

Facing The Audit

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[0 : 00] What we're looking at today is an argument from the Gospel according to St. John. You'll remember that in the 60s that distinguished fellow, Bishop J.A.T. Robinson, wrote that God is Dead book or something like that.

And then he retired from all the publicity of that, went back to being a professor in Cambridge University and did further work on the Gospel of John.

And he's one of the scholars who has suggested that John, instead of being what a number of people think is one of the last of the writings of the New Testament, may have been quite early on in the history of the New Testament.

It's a very interesting passage because it's not a parable, which is the way that Christ taught a number of things. It's not an historical narrative of something that happened to Christ.

It's when Christ takes on the Jews and argues with them. And there's several places in the Gospel where these arguments are carried on. And this is part of an argument that appears at the end of the chapter, chapter 5, which tells you about, it tells you initially the story of the man who was healed by the pool of Siloam.

[1 : 19] But then it goes on and develops this. Now, one of the difficulties that scholars have with the New Testament is what does John mean when he refers to the Jews?

And of course, Christians are accused of being anti-Semitic because of things like these kinds of arguments. But what he's referring to, I think, is those people who create the pattern of thinking to which the whole of that society was subject.

So it's kind of as though you went to the opinion makers of our society, the people who create the ideas, the people who generate the ideas, the Madison Avenue crew who tell us how to think about things, and those are the people that I think Jesus is addressing in his own time and generation and who are referred to here as the Jews.

For in fact, most of them were leaders of the Jewish community, whether Pharisees or Sadducees. There they were.

And so he's having this kind of flat-out argument with them about who he is. And this is how the argument develops, and I want to just show you.

[2 : 42] The talk today that I've entitled Facing the Audit, an audit is, I am told, an official scrutiny of accounts. And so Jesus is giving a kind of audit of the way that they have accounted for him and trying to point out where their accounting has gone badly wrong.

So Jesus tries to explain who he is. The way he starts, if you look just in the text that we have written down, and the argument actually starts before the passage, but he says, But the testimony I have is greater than that of John.

Now, the Gospel of John has a lot to do with the person of John the Baptist who said that this is the Christ.

This is the Lamb of God. And he pointed to the person of Christ. John the Baptist was a very famous preacher, a very famous man, a very outstanding man, a person who had influenced the whole of his generation, the man who brought the whole of the Old Testament to its final conclusion, the man who was the last in the line of the Old Testament prophets, the man who summarizes the whole of the Old Testament by saying, The man whom we have been talking about since Genesis is this man, Jesus.

And he points to him. So that John's testimony to Jesus is very powerful indeed. And that testimony is recorded in the Gospel of John as well as in the other Gospels.

[4 : 28] Mark's Gospel, the shortest, and considered the first of the Gospels, begins with the testimony of John to the person of Christ. So, Jesus acknowledges that John the Baptist ends up in

the ignominy of being imprisoned in a dungeon and being beheaded at the whim of a dancing girl. So, that he says, So much for John's testimony. It has not been accepted. And he has been put to death. So, you go on and you watch how Jesus develops the argument from there.

And he says this. Now, you have to watch the text pretty closely today. He says, The testimony which I have is greater than that of John.

John's was significant, but this is greater. The works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing bear me witness that the Father has sent me.

Now, you will remember that the works, that John's Gospel is called the Book of the Signs. And the works that Jesus is referring to are in part the miracles.

[5 : 48] The miracle, you know, you can test yourself on whether you can get all seven of them or not. I can't always, but I'll try. The miracle of the changing of the water into wine.

The miracle of the healing of the nobleman's son. The miracle of the healing of the man at the pool of Siloam. The miracle of the healing of the blind man in John chapter 9. The miracle of the raising of Lazarus.

The miracle of walking on water. And the miracle of feeding the 5,000. The whole of John's Gospel is built around the record of those stories concerning Christ.

And when John's Gospel comes to an end, it summarizes the whole thing that these things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ.

He says, many more things are written. So many, he said, that, you know, that lovely hymn, if the oceans were ink and if the sky were parchment, you couldn't tell the whole of the story.

[6 : 44] But these seven signs are given. And that's basically the argument that is developed here when Jesus says, the Father has granted me to accomplish these works which I am doing, and they bear me witness that the Father has sent me.

So that Jesus is not giving a kind of demonstration of power when he says to this man, stand up and walk. He's not giving a demonstration of power when he rubs mud in a man's eyes so that he can see.

What he is doing is what the Father has chosen to do through him in order to demonstrate to people who he is. You see, I think there's a difference there.

I hope I conveyed it to you. Jesus is not saying, look at what I can do. He says, look at me because the Father has given me to do these works in order that you might hear his testimony concerning who I am.

It's like when Paul concludes his argument with the philosophers at Athens. He says to them, God has appointed a judge. And in order that you will understand who that judge is, God has raised him from the dead.

