

Faith On Trial

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[0 : 00] Well, if you'll turn with me to, well, I'll keep your Bibles open, John chapter 5, and we're going to read from verse 30.

So we're just skipping out the section that we looked at last week for the sake of time, where Jesus explains in more detail what it means for him to be equal with God as the Son of God.

And now he defends that claim. So let's read from John chapter 5 from verse 30. It 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.

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. You sent John, and he is born witness to the truth.

Father, 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.

[1 : 04] 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 born 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 on to the Father.

[2 : 04] 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? Well, I do not know how you feel about flying.

Just this past week I was away at a preaching conference on the mainland, and I flew back on Friday. And often when I am on a plane, I think about how amazing it is that planes actually fly.

They are not like a balloon, they are heavier than air. The wings are just held on with a few rivets and bolts. And if something goes wrong, it is not like you can calmly file out the emergency exit out the door.

You will be unsurprised to know that whenever I am flying with Helen, my wife, and I turn to her in my seat and tell her these things, she reminds me that I have a very bad inside voice, and that I should be quiet, otherwise I will upset the rest of the passengers.

[3 : 06] But I do not know how you feel about flying. You might be terrified at the very thought, and actually me talking about all of that has just convinced you that you never want to get on a plane at all anyway.

Or maybe you are willing to fly, it is a necessity, but the whole time you are on the plane you just grip the seat with white knuckles. Or maybe you love flying, maybe you love airplane food like me, bizarrely, and it is one of the best parts of any holiday.

How you feel about getting on the plane will probably be closely related to how confident you are that it is a good idea and that it is safe. And you know it is a bit like that with Jesus.

In this room and listening online will be a whole range of people. Some of you will have never got on the plane if I can put it that way. You might be thinking about Jesus for the first time, you might have grown up in a Christian home, you might have heard the Gospel a hundred times, and you have thought, I do not want anything to do with it.

Or maybe you are interested, maybe you even wish that you could believe, but you are terrified.

Then there will be those who have got on the plane as it were, who are trusting in Jesus.

[4 : 15] But like passengers there will be a whole range. There will be those who go through this life or who feel like they are going through this life with white knuckles clutching the seat as every bit of turbulence makes them wonder if they have made the right decision.

And there will be others who from time to time maybe feel like this is the best thing and I am having the ride of my life. Most of us will probably find ourselves oscillating, moving somewhere in between.

And you see when it comes to Jesus, we need the same thing as the person who is flying. We need confidence. We need to be sure that following Him is a good idea.

And that might be confidence to start following Him for the first time. That might be confidence that we have made the right decision, confidence to keep believing, to keep going on following Jesus.

The great thing is that Jesus wants us to have confidence too. Jesus doesn't ask us to blindly jump on board the Christian life. He gives us evidence so that we can trust that the plane is safe, that it is the right decision.

[5 : 20] And John's whole account of Jesus' life is a book of evidence if you like for Jesus' life. He ends the book saying these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

That you may believe, in other words, know that you can trust, that you can be sure that Jesus is the Son of God. It's evidence so that we can believe and keep believing.

And John chapter five that we just read is one of the places as it were when the evidence gets presented before the jury, where we as readers are asked to examine the evidence and to think for ourselves.

Chapter five began with Jesus healing the lame man on the Sabbath and pretty soon the tensions boiled up and Jesus claimed that he can do the work of God because he is God.

Now it's as if Jesus is on trial. Jesus has explained in detail what it means for him to be God. We heard that last week when Thomas was preaching. But now he's defending, or now it seems as if he's defending his claims to be God.

[6 : 28] Jesus is on trial. You might even say the Christian faith is on trial because it all stands on false on who Jesus is. And so outcome the witnesses.

Can we really be confident about Jesus? Let's see. So first point then, the voice of the witnesses.

And the first witness that Jesus calls is John the Baptist.

I don't know if you can see if the verses are on the screen behind me. But if you can see verse 33, Jesus calls John the Baptist to the witness stand.

He says, you sent to John and he has born witness to the truth. I don't know whether you remember John. If you've been listening since the start of our series in John's Gospel, John was God's messenger.

