

The Witness

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[0 : 00] Lord Jesus Christ, may we in this time we have to look at your word, consider very seriously in the circumstances of each of our own highly individual lives, the testimony which is born by the Father to the Son, that we may by the gracious work of your Holy Spirit be able to hear and receive that testimony.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. There's a great day coming, and of course that's the theme of Advent.

But I read that in a secular newspaper this week which says the world is in such a totally chaotic state and so desperately in need of some major breakthrough in understanding that the world we live in is looking for something, but they don't know what it is.

They are, though, almost certain that it's not Christianity. And so one of the great opportunities of living at this time is that Christians not only have the right to confess their own sins, but almost everybody else wants to get in and confess their sins for them as well.

So that we live in a world in which we discover that the Bible is responsible for our ravaged environment, that the Bible has contributed to the repressiveness of psychological diseases, that the Bible has been responsible for sexual repression for centuries, that the Bible has motivated missionaries to devastate most of the world's primary cultures, that the Bible concept of the family has repressed for centuries the possibility of alternative lifestyles, that the biblical concept of objective truth has destroyed the private and personal subjective awareness, that the biblical teaching has undermined our ability to take charge of our own lives.

[3 : 04] Well, you'd wonder why you'd be a Christian after that. If I was inclined to stay in bed on Sunday morning, that would be a great confirmation that I was doing the right thing.

And public education has become militantly secular. Government has been reduced to manipulating the economy.

Family life has been shown to be a repressive conspiracy. The name of Jesus is forbidden in public discourse.

The biblical concept of Sabbath has been eliminated. And the Ten Commandments are regarded as a social absurdity.

The church as an institution sees itself in a life-and-death struggle to try in a world that has almost totally disregarded it to establish its relevancy.

[4 : 16] There is a massive split in the church, as some feel that the great object of the church is to prove itself relevant. And I'm not being smug about this.

The other possibility is it might prove itself to be... What would you say? That it might prove itself to be significant as a voice, the kind of voice that is spoken of in the passage we read this morning.

Now, by way of practical examples, this week I listened to Vicki Gabbro's program as I drove along Oak Street one day and heard somebody who runs an aboriginal radio network in the north sing one of the favorite songs along that network which says, Christianity has stolen my religion away.

And I was very incensed at that until I thought, I said Paul could have sung that song too. The Max Ferguson, with all the wonderful objectivity of the CBC, with their clear concept of what the truth is and the awareness that it has been delivered primarily to them.

Excuse me. He said the Christians, witches were good people until the Christians started burning.

[6 : 09] In what has been to me a totally fascinating story with a kind of horror to it has been the story of the murder of the Bulger boy in Liverpool.

And in an editorial on that, this week it said, the structuralists say the problem is poverty, poor housing, and a blight upon the society versus individual.

And that's what the constructionists say, that the construct of society is wrong and therefore crimes like this are committed by 10-year-old boys.

The other one is, says that, and these are the pathologists, they say that this is personal deviancy and irresponsibility.

And that the editorial says these two have got to get their act together because obviously it's both. And then just a parting shot as he leaves the scene, he says, the moralists should recognize that restoring sin will not resolve the issue.

[7 : 41] Crime was rampant even when retribution was not restricted to earth. Well, that's a brilliant statement, I'm sure.

but it doesn't come from having read the Bible. And it doesn't have any recognition that the business of identifying sin is that you can identify why Christ Jesus came into the world, that is, to save sinners.

So that in that remark in the paper, all he's saying is there is no place of forgiveness. There's no place of repentance. There's nothing.

Just construction of a better society and looking after the pathologically disabled. Well, these criticisms, I think, are all very helpful.

powerful and they're going to be enormously powerful because into the midst of this, we have to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 01] And that's what John does. The church, undoubtedly, is going to be, in months and years to come, subjected to far more devastating criticism than that.

And the, the fact of the matter is, I think, that, that, we're going to have to look at our Christian faith. I mean, the reason I think it's so exciting is that, well, you know what, you know what you people did this morning? I listened to you and you did it right in front of me.

You stood up and sing hail to the Lord's anointed, great David's greater son. In the time of, pointed, his reign on earth begun. He comes to break oppression, to let the captive free, to take away transgression and rule in equity.

He comes with succor speedy to those who suffer wrong. He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth. Kings shall fall down before him or every foe victorious.

[10 : 20] He on his throne shall rest. Well, you see, what you were doing then, all of you, and I trust all of you were doing it with all of your hearts, is that you're proclaiming a great coming.

