

John 5-31-47
The star witnesses!

Prayer for illumination: please join me in prayer....

Sermon introduction:

When Elijah Baptist was convicted of murder for taking the life of Sam Blue outside his Chicago grocery store, it was on the testimony of just one eyewitness. His name was Leo Carter.

Leo was a very credible witness for a few reasons.

First, he had a clean record.

Second, while playing basketball with a friend across the street from the crime scene, he watched Elijah Baptist take the life of a fellow human being. He saw all the events of the murder unfold with his very own eyes.

Third, the murderer tracked the witness (Leo) down and put a bullet into his head, just as he did to the other witness. Fortunately, Leo survived, although he was terribly wounded.

When Leo sat in the courtroom, he looked directly at Elijah Baptist with his scarred face and a missing eye. Then he raised his finger, and slowly said, “that’s him. That is the guy I saw murder so and so and that is the same guy who shot me in the face.”

The testimony of this star witness was enough to secure a quick and guilty verdict. (Lee Stroebel, Case for Christ, 19-20).

The testimony of a star witness often determines the guilt or innocence of the defense.

2000 years earlier there was another court case. Jesus was on trial before the Jews. Why? They claimed that he was guilty of blasphemy for claiming to be God.

To prove that he was God and therefore not guilty of blasphemy, he brings forward four star witnesses.

Maybe you can relate to the Jews. You too wonder if Jesus is really God. Or you wonder, if he is God, why does it matter? There is nothing that matters more!!!

But what is the evidence that he is God? This brings us to the four witnesses.

Let’s examine each witness!

First, the witness of the Baptist! (v. 31-35)

John 5:31 (ESV) — 31 If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

Is Jesus saying that he is lying about his divinity? Of course not. He spoke these words because he recognized that he was in a legal/courtroom context. He knew that in a Jewish court of law at least two or three witnesses were required to corroborate facts. He is not saying that his witness is untrue, he is simply saying that in his specific legal context his solitary witness was insufficient.

John 5:32-34 (ESV) — 32 There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.

The other witness mentioned in verse 32 is the witness of the father... more on this in a moment.

33 You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. **34** Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

The John mentioned in verse 33 is John the Baptist. We learned earlier in the gospel of John that God raised up John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus Christ by preaching fiery sermons in the desert.

John 5:35 (ESV) — 35 He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

Jesus said that John the Baptist was “a burning and shining lamp.”

John the Baptist burned with a passion for the glory of God.
He burned with a passion to see souls won to Christ.
The light of the gospel shined through his preaching.

He was not just another rambling preacher—he had great passion (he was on fire—burning up) and he had great content (he was a shining lamp).

Illustration:

The protestant reformation of the 16th century took root in England because men and woman burned with passion to show forth the light of the gospel.

One thinks of the witness of Bishop Hugh Latimer and his friend Nicholas Ridley. They were both burning and shining lamps in the darkness of England’s state church.

In 1555, they were both accused of heresy for preaching that one is justified by faith alone plus nothing. As a result of their protestant convictions, they were put on trial, accused, and then marched down the streets by armed guards as thousands looked on from the sidewalks (including their families).

They finally stopped next to a huge pile of dry wood in the center of Oxford. They were then tied to a large wooden stake in the middle of the pile of wood. Then a guard lit a match and threw on the wood surrounding Latimer and Ridley.

As the flames burned, Latimer turned to his friend Ridley and said in a loud voice,

“Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God’s grace in England as I trust shall never be put out.” (R. Phillips, 331)

Many of the onlookers were inspired by these martyrs, causing them to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

These men were willing to literally be a burning and shining lamp for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hopefully, known of us will experience a similar fate.

But are we willing to boldly proclaim the gospel, like John the Baptist, and Hugh Latimer, and Nicholas Ridley no matter what it costs?

Application:

Our world is in desperate need of people like John the Baptist who will burn brightly for Jesus Christ, no matter what it costs!!!

What keeps us from being a “burning shining light” for Christ???

- Fear of man?
- Apathy?
- Lack of contact with non-Christians???

Pray with me, that God would give the members of GCF (including me) a burning passion to witness to the light of Christ!!!

John the Baptist boldly witnessed to the deity of Jesus Christ. He is the first witness mentioned by Jesus. There are more...

First, the witness of the Baptist!

Second, the witness of the miracles!

John 5:36 (ESV) — 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.

Jesus says that his testimony is greater than John's testimony. How? Jesus' testimony includes the supernatural works his father gave him to perform to prove his deity. These supernatural works are called signs. The gospel of John is often called the book of signs. There are seven signs pointing to the deity of Christ in the gospel of John.

Jesus transforms water into wine (John 2:1-11), proving that Jesus brings supernatural joy.

Jesus heals an official's son (John 4:46-54), proving that he has power to bring life.

