

Lent Reflection 18th March 2021

John 5:31-end [Exodus 32:7-14, Psalm 106:19-23]

The Jews were out to get Jesus. We are still 18 months before Jesus is crucified but already certain religious leaders were plotting to kill him. There were grumbings about him healing on the sabbath but then, when Jesus claimed to be God, well that was blasphemy, punishable by death. We come to our reading and it feels like as if Jesus is on trial and having to defend himself against the religious leaders. Let's see what kind of defence he puts up.

John Chapter 5 - beginning to read from v31 - here are the first 5 verses of our reading.

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. ³³ You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf.

So, Jesus starts his defence. In courtrooms of the time and indeed today, the judge doesn't just take the word of the accused. To have a credible defence there is a need for witnesses. So here Jesus calls upon three star witnesses.

Firstly, there is John the Baptist, who testified about Jesus. We read in John 1: 34 that John called Jesus, God's chosen one, the Messiah. He went on to say Jesus was the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Witness number 1 is John, whom the Jews liked. The second witness is Jesus' miracles, 'the very works that I am doing', Jesus said. At the beginning of this chapter, we read about the healing of the crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda, before that the healing of the official's son, and turning water into wine. And there were many more miracles and signs to come. As it says at the end of the book of John – 'were every one written down, the world wouldn't be able to contain all the books. Miracles which bear testimony that Jesus has been sent by God.

Then to the greatest witness, which is God himself; a testimony weightier than that of John. We read of the audible testimony at Jesus' baptism where God said, 'this is my son in whom I am well pleased.'

Three pretty impressive witnesses. But before the Pharisees and Sadducees could draw breath, he lays into his accusers and all of a sudden, the tables turn, and it is them who are in the dock. Let me continue - John 5: 37 – 44

*You have never heard his voice or seen his form, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him, whom **he** has sent.*

*³⁹ "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is **they** that testify on **my** behalf. ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me, to have life. ⁴¹ I do not accept glory from human beings. but I know that you do not have, the love of God in ⁴² you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name,*

you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?

Jesus is saying here that the very fact that they are trying to kill God's Messiah is proof that actually they "have never heard his voice nor seen his form". It also proves that their Bible studies are a superstitious grasping at salvation, instead of a readiness to do what those Scriptures actually say. Their compromise with Rome, with Herod, with the common people and with each other, for the sake of human praise, is further proof that they do not love God, or his Word, but only themselves.

If that was not enough, now it is time for the biggest surprise of all, Jesus calls on Moses to become the final witness and accuser. Let me read the final few verses.

⁴⁵ 'But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?'

Moses, the Lawgiver, the great founder of the Jewish nation, and the source of their faith for salvation. They believed that If they obey the law, then they will be saved.

However, they can't even obey the law. In Deuteronomy 27:26 Moses writes '*Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.*' You see, Moses spoke about Jesus when he wrote, Deuteronomy 18: 15 *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet, like me, from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.*

Not only had these Jewish leaders simply failed to listen to the one Moses had do this and they are even trying to murder God's Messiah for his message!

These words seem harsh, the Jews were trying to follow the law, but Jesus was deliberately challenging them, and he continues to challenge us today. They were stuck in their ways, in their way of seeing things. They were so convinced about their own understanding of how things were supposed to be, that they weren't able to accept the truth even as it was clearly laid out before them and see a better way.

At this time of Lent, let us all ask God to search our hearts for any blocks we have to seeing Jesus, and accepting his amazing grace for us - after all there is plenty of evidence that he is who he says he is.

Let's pray,

Father God, we thank you for Jesus.

We thank you that you have provided so much evidence that he is your son.

We thank you, that through him, we are saved.

Help to rid us of any blocks to our belief in you.

Open our eyes and hearts once again.

Help us see Jesus for who he is.

In His name we pray,

Amen