

God the Father's Testimony about Christ

John 5:1-39

The Gospel of John Sermon Series

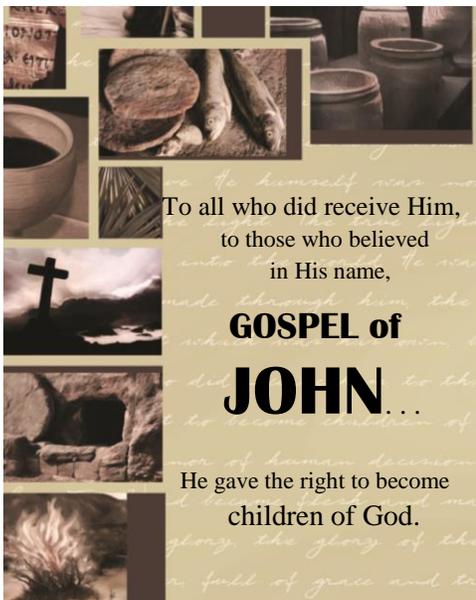
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

March 16, 2014

TEXT: John 5:1-39

We continue this morning in our series on the Gospel of John. We're listening to a series of testimonies about the Person of Jesus. We heard John's own testimony that in the beginning



was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. We heard John the Baptist's testimony pointing to the sin-bearing Lamb who takes away the sin of the world; that He must increase, and I must decrease. We heard Mary's testimony at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, to do whatever He tells you to do. We heard Nicodemus' testimony in a late-night conversation with Jesus, where he learned that God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son to die so that all who believe in Him might live. Last Sunday, we heard the testimony of a woman from Samaria who discovered at high noon that Jesus was in fact the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. We're praying throughout this series for two large things: We're praying for conversion, for people to come to believe that Jesus is this saving Son for

the very first time. We've seen God working in answering these prayers. For all who have already become converted, we're praying for a second thing, and that is for new life, for if you know Jesus Christ, then the power of Christ in your life begins to generate new patterns of living. You'll find yourself speaking things you would never have spoken before, making decisions unlike those you made before knowing Him. So, continue to pray with me for conversions and new life in our midst.

We've heard this set of testimonies, and yet this morning we turn to a higher register, not just another human testimony, but in John 5, we are in fact privileged to hear the testimony of God Himself. God Himself enters the narrative of John 5 and swears a testimony to the truth about His Son, that Jesus is no ordinary man, but the very Son of God.

Rudolph Schnackenburg, a German writer says about this passage:

“This section is one of the most profound in the whole Gospel. Jesus’ calling Himself the Son is explained in the light of His relationship with the Father in a way that is fundamental to the whole discourse and our understanding of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. The Son carries out the function that is God’s alone, namely, to give life in all its depth and fullness and in this way makes God’s concern for mankind visible. Jesus Christ is therefore God’s unique, ultimate, historical, and eschatological revelation in the world. His coming to reveal God in history has made it possible for man to move from the sphere of death into that of life and to achieve His true existence.”

This revelation of Jesus the Son of God fits well with John's great purposes. In John 20:31 he tells us:

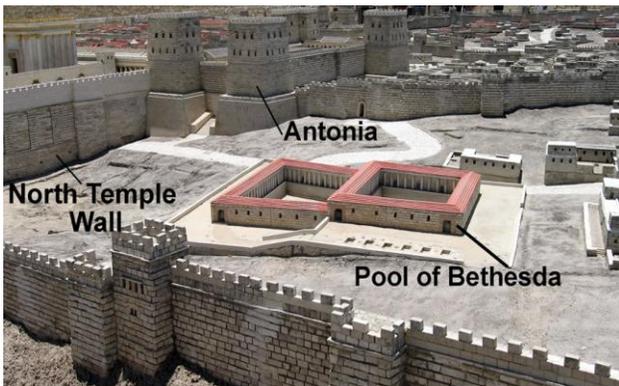
“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

That’s conversion. Our passage this morning unfolds in three stages: It begins with Jesus’ performing a sign of healing at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath; this sign prompts a discourse, a teaching of Jesus, where He claims to be this unique Son of God; and finally, God the Father comes, bringing in divine attestation to the identity of His Son.