You're, you're proclaiming a great reality. You're proclaiming the ultimate revelation of the truth of God focused in the coming of the person of Jesus Christ.

And that's a very powerful picture. It's probably the most powerful picture there is in our world today.

I mean, there are lots of people who are tearing things apart and tearing them down and there is lots of erosion going on, but that tremendous picture of the one who is coming is, is a very powerful picture indeed and a picture we desperately need because you can't get through our world with your two-bit ideas about how to change things or how to improve things.

The problem is far, far bigger than the likes of you or I with all the supplementary ability which computers may provide. We can't begin to see how to resolve the problem that we are in in our world.

And there's got to be a great coming. And that great coming, I think, we have been taught to anticipate. And somehow it concerns that the moment when kings shall fall down before him and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[12 : 09] Now you can say what you like about that, but there is nothing that compares with that vision as a vision which people have been given through the scriptures.

And you can tear institutional Christianity to shreds if you want, and you can take the Bible and make it say all the desperate and terrible things which you want it to say in accordance with your own prescription.

But such a vision you can't find anywhere. Now that's all sort of background to looking at the text for today.

And the text is in John chapter 5 verses 6 to 13. And it begins as you see with that great word come.

This is he who came by water and by blood. He came because God had promised that he would come. He came in obedience to the Father.

[13:14] And he who came is he who will come. And the whole focus of the coming is on Jesus Christ. Now, in preparation for looking more closely at this passage, I would like to take you through a gallery of cartoons that are written up in the first epistle of John, of people whom the public takes to be the Christians.

But John says there's some question about it. And here are the cartoon characters which are brought before you in that epistle. It's almost as though it was a, you know, a police lineup which you put in front of you, in front of the world and ask the world to come and say, will you identify, please, the real Christian.

And these are the characters that are put in the lineup. And I'm going all the way through the epistle in about two minutes, so don't think you can keep up with me, but just listen. Then you can go and look at the cartoons on your own when you read it privately afterwards.

These are the cartoon characters that are lined up in one John. The one who knows the fact of Christ but not the person of Christ. the one who talks fellowship and walks in darkness.

The one who claims to be without sin. The one who is convinced he has not sinned. The one who says, I know him but does not do what he commands.

[15:04] The one who claims to be in the light but hates his brother. The one who loves the world and claims also to love the father.

The one who claims to belong to the family but has wandered away from the family and never comes back. The one who claims to know the father and yet denies the son.

John's epistle, you just can't separate them. You can't separate the father and the son. The one whose focus of faith has changed.

In the beginning he believed in this but now he knows better. That's one of the guys in the lineup. the one who doesn't understand Christians because you can't understand Christians until you understand Christ.

The one who claims to love God and yet hates his brother. The one with material possessions who has no pity on a needy brother.

[16:26] The spiritual person that denies Jesus like that is. Let me put it this way because I don't want you to miss it. The spiritual person that denies Jesus but has in fact the wrong spirit.

The one who knows God but does not love. The one who claims to have seen God and can't see the person sitting next to him.

the person who thinks he is true and thinks God is a liar. The one in whom sin is an unbroken and continuous process in his life yet believes himself to be born of God.

Now those are all counterfeits things that John goes through the epistle and says if you think that's what a Christian is you don't know what a Christian is and that you see is why he comes to testify to you what a Christian is and he does it in the words that are our text today.

this is he who came by water and blood Jesus Christ not with water only but with water and blood and the spirit is the witness because the spirit is the truth.

[18:03] There's a doctrine of the Trinity built into this statement because the son comes the father historically bears witness to him the spirit contemporarily bears witness to him as our contemporary.

So it's talking about all those things. The father's testimony is to Jesus. So you can see yourself as you read this passage in a court of law being called on to make a decision and will you or will you not accept this testimony and if you won't accept this testimony the conclusion is clear God is a liar and that's how the argument of this passage is built up.

The testimony of the father is that the birth and baptism of Jesus the death and resurrection of Jesus the coming of the Holy Spirit the water the blood and the spirit all bear witness and John says you accept the fact that if something is confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses it is accepted as true.

