

The Witness from Heaven

John 3:31-36

“The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. ³³ The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. ³⁴ For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God ^[a] gives the Spirit without limit. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” NIV

^{31(A)} He who comes from above ^(B) is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and ^(C) speaks in an earthly way. ^(D) He who comes from heaven is above all. ^{32(E)} He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, ^(F) yet no one receives his testimony. ³³ Whoever receives his testimony ^(G) sets his seal to this, ^(H) that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom ^(I) God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit ^(J) without measure. ^{35(K)} The Father loves the Son and ^(L) has given all things into his hand. ^{36(M)} Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; ^(N) whoever does not obey the Son shall not ^(O) see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. ESV

Intro:

This passage of Scripture continues with some of the truths regarding Jesus Christ that have already been introduced by John the Apostle and writer. Who is speaking here? John Baptist, John the writer, or is this a quote of Jesus? I think the most likely speaker is John the Apostle, but whichever person you think is speaking here doesn’t change the truth of the words or their authority as inspired revelation.

There is a great truth that unites this passage, and that is that Jesus Christ comes from heaven and speaks with the authority of heaven and therefore it is incumbent on all people to believe in him.

James Boice in his sermon on this passage has given us a helpful way of viewing the Apostle John’s presentation of Jesus Christ to his readers. It is the concept of a faithful and truthful witness.

Mr. Boice points out that in a court of law there are 3 requirements of a good witness:

1. The witness must have first hand information about the court case: he must have seen or heard the events about which he is testifying.
2. He must be will to testify – to get involved.;
3. The witness must be reliable.

“His witness must be substantial and possess enough self-consistency to be believed.” P. 326

Today we want to look at Jesus as the Witness from Heaven. We want to consider his first hand knowledge of the things he taught, his willingness to share what he knows about God, and the reliability of his testimony.

I. The Witness of First Hand Information

“The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth....

(L. Morris) – It’s is John’s purpose in writing this gospel to show that Jesus is the Christ and one way he does this is to show his heavenly origin. p. 243

John 3:13 - No one has^(B) ascended into heaven except^(C) he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.^a

John 8:23 - But he continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

1 Cor. 15:47 - The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.

The “one who is from the earth” is specifically a reference to John the Baptist.

...The one who comes from heaven is above all.

This is an absolute statement. There is nothing that exists over which the Lord Jesus Christ is not supreme. This includes all religions and religious leaders, all political systems and political leaders, over every human person and human organization, over every spiritual power, whether good or evil – the Lord Jesus Christ is over and above every one of them. There is no power or authority that is not subject to his rulership.

II. A Witness Must Be Willing to Testify v. 32

³² **He testifies to what he has seen and heard...** Christ, the one who came from heaven, is not silent about regarding divine truth in heaven. He has testified to the divine truth established in heaven. As a witness to the people of the earth he has shared with us heavenly realities. As he said in John 15:15, *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you **friends**, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

John 3:11 -

¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you,^(A) we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you^[a] do not receive our testimony.

...but no one accepts his testimony.

This is not to be taken literally. See, for example, 1:11, ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him,...

Now this is an amazing statement. How can it be that a man would come from heaven itself, someone who is, of course more than a man, he is God who has come to earth, taking our own nature to himself...he comes from heaven, the tells us “everything he learned from the Father...” - in other words, he does not withhold any valuable information about God that we need to know. He testifies of heavenly realities, he brings divine revelation to the peoples of the earth.

You notice that God has spared no effort to make himself known to man. We should remember who God is, his nature and being. The wonderful doxology in 1 Tim. 1:17 proclaims, *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

It is amazing to us, but this being who is God is a spiritual being, he does not have a physical aspect to his being like we do. This verse in 1 Timothy describes him as “immortal and invisible,” in other words, he has always been alive and he can never die, he is eternally existent, always very much alive. But also he is invisible, he is a Spirit. He is not flesh. He does not have a body like we do. Yet he is every much person as we are, and even more so. Because it is his personhood that is the source and origin of our personhood.

