

The Fourfold Witness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2026

Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everybody. We're going to read from John's Gospel, chapter 5, and we're reading from verse 31 to the end of the chapter.

And I know that his testimony about me is valid.

You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony, but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

I have a testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You've never heard his voice, nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.

[1 : 17] You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.

Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.

I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me. But if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?

But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.

But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say? Amen, and the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. The title of the sermon is A 4-4 Witness.

[2 : 32] And in actual fact, that is to underplay what is actually stated here. You will have noticed that the word testimony comes up a lot, ten times in as many verses in this particular passage.

And this is all about testimony, whether an intended testimony or an unintended one. So even the Jewish leaders who are rejecting Jesus are kind of declaring a testimony, a witness.

They're saying, we will not receive this man. We will not accept his word. We will not believe that he has come from God. That is their testimony. That is the place they're standing.

And all of us have some kind of witness and testimony about the life that we live. And as Richard reminded us last week, we will all have to give an account for that testimony or that witness.

The life that we've lived. We will have to give an account for it. We are answerable for the life that we live. A story is told of a rescue team who received two very different reports about a stranded hiker near a cliff edge.

[3 : 39] One caller said, they're right at the edge, in immediate danger of falling. Falling. Hurry. Another said, they seem safe.

They have plenty of room. There's no hurry. Well, the rescue services arrived and discovered the situation was actually imminent and dangerous.

The person was in great danger because the gravel around his feet was giving way and he could have easily slipped at any moment. Two witnesses, each given a report, an eyewitness report, of what they were seeing.

But one was a reliable witness and the other was not. Now, the difference between the witnesses was not that one did not see clearly, nor that one was less concerned than the other.

The difference was due to proximity and clarity. The one who was closer to the man in danger saw the danger immediately.

[4 : 42] The gravel was giving away. The other man saw at a distance, so he thought they had plenty of time. And the man who was close up and witnessing the event firsthand had absolute

clarity about how imminently in danger this particular man was.

We have witnesses in this story. And we've had witnesses throughout history who have considered the account and the claims of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And some have seen that they most imminently respond to that witness because their very lives are on the line. While others viewing it at a distance, so to speak.

Those who are viewing it from perhaps an intellectual or academic or just a curious perspective, well, they stand back. They take it all in.

And they think, well, this is very interesting. But I'm not in any imminent danger or threat. I don't have to do anything with this message. Or at least I don't have to hurry. At its most base level, something I once said when I was first confronted with the gospel.

[5 : 52] Well, I think I'll put it off until I'm older. Because I've got my life to live first. And I don't want Jesus messing that up.

The trouble is, of course, we never know whether we'll ever see older. Do we? That's something we cannot determine. Now, the other interesting thing about this story is that Jesus clearly does not have a concept of faith which is based upon a leap in the dark.

Jesus doesn't ask us to believe in faith. Now, some people do believe in faith. They're called fideists. They say, well, it doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you believe in something.

You have to believe in something, don't you? And everybody else nods meaningfully and says, oh, yeah, well, yeah, even if what I believe in is kind of healing crystals. And even if I believe in kind of the stars aligning and being able to tell me that I'm going to meet the person of my dreams, etc. All of this kind of thing. Now, Jesus doesn't accept that theory. What he does say is that you have to have good reason, good cause for the things that you believe in.

[7 : 05] If you're going to set your hope for eternity on something, you better make sure that it has validity and credibility. Because there's no point in believing a lie or just a fairy tale or a fanciful story.

So Jesus actually presents to us four witnesses for his credibility. And these are four reasons, and there are others, of course, in the Bible, but four reasons why we should believe in him.

For faith is not blind. So Jesus opens by saying in verse 31, if I testify of myself, my testimony is not valid.

Now, he's referring to the Jewish law. For the Jewish law in Deuteronomy 19 verse 15 says, One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by testimony of two or three witnesses. Now, that's important. Jesus gives four here. So he's kind of taking up the fact that they do hold to this idea that you can't testify about yourself.

[8 : 15] Why should anybody believe a self-testimony? Okay, he says, I'll not only give you two or three, I'll give you four. And that's the context in which he's speaking. And the first witness, next slide, is the witness of John the Baptist.

That's verses 32 to 35. Now, what Jesus says about John the Baptist is very interesting. Because John the Baptist is the witness that he calls.