We met him right at the beginning in John chapter one. You might want to turn back even. But John the Baptist was sent from God as a witness to tell everyone about who Jesus was.

[7 : 27] And that's exactly what he did. As the drama unfolds, every time John is asked about what he's doing, he says, I'm not a big deal. I'm not the Christ.

I'm just like the heralds proclaim me the coming of the King. I'm just like the spotlight that shines on what we need to see. When Jesus comes on the scene in John chapter one, verse 29, he says, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John's entire life mission was to be a witness. He was born on the witness stand. You might even say his entire purpose was to be pointing to Jesus and saying, this is the Son of God.

You can be sure that this is the Son of God. And Jesus tells us in chapter five that he's telling us these witnesses. He's telling us about John's witness.

Not because Jesus has got some kind of fragile ego. Not because Jesus is unsure about who he is. But Jesus says, not the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you might be saved.

[8 : 30] In other words, Jesus is laying out these witnesses in some ways, not to defend himself, but so that we can be sure of who he is. It's not like me claiming to have run, I don't know, 5K in 15 minutes.

And I say, ask Thomas because I'm afraid that you're going to think I'm a liar because I totally can't do that. Jesus telling us so that we, for our sake, so that we might believe.

He's completely confident. He knows that he's the Son of God. He just wants us to be sure as well. So that's the first testimony, the witness of John the Baptist. But second witness Jesus calls is the work of the Son.

Now Jesus' works are a big theme in John's gospel, but now he's referring, he's referring back to asking us to examine everything that he's done.

Let me read again. Let me read again from verse 36. He says, 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'm doing bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

[9 : 39] So Jesus has done lots of works throughout John's gospel. And John actually says that he could include lots more things, but he's only chosen, had to be very selective. He's chosen a few things to record so that we might believe.

And John's gospel, if you track through it, the things he, he includes, sorry, he decides to include seven signs, seven big major works that Jesus does that point towards who he is.

You might think of those road signs that looks like it as a guy kind of digging in a pile of dirt or that maybe some people say looks like someone opening an umbrella. That's a sign that means man at work.

Well, Jesus' works, Jesus', the things that Jesus does are like road signs that say God at work. We should see what he does and recognize that's only something that God can do.

This is a sign that says God is at work. So for example, earlier on in chapter five, Jesus has described what the work of God is. He says in 5:21, for the Father raises the dead and gives them life.

[10 : 45] In other words, it's one of the big things that God does is gives life. No one else can do that. But life, giving life is peppered throughout John's gospel.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus is the one who gives life. So at the end of chapter four, the official son, someone's son has died. What does Jesus say?

He says, your son shall live and he does. This lame man you might even say is as good as dead. 38 years he's been paralyzed. And Jesus puts him on his feet just with a word, take up your mat. Later on in the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus will proclaim that I am the bread of life. Later on he'll raise Lazarus from the dead, who's been dead for three days.

And most climactically, of course, Jesus himself will rise from the dead. All of Jesus' works through John's gospel, through all the gospels, are like signposts that say, God is at work.

[11 : 44] This is the life giver. This is the son of God. So that's the second witness we've seen, the witness of John, the witness of Jesus' works. But not only does Jesus give that as those, not only do we have the works of the son, but we also have the word of the father.

That's the third witness that Jesus calls to the stand. Verse 37, Jesus says, the father himself has borne witness about me. Well, how has the father borne witness about Jesus?

Now Jesus could be speaking about his baptism where God spoke from heaven and said, this is my son whom I love, with whom I am well pleased. However, John doesn't actually record, John doesn't choose to record that event in his gospel.

And so it's not clear, it's not clear that actually this will be the event he's talking about, especially because he doesn't say this is one of the signs. It's more likely that Jesus is referring to how the father bears witness about him through all of scripture, because that's what he then goes on to talk about.

So at the end of verse 39, I don't know whether you can even see that writing, if it's too small on the top of the screen. Jesus says that in the scriptures, they bear witness about me.

[12 : 58] Same phrase, bearing witness. By the scriptures, Jesus means everything that we have in the Old Testament. At that time, the New Testament had been written, and so people had the history books, the law, the prophets, the Psalms, the wisdom literature.

