

—{1}. **John 5:31–47** . . . . . **The Four Witnesses**

A. Introduction – Societies' Questions

1. I was told that recently the council of one Ontario town had a banner taken down that said "Put Christ back in Christmas" – the grounds? It would be offensive to other faith groups!
2. Just who do Christians think they are, trying to convert Jews, Hindus and Muslim to Christianity?
3. Where do Christians get off in thinking they are the only ones who know the truth?
4. United Nations Secretary-General Kafi Annan in his speech accepting the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize said, "The idea that there is one people in possession of the truth, one answer to the world's ills or one solution to humanity's needs has done untold harm throughout history." —{2}.
  - a. this is the opinion echoed throughout society today
  - b. the pluralistic view of religion – you will run into it as soon as you talk to someone about Christ, be it at school, at work or among your neighbours
  - c. "we are all going to the same place but on different roads""
5. In 1999 the Southern Baptist Churches had plans for holding an evangelistic campaign in the Chicago area. As reported in the United Methodist News Service, Bishop C. Joseph Sprague of that church made the following statement: "I'm always fearful when we in the Christian community move beyond the rightful claim that Jesus is decisive for us, to the presupposition that non-Christians ... are outside of God's plan for salvation ... That smacks of non-Jesus-like arrogance."! —{3}.
6. Just who is this Jesus? Just who does He think He is, anyhow? That's the question Sprague and his kind ask. It's the same question that the Jewish rulers were asking Jesus in His day.

## B. What Were Jesus' Claims?

### 1. The context of our Scripture reading (John 5:31–47; NAS)

- a. preceding Jesus question and answer period with the Jewish religious leaders there were a number of events and statements that Jesus made
- b. Chapter 5 commences with the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda
  - (A) a man who had his bed-mat there and had been waiting there for 38 years for an opportunity to step down into the pool when the waters were troubled, but someone always stepped in before him
  - (B) and Jesus, on the Sabbath day, told him to take up his bed and walk – he did so and was miraculously healed
  - (C) which brought Jesus into direct conflict with the Jewish religious rulers whose interpretation of the fourth commandment was that this constituted work
  - (D) In the old testament one of the titles of God is Jehovah Raphe – [the LORD that healeth](#) (Exodus 15:26)
  - (E) what were the qualifications that Jesus listed that gave Him the right to heal in this way on that day?

### 2. verses 16–17 (NAS): [And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."](#)

- a. now there is Jesus' first claim – "the things that I do, the miracle that I just worked, yes, this healing on the Sabbath day when I told the man to take up his bed and walk, I and My Father are working cooperatively on it"
- b. you see how Jesus couples Himself with God the Father? "My Father is working, I Myself am working"
- c. and, in case you think that I am making too much out of those words, hear how the Jewish rulers understood Him
- d. verse 18 (NAS): [For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.](#)
- e. Jesus' first claim? Equality with God.

### 3. verses 19–20 (NAS): [Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless \*it is\* something He sees the Father doing; for whatever \*the Father\* does,](#)

these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel.”

- a. next Jesus answers the question of the source of His power
  - b. it comes from a love union that exists between Him and His Father: a union that results in the Son doing the same as His Father: the same things, the same way, the same power
  - c. Jesus' second claim? An intimate union with Father God.
4. Then we come to some specific instances – beyond the healing that was just performed – of the intimate union that is found in the Bible as being between the Father and the Son
- a. the Son, like the Father, possesses the attribute of LIFE
    - (A) one of the titles of God found in His word, is “the Living God”
      - (1) this is more than just the fact that he is alive as opposed to idols made of wood or stone
      - (2) for this would not distinguish Him as the true God from those rulers who were considered divine
      - (3) no, it also includes the fact that He is the source and sustainer of life
      - (4) which all stems from the fact that He is the God who exists simply because He exists: or, as He said to Moses, “I AM that I AM” – the self-existent One
    - (B) Jesus shares this attribute with the Father; listen:
      - (1) verse 21 (NAS): “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.”
      - (2) the Son, like the Father, is the Life Giver
      - (3) verses 24–26 (NAS): “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself”
      - (4) the Son, like the Father, is the Life Possessor; He is the I AM just as much as the Father
  - b. But another title of God, is that of Judge
    - (A) Abraham expresses it very briefly in pleading with God over the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 18:25b (NAS): “... Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”
    - (B) while David describes God in this fashion in a number of places, such as Psalm 94:2a (NAS) Rise

up, O Judge of the earth

(C) but what does Jesus claim?

- (1) verse 22 (NAS): "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son"
- (2) verse 27 (NAS): "and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man."
- (3) verse 30 (NAS): "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."
- (4) Jesus claim is this: God the Father has delivered into His, Jesus', hands the right to judge which is the prerogative of God alone

c. Finally, only God is worthy of worship

- (A) and Jesus says in verse 23 (NAS): "in order that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him."
- (B) Jesus' claim is that He is worthy of the same worship as the Father; in fact, that denying Him this worship also denies the Father the worship that is due to the Father

5. So, there are Jesus' claims in these few verses

- a. well, so much for Bishop Sprague's comments, for there is not much room for any alternative if ...
- b. Jesus, the Son, is equal with God, the Father
- c. Jesus, the Son, is in intimate communion with the Father
- d. Jesus, the Son, is the Life-Giver, the Life-Possessor just as is God, the Father
- e. Jesus, the Son, is the Judge of all the earth, by delegation from God, the Father
- f. Jesus, the Son, is worthy of worship just as God, the Father
- g. this forms part of a truth that theologians have attempted to frame into words, namely, that God is a Trinity, one indivisible essence or being, but subsisting in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Jesus is the Son

6. so what evidence does Jesus call upon to support His claims

- a. first, Jesus testimony concerning Himself is true, as in John 8:13–14a (NAS): *The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You are bearing witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true."* Jesus answered and said to

them, "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true ..."