You imagine he's in court here, just for a moment. And he says, here's my first witness. I'm going to call John the Baptist. Now, the religious leaders would have thought, okay, we quite like John. Or at least we did in his early days before he went off the rails.

Because Jesus says, you chose to enjoy the light. He was a light. He was a light. And he testified to the truth. In fact, he brought heat.

And you chose to enjoy it for a little while. Until he turned his ire on you and his attention on you and began to call you hypocrites. Then you weren't so keen.

[9 : 15] But nonetheless, they welcomed him at first. Why wouldn't they? He wasn't preaching anything differently. He was telling them that the Messiah is coming. They liked that. He was telling them, he was preaching from the Old Testament Scriptures.

He was calling people to repent and be baptized. They liked that. But if he was going to add to their number, particularly the Pharisees, who were very critical of the establishment and the Sadducees, then why not?

We'll follow this Elijah-like figure. Absolutely. Until he pointed to Jesus and said, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Then we don't like what you're saying.

People who pick and choose what they will listen to and what they will accept. It's not a new thing. It's an old thing. We'll only accept the things that we like and we'll dismiss the things we don't like. That's not how we should approach God's Word. John was a prophet recognized by the people. He was a lamp that burned and gave light, says Jesus.

[10:15] He was the long-anticipated forerunner of the Messiah. He pointed to Jesus as the Son of God and the Lamb of God. And they enjoyed that light for a moment.

But then they rejected it. And just a word here. Over the many, many years of ministry, I have noted that people will sometimes respond positively and favorably to the message of the gospel.

They will get excited in a place of worship. They might even come forward and confess their faith in Jesus. They might even be baptized and become members of the church. But it doesn't last.

They enjoy it for a time. And then they reject it. But here's your problem. Jesus says, those who persevere to the end will be saved.

The problem with those who enjoy it for a time and then reject it. It doesn't mean, of course, that they were never saved. They may well be. And they may be backslidden. But it does raise the suspicion that what they experienced was not a genuine and true conversion.

[11:27] Just a little dabbling for a time. And then they'll move on to yoga or something else. Now, that's not to, you know, denigrate yoga, by the way.

You get my point. They move and move from one thing to another to another. Always seeking truth. But never settling on Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

So that was the first witness. Then the second witness after John the Baptist is a witness of Jesus' works. In verse 36, he says, I've got an even weightier testimony than John the Baptist.

And it's the works that I've done. Now, John uses the word works, erga. Or he uses the word sign, semion. And the signs or the seven signs that he gives in John's gospel, the seven miracles.

His works are much greater than those, of course. They incorporate his words as well that have an impact and effect on people. But Jesus is saying, you want evidence that I am the Son of God.

[12:30] You want evidence that I am the Lamb of God who takes the sin of the world. Well, believe in the works that I've done. The changing of water into wine. The healing of the royal courtier's son.

The healing of the man at Bethesda. See the works I've done. Now, the interesting thing here is, you're in this law court, as it were, and he says to those who are accusing him, look at the works.

They don't say, ah, well, we think you made them up. We just dismiss those as tricks and stories.

They couldn't deny the works. You remember in John chapter 3, Nicodemus, when he was deciding whether Jesus was really the Messiah, he says, we know that you have come from God, for no man could do the works that you do unless God were with him.

No man could do the works you do. So he got it. He understood it. But these religious leaders, they were kind of holding their bets a little bit, and they were saying, ah, well, maybe you do these works.

They didn't deny it. Maybe you do these works through the power of Beelzebub, the devil. Now, that's a serious sin. That is attributing to God, sorry, attributing to Satan, what is done by God.

[13:52] That is a blasphemy. But they were prepared to blaspheme because of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. No man could be from God and do the works that you do unless God were with him.

These wonderful miracles, Jesus says, these are evidence that I am who I say I am, and I am who John the Baptist says I am.

And any reasonable person would see that. Why would Satan cast out Satan, Jesus says? A house divided against itself will fall.

The only conclusion you can draw when you look at these works is that I am from God. And Nicodemus knew that, but he needed to know there was an even greater miracle that he needed to experience.

No man can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. And next slide, please. Augustine once said this, I never have any difficulty believing in miracles since I experienced the miracle of a changed heart.

[15:00] And you know, when I go back to my own testimony, I remember on the 18th October 1981 when I wanted to say no to Jesus but found myself having to say yes.