And amazingly, Jesus doesn't just pick a few verses. He doesn't just pick a few passages and say, these bits are talking about me. Rather, he's making this general statement that all scripture bears

witness about him.

And it's really worth us kind of sitting up to hear this, because Jesus is essentially giving us the key to understanding the whole Old Testament and by extension the New.

You can't understand the Bible without Jesus, in other words. Let me just illustrate what I mean. I don't know much about art at all. Some of you have done art degrees and just like paintings more than I do.

But the few times I have been in art galleries, I always found the big crucifixion pictures interesting, maybe because they were big and I understood what was happening.

[14:03] They weren't abstract. But anyway, you have these big frescoes, these big canvases that detail that are illustrations of Jesus on the cross.

And central to all of these, obviously, is the person of Jesus. You have other characters there. You might have Mary weeping. You have the soldiers drawing lots of Jesus' clothes.

You might have the centurion looking on at Jesus or the disciples running away. But central to all of these pictures is Jesus. And you could whitewash him out. You could even just cut it away, which is essentially what these religious leaders were doing.

They were trying to get Jesus out of the Bible. But it will still be obvious that something was missing. It would be an interesting scene. You might learn a lot. You might learn something about what kind of armor the Romans wore.

But you'd be missing the point of it. You wouldn't be able to understand the picture without what's going on in the center. Without Jesus, the picture's not complete.

[15:06] And the same is true for the grand narrative of the Bible. While not every single sentence, while not every single word, is talking about Jesus, he is the focal point of this whole story.

It's a story of redemption that we have all across these pages. We could spend ages talking about the way the acts of God's acts of rescue, like the Exodus point to Jesus, how the heart of God expressed in his law is seen supremely in Jesus, in his person, in his character, how all the kings, both the good kings and the bad in the Bible, all point to the greater king, Jesus.

Everything is kind of converging on one point. Everything can only be understood through Jesus. So Jesus is quite correct to say all the scriptures bear witness about me. They only make sense with Jesus.

But Jesus isn't just giving us a lesson how to read the Old Testament. We're rather saying that this is God at the witness stand. When we read the Old Testament, God is speaking for hundreds of years saying, this is my son.

Listen to him. This is the Son of God. So do we want to be sure about who Jesus is? Do we want to have confidence of who Jesus is?

[16:21] Well, in some ways, Jesus says, pick up his word. Listen to the witness of God through the pages, through the ages. And we need confidence, don't we?

Some of you, many of us will have grown up in Christian homes. And you might be thinking, does my parents' faith, does my grandparents' faith actually have any grounding? Does the faith of those who I've looked up to years and years, does that actually make any sense or is it all just based on a myth?

Let me just say, if it is a myth and Jesus isn't God, then run. There is no point in wasting your time with Christianity if Jesus isn't God. There's absolutely no point.

You'd be the biggest fool for devoting your life to Jesus if he's just a man. But if Jesus is God, you'd be the biggest fool for walking away.

And the only thing more foolish than walking away from the truth would be never examining the evidence in the first place. So can I encourage you, if you've never read the Bible, if you've never looked at, as an adult, looked at one of the gospel accounts, to examine it and ask for yourself, is Jesus really the Son of God, as he claims?

[17:36] Whether that's for, whether you've grown up hearing the stories of the Bible or whether it's for the first time, maybe you're listening online and this is the first time you've ever thought about Christianity, can I encourage you to look at the gospel and to ask, is Jesus who he says he is?

Many of you though are following Jesus and we need to go over the evidence as well. You might have been a Christian for years, even decades, but we can feel tired of living as a Christian.

We can all sometimes wonder, is this really worth it? Is what I'm pouring my life into worth all this time and energy? Maybe your heart's just been shaken by all the turbulence of life, by all the pain in

this world.

We need to feel sure about it. Maybe you've wondered, can I really be sure of all this that I've been building my life on? We need our Savior's reminder in many ways that the evidence is there, that all the witnesses speak with one voice.

We need to be encouraged to look through and hear God speaking through the ages. The God who said to Eve that one of her descendants would crush the serpent's head, that he has come.

