



The Gospel of John

Session Ten: Jesus's Discourse on His Authority

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

Today we'll examine Jesus's testimony before the religious leaders of the day. He accused them of arrogantly ignoring the truth that was right before their eyes—Jesus's own words and actions, the witness of others like John the Baptist, the approval of God the Father, and the evidence of Old Testament Scripture all point to Jesus as Messiah.

For believers, the fact that we have responded to the gospel is an act of God's goodness and generosity, not a cause for arrogance. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast."*

As we discuss Christ's rule and reign this week, consider those in your life who have yet to respond in faith to Christ. Commit to pray for them to see the truth and trustworthiness of Jesus. Also, look for ways you can respond anew to Jesus's authority in your own life.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 5:19-47

THE MAIN IDEA

Like a television courtroom drama, Jesus presented His case to the religious leaders of the day. As God's Son, He has authority over all things. Each person must choose how they respond to the authority of Jesus in his or her life.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do you relate to Christ's authority in your life? Are there parts of life you try to keep from Jesus's rule and reign? How is that keeping you from experiencing Him fully?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 5:19-30 Like an expert witness in a trial, Jesus told the religious leaders that He was at work because the Father had commissioned Him to work on His behalf. He and the Father are united in purpose and authority. To reject Jesus is to reject the Father.

John 5:31-35 There are other witnesses to the authority and divinity of Christ. The testimony of John the Baptist, Jesus's own healings and miracles, the approval of the Father, and the witness of Scripture all point to Him. For some, no amount of information will be enough. Data isn't sufficient for belief in Jesus—it is a step of faith.

John 5:17-18 God has given Christ authority over all things. For the religious leaders, the verdict was in—their lack of belief in the Scriptures and faith in Christ would condemn them to life apart from God. Jesus stands ready to give eternal life, but we must come to Him by faith to receive it.



START HERE

The religious leaders of the day should have been among the first to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. They had the benefit of years of studying the Scriptures and knew what they said about the coming Messiah. However, their knowledge made them arrogant and self-righteous. In their own pursuit of knowledge, they missed wisdom and spiritual insight. Be on the lookout for ways in which you might be tempted to overlook Christ's rule and reign in your life and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how you can rightly relate to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

DISCUSS

Have you ever been called for jury duty or to testify in a case? How important was it that your judgment or testimony be accurate? Today, we'll examine the evidence Christ gives for His authority as the Messiah. Notice the different "witnesses" He called. How compelling is the evidence?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. The Expert Witness: The Son's Word and Authority

John 5:19-30: Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son likewise does these things. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing, and he will show him greater works than these so that you will be amazed. And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants. The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

"Truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.

"Truly I tell you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he has granted to the Son to have life in himself. And he has granted him the right to pass judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of condemnation.

"I can do nothing on my own. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me.



Unpacking John 5:19-30

In modern courtrooms, a case can turn on the testimony of an expert witness. Crime scene investigators, crash reconstruction experts, or forensic psychologists offer what they know, what they have observed, and what the evidence points to in order to give testimony in court. In ancient Jewish culture, the testimony of two or three individuals held great weight (Deuteronomy 19:15). In today's text, Jesus continued to address the Jewish leaders who accused Him of blasphemy (See last week's lesson on John 4:43–5:18). This time, Jesus stands as His own expert witness—pointing to His works as evidence of His divine nature.

Look back briefly at John 5:1-18 to reorient yourself to the context. Jesus had healed the man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. When the Jewish leaders questioned Him, Jesus declared that *"My Father is still working, and I am working also"* (v. 17). The religious leaders became enraged and wanted to kill Him, because He not only broke their Sabbath laws, but He called God His own Father. Jesus's words comprise today's text as He confronted the religious leaders for their lack of faith. As you study, look for themes that resonate in our culture today—examples of reasons people give for not coming to faith—as well as areas in which you also struggle to believe from time to time. Facing our doubts with the truth of God's Word is one tool God uses to help our faith grow.

