

Witnesses

HN/SS 10/10/04 am

Reading: Deuteronomy 19, John 5:24-47

Study: John 5:31-38

Psalms: 119:129-133, 18:28-32, 36:1-4, 36:5-9

When applying for a job you prepare a Curriculum Vitae for yourself. You write details about your education, interests, and employment history. And then you attach letters from referees, people who know you and will vouch for your good character. Usually these are prominent or important people in their field.

A friend of mine tells how he went for a job interview when he was young. He carefully prepared his C.V. and went along very nervously to meet the panel. As the interview started one of the panel, noticing his name was the same as that of the owner of the company, asked him if he was related. "Yes, he is my uncle," said the nervous young man. He got the job.

As Jesus stood before His accusers defending His claim to be the Son of God, He referred to a number of witnesses that supported His claim. But His greatest witness was the Father himself.

When Jesus spoke of God as *My Father*, the Jews accused him of blasphemy, of making himself equal with God. Jesus went on to explain to them that he was indeed loved by the Father in a most intimate way. They did the same things. Like the Father, Jesus was the giver of life and the judge of all men. Therefore, he must be accorded the same honour and worship.

But the legally minded Jews wanted evidence, they wanted witnesses to support these exalted claims of Jesus. He stood before them having just healed a cripple of 38 years, but that was not sufficient evidence in their view. They wanted witnesses.

In 8:13 the Pharisees said to Jesus, *you bear witness of yourself; your witness is not true*. Self-witness was not accepted in their law, even though in Jesus' case it is true for as he said *he knew where he came from and where he was going*.

Jesus brings forth four witnesses to substantiate his claim to deity, to being the Son of God – John the Baptist, his works, the Father and Scripture (only time to look at three today).

His own witness was not acceptable to them – okay he says, but there is another witness whose witness is true. He was probably thinking of his Father at this time. What greater witness could he have than God the Father! But for their understanding, to start with them where they were at, he begins with other witnesses. In their blindness, they would struggle to understand the direct witness of God to his deity.

John the Baptist

The Jews knew John. They had sent a delegation to question him as to whom he was, and by what authority he was baptising. He told them he was not the Christ but the forerunner, the herald of the coming One. When he saw Jesus, he testified *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. John bore witness to Jesus as the Son of God – *I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God* (1:34). The people flocked to hear John and be baptised, including Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 3:7).

You were willing for a time to rejoice in his light said Jesus. The Jews at that time were on the lookout for the Messiah. It was a time of heightened expectation. Hence, the questions put to John. They basked in the religious fervour surrounding John, even though they obviously did not understand his message.

John was a burning and shining lamp. His lamp would burn out. He was only for a time and that time was cut short by the wickedness of Herod in putting John to death. Herod, not the Jewish leaders put John to death.

John's witness was clear and unequivocal. Look at 3:31-36. His words are very similar to those of Jesus in this chapter. He comes from above – from heaven. He speaks the words of God. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life. This is the testimony of John.

Jesus calls upon his accusers to think about, to consider the witness of John for *he has borne witness to the truth*. If they will consider John's witness and accept the truth, they will be saved. For John himself called upon them to believe in the Son and live. How great is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that even as he stands before his accusers he expresses this desire that they be saved and not perish.

For himself Jesus did not put much value in the testimony of John. *I do not receive testimony from man*. Referees on your CV are usually prominent men or women in their field. I found it a bit embarrassing after returning from India to have references from men who were junior to me in the Government service 15 years before. I had actually given a reference to one man to help him emigrate all those years ago. Now he had become a leading researcher. Jesus humbly pointed the Jews to the testimony of John that they might be saved – but he himself did not depend on such testimony.

Works

In prison, John sought confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 11). He heard about the works of Christ. Jesus sent him a message – the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised. Such miraculous signs are clear evidence of the power of God revealed in this world.

Power to heal the sick and raise the dead, power to cast out demons, power to rule over creation as demonstrated in turning water into wine - Jesus displayed such divine power.

In the beginning, all things were made through him as the Word who was God. It stands to reason that as God the Son he has power over his creation.

The Jews were forced to account for the miracles which Jesus did, and the undeniably supernatural power being displayed. Tragically, they attributed this power to Beelzebub, to the devil. Great also is the blindness of modern men who seek to deny the miracles all together – to try to account for them on scientific or literary grounds.

Jesus performed miracles and indeed many other works by divine power, by the power of God. They were the works the Father gave him to do. The prophet Isaiah had spoken of such a witness and Jesus inaugurated his ministry with reference to this Old Testament prophet (Luke 4) – *he has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives...and recovery of sight to the blind.*

But the Jews were not listening to this testimony of the works of Jesus – even though it was so clearly pointed out to them by John and by Jesus.

Father

The Father himself who sent me has testified of me. This was the greatest witness, the weightiest evidence, as far as Jesus was concerned – the witness of God the Father to his being God the Son. He knew he was sent by God, he knew the miracles were done by the power of God, for all that he did was in accordance with his Father's will. But how to convince these sceptics, these blind religious leaders – that was the challenge!

God had spoken but they had not heard. When had God spoken? Well at his baptism, a voice spoke from heaven saying *this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* God spoke giving direct testimony to Jesus as his Son. This was witnessed by John and others. There was the visual witness of the dove also at that time.

But Jesus was probably thinking of the witness of the patriarchs and the prophets as he spoke to these Jews of the testimony of his Father. God spoke to Abraham, while Jacob saw God face to face at Peniel. Moses met with God on the mountain, and the prophets heard the voice of God and proclaimed his word. God revealed himself to men and this revelation is there for all to see.

In the past God spoke by the prophets – at various times and in various ways (Hebrews 1:1). But these Jews did not hear his voice. They did not see his form even though they diligently searched the Scriptures.

Why was this? Why did they miss this whole comprehensive witness of the Father to Jesus being the Son of God? The witness was there- the evidence for his deity was overwhelming. But they **willed** not to hear. They willed not to see this evidence. His word was not abiding in their hearts. It was only in their heads.

In their religious pride, they were looking only to themselves and seeing how they could keep the law. They were not ready to humble themselves before the Lord. They were not

seeking the truth. If they had done this – if they had truly looked to God they would have seen clearly and would have believed in Jesus whom God had sent according to all that he had spoken in the past and in the present .

‘They willed not to come to Jesus and accordingly found all sorts of reasons for rejecting the divine witness. Let us be warned’ (Morris). There is no blindness so profound and so dangerous as the person who thinks they see when they are blind. Such a person is a great danger not only to themselves but also to all around!

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