

**-S-** Reading John 8:12 to 20

**-S-** John 8:12-18

Sermon #51

**-S-** **Do the Witnesses Agree?**

May 18, 2014

Today I thought we would start with some intrigue and see if it applies to our study in the Gospel According to John. If you were a person of low morals and were being accused or charged of crimes by witnesses, what might you do? If you were guilty and unscrupulous then you would have three courses of action before you. **-S-** Firstly, you could eliminate the witnesses. As Mary Mohane, former White House intern, was gunned down with 2 co-workers in July of 1997. She was about to testify concerning sexual harassment at the White House. Or, if murder were beyond what you were willing to do, you would buy them off so they would not testify. As the former Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, was charged with in November of 2013 during his trial for tax evasion. **-S-** Secondly, you could work to discredit the witnesses so their testimony would lack merit. In March 2014, the murder trial of Allan Kustok, several expert witnesses were called to discredit the prosecution's key forensic witness by attacking his past testimonies in trials and the discovery that he had been paid \$150,000.00 for his testimony by the District Attorney. This character attack worked and the taxpayers paid heavily for the botched trial and the possible release of a guilty man. **-S-** Thirdly, you could seek to have the witness's testimony thrown out on some technicality. This is what lawyer and future president Abraham Lincoln did as the attorney for William Armstrong in his murder trial in 1857. This trial helped make Lincoln famous and launched his political career.

Why do I mention these three tactics for trials and witness? How do they relate to our study in the Book of John? They relate because these are the very tactics

used by the Pharisees who wanted to discredit Jesus and His testimony. **-S-** The Pharisees first line of attack was to eliminate Jesus. We have seen that they made several attempts, the last time is at the end of chapter seven where we observe the exchange between the Pharisees and the officers of the temple who were sent to arrest Jesus. **-S-** “The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them (the temple officers), ‘Why did you not bring Him?’ (Referring to Jesus) **-S-** The officers answered, ‘Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.’ **-S-** The Pharisees then answered them, “You have not also been led astray, have you?” (John 7:45-47) The Pharisees failed on this attempt, but they would succeed in about six months. At that time Jesus would be arrested, bought before an illegitimate trial, which included false witnesses and then be executed. However, since their attempt to arrest Jesus and eliminate Him failed **-S-** they then tried to discredit Him in the hope that no one would listen to Him. We find this failed attempt at the beginning of chapter eight with the story of the adulterous woman, which in truth, was more about the sin in the lives of the Pharisees. This was covered in the sermon two weeks ago and you can go to the Canyon Bible website to listen it or read the text. Their third attempt to **-S-** neutralize Jesus and discredit Him was to have His testimony thrown out on a technicality. It is this third tactic used to discredit Jesus that we now come to in our study.

## **Prayer**

### **-S- Two or Three Witnesses**

Last week we found in verse twelve Jesus makes an incredible claim at the close of the story of the adulterous woman. Jesus said to the people, **-S-** “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the

**Light of life.”** We explored how this was a reference to the pillar of cloud and fire of God in Exodus and thus Jesus was saying He was God come to bring spiritual light back into the world and to live in their midst. Observing the behavior of the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees it is clear that the spiritual Light of God had been extinguished among the leaders of Israel. These Jewish leaders in their arrogance and their efforts to maintain their positions at all costs was the cause for their rejecting Jesus’ claim as “life and light.” I am sure there were many people who sided with these Jewish leaders. However, there was a growing number of people not only listening to Jesus, but following Him as well. The problem then was how were these leaders to eliminate Jesus’ testimony and keep more people from following Him? The answer is found in one of the core Jewish principles foundational in all legal matters. The truth had to be established by two or more witnesses. In the Book of Numbers we read, **-S-** “If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness.” (Numbers 35:30 NASB) In Deuteronomy we find, **-S-** “On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.” (Deuteronomy 17:6) Over time this principle had come to be applied to all legal matters in Jewish law. This principle was evidenced in the story of the adulterous woman where the Pharisees had prearranged the whole situation in order to be sure that they would have several witnesses so they could legally present this case to Jesus in an effort to trap Him. And, of course, this principle meant that no one could testify about himself without supporting evidence or witnesses. The Jewish leaders now apply this legal principle to Jesus. Whether or not what Jesus claimed was true, the Pharisees now say it did not meet the requirements of the law of two or three

witnesses and therefore, could not be considered valid or true. This is made clear by what the Pharisees say to Jesus in verse 13, **-S-** “You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true.” Do we not see this same attitude today – many people discount or refuse to believe in the testimony of Jesus, **not** because it has been proven untrue, but because by their way of thinking the Bible cannot be proven true and they cannot tell if what Jesus claims is true or not? Of course, most of these people have not actually read the Bible. This passage where Jesus responds to the charges of the Pharisees is critically important, for it deals with this problem then and the same problem people have with the Bible and Christ today.

### **-S-** Jesus Responds

Jesus responded to the charge that His testimony was invalid by the requirements of the law and the need for multiple witnesses in three ways. **-S-** First, Jesus makes it known that what He is testifying to - a mere person could not do, but He can because He has a superior source of knowledge – God the Father. Jesus tells the Pharisees in verse 14, **-S-** “Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going.” Jesus is saying that the Pharisees would be right if what He testified to was a human issue, but since what Jesus testifies to is of God, of knowing God, well then, only God can testify. As Moses made clear, **-S-** “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4) Since there is only one God then His testimony would be a valid exception of the law – for the law applies to men, not God.