In verses 19-23, Jesus said He was not acting independent of the Father, but rather interdependently. Jesus does what He sees the Father doing. The Father entrusts all that He does to the Son. The Father has even entrusted all judgment and giving life to those whom He chooses. For the Jewish leaders of the day, this was an astonishing statement. Not only was Jesus calling Himself God's Son, but He also testified to personally hearing from God and sharing authority with Him.

Even in the early church, there was controversy around the nature of Christ's divinity. In the early 300s CE, a pastor named Arius of Alexandria, taught that because God is unknowable, Jesus couldn't be fully God because He was known. Arius held that Jesus was the first created being, but not equal to the Father. This heresy ripped at the fabric of the early church, causing controversy and confusion. At the first Nicene Council in 325, the church declared that Jesus is *"of the same substance of the Father."* The creed that came out of that debate, called the Nicene Creed, reads in part:

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."

In today's text, the Jewish leaders were not ready to accept that Christ is fully God and fully man. However, in rejecting Christ, they rejected the very One through whom they could be saved. Even now, people will try and make Jesus fit their preferences. Some may view Jesus as



a good teacher yet reject His divinity. Others may say He is God, but do not believe He has authority over their lives. Some may see Jesus as a political leader, fighting to give them the kind of security on earth they will only experience in heaven. Still others may attempt to make Jesus a talisman—a kind of good luck charm to pray to when they need something. When we come to Christ, we don't get to set the terms about who He is. Christ's eternity, His position as the second member of the Godhead, His authority to forgive sins and His eternal relationship with the Father are not up for debate. We come to Christ as He is, not as we wish Him to be. As He said in verse 23: *"Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."*

"Truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life" (v. 24). The Father has given all judgment to the Son, and we are all sinners who deserve God's judgment (Romans 3:23; 6:23). However, Jesus declared that faith in Him is the bridge over which sinful man may cross from death to life. Isn't it ironic that Jesus declared freedom from judgment to the very people who stood in judgment of Him? Christ preached freedom from sin and eternal life to them, knowing they belonged to the same group of people who would soon call for His death. Like the Jewish rulers, we are by nature *"children of wrath"* (Ephesians 2:3). It is wonderful news that Christ made a way for sinful man to come near to Him! *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!"* (Ephesians 2:4-5).

In verses 25-29, Jesus made the case that while all may come to Him for eternal life, there is not an unlimited amount of time in which to come to Him. Jesus declared that an hour is coming when the dead will rise, and Christ will pass judgment on humanity. Some will be resurrected to eternal life, and others will face eternal separation from God. Christ is both the expert witness to the glory of God, and the ultimate judge over humanity. Because *"an hour is coming,"* we should take seriously our commitment to Christ and sharing Him with others. Jesus concluded His expert testimony by saying, *"I can do nothing on my own. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me"* (v. 30). Jesus does not act independent of the Father but aligns His judgment with His Father.

The writers of the Nicene Creed had an arduous task. How could they, in a few short sentences, summarize the major theology of the early church, protect it against heresy, and make it plain enough for the average follower of Jesus to remember? At the Council of Nicaea the canon of Scripture was closed, meaning that the books of the New Testament were determined and fixed forever as the Bible we know today. However, it would be more than a thousand years before the average person would even see a printed copy of the Bible, let alone possess one of their own. The Nicene Creed became a way for people to articulate the major teachings of the church, and to declare what they believed. As these early Church fathers wrote a few sentences about the divinity and authority of Jesus to judge mankind, they wrote, *"He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end."* Jesus has authority to judge because He



suffered to pay the price for our sins. And He is the only One who could do that, because He is the only One eternally equal to the Father. What we believe about Jesus matters today, how we talk about Jesus matters today, because what we do with Jesus matters for eternity.

DISCUSS

- *What did Jesus mean when he said, “The Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing” (v. 19)?*
- *How does the courtroom image of an expert witness help us understand Jesus’s relationship with the Father and His authority over all? In what ways does this challenge modern notions of individual autonomy?*
- *If Jesus’s authority is rooted in His submission to the Father’s will and His doing only what He sees the Father do, how might that shape how you respond to Jesus’s words and work in your life? Where might you need to recognize His authority rather than “doing your own thing”?*

2. The Corroborating Witnesses: John the Baptist, Works, the Father, Scripture

John 5:31-40: *“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies about me, and I know that the testimony he gives about me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. I don’t receive human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. John was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.*

“But I have a greater testimony than John’s because of the works that the Father has given me to accomplish. These very works I am doing testify about me that the Father has sent me. The Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You have not heard his voice at any time, and you haven’t seen his form. You don’t have his word residing in you, because you don’t believe the one he sent. You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.

