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## The Witness of the Word

### John 5:37-47

**Intro:** We have arrived at the concluding argument of Christ's first major discourse recorded in John. This discourse, in fact, the entire 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, deals with the #1 most important question of theology: how can a person know God? Again, this question has 2 parts: **1)** by what channel does God reveal Himself to us? Jesus addressed this in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the discourse by revealing that He's both united with and equal to the Father in every way (except function). He declares Himself to be God and, as such, is uniquely qualified to be the sole channel of divine revelation for man.

**2)** How do you validate the channel? Jesus deals with this in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the discourse. Since Jewish law required a fact to be established on the testimony of 2 or 3 witness, Jesus offers testimonies from 3 supportive witnesses that reinforce and corroborate His claims: the testimony of John and the witnesses of His miracles and OT Scriptures.

We dealt with the testimony of John and the witness of Christ's miracles last time so today, we'll consider the witness of the Scriptures. This is the most important of the 3 for of the 3 witnesses, it's the evidence of the Scriptures that Jesus dwells on the most and it's also the one He links most directly with the witness of the Father. This witness isn't mentioned in passing like **vs36**. Jesus gives particular attention to this witness; so much so that our text stands as one of the most significant summaries of the importance of Scripture in all of the Gospels. In this teaching Jesus claims 3 things **1)** OT Scriptures are from the Father and are fulfilled in Himself; **2)** unbelieving Jews had perverted the OT and misunderstood it (much like today); **3)** the OT itself will accuse those who refuse to believe in it.

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The importance of this witness is also seen in the fact that it comes at the end of the discourse, giving it a position of prominence. It stands at the end much like a star witness is introduced at the end of a trial to nail down the case for the prosecution. John the Baptist's witness was real; it was the witness of a prophet of God. The witness of Christ's miracles was more important as they were the evidence of the Father working in and through Jesus. Both witnesses are very important but they pale in comparison to the

final witness presented, the witness of the Word of God.

As Jesus begins to speak about the witness of the Scriptures to Himself, He stresses two main points. The 1<sup>st</sup> point is the divine origin of the Scriptures and the 2<sup>nd</sup> point is the primary purpose of Scripture, which is to point to Him.

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**37-38**- His word- Jesus emphasizes the divine origin of Scripture. Of course, when we refer to the divine origin of the Scriptures, we must also acknowledge that in one sense all the books of the Bible were written by men. Men did the actual writing. Still, we also must affirm that there's a huge difference between the Bible and every other book written by humans. Men wrote the Scriptures but God stood behind the writing. Men used their own vocabulary and literary style, but it was the Holy Spirit that guided them in their choice of the words and guaranteed the outcome.

This truth is stated in a wonderful way by Peter in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle (**2 Peter 1:21**). The Greek word translated "moved" is the same word used by Luke in Acts to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to "a rushing mighty wind" (**Acts 2:2**). Again, in **27:15**, it's used to describe the force of the wind on the ship that was carrying Paul to Rome. Luke says the ship was carried along by the wind. He says, "when the ship was caught and could not head into the wind; we let her drive." Then again in **vs17**, "they...were driven". Luke's clearly saying that the ship was at the mercy of the storm. It didn't stop being a ship, but it did cease to have control over its course and destination.

Peter says the writers of the Bible were similarly carried along in their writing to produce the words that God intended to be recorded. They wrote as men, but as men moved by the Holy Spirit. The result was the revelation of God.

Now, some may insist that if fallen man had anything to do with writing the Bible, then it must be filled with error. But that logic doesn't stand in light of the Christmas story. How was Jesus Christ born to the virgin Mary? The Holy Spirit overshadowed her. In this conception there was a touching of the divine and the human and the results were both divine and human. Jesus was 100% Almighty God and 100% man – yet without sin.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit came upon the minds of Moses, David, the

prophets and the other biblical authors and brought forth from their minds the books that make up the Bible. All their writings display the marks of human personality. They differ in style. At the same time, the ultimate source of their writings is divine, and the touch of the human did not mark them with weakness or error any more than the womb of Mary imparted sin to the Savior.

