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Bridgeway Church  
Gospel of John #17  
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### Sermon Summary #17

#### Witness for the Defense: Indisputable Testimony Concerning the Deity of Jesus John 5:30-47

Last week we looked at the most amazing claim that any human being ever made concerning himself. We listened as Jesus of Nazareth, carpenter and itinerant preacher, claimed to be equal in power, dignity, deity, and glory with God the Father. It is one thing for a man in a mental institution to claim to be Napoleon or for a woman to insist she's Amelia Earhart. But Jesus claimed to be God. He claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah, foretold and foreshadowed in the OT Scriptures.

Either he is wrong and ought to be locked away in a padded room with that man who thinks he's Napoleon, or he is right and ought to be worshipped and adored and honored and obeyed. To reject Christ's claims for deity while still holding him up as an example of goodness, truth, and morality, simply won't do. You must decide one way or the other. As we saw last week in the words of C. S. Lewis, "Is he Lord or Lunatic or Liar?" There are no other options.

The question we face this morning is this: "Is there any evidence that Jesus is Lord, God in human flesh?" Did Jesus himself provide any proof of his deity? If Jesus had been given a fair trial, what witnesses would he have called to the stand to testify in his defense? What documentary, written evidence would he have presented?

Perhaps he would have called character witnesses to corroborate his general truthfulness and reliability of his word. Perhaps he would have called Mary to relate the events surrounding his conception and birth. Maybe the shepherds would have been called to the stand to tell of the angelic visitation they experienced and the declaration of the birth of the Messianic King. The wise men from the east could easily testify, as well as the changed lives of his many followers. Of course, the greatest proof was yet future: his resurrection from the dead.

I raise this question because Jesus was himself keenly aware that the people of his day wanted proof, evidence, testimony, witnesses to confirm the validity of his claim. Jesus happily obliges them here in John 5:30-47.

Here, in effect, Jesus says: "Your honor, in defense of my claim to be God, I call to the stand God the Father!"

In other words, today we are asking the question: "On what grounds do we say that Jesus is God?" What evidence is there? Why should the people of his day or any day believe his word? Why should they consider him reliable? The answer Jesus gives is that none other than God the Father himself testifies on his behalf. And the testimony of the Father is three-fold:

***John the Baptist (vv. 33-35)***  
***The miraculous works of Jesus (v. 36)***  
***The OT Scriptures (vv. 39-47).***

In other words, there is the *prophetic* word of God through John, the *acted* word of God by means of the miracles Jesus performed, and the *written* word of God as found in the Scriptures. But before Jesus calls his first witness, he makes an opening statement in vv. 30-32.

#### *Your Will or God's Will?*

We find in v. 30 three assertions reminiscent of v. 19. First, "I can do nothing on my own" (v. 30a). Second, "As I hear, I judge" (v. 30b). Third, "my judgment is just because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (v. 30c).

In saying these things Jesus does not want us to think of him as some sort of automaton or marionette, able only to think, act, and speak when the Father pulls the strings. It simply means he is so completely dedicated to doing the Father's will that it is unthinkable that he should ever act independently of the Father.

Consider how v. 30 should give shape to our perspective on life and ministry. Here Jesus makes clear the distinction between a God-oriented, God-saturated life, on the one hand, and a life devoted entirely to self on the other. ***He has in mind a life in which God-exaltation takes precedence over self-exaltation.*** The old Frank Sinatra song, "I did it my way" may give you chills and bring back memories of better days, but it is utterly godless and sinful in its focus. Jesus never did things "his way" but only "God's way." God's will, not his own, took precedence over all. Can you say the same thing about your life, your priorities, the way you spend your money and use your time and make use of the talents you've been given?

Jewish law required that all testimony or evidence be established on the basis of at least two witnesses. We find this in Deuteronomy 19:15,

"A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established" (Deut. 19:15).