Unpacking John 5:31-40

In a trial, the jury can’t rely on only the defendant’s testimony; other witnesses must corroborate it. In this portion of the text, Jesus transitioned His argument from His own expert testimony to the testimony of others. Here Jesus appealed to four categories of witness: the witness of John the Baptist, Christ’s works, the witness of the Father, and the witness of the Scriptures—each supporting the claim of His identity and authority. In essence, Jesus said: *“Don’t just take my word; here is supporting testimony.”*

“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies about me, and I know that the testimony he gives about me is true” (vv. 31-32). Jesus acknowledged that if His



testimony was the only one given, no one would take His claims seriously. There is another who bears witness to Him. Additionally, think for a moment of all the ways that Jesus's testimony could have been proven true. Think about Old Testament prophecies, miracles, and healings, as well as the three witnesses in this section. If you were a first-century Jew who witnessed Jesus and His teachings, which evidence would be most compelling for you?

The first piece of evidence Jesus presented was the life and ministry of John the Baptist. He reminded the Jewish leaders that they went to John at the Jordan River to hear his testimony (John 1:19-23). However, they rejected his claim that Jesus is the Messiah. In fact, John the Baptist claimed that part of the reason he baptized was so the Messiah might be revealed in Israel (John 1:26-27). They came to John to satisfy their curiosity about this traveling teacher who preached so provocatively, but they failed to listen to His words. John's testimony was clear: *And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he rested on him. I didn't know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The one you see the Spirit descending and resting on—he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God"* (John 1:32-34).

The person who comes to Christ does so because the Spirit draws him or her (John 6:44,65). Jesus described John as a "shining light" the people were compelled by for a season, drawn by his fiery preaching and his baptism of repentance. Even John, who testified about Christ with conviction and power, experienced people who rejected his testimony. As we share Christ with others, we can rest in the truth that it is our responsibility to share, but it is God who causes the seed of the gospel to take root and grow (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

"But I have a greater testimony than John's because of the works that the Father has given me to accomplish. These very works I am doing testify about me that the Father has sent me" (v. 36). Jesus's next witness was the evidence of the works He had done. As we have studied over the last few weeks, by this point in His ministry Jesus had turned water into wine (John 2:7-9), cleansed the temple (John 2:13-17), performed signs at Passover (John 2:23), healed the royal official's son (John 4:50), and healed the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:8). The witness of His works should have been sufficient for people to believe He is the Messiah. However, as Jesus said in Matthew 12:38-40, no number of signs would be enough. The ultimate sign Jesus would give is the "sign of Jonah." Christ's death, burial, and resurrection three days later would be the ultimate sign, though He correctly foretold that even that would not be sufficient for some to believe.

In verses 37-38, Jesus called His next witness—God the Father. *"The Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You have not heard his voice at any time, and you haven't seen his form. You don't have his word residing in you, because you don't believe the one he sent."* Here, Jesus likely referred to His own baptism, when God spoke from heaven, saying, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). Jesus told the religious leaders that their failure to recognize the Messiah was paramount to rejecting God Himself.



In verses 38-40, Jesus called His final witness to His divinity—the testimony of Scripture. To these religious leaders who spent their lives memorizing and teaching Scripture, Jesus declared, “*You don’t have his word residing in you, because you don’t believe the one he sent. You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.*” The religious leaders of the day should have been the first to recognize the Messiah. However, they stubbornly refused to acknowledge what the Old Testament declared about Jesus. They were filled with knowledge about God but lacked love. Their endless recitations of Scripture had turned them into “*clanging cymbals*” who had abundant knowledge but lacked love (1 Corinthians 13:1-2). Knowledge of Scripture isn’t enough to get into heaven. Scripture is a corroborating witness that points all people to Jesus.