[18 : 49] That's Jesus Christ. That he promised to Abraham that from his offspring, that he would make a great nation from Abraham and that one of his offspring would once more gather God's people together.

That's Jesus. The God who promised to David that one of his great, great, great, great grandsons would be the eternal King. That's Jesus. God's testimony speaks all the way through the ages.

We can look at God's Word. We can look at Jesus and we can have confidence in who he is. He's not just someone who appeared randomly 2,000 years ago.

The whole Bible is building up to him. Look at who Jesus is. Look at his life. Jesus says, look at my works. The blind have sight.

The lame walk. The dead are rising. We see Jesus' works continuing today. This room is full of people who have been brought from death to life because of Jesus' Word, who have been transformed by Jesus' work.

[19 : 54] They're living and breathing evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, that he can do what he says he is. In many ways, you might say belief is the only wise response to this kind of witness.

I think we can have confidence as well as we bring the message of Christ to people that actually God's Word is powerful, that actually what we have here isn't just a myth.

The Scripture is ridiculed. People say you can't trust it. Well, we can have confidence. I'm happy to talk with you, as I said with the children's talk, about whether we can believe it, whether there's really evidence, whether this is actually a reliable historical document.

We can have confidence to read God's Word with people, to point people to Christ in his Word because of the evidence that we have here.

I'd say the witness is irrefutable, but that doesn't mean that everyone will believe. The question that we're going to examine in our second point is what does Jesus think about that?

[20 : 57] What's the verdict of the Son? You see, Jesus mentions people's unbelief numerous times in this passage. You'll notice I've highlighted it on the paragraph up there, verse 38, Jesus tells those who are listening.

He says you do not believe. He says you refuse to come to me. He says you do not receive me. Of course, we know that because earlier on in that passage, the religious leaders have been planning to kill Jesus.

But why? Why don't people believe in Jesus? I wonder if you ever asked that question. It's the question that comes from the very beginning in chapter one of Good John.

Why when Jesus comes to his own people, do his own people not believe? You might widen that question. If Jesus really does have such a powerful witness, then why don't all the smart people in this world believe?

Why did my friends, professors, stand up in their class and ridicule Christians from the fun to the class? Why do all the people who are maybe expert historians and Bible scholars question and even rubbish Jesus' claims?

[22 : 06] Is it that there's insufficient witness? Are they wise? And am I just a gullible fool you might be thinking? Well, throughout this passage, Jesus has not only laid out the evidence, but he's also given his verdict on those who ignore the evidence.

He says unbelief isn't wisdom. It's folly. Jesus says that people don't believe because of a lack of witness, but because they don't listen. They're witnesses again.

So take John the Baptist in verse 35. Jesus says that the religious leaders saw him as a burning and shining lamp and he says you're willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

However, the problem is that that's all that they did. They looked at the lamp, but they didn't look at where the lamp was shining. They were happy. They were enthusiastic that John talking about the Messiah had kind of built up the religious tempo and they were in the middle of it and they loved it. But when Jesus came on the scene, the one who John was pointing to, they refused to look. In some ways, it's just pure folly.

[23 : 15] They were like someone who maybe goes to lose Castle at night and they spend three hours looking and examining and taking photos of the spotlights and they completely ignore where the spotlights are pointing.

That's what they did with John's witness. They looked at the signpost, they refused to look where he was pointing. Likewise with Jesus' works, in chapter 5, they completely ignore the healing of the man.

Do you notice? Jesus heals a man who was an invalid for 38 years. You'd think that they'd be talking about that. You'd think that they'd be quite excited about that. They'd wonder how Jesus could do that, but what did they do?

They just want to kill Jesus. It's not simply that the evidences are there. It's that they've rejected it altogether. They've rejected the Messiah and His gift of life.

In fact, as the strength of the witnesses increases, so does the condemnation for rejecting it. When Jesus speaks about the Father's Word in Scripture, Malekwadi says, in verse 37, The Father who has 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.

[24 : 26] 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, but it is they that bear witness about me.

Some of the religious leaders, like the Pharisees, would have memorized the entirety of the Old Testament. They would have known it back to front from birth, and they would have revered the law of Moses.