This is the point Jesus is making in vv. 31-32. It's as if he says, "If I have no other testimony to advance other than my own, my word would be rightly open to suspicion." Jesus knew that in any disputed question a man's assertions in his own favor are suspect. Other testimony is essential.

Although Jesus appeals to three witnesses to confirm his claim, there is ultimately only one: God the Father. But the Father testifies to the truth of the Son by many different means. Here, three are singled out.

***(1) The witness of God the Father through John the Baptist (vv. 33-35).***

The first thing Jesus does in his own defense is to point everyone to John the Baptist. You may recall what was said of John back in chapter one, verses 6-8:

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light" (John 1:6-8).

The "another" in John 5:32 that "bears witness" about Jesus is clearly a reference to John the Baptist. Although human testimony itself is never decisive for God, Jesus nevertheless appeals to John because the people in the first century gave him credibility for a time. Listening to what John said may well be used to bring people to salvation.

Although everything John said about Jesus was true, Jesus himself could not, indeed would not, accept human testimony by itself. He refused to depend on it to establish who he was in his own mind. It's as if Jesus is saying, "I don't need John to tell me who I am. But evidently you do. So listen to him."

The reason he mentions the witness of John was for the sake of his hearers, so that they might again reflect on John's message and repent and be saved.

John was far more than simply a clear witness for Jesus. He was a prophetic witness. He had seen the dove descend on Jesus at his baptism. He had heard the audible voice of God declare that this was the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was recognized by the people as a true prophet. His witness, therefore, must be heard.

For a time, he had quite a following (see Matt. 3:5-7). His message provoked enthusiastic joy and excitement among the masses, but their zeal and interest were short-lived. Nevertheless, John himself, a prophet of God, a spokesman for God, had identified Jesus as the Messiah.

***(2) The witness of God the Father through the miraculous works of Jesus (v. 36).***

Better still than even John's witness are Jesus' works, the miraculous deeds he performed. The message John proclaimed was persuasive, but the miracles Jesus performed were greater still (v. 36). There are several things for us to note here.

First, the term "works" refers primarily to the signs and wonders he performed. They were more than mere displays of power. They were miracles that communicated meaning. They were designed to point beyond themselves and convey spiritual truth. Signs signify; they signify or point to something spiritually important.

Second, John the Baptist, as far as we can tell, performed no miracles, no signs (see John 10:41). What Jesus is saying in v. 36, then, is that a testimony or witness that has miraculous works is greater than one that relies solely on the spoken word (see John 10:25, 37-38; 14:11; 20:30-31). It's important to observe here that neither Jesus nor John nor Paul nor any other NT author believed there was a conflict between wonders and the word (see Acts 14:3).

Perhaps a personal testimony will serve to illustrate what I mean. I have always believed in the providence of God. That is to say, I have always known from Scripture itself that God is in control of my life and the timing of every event, that he orchestrates all things for my ultimate good and his ultimate glory. Sometimes those events are painful, and other times are pleasant. But Romans 8:28 assures me that God is behind it all to make me more and more like Jesus.

One example of this is a story that many of you have heard me tell before, but I thought it might be helpful for you to hear it again. It demonstrates, at least to me, how the truth of Scripture is reinforced by the miraculous, in this case the spiritual gift of prophecy.

#### *The Power of the Prophetic*

In March of 1993, Jack Deere invited me to a conference in Houston, Texas, hosted by Calvary Community Church. On the last night of the conference, a prophetically gifted man called me out of the audience and delivered a ten-minute prophetic word of encouragement. The text he used was from Isaiah 58. In the course of his message, throughout which he had been speaking of my ministry and how God wanted to use me, he paused. He said, "Sam, I know you have thought, 'Who's going to take care of me? If I give my life to pastoral ministry, if I deny myself and take up my cross, who will watch over me?' Sam, the Lord says to you right here in Isaiah 58:11, '**I** will guide **you** personally. I **will** guide you personally; I will take care of you. I will guide you continually.'" This very pointed application of the first phrase in Isaiah 58:11 was then followed by his quoting the rest of the verse: "I [the Lord] satisfy your desire in scorched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail" (Isa. 58:11b).