Let's look at John 5:2 in which we learn:

“Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.”

We bring the word Bethesda over into English from the Greek word, and it means *a house of mercy or loving-kindness*, a place where the steadfast love of God and His covenant mercy is



Pool of Bethesda today

experienced. Bethesda is a place where you go for refuge, for healing, for restoration, and it is a name that is frequently chosen for

other structures where people can go for healing and restoration, such as a hospital. The pool of Bethesda is a known site just north of the temple mount. It was surrounded by five covered colonnaded structures formed around two pools of water. The smaller pool was 120' x 150'. The colonnaded structures were sunk down into 25 feet of bedrock, and the pools were filled with rainwater from the Kidron Valley and an underground spring that still flows in this area

today. This is a place where you can actually go and stand where a great work, a sign of Jesus, had taken place. There were a number of people there with disabilities and illnesses, and there was one man who had been there for 38 years. Jesus encounters the man, and in John 5:8 Jesus speaks to him and says:

"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

Just like in the miracle of turning the water into wine, Jesus speaks, He is obeyed, and things happen. Jesus tells the man to get up, pick up His mat and walk, and so the man does. It's a sign, a revelation of Jesus' power and glory. John tells us in John 5:9:

"At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath."

The religious leaders spoke to the man who had been healed and reminded him in John 5:10:

"It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

The Sabbath is a slice of eternity in the present time; it is something very serious and sacred to God; it is a gift from God to His people. In Exodus 20, the Sabbath is given to us as a model of God the Creator who worked six days in making the earth and then sets aside a day for worship. In Deuteronomy 5, the keeping of the Sabbath is linked to the deliverance from Egypt, from the house of slavery, and so we have one day off. It is a blessing to have a day off for worship and rest. Slaves never have a day off. I know people today in our city who never have a day off; they work continuously. The Sabbath is a gift, time off for worship. Man is not made to toil on the Sabbath, but is given true freedom and the opportunity to praise God.

This Man, however, appears to be working on the Sabbath, and in the first century, there was great intellectual energy spent on how exactly you keep from breaking the Sabbath. A very important idea is that you cannot take objects from one domain to another domain; you cannot lift a load and carry it from your house to your neighbor's house, for that is working on the Sabbath. One way around this is that you can lift up, for example, a bag of flour from inside your house and your neighbor can reach inside your house and take that. You can stretch your hand out and have it in your hand, and your neighbor can then take the object, and in that way, neither of you is actually completing the transfer. It's a small piece of legal fiction, but in a sense necessary to keep the world going. There is great effort spent to define how far you can go. It's a high-stakes matter because in the prophetic books of Scripture, failing to keep the Sabbath is one of the great reasons why Israel was driven into exile.

The Jews see the man carrying His mat on the Sabbath and tell him that is not allowed by the law. Then they ask this man in John 5:12:

"Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

The man could only reply: "I don't know." Later, Jesus finds him in the temple and gently reminds him in John 5:14:

"See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

The man finds out that it was Jesus who healed him, and he reports this news to the religious leaders. Then Jesus says this astonishing line in John 5:17:

"My Father is always working to this very day, and I, too, am working."

Within Judaism, there is a large conversation pertaining to the fact that God, as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, actually does work on the Sabbath in certain specific ways. Think for a moment if God were to take a break from running the universe. What would happen? The universe would hurl into chaos and disorder. He continues His work on the Sabbath to sustain the universe; He continues His work of exercising divine providence to pursue the righteous and chase down the wicked. In these ways, God is at work on every day.

There is a famous dialogue between a Greek king and an Israelite sage around this time in the *Letter of Aristeas, Paragraph 210*:

A Greek king asked an Israelite sage:

"What is the essence of godliness?"

The Israelite sage replies:

"The essence of godliness is the realization that God is always at work in everything, that He is omniscient, and that man cannot hide from Him an unjust deed."

