



Others Bear Witness About Jesus

John 5:32-47

- 1. John the Baptist (verses 33-35)**
- 2. The Works of Jesus (verse 36)**
- 3. The Father (verses 37-38)**
- 4. The Scriptures (verses 39-47)**

Let me tell you about Josh McDowell. He was born in 1939, which makes him 85 years old. I want to read his testimony for you from his most popular book, “More than a Carpenter,” which has more than 30 million copies that have been printed. The idea of the book is to persuade people that Jesus was “More than a human carpenter who lived long ago.” He is God in the flesh, who came to die for our sins. McDowell writes of his time at the local community college.

I suspect that few people in the universities and colleges of this country were more sincere in trying to find meaning, truth, and purpose to life than I was. I hadn’t found it yet, but I didn’t realize that at first. In and around the university I noticed a small group of people: eight students and two faculty members, and there was something different about their lives. They seemed to know why they believed what they believed.... That’s unusual among university students.

The people I began to notice didn’t just talk about love. They got involved. they seemed to be riding above the circumstances of university life. I appeared that everybody else was under a pile. One important thing I noticed was that they seemed to have a happiness, a state of mind not dependent on circumstances. They appeared to possess an inner, constant source of joy. They were disgustingly happy. They had something I didn’t have.

My new friends challenged me intellectually to examine the claims that Jesus Christ is God’s Son; that taking on human flesh, He lived among

real men and women and died on the cross for the sins of mankind, that He was buried and He arose three days later and could change a person's life in the twentieth century.

I thought this was a farce. In fact, I thought most Christians were walking idiots. I'd met some. ... But these people challenged me over and over. Finally, I accepted their challenge, but I did it out of pride to refute them. But I didn't know there were facts. I didn't know there was evidence that a person could evaluate.

Finally, my mind came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ must have been what he claimed to be. At that time, though, I had quite a problem. My mind told me all this was true but my will was pulling me in another direction. I discovered that becoming a Christian was rather ego-shattering. Jesus Christ made a direct challenge to my will to trust Him. I didn't care if He did walk on water or turn water into wine. I didn't want any party pooper around. I couldn't think of any faster way to ruin a good time. So here was my mind telling me Christianity was true, and my will was somewhere else.

Every time I was around those enthusiastic Christians, the conflict would begin. If you've ever been around happy people when you're miserable, you understand how they can bug you. They would be so happy and I would be so miserable that I'd literally get up and run right out of the student union. It came to the point where I'd go to bed at 10 at night and I wouldn't get to sleep until four in the morning. I knew I had to get it off my mind before I went out of my mind!

On December 19, 1959, at 8:30 p.m. during my second year at the university, I became a Christian.^[1]

McDowell graduated from Wheaton College and Talbot Theological Seminary. In 1963, he joined Campus Crusade for Christ, and has been in ministry ever since. That's more than 60 years of speaking to young people and college students. One website said that he has spoken to more than 46 million people, giving more than 27,000 talks in 139 countries.

Further, he is the author or co-author of more than 150 books. I read to you from his most popular book, "More than a Carpenter." But he wrote a more influential work, entitled, "Evidence that Demands a Verdict." World Magazine called this

book, one of the 20th century's top 40 most influential books. In this book he expands upon the research that he did while investigating the claims of Christianity before he was a Christian. The book has been used in many apologetic classes in Bible Colleges and Seminaries.

The two big books are parred down into the smaller, popular book. The two volumes contain hundreds of pages of evidence for Christianity, that demand our attention. that demand our verdict. The first section of his book contains four chapters focusing upon the trustworthiness of the Bible. The second section of his book contains six chapters focusing upon the truth claims of Jesus, including the trilemma that we talked about last week from C. S. Lewis. Is Jesus a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord of the universe. Josh McDowell succinctly concludes, "If Jesus was not God, then he deserved an Oscar" for his acting ability. The final section of the book contains two chapters that show what God has done through history. His second volume speaks all about textual criticism, and how we got our Bibles.

I mention Josh McDowell and all of this because this is similar to what Jesus is speaking about in our text this morning. He is putting forth proof of who he is. He is putting forth "Evidence that Demands a Verdict." So, if you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bibles to John, chapter 5. If you remember this chapter begins with the story of Jesus healing the lame man, the man who couldn't walk for 38 years. Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk" (John 5: 8). And he did! He got in trouble from the Jews, who told him that it wasn't lawful for him to carry his bed on the Sabbath. But when the Jews found out that it was Jesus who told him to take up his bed and walk, it was Jesus who got into the real trouble.