Jesus heals a lame man on the sabbath, (John 5), proving that he has the power to heal our bodies and proving that he is Lord of the sabbath.

Jesus feeds 5000 with a few loaves and fishes (John 6:1-15), proving that he can satisfy our hungry souls.

Jesus walks on water (John 6:16-21), proving that he rules over nature.

Jesus heals the man born blind (John 9:1-41), proving that Jesus provides physical and spiritual sight.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (John 11), proving that he has authority over death.

These miracles are signs designed to help us believe that Jesus is the Christ...

John 20:30–31 (ESV) — 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** 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.

The greatest sign of all was the resurrection, observed by over 500 eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:1-9).

Objection...

Didn't others perform miracles? Yes, but the number of miracles that Christ performed and the types of miracles that Christ performed were specifically designed to prove his deity.

Objection....

Do you really expect us to believe in miracles? It is the 21st century? It is the age of space travel, brain surgeries, and electric cars. Yes! Why? There is incredible evidence for God's existence. If God exists, then miracles are possible. What is the evidence?

The existence of the universe... the vast majority of scientists now believe that before the universe existed there was nothing—no time, no space, and no matter. Therefore, something outside of time, space, and matter must have created time, space, and matter. God is the best candidate.

How about the fine tuning of the universe? There are over 200 finely tuned conditions for life to exist on planet earth, fine tuning requires a fine tuner.

The odds of these conditions existing by chance is **1 out of 10 to the 138th**.

The estimated amount of sub-atomic particles in the universe is **10 to the 80th**. (1 followed by 80 zeroes)

“... the odds against the universe existing are so heart-stoppingly astronomical that the notion that it all “just happened” defies common sense. It would be like tossing a coin and having it come up heads 10 quintillion times in a row. Really?” (Metaxas, WSJ article)

How about the existence of massive amounts of information in DNA? One single celled organism has enough information in its DNA to fill 1000 sets of the Encyclopedia Britannica. We know that organized information/specified complexity only comes from intelligence.

The latest findings from science point us towards God, not away from God. If God exists, then miracles are possible.

Application:

All this to say...

It is very reasonable to believe that the miracles of Jesus actually happened.

If they happened, they witness to his divinity.

But there are more witnesses.

First, the witness of the Baptist.

Second, the witness of the miracles.

Third, the witness of the father!

John 5:37–38 (ESV) — 37 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, **38** and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.

Jesus claimed that his heavenly father has also witnessed to his deity, but they had not heard it. This is most likely a reference to the words of the father at Jesus Christ’s baptism (Matt. 3:17). And it is probably a reference to the audible words of the father spoken at Christ’s transfiguration (John 17:5 or matt 17:5).

Furthermore, Jesus says in verse 38 that the Jews do not have the father’s words abiding in them. The word for “word” in verse 38 is the word Logos. This is often the word used to describe the Scriptures. So, Christ is saying, the father spoke in the Scriptures about me, but you did not believe it.

The father witnesses to Christ’ deity with audible words and the words of Scripture. Which brings us to the last and the most profound witness.

First, the witness of the Baptist.

Second, the witness of the miracles.

Third, the witness of the father.

Fourth, the witness of the Scriptures!

Illustration:

When attorneys arrange witnesses for a court case, they often save their star witness for last.

One author writes,

“Suppose a man is on trial for murderer and the evidence for his conviction is being presented by the district Attorney. The first witness comes forward and demonstrates that the accused had an opportunity to commit the crime... The second witness shows that he had a motive for committing the crime... The third witness proves that the accused had access to the murder weapon. Finally, the fourth witness was an eyewitness of the murder itself and can identify the murderer.” (J. Boice, 2:415)

This seems to be how Jesus arranged his witnesses. He saves his best witness for last. What is his best witness? The witness of the Scriptures, which contains the voice of his father.

John 5:39–40 (ESV) — 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, **40** yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life...

The word Scripture is the word for the OT Scriptures. The Jews diligently searched the OT Scriptures to find eternal life. The verb behind the word “search” (eraunate) connotes a careful inquiry and is a semi-technical rabbinic term for professional exposition of the Word of God. (Osborne)

At the end of verse 39 Jesus says, “it is they (i.e., the Scriptures) that bear witness about me.” In other words, the entire OT points to Jesus!

John 5:45–47 (ESV) — 45 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. **46** For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. **47** But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. Jesus is simply reinforcing what he said in verses 39-40. The entire OT is a witness to Jesus (see also Luke 24:25-27).

How is the entire OT a witness to the deity of Jesus? Let me provide a few brief answers...

Key OT themes witness to Jesus.

For instance...

The kingdom theme - Jesus Christ is the king who dies for his subjects.

The covenant theme- Jesus Christ is the only one who truly keeps covenant.

The presence theme- Jesus Christ brings us into God’s holy presence by dying on the cross.