God is working on the Sabbath. Some of the sages discussed how it is that God works on the Sabbath day. Maybe you have asked the same question: How is it that God's work on the Sabbath is not a breaking of the Sabbath? How is it that God's moving people and controlling history and running the universe is not a violation of the Sabbath? The sages came up with a brilliant answer: They say God does not break the Sabbath by moving people and controlling history, pursuing the righteous and chasing down the wicked, because His movements are not moving objects from one domain to another domain, **because all the earth is His domain**. This is expressed clearly in Jeremiah 23:24:

"Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD.

'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' declares the LORD."

We read the same thought in Isaiah 6:3:

*"And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; **the whole earth is full of His glory!**'"*

We see it is not wrong for God to work on the Sabbath, because all of the earth is His dominion.

What is the meaning when Jesus Christ says: “I, too, work on the Sabbath and it is not wrong for Me”? This prompts a whole discourse. Jesus' original hearers recognized immediately what He was claiming: that He made God His Father and claimed to be equal with God. Jesus' teaching from this point explains His true identity as the Son. Our memory verse for this week is John 5:19:

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. When you see Jesus acting, you are seeing the very works of God. Jesus teaches that what He does the Father does and that the signs He performs in our seeing are visible manifestations of His divinity. Jesus does what only God can do. In John 5:20, Jesus says:

"For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does. Yes, to your amazement He will show Him even greater things than these."

What are the greater works that Jesus will perform? It is surely what He says next in John 5:21:

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom He is pleased to give it."

In just a few chapters, Jesus will call forth people from the grave, works that only God can do. Jesus is no ordinary man. Jesus is not merely a prophet, one among many. He is not allowing us that option. Jesus speaks and acts as the incarnate, beloved Son of God. He says in John 5:22-23:

"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him."

You cannot think highly of God and think poorly of Jesus. Jesus says: “If you honor the Son whom the Father has sent, then you honor the Father.”

Jesus says in John 5:24:

"Whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

Who can say that if you hear my word then you cross over from death to life? Jesus says in John 5:25:

"I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live."

This is a staggering claim, isn't it? It is a staggering claim that Jesus says that what He does God

does and that the Father loves the Son and has sent Him into the world to grant life to all who receive Him. This is a claim of the highest order, and we want to be able to confirm and verify this statement. We live in a society where we have to constantly verify our identity. You want to buy a book or a DVD online, you have to enter your password, and there is that moment in time when you press enter and that mysterious transaction takes place somewhere. Sometimes you get a message back that says: "Failed to authenticate," and your mind starts scrambling to which of the 600 passwords and logins that you are currently using belongs in this spot. We have security clearances for access to the airport. I had to swear an oath last week in the presence of a government agent, with my hand raised, that these were in fact my children for them to receive a renewal of their passports. I raised my hand. I was prepared for the religious language: "Do you swear. . ." and there was none. I just had to swear on my own authority. I thought, "I could lie," but I was sure, because I have seen them for years. I knew for certain who they were. We have had sets of twins in our congregation throughout Kenwood's life, and there was one set of twins that were very hard for me to keep straight. I didn't want to miss-identify them, so I thought: "I'll ask their brother and I'll get some insider information." So I pulled the brother aside and asked him how he was able to tell them apart. He looked back at me with a straight face and he said: "You know, I just watch to see which room they come out of." That didn't help me at all.

Here we have an identification question of the highest level of importance. Jesus is claiming to be God in John 5, nothing less, and now John brings forward for us a testimony, an authentication of this highest claim, the highest order of testimony possible. He calls upon God the Father, and God the Father enters the great court of history, the chamber of deliberation in your heart and mine. Jesus says in John 5:31:

"If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not valid."

In both Greek law and Jewish jurisprudence, self-testimony is not acceptable as evidence. Jesus says in John 5:36:

"I have testimony weightier than that of John."

He mentions John the Baptist's testimony, but He says: "I have testimony weightier than John's." He says in John 5:32:

"There is another who testifies in My favor, and I know that His testimony about Me is valid."

Who is this "another"? In John 5:36, Jesus continues by saying:

"For the very work that the Father has given Me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent Me."