At the time, I didn't fully appreciate his words. I thought it was nice. But I couldn't make much sense of its application. After all, this was March of 1993. I was committed to my church in Ardmore, Oklahoma. I had no intention of leaving. Our family was happy and the church was prospering. Moving and joining the staff at another church was the farthest thing from my mind. Immediately after the meeting, Jack came to me and said, "Sam, you may not understand fully that prophetic word, but get a videotape of it and write it down. It will probably take on new meaning in five months." As it turned out, Jack's advice was right on target, almost to the very day!

About two weeks after the conference in Houston I was invited to join the staff at the Metro Vineyard Fellowship in Kansas City, where Mike Bickle was serving as Senior Pastor. I won't share the details about why I decided to accept his offer, but I knew it was God's will that I say Yes. Moving day was August 18, 1993. It was one of the most demanding and depressing days of my life. Making the decision to leave our church family in Ardmore was among the most difficult I had ever made. When the time finally arrived for us to say good-bye, it was almost more than I could bear. We had spent the day before helping the movers load our belongings and saying our farewells to family and friends. We were scheduled to meet the movers at our new residence in Kansas City at three in the afternoon. It was very early Wednesday morning, August 18th. I was depressed and worried that I had made a terrible mistake. I was fearful of the new responsibilities, both financial and occupational, that I was to assume upon our arrival in Kansas City. Ann was tired and apprehensive. Our daughters were just tired.

It's important that you realize that I had completely forgotten about the prophetic word in Houston and Isaiah 58:11. It simply didn't register in my head. But that was soon to change.

Our older daughter Melanie was in the car with me. She was 14 years old at the time. Ann and Joanna, our younger daughter, were in the mini-van. As we pulled out onto I-35 on our way to Kansas City, I had an emotional breakdown. I began to cry uncontrollably and almost hyper-ventilated. I was convinced that leaving Ardmore and moving to Kansas City was the biggest mistake of my life. Melanie was terrified, thinking that her dad was having a heart attack. As a way of turning her attention away from me, she opened a going-away gift she had received from the principal of her school. It was one of those verse-a-day calendars that people set on their kitchen counters or on their bed-stand. Needing more than a little encouragement, but with no expectation I'd receive any, I said, "Well, Melanie, this is as big a day as we've ever had. We're moving to Kansas City. What's our verse for today?" She opened the calendar and turned to August 18th.

If you haven't figured it out yet, the verse for that day was . . . Isaiah 58:11! Suddenly the memory of the prophetic word I had received came rushing back into my mind. This was the precise verse the Lord had given to me in Houston as a special reassurance of his guidance and provision. And just as Jack Deere had said, it was virtually five months to the day since that word had been given. I felt like I had been hit with a bolt of lightning. Slamming on the brakes, I jumped out of the car and ran back on the shoulder of the highway to Ann who was probably thinking that I had changed my mind about the move. I shouted, "Ann, you'll never guess what has happened. Today is the day. We're moving. We're stepping out in faith. And look at what verse is for today!"

I have no idea how many thousands of verses there are in the Bible. But I do know there are 365 days in the year. You tell me: What are the odds of that *one* verse appearing on that *one* day? They are astronomical, no doubt. But to a God who controls the universe and speaks through his people whom he has gifted prophetically, it is a mere trifle. To me, it was a stunning, supernatural confirmation that indeed we had heard the Lord correctly and were doing his will. In case you would like to see the page from that going-away gift, here it is. It's a little tattered and wrinkled after all these years.

#### *Isaiah 58:11 Again*

Before I move on, I need to share one other incident involving this passage of Scripture and how God continued to use it in providential ways.