This eternal, invisible person – the one who created the physical universe including planet earth and all the people who live here – did not leave us in the dark regarding the kind of God he is – he revealed his nature, his attributes, his character, to his people throughout the centuries, i.e., specifically to the people of Israel by various revelations of his nature. He revealed himself and his will through the Old Testament system of sacrificial worship. He revealed himself through historical events such as the deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. And he revealed himself through the prophets who expressed God’s command for his people to repent of their idolatry and worship him alone. Through these means and others God was in the business of revealing his nature and will to his people, but then at the end of his age he capped off all these previous revelations with one that was so radical and powerful and mind boggling that it still amazes us every time we think about. The eternal, immortal, invisible God executed a plan he had formulated before the creation of the world, and he carried it out in human history. From his eternal throne he entered out space-time-physical existence by sending his own Son, who took upon himself our full human nature, in order to live among us, to reveal the Father to us, to tell

us earthly creatures about heavenly things – things we would have never known or been able to discover on our own in a million years – he came down to earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth so that we could learn the truth about God!

How can you possibly learn about an eternal, immortal, invisible being, we who are time-bound, creatures of time, who only live for a brief span in the time line of the universe, we who are physical – who have to eat and sleep and sweat and eventually die have about 80 years or so if we have the strength – we who are bound up in ignorance of God and besides all that our minds are darkened and perverted and twisted because of sin. Sin has such a hold on our thinking that if God appeared in the flesh and began talking to us we wouldn't even recognize that he was God – we would in fact hate him and stop our ears to his words – because we find his words uncomfortable and disturbing to the comfort and contentment we have as we bask in in our sin, in our sinful thinking and scheming and sinful speech and sinful behavior. “Go away, Jesus, we're happy like we are. We don't need you telling us what to do and believe. We don't like you because you're so holy. Get away from us. Go back where you came from and leave us alone. We don't need you, we don't want you. Don't bother us. You require too much. You're telling us to leave our wonderful sin and our precious idols that we're so devoted to – and to believe in you, you who say you are the Son of God who came from heaven. Leave us alone, Jesus, why don't you just go back where you came from? We don't have the time or interest to listen to you. Just leave us alone.”

How in the world can mankind do this? Someone comes from heaven and tells us the truth about God and we don't want to accept his testimony? We prefer to just go our merry ol' way and live and think and act like we always have. What stupidity! What foolishness! How utterly sinful is such rejection by mankind towards the gift of God's Son given to the world.

What is going on here? How can people be so stupid and foolish? The answer of course, is because of sin. Earlier in this chapter, John 3:19, gives us the reason people don't accept Jesus' testimony:

^{19(A)} And this is the judgment:^(B) the light has come into the world, and^(C) people loved the darkness rather than the light because^(D) their works were evil. This is rather shocking, but it is true. People actually prefer sin and darkness to holiness and light. They love their sin more than they love God and his will for their lives.

In addition, the apostle Paul says that *The god of this age has **blinded** the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* (2 Cor. 4:4). The “god of this age” is Satan, the Devil. He has blinded people. Because of their sin and the blinding of Satan, people are not able to understand who Jesus is, or, if they do understand who he is, they simply refuse to believe in him or accept him.

So this is indeed a great tragedy – it is the worst tragedy imaginable. Tornadoes and earthquakes and famines and wars are all tragedies – but they are not as terrible as this great personal tragedy that befalls every human being who is ever born: they love their sin so much that they neglect, ignore, and rebel against God and his only Son whom he sent to save them from their sins.

So this is something of the meaning here in v. 32, “no one accepts his testimony.”

This, however, is not to be taken literally. See, for example, 1:11, ¹¹ *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* ¹² *Yet to all who received him,...* So, thankfully, there are some who received the Son of God. Why do some receive him, but most reject him. The answer, the thing that makes the difference, is only the sovereign grace of God. If I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is because he came to me, he enabled me to hear the gospel, and he enabled me to believe by giving me the gift of regeneration – the work of the Holy Spirit who plants spiritual life in me so I can repent of my sins and believe the gospel. Apart from regenerating grace, we humans have no interest in serious commitment to the Lord Jesus. But, by the grace of God, some do believe...