[8 : 07] That Jesus is that person whom God has vindicated. And so what he's appealing to here is God the Father's vindication of who Jesus is.

He goes on, again, if you're back to the text, and you find that his voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen.

Now, there is there is a kind of reverse argument that goes on in our society, and that is, you know, that people are really anxious to, if I could just see him, if I could just touch him, if in some way I could reason my way to an understanding of who God is, then I would have no more doubts and no more questions.

But Jesus is developing in this passage a compelling argument for you to believe. And he's taking the history of these people and saying, you will remember at Mount Sinai, where the law was given to Moses, where the mountain was shrouded in darkness, where the voice of God spoke and it sounded like thunder, that you never saw him and you didn't hear what he was saying, but you knew his presence there.

Well, the basis of Christ making that reference, and other commentators think that it may have been a reference to the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist when at the River Jordan John baptized Jesus and there was a voice from heaven which said, this is my beloved son, hear him.

[9 : 51] And Jesus sometime later is saying, you didn't hear that. When the Holy Spirit descended on Christ as a dove, he said, you didn't see that. So you're not convinced.

But you have seen the works which I've done and those works are God the Father bearing testimony to who I am. So he goes and develops the argument a little further.

And watch how he does it. He says, you do not have his word abiding in you for you do not believe him whom he has sent.

Now, the way William Temple deals with this argument that Christ develops is this, that what you have in the scriptures is the word of God.

We read it as the word of God. We accept it as the word of God. It is the word that God has spoken to us. And when we read that scripture, that word speaks. But he says, the reason you can't hear it is because that external word of God which is in the scripture should speak to an internal word which is abiding in you, in your heart and in your conscience.

[11:07] So that the external word of God and the internal word of God in your heart and your conscience, in the self-evident reality of the truth in our world, that those two things will come together and that they will be a means of convincing you.

But if you take the external word by itself and there isn't within you a response to that, that this is indeed the word of God, then you're going to reject it.

And so you have that, you have that argument that Christ puts before them when he says, you do not believe in him whom he has sent.

you see, what I, I'll come back to it because I don't want to get ahead, I just want to keep at the text for a minute here.

He goes on in verse 39 to say, you search the scriptures, you know, there they are. And you know that if you read the Sholem Ash books or any of those, unless you know from personal experience that one of the things that the whole tradition of the children of Israel has been to take the written word and to examine it, to examine it from every possible corner, to examine it from every possible vantage point, to look at it in exquisite detail, thinking that somehow in it, God has hidden the revelation of himself.

[12:42] And if you can break it apart, analyze it, tear it to pieces, chew over it, you will find life in this passage. And Jesus says to them, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have life.

He says, but you missed the point because they don't have life in them. They point to me and the life is in me. Now this is a fairly strong argument if you understand it in the context of the whole of the old, of the scriptures.

In the same way that Jesus says the works which I do, these contemporary things like the seven signs, these works bear witness to the Father that he is, he is bearing witness to me.

Similar, he says, that's what the scriptures are about. They are the external word which bears witness through the internal word in you that Jesus is who he says he is.

And he says, but your basic relationship to that is that you reject it and you refuse it. You say that it is life you are looking for, but it is me that these scriptures testify and you refuse to come to me.

[14:06] so that what you, what it has to come right down to, I think, and what you find almost on every page of the New Testament is a refusal to accept Jesus as the one whom God has sent.

There it is. There is a, it's there again and again and again. That's what you experience and you experience that too in any sort of social milieu in which you might mix in the city of Vancouver where you bring up the subject of Jesus, you will find that in people there is a deep-seated refusal to accept him on his term.

We're, we're glad to use him for various good causes which we might think he commends, but for himself we reject him and that refusal is there and that's what, what, what is being talked about here.

Now watch how he develops the argument from that point on. He says, you refuse to come to me. Okay, verse 41 he says, I do not receive glory from men.

Now, what I think that means is that, is that the thing that we find most fulfilling in life is the acknowledgement of our fellow human beings and we really work for it.

[15:37] We dress for it, we drive for it, we talk for it, we, we, everything we do is to receive that kind of feedback from people around us. We want them to be impressed with our power, we want them to be impressed with our intelligence, we want them to be impressed with our knowledge, our understanding, we want people to be impressed.

So we receive glory from men. Now, glory is one of the ultimate goals in life, you know, that's the breakthrough into what life is all about. And when Jesus says to them, the thing that makes life worthwhile for you is the glory that you receive from other people.

And so you commit your life to winning that kind of recognition by people around you. That's the addiction to which you are committed.

You want that above everything. And the difficulty with talking to people like you, I say with all due deference as one of you, the difficulty of talking to people like us is that that's the pattern of our life. We have the respect and honor and high regard of a lot of people. Most of us. There's a few of you who haven't understood properly who I am yet and I don't have much to do.

[16 : 58] But for the most part that's very deeply satisfying. And Jesus points that out to them.