They began persecuting Jesus. But Jesus said to them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17). In other words, God isn't bound by the Sabbath. And neither, Jesus claims, is he bound by the Sabbath. This really enraged the Jews! "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). Then Jesus (from verses 19-47), speaks to the Jews, essentially presenting his evidence for being equal with God. evidence that demands a verdict.

His talk comes in two parts. The first part is Jesus bearing witness about himself (in verses 19-31). We looked at this last week. In those verses, Jesus made the claim that he was God, saying, "I Do the Work of God" (verses 19-20). Not in the sense that we do the work of God in our ministry to others, but in the sense that I

do what God does. For instance, in verse 21, Jesus said, "I Give Life." Even raising the dead life. Jesus said, "I Will Judge" (verse 22). That is, at the final judgment, we will stand before Jesus. Jesus said, "I Will Receive Honor" (verse 23). That is, the honor that is due to God alone! So, Jesus urged the Jews, saying, "Believe Me!" (verse 24). He said, "I Have Life" (verses 25-26) and "I Will Judge" (verses 27-30).

That was the first half of his message to the Jews, presenting the evidence of who his is. Then, in verse 31, Jesus transitions. He transitions from evidence that he himself gives, to evidence that that others give. Jesus says in verse 31, "If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true." That is, in the court of law, as Moses said, "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15).

So, at this point, Jesus says, "You don't have to just believe me." "I have others who bear witness about me." That's where our text begins, in verse 32, Jesus says,

John 5:32

There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.

And Jesus will proceed to give four more witnesses who will bear witness about Jesus. Thus, the title of my message this morning is this: "Others Bear Witness About Jesus." So let's read our text: John 5:32-47. As I read, listen for those who bear witness to Jesus.

John 5:32-47

Jesus says, There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You

search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have 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. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?

The first witness that Jesus brings to the stand is

1. John the Baptist (verses 33-35)

Jesus tells the Jews how they went out to see John, as he was baptizing people in the Jordan river.

John 5:33

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.

Do you remember the scene in chapter 1 of John's gospel? You can turn back to chapter 1 if you want.

John 1:19-23

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.

John said, "I'm not the Christ!" "I'm the forerunner to the Christ." "I'm the one who will point to the Christ." Do you remember when John pointed to Christ? "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)! John was saying, "Jesus is the one!" "Jesus is the Christ!" "Jesus is the one who will take away our sin!"

Jesus said,

John 5:33

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.

“It’s not just me who say that I am God” (verses 19-31), but that’s what John says as well! Jesus then speaks about John’s testimony in verse 34.

John 5:34

Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

In other words, “I don’t really need John’s testimony.” “But I bring up his testimony for you!” “I refer to John’s testimony for your sake, that you may believe him! that you may believe me! that you may be saved!” In verse 35, Jesus speaks about how the Jews heard what John said.

John 5:35

He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

In other words, “You heard John! You liked what he said! He was shining a lamp on me!” But, the implication here in verse 35 is that they no longer are rejoicing in the light of John’s testimony. But that’s OK, because Jesus had other, greater witnesses. We see this in verse 36, in which Jesus brings up his works.

2. The Works of Jesus (verse 36)

John 5:36

But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

We have already seen some of the works of Jesus. In chapter 2, Jesus turned 150 gallons of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. In chapter 4, Jesus healed the royal official’s son from afar, by simply saying, “Your son will live” (John 4: 50). In chapter 5, Jesus healed the lame man by saying, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk” (John 5:8). At this point in the gospel of John, Jesus said that these works

John 5:36

...bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

Of course, as time would go on, there would be other signs that Jesus would do. In chapter 6 (as we will look at next week), Jesus will feed the 5,000 and then he will walk on water. In chapter 9, Jesus will heal the man born blind. In chapter 11, Jesus will raise Lazarus from the dead. Then, as the book ends, Jesus, himself will rise from the dead!

All of these signs are his works, that bear witness to Jesus. These are only the signs that John tells us about. But, of course, there were others. Do you remember when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night? He said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). At this point in the narrative, Jesus had only done one sign, turning water into wine. But Nicodemus mentions “signs.” Jesus was doing more signs that John recorded.

We see this same thing in John 5:16, when the Jews were persecuting Jesus, “because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.” That implies that he was doing other signs on the Sabbath, although John has just recorded one sign for us. Which, you remember, is sufficient for us! “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31).

We have the signs of the gospel of John. The Jews, who were accusing Jesus, had many more signs that they saw, which bore witness to Jesus. So, as Jesus continues, the Jews had the testimony of 1. John the Baptist (verses 33-35) They saw 2. The Works of Jesus (verse 36), and now, in verse 37. Jesus says,

John 5:37

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me.

