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Message: Witness for Christ

Transcribed Message
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John 5:30-37

When sin first entered into the world, probably captured in the words of Lucifer, I will be like the Most High God, I would suggest from that point forward, the greatest battle in the heart of every fallen person is, in fact, the sin of pride. And I think that sin of pride manifests itself in two very specific ways: with the words, “I will”, and the words, “I want”. Someone has rightfully said, the words, “I will”, is the sin of pride in which we lift up ourselves. And the sin of “I want” is the sin of the weak who are looking for the praise of others. So, I think, interestingly, Jesus speaks to both of those. The sin of the proud and the sin of the strong, who says, I want to lift up myself, and the sin of the weak, which says, I want other people to praise me. And Jesus deals with both. So let's look at John 5, and we look at it for the last time, verses 30 through 47, and yes, we can do this. That's more verses than normal, but watch, we're going to make this happen, right? Our big idea this morning is, along those lines, at the root of all sin is to live for the glory and praise of others instead of living to please and glorify God.

A very quick just snapshot, again, of the gospel of John, the uniqueness of the gospel of John. Remember when we introduced the study, we talked about the synoptic gospels, which are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The synoptics just means the same and similar. So you have often found, as you read through Matthew, Mark, and Luke, that you hear a lot of repetition, because there's a lot of things that they share that are very similar. Well, John is the unique one. John is the different one. He's not a part of the synoptic. And one of the ways that John does that is in his perspective, his perspective of the life of our Lord. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, I think you could argue that they're going to present Jesus as the man and then really bring out this idea that He is God. And so they're kind of pointing upward in that sense. Here they give us the narrative stories of the birth and some of the early things in the life of our Lord. It's really an earthward, almost, center to the fact that this man is God. John does the opposite of that. John takes us from a heavenly perspective, and that's why he begins his gospel – In the beginning

was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the same was in the beginning. He was God, right? So, John gives us this directive, almost, as it were, heaven towards earth. This God became a man.

And then just the simplicity of John's gospel, the clarity with which John—now I'm not saying that there isn't simplicity in the other gospels, but it's John's gospel that we have these reminders of just how John sets some of these truths forth so clearly, so simply. He's the one who says to Nicodemus, you've got to be born again. Very simple, straightforward reality, right? John 3:16. The woman at the well. Living water and you'll never thirst again. All these memorable, very simple, clear statements. And all of this does what? It all points to the claims of Christ for who He is.

Let's look at that this morning. Jesus's claims are true. We begin in verse 30 with just simply the need for the witness to the Son. Verse 30 is often viewed as something of a transitional verse, and you'll understand why in just a moment. But look at what verse 30 says, 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. Some people see this 30th verse as being the ending portion of the previous section. Some people see it as the first verse of the coming section. So, we just kind of say it's both of those in a sense. It's a transitional verse.

Verses 16 through 29, Jesus says whatever He has done or will do is on behalf of the Father. And in that section, remember that great discourse on His relationship to the Father. He keeps pointing to His relationship to the Father. Look back again at that 19th verse in the 5th chapter when Jesus says, truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. Then verse 30, 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.

There could be no mistaking that Jesus is claiming equality with the Father. He's claiming to be one with the Father. Now He's basically in this closing section of the 5th chapter, He's going to call forward the witnesses to that truth. And as we'll see, most significant, of course, is the witness of the Father. I look at this, and it's almost like this is an accommodation on Jesus's part towards those that He was speaking these words to.

Verses 31 and 32, if I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that He bears about me is true. Now, that's an amazing thing for the Son of God to say. Just look at those verses and realize who's saying them. It's startling that Jesus is the one who says this. Verse 31, when He says, if I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. He's talking about the inadequacy of self-testimony. He's not saying that His testimony is not factually true or accurate. He's saying that self-testimony is not admissible under the law. Deuteronomy 19:15 says that you have to have more than one witness. You can't just say, I did or didn't do that. No, you have to corroborate that with other witnesses, right? And so, that's what He's saying here. There has to be two or three witnesses. He'll say the same thing when we get to the 8th chapter. So, it's a matter of admissibility, not a matter of truthfulness, not a matter of accuracy.

