

His Own Did Not Receive Him

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[0 : 0 0] Good afternoon, everyone. It is lovely to see you all here. You've all grabbed a seat already. You're behaving today. Well done. Today we're going to be reading from John chapter 5, and that's on page 890 of the Bibles you should have on your seats. That's page 890. And as you turn that up, let's pray together and ask the Lord's help as we turn to his word.

Our Lord and Father, we come to you with many worries, many thoughts swirling around our heads and many concerns in our lives. But Father, please help us to have clear minds to hear you speak from your word. Give us your spirit so that what we hear today will lead to us knowing and trusting in your Son and seeking to give you all the glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. So we're going to be reading from John chapter 5, verse 31 through to verse 47. That's verse 31 we're starting at.

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things to you so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen. And you do not have his word abiding in you. For you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness about me.

[2 : 3 9] Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.

I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe when you receive glory from one another, and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you, Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? Ewan McGregor is a Scottish actor. He's one of our own.

He's famous for many of his roles, but probably none more so than his turn as Obi-Wan Kenobi in the Star Wars saga. A few years ago, he was on a rather long bike ride with a friend, traveling from John O'Groats, not to Land's End, but to South Africa.

[3 : 5 7] And along the way, he stopped in a place called Matmata in Tunisia. Now, this place might mean nothing to you. It means nothing to me. But if you're a Star Wars fan, then this place is a big deal.

It's where Luke Skywalker was raised and has a range of different sets that were used in the movies. It was all filmed there. It's a bit of a pilgrimage place for people who consider themselves real Star Wars fans.

And it's always full of tourists who are walking around looking for all the details they can see in the film sets. Well, as Ewan McGregor stopped off there, he said this.

We went to the place where Luke Skywalker grew up in the film. I was standing next to my own poster there. The place was full of Star Wars fans and...

No one recognized me. No one. Somehow, despite them being experts in all things Star Wars, they managed to miss one of its most famous faces, standing right in front of them, with a big poster there to help them.

[5 : 06] No big welcoming party. No one excited to see him. Just people wanting him to get out of the way so they could see the real stuff, the real Star Wars set. I've no idea why they didn't recognize him, but it's quite embarrassing that when you're a huge Star Wars fan, with Obi-Wan Kenobi himself standing in front of you, that you don't recognize him at all.

Today in our passage, we're presented with a different set of experts. We're presented with Jesus' own people. Those who knew everything there was to know about the scriptures. Those who had the temple, the land, the people, the promises, all of that.

But who, when they were presented with Jesus, the one who all of that pointed to, they didn't notice him for who he is. They didn't recognize him.

Despite being his own people, waiting for him, they didn't recognize Jesus. As John said in chapter 1, his own people did not receive him.

So Jesus speaks to these people who, despite having everything they could ever need to know, to know who he is, did not receive him. And we're going to look at this passage in two parts, and see firstly, that Jesus is the witnessed Messiah.

[6 : 30] For us to understand this passage, we need to remember who Jesus is speaking to. He's speaking to a group of Jews who doubt who he is.

They doubt his credentials. And who, in verse 18, are seeking to kill him. They know the scriptures. They're part of the established religious setup.

And they think that Jesus is blaspheming. Last week, we heard that he was equating himself with God, and that he is the judge and life giver of all humanity.

But the Jews didn't buy it. Not for one second. They thought he was blaspheming, that he was lying. That's why Jesus says in verse 31, if I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

Now, we know that we can trust Jesus' testimony. We know that. But for these Jews he's speaking to, they don't know that at all. So they just see this man coming out of a small town, making great claims about himself, with no one else backing him up.

[7 : 36] So why would they believe him? Especially if Jesus was the only one saying he was the son of God. But thankfully, Jesus says that he's not the only one who says that.

He's got proof, people who will corroborate his testimony. So as he speaks to this crowd of people who don't believe him and are seeking to kill him, he tells them of four witnesses to who he is, who are all saying the same thing.

They're singing from the same hymn sheet. And who to the Jews should be the most credible of witnesses. So let's meet these four witnesses. And firstly, Jesus brings up John the Baptist.

Let's read what Jesus says about him in verse 32. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Jesus unequivocally states that John the Baptist spoke the truth about him. John was there to prepare the way of the Lord, so he preached of the coming one, of the Messiah coming to save the world from their sin.

[8 : 46] John's ministry, it was never about John. He was always pointing away from himself, towards Jesus. He spoke of him, the one who was far greater than himself, so that people would find salvation in him.

And as knowledge of John's ministry grew, and more people recognized that he was a prophet truly sent by God, the Pharisees sent people to scope him out, to see what he was saying.

And the result of that was, at the end of verse 35, you are willing to rejoice for a while in his light. The Jews responded well to him at first.

They were looking forward to the coming Messiah, and the baptizing of the Spirit, which John spoke of. But when the Messiah came, they rejected him. Sadly, they rejoiced in John's witness, only for a while.