That's how you live. You live for the recognition of other people. So that when you're facing retirement or old age or illness and people write you off, that's rough.

Because, you know, there's nothing wrong with it, but suddenly you ain't there anymore as far as other people are concerned. And you've lived for that for years.

That's what's fed you and nourished you and motivated you. And that's what Jesus says when he tells them that I do not receive glory from men.

And that remains true. He is the despised and rejected one in our society still. He is the one that had no comeliness that people may be the one whom God has chosen is the one whom men will not give glory to.

[18 : 21] It's very strange. Now, you know that if you pick a friend of yours and want him to become the mayor of Vancouver, the premier of British Canada, what you've got to do is you've got to put him up there where people see this is the man, this is the personality, this is the brains, this is the leadership, this is the man of ability, this is the one.

And so we create a kind of artificial glory around this person as he is exalted so that the masses will turn out and say, yes, he's the one we want, he's the one we'll vote for, and so up he goes in the public image until he stands ten feet tall.

And then some miserable reporter puts the prick to it and it all comes collapsing down. But that's just the process that Christ is describing when he says, you seek glory from men.

That's the way you live your life. But I know that you have not the love of God, Jesus says. I know that you have not 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. And you, I mean, historically, you know the truth of that statement.

[19 : 51] Now, what I think is happening, I mean, I think the underlying argument that Christ is putting before us here is this. Do you really know what you're looking for?

Are you really aware of what it's all about? It's like that man at the Pool of Siloam to whom Christ said, do you want to be healed?

He put that question to him. Do you really know what you want? And remember, the rather tragic answer was, well, I know what I want, but it has no real relevance because I know that when the time comes that I could be healed, there'll be nobody to help me and I won't be able to do it.

And so we write off our life. There's no hope that we're ever going to find what we're really looking for, so we've settled for looking for something less. Something that maybe we could find, some modicum of satisfaction in something other than the thing that I really long for in my heart.

And that's the argument that Christ puts to them. He says, if you really know what you really want and are really looking for, then when you see me, you'd say, wow, this is it.

[21 : 14] But we've lost something and we don't really know what it is we most want and we are compromising and prepared to settle for something less if we can get by.

and that's what Jesus tells them when he says to them, I have come in my father's name, you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, him you will receive.

How can you believe who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? In other words, you've given up the search for the thing that will really make your life meaningful and it doesn't come from the glory that other people give to you, it comes from the glory you get from God.

Now, I conduct a lot of funerals in my business and it's a very interesting occupation if you can sit back and speculate about it sometime and that is that you very often see a very strong human desire that when the departed comes into the presence of God that they will be received with great honor and great dignity conferred upon them.

And so, in order to ensure that as far as humanly possible, all your friends are gathered around at your deceased and they tell all the good things they can about you in the hope that God will

overhear.

[22 : 59] And, not having known you too well up to that time, he may think better of you than he might at first. And, because that kind of thing happens.

And that's, I think, what Christ is addressing here when when he says that you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God.

I would like to advertise Anglican funerals to you. They're really good. If you want one, I've been told on more than one occasion, I may not mind living as a Baptist, but when I die, I want to die an Anglican.

You know, that's, no. The only reason I say that, and I'm teasing you, I hope you know, is that you have a psalm read over you, you have the scriptures read over you, you have the prayers that God will be merciful to you, and you sing a hymn, and it's over.

You know, and the whole dependence is that God in his grace and mercy will receive you, you know. There isn't built into the service, though often we try to build it in, there isn't built into the service a great kind of fanfare, saying, Lord, are you ever lucky to get this one?

[24 : 31] You know, that's, it doesn't happen that way. You seek the glory that comes from God, and that's why, I mean, that's what our life is all about, that when you get there, God will know who you are, and that the thing that you sought for all your life, you will find fulfillment as the glory of God in Christ is revealed for you.

So, time's gone. Let me just finish with these last two verses in one minute. Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father. I don't have to, he says.

I don't have to be your accusers, and most people think that that's one of the main functions of the Christian churches, to accuse people of their sins. Don't think that that's what I've come here for. He says to them very plainly, if you believe Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

You have already chosen the grounds of your own condemnation. You don't have to go anywhere else. You are, the standards which you have accepted, the ideals which you put before yourself.

All those things, just as it was for these people of Israel, was that by their adulation of Moses and his law and their pretense that they could keep it, they were thinking that their life found mean.

[25 : 57] And Christ says to them, all that Moses did for you was to tell you that unless Christ comes, there is no hope, and you have missed the point.

And to think that you're going to live by the law of Moses is just establishing the grounds of your own condemnation because what Moses said was in testimony to me.

And if you really believe Moses, you will believe me. let me pray. Our God and Father, thank you for this passage.

We pray that you by your Holy Spirit will burn it into our hearts and minds that we may come to terms with the things which Christ teaches us here. We may examine the grounds of our own refusal, that we may examine the grounds of our own seeking glory from men and not glory from God.

we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.