God the Father testifies that this is My beloved Son, the saving, slain Lamb sent into the world.

This is the Father's testimony about His Son. You may remember that the Father spoke audibly at Jesus' baptism. When Jesus was baptized, immediately He came up from the water, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit descending, and a voice from heaven proclaimed: "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." When Jesus was transfigured in heavenly glory in the presence of His disciples, a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from this cloud announced: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him." In this passage, however, Jesus focuses our attention on the works that the Father has given Him to accomplish, which reveal and confirm the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus does what only God can do. His signs together testify: Jesus' miracles of nature, like turning bread into feeding thousands of people; Jesus' miracle of turning water into 120 gallons of wine; His calming of the storm. Jesus' sign this morning is that He works on the Sabbath, something that only God can do. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus announces the forgiveness of sins. He speaks to a paralyzed man in Mark 2:5 and says:

"Son, your sins are forgiven."

Those who heard Him said in Mark 2:7:

"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Who can say that? Jesus says it. When John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus upon John's request and asked, "Are You the coming One," Jesus replied in Matthew 11:4-5:

"Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised."

Tell him that God has come! Tell him of Jesus' works of raising people from the dead, just as the Father raises the dead. Jesus' great work in the future of a judgment of the world in righteousness is something that only God can do. Jesus says the Father has entrusted this judgment to the Son.

Perhaps the greatest of the works that the Father has given the Son, so that we can know with absolute certainty that Jesus is the Son of God, is that the Father actually does give eternal life to all who believe in the Son. The greatest seal of approval, the raised stamp on the documentation of eternity, is that eternal life, which is God's alone to give, He actually gives to whoever believes in the Son. First John 5:9-10 says it in this way:

"If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning His Son."

In 1 John 5:11-12, we read:

*“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.
Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

The greatest of the works that God has entrusted to His beloved Son is the conferring of this eternal life which we seek desperately as creatures made in the image of God and designed to live forever. The only way you can get this is through faith in Jesus Christ, the saving Son of God.

My application in conclusion this morning is just simply and profoundly that every single person in the sanctuary accept and receive God's testimony about His Son. If you do, you will be converted. I wouldn't want anyone to leave here unconverted. I wouldn't want anyone to leave here not believing that Jesus is the saving Son of God. And for all of us who are converted, I want you to fasten your theological seatbelts, because new life is happening, and you will begin to make decisions unlike decisions you've ever made before. You will begin to speak things that you've never spoken before, and this is where the living is to be had, in Christ. That eternal life begins the moment you receive Him. If you do not receive God's testimony this morning, then according to 1 John 5:10, you sit here this morning calling God a liar, and that is a sobering statement. You cannot sit in a neutral place. If you do not accept God's testimony, then you shake your head at God in disbelief; you have to force your mouth to stay closed, this mouth that's been created by God and designed to burst forth in praise. You have to force yourself to keep it closed. You will fill your appetites with unsatisfying things and pretend you don't feel like you're dying inside. You will keep yourself busy running around the city telling yourself other things are more important. You will remain in a dangerous, isolated position burying the evidence, closing your ears to an overwhelming and unceasing stream of testimony. You can reject my testimony; you can reject John's or Mary's or Nicodemus' or the Samaritan woman's, but if you would accept just one, then accept God's Fatherly testimony: “This is My beloved Son, and I have sent Him into this world to perish on a cross for your forgiveness. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the Savior of the world.”

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we bow before You. Heavenly Father, we open our ears and hearts to receive Your testimony. Oh Lord, forgive us for our lying days which seem so pleasant. Lord, we ask Your forgiveness of all the things that we have done or said or failed to do in this life. Maybe the worst of all is to call You a liar. We wish to do that no longer. We want to stand in Your truth, and we want to thank You, Lord Jesus. Thank You for the cross. Thank You for the price You paid, bearing all of our sin and shame, You came and gave amazing grace. You are worthy, Lamb of God, seated on the throne. You are high and lifted up, Jesus, Son of God.

Would you stand with me and let's worship Him, this worthy Lamb, the Son of God.

Amen.