³³ **The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. (literally, true, see ESV)**

What does this mean, “the man who has accepted the testimony, the witness of Jesus, certifies that God is true?” Can I, a mere man, do something to certify the God is the God of truth? Yes, I can. It is like this: if I accept the testimony of Jesus Christ as to who he is, the divine Son of God sent by the Father to save his people from their sins, if I accept this, if I believe in Jesus Christ, then by my own belief, by my own confession, I am saying “yes” to Jesus Christ. I am confessing my belief and my loyalty to him as the one and only, the true Son of God who has been sent by the Father, the God of truth. I am certifying by my belief that all that God has said and done in Jesus is true. The true God, known as Yahweh by the ancient Jews, sent his Son, to rescue his people from their sin. All this is true, it is real, it is our only hope, and I believe it and confess it and have absolute confidence that this the truth that comes from the true God, the creator and sustainer of all that is.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the Son of God? Believe that with all your heart and you are certifying with your life that God is true.

Jo. 3:17 - For^(A) God did not send his Son into the world^(B) to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John 5:20 - ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does...

III. A Witness Must be Reliable

³⁴ For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God^[a] gives the Spirit without limit.

This whole truth of the Father sending his Son, the term “sent,” is a term in John’s gospel which is repeated and though it is simple, it has profound meaning. It means that the Son existed with the Father before he was sent to the earth and it means that it was the Father’s determinate will to send his Son. It was the sending of the Son that was the definitive act of God to save a people for himself.

And this One whom the God the Father sent, speaks not just his own words, but the “speaks the words of God.” Hear what Jesus says in **Jo. 12:49** - *For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. (NIV)*

...but the Father^(B) who sent me has himself given me^(C) a commandment—what to say and what to speak. (ESV)

Wm Barclay (quoted by J. Boice, p. 327): “...When Jesus speaks about God and about the heavenly things, says John, it is not a carried story, no secondhand tale, no information from a secondary source. He tells us that which he himself has seen and heard. To put it very simply, because Jesus alone knows God, he alone can give us the facts about God, and these facts are the gospel.”

Now the truth of what v. 34 of John 3 says, that Jesus “speaks the words of God” is of profound significance. Did you catch this, when Jesus speaks, he speaks not just the words of men, but the very words of God. So you can pick out anything that Jesus said in any of the 4 gospels, or anything that one of the apostles quotes in his epistle, and what you are reading and hearing is not just the words of some 1st century small town carpenter who became a controversial prophet, but you are reading the very words of God Almighty. Do you see why we treasure our Bibles so much? One chief reason is because it records the very words of God through the lips of Jesus, the Son of God. Do you see why Bible scholars through the centuries have given so much labor and diligence to securing the best Greek texts possible and making the most accurate translations possible? It’s because they want to record faithfully the writings of the apostles who recorded the words of Jesus which in actuality are the words of God!

When we read that Jesus said, “I am **the light of the world**. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have **the light of life**...” – these are the words of God.

When Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me...” – these are not just the words of a man, but the words of God.

So, as a voice told Augustine of Hippo in the garden one day, “Take up and read...” – referring to the Bible, take up your new testament and read the words of God when you read the words of Jesus. Take up and read! Hear God himself speak to you in the words of Jesus.

Now one major reason we know that Jesus’ words are the words of God because of what the rest of verse 34 says, **for God^a gives the Spirit without limit.**

To understand the meaning here requires us to look back in the Old Testament to those references to the anointing of the Spirit that would accompany the promised Messiah:

Isa. 11:1-2

- ¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
 from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
 the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
 the Spirit of counsel and of power,
 the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—

Isa. 42:1

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
 my chosen one in whom I delight;
 I will put my Spirit on him
 and he will bring justice to the nations.

