



Text: John 5:30-47<sup>1</sup>

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 15 ... *Judging Jesus the Judge OR Witnesses for the Defence*

Date: January 23, 2011

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

One of the aspects of the Christian faith that I appreciate the most is that Jesus invites our questions.

A few months ago I was talking with someone who had quite a few questions about Jesus and the Christian faith. They asked their questions and I attempted to answer them as well as I could. Afterward this person remarked on how surprised they were to find that asking questions about Jesus was OK. I would say, not only is it OK, but even more than OK, Jesus invites our questions. Jesus says to us: “Check me out. Ask your questions. Do your research. Examine my claims.” Jesus is convinced that fair minded examination of the evidence will lead us to believe in Him.

In the passage we’re about to read from John’s Gospel Jesus presents his defence for his claim that he is equal with God the Father and he invites us to weigh the evidence and make our decision about whether or not we believe him. Jesus had made a bold declaration when he said...

**“My Father is working until now, and I am working.” John 5:17**

That statement might not seem all that earth shaking to us today, but Jesus’ contemporaries knew exactly what he was claiming. John explains for us the response of Jesus’ hearers...

**“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because ... he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”  
John 5:18**

Last week we saw that Jesus claimed equality with God in at least three ways. First of all,

***Jesus claimed equality with God in all His work***

**“whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” John 5:19**

Second...

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***Jesus claimed equality with God in giving life***

**“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.” John 5:21**

And thirdly,

***Jesus claimed equality with God in judging humanity***

**“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.” John 5:22-23**

But Jesus didn't just “claim” equality with the Father, he offered a defense of his claim and that's what we're about to read. As we read Jesus' defense I want you to take notice of the “courtroom” language that Jesus uses. Notice the frequency of words such as: “witness,” “testimony,” “judge,” “judgement,” “truth,” “accuse,” and “just.” And secondly, I want you to notice the way in which Jesus shifts from offering a defense for his claims to cross-examining his accusers. He shifts from the defense table to the role of prosecutor. Look for that.

I'm reading John's Gospel, chapter five, verses thirty to forty seven. This is God's Word, not just because Jesus is speaking in this passage, but because this Gospel is part of God's holy, inspired and authoritative Word. Let's hear it with due reverence and respond to it with living faith. Jesus said...

**<sup>30</sup> “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. <sup>31</sup> If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. <sup>32</sup> There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. <sup>33</sup> You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. <sup>34</sup> Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. <sup>35</sup> He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, <sup>38</sup> and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. <sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. <sup>41</sup> I do not receive glory from people. <sup>42</sup> But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> How can you believe, when you receive glory from one**



**another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? <sup>45</sup> 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. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"**

Before launching into his defense, Jesus establishes some basic ground rules for the trial. First of all, he establishes the rule of evidence. Jesus said...

**"If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true."  
John 5:31**

Jesus is not saying that his claim to equality with the Father isn't true. What he's referring to is the Old Testament standard for establishing a case before a court. The Old Testament law declared...

**"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**

Jesus is declaring his willingness to let his claim to equality with the Father be established before the court of public opinion on the basis of proper witnesses and, in fact, **he brings three witnesses** before us in his defense.

Secondly, Jesus establishes that the primary issue before the court of opinion is not what he thinks about himself or what public opinion thinks of him. Jesus said...

**"There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true." John 5:32**

Jesus is referring to the witness of the Father to him. In fact, it's the Father who stands behind every witness that Jesus brings before the court. The central question before the court is this:

***What does the Father think of Jesus' claim to equality?***

Let me just stop here and move sideways for a second or two.

The central question in all of life is: **What does the Father think of me?** God is the centre of all things. He's the reference point for everything and the most important question to answer isn't, "who do I think I am?" but rather, "who does God think I am?" Jesus is modeling something for us here. He's demonstrating the way we should all be determining our true identity and the question we must ask is: "what does God say of me?"



God says that we were created in his image for a relationship with Him. But we rejected that relationship and we became broken rebels with hearts and lives turned against him. But he pursued us with an everlasting love and sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Saviour. John opens his Gospel, his story of Jesus, God's Son our Saviour, with this wonderful word of hope from our Father to we who by nature are rebels against him and who by nature reject him ...

