

Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 30th August 2009

“Bearing Witness to Jesus”

John ch.5:30-47

Introduction

If you can remember back a couple of weeks ago, you will know that the context for the passage I read tonight is the healing of the disabled man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15). That was the man who lay beside the pool of Bethesda in one of its five covered porches for 38 years, waiting and hoping that one year someone would be there to help him down the steps to be the first into the water whenever it was mysteriously stirred. That's when its waters were supposed to have their greatest healing powers.

But then one day a man came along and asked him a bit of a silly question:

‘Do you want to get well?’ (v.6)

Well – of course he did! But he told the man,

‘Sir, I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.

While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.’ (v.7)

But then, the man simply said to him:

‘Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!’ (v.8)

And before he knew it, he was on his feet, with his mat under his arm, fit and well and able to walk away – totally unaided by himself! He was healed!

But no sooner was he outside the covered porches of the Pool of Bethesda, than he was accosted by the Jewish religious leaders! What was the problem? They were accusing him of carrying his mat on the Sabbath day!

‘It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat!’ (v.10)

But the man who had been healed could only say (v.11):

‘The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk!’

So I just did what I was told – and it seemed to work – because here I am walking about!

So the Jews then asked him:

‘Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk? (v.12)

In other words, *‘Who does he think he is? How dare he ask you to carry your mat on a Sabbath – to get you to break the Law!’*

But you know what? The man who had been healed hadn't a clue who it was! At first he didn't know who had healed him, it was only later that he found out that it was a man called Jesus (v.13-14). As soon as Jesus had healed him, he had slipped away into the crowd. But later Jesus found the man at the Temple and said these words to him:

‘See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.’ (v.14).

So it would seem that in some way his disability had been connected to some sinful behavior 38 years previously!

(Obviously that is not always the case, but in this case it was.)

After that, the man who had been healed went back to the Jews to tell them that it was Jesus who had made him well. (v.15)

As a result of this incident the Jews began to persecute Jesus (v.16)

It's a bit like Stephen in the Book of Acts. As soon as he was stoned to death by these same Jewish leaders, they began to unleash persecution on the followers of Jesus from that day on. It was Saul of Tarsus who instigated that wave of Persecution against the church in Acts ch.8 – until he himself met with the Risen Lord and was converted in Acts ch.9.

But why? Why was it that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem turned on Jesus from this point onwards? Well we have the answers in v.17-18:

Jesus had said to the Jews that:

'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.'

It was because of that statement that the Jews tried all the harder to kill him for these 2 basic reasons: (v.18)

1. He was breaking the Sabbath, by healing this disabled man!
2. He was making himself equal with God, by calling God his Father!

But what did Jesus mean by that statement?

'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.'

Didn't God create the world in 6 days, and then rest on the 7th day, the Sabbath? And didn't he then make a law – one of the 10 Commandments, that we should: *'Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy, six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work...For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.'*

But does that mean that God has never done a day's work since?

Does that mean that God has been sitting idle up in heaven ever since?

Jesus said, *'My Father is always at his work to this very day...'* and of course he was absolutely right. How are we to understand this then? Well, we have to make a distinction between God's Creative work, and God's sustaining work. Yes, we believe on the basis of the Book of Genesis, that God did indeed create this world in the space of 6 days, and he rested on the 7th, establishing a pattern for mankind to follow ever since: that one day in seven should be a rest day, and one day in seven should be a day set aside for the worship of God. (It's great when those 2 days can coincide, but it's not always the case.)

Jesus himself said on another occasion that,

'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.' (Mark 2:27)

God established the Sabbath day of rest, the principle of one day in seven off, because **WE** needed it, not because **HE** needed it. God's work doesn't tire him out. God is at perfect rest within himself. It's not that he gets taxed or finds work a stress or strain. One day in seven 'rest' is for our benefit, not for God's.

So what Jesus said is absolutely true – '*God the Father is always at his work to this very day.*' He is always 24/7 sustaining the stars and planets, He is always 24/7 causing the seeds to sprout and grow in the fields, He is always 24/7 causing cells to knit together in our bodies to bring us healing. He is always 24/7 listening to and answering the prayers of his people. He is always 24/7 somewhere around the world active in the work of saving men and women and bringing them to faith in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, to put it in a nutshell – God never goes off duty!