Verse 32, there is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that He bears about me is true. This is the adequacy of the Father's testimony. Now, that's game, set, match right there, isn't it? He's calling for, after having just said, I can't offer self-testimony, but I have somebody who I can call, and I can call my Heavenly Father. I can call the Sovereign Lord over all, right? I can call on Him. I mean, just think, in every trial, in every deposition, in any legal situation, what does the prosecution want and what does the defense want? They both want a star witness, don't they? They both want somebody who's going to step forward and just slam the door on the whole case, and I think that's exactly what Jesus is doing here. He's basically saying, this is it. I'm calling for not my testimony, which I understand under the law, even though I'm the Son of God, and I'm operating under that law, is inadmissible. I think, you know, the immediate application to us is simply to say, here is Jesus's declaration of who and what He lives His life for, and He lives His life for the Father. He's here on behalf of the Father. That's what He said in this whole discourse. He's just laying out how His life is lived to the glory of the Father.

We've said so many times, I know you know it by now, but Psalm 40 and verse 8, Jesus's life verse, I've come to do your will. That's the whole purpose of His life. That should be the whole purpose of our life. That should answer every question any time it comes up. Who is it

that we are living for, and who is it that we're serving? It is, in fact, to live in a way that pleases and glorifies the Father.

I did a funeral for a guy years and years and years ago. I didn't look back to see when it was. I did not know the man. It was a situation where someone in the community, as I remember, reached out and asked if I would be involved in this service. Since my calendar allowed for it, I said, yes, I would, because it's always an opportunity to share the gospel. So even though I didn't know this guy, didn't know his family, we're at the funeral home, and before I'm going to get up and share the gospel, the song that's queued up, and it is a part of the order of the service, is Frank Sinatra singing, "I Did It My Way". It took all the work of the Holy Spirit to suppress within me, beginning the whole point in saying, if he did it his way, it ain't a good way, because he ain't in a good place, because if that's the way you're living your life, that's a bad outcome. Here Jesus puts it right before us and says, this is the way we are to live life.

Look at the presentation then of the witnesses. So, Jesus, in effect, is going to call four witnesses, and I think behind all these witnesses, we're to understand is, of course, the work of the Father. The first one is John the Baptist, verses 33 to 35. What they heard in verse 33 from John's ministry, you sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Now, what is it that John said? Well, let me remind you, back in the first chapter in verse 6, 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. He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light. That was John, wasn't it? John called for repentance. John called the nation to look to Jesus, the one who is the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world. John is the one who said, he must increase, I must decrease. That was John's message.

Jesus, in effect, says, I don't need the witness of John, but you do. You need the witness. I don't need the witness of John, but you need the witness of John, and what did John say to you? Everything that John was saying was pointing to me, and so that's what they were to have heard, right? He's the light of the world. He's the Lamb of God. Listen to him. He's the sent one. He's the Messiah, and then how did they respond? Look at verse 34 or 35. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

Now, you look at that 35th verse, two times Jesus speaks of something in the past tense. Both of those things, he says, he has. He was a burning and shining lamp, and this is what he was doing. So, I think at this point, John is either in prison or John is dead. So, Jesus is looking back, and he's saying, this is how you responded to John. There was a time when everybody was going out to the wilderness. Going out to the wilderness to hear this oddly dressed man with some kind of quirky behavior, and they were drawn to him. They were listening to him, and everybody was. Jerusalem was abuzz. Judea was abuzz with who is this John guy out there in the wilderness. They were all going out there, and it kind of reminds me of fads that take place even within the Christian circles in which we all kind of jump on something, and all follow something, and all give attention to something for a while, and then it kind of passes off, doesn't it? Jesus says of John that he was a burning and shining lamp. A good picture, a good reminder, isn't it, of what we are to be, and I just, again, I look at this, and I think we just pause, and we say, here is the Holy Spirit saying to us, be mindful when you engage the Word of God. Whether you're reading it, whether you're listening to it, whether it's being taught, be mindful that as you hear the Word of God, that you have an open heart to receive it, that you have a spirit that is engaged in the truth that God is presenting to you.