**“But to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12-13**

Who are we? Who does the Father say we are? The Father says that we are either rebels against him **or** we are his children through faith in Jesus Christ. So, let me ask you: **what does the Father think of you?**

Let me bring that question to our study of Jesus this morning: What does the Father think of Jesus? Jesus brings three witnesses before us, all of whom are really expressions of the Father's view of Jesus.

**First** of all...

***We see what the Father thinks of Jesus...  
In the witness He sent before Him***

**“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.” John 5:33-35**

The first witness Jesus calls is John the Baptist. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets and as a prophet he was God's messenger to his people. The Gospel opens with a word about John the Baptist...

**“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.” John 1:6-7**

The important thing to notice is that John the Baptist was sent by God to be a witness to Jesus Christ. He was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus coming. John's message about Jesus was the message that the Father gave him to declare. As a prophet, John was obligated to speak only what God told him to say.

One day Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized in the River Jordan. As Jesus approached him, John heard God speak to him. John didn't know who Jesus was. He said...



**“I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” John 1:33**

As John was baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan, the Spirit of God came down upon Jesus as he came up out of the water and John testified...

**“I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” John 1:33-34**

John the Baptist was a spiritual superstar. He was held in the highest of regard by the religious leaders of the day. They knew he was a man of God. In fact, Jesus said of John that there was none greater born of woman. The religious leaders were excited by John’s message that the Lord was coming to his people and as Jesus said, they “rejoiced for a while in his light.” But although John declared that Jesus was “the Son of God” the religious leaders turned a deaf ear to him.

Jesus knew the respect they held for John and Jesus appeals to them to listen again to the voice of the Father in the words of his prophet John. John was just “a man” sent by God, but he was a man who was faithful to God to the death. Even though he was just a man John spoke the truth about Jesus and Jesus pleads with them, “Although what people think about me isn’t important,” Jesus said,

**“I say these things so that you may be saved.” John 5:34**

Get this picture clear in your minds: Jesus is pleading for the salvation of people who want to kill him! And Jesus does this right to the very end. As he hangs on the cross he prays...

**“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34**

Jesus keeps appealing and often he uses people, people like you and me. He uses our human witness to Jesus to call people to salvation. And wonder of wonders, sometimes they listen as Jesus calls to them through us and they believe in Him. I love the old definition of evangelism as “**one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.**”

**Secondly...**

***We see what the Father thinks of Jesus...  
In the works He gave to Him***



Jesus calls his “works” to the stand as witness to his claim of equality with the Father. John’s testimony about Jesus was true, but John was just a “man.” Jesus said...

**“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.” John 5:36**

John selectively lists only about seven of Jesus’ “works” in this Gospel. You’ll find many more in the other Gospels but these “works” beg the question: ***Who is this?***

**Who can turn water into wine? (2:1–11)**

**Who can heal a sick boy from over twenty miles away? (4:43–54)**

**Who can heal a man paralyzed for thirty eight years with just a word? (5:1–15)**

**Who can feed over 5000 people with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 small fish? (6:1–14)**

**Who can walk on the water? (6:16–21)**

**Who can make a blind man see? (9:1–41)**

And more than all this...

**Who can bring a dead man back to life? (11:1–44)**

And the greatest work of all...

**Who can rise from the dead after three days in the grave? (20:1-28)**

Nicodemus understood the message of all these “works” that the Father did through Jesus. 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**

And Jesus said of his own works...

**“If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” John 10:37-38**

Jesus invites us to check out his works and especially to examine the claim of his disciples that he rose from the dead.



How do you explain the empty tomb? One lawyer in the United States set out to debunk the resurrection of Jesus and to publish a book to expose the fraud of the resurrection. But as he examined the New Testament evidence he came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the first chapter of the book he eventually wrote was entitled, "The Book That Refused to Be Written." Frank Morison's "Who Moved the Stone?" is still a classic defense of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the book itself is a testimony to the integrity of a man who examined the evidence of Jesus' works and simply followed the evidence where it led.

And now for Jesus' **third** witness...

