

# John 5:30-47

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn your Bibles to John chapter 5. John chapter 5. We're looking at verses 30 to 47. Let me start with a confession. This is the third time I've preached this over 20 years. I preached it twice early on in my time here.

So, the first time I preached it, I thought it was all about the proofs of Christ's divinity. And then the second time I preached it, I changed my mind a little bit. I said, no, the emphasis is on the fulfilment of Christ in the Old Testament.

But on Friday afternoon, I had a bit of a brainwave and actually realised John 5 isn't, I don't think, about that. I think this passage is about God's divine identity and our human identity.

And how our identity depends on God. And in Jesus Christ, he offers us a radically new and different identity. That's basically the heart of what I want to say.

John 5 is one amazing day. In the morning, do you remember back to verses 1 to 18, Jesus approaches a man in Jerusalem who's been paralysed for 38 years.

[ 1 : 14 ] He says to him, do you want to be made whole? And the man gives him a completely off answer. He doesn't really understand what's going on. And despite that, Jesus, with a word, raises him to his feet in complete health.

But since he's done that miracle on the Sabbath, the authorities, they demand an explanation. How dare you do it on the Sabbath? And Jesus so infuriates the Jewish authority that he spends the rest of the afternoon basically dealing with their death threats.

And although their reaction is inexcusable, it is in one sense understandable. They think he is claiming divine identity.

And despite the fact that he is speaking to people who've just said they have to kill him, Jesus makes some of the most astonishing claims in all the scriptures about himself. And all the time he is offering them life and salvation to his enemies.

So remember in verse 19, if you just glance down there, he claims that his deeds are divine deeds. And in verse 20, he claims that his knowledge is divine knowledge.

[ 2 : 24 ] And in verse 21, he has the divine prerogative of life and death, judgment of heaven and hell. Eternal destiny, he says, rests in his hands. And in verse 23, he claims divine worship for himself.

And the obvious question that you've got to ask is, how can you back up those kind of claims, Jesus? What proof can you give me if it is true?

And then we also have to ask the question, why do so few people believe in Jesus despite his claims? Why don't these guys who actually saw him raise this paralyzed man before their very eyes, why don't they believe in him?

And it has to do with the nature of God's identity and with the nature of our human identity. So let's take those two points. First of all, the nature of divine identity. Think about it.

How can you authenticate such outrageous claims as the claim to be the divine son of God? How can you authenticate that?

[ 3 : 34 ] You can't do it with legal proof or mathematical proof or induction or deduction. You can't do it with empirical proof. What rules can you follow? How can any human being make a call on whether somebody is divine or not?

We don't even have, do we, a peephole into heaven. We cannot access God's identity horizontally by looking to each other.

We could line up, couldn't we, the smartest people that have ever lived in history. And even if we could get a consensus among them, it wouldn't tell us anything. The identity of God is so far outside of our standards and our courts and our brightest minds and our experience and our experts and

our explanation.

The burden of proof is heavier than any human can bear. It's heavier than the universe itself. And of course there is only one who can bear this burden which is God himself.

Because only God himself knows truth, capital T, and all the truth. And that is why I hope you noticed as Reuben read it to us, there's this term that keeps coming up again and again and again.

[ 4 : 50 ] It's the term witness. Witness. Testimony. Witness. Witness. Eleven times. Witness.

Witness. And the reason is because Jesus' divine identity cannot be established in any other way than the personal and divine testimony of God himself.

We're not in a lecture hall in John 5. This is not legal evidence in a law court. Jesus is revealing to you tonight something very, very intimate and personal about the identity of God.

It is the language of intimacy and invitation, not of law. And the lovely thing Jesus is saying is that God doesn't speak way up there.

Invisible, ineffable, inscrutable, inaccessible. But what God has done is he has entered into his creation, into the human world, and God uses human means.

By which he gives testimony to his son. He has revealed who his son is, the divine identity of his son through human words. And the reason for that, of course, is that if God spoke to any of us directly, we would be incinerated.

[ 6 : 13 ] Do you remember in the Old Testament when God spoke to, on Mount Sinai? And the mountain shook with thunder and fire. And Moses said to the people, let's go up the mountain and talk to God.