- b. but, from the point of law in a court it cannot be taken as true, so that is why Jesus says here in verse 31 (NIV): "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid."
- c. so, Jesus calls upon four witnesses to His claims

### C. The Four Witnesses

#### 1. One: The Witness of God Himself – and specifically of the Father and also of the Holy Spirit

- a. verse 32 (NIV): "There is another who testifies in my favour, and I know that his testimony about me is valid."
- b. and he resumes this in verse 37 (NIV): "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form"
- c. let me illustrate a number of ways that this was done:
  - (A) at Jesus' baptism: Luke 3:22 (NAS): and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased."
  - (B) at Jesus' transfiguration on the mount: Luke 9:35 (NAS): And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"
- d. but it doesn't stop there, for in John 16:7–14, Jesus tells how the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, will come and that
  - (A) He will convict men of sin, righteousness and judgment
  - (B) He will Guide Christ's followers into all truth, and,
  - (C) He will glorify Jesus
  - (D) so, this witness of God is still working in hearts of men and women, boys and girls this very day
  - (E) C. S. Lewis' testimony can be repeated by many: on the night he was converted he was "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England." His mind was still trying to find an escape as his heart and will were being captured by the Father's and Spirit's witness <sup>-(4)</sup>.

#### 2. Two: the Witness of John the Baptist

- a. now this witness, is coupled with the Father's witness, as it was the Father that sent John
- b. vv33–35 (NIV): "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you

chose for a time to enjoy his light.”

- c. you see, John ministered in direct fulfilment of prophecy and was a problem to the Jewish rulers, even long after John was dead; for they had refused to repent at his words
- d. John bare testimony concerning Jesus that <sup>—{5}</sup>.
  - (A) Jesus is Lord, the Messiah (John 1:23)
  - (B) Jesus is Lamb of God (1:29)
  - (C) Jesus the Baptizer by Holy Spirit (1:33)
  - (D) Jesus is the Son of God (1:34)
- e. John’s testimony was a help in pointing men to Jesus, and several of Jesus’ disciples had first been John’s disciples, but they quickly tired of John and drifted away

### 3. Three: the Witness of Jesus’ Miraculous Works

- a. these, too, are coupled with the Father’s witness
- b. verse 36 (NIV): “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.”
- c. these were, indeed, a mighty witness: but did it convince the rulers? They admitted his works, yet they refused to believe: John 11:47–48 (NAS) Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”
- d. well, you might say, “if I were there and saw them, then I would believe; but where are the miracles today?”
  - (A) well, Jesus Christ is still doing mighty works
  - (B) the work of salvation itself
  - (C) the changed lives of believers through God’s power
  - (D) I wasn’t sure about the difficulty of the tune or we would have sung this hymn today:

Creation shows the power of God

There’s glory all around

And those who see must stand in awe

For miracles about

I believe in miracles  
I've seen a soul set free  
Miraculous the change in one  
Redeemed through Calvary ... —{6}.

(E) God is still working mighty works through Jesus

#### 4. Four: the Witness of Scriptures

- a. verses 38-39 (NIV): “nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me”
- b. A clergyman came across one of the simpler members of his parish reading the Bible. He bawled her out for daring to read what could only be understood by the learned, by those trained in its interpretation, and warned that she might well wrest them to her own destruction. “But,” she said, “I am authorized to read the Bible; I have a search warrant.” “Oh, what is that?” “Well, Jesus himself says, ‘Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think that ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.’” —{7}.
- c. time and time again, the Old Testament prophecies tell about the Christ to come and Jesus fulfilled those in His life – and yet the people of His day, and ours, refuse to believe – then, as now, pride gets in the way; the love of the praise of men over the praise of God

#### D. Conclusion

1. so, we have read
  - a. of the claims of the man, Jesus of Nazareth
    - (A) that He came from God
    - (B) that He was sent by God
    - (C) that He was one with God
    - (D) that He would judge the world
  - b. and He provided four unimpeachable witnesses
    - (A) God Himself: the Father, the Spirit
    - (B) John the Baptist
    - (C) Jesus’ miraculous works

(D) and the Scriptures

2. and this man, Jesus, the Christ is the only way of salvation

- a. 1 John 5:12 (NAS): [He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.](#)
- b. how will you respond to the claims of Jesus; think about this as we sing our closing, invitational hymn:  
What will you Do with Jesus?

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. Newsweek Magazine, December 17, 2001 – Kerux illustrations 22068
3. “Reconstructing Bishop Sprague” – Kerux illustrations 28965
4. From “The Credentials of Jesus” a sermon by Ray Steadman, 30 Oct. 1983 – Kerux sermons 5411
5. From Ray Steadman’s sermon, *op cit*
6. “I Believe in Miracles” by Carlton C Buck, © 1956, ren. 1984 by Singspiration
7. Adapted from Biblical Museum (c. 1880) under John 5:39–43