There's a real danger here. That's a part of this story. There's a real danger here that Jesus is pointing out that these people listened to John. He had an incredible message. He was pointing to the Messiah. He was pointing them to Jesus. They went after him for a while because it was the popular thing to do, but they never engaged and submitted to the truth of the Word of God, and we can do that regularly. We can read our Bible, and we can listen to it, and we can hear somebody teach it, and we can talk about it, and then that's all it does. We need to take heed. It can be a dangerous thing to regularly listen, read, hear the Word of God, and not respond because the writer of Hebrews says something happens that's very bad when we do that. Our heart becomes harder to the truth of God's Word, so we don't want that.

Now, look, the witness of Jesus' works is second, verse 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. So, here's the witness of Jesus' works. John, I would point out to you, used only words. As far as we know, in

none of the Gospels is it recorded that John ever did miracles, that John ever performed signs. He may have. The Bible just doesn't record it, and if it doesn't record it, then it's certainly open to speculation that perhaps he did not. The fact what Jesus is saying here is that point being that John did ministry through words. Jesus comes, and He does ministry through words and signs and miracles. Jesus is pointing out this difference. The "greatness" that Jesus talks about is not a "greatness" in truthfulness. It's not a "greatness" in authenticity of the message or the messenger, because John is a man of God. He's a man who has been sent from God, right? Verse 6. So, it's not that.

It's that Jesus is making this distinction. John came, and He preached, and He preached in power, and you really didn't listen very well. I have come, and I am using words, but I'm not just using words. I'm putting before you signs and wonders and miracles, and those works and those signs and those miracles were in fact a fulfillment of specific Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah. Isaiah 35 says that when the Messiah comes, the lame will walk.

How did this whole chapter start off? It started off with Jesus coming to a man who hadn't walked for 38 years, and He looks at him and says, just pick up your pallet and walk, and the man did. What was that? That was a sign pointing to who Jesus is. It was a part of the words and works of our Lord. The Old Testament prophets said when the Messiah comes, the blind will see. We'll get into that in chapter 8, right? The deaf will hear. Those who can't speak will speak. The lame will walk. Every one of those was like a flashing sign saying, this is the one. This is the Messiah. This is the sent one. Jesus is who He says that He is.

When Bonnie and I were gone a month ago, we went up to South Dakota. By the way, I always love to go to South Dakota, because in South Dakota, the name Tschetter is actually known. People know how to say it, and they even know how to spell it. It's kind of an amazing thing, because when you open the phone book, which they don't have phone books, but back in the day when you would open a phone book in South Dakota, almost any town had a Tschetter. Everywhere we've lived, we've been the only one, it seems like, for most of that time.

So, we're up there in part of God's country, just north of God's country, and we're going towards the Badlands and Black Hills and Mount Rushmore. And you know what's up there – that famous drug store, Wald Drug. In Wald, South Dakota, is the largest drug store in the world

– 80,000 square feet. It's a whole block long. But the point of it is as you drive to Wald Drug from any direction, there's signage that starts. I kind of wanted to try to remember when did the signs start, but they start like a hundred miles away. The closer you get, the signage just becomes more intense, so that you could never drive on any highway or any interstate anywhere near Wald Drug and not know Wald Drug was coming. That's the whole point that Jesus is making about the words and the works that He's doing. Everything is pointing from the Old Testament prophecies to the fact that this man is who He says He is. He is the Son of God.

The third witness is kind of a parenthesis, because it takes us back to the witness of the Father, verses 37 and 38. Look at verse 37, Jesus speaks again of this relationship that He has with the Father. And the Father who sent Me has Himself borne witness about Me. His voice you have never heard, His form you have never seen. Just another relational reminder. Jesus will not let us forget that God is one, but He's three in one, and He keeps coming back and pointing us to this beautiful, unique, mysterious relationship between He and the Father, and just causing us to contemplate and think about who our God is and how He has revealed Himself to us.

We saw back in verse 26 last Sunday that this matter of the eternal generation of the Son, that the Son has always been the Son. The Father has always been the Father. It's the Father who sends the Son. It's the Son who, in obedience to the Father, comes and fulfills this incredible mission of redemption and salvation. The Son bears witness about the Father. Jesus will say later, you have seen Me, you've seen the Father. That's an amazing and remarkable thing, isn't it?