I said to the minister, almost as the kind of last resistance, I said, well, I will pray that prayer, but I don't believe in miracles. And he said to me, pray the prayer, and you will never have a problem

with miracles.

And he was right. Because I experienced the miracle of a changed heart. And once you've got God in the right place, once God is God to you, then surely you say nothing is impossible for him.

Changing water into wine, that's easy. Raising the dead, that's easy. The God who spoke life into the world, said, let there be light, and there was light. Paul says, a shine in our hearts to give the light, the glory, the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Once you know that, miracles become possible. So the miracles are important, but they're not merely to impress the unbeliever.

[16:18] They're there to authenticate Jesus as truthful messenger and that he is a messenger who comes from God and claims to be God. For as Spurgeon says, I've got the quote, wonderful quote, without the miracles, we would have a teacher.

But with the miracles, we have a savior. Without the miracles, we would have a teacher, like Buddha. He'll give you wisdom. We'll have a kind of guru, if you like, like some of the gurus in some of these religions.

But with Jesus, we do not merely have a teacher. We have a savior who has the power to transform our lives if we will trust in him and we will believe in him. And not only that, but to take away our sins by his precious blood.

Two witnesses, but you'll get a third. This is his greatest witness, his best witness that he calls now to his defense.

The witness of the Father in verses 37 and 38. He says, my highest authority is the Father who sent me. He has himself testified concerning me.

[17:33] And you ask when, next slide. Well, at his baptism. At his baptism, people heard his voice. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

And at the transfiguration, this is my son whom I love. With him, I am well pleased. And then he goes further. Listen to him. He's worth listening to.

This is my son. I have validated him. I have authenticated him. He is the one on whose words you are to hang. He is the one whose words will guarantee you eternal life.

Listen to him. And then at the prayer at Lazarus' tomb, when Jesus prayed, Father, glorify your name, a voice came from heaven saying, I have glorified it and I will glorify it again.

Three times the voice was heard. Three times authenticating that Jesus is the Son of God and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And Jesus says, this is my best witness.

[18:37] But the problem with you is that you will not hear his voice. You're not interested. You play the religious game.

You go through the religious ritual. But you'd be terrified if he spoke to you and you don't want it anyway. You see, the interesting thing about these is the next witness Jesus brings is the witness of Scripture.

And Jesus says of them and it's a tragedy. You search these Scriptures to find eternal life. But they were not really, really interested in hearing the voice of God.

It simply became an academic exercise, one that gave them status in society. The rabbis could get together with their latest theories and boy, they were endless. They knew the Torah well, but they did not care for the God of the Torah.

And there will be many people on the day of judgment who may say to God, I had a Bible on my shelf. But the problem is they didn't have a Bible in their hearts.

[19:43] And that's the tragedy. Unless the Word of God lives in us, it will not save us. And there's the fourth witness that comes, the witness of Scripture.

You diligently study the Scriptures and these are the Scriptures that testify against me. Did you notice I took a Bible off the shelf? That was Andy's Bible, not mine.

I'm used to my own, so I wanted to use my own for preaching. But then I was thinking, where do I put it? If I put it on the floor, you might think it's being disrespectful. If I was a Muslim, I have to keep it above my waist height.

Because the Torah is some, sorry, the Quran is something precious. It has to be at the highest point in the room, such as they respect for it. But let me tell you something, just in case you wonder about this.

We are not bibliolatrists. We do not worship a Bible. Now I confess, I have loads of Bibles in the house. I have tattered and torn and heavily marked Bibles. You know why?

[20 : 44] Because I can't decide what to do with it. I don't want to throw it in the bin. I don't want to get rid of it. I'm not, you know, even if it's, the pages are falling out, I don't know what to do. So I keep hold of them.

I pity the people who have to clear up after me when I'm gone. Because there are lots of Bibles to get rid of. But nonetheless, you see, I don't worship this book. This is the Word of God and it's very precious to me.

My life depends upon its testimony. But it only becomes alive to me when the Holy Spirit shines in my heart and makes it understandable.

When He becomes the interpreter and He brings to mind the words of Jesus. So, I'm not just reading now, the Lord is my shepherd like people do at funerals and weddings.

I know it to be true. The Lord is my shepherd because the Word of God lives in my heart and it divides like a sword into the very depths of my being and it judges me and it approves me.