So when Jesus said, '*My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.*' He was absolutely correct, and at the same time he was making a claim to be equal with God – He was claiming to be the Son of God, He was calling God, 'My Father' – He was saying, 'I and the Father are One' and because that is so, he too can always be at his work – whether it was the Sabbath, or whether it was any other day of the week – it didn't really matter to him. He had just caused a man who had been disabled for 38 years to get up onto his feet and to walk home. What better thing could he have done on a Sabbath day? '*The Sabbath was made for man – to do good to this disabled man – not man for the Sabbath.*'

So what was the problem? Why were these Jewish leaders getting so irate? Well their real problem was that Jesus was claiming to be God – equal with God – and that He was God come in the flesh. Look at what he is saying in vs.19-23:

- The Father and the Son work together (v.19)
- The Father and the Son love each other perfectly (v.20)
- The Father and the Son raise the dead and give life (v.21)
- The Father has entrusted the task of Judgement to the Son (v.22)

Why? (v.23): '*So that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father.*' In fact: '*He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent Him.*'

That was some indictment on these Jewish religious leaders!

They thought they were in touch with God. They thought they had the hot-line to God. They thought nobody on earth had a closer relationship with God than they had. But they had got it so badly wrong! Here was God's Son standing in front of them, and they couldn't accept that God even had a Son, and so they were intent on persecuting him – ultimately hounding him to his death!

But if they weren't prepared to honour the Son, there was no way they were honouring the Father.

Some people talk about God, search for God, even try to worship God in their churches every Sunday, but they have no relationship with His Son. But you cannot get to God by any other route, than by trusting in His Son! (John 14:6, Acts 4:12, 1 Tim 2:5 etc).
What about you? Do you cower in fear of God, or are you trusting in His Son?

(We looked at vs.24-29 last time, so let's move on down to v.30-47)

In this passage we have 4 testimonies about Jesus.
If you like we could call them 'Witness Statements' for Jesus.
It's as if the Jews already have Jesus in the dock – they're putting him on trial. Even though one day it will actually be the other way around, because God the Father has entrusted all judgement to the Son: He will judge them then...

Remember that the charges against Jesus were two-fold:

1. They accused him of breaking the Sabbath, and
2. Of making himself equal with God, calling God his Father.

How does he plead? He pleads 'not guilty' of course!
But Jesus knows well that the Jews believed that the truth of something can only be established in the presence of 2 or 3 witnesses, so his own testimony about himself is not really valid. (v.30-32)

Some actually think that Jesus is referring to the Holy Spirit in v.32, when he says, *'there is another who testifies in my favour, and I know that his testimony about me is valid.'* The word for 'another' is 'allos' – the same word that Jesus uses when he talks about '*another Counsellor*' whom the Father will send in my name in John 14:16. John chs.14-16 are great chapters all about the Holy Spirit. Jesus goes on to say in John 15:26 that:

*'When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, **He will testify about me.**'*
So the Holy Spirit's testimony about Jesus is absolutely true and absolutely trustworthy. But at this point in John's Gospel the Holy Spirit has not yet been given, so let's call these other witnesses to speak in defense of Jesus.
The first witness to be called is:

1. His Relative: (v.33-35)

John the Baptist was a close relative of Jesus – he was born to Elizabeth about six months before Jesus was born to her cousin Mary. John the Baptist was sent as the forerunner of the Messiah. He was sent to prepare the way for Jesus to be announced to the world. And the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had actually accepted John the Baptist as a man of God, as a prophet in the style of the Old Testament prophets. In fact they had sent a delegation out to John, where he was baptizing in the desert, to ask him who he was and what he was about. What was his message? What was his testimony about Jesus?

Well Jesus reminds them in v.33,

'You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth.'

So what was the response – what message did John give them?

Read John 1:19-34

This is an unmistakable testimony. John testifies that Jesus is the Son of God. And he knows that because he had been told in advance, out of all the people you baptize in the Jordan, there will be one who is special. 'The one on whom you see the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, that's the one who will baptize, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit' – that's how he knew that this Jesus of Nazareth, his own earthly relative, was in fact the very Son of God!

The Jewish leaders from Jerusalem had already heard John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus, but obviously they hadn't accepted it or believed it.

So what next? Who will we call to bear witness for Jesus next?

Well the second witness is not actually a person at all. It's really some pieces of evidence. Let's call them exhibits. John actually calls them signs:

2. His Work: (v.36)

The work the Father had given Jesus to do while he was here on earth actually speaks volumes as to who He really is. His miraculous works testify about Jesus – about who He is – that He is the Son of God.