Jesus says that they have the witness of

3. The Father (verses 37-38)

The question here is this: how has the Father testified to Jesus at this point? You might easily think about the baptism of Jesus, when Jesus was coming up out of the water, the Father’s voice from heaven boomed out from heaven, “This is my

beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). However, John doesn’t mention that event. I don’t think it’s best to pull from another gospel as the ground for interpreting what John didn’t include in his gospel. Here’s how Jesus continues:

John 5:37-38

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.

This is surprising. When Jesus said that “the Father...has himself borne witness about me.” You would think that Jesus would go on to show the Jews how the Father had indeed borne witness to Jesus. But instead, he says, “But you haven’t heard him or seen him.” The key to understanding this comes in John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." In other words, the witness of the Father is without words and without form, because Jesus is the one who comes and speaks and shows us what the Father is like, Jesus has made the Father known.

In Jesus, the Father speaks. Yet for these Jews, they didn’t hear the Father, they didn’t see the Father, they don’t have the word of the Father abiding in them. Why? Because, “for”

John 5:38

you do not believe the one whom he has sent.

To believe in Jesus is to believe in the Father. To have the words of Jesus abiding in you, is to have the Father’s words abiding in you. These both are the testimony of the Father. That’s why they were persecuting Jesus (John 5:16) and trying to kill him (John 5:18). Because they did not have the Father’s word abiding in them.

You say, “What is ‘The Father’s word’?” Well, it could be the Scriptures, but it could just as easily be the internal testimony that God gives in the heart of every believer.

Jesus speaks about this in John 15, when he speaks about abiding in Jesus. In John 15:7, Jesus speaks about his word abiding in his disciples, those who are believing in Jesus. As these Jews are persecuting Jesus, it shows that they are not believing in him, which means that his word doesn’t abide in them, which is why they are

rejecting the witness of the Father. Now, it wasn't for lack of effort. Look at verse 39.

John 5:39

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,

Here is the fourth witness of the text:

4. The Scriptures (verses 39-47)

Jesus said that along with John the Baptist, his works, and the Father, the Scriptures "bear witness about me." Jesus affirmed the Jews. He said,

John 5:39

You search the Scriptures.

Indeed they did. Today, we are lambasted with reading materials and with media all around us. It's easy that the Bible gets crowded out in our lives, because there is so much else to read and listen to and to watch. Not so the Jews. They had one book: what we call the Old Testament. They had the Talmud, which was a collection of the writings of the Rabbis to help them interpret the Scriptures.

As a result, indeed, they searched the Scriptures. They knew the Scriptures. From their youth, they memorized large portions of the Scripture. In their family life, the Scriptures were read daily. They received much teaching on the Old Testament in their lives in the temple and in their synagogues. I would contend this: they knew the Scriptures better than we do. Jesus commended them for this. He said,

John 5:39

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life;

Jesus affirmed their diligence, but pointed out their error in so doing. They thought that the Scriptures were the source of eternal life. But they were wrong. Jesus said,

John 5:39

...it is they that bear witness about me,

The Jews were diligent about their study of the Bible, but had missed the point of the Scriptures. They pointed to Jesus, but they didn't believe in Jesus. In verse 40 we read,

John 5:40

yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

In other words, it's like thinking that health is in the doctor. But health isn't in the doctor. Health is in the antibiotic that the doctor prescribes. Health is in the surgery that the doctor performs. Health is in following the counsel of the doctor to eat right and exercise. Ultimately, of course, health is in the hand of the Lord. But going to the doctor won't make you well. It's following the counsel of the doctor that will direct you toward health.

So also the Scriptures! The Scriptures aren't able to give life. It's Jesus who can give life. Remember John 5:26, "The Son has life in himself." Remember John 5:21, "The Son gives life to whom he will. The Scriptures point to Jesus. Did you know that you can know the Scriptures and study the Scriptures and have the entire Bible memorized, and still get it wrong? It happens all the time (cults, liberals, legalists). The central message to all the Bible is Jesus, the giver of life. If we miss that, we miss everything. The Jews were missing it. They refused to come to Jesus, that they might have life (verse 40). Instead, they stuck with the Bible.

Consider again why John wrote his gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). John wrote that we might believe in Jesus, that Jesus may give us life. In other words, life isn't in the gospel of John. Life is in the one to whom the gospel of John points. The gospel of John leads us to believe in Jesus, who can give us life. That's the point of our main teaching slide: Believe so that you may live. Yet, the Jews, in all of their diligence and knowledge, refused to believe in Jesus, and refused to come to Jesus.