And they said to Moses, and I quote, you speak to him. You speak to us, Moses, we'll listen to you. But do not let God speak, lest we die.

That's why Jesus says in verse 34, the testimony I receive is not from man. Human testimony is laughably inadequate.

Verse 30, 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. This is what he's been saying about himself all along.

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true, verse 32. But there is another who bears witness about me. And he's speaking about God.

[ 7 : 13 ] And he says, I know that the testimony he bears witness about me is true. So Jesus gives three examples of the testimony of another. Three examples where God speaks and bears witness to his son.

By using human means. The first is John the Baptist, verse 33 to 35. The only reason he's using John the Baptist is he wants to break through the icy coldness of their heart.

The deafness of their hearts. These guys, they're like John the Baptist. They thought he was interesting. They thought he was funny. They thought he was entertaining. And they gave him a few moments of their time.

Verse 34, I'm just telling you this, that you might be saved. Listen to John the Baptist. John the Baptist who said, I'm just a voice. After me will come one who is much greater than me.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Do you remember? He points at Jesus. And John the Baptist says, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And in those words of John the Baptist, God the Father from heaven was identifying the divine identity of his son.

[ 8 : 17 ] Secondly, he says, my father bears witness by my works. Look at verse 36. The signs of John's gospel. They ought to settle the issue of who Jesus is.

They are weightier than the testimony of John the Baptist. Not just because they are awesomely impossible of humans to do. But each sign shows what salvation is about. Remember water into wine.

The healing of the noble man's son. Or the raising of this guy earlier in John 5. Each time when you go through John, it is God the Father bearing witness to Jesus through the signs.

But there's a third example which is the most important of God's testimony. And that is the scriptures. The writings. And he means particularly the Old Testament. Verse 37. Look how Jesus speaks about the Old Testament.

He says, and the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. Or verse 39 at the end. The scriptures bear witness about me. Or verse 46. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me.

[ 9 : 20 ] For he wrote of me. In other words, the Old Testament that you've got on your lap this evening is not just a human document reaching up to God.

But it is a divine document of God reaching down to us. It is not a collection of the greatest hits of Israeli literature. The Old Testament is the testimony of God the Father to you.

Of course. Of course, they are human writings. But ultimately, the source is God. And not just a general sense that as you flick through the Old Testament, you get a general sense of God.

In Jesus' view, the writings of the Old Testament are the Word of God. These writings are the testimony of God the Father to God the Son. So the obvious application is this.

It's read the Old Testament. And when you read it, it is a profoundly relational experience as you encounter the Son of God in the Old Testament.

[ 10 : 25 ] And so we don't read the Bible, do we? We do not read the Bible so much for information, but more for transformation and formation.

As we try and listen and God bears witness, we pray as we read the Bible. Not Lord, help me to get a head full of facts. But help me to know Jesus.

It is extraordinary. The care and the effort that God has gone to to make himself known to you.

But we have to go deeper because Jesus here is laying bare what is a particular temptation and threat to us. So the end of John 5 is often preached evangelistically. I think you can do that and preach on the proofs of who Jesus Christ is.

I think you can do that. But the end of John 5 isn't speaking to the agnostics, somebody who doesn't know. And John 5 isn't speaking actually to atheists who don't believe.

[ 11 : 24 ] The end of John 5 is actually speaking to Presbyterians. To Bible believers. He's speaking to the Orthodox. He's speaking to the Sunday night crowd.

Because the guys at the end of John 5 have studied the Bible more than any of us. And they have completely missed the point. They've studied the written testimony of God. And they have refused and they have not received God's testimony to his son.

And that means they are lost. There are all sorts of ways, aren't there, of avoiding and evading the clear testimony of God about his son.

There's the pick and choose approach. Do you know that? When what we basically do is we put ourselves over the Bible and we say, Well I love the scriptures but there are parts of it.

I can't take it. And it offends me to think that Jesus is the only way to the Father or there might be judgment.

[ 12 : 30 ] Or Jesus has something to say of my sex life and I don't like that. So we cherry pick and we jettison what we don't like. But there are other ways that are even closer to home.