We have already seen this in the opening chapters of John's Gospel:

John 2:11 – The changing of the water into wine was a sign, it revealed Jesus' glory, and as a result, his disciples put their trust in Him.

John 2:23 – While he was at the feast in Jerusalem many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing, and believed in his name.

John 3:2 – Even Nicodemus said, *'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.'* – Again the miraculous signs were the evidence as to who Jesus was – and many were getting the message!

John 4:48 – Back in Galilee – When faced with the nobleman whose son was at the point of death, Jesus said, *'Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders...you will never believe.'* Having said that, Jesus did heal the Nobleman's son from a distance! And as a result the nobleman and his family believed in Jesus.

John 5 – The healing of the disabled man at the pool of Bethesda should have produced the same faith in the hearts and minds of these Jewish leaders who had witnessed the change in the man's life. But instead all they were intent on doing was persecuting Jesus, for breaking the Sabbath!

John 14:10-11 – Here is the crux of the matter as far as these pieces of evidence are concerned:

'Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.'

Jesus' miracles should have been enough to make people believe in who he was – The Son of God.

However, back in John 5:36 Jesus talked about the work that His Father had given him **'to finish'**. What does that remind you of? Well turn with me to...

John 19:28-37 – This passage contains those final words that Jesus said from the cross: *'It is Finished!'* (v.30) It was with those words, (in fact one word in the original *'Tetelestae!'*) that Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit. That was his point of death. How do we know?

Well John goes on to give us the evidence yet again:

In vs.31-33 we have the proof that Jesus was actually dead, because the Roman soldiers did not break his legs, like they did with the other two criminals hanging either side of them. That was to hasten their deaths, because with no power in their legs they would not be able to lift themselves up so as to fill their chest cavities with another breath of air. So they would die quite quickly after that. But these soldiers – expert executioners, who had done this so many times before – didn't break Jesus' legs because they knew he had already breathed his last. Jesus did actually die – he didn't just swoon on the cross and then revive in the tomb as some have said. He was dead!

But there's another piece of evidence **in v.34-37**– Not only was Jesus already dead, but now just to make doubly sure, one of the soldiers standing at the foot of the cross lifted his long spear and pierced it up through Jesus' side, up through his stomach and into his heart. That's why it brought forth a sudden flow of both blood and water: (water from his stomach and blood from his heart). And just look at the words that John uses next in v.35 *'the man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies (why?) so that you may believe!'* And then he goes on to show how even this piece of evidence fulfils the Scriptures: *'Not one of his bones will be broken'* and *'They will look on the one they have pierced.'*

What more evidence did these Jewish leaders need? Jesus' finished work on the cross and his miraculous resurrection from the dead on the third day are the greatest pieces of evidence that Jesus is actually who he claimed to be – He is the Son of God!

And in Mark's Gospel (15:39) that's exactly the conclusion the centurion came to, who was in charge of those Roman soldiers at the foot of the cross:

'And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!' (Mark 15:39).

- If a pagan Roman soldier could see it, why couldn't these Jewish religious leaders see it!?

3. His Father: (v.37)

The Father who sent Jesus into the world also testifies to who He is (v.37). How does he do that?

Well Jesus is able to say to these Jewish Religious leaders that they have *'never seen the Father's voice or seen his form'* but on at least 3 occasions

while he was here on earth, the disciples who had believed in Jesus, and who were following Jesus, were permitted to hear the Father's voice from heaven, and to see God the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending on Jesus:

At his baptism: Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that when Jesus was being baptized by John in the River Jordan that the heavens opened *'and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'* (Luke 3:22).

At his transfiguration: Jesus' closest disciples, Peter, James and John, had the privilege of seeing *'a bright cloud enveloping them, and a voice from the cloud'* saying, *'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'* (Matthew 17:5). Yet again the testimony from heaven was that Jesus was the Son of God. That God the Father loved him, and that he was well pleased with him. He was sinless and perfect.

But there was one more occasion when a voice spoke from heaven.