In our text, Jesus continues,

John 5:41

I do not receive glory from people.

In Jesus' day, Jesus wasn't saying these things because he wanted some large following. Jesus didn't need social status. Jesus wasn't seeking followers in vanity to boost his ego. But he wanted people to come to him, that they might have life. But the sad reality is that the Jews were seeking to kill him. It didn't take much rocket science for Jesus to say what he did in verse 42.

John 5:42

But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.

Their desire to kill the Son was a demonstration of this. Had the love of God been within them, they would have believed in Jesus, they would have received him, they would have come to him for life. Instead, they were seeking to kill the life-giver.

John 5:43-44

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. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

The Jews were a fickle people. They received others. There were plenty of Rabbis in Jesus's day, and many were willingly receiving them and following after them. But when Jesus, the Son of God, came, they didn't receive him because they didn't believe the testimony of the Scriptures. They pointed to Jesus, but the Jews didn't see it. Their fundamental problem is that they didn't really believe the Scriptures. Jesus said,

John 5:45-47

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

What amazing words! They hoped in the words of Moses, but didn't really believe in the words of Moses.

John 5:46

For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.

The Jews would have said that they believe in Moses. There was much about their culture that was centered around Moses, and all that he wrote! The Sabbath laws is exhibit A! They were a culture who shut down on Saturday, seeking and trying to live in accordance with the Sabbath requirements of the Old Testament. Yet, they missed it. They thought that coming to God was about the rules and regulations. They missed the heart.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

They didn't believe Moses. Because, to believe in Moses is to believe in Jesus. This has huge implications for us regarding how we read our Bibles, especially the Old Testament. We must read them Christ-centrally, even the Old Testament. The Old Testament speaks of Jesus and anticipates Jesus. So, in every passage in the Old Testament, we must ask ourselves, where is Jesus? Does the passage prophesy of Jesus? Does the passage speak of what Jesus would be? Does the passage show our human failure? Does the passage give us a future anticipation of something better?

There is the evidence from John the Baptist, from the works of Jesus from the Father from the Scripture. It demands a verdict about the reality of Jesus. It's really as Josh McDowell has said. It's evidence that demands a verdict. I just want to read one more quote from Josh McDowell. He says there are three categories. The trilemma is is Jesus, the Lord, a lunatic, or liar. That's what his Chapter 2 was all about here, picking up that same thing. I think it's a great paradigm for you to think through things. That's what John 5 is about. John 5 is about Jesus presenting his case before the court. Is he lying about these things? I mean, you can say that, like, well, that's not really true. Or maybe he believes, maybe he's just a crazy man. Or maybe he was an actor, I guess. But here he is, is he Lord, lunatic, or liar?

I close with Josh McDowell. After going through lots of reasons and thinking about Jesus. He asks, was Jesus really crazy? Or was he really a liar? What does his character say about things? Is he any of those categories? He says,

I cannot personally conclude that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic. The only other alternative is that he was the Christ, the Son of God, as he claimed.

When I discuss this with most Jewish people, it's interesting how they respond. They usually tell me that Jesus was a moral, upright, religious leader, a good man, or some kind of prophet. I then share with them the claims that Jesus made about himself. And then the material in this chapter on the trilemma (liar, lunatic, or Lord). When I ask if they believe that Jesus was a liar, there is a sharp, "No." Then I ask, "Do you believe he was a lunatic?" The reply is, "Of course not." "Do you believe he is God?" Before I can get a breath in edgewise, is a resounding, "Absolutely not." Yet one has only so many choices.

The issue with these three alternatives is not which is possible, for it is obvious that all three are possible. But rather, the question is "Which is more probable?" Who you decide Jesus Christ is must not be an idle intellectual exercise. You cannot put him on the shelf as a great moral teacher. That is not a valid option. He is either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord and God. You must make a choice. "But," as the Apostle John wrote, "these have been written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and"--more important--"that believing you might have life in His name" (John 20:31).

The evidence is clearly in favor of Jesus as Lord. Some people, however, reject this clear evidence because of moral implications involved. They don't want to face up to the responsibility or implications of calling Him Lord.^[2]

That's exactly what we see with the Gospel of John. They did not want to face up to the responsibility or implications of calling Jesus Lord, so they tried to kill Him.

That's how the Gospel of John ends. The whole point is to present Jesus. He's so hated by the Jews because He was stepping upon their sin, and they did not want to have anything to do with that. But Jesus was not a lunatic. He was not a liar. He is Lord of all. Let's embrace that with all of our hearts, church family.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 10, 2024
by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* (Wheaton: Living Books, 1977), 119-124.

[2] *Ibid.*, 33-34.