We take all kind of things and we put them alongside the Bible. Like my experience. Or we judge scripture by our church tradition.

Or my intellect. Or my demand for immediate application. If I can't see the immediate application of this passage, I'm not going to believe it. And I think the most dangerous and insidious temptation is especially for Christians like us.

For reformed evangelicals if I can call us that. Because we take, don't we, I hope, an orthodox view of the Bible. And the danger is that we use the Bible to accumulate knowledge.

To build a sense of our own rightness. Without receiving the person. The identity of Jesus Christ. And we use the Bible as a tool to establish our identity in the eyes of each other.

[ 13 : 43 ] Instead of receiving the identity that Jesus is willing and able to give. Why did they not receive the Father's witness?

And the answer the passage gives us is they did not want to. And they didn't want to because they were forming their identity horizontally.

The audience for their identity. They were looking for their identity from one another. So the idea was the more knowledge that they had, the more spiritual they would be regarded.

So at the beginning of the day, at the start of John 5. Jesus confronts a man who's 38 years paralyzed. And he says, do you want to be made whole? And here at the end of the day, he's facing Bible experts who do not want to receive his testimony.

Because they are seeking their human identity in the wrong place. And that moves me to my second point. And the second point is the nature of human identity, of our identity.

[ 14 : 51 ] I want us to see how Jesus exposes the way that we go about constructing our identity. I know it's a little bit hard work tonight, right?

We're all a bit sleepy. But stick with me. It's really, if we can get hold of this, it'll really help us. He takes three steps. Verse 38, he says, you do not have his word abiding in you.

For you do not believe the one whom he has sent. Their hearts are so busy forming their identity horizontally. They're getting their sense of who they are from each other.

They've closed their ears to God. That's step one. Why step two? Because verse 42, they have no love for God in their hearts, really. Why step three?

And I want to read to you verse 44 for that. Because it's so searching. Look what it says, verse 44. Just cast your eyes down. How can you believe when you receive glory from one another?

[15:52] And do not seek the glory that comes from the only God. It's an incredible verse, isn't it?

How can you believe when you receive glory from one another? You look to each other for your identity. And yet you do not seek the glory that comes from God. I've been really helped in thinking about this.

You and I were made for approval. You and I were made for love and for acceptance and for praise and for applause from each other.

That's why when we get it, it feels so good. And we want to know that we are appreciated and worthwhile. That is who we are.

And this is how we form our identity. No matter where you find human beings. It doesn't matter what culture they're from.

[17:00] This is the way that we form our identity. So you think of the more traditional cultures.

Your identity comes primarily from your family. From fathers, grandfathers, from grandparents, what your elders say.

And you slot into your family and an identity tends to be given. Today though, isn't it? It's all about constructing your own individual identity.

So we are told, aren't we? It's difficult to explain. You must not let anyone quash your individuality. You have to find yourself.

You have to believe in yourself. You actually have to express yourself. You have to dream a dream and believe in yourself.

And you have to express yourself. And you have to have a dream and believe the dream so that you can reach the dream. And achieve the dream. And the way that you actually achieve the dream is by everyone else saying you've achieved the dream.

[18:03] so ultimately my identity will depend on me achieving the dream and then you all approving it there's advantages and there's disadvantages to both approaches but in that older approach of the family and the kind of wider community in that approach and in our kind of modern cultures approach of forming identity it all depends doesn't it on the praise of horizontal praise of others can you see that this is a fundamental flaw of human beings living outside the garden of eden because our hearts are no longer tuned to god's approval but different voices to other voices and apart from the lord jesus christ we do not seek the praise that comes only from god we look to others that's why people can't believe in the lord jesus because we replace the approval of god with the approval of each other we're fixated on the horizontal it's a crazy thing is that we give the power of approval and and condemnation and judgment to people around us people some people we don't even like or people we love because our hearts are constantly seeking for this verdict of approval why do you do what you do why do you do what you do why do you do what you do you do something you plan something you share something with someone and and they say to you that devastating question why are you doing that it's very very painful isn't it do you ever ask yourself the question ask yourself the question why are you doing that very often it's for the approval of others isn't it tragedy is it's possible to practice our christianity in exactly that way studying the bible not to encounter the living god but to accrue praise and applause from each other there have been times in my christian life when i've not prayed like i should have been praying and i'd always feel that before i could pray i needed to do a really good hard bible study to show i was genuine it was like i was using the bible to ease my conscience i was trying to make myself more acceptable to god which is stupid all that does is make me deaf to his approval i mean if i would just listen to his word i would hear the testimony of jesus divine identity identity offering to me a new identity a new identity that is not based on my performance or lack of it identity that's not based on my achievements or my genuineness but an identity based on the lord jesus and that is why jesus has come he has come to give us a radically new identity that's not based on what we've achieved that's not based on horizontal applause but based on what he has achieved when i was back at my parents home in