This time it's in John's Gospel (ch.12:28-30). Jesus has just entered Jerusalem at the beginning of his final week before he goes to the cross. He is predicting his death, and he has mixed feelings as he contemplates what lies ahead of him that very week. In John 12:27 he says,

'Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' *The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from this earth, will draw all men to myself.'* *He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.'* That was the last time Jesus would speak to these Jewish leaders about who he was. If you read on down that passage you will discover in v.37 that... *'Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.'* - fulfilling the words of Isaiah, the OT prophet. But read on down to v.42 and we are told: *'Yet at the same time many **even among the leaders** believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.'* That ties in exactly with what Jesus said in John 5:41-44.

- **In The Scriptures (v.38-40)**

But not only did God the Father speak audibly from heaven on these three occasions testifying to the truth that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. God the Father has also spoken to all of us through His Word – the Bible.

Jesus said in v.37 that, *'The Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.'*

'Nor does his word dwell in you.' If we allow God's Word to dwell in us, we will get all the evidence we need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that he has come and died in our place on the cross. It's those who treat the Bible like a closed book, and he refuse to read it for themselves, who will be kept in the dark about the truth of these matters. But we must see that Jesus is the key to unlock all of Scripture. Without him, none of it makes sense! Look what Jesus goes on to say to these Jewish leaders:

'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.' (John 5 v.39-40)

The Jews didn't need to be commanded to study their Bible. The Hebrew Bible was exactly the same as our Old Testaments. These Jewish Religious leaders would have read it inside it, picking it to pieces to try to understand when the Messiah would come and what he would be like. But the problem was they had missed the point of it all. They were looking for *their kind* of a Messiah, not the one that the Bible actually predicted. So when Jesus came fulfilling all of the Old Testament prophecies, they were blinkered, their eyes were blinded to the truth, and they couldn't see that Jesus was the answer to all their hopes and fears. Jesus was the one they were looking for all along! They thought that simply because they were the guardians of the Scriptures that they possessed eternal life already. They were worshipping the book, instead of the one the book spoke about!

Sometimes how people treat the Bible today, still smacks of that kind of an attitude. They'll fight and argue over Bible translations, and they'll split hairs over what this means and what that means, but they refuse to see the bigger picture of their need for a personal relationship with the one the Bible speaks about – the Lord Jesus Christ!

'These are the Scriptures that testify of me,' Jesus said,
'yet you refuse to come to me to have life.'

This sounds exactly to me like Paul's words in 2 Tim 3:14-15 where he says to Timothy *'how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation...'* how? *'...through faith in Christ Jesus.'*

It's been great to be able to teach boys and girls this week in the Holiday Bible Club the Word of God at such a young age, but unless they come to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, it will all be of no use to them. Knowledge of the Scriptures must lead us to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That brings us finally tonight to our fourth and final witness...

4. His Predecessor: Moses (v.45-47)

Moses, the Law-giver actually testifies to Jesus, because he wrote the first 5 books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. All of them testify to Jesus as the coming Messiah.

Moses may have been the one who introduced the Law to show us where we had sinned, but the Law could never bring us forgiveness for our sins. It just showed us our need. But it pointed forward to the day when God would send one who would fulfill the Law in every way, and then die in the place of those who were sinners, who needed their sins forgiven – and that was Jesus!

These Jewish leaders had got stuck on Moses (v.45)

Whereas Jesus says, that if they had really believed Moses, and understood Moses' writings, then they would have believed in Jesus, for Moses wrote about Him.

Right from the first book of Moses in Genesis 3:15 God speaks to the serpent:

'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'

Jesus had now come to do just that – to crush the serpent's head for good, as he died on that cross.

Right up to the last book of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18-19 where God says:

'I will raise up for them a prophet like you (like Moses) from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.'

That's exactly what Jesus was saying here in John ch.5. Jesus was the prophet like Moses. God had now raised him up. The voice from heaven said again and again, **'This is my beloved Son, Listen to Him!'** and yet these Jewish leaders were refusing to do so. So the final words of that prophecy of Moses were now going to testify against these Religious leaders:

'If anyone will not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.' (Deut 18:19)

So we have called Moses as a witness *for* Jesus, as the Son of God, sent to bring God's Word to the people of New Testament times. But in effect Moses has also been called as a witness for the prosecution to testify *against* the Jewish Religious Leaders of Jesus day. They have been condemned by him, because they have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Conclusion:

And so tonight, we have all the evidence we need that Jesus really is the Son of God, come in the flesh, to die on the cross for our sins.

The question is do you accept the evidence and will you believe in Jesus for yourself, or will you reject the evidence and one day be condemned by it instead?

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