Testament alone that are traditionally ascribed to Moses as their author but by personalizing it to Moses as a witness Jesus adds a bit of bite to what he's accusing these Jewish people of because they loved Moses the Pharisees especially delighted in the laws of Moses that was their their center of their scripture and not only did they hold up and revere and venerate the laws the 612 so-called laws of Moses in the first five books of the Old Testament but they had what they called the oral law of Moses that they believed had come from his mouth never been written down but passed on faithfully by word of mouth for 1400 years or so it later came to be codified after Jesus time in the Mishnah and Talmud Moses was their delight Jesus says Moses is your accuser isn't it ironic that the things that they're accusing Jesus of come from the law of Moses breaking the Sabbath and

claiming to be on a par with God which could be seen as idolatry taking the Lord's name in vain blasphemy or whatever

Jesus is saying that the true reader of Moses will believe in Jesus the true reader of Moses or believer in what Moses wrote is well on the way to Christian faith sadly so much that is written today on the Old Testament part written by Moses never even mentions Jesus on our recent trip in Israel our guide for most of the trip was a Brazilian Jewish Christian he didn't call himself particularly by the label Christian a messianic Jew or the expression of fulfilled Jew he didn't have a sort of dramatic conversion experience like St.

Paul but as he read the Old Testament scriptures he came to realize that they pointed to Jesus Jesus was where they led Jesus was their fulfillment this man keeps Jewish laws he calls himself a Jew as he is but Jesus is where his scriptures pointed to and he is the one in whom he believes he's an example of what Jesus is saying at the end of this passage if you believed Moses you would believe me well it's not unusual to put Jesus on trial the Jews were not Jews may have been the first pilot followed them a few years later but even in our own day and age there are many who seek to in effect put Jesus on trial I remember when I was at university there was a Christian group on campus the student Christian movement and they had a weekend conference to decide what was right about Jesus or not and in effect they set themselves up as judge and jury over Jesus and his words in scripture more recently there is a group called the Jesus Seminar based in the [33 : 06] United States that is seeking in a massive way with an international team of scholars to go through the scriptures and to find what is authentic about Jesus and they haven't found much they are the jury and judge over Jesus but whoever dares to judge Jesus in any age will soon find the tables turned those who seek to stand over him now will find themselves fallen at his feet when he comes to judge as he claims he will do I I can do nothing on my own as I hear I judge and my judgment is just because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me one day we all will stand before that judgment throne amen