***We see what the Father thinks of Jesus...  
In the Word that He spoke about Him***

Jesus calls the Father's own documentary evidence to the bar. Jesus said...

**"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." John 5:37-40**

The Old Testament is full of testimony to Jesus. The Old Testament of the Bible points to the New Testament story of Jesus. During his teaching ministry Jesus declared...

**"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Matthew 5:17**

And after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and instructed them from the Old Testament...

**"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Luke 24:27**

Already in John's Gospel we've seen Jesus connect his ministry to writings of Moses. Let me give you just a couple of examples of the Old Testament connection.

In the Book of Numbers, Moses wrote the story of how God saved his people from a painful judgment against their sin. As a judgment against their sin God had sent poisonous snakes into the camp of Israel. But then he commanded Moses to make a bronze snake, put it on a poll and raise it up.



**“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ Numbers 21:8**

Jesus saw in that story a picture of his coming death on the cross. Jesus said...

**“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3:14-15**

In John chapter four, we saw Jesus talking with a woman at a well in Samaria and miraculously revealing to her her entire marital history. She was astounded! “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet,” (4:19) she said to him. His knowledge and insight amazed her.

**“The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” John 4:25**

What that woman was referring to was the promise God had made through Moses that one day he was going to send another prophet, like Moses but great than Moses, to speak his Word to his people. Moses wrote...

**“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— ...I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” Deuteronomy 18:15, 18**

That woman in Samaria made the Old Testament connection with Jesus. She began to realize that she was standing in the presence of fulfilled prophecy and just as that idea began to form in her mind, Jesus confirmed it to her...

**“Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he.’” John 4:26**

There are many other Old Testament prophecies of the coming of Messiah, the Christ. Jesus challenges his opponents: “Check out what God has said about me! See if I fit the description! Evaluate my claims!”

Louis Lapidés was raised in a conservative Jewish home. One day he was challenged by a street evangelist to consider the prophecies about the coming of Messiah. The man gave him a Bible. Lapidés refused to read the New Testament but the preacher’s response took him aback. “Fine,” the man said. “Just read the Old Testament and ask the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the God of Israel – to show you if Jesus is the Messiah.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 177



Eventually Lapidés would read over four dozen Old Testament prophecies about Messiah. “Isaiah revealed the manner of the Messiah’s birth (of a virgin); Micah pinpointed the place of his birth (Bethlehem); Genesis and Jeremiah specified his ancestry (a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the tribe of Judah, the house of David); the Psalms foretold his betrayal, his accusation by false witnesses, his manner of death (pierced in the hands and feet, although crucifixion hadn’t been invented yet), and his resurrection (he would not decay but would ascend on high); and on and on. Each one chipped away at Lapidés’ skepticism until he was finally willing to take a drastic step.”<sup>3</sup>

... he opened the New Testament! And on the first page of the New Testament, in the first verse of the New Testament he read...

**“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Matthew 1:1**

Lapidés thought: “Wow! Son of Abraham, son of David – it was all fitting together.” He couldn’t stop reading and saw prophecy after prophecy of the Messiah fulfilled in the story of Jesus, eventually coming to faith in Jesus. He checked out the Father’s Word about Messiah and saw the Jesus fit.

What are the chances of that? Someone did the math on that question and found that the chance of someone fulfilling just eight of the Old Testament prophecies about Messiah was “one chance in one hundred million billion.”<sup>4</sup> To grasp the immensity of that number picture in your mind a pile of silver dollars covering the state of Texas to a depth of two feet. Somewhere in that pile is one dollar that has been marked. Reach in and put it out! The chance of you doing that is “one in one hundred million billion.” In other words, there is no chance. Jesus fulfilled over forty Old Testament prophecies about Messiah.

**“what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.” Acts 3:18**

In summary, Jesus presents his opponents with three witnesses who support his claim to equality with the Father.

- John the Baptist, a man they held in high esteem, had declared that he was “the Son of God.” (John 1:34)
- The works that Jesus performed begged the question of who could do such things. Nicodemus confessed that no one could do these things unless God was with him. (John 3:2)
- Finally, their own Bible, the Old Testament, pointed to Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy.

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<sup>3</sup> Strobel, p. 179

<sup>4</sup> Strobel, p. 183



But they “refuse to come to” (v.40) Jesus! Why?