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**39-** What is the primary purpose of Scripture? Is it to record the history of God's dealings with men? It does record that history, but that's not its primary function. Is it to reveal certain truths to men? It certainly does reveal truths but this is not its primary function either. The primary purpose of Scripture is to point men and women to Jesus Christ. True, it uses a variety of ways to do this. History is one of them; the communication of truth, particularly about God's nature and about man's sin, is another. But the primary purpose of Scripture is to reveal Jesus and point men to Him.

Most will agree with this statement but the question that must be answered next is how does the OT point to Jesus? Is it not mostly history and does it not talk a lot about things other than Jesus? How can He be its main subject? The answer is that Jesus becomes the subject of the OT in 2 ways: **1)** by fitting in with the general themes of the OT and **2)** by fulfilling the specific prophecies found in the OT. Of course, Jesus becomes the subject of the New Testament in a far more obvious way, for the New Testament tells His story and is almost exclusively about Him.

Consider one of the great themes of the OT: the sin of man and man's great need of forgiveness. No sooner was Creation completed then man fell into sin. Instead of being humbly and gratefully dependent upon his Creator, man was soon in a state of rebellion against God. Thus, the consequences of sin, including death, passed upon the human race. The rest of the OT relates the unfolding of these consequences. The sinfulness of man is a great biblical doctrine but it's not an end in itself. The truth of man's sin and great need is not reveal in the Bible for the sake of revealing truth but to point sinners to Jesus Christ who is the solution to their inherent dilemma.

There is also the theme of the God who acts in love to redeem sinners. We see it in the story of Adam and Eve where God must kill an innocent animal to cover the shame of their sin and nakedness. We see it in God's promise to crush Satan's head and to bless all the nations of the earth through one

of Abraham's descendents. Each of these things was pointing to and will ultimately be accomplished by Jesus Christ.

There are dozens of prophecies that concern specific details of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Psalms are full of prophecies that speak of His eventual victory and rule over the nations of this earth. From the materials used to build the tabernacle, to the arrangement of the furniture in the temple to the minute details of the sacrificial system and the required feast days of the Jewish calendar, all of it point to the reality of Jesus Christ. The Bible is not just a book to be handled, it's a tool to look through – a telescope that brings you closer to Jesus.

But, the religious leaders Jesus was speaking to had the Scriptures, did they not? In fact, they knew the Scriptures better than anyone else in the country. Their entire careers were based on the study and exposition of the Scriptures. Plus, they would have certainly agreed with Jesus that the Scriptures had a divine origin. So what was the problem? Though they agreed on the 1<sup>st</sup> point, they didn't agree on the purpose of the Scriptures and thus, they misused them!

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**39-44-** How did the Jews misuse the Scriptures? According to Jesus' words in **vs39**, the Jews misused Scripture by treating the words of Scripture as an end unto themselves instead of letting them to do their primary work of pointing to Jesus. They searched the Scriptures, but they did not come to Christ. Another error of the Jews was that they became so preoccupied with the details of Scripture that they completely missed the truths it contained. By straining to catch every detail, they missed the big picture. As a result, they sought to gain honor from men for their detailed knowledge of the Bible, but in all of that study and effort, they failed to gain salvation.

The greatest error the Jews made was in believing the Scriptures to be the source of life rather than God. This can be documented from their own writings. "As rain is life for the world, so also are the words of Torah life for the world."

"This is the book of the commandments of God and the Law that endureth forever. All...that hold it fast are appointed to life; but such as leave it shall die." "More Torah more life...Whoso has gained a good name has gained it for himself; whoso has gained for himself words of Torah has gained for himself the life of the world to come" This was the common belief! The

important thing to them was memorizing Scripture, this in itself won salvation. But Jesus is here stating that a formal study of the Bible was not a guarantee for eternal life. Christ is the source of life, not the Scriptures in and of themselves. Only Jesus Christ can guarantee salvation.

Can we misuse the Scriptures today? We absolutely err along the same lines as the Jews whenever we allow Bible study to become academic and, as a result, do not allow ourselves to be drawn closer to God because of it. We see this in the world of biblical scholarship and higher criticism. Quite often, in the hands of scholars, the Bible is merely a book to be weighed and manipulated rather than believed and obeyed. Regardless of intent, Christ is the casualty.