DISCUSS

- *What are the three witnesses Jesus referenced, and how does each support His claims?*
- *The legal notion of the day was two or three credible witnesses were needed (see Deuteronomy 19:15). What does this tell us about how Jesus invites belief?*
- *In your life, whose “witness” do you rely on—or fail to rely on—for Jesus’s identity and authority? How might you give greater priority to the witness of Scripture and the Father rather than relying solely on your personal feelings or experience?*

3. The Verdict of Rejection: Ignoring the Witness, Rejecting Christ

John 5:41-47: “I do not accept glory from people, but I know you—that you have no love for God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and yet you don’t accept me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, since you accept glory from one another but don’t seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But if you don’t believe what he wrote, how will you believe my words?”

Unpacking John 5:41-47

In a courtroom, once the final witness has been called, the jury begins their deliberations. Before they can decide a verdict, they must examine the evidence. Do they believe the witnesses called were credible, and how did their testimonies impact the jury’s ideas about guilt or innocence? Will they accept the testimony of the expert and corroborating witnesses, or reject them altogether? After Jesus presented His final witness, Scripture, He gave a verdict to the Jewish rulers—they did not have God’s love in them, and they had rejected the One God sent. When the jury returns a verdict, the accused stand before the judge to hear their fate. Christ’s verdict for the religious rulers was severe. The same verdict applies to us. We can have all the information we want, but if that information doesn’t move us to turn to Christ for



forgiveness and healing, our destiny will be eternity apart from God. Like the religious leaders, we all need to come to God through faith in His Son.

“I do not accept glory from people, but I know you—that you have no love for God within you.” (vv. 41-42). The religious leaders loved the praise of people. Jesus taught in Matthew 6:5, *“Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward.”* Jesus wasn't impressed with their religious posturing, and He said their arrogance meant their love for God was lacking. This is a warning—if the highest rulers in the world approve of us, but we lack God's approval based on faith in His Son, we have nothing. In Galatians 1:10, the apostle Paul wrote something similar when he said, *“For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*

“I have come in my Father's name, and yet you don't accept me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, since you accept glory from one another but don't seek the glory that comes from the only God?” (vv. 43-44). The religious leaders were quick to seek the approval and validation of others but refused to acknowledge Jesus. They gave one another attention and glory for their pious deeds and religious activity but failed to seek God's approval. These men had created an arrogant feedback loop—spending all their time applauding one another while missing living in the light of the one the Scriptures pointed to all along.

Finally, Jesus accused the religious leaders of betraying the law of Moses, whom they revered: *“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But if you don't believe what he wrote, how will you believe my words?”* (vv. 45-47). Moses, along with all the other Old Testament prophets, pointed to Christ, yet the people who spent the most time studying the prophets could not recognize the Messiah in their midst. God is still at work in our lives and in the world around us. *“My Father is still working, and I am working also.”* (John 5:17). Will we join God in His work? Will we search and apply the Scriptures to our own lives? Will we submit to His authority in our lives?

The religious leaders of the day had all the evidence—the expert witness of Christ, the corroborating witnesses of John the Baptist, Jesus's works, the testimony of the Father, and the Scriptures, yet failed to recognize Him. The judicial image is stark: to reject the verdict is to condemn oneself.

DISCUSS

- *Who were the leaders ultimately rejecting?*
- *How does the legal/witness metaphor help you see the seriousness of this rejection?*
- *Have you ever been in a position where you had evidence or testimony but chose to ignore it or reject it? In what area of your spiritual life might you be resisting the witness*



of Christ, the Father or Scripture? What step could you take to move toward acceptance rather than rejection?

DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *How does failing to recognize Jesus's authority in all things keep us from experiencing the fullness of life in Him?*
- *Did you experience a time of searching before you came to Christ? What finally moved you from unbelief to belief—was it more information, or something (or someone) else?*
- *What's at stake for those who reject Christ? What should people who already belong to Christ do with that knowledge? How should it change how we live?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

How can you keep your heart open to Jesus's authority and work in your life this week? How can you be a reliable witness if God gives you the opportunity?

APPLY

Is there an area where you struggle to acknowledge Christ's authority? What is holding you back from surrendering to Him? What would faithful obedience or surrender look like?

REFERENCES

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