Isa. 61:1

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
 because the LORD has anointed me
 to preach good news to the poor.

The whole meaning of Messiah, is “Anointed One.” A chief mark of the promised Messiah would be his anointing with the Spirit. Acts 10:38 gives us a summary statement of the secret of Jesus powerful ministry:

... God **anointed** Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

So the meaning here in verse 34 of “God gives the Spirit without limit or without measure (ESV)” is that God poured out on his Son his Spirit without restriction but fully and totally so that he had the presence and power of the Spirit of God with him throughout his ministry. Thus his words were words that came from God and were inspired and guided by the Spirit. So we have a Trinitarian authority that stands behind the words of Jesus Christ: he himself as the Son of God spoke the truth – this were enough to certify the truth of what he spoke. But there is more: the text says in John 3:34 that he spoke the “words of God” – so his

words were also the words of God the Father. And if that were not enough, we see that the inspiration and power behind his words were that fact that the Father had given his Son the Spirit without limit or measure, so that his words were born along by the Spirit of God also.

When you read the words of Jesus, and you believe them, you are certifying that God in his Trinitarian being, Father, Son, and Spirit is speaking words from heaven with divine authority, for you and for all people everywhere.

This is why we need to “publish the Word of God” – we need to get the Word of God out to all peoples, to every nation, tribe, and tongue so that they too can have the opportunity to hear God speak his words in and through Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of his public ministry the Spirit was poured out on Jesus at his baptism, and at that time the Father spoke from heaven, ““This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:17)

This love of the Father for the Son is spoken of in verse 35:

³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

In a previous sermon this series we have considered this great fact of the Father’s love for the Son. It is a love **that has existed** forever. As long as God has existed, and there has never been a time when he did not exist, the Father has loved the Son, and the Son has loved the Father. The Father delights in his Son and when he spoke from heaven at Jesus’ baptism and at his transfiguration, he testified of that Jesus was his beloved Son. If this love of the Father for the Son were not enough of a marvelous reality, God has graciously included us his people in this experience of love that has always existed within the Triune God. Jesus says this in John 17:23:

May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

But we cannot tarry here to consider our inclusion in the love of the Father for the Son, but let us press on to consider the rest of verse 35. It is because of the Father’s love for the Son that he “has placed everything in his hands.” Now the text says “everything.” It doesn’t say, “some things.”

What are some things that the Father placed in the hands of his Son?
Let’s consider three things for a moment:

Judgment:

Jo. 5:22 - Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,

Jo. 5:27 - And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Source of Life:

Jo. 5:26 - For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.

Universal Reign:

Eph. 1:20-21 ...which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Revelation:

Jo. 12:49 - For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

Jo. 17:2 - For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

Jo. 17:24 - "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Let us now consider what John the Evangelist has just presented us in these 5 verses. These 5 verses continue with some of the truths regarding Jesus

Summary:**1. Jesus comes from heaven.**

He has a heavenly origin.

He thus speaks with heavenly authority.

2. He is Supreme above all things, physical and spiritual

4. He is an eye witness of all he's see and heard in heaven, from the Father.

5. He speaks the words of God.

6. The Father had given him the Spirit without limit.

7. The Father loves the Son

8. The father has placed everything in his hands.

³⁶ **Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.**"^[b]

Consider the benefits and blessings of believing:

To reject (disobey) is to lose eternal life and suffer wrath of God.

The witness from heaven has come; he testifies to what he knows from heaven, what he has seen and heard, he is reliable – the Holy Spirit has been poured out on him to inspire and guide all that he does and says in perfect harmony and obedience to the will of the Father.

The Witness who has come from heaven has appeared at the end of the Age to bring salvation from sin to all who trust in him. He is the faithful witness; he speaks the truth of God. Believe him, obey him, and testify to others that he alone is the true and only witness who has come from heaven itself to teach us and demonstrate the truth of God. So believe the gospel: Jesus has come, Jesus has died, Jesus has risen, and Jesus will come again.

To God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever. Amen!

J. Gregory

8-7-11