TESTIMONIES ABOUT JESUS

John 5:31–47

Key Verses: 5:39,40

“You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

Have you ever told someone, “You’re just being irrational!” We’d all like to think of ourselves as being logical and rational. But as human experience often tells us, we all can be very irrational. Our fears make us irrational. Our desires make us irrational. And the list goes on and on. But what does it matter? Well, it matters when we’re seeking truth. Our human irrationality obscures the truth from us. Sometimes we’re fearful when the truth is, we have no reason to be fearful. Sometimes we desire something when the truth is, we have no need for it. In today’s passage Jesus is speaking to his Jewish opponents. He wants to help them believe in him. He’s basically saying that in light of so much testimony, it’s very reasonable to believe in him. But they refuse to believe because they’re being irrational. Jesus points out why—it has to do with what’s in their hearts. Today we want to listen carefully to our Lord Jesus and let his word convict us. We especially want to learn what it means to “come to him,” and why we all need to do so. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word.

Look at verse 31. Jesus has just made some incredible statements about himself. Verse 18 says that he claimed to be equal with God. In verse 24 he says he gives eternal life. In verse 26 he adds that he’s the source of life. In verse 27 he says he’s authorized to judge sin. These are things only God can do, so it’s very hard to believe these things about Jesus. Jesus says here that if he’s just making such claims about himself, they wouldn’t be true. So in this passage he mentions other testimonies about him that all say basically the same thing. The language he’s using is like that in a court of law, where witnesses, evidence and testimonies are brought forth to help the court determine the truth of a matter. To know the truth that Jesus is God, we don’t have to just blindly accept it; we just need to look at the evidence.

What evidence? Look at verse 32. Who’s Jesus talking about here? It’s God the Father (37). Jesus mentions various testimonies about him, but ultimately they all come from God the Father. Read verses 33–35. Here he mentions his first earthly witness, John the Baptist. He says he actually didn’t need this human testimony, because he already had God’s (cf. 1Jn5:9). But God sent John as a witness to Jesus, to help us believe so that we can be saved. It’s easier for us to believe something when there’s a reliable human witness we can relate to. And John the Baptist is very reliable. Why? For one reason, it’s because his practical life matched his message. Everyone who examined him knew that John the Baptist was a man of integrity. John was such a man of truth in a dark world that he was like a lamp that burned and gave light, and many went to him to enjoy his light. Jesus says here that John testified to the truth. What truth? John clearly said, “I am not the Messiah” (1:20). And he clearly pointed to Jesus. He said Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). He said Jesus is the one on whom he saw the Holy Spirit come and remain, and that Jesus is the Son of God (1:32–34). John sent the crowds, and even his own disciples, to Jesus. To testify to Jesus, John had to deny himself and make himself nothing. He personally got nothing out of it. So his was very powerful, unselfish, convincing testimony.

Read verse 36. Here’s Jesus’ second witness—the “works” he was doing. As the old saying goes, “Actions speak louder than words.” During his ministry Jesus didn’t just speak well; he did things that only God could do. In chapter 2 he changed water into the best wine. In chapter 4 he healed an official’s son without even being there. In chapter 5 he healed an impossible man who’d been an invalid for 38 years. No one else could ever do such things. These miraculous signs prove that Jesus is God. Jesus did miracles not just to meet our needs, but to show us who he really is. He urges us to believe in him at least based on the facts, the miracles he did (14:11; 15:24).

Read verse 37a. Jesus’ third witness is the Father himself. God the Father is the main witness about Jesus. He’s behind John the Baptist, behind the works Jesus did, and he himself sent Jesus. God the Father is the most reliable witness there could ever be. As we know, most human witnesses are flawed. Many have lied in the past, making their current testimony questionable. Many have selfish motives. Many have dubious characters. But God is none of those things. God is completely reliable because God alone is perfect. God has the most righteous character. God has only pure motives. God always speaks truth. God the Father testifies to us that Jesus is his Son, and that he wants us to believe in him.

After mentioning God the Father’s testimony about him, Jesus goes on to rebuke his opponents. Look at verse 37b. He says they have never heard God’s voice or seen his form. In a sense, he’s speaking literally. God revealed himself to his people down through the centuries in many ways. He delivered them from slavery in Egypt through wonders and miracles. He spoke to them through his servant Moses and through many other prophets. But the people had not heard God’s voice directly, nor had they seen his form in person. Jesus, on the other hand, did hear God’s voice directly and actually saw his form, because he alone came from heaven and was with the Father in the beginning (3:13; 1:1,2). So, he is far greater than any servant of God or prophet who has ever lived.