It didn't last. The fruit of John's ministry should have been God's people, and en masse, recognizing the Messiah coming, swarming towards him. But instead, the Jews rejected him.

[10 : 01] His own did not receive him. Jesus' second witness is his works. Verse 36. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John.

For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. Jesus has an even greater testimony than that of John.

And it's weightier, it's heavier, it's more substantial. It's not just a human saying that Jesus is Messiah. It's the witness of the Father, as Jesus is doing his work.

And the works Jesus did, the miracles he performed, were nothing less than what the Father gave him to do. They're not human, but divine, and showed who he was sent from.

So they're even more credible than the words John said about Jesus. We can quite often get confused in our heads about what these miracles meant, and think that they were purely acts of kindness, which were meant to follow in our own way, that it was an example for us to follow.

[11 : 13] Now, Jesus' miracles absolutely were kind. He had great compassion on the people he helped. He loved them deeply, far more deeply than you or I ever could. But these works primarily asserted who he is, that he is the Son, the Lord of all creation, sent by the Father to save.

Jesus wasn't just special. He wasn't just a prophet, or someone noteworthy, or someone who could give a really good speech.

He's the Son of God, come to save us from the judgment of sin. And every work he did, proclaimed that loudly and clearly for all to see. And the Jews didn't get that.

They still thought he was blaspheming. In fact, they even accused him of doing these good works, healing people, helping people, by the power of the devil, rather than God.

They were given all the evidence they needed to know who he was, but still, they rejected him. And here is Jesus' third witness, and it's one that the Jews would surely have to listen to.

[12 : 29] Their scriptures. Look at verse 39 with me. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me.

The Old Testament bears witness to who Jesus is. And he goes even further for his Jewish listeners. Verse 46.

If you believed Moses, which, of course, in their opinion, they did, you would believe me. For he wrote of me. Even Moses, their Moses, testifies to Jesus.

The Jews searched the scriptures diligently, thinking that searching alone and knowing lots about them would lead to eternal life. But they missed the point.

They were missing that the whole Bible is designed to make people recognize who Jesus is, to have faith in him and receive eternal life in his name. They knew lots about the scriptures more than anyone else.

[13 : 34] But they didn't know the author. They didn't know the Savior, who it was always leading them to, even as he stood right in front of them and looked them in the eye.

Let's hear Jesus' fourth witness. And this witness is the one tying all of those other witnesses together. The Father himself. In verse 37, Jesus says, The Father is witnessing to Christ through all of this.

John the Baptist was his prophet, preaching of his son coming to bring his kingdom. The works themselves were a witness of the Father. As Jesus said, he was doing the Father's work that the Father had given him.

And the scripture, well, of course, that is God's word. So the Old Testament itself is the Father's witness about the son. The God the Jewish leaders of the day claim to know so much about is witnessing to his son through his prophet, his works and his word.

And his son is standing right there in front of them, looking at them, speaking with them. But still they don't recognize him for who he is. They're like these Star Wars fans with Obi-Wan Kenobi right in front of them.

[14 : 56] A poster there to tell them exactly who he is. Without a clue of what's going on. John wants his readers to be in no doubt about who Jesus is.

He is the clearly proclaimed son of God come to save. And he builds up this case to prove that without doubt. He's presenting them with lots of evidence so that they might believe and have eternal life in his name.

So if that's all true, and it seems like quite a conclusive case, why would the Jews not believe him? He's the son of God who's come to save. He's their Messiah, who their scriptures point to.

So why are they not jumping on board? Why do they not believe this? That's what we see in our second point where we see very sadly that his own people want praise rather than salvation.

Jesus makes a series of piercing pronouncements telling the Jews he's speaking to that in no uncertain terms, they are getting everything wrong. For all their knowledge of the scriptures, all the time they spent studying them and teaching them and making themselves experts, they are missing everything that the scriptures are all about.

[16 : 16] So Jesus tells the Jews that they don't know God. They don't know his word. They don't love him. And they don't believe any of the words that they actually study.

Look at the second half of verse 37 with me. Speaking about the father, his voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you.

They don't know God. They wouldn't know what he sounded or looked like if he was standing right in front of them, which he was. And they don't have his word living in them despite all the time they spent searching the scriptures.

Look at verse 39. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

For all their searching of the scriptures, they're headed for death. They have no life at all. Or verse 42. And this one is cutting.

[17 : 36] But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. They don't love God. For all the time they spend in his house, his word, his people, his land, they've got no love for him.

None at all. And verse 45. There is one who accuses you. Moses. On whom you have set your hope.

The people who hold themselves up as being experts in Moses' writings don't actually believe in Moses' words. And in fact, Moses accuses them.

He judges them. They don't know God. They don't know his word. They don't have life. They don't love him.

And they are accused by Moses. Why? Verse 40. You refuse to come to me that you may have life.

[18 : 44] And he says almost exactly the same in verse 38, verse 43, and verse 46. Jesus says all this is because they won't receive him.