The rest and sabbath theme- Jesus Christ brings us true and lasting rest from our efforts to earn salvation.

The justice theme- Jesus Christ satisfied God’s justice on the cross by dying in our place.

The righteousness and nakedness theme- Jesus Christ covers our nakedness with his robes of righteousness.

Key OT characters witness to Jesus.

Tim Keller writes,

“Jesus is the true and better Adam who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed to us (1 Cor. 15).”

“Jesus is the true and better Abel, who, though innocently slain, has blood that cries out for our acquittal, not our condemnation (Hebrews 12:24).”

“Jesus is the true and better Abraham, who answered the call of God to leave the comfortable and familiar and go out into the void ‘not knowing whither he went’ to create a new people of God.”

“Jesus is the true and better Moses, who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant (Hebrews 3).”

“Jesus is the true and better David, whose victory becomes his people’s victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.” (Keller, 77-78, Preaching)

In addition...

Key OT images witness to Jesus.

The entire **sacrificial system** points us to Jesus the true and perfect sacrifice.

The **temple** points us to Jesus Christ the true temple who is not only the place where God meets with man, but he is also the perfect sacrifice.

The **sabbath and the year of jubilee** point us to Jesus Christ who provides us with true rest.

Jesus is the **bread on the altar** (John 6)

Jesus is the **light stand in the holy place** (John 8)

Jesus is the **Passover lamb** (1 Cor. 5:7)

In addition...

Key OT prophecies witness to Jesus.

One scholar writes,

“There are **191** predictions in the OT about the coming of Christ, including his ancestry, the city in which he would be born, that he would be born of a virgin, precisely the time in history when he would die, and so on.” (Stroebel, 131)

These prophecies are very specific. How specific?

1000 years before Christ, **Psalms 22:16-18** says that his hands and feet would be pierced, that his bones would be out of socket, and that others would cast lots for his clothing.

500 years before Christ, **Zech. 12:10** says that Jesus would be pierced with a lance.

700 years before Christ, **Isa. 53:2-12** specifically describes twelve distinct aspects of Christ’s suffering on the cross.

The specificity of the prophecies is astounding; they describe where Jesus would be born, how he would be betrayed, how he would specifically die, plus many other things.

Peter Kreeft, the prominent Boston College philosopher, wrote,

“If you calculate the probability of any one person fulfilling, sheerly by chance, all of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled, it would be as astronomical as winning the lottery every day for a century. Even if Jesus deliberately tried to fulfill the prophecies, no mere man could have the power to arrange the time, place, events, and circumstances of His birth or events after His death.”

(Reflections on the Existence of God, Simmons, 223-224)

Application:

The OT Scripture clearly witnesses to the deity of Jesus Christ.

This raises a few important questions.

Why didn't the Jews come to Jesus? They did not want to come!!!

John 5:39–40 (ESV) — 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, **40** yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life...

Jesus is saying, “The Scriptures clearly point to me, yet you refuse to come to me.”

The Jews did not see Jesus in the OT, because they did not want to see Jesus in the OT. They had tons of evidence from the Scriptures for his claims, but they did not want to believe.

A lack of evidence is rarely the issue!!!

Maybe this describes you this morning. There is a massive amount of evidence for the claims of Christianity, but you don't want to see it.

Why? Because if Jesus is God, he must be followed. Following Jesus means that we can't follow the impulses of our wicked hearts. Following Jesus, means that we need to make some serious changes.

The issue is not a lack of evidence. The issue is the sinful human heart.

What is holding you back? Is it really the lack of evidence??? Probably not!

But why wouldn't you come to Jesus? He is the one who brings eternal life.

Next question...

How do we find Jesus in the OT?

We must pray... and... we must

Simply ask these two questions-

What does this text reveal about Humanity's need for a savior?

What does this text reveal about God's gracious disposition to provide a savior?

Next question....

What is the primary purpose of the Bible?

Is the Bible primarily a history of God's dealings with humanity? No.

Is the Bible primarily an explanation of doctrine? No.

Is the Bible primarily a rule book? No.

What is the primary purpose of the Bible? The primary purpose of the Bible is to point us to Jesus Christ.

The Bible's primary message is not spelled do...

The Bible's primary message is spelled done... explain...

This means the Bible's primary hero is Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

Jesus put forward four witnesses to prove his deity! We have even more witnesses today.

We have the evidence of billions of changed lives.

We have the evidence of all the good that Christianity has done throughout world history. In the superb book titled *Jesus Skeptic* the author argues that Christianity has been by far the greatest source of good in world history.

We have the evidence of modern science pointing us towards the God of the Bible.

We have the evidence of the resurrection pointing us to the deity of Jesus.

The evidence for Christianity's truthfulness is overwhelming. How will you respond to all the witnesses? Your response will determine where you spend all eternity. Let's pray...