In 1997 Ann and I were struggling over a major decision related to her job. From the time of our move there in 1993, Ann had served as the receptionist at our church in Kansas City. She loved her job and everyone was thrilled to know that she was, so to speak, the “gatekeeper” for the ministry of our local fellowship. But another opportunity had come along.

The Headmaster at our church school, Dominion Christian, had approached Ann about a teaching position. The possibility of returning to the classroom was quite appealing. Ann had taught school for several years at Trinity Christian Academy when we lived in Dallas. This job would give her the summers free, a higher salary, and also make it possible for her to spend more time with Joanna, our younger daughter, who was a student at Dominion.

I can’t begin to tell you how much turmoil and inner anguish this decision created for both of us. It may sound like a simple decision, but anyone who has faced a choice such as this in which both options appear equally rewarding knows how difficult it can be. We prayed for weeks and sought the advice of friends and family. We were about at our wit’s end when the Headmaster called on Tuesday night and said he needed a final decision by Wednesday morning at 11:00 a.m.

Ann and I prayed yet again for some clear indication of God’s will in the matter and then went to bed, hoping for an answer by the next morning. I decided to attend the prayer meeting that we regularly conducted on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. It was about 10:15 and I was deeply immersed in prayer, pleading with God for clarity so that our decision at 11:00 would reflect his best for Ann and everyone concerned.

Suddenly I had what felt like a random thought race through my head. Perhaps you know what I mean. One of those “out of the blue” ideas that just seems to pop into your head without cause or warning.

“Go check your mail.”

That’s what I heard in my head. I don’t know how else to explain it. What made it so odd is that not only had I not been thinking about the mail, but it typically didn’t arrive until around 1:00 p.m. Still, it was so unexpected that I decided I should “obey”. I walked into the office where Ann worked and the mailboxes were located.

“Hey,” shouted Ann, “the mail came early today. That’s weird.” I could tell from the sound of her voice that she was as uptight as I, worrying about what we were going to tell the school in about 45 minutes.

I looked into my box and there sat one item, and one item only. It was a letter from Jean Raborg. For those of you who don’t recognize that name, I strongly encourage you to obtain Jack Deere’s book, *Surprised by the Voice of God* (Zondervan) and read the story of a remarkable miracle of healing that occurred in her life. Trust me, you’ll never forget it. Jean had shared her testimony at one of our conferences in Kansas City just a few weeks earlier, but I hadn’t expected to hear from her. There was no special occasion to warrant her writing me. Yet, there it was.

I opened the envelope to find a brief word of encouragement from Jean written on what appeared to be a fairly typical greeting card. But pasted to the card was a short article she evidently had cut out from another publication. The title of it was “The Graciousness of Uncertainty.” I can’t begin to tell you what happened in my soul as I read the three paragraphs in the article. I gave it to Ann, and she read it too. Nothing could have spoken more clearly to Ann and me about what decision we needed to make. It was as if a huge burden simultaneously lifted from our hearts. We looked at each other and said, “Well, that settles it.”

Then I saw it. At the bottom of the card was a biblical text. Jean hadn’t written it. It was printed as part of the card itself. You guessed it! “The Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail” (Isaiah 58:11).

Incidents like this understandably don’t have the impact on others that they do on the people for whom they are intended. I certainly don’t expect you to respond as Ann and I did. But given the magnitude of the decision we were facing, the deadline that had been given us for making it, the prompting in my spirit to check the mail, the fact that Jean’s letter came on *that* day rather than Tuesday or Thursday, its bizarre and almost unprecedented early arrival at 10:15 a.m., the singularly appropriate message it contained, and what I can only call the divine imprimatur of Isaiah

58:11 staring us in the face, nothing could have been clearer that God had once again spoken in a powerful and loving way.

God used the miraculous works of Jesus to bear witness to the truth of who he was and what he said. And God used the miraculous gift of prophecy to bear witness to the truth of his providential guidance and provision that I already knew about from reading Scripture.