Of course, there are more common ways to misuse the Bible. Like when a person buys a beautiful Bible and puts it in an important place in their home but fails to read it? Why do they do this? In their minds the Bible is something special. They have a superstitious reverence for it. But their belief does not go beyond superstition. As a result, they never read it and, therefore, never come into contact with its author.

The truth is that the Bible was given by God to point men to the Savior and that they must come to the Savior if they are to find eternal life. Unless the life of God possesses our hearts then the Word of God will be incomprehensible.

Have you ever considered the number of people who needlessly missed out the birth of Christ in the Christmas story? The innkeeper was too busy. Herod was too distracted. But think of all the religious leaders, priests and scribes who missed it even though they had the OT and knew where Christ should be born. Some even told Herod where it was. They said that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. The wise men listened to them and found Jesus there. These scribes had the Scriptures and knew them well enough to have the right answers. But they didn't bother leave their own homes to investigate the Savior's arrival.

Of course, there were some who did Jesus: the shepherds, the wise men, even old Simeon and Anna in the temple. The shepherds weren't important people, the wise men weren't even Jews; Simeon and Anna were just poor saints.

But they not only saw God's greatest treasure, some of them even held Him in their arms! Why did these people find Jesus when the "important" people so clearly missed Him? Because they were honest enough to admit they needed a Savior and humble enough to receive Him personally when He came. Have you met Him or are you missing Him?

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**45-47**- We can see that the Jews had another problem: they suffered from a terrible case of misplaced confidence, the like of which wouldn't be seen again until the Titanic set sail on its maiden voyage. These Jewish leaders weren't at all worried about salvation. They had the law of Moses and they trusted their knowledge of it. But Jesus is saying that knowledge of the law was not enough. The law was useful, but by itself it could not save; it was powerless. In fact, Jesus tells them that the law will actually condemn those who trust in it.

John ends the discourse here but we can probably guess what the Jews were thinking. "If the law only condemns, why did God give it? Why bother to keep it?" While these objections may seem logical to just about anyone, we must understand that they stem from the human expectation for God to take into account our nature and good works.

That's what the Pharisees had under the religious system they had built. They truly desired the honor that comes from men. They actively sought praise. They dressed so that everyone would recognize them. They prayed in a loud voice, publicly, so everyone could see and hear them. They made sure everyone knew what they were giving to the temple. Under this system, they took their minds off God and compared themselves with others. They did quite well by this comparison, at least in their own eyes. So when Jesus came they obviously saw no need for a Savior.

But in this, they missed the major point of the law, for the law was not given to help them do better than others but it was given to show them that no matter how well they did they could not do well enough to satisfy God. Instead of asking "Am I as good as my neighbor?" they should have asked, "Am I as good as God?" That's really the only standard God goes by – perfection. Not only does one have to keep the law, they have to keep it perfectly and they would have had to do so from the very beginning of their life.

Of course, no one has ever done this. So, it follows that if no one has been able to live up to perfection, and if this is the standard God gave, then there has never been anyone who has ever been saved by the law. You will never meet anyone in heaven who got there by keeping the Law or by following the Golden Rule. Both are good but the real purpose of both is merely to show us that we are incapable of meeting God's standard of perfection.

This is the accusation of Moses that Jesus spoke about. We hear it and tremble, and rightly so, for this is a terrible verdict. But we need not tremble for long, for just as God sets forth His standard, He also sets forth the means by which that standard may be met – believing in Jesus! Jesus came, the Son of God, embodiment of total perfection. He came to die for our sins. Since Jesus is God, His death is sufficient for us all. He's able to take the punishment of the law for an infinite weight of sin and cancel it by His blood. Now sin may be removed and righteousness is made available for all those who put their trust in Him. This was the testimony of John, the point of the miracles and the true purpose of the Scriptures. This is the real story of Christmas. Jesus was born to die so that we may live!

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Have you accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior? Remember, it is not enough to have the Bible. It is not enough to read the Bible. It is not even enough to study the Bible or memorize it. You must obey the Bible. It is the purpose of the Bible to point you away from your own efforts to earn salvation, which you could never do and direct you toward the Lord Jesus Christ, the only one who can be your Savior. 😊