

The Fantastic Four
John 5:30-40, February 11th 2024

In 1920, a young woman was taken to a mental hospital in Berlin. She was lovely and spoke with a thick Russian accent. But when the doctors asked her name, she couldn't remember; that is until another Russian patient bowed down and hailed her as Princess Anastasia, the daughter of the assassinated Tsar Nicholas II, who was rumored to have escaped her family's fate during the Bolshevik Revolution. The mystery woman was the right age and she resembled the princess in photographs, so newspapers began reporting that Anastasia had been found. If true, she was entitled to a share of the vast Romanov fortune. So, friends and family came from all over the world to see her but those who knew the princess best renounced her as an imposter. After a lengthy legal battle, the German courts agreed, ruling that the mystery woman failed to produce sufficient evidence to prove she was who she claimed to be. Modern forensic evidence has since vindicated that ruling.

But what about Jesus? He too rose out of obscurity with an extraordinary claim, insisting that he was the Son of God and Savior of sinners, worthy of absolute obedience and worship. *Do you believe Jesus is who he says he is or are you skeptical, unconvinced by a lack of proof? Or maybe you've only ever given cool consent to Christ's claim without being passionately persuaded that "truly this man was the Son of God!"* In our passage this morning, Jesus calls four witnesses to the stand to drive home the central thesis of John's gospel: Jn20:31 ***"Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."***

One of the most sensational moments in any court proceedings is when the accused takes the stand to defend themselves. In John 5, we find Jesus doing just that, either formally before the Sanhedrin or informally before a handful of Pharisees, who accused him of the capital crime of blasphemy for making himself equal with God, claiming to share in his nature, work, honor. ***In v30-31*** Jesus doubles down on that claim. Far from admitting deceit, Jesus acknowledged that legally, his claim was not sufficient & required the corroboration of 2-3 witnesses (Deut17). But in our text, Jesus went the extra mile and provided four fantastic witnesses.

The first witness Jesus calls is ***John the Baptist (32-33)***. When Jesus began his public ministry, John was already famous for his fiery, wilderness preaching which sparked a flame of revival in Israel. ***Mark 1:5***, "all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." Even the Pharisees, "sent to John (33)" an envoy asking "*who are you?*" and later, when Jesus asked, the Pharisees could not deny the heavenly origin of John's baptism. For 400 years the voice of God had been silent and the prophetic light of revelation had been dark in Israel. Then, after all that time, John came in the clothes and spirit of Elijah, pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world... I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God"(1:29,34). Though the Jews were willing to rejoice in John's warmth and light, the passion and truth of his preaching, they refused to believe his witness to Christ and be saved.

In July of 2018, astonishing body camera footage from a NJ police officer, Kyle Savoia, made national news as it showed him sprinting down train tracks screaming "move move!" to a man who'd fallen asleep in the path of an approaching locomotive. He was saved without a moment to spare. Jesus was gripped by the same heroic passion! ***V34***. He didn't appeal to John's witness to beat the Pharisees in court or fluff his own feathers. Jesus was trying to "rouse them from their fatal ease" in the path of the approaching wrath of God. *Isn't it something?* Even while they were trying to kill him, Jesus was trying to save them!

Do you know why Jesus had to say, "Love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you,"

(Mat 5:44)? Because our natural disposition towards our enemies is to hate and curse them. *Do you have enemies? People who seem against you; seeking to cause you pain? Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus did too? Isn't it convicting to know that Jesus never sinfully hated anyone but he loved his enemies by longing for their salvation?* God help us to do the same! The next time you're tempted to hate or slander an enemy, lift their name to the Lord in prayer, asking God to save or sanctify them and purify your own heart towards them, replacing anger w/ compassion.

The second witness to which Jesus appeals are his own works (36). The other day, Kyler and I were walking the trail in the woods behind the church. And as we walked, we spotted different animal tracks in the dirt: Raccoon tracks look like tiny human hands, three-toed turkey tracks, and heart shape deer tracks. In the same way, as we track Jesus through the gospels, we see the unmistakable footprints of God. In each chapter of John's gospel thus far, Jesus has proven he was who he claimed to be by what he did. In the 1st chapter he saw Nathaniel under the fig tree with his omniscient, all-seeing eyes. In John 2, he turned water into wine at a wedding in Cana and manifesting his power over the elemental forces of nature. In John 3, Nicodemus the Pharisee sought Jesus by night & confessed, 3:2 "no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." In John 4, after he told the Samaritan woman everything she ever did, Jesus healed the official's dying son with a word. John 5 began with Jesus' healing of an invalid man. These miracles prove that Jesus was the Son of God.

In our day, the word "miracle" is widely overused. While sunsets, baby births, college acceptance letters, and front row parking spaces may be gifts of God, they aren't miracles. A miracle is a supernatural act wrought through human agency. More than blessing the recipient, the purpose of miracles was to authenticate the divine authority of the miracle worker. The prophets of the Old & apostles of the NT were given the power to perform signs & wonders so that the church & the world would know they spoke for God. While God himself still works supernaturally as he pleases, those who claim to perform miracles in his name today are either deluded or deceptive as the need to perform miracles ceased with the completion of the canon.