Third, all who attempt to deny the reality of his miracles would do well to remember that those who had the best opportunity of judging their validity, his contemporaries, never disputed the fact that they were authentic supernatural deeds. The enemies of Jesus never suggested that his works were tricks or sleight of hand. Faced with the indisputable, they resorted to the charge that he did miracles by the power of Satan (see Matthew 12).

There is in vv. 37-38 a parenthesis. Here Jesus pauses in his argument to again emphasize that it is the Father who bears witness to who he is. Some think Jesus is talking about the voice from heaven at his baptism or on the mount of transfiguration. More likely he gives here a summary of the Father's witness through the three avenues under discussion. In other words,

“You people have never heard God's voice, like Moses did. Moreover, since I speak the words of God and you do not recognize me, you remain deaf to what God is saying.”

“You have never seen the form of God, like Jacob did. Yet, I am God in human flesh. But you refuse to see God before your very eyes.”

“You don't even have God's word dwelling in you, like Joshua did. But I am the word of God made flesh, and you reject me.”

Their tragic failure to grasp God's truth was nowhere more clearly manifest than in their approach to the Scriptures, which brings us to the third way in which the Father bore witness to Jesus.

### ***(3) The witness of God the Father through the OT Scriptures (vv. 39-47).***

There is some question here as to whether the opening statement of v. 39 should be translated as a command or a mere statement of fact.

If it is a command, then Jesus is saying that we must diligently search the Scriptures because in them we have a pointer to Christ who alone gives eternal life. But the Jewish leaders needed no encouragement to search the Scriptures. This is something they regularly did and for which they were well-known. Also, the second half of v. 39 indicates that they relied on Scripture to give them life rather than seeing the Scriptures as pointing them to Jesus.

Therefore, it is most likely that **v. 39 a is a statement of fact**. Indeed, it is an **indictment** of the religious leaders. Jesus is saying: “You are searching the Scriptures because you think your knowledge of them will in itself gain for you a standing with God!” But that is not the Bible's purpose. Its purpose is to direct us to Jesus and to complete reliance on him. Jesus saves, not the Bible.

Are some people guilty of this error today? Yes! In a certain sense, at a certain time in my past, I was probably guilty of this. I don't think I ever trusted in my knowledge of the Bible to save me or to secure for me the forgiveness of sins, but ***my identity as a believer was wrapped up more in what I knew of the Bible than in God's love for me and what he did for me in Jesus.***

There is a constant, ever-present danger among some Christians. It is the temptation to build your identity or your sense of spiritual security and well-being on the fact that you know a lot about the Bible. Some will virtually deify the Bible. It isn't unusual for some people to define the Trinity, not as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but as Father, Son, and Holy Scriptures.

Please don't let this become an excuse for you to neglect the Bible or to diminish the absolute necessity of your being fully informed of its teaching. It is our final authority in determining what is true and what is false, what is good and

what is evil. But the Bible wasn't sacrificed for you on the cross. Neither the Bible nor your familiarity with it can atone for your sin. The Bible wasn't raised from the dead and it isn't the Bible that has been enthroned in heaven at the right hand of God the Father.

But it *is* the Bible that tells us how we may be saved and forgiven. It is the Bible that provides us with all we need to know to live a godly life to the glory of Jesus. There is always a delicate tension between affirming the glory and sufficiency of the Scriptures, on the one hand, all the while we put our final trust and confidence in Jesus Christ himself, on the other.

In any case, don't miss the connection between vv. 39 and 40. Jesus says in no uncertain terms, the Scriptures testify and bear witness of me, and yet in the face of this testimony you will not come to me so that you might have eternal life.

***Why do people, who possess the Scriptures, not believe in Jesus?*** It is not God's failure or Christ's failure. It is not for lack of evidence or proof or logical reasons. ***People don't believe because they don't want to believe.*** "You refuse to come to me," says Jesus (v. 40). You willfully reject me, notwithstanding the consistent and pervasive testimony of the Scriptures as to my identity and purpose.