swansea last week i'd forgotten my antiperspirant

and so i i opened my um parents bathroom cupboard 80 year olds have some very funny things in their bathroom cupboards i don't know if you've done that but there was a 10 year old bottle of old spice deodorant old spice deodorant it was all the rage in the 60s but this was my i think this was kind of 10 years old it got out of date i used it anyway and the slogan on old spice deodorant said believe in your smell it's terrific isn't it as my dad believing in his smell it's ridiculous isn't it if jesus christ gives us our identity it's a great relief it's a great relief isn't it true christianity says that you don't have to believe in yourself you young people you know you're taught lots of great things in school but the believing in yourself is absolute rubbish you don't have to believe in yourself tonight you have to believe in the lord jesus you don't have to find yourself or become someone christ alone offers you a radically new identity and the message of christianity is it is received isn't it it's not achieved how well we'll cast your mind back to this wonderful day in john 5 because jesus models for us what it truly means and truly is to live for the praise of the only god look at verse 19 so jesus said to them truly truly i say to you the son can do nothing of his own accord but only what he sees the father doing for whatever the father does the son does likewise for the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing this whole idea of testimony and witness shows us that jesus is living for the praise of god he's not depending on human praise or human witness he's living for god and god the father delights in him because jesus is the only human isn't he who has fully and perfectly lived that life of seeking the praise of the only god but do you know why he did that why did jesus live solely for the praise of god he did it not for himself but for us he came from heaven full of grace and full of truth he gave up his reputation and on the cross he gives up the rightful praise of god and he dies alone and he dies rejected and he dies cursed and he gives away the glory that we might receive it he goes to the end of condemnation so that instead we would receive the praise of god he takes to himself my sinful identity so that i can receive his praiseworthy and glorious identity and so faith in jesus christ is simply hearing the father's voice saying the praise that belongs to christ i'm giving to you the praise that jesus deserved i'm giving to you i'm looking at you as though you are clothed in jesus christ

but there is no possible condemnation for us and it's not just a negative thing is it it's not just a negative thing at all you have all the righteousness that my son has and and that is the basis for our new identity that tonight we gather around the table of the lord as the family of god as the children of god as the sons and daughters of the father as the brothers and sisters of jesus alive with the spirit not earning god's approval but living life based on his approval living life based on his acceptance that is in jesus christ and that is the way that our new identity works and i think that's what this passage is about and as we draw nearer to christ by faith we draw a greater sense of our identity here is the great thing here is my prayer that this week we would be weaned off the crushing dependence of the judgment of others and even of our own judgment and as we begin to seek the praise of the only god because we are we know that we are secure in the praise that we receive from him there's a wonderful passage you can look at tonight before you go to bed it's one corinthians 4 the apostle paul is writing to to a church that's really pretty critical of him and it's very interesting paul doesn't say that he justifies himself he says this he says any human judgment on me doesn't really matter and then he says my own judgment of me doesn't really matter i think i'm innocent but actually what really matters is the lord's opinion it is the lord's conduct commendation that is what matters and praise so verse 24 of john 5 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 and as we go daily this week to his word and as we come to the lord's table tonight and we hear the father's testimony about him this is my son with whom i'm well pleased we we recognize that our father is pleased with us we grow daily on the basis of that identity that we have in the lord jesus christ let's pray