It’s at this point that Jesus switches roles. He moves from the role of defendant making his case, to the role of prosecutor on the attack and he puts his finger on the central reason for their rejection...

**“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” John 5:44**

Evidence isn’t the issue. There is plenty of good evidence to support Jesus’ claim that he is “the Christ, the Son of God.” (John 20:31) But Jesus is able to see into the human heart. He said to his opponents...

**“But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.” John 5:42**

This is at least the fifth time in this Gospel that we’ve encountered this supernatural ability of Jesus to see the inner working of humanity. He knew that the root of their refusal to come to him was a deep-seated pride. As Leon Morris put it: “The issue is the glory of the self or the glory of God. It is an issue that divides men still.”<sup>5</sup>

Kent Hughes analyzed the situation well. He wrote...

*Self-glorification will keep us from the truth, and in fact any moral deficiency is capable of doing so. Finding the truth is as much a matter of the heart as of the mind. A man may say, “I’ve read the Bible, and I want to believe it, but I just can’t.” But further conversation reveals he is having an affair or is short-changing his boss or is fudging on his income tax return. He cannot believe when he is in that state. Nor can the woman who comes and says, “I’ve been reading my Bible for years and I cannot believe it,” but she has an unforgiving spirit. The Lord’s Prayer says we are to forgive as we have been forgiven and that an unforgiving person is an unforgiven person. So when we come to the Scriptures, there must be a yielding of our lives, a focus not on self but on God. Then we will be able to hear what the Scriptures have to say to us. Learning from the Scriptures depends on the motive and morality with which we come to them.*<sup>6</sup>

When we come to a study of Jesus claims there are only two things that are needed: intellectual honesty and moral honesty. And sadly, it’s often a lack of the latter that short circuits our investigation. Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli addressed the question of why people don’t come to Christ despite the compelling strength of the arguments for faith in Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *John*, p. 334

<sup>6</sup>R. Kent Hughes, *John : That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999), 173.



*“The reluctance,” they wrote, “is usually moral. To admit that Jesus is divine is to admit his absolute authority over your life, including your private life... We are all addicts to something – to selfishness, at least. That is the meaning of sin, the very disease Jesus came to cure. Of course the cancer is going to fear the surgeon. That is exactly what you would expect. That is not a reason to disbelieve the surgeon’s claim to be the specialist. ... The old self is no fool. It sees that Christ has come to kill it. It knows that Christianity is not a harmless theory, but something alive and dangerous.”<sup>7</sup>*

Let me bring this message today home in a couple of ways.

First of all, let me ask: if you have not accepted Jesus’ claim to be “the Christ, the Son of God,” **have you examined the evidence?** Have you studied his life and teaching? Do you know what he said and what he did? If you would like some resources to help you evaluate Jesus claims let me recommend one book, along side the Bible.

**Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan, 1998)**

Second, let me ask a harder question: if you have studied the claims of Christ and have not accepted them, **is there something else that is keeping you from coming to Christ?** Perhaps it’s the fear of what your family or friends might think; maybe it’s the realization that your life is going to have to change; possibly it’s the refusal to surrender the control of your life to anyone, including God. Recognize that those reasons do not disprove Jesus’ claim; they are only excuses for why you won’t acknowledge him as Lord.

Third, let me ask a hard question of those of us who have accepted Jesus’ claim to be “the Son of God”: **Is our faith in Jesus something that is “alive and dangerous”?** Has Jesus got our “old self” on the run? Is Jesus active in our lives or have we settled into the kind of dead ritual the kept Jesus’ opponents locked in religion and separated from God’s life and love?

**Brothers and sisters, my prayer for my life and for this church is this...**

**Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ,**

**“Let the glory of Your name be the passion of the church.  
Let the righteousness of God be a holy flame that burns.  
Let the saving love of Christ be the measure of our lives.  
We believe You’re all to us.”<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p. 172-173

<sup>8</sup> Chris Tomlin, Jesse Reeves, Matt Redman & Matt Maher, “All To Us,” © 2010 Worshiptogether.com Songs



- **Final Song:** We Believe
- **Benediction**