Moses says, you can know it off by heart, you can be familiar with the gospel, you can be familiar with Christianity, and you can still completely miss who's at the center of the picture. Jesus' condemnation ramps up because they would have loved the law of Moses.

Moses was like their hero. If they had had cartoons, Moses would have been like one of the Avengers. But Jesus says their folly is, Jesus exposes the true folly of what they're doing when he says, Moses is the one that's going to stand up and condemn you.

Because Moses was the one, in verse 45 and 46, Moses was the one who was speaking about me. Really their folly is like a boy who gets a note from a girl that says, I don't know, meet me at this beach, at this time, and what the boy does is kind of he takes pictures of the note and he smells the scent of this girl that he fancies, and then he doesn't go.

[25 : 49] You might know the note really well, but he doesn't go where the note's telling him to. The religious leaders were just like this. They just completely missed where all of these witnesses were pointing, and they refused to go to Jesus, and it's folly.

And there are people who will devote their entire careers to studying the Bible. There are people who are fluent in the biblical languages, who will write commentaries, sometimes even quite helpful commentaries to understand the Bible, but they refuse to come to Jesus.

And when the question, we might wonder why? What are they, have they, have they kind of, has Jesus' witness fallen apart under their cross examination?

As they look at the resurrection, have they suddenly found something that I haven't? Has their expert analysis meant that the evidence has fallen apart?

Jesus says no, it's not lack of evidence, it's lack of listening. The passage began looking like Jesus was on trial, didn't it?

[26 : 54] However, as it goes on, it becomes clear that it's not Jesus who's on trial, but it's us. The witnesses that Jesus calls don't just testify that he is the Son of God, they also testify against Jesus' opponents, against anyone who doesn't believe.

You see, it's very easy to come to the Bible, to come to Jesus, and to put him on the trial. To put him in the dock, and to question, and to ask, well, what am I going to make of him?

See us, Lewis, in one of his essays, he warns us of the, perhaps the folly of that. He says the real question is not what are we to make of Christ, but what is he to make of us?

He says to act otherwise is folly, it's like a fly sitting on an elephant's head trying to decide what he's going to make of the elephant. All the while, it's not God in the dock, but those who oppose him.

So let me ask you, what does God make of you? You ever ask that question? What does God make of you? I know some of you haven't believed in Jesus yet, but you probably wouldn't call him yourself opponents though, would you?

[28 : 03] Jesus doesn't make that distinction though, does he? Everyone in this passage who doesn't listen to Jesus is described as rejecting Jesus. Just look at verses 38, for example, he says, you do not have God's word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent, or verse 42, he says, I know that you do not have the love of God within you.

I have come in my father's name and you did not receive me. Jesus is very black and white. If you do not listen to the witnesses, if you do not believe that Jesus is the son of God, he says, then you've rejected him and you've rejected God.

However, Jesus has come that we might believe. He's called up these witnesses for our benefit. And if you believe that Jesus is the son of God, if you receive him, then you have life.

You can turn verses 38 and 39, at then 42 around. You could say if you have believed on the one whom he has sent, if you have believed in Jesus, you do have God's word abiding in you.

You do have the father's love in you. There can be lots of misunderstanding about what makes someone a question, but it's great that Jesus is so clear.

[29 : 21] In verse 40, in verse 24 that we started off with, Jesus says, truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

What makes someone a question? They've heard the witnesses and in response, they believe that Jesus is the son of God and they have eternal life.

Jesus says it's as simple as that. Like passengers on the airplane, there's going to be some of us who believed and we're still holding on with right knuckles and we're still not really sure about some things.

We still might not really trust that this airplane works, but you're still on the plane. If you believed in Jesus, you're still on the plane.

You still received him. You still have life. Jesus has given us evidence so that we can believe for the first time, but also so that we can grow in confidence in our belief.

[30 : 19] God doesn't ask us to go through this question life with white knuckles gripping the seats. He wants us to have confidence that Jesus is the son of God.

One day God will give his verdict on each one of us, but the wonderful promise is still in verse 24 that if we believe in Jesus, then this is God's verdict.

He says, whoever hears my word and believes him has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. So take heart, have confidence.

Let's pray. Amen.