Have you considered Christ's miracles, friend? Far from works of fiction or mythology, the gospels are, by far, the most authenticated & trusted texts of all antiquity (*Illiad*- 1800, NT-5000+). Despite what your college prof. might say, they meet the highest standards of legal scrutiny & must be accepted as history. But simply believing in the historicity of the miracles is insufficient. The Pharisees believed Jesus healed the invalid in John 5. They believed he healed the man born blind in John 9. They believed Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in John 11, but rather than repenting & claiming Christ as the Resurrection & the Life, they sought all the more to kill him & Lazarus. They even believed that Jesus rose from the dead because when the guards reported what happened, the chief priests paid them to lie. You see, the Pharisee rejection of Christ wasn't the result of a "lack of evidence" but of a predetermined malice in their hearts for Christ. Like those who say, "There is no God and I hate him!"

You may be hiding behind the same excuse this morning, saying to yourself, "if only there was more compelling evidence, then I would believe." But friend your problem with Jesus is not ultimately intellectual, it is spiritual-for a hatred of his holiness is hardwired into the human heart. No amount of evidence, no archeological discovery, no philosophical argument can change the lepers' spots & melt the heart of stone. You don't need more evidence. Your problem isn't one of information, but rebellion. You need to call upon the Spirit of God to open the eyes of your heart to see the plain truth, thaw the permafrost of your mind to understand and believe the word & open your mouth to confess and repent of your sins, begging God's forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ who really suffered and really died on the cross and really rose again from the dead to save you from your sins and bring you peace with God.

The third witness Jesus calls to his defense is God the Father (37-38). When my big brother John finished his course of study at the USNA, my family caravanned from all over the country to witness his graduation. But the highlight of that event for me as a proud little brother, wasn't watching all of the parades, it wasn't the blue angel fly by or the canon fire, it was watching my father, a navy captain, recognize his rank and pin the boards of an ensign upon the shoulders of his son and swear him in as an officer of the U.S. Navy.

So too, God the Father publicly owned & honored his Son at the outset of his ministry. When Jesus was to be anointed by John's water & the Spirit's power, God the Father called upon all the world to recognize Jesus' divine rank as the Son of God, and his sinless perfection as the mediator of the new covenant saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." There is no witness testimony more compelling than that of God himself. RC Sproul mused, "I'm sure you've seen the popular bumper sticker that says, "God said it, I believe it; that settles it." How arrogant is that? We need a new bumper sticker, one that says: God says it, that settles it." Because God doesn't need your endorsement. His word is always the last word.

And yet, Jesus said, **v37-**"His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, & you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent." *Do you hear what Jesus is saying here?* He's saying "if you don't agree with my Father about who I am, if you don't look to me in faith & say 'this is my beloved Savior, in whom God is well pleased, in whom my soul delights and upon whom my salvation depends,' then you don't know God."

During my religious studies comprehensive exam from Eckerd College, I was chastised by the head of the department who said, "We want our religious studies majors to be more open minded. You're just too narrow." No doubt, the world's chief criticism of all Christians is their claim that Jesus is the only way to God. But let's get one thing straight: that was Jesus' claim! Jn 14:6-7 "I am the way, & the truth, & the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

You may be open-minded with a "coexist" bumper sticker on your car, but if you don't know JC as your personal Lord & Savior you do not know God. You may be a PHD in psychology or philosophy or a student of the Quran, Bhagavad-Gita, Book of Mormon, or the Jewish Talmud but if you don't know JC as your personal Lord & Savior you do not know God. You may be a successful businessman, a generous philanthropist, a passionate patriot, a skilled doctor or nurse, an award-winning teacher, or the most loving parent, but if you don't know JC as your personal Lord & Savior you do not know God. You may even be a diligent student of the Bible, having memorized large portions of Scripture and bible trivia and well versed in sound theology, but if you don't know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord & Savior you do not know God.

This is the final witness Christ calls to the stand, ***the very word of God (39-40).*** You see, Jesus acknowledged (even commended) the Pharisees for searching the Scriptures: but they were looking for the wrong thing in them! They were looking for their own glory not the glory of God in Jesus Christ. They were looking to justify themselves by their knowledge of the Bible rather than being justified by the one to whom all Scripture points. Jesus sets 2 eternal truths before us: 1. Eternal life can only be found in Christ. 2. Christ can only be found in the Word of God.

So, we must be people of the book! **JC-**"Just in proportion, therefore, as any man knows Christ, is the proficiency which he has made in the word of God." We must read the Bible, not to check the Pharisee's box but to bask in the beauty of Christ in the Scripture. We must read the bible to our children & to teach them to see Christ is on every page. You children ought to ask for Bibles of your own & read them or demand that they be read to you. And if we desire TPC to be an oasis of spiritual life in the wilderness of this world, we must teach and preach Christ from the whole counsel of God. *Is your soul dry this morning? Do you feel weary & distant from God? Has your heart grown numb to the gospel? Are you trapped in sin & longing for forgiveness and freedom? Are you overwhelmed by life and in need of wisdom?* Go back to the book, friend, where Jesus is waiting to be found by those who seek him in faith, to give them everlasting life. You've heard the 4. *What is your verdict?* "Surely, this man was the Son of God, my Savior."