I think when you look at that 37th verse, what Jesus is pointing out is the distinction you haven't seen. He said, you haven't heard Moses. You haven't heard God's voice, but Moses has, right? Moses heard the voice of God. These guys hadn't heard the voice of God. Jacob wrestled with God. What was almost certainly a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus comes, and He wrestles with Jacob, right? And I think that's the point here. You have never seen His form. You have never seen that. I think He's talking about Jacob wrestling in that sense, just as Moses heard the voice of God. They had not. He's just reminding them of this witness as to who He is.

Now, there's another indictment in verse 38. And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom He has sent. Can you say, ouch? Look at what Jesus says here. You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom He has sent. We live, I think it's fair to say, in a fairly soft time. People want to be treated in a certain way. And I'm not against treating people, obviously, with kindness and love and respect. But we are so consumed with personal space and personal safety, and you're making me feel uncomfortable. Do you think these guys might have raised their hand at this point and said, Jesus, you're kind of making me feel uncomfortable with these words. Could you not speak so harshly? Yeah, they probably were.

But consider this. Consider this. Jesus in His earthly experience was rejected more than He was welcomed. Isn't that amazing? We process, we think about rejection, and it's hard. I'm not suggesting that we should love rejection, but Jesus interacted with people, and the majority of people that He reached out to rejected Him. Jesus never soft-pedaled the truth either, did He? And He just put it out there.

This first use in that 38th verse of abide, we're going to see that a lot later in the Gospel of John. The word "abide" simply means to be at home with. You do not have His Word abiding in you. You don't know the Father. You don't even know the Son. I mean, these are hard things, aren't they? Another reminder, the danger of hearing truth and not responding and believing. That's, I think, again, part of Jesus's point.

Now, the final witness is really the witness of Scripture. The witness of Scripture in verses 39 through 47, and it begins with the presence of the truth. In verses 39 and 40, 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. Here is a pointed word again from our Lord. Right actions, yes, but wrong motives. Right actions, wrong motives. The point is relevant to us today, right? We can go through all the right motions. We can fall into this very same pattern, especially in this matter of wanting to receive the praise of other people, which is where we started in this section. Wanting to receive the praise of others.

Remember the woman at the well? She thought she was worshiping in the right way, and she wasn't. She wanted to in some sense worship, but she had it wrong. She was engaged

in an activity, but her motivation and her understanding of worship, Jesus had to correct that, didn't He? Here's what I want you to understand. These guys, these religious leaders, they loved the Bible. They were Bible people. We probably, collectively, would say the same thing. We love the Bible. We're Bible people, right? That's probably what we would like to be known as, and that's who they were. They loved to read it, and they loved to study it, and they loved to memorize it.

The Scriptures that Jesus speaks of here is the word *graphe*, writings. Obviously, it's the Old Testament Scriptures. They had the Old Testament Scriptures. They loved the Old Testament Scriptures. They searched them. Jesus says, look what He said, you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. Well, in a sense, they do reveal the way to eternal life, but Jesus's point is, you're so caught up in your right actions that you're missing the forest for the trees. You're consumed in giving yourself over to the study of the Bible, thinking that studying the Bible and reading the Bible is how you are, in fact, going to gain eternal life, which is just to say you think you're going to work your way there. It's true. The Bible reveals how to have eternal life, but what they missed was the way that that was available.

Here's what they would do. They were so devoted to the Torah. They were so devoted to the Old Testament Scriptures that they would number all the verses off, and they would number the words in those verses, and they would number the letters of the words in the Bible, and they would probably share that in a small group Bible study. Did you know that there are 3,762 letters in this passage that we're looking at tonight and impress each other with how much they knew and yet missed the whole point? Do you realize Rabbi Hillel, one of the established, well-loved rabbis said one who has acquired for himself the words of the law has gained for himself life in the world to come. Just store it up here, and you gain eternal life. Well, Jesus is basically saying, no, the actions are right. Your motivation is all wrong.

I don't know what's happening in Israel in this regard now with everything that's been going on, but when Bonnie and I went there early on in 2008, you could walk close to the Western Wall. Well, the Western Wall is believed to be one of the places as closest to the Temple Mount that you could ever get to the Temple of Solomon, and so it's a very holy place.