Jesus goes on to rebuke them further. Read verse 38. Here’s a secret into why people don’t believe. Jesus says God’s word doesn’t “dwell in” them. The Greek word is “menonta,” and it means to live in. We’ve all heard the expression, “In one ear and out the other.” God’s word is meant to remain in us, dwell in us, live in us, stay in us. But how does that happen? It’s not by some miracle—it depends on us. We have to keep thinking about his word, holding to his word. Jesus later rebukes his opponents for having “no room for” his word (8:17). When from day to day we fill our minds and hearts with so many other things, God’s word can’t dwell in us practically. It’s about not the outward things we’re doing; it’s about our inner life. Jesus says the evidence that God’s word doesn’t dwell in them is that they don’t believe in the one God sent. If they’d really been holding onto God’s word, they would’ve been believing in Jesus. It tells us that we’ll really believe in Jesus when we let his word dwell in us. Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the message of Christ dwell in you richly…” We can make room for his word and have it dwell in us richly as we make time to meditate on his word each day.

Jesus goes on to give them an ironic rebuke. Read verses 39,40. His opponents were diligent students of the Bible. Their diligent Bible study would make one think they were prime candidates to believe in Jesus. But actually, just the opposite happened. How on earth did *that* happen? Jesus says they missed the point of the Bible. Wow, they missed the whole point! Have you ever studied really hard but missed the whole point? It’s really embarrassing.

The whole Bible points to Jesus. How so? In one sense, the Bible convicts us of our sin. It shows us how we have a broken relationship with God and how we’re helpless to recover that relationship. It shows us how deceived, how sinful, how incorrigible we are. Without the Bible, we’re not even aware of the depths of our need. In another sense, the Bible shows us God’s great promise to send us the Savior. It was his promise from the beginning (3:15). In the Old Testament there are not only so many prophecies about Jesus, but also so many shadows of Jesus. Joseph in Genesis is a shadow of Jesus. Moses is a shadow of Jesus. Joshua is a shadow of Jesus. David is a shadow of Jesus. If we want to know Jesus, there are so many descriptions of him even in the Old Testament. All these shadows of Jesus are like great promises that show us who Jesus is to us today and how he can help us. Sometimes as Christians we get hung up on morals and ethics and duties. We think Bible study is to show us what we must do and what others must do. Partly that’s true. But really, Bible study is to show us who Jesus is and what he did for all sinners, including us.

Read verse 40 again. Here Jesus says the point of all Bible study is to “come to” him. What does it mean? First of all, it means to realize how much I personally need him. If I don’t think I really need Jesus, I won’t come to him. This speaks to our stubborn self-righteousness and pride. We think we can do it on our own. We think we can make ourselves better. We think that our diligence in Bible study will earn us righteousness with God. We think we’re better than others. But really, in our sin we’re no better than anyone. It’s a delusion. God has to show us how much we need Jesus. It could be through a Scripture passage, through the Holy Spirit convicting us, or even through our own shameful failure.

Secondly, to come to Jesus means to believe in God’s promises to us through him. It means to believe that Jesus can take away my sins. It means to believe that Jesus can change me. It means to believe that Jesus can heal me of my most chronic problems. It means to believe that Jesus can give me life. Each time we study the Bible, we should be careful not to just fill our minds with knowledge or try to teach or impress or fix others, but to personally come to Jesus and really put our faith in him.

Jesus rebukes them further. Read verses 41,42. As was said earlier in John’s Gospel, Jesus knew what was in each person (2:23–25). This was what was hindering them from believing in him. Not only did they **not** have God’s *word* dwelling in them, but also, they didn’t have God’s *love* in their hearts. It means that despite all their strict religious observances and diligent Scripture studies, they didn’t really love God; in their deep hearts they really loved themselves. Self-love may be the biggest hindrance to believing in Jesus. In their self-love they were seeking praise from one another but not really seeking God’s praise. Seeking their own glory made their standards all mixed up (43,44). In the last verses Jesus rebuked them for not really listening to Moses (45–47). They thought they had hope because they were trying hard to keep Moses’ law. They prided themselves on being Moses’ followers. But in fact, they missed the point of what Moses wrote, which was Jesus. Jesus says they didn’t really believe what Moses wrote, so he doesn’t expect them to believe what he says, either.

Today’s passages shows us all the beautiful testimonies about Jesus: John the Baptist, Jesus’ miracles, the Scriptures, and Moses. Put together, they’re so powerful! But in our irrationality, just like his opponents in this passage, we, too, refuse to believe. We may be “doing religion” in various ways, but still refuse to come to Jesus. Why? Because of our self-love, seeking our own glory, seeking praise from others, and mainly, our pride and self-righteousness. It’s hard to hear. But let’s examine our hearts. Let’s let Jesus’ words and his rebukes dwell in us, show us our sin, lead us to repentance and to real faith in him. And when we study the Bible, let’s not miss the point: let’s personally come to Jesus.