They refuse to come to him. They don't believe and trust in him for salvation. They don't recognize him for who he is. Despite having all the evidence right there in front of them. Why won't they receive him?

Well, surely it's more than just a case of mistaken identity. Surely it's more than just an honest mistake than them not quite getting the final piece of the jigsaw together. Well, Jesus says that they reject him not because they just can't quite put everything together, as though it were some kind of mental stumbling block.

This isn't a question of intelligence. This is a question of heart. And theirs is very disobedient. They all have hearts of self-glory.

Look at what Jesus says of the Jews in verse 44. How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

[19 : 57] It's quite simple, really. They want to be liked. They want praise from people, from each other, rather than God. Those who seem to know the scriptures better than anyone have God himself in the form of Jesus Christ standing in front of them, speaking with them, telling them clearly who he is.

And they don't recognize him. Why? Well, they want to be liked by the people around them. They'd rather do that than take a stand and trust this man who is everything that their scriptures were pointing to.

Remember, the Jewish leaders have decided that they're going to actively try to kill Jesus. He's seen as a threat to their way of life, their control of the people, and well, they don't want to give that up, do they?

Quite simply, they've got too much to lose. They love the religious setup where they have all the power, they have all the praise, they've got the adoration of the people, and they can quite happily sit around and, well, just tell each other what a great job they're doing.

They think they don't need God's praise because they're just completely satisfied with the praise of each other. They've got disobedient hearts which are desperate for the praise of others.

[21 : 20] Well, what does all this mean for us today? How does Jesus' conversation with a bunch of Jews who were seeking to kill him relate to us at all? Well, we might not be disobedient Jews but we are Bible people, aren't we?

We have lots of the Bible in our churches, we go to Bible studies and, well, kudos to you, you're even here at the lunchtime Bible talk. We get lots of Bible and we might be quite proud of it, we might wear it as a bit of a badge of honour.

But we need to remember the whole point of all that Bible. We can't forget why we do this, why we open up and read from this book. The whole point of everything we do in church, especially in preaching and reading the word, is to find salvation in Jesus and grow in him.

That's the point. It's about knowing him, loving him and serving him, recognising who he really is. It's easy for us to keep coming to church to know lots about the Bible, yet not truly be in relationship with him, holding him at arm's length on the outside.

We can fool ourselves into thinking that, well, we don't really need to do anything about the sin that's in our hearts and our lives because, well, it's only in here. It doesn't actually affect anyone out there.

[22 : 47] We're still serving in church, we're still members, we're looking like committed church members on the outside. But slowly, slowly, that idea can just chip away until there is nothing left.

And we're just doing church because, well, we're on the road to this Sunday, we've got to be there. Or we're going to see our friends or, well, some folk would be disappointed that we're not there. Our prayer life might die and, well, Jesus isn't part of the picture of our everyday life because we don't know him.

There's no real relationship there. You can know all you want about how sacrifices functioned in the Old Testament. You could know everything there is to know about the geography of the promised land and you could know all about how the gospel accounts were written.

But crucially, if you don't truly recognize Jesus as your Lord and Savior and submit to him, then knowing everything about the Bible doesn't do you any good.

In fact, Jesus would say that it accuses you. It lines you up for judgment. When you open up your Bible and read the word in front of your eyes, you're either knowing and loving Christ more or bringing more and more judgment upon yourself.

[24 : 08] So humble yourself before him in his words, for only in him is life found. And we might fall into the second temptation of wanting people's praise more than we want God's.

The world we live in has a very strange, restricted relationship with Jesus. It's okay with us believing in him as long as we keep it very personal and keep it to ourselves.

We certainly shouldn't be doing anything that would tell anyone to change their behavior or impact on their freedom, making them deny who they think they are. There are pressures all around us which want us to keep quiet when it comes to who Jesus is on a whole bunch of different matters, depending on your friendship group or your neighborhood or wherever you get your news.

We as people living in the real world in 2020 need to accept that we are not going to be faithful Christians if we're concerned with pleasing people, if we don't want to rock the boat.

We're just not. But to be faithful to Jesus, we're going to have to lovingly upset people so that we can be faithful to Christ.

[25 : 24] We might lose friends or family. Our neighbors might think we're total lunatics. Our colleagues might look down at us and think we're inferior.

But recognizing who Jesus is should mean that we don't think for a second, about disobeying him for the sake of man's praise. We are to recognize the truth that Jesus is God.

He really is in our minds. So that every other opinion, every other verdict is put into perspective. Because Jesus is the judge of all humanity and the only source of eternal life.

So his opinion and verdict is the only one we are to live for. let's pray. Our Lord and Father, we thank you for your kindness in sending your son into the world to die so that we might have life in his name.

Please be helping us to recognize him for who he is and to honor him in the way we live day by day. and please father help us to seek your glory above anything else, above the praise of any other so that we might bring glory and honor to you.

[26 : 48] in Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Thank you.