They have excavated next to this area, and as you walk through this excavated area, they have allowed you to look down into this little area close to the wall. There are all these Orthodox Jewish men standing and walking and reading the law, and they're all clothed in their garb, and they're there hour after hour after hour, day after day after day. This is John 5. They think that in them you have eternal life, and all the while miss who this book is pointing to. And so, Jesus is simply saying, you're doing some of the right things, but you've got your motivation all wrong.

Now the reason, look at verse 40. We thought we had a hard word before. It's hard hearts. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. Jesus says people don't believe because they don't want to believe. People don't believe because they don't want to. I mean, have we heard something like that before? Well, yeah, we have back in the third chapter and in verse 19. Jesus said to them, and this is the judgment, the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. What does Romans 1 say? The evidence and the testimony that there is a God is all around you every day.

I just read an article last night about some new discovery from so far out into outer space. These scientists are talking about things that they didn't even know existed. There's some kind of signal that's being sent back in that they've recently picked up and they're sure that this is again another evidence of the origins of our universe that took place billions and billions and billions and billions of years ago. And the heavens declared the glory of God and the earth shows forth its handiwork and day after day and night after night it declares that there's a God and they don't see him. Dr. Johnson used to say God has to wiggle our willer to get us to come, to understand, to believe, to receive. The scriptures ultimately point to Jesus.

Look at this last point, the rejection of the truth, verse 41 through 47. Its cause is in verse 41. 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. That's probably a coming vision of the many Antichrists and maybe even the Antichrist himself, but at least it's an indication of the gullibility, the willingness

to believe the witness of others, right? How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Plain and simple, they're seeking the praise of each other. They're seeking the praise of man. They're not interested, they're not consumed with, they're not passionate about the glory of God and the truth of God. The fallen heart enjoys few things more than the approval of others. The fallen heart, mine probably just like yours, is inclined toward and enjoys few things more than the praise and approval of others.

Just think of the self-congratulatory culture that we live in. Think of how social media has exacerbated and lifted up this inherent sinful tendency that we all have I'm just asking for a friend. How much of social media is just driven by people desiring approval from others? What? Maybe like 99%? No, I'm kidding. I don't know, but it's certainly indicative again, isn't it, of the narcissism of our culture and of our society and Jesus is pushing back against that.

Its consequence, verse 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. 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? I mean, here is great irony, right? They're lifting up Moses. They love Moses. They want to talk about Moses. They want to quote Moses. They read Moses and Jesus says, you know what? There's coming a day. I'm not going to be the one accusing you, but Moses is. Because Moses is going to say, I was giving testimony to you all along that this is, in fact, the Christ. These will one day stand accused, and Moses will be the accuser.

It takes me right to Luke 24, Jesus walking on the Emmaus path with the two discouraged, oppressed disciples. And remember, he opened to them the Scriptures. Well, the Old Testament Scriptures. He opened to them the Scriptures and he showed them, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, all the things concerning him that had been testified about him. Jesus is the central figure of the Old Testament. You can just name any Old Testament book and there's something in that book that points us to Jesus as the Messiah. At the root of all sin is to live for the glory and praise of others instead of living to, in fact, give glory and praise to our Heavenly Father.

What do we take away? We each have to decide. We each have to decide whose approval really matters. Are you more concerned about what people think of you or what God thinks? Because only one ultimately matters. And that approval that we're seeking ultimately, in some respect, determines our eternal destiny. Because it is only as we have the approval of God the Father, through God the Son and what he has done for us on the cross, that we can have our sins forgiven, that we can be made a new person in Christ. If anyone is in Christ, they're a new creation. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things become new. We offer you this morning the approval that only matters.

That approval is that of the Father, that of the Son, that of the Holy Spirit, that we would be in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That comes about when we recognize that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That we can't, on our own effort and initiative, earn our way to heaven. But it is only as we understand the gift of grace that God gives to us when we believe and trust in Christ alone. That God puts his stamp of approval on us in the righteousness, that his righteousness requires him to require, and the righteousness that is found in Christ.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we are forever grateful that we get to lift up your name, that we get to declare your greatness. We get to do so because of what Jesus has done for us. Lord, we want to step further and deeper into this amazing truth of who we are in Christ, of what it is that God has done for us in his Son. This amazing place of approval and adoption into your family, your family forever. We thank you for that. In Jesus's name, amen.