In Jewish law a charge was to have two or more witnesses, but also the character

of these witnesses was important. The witness of known thieves, men of violence, those who have proven dishonest in the past and tax collectors was discounted and subject to inspection. In Jesus' response the character of God is beyond question, but unfortunately the character of the Pharisees is in question and so then is their testimony. So the only question would be - is Jesus God? If Jesus is more than a man then He is God and He alone knows where He came from and where He is going. To make His meaning more clear, Jesus continues in verse 15 saying to the Jewish leaders, **-S-** "You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone." Jesus judges according to truth and spirit, not according to the flesh as these men – their flesh is sinful. This is clear from verse 16, **-S-** "But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me." Jesus is in complete unity with God the Father and He has come to fulfill the Father's will not His own. To further understand what Jesus is saying He makes an important change of wording in verse 17, **-S-** "Even in your law (man's law) it has been written that the testimony of two men is true." Do you see the change – do you see the difference from Deuteronomy? Remember these Pharisees are using Old Testament scripture from Deuteronomy, which says **-S-** "the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses." Jesus restates this saying, **-S-** "the testimony of two men is true." So here Jesus is stressing the vast difference of man's limited knowledge and testimony compared to that of an unlimited God. If Jesus is not God then He would have no absolute truth or firsthand knowledge – He would be like these men, limited and with a sin nature. On the other hand if He is God, well then, His knowledge is true and completely trustworthy. Jesus has demonstrated that He does have knowledge of God in many ways in His ministry. Jesus' testimony is unlimited as God is unlimited and can therefore be trusted.

**-S-** Secondly, Jesus defends His right to give testimony about God and man on the basis that His testimony is impartial. This is what Jesus is saying in verses 15 and 16, **-S-** “You (Pharisees) judge according to the flesh ... My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me.” Jesus uses the word “flesh” to show a separation of man and God. Mans judgment of his fellow man is limited in knowledge and often not objective. Jesus’ judgment is not limited and is completely objective. Men are tainted by their sin nature, but Jesus has no sin in Him. This is one reason why we know the scriptures are of God - for they deal rightly with sin but are not affected by sin. This is also why we see such great effort of fallen mankind, both those who say they are Christian and those who are openly not Christian - they try to change the Word of God, for its purity exposes sin. All behavior and thought is brought into the light.

### **-S-** Divine Witness

Thirdly, Jesus points out, as He has already done many times in the Gospels, that His testimony can be tested, supported and substantiated by the Word of God, which at this time is the Old Testament. Jesus says clearly in verses 17 and 18, **-S-** “Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.” This then meets the requirement of two witnesses. God the Father is Jesus’ witness. In addition, John the Baptist was widely recognized as a prophet sent by God and John testified that Jesus was the Messiah. Then there is the witness of Jesus’ miracles that were supernatural and demonstrated the power of God. We can ask ourselves how many Old Testament scriptures had Jesus fulfilled up to this point, I do not have a exact count, but I will give you my answer – it was “a bunch.” There is plenty of evidence that Jesus is the Messiah.

**-S-** So we have the testimony of Jesus Himself. His testimony is characterized as having superior knowledge and being impartial because it is devoid of sin. Added to this the fulfillment of Old Testament scriptures – the very Word of God, the testimony of prophets and signs and miracles that only God could perform. These men tried to discredit Jesus and they failed. Fallen men ever since have been trying to discredit Jesus to avoid conviction and accountability, and they also have consistently failed.

### **-S-** Three Applications

In closing I would like to make three applications from this passage of scripture to our lives today. **-S-** First, I hope we have learned this day that we must not trust our own judgment. Our knowledge is limited; our perspective is skewed by our sin. Proverbs makes this clear, **-S-** **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”** (Proverbs 3:5 and 6)

**-S-** Second, all evidence of the scriptures and history demonstrate that we should trust in the Lord Jesus Christ completely. We should trust in Jesus because of who He says He is and because of the scriptures, the prophets and the truth of history. There certainly is scripture we do not fully understand, since it is of God, there may be scripture we do not like and wish we could change or eliminate. This is because of our sin nature and God has no sin in Him. Changing or modifying the Word of God is not an option for the true children of God. Many churches and people play loosely with the divine Word of God. On this matter the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying, **-S-** **“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,**

but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. **-S-** *We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) The tides of human belief change with the coming and passing of mankind, but the Word of God is the same forever. What the scriptures teach is that we are to obey God and live in a way that honors Him.

**-S-** Thirdly, if the words, teachings, miracles and signs of Jesus Christ are true, then we should accept Him as our Savior, not just with words, but believing in Him and living for Him. Let me ask you, “Have you done this?” If not, let me challenge you to test Jesus for He will ever prove true. Read the scriptures, test the scriptures – the only thing you have to lose is this temporary world and you may gain eternity.

When a person comes to the Lord Jesus and tests Him with an open mind and heart, it is because the Lord spiritually awakens the soul and one comes to see His truth – when this happens, then that person will become part of the evidence that Jesus is who He says He is. **-S-** *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, **-S-** namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17-19) We are reconciled to God the Father through Jesus, the Son, therefore let us live every moment for Christ.