[21 : 47] It gives me life and bread and it sustains me. But unless God creates new life in me, I can search the Scriptures for years and still be lost.

And that is the tragedy of these Jews. You diligently study the Scriptures. They testify about me but you reject me and therefore your study is a waste of time.

The Scriptures are full of Christ. Next slide. Christ is the promised seed, the seed of the woman.

Christ is a blessing to the nations, the seed of Abraham.

Christ is a prophet like Moses. Christ is the suffering servant who can read the crucifixion and then read Isaiah 53 and not see Jesus. Christ is a ruler born in Bethlehem.

Christ is the pierced king according to Zechariah. The Scriptures are full of Jesus and anybody who had eyes to see, any Jewish scholar should have seen it.

[22 : 55] But they refused. And that tells you something you see about people. People are not always honest inquirers.

As Charlie Brown once said when he was seen reading the Bible and one of his friends asked him what he was doing, he said, I'm looking for loopholes. Some people read the Bible just to pick faults with it.

I've heard many attest me of people who said, I became a Christian because I was an atheist and I was searching for reasons not to believe. And then I read the Scriptures and something happened in my heart and I was converted.

It works the other way, of course. It works the other way. But we are seldom open-hearted. An open heart and open eyes will produce an open mind.

But we must begin with an open Bible. Yep. Now, The Guardian very interestingly has reported on the 10th of January 2026 that sales of the good book reached a record high in the UK in 2025, increasing by, notice, 134% since 2019.

[24 : 15] That's the highest since records began. According to industry research, last year, total sales of Bibles in the UK have reached 6.3 million, 3.61 million up on 2019 sales.

And the comment from Church House and the Bible Society, we've seen an increase in people coming to the Bible from scratch. They have no Christian background whatsoever. They have no grounding from their parents or from their school.

whereas most people in prior generations would have had. It is definitely younger people who are seeking some sort of spirituality. They want to understand the world and themselves better.

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that terrific? The Bible is beginning to convince people of their need of Jesus. But Bible reading alone will not do it.

in the end, it is important to see the Christ of the Bible in order to be saved. Now, the root cause of unbelief Jesus places here, I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.

[25 : 27] That's the reason in the end why people do not believe. They do not have a regard, a love, an affection, a respect, a reverence for God in their hearts.

And so, as we close today, I want to ask you, what do you make of the fourfold witness? There's a call to decision here. Jesus creates crisis.

He always does that. No one who ever meets Jesus will remain neutral. You can't. I find it fascinating that you don't hear on television people saying, oh Buddha or oh Muhammad, but they do, oh Christ, an awful lot as a swear word.

Isn't that interesting? That the person who says, I am the way, the truth, and the life is either a person respected by people or sworn about and taken as a bad word, a curse word.

Rebecca Manley Pippet said, whenever Jesus, wherever Jesus went, he produces crisis. He compelled individuals to decide to make a choice. In fact, he struck me as the most crisis-producing individual I have ever encountered.

[26 : 42] Nearly everyone clashed with Jesus whether they loved him or hated him. Jesus insists, you either love me or you hate me. There can be no middle ground.

Those who are lukewarm, he says, I will spew out of my mouth. I would rather, he says, you were called. I would rather you were called. At least you would be honest.

At least you would be honest. So you've heard the witnesses. John testified, the works testified, the Father testified, the Scriptures testify.

but the question is, what will you do with the evidence? If God was to call you to the dock and ask you, why should I let you into my heaven?

The question I would ask you would be this. Would you say, because I've been a good person? Because I've been sincere? Or would you say, because I have trusted and believed in your son, Jesus Christ, for my salvation and I have no other hope apart from him.

[27 : 58] Your faith should not be blind faith. It should be a reasoned and reasonable response to the evidence for Jesus. It is too important to risk.

Our soul is too important to risk believing in nonsense. But the Bible does not present us with nonsense. It presents us with history and facts and says, what will you do with this man?

The one who died for you, who rose again for you, offers himself to you. What will you do with Jesus? And beware of possessing a knowledge of truth without loving your heart for God.

Moody says, the Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives. That's why they were given.

To change our lives through the evidence that Jesus provides that he is Lord and Savior and will take away the sins of the world and he will take away yours if you will have him.

[29 : 05]