Now the witness to Jesus is the witness to his birth of the Virgin Mary the witness to his death on the cross of Calvary the witness to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost those three say this is the one of God's choosing this is the father's testimony and it's the testimony of the water and the blood and the spirit and when you accept that testimony that is believe it you have the heart's testimony to the person not just the head's testimony to the fact now this is this is very much John is dealing with the essential problem here of those who witness the life death and resurrection of Jesus

Christ as he himself did and he said I speak to you because I have touched with my hands and handled the word of life but you haven't you never saw him you never heard him speak you've never seen him in any way but and this is what he this is the argument that he develops here the reality of it is that there is given to you as you believe in him a testimony from your heart that this that what God says about him is true you believe that from from your heart you see what he says is I mean the picture that he gives you is that the heart's central conviction is that

[21 : 26] Jesus is whom God the father says he is and and you know all sorts of people want to separate God the father from from Jesus but what John is saying is if you want to communicate with the father the thing that the father wants to talk about is his son Jesus Christ and if you don't want to talk to him about that there's no way you can talk to the father because that's his concern I have a friend who is a grumpy fellow I must say who is totally immersed in wars and battles and soldiering he's been part of that the whole of his life and when you go visit him he for the most part grumps and but then you bring up the subject of soldiers and suddenly he's alive and well and present to you and will talk for the rest of the afternoon because you're now talking about the thing he'll talk about well

God may not be grumpy but the thing that is at the heart of your relationship to him is what he has said to you and if you don't want to hear that then there's no basis for talking to him now that's the argument that John has developed and so that you have in your heart either the witness of the spirit that this is what God is saying and this is the one of whom God is speaking which is Jesus Christ or else you have in your heart a heart of lead which says God is concerning the person of Jesus Christ you have one heart or the other John says either you accept the testimony of the father just as you would accept the testimony of three witnesses and just as you are bound to acknowledge that the testimony of God must be greater than that you accept that and having accepted it that is how God performs what I find to be a most provocative kind of statement when he says he who has the son has life and he who has not the son of God has not life that life is dependent upon you accepting the testimony concerning Jesus and receiving Jesus into your heart by faith not receiving him into your head as a fact with which you are familiar not being as John says he was he was among those who witnessed with their eyes the life and death of Jesus Christ but he says many people did who don't believe in him so many people still know the facts concerning Jesus Christ but have never received him and believed on him in their hearts and they don't believe the testimony that

God the father made to him this is my son in whom I am well pleased and not believing that they don't receive life which comes through believing that that's how God has chosen to impart eternal life to us is through our accepting his testimony concerning Jesus Christ and believing on him in our hearts that's what genuine Christian faith is he who has the son has life and he who has not the son of God has not life and so John concludes I write this to you who believe in the name of the son of God that you may know that you have eternal life well that's what's going to happen in our world the reality of what Christian faith is is not necessarily what the world around us thinks it is or what the world around is criticizing the reality of

Christian faith is the reality of accepting the testimony of God concerning the person of Jesus Christ and I'm not telling you this but John is telling us all this that it is in accepting that testimony concerning Jesus that God imparts to us eternal life you see it's it's sort of a bit I think like an arranged marriage you know you go to the father and say who is it that you want me to marry he says this is the one that I want you to marry Jesus Christ now in an arranged marriage what is presumed to happen though of course in our sophisticated way we wouldn't accept this at all but think about it for a moment in an arranged marriage it is possible that having found the one whom the father has chosen you will learn to love that person and so in this situation there is an arranged relationship between you and

[27 : 20] Jesus Christ and God the father says this is the one whom I want you to commit your life to and in committing your life to him you will learn to love him and you will learn to love others and he will be the means by which I give you eternal life I'm telling you this John says I'm writing it down so that it has been a witness to every generation of Christians that has ever been I'm writing it down so that you will know that you have eternal life you know what happens is that if you believe in the existence of God that you may think is a great step to have made but it's not a very great step as far as the New Testament is concerned because having believed in his existence you now have to accept his testimony if you accept the testimony of

Jesus you encounter the person if you accept the testimony of God you encounter the person of Jesus Christ in the encounter with Jesus Christ you found that you have broken the barrier which exists between you and God and in that relationship God imparts to you the thing which he desires for you and that is that you have eternal life so there you are the decision seems to be fairly simple there is either in you a heart which is centered on believing in Jesus Christ or a stone cold heart which says God is a liar and you are probably the only one who knows what is your heart focus and attention that be great father we are

I mean I am and I suspect others may be quite overwhelmed by by the reality of your testimony testimony to the person of your son Jesus Christ and by the awareness that in the whole scheme of things our lives are totally irrelevant until we accept that testimony which you make to the person of our Lord and we pray that as we have the vision of the Lord's anointed and the promise that he is coming even as he has come that we might be deeply concerned to share that vision with our world which is very much aware that something is coming very much afraid that something is coming but so totally ignorant of who it is help us to share that in the joy of our salvation we ask in Christ's name
Amen