Your passion, says Jesus, is for praise, but not from God. You want human praise. You prefer to be at the center of attention rather than Jesus. Your desire is that others would make much of you instead of you making much of God. This, Jesus says, is the underlying cause of your unbelief.

All excuses are banished. You cannot justify your rejection of Jesus because you were raised in a pagan home and taught not to believe. You can't fall back on the claim, "Well, I can't help myself. I am what I am," or "I wasn't given enough evidence." We have already seen earlier in John's gospel why people reject Jesus:

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" (John 3:19-20).

Please note that Jesus also tells us what is behind and beneath this unbelief. It is the human hankering after praise from other humans rather than the approval from God. "How can you believe," he asks them in v. 44, "when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" In other words, as long as you are more concerned about what other people think than what God thinks your eyes will be blind to the truth and your hearts will be hardened.

By the way, this isn't a Jewish problem. This is a human problem. They didn't respond in unbelief because they were Jewish but because they were human. It is no less our problem than it was theirs.

#### *The Testimony of Moses and the OT*

In the interests of time, I'll briefly summarize what Jesus is saying in vv. 45-47.

They valued the Mosaic Law; they revered both Moses and the Law; they had set their hope on Moses in the sense of believing that obedience and honor shown to him would secure a right standing with God. But they didn't truly understand Moses and the OT, for if they had they would have realized that everything he said was about Jesus. Our Lord himself, after his resurrection, said the same thing to the disciples on the Emmaus road: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

And thus he concludes with the somber declaration in v. 47 – "If you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" So I conclude with this question for each of you: "Will you believe the witness of the Father to the person of Jesus? You say you believe the Bible. Will you embrace its undeniable testimony to the identity of Jesus as God the Son who has come in human flesh to secure our redemption?" As Jesus said in v. 40, if you want "life" you must come to him. Will you?

### *Addendum*

We don't have time to examine the many ways in which the OT Scriptures point to Jesus and bear witness concerning him. So I have given you below John Piper's summary of the evidence.

(1) In John 2:17, Jesus drives out the money changers in the Temple, and John quotes Psalm 69:9 and says, "His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"

(2) In John 6, Jesus reminded the Jews that their fathers had eaten manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:15) and then applied it to himself and said, "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33). So the manna is a pointer, a type of the life and ministry of Jesus.

(3) In John 6:44-45, Jesus teaches that no one comes to him unless the Father draws him. And he then explains it in terms of being personally taught by the Father. He refers to Isaiah 54:13, "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." So the prophets point to how people will come to the Messiah, Jesus.

(4) In John 7:38, Jesus compares the Holy Spirit to living water that will flow out of those who believe on him and says that this has all been "said" in the Scriptures: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Perhaps he's referring to Isaiah 58:11 — "You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail" — and to passages that compare the Holy Spirit to water (e.g., Isaiah 44:3; Ezek. 36:25-26).

(5) In John 7:42, the enemies of Jesus draw attention to the fact that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, referring to Micah 5:2, because they didn't think that's where Jesus was born. But he was, and that too pointed to his truth.

(6) John 10:35 is one of the most important references to the Scriptures in John's Gospel because after referring to Psalm 82:6, Jesus says, "Scripture cannot be broken." This is one of the strongest claims for the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible in all of Scripture.

(7) Perhaps the most astonishing statements about the Scriptures in the Gospel of John is John 12:37-41 where John quotes Isaiah 6 (verse 10) which has in it the famous vision of God: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). John then says in John 12:41, "Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him."

This is simply astonishing. Isaiah is witnessing to the glory of Jesus because when he saw the glory of God revealed from heaven, he was seeing the glory of Jesus. Nothing more sweeping could be said about the way the Old Testament witnesses to Jesus. In essence, John is saying: Where God is manifest in the Old Testament, Jesus is manifest. If you see God at work, you see Jesus at work.