

Text: John 18:36-38

Title: "God's Witness – how we know the truth"

Time: 2/26/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: On February 3rd news reports came out of Billings, Montana that Chase Doak, a data analyst for River Stone Health and a photograph hobbyist, had taken a picture of an unusual balloon in the sky over his driveway.

Chase posted his picture online along with a few jokes about UFO's. Soon after, the picture went viral, and the people of the United States learned a truth about their lives that they had not known before: China is spying on us with balloons.

That China's balloon was overhead is an important truth, but truth does us little good if we do not know about it. It may be true that I have cancer on my thyroid, but that truth does me little good unless I know about it. For that reason, I scheduled a biopsy next week so I and my doctor can know the truth.

Our last time in the Gospel of John, we noted from our passage how important truth is to John's good news about the person and work of Jesus Christ. In this context, Pilate asks the question, "What is truth?"

He asked rhetorically to deny the existence of absolute truth. Jesus, however, told Pilate what truth is. Truth is something that comes from Christ, not from the world. And truth is something that comes to those who listen, not those who refuse to listen. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).

So as something coming from Christ and as something that comes to those who listen, it is clear that God's truth, unlike the Chinese spy balloon, was designed to be known, not unknown. For this reason, the theme *truth* in John always includes a related theme, *witness*.

Truth is still true when it is not known, but it does little good. That is where witness comes in. And so our text this morning tells us that one of the reasons Jesus came into the world was to testify or to witness to the truth (v. 37).

Just like the witness of a lucky photographer made the truth about Chinese balloons known, and just like the needle and microscope of the cancer doctor makes the truth of a patient's condition known, so also there is a Witness from God that makes the truth of God known. Jesus Christ told Pilate that He is this Witness. He is God's Truth, and He is God's Witness.

The Gospel of John has much to say about God's witness to the truth. The Greek word translated *witness* is the root of our English word *martyr*. When we use our English word, we mean a witness who had to die for his witness, and Jesus Christ as God's Witness also came to die for that witness.

John seems to love this noun *witness*, or *testimony*, or *record*, and its related verb meaning *to witness*, or *to testify*, or *to bear record*. Of the 86 times the verb is used in the New Testament, it occurs around 56% of the time in the writings of John. In Greek there are two forms of the noun, and again around 56% of their occurrences were put down on paper by John.

John believes God's witness is important because it is how we can know God's truth. I want to note three things John's Gospel teaches us about God's witness to the truth that saves.

I. God's Witness has a cause (v. 37).

Illustration: None of us looks to Chase Doak to keep us safe from Chinese spy balloons. As a witness, it was Chase's cause to post a few pictures online and get a few laughs. He had once worked for the *Billings Gazette*, and he says that taking the picture of the balloon fulfilled for him a lifelong dream of making history with one of his photographs, but he did not go

out to his driveway that afternoon expecting to perform a duty related to our national security.

Application: God's witness is far different from this. God understands the danger sinners are in, and it is the cause of His witness to make them secure. His witness is not happenstance, but an eternal strategy to save those who are lost.

John 5:34, "But I [Jesus] receive not testimony [witness] from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved." It is like a stealth balloon of our sin floats above our heads, ready to explode with the judgment of a holy God upon us, and so God has sent His Witness to save us from our sin.

It is God's amazing love for sinners that caused Him to send Jesus as His Witness. When Jesus said, "I say these things so that you might be saved," He was speaking to a crowd of people that cared little whether or not He was destroyed or saved.

"And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (vv. 16-18). That's the crowd God wanted Jesus to witness to so that they could be saved.

They failed to see God's desire to save them because they did not think they needed saving. They were good Sabbath keepers, religious teachers, and holy men in the eyes of their community. If anything, the God who would make Jesus His Witness, so they thought, must be worse than they were. Jesus broke their Sabbath. He claimed to be equal with God. All their lives they had believed in the importance of the Rabbis' Sabbath regulations, and that no man could claim to be God.

And now confronted with God's Truth from God's Witness, they chose the lies they had believed their whole lives rather than the truth of the Witness of the God who loved them. What lies have we believed our whole lives that are difficult to abandon as we are confronted with God's Truth from God's Witness?

As you answer that question, remember that this Witness would hang on the cross and pray for these same people, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." God's Witness in Jesus Christ has a cause, and that cause is the love of God for sinners and His delight in saving them from the destruction of their sin. The cause is the forgiveness we need to be right with God.

Do you see your need for this Witness this morning? Or do you have too much in common with those who simply will not hear the Witness of his love, true or not?

II. God's Witness has validation (v. 38).

Illustration: Although he would ultimately order the crucifixion of Jesus, Pilate in this verse validates the innocence of Christ with his admission: "I find no fault in him."

For this reason, the trial of Christ became a travesty of justice as it reached the verdict to execute an innocent man. The Greek word *pseudomartyr* is a *false witness*, and they were called in along with a riotous mob to ensure the outcome desired. We are being nice when we say that Pilate's claim to true justice lacks proper validation.

John wrote his Gospel in part to let the world know that God's Witness, Jesus Christ, does not lack for validation. Jesus's testimony as God's Witness is a bit paradoxical in this regard. On the one hand, Jesus admits His need for validation as God's

Witness: "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true" (John 5:31).

Jesus understood this truth because of the requirement of the law: "It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true" (John 8:17). He said this after the Pharisees leveled an accusation against Him: "Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true" (v. 13).

God's Son became a man made under the law to redeem them that are under the law (Gal. 4:4). The law required the witness of Jesus to be validated by another witness. Jesus did not lack these witnesses.

1. John the Baptist was a great witness validating God's Witness in Christ:

John 1:6-8, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light."

John 1:15, "John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me."

John 1:19-23, "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias."

John 1:23-36, "And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with

water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!"

2. Jesus's works were a greater witness validating God's Witness in Christ:

John 5:35-36, "He [John the Baptist] was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." An example is His healing the lame man in that chapter. John 10:25, "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me."

3. The Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Scripture are the greatest witnesses validating God's Witness in Christ:

John 5:37, "And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me [perhaps a reference to His baptism]." John 15:26, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." John 5:38, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

And so on the one hand, Jesus's witness required the validation of a second witness, and He met this requirement in a mighty way. His witness is trustworthy. It holds up in court buttressed with many witnesses. When the unbelief of man hauls Jesus into court accusing Him of fraud, Jesus answers every charge, and His witnesses prove He spoke the truth.

But also in John's Gospel, Jesus is clear about another sense in which He needed no validation as God's witness, and this is the paradox I mentioned earlier: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go" (John 8:14).

Here Jesus says He needs no validation after all, that He should be believed and trusted without it. This was His first answer to the Pharisaical attack. This paradox is the paradox of the dual nature of the God-man. As man, Jesus submitted to the law requiring more than one witness. But as God, Jesus wrote that law and needs no more validation than it does. A higher form of validation is simply not possible than the divine Word of the witness of Jesus Christ. He said of His witness, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words shall not pass away (Matt. 24:35).

### III. God's witness has multipliers (v. 36).

Illustration: Jesus speaks of His kingdom and His servants. He explains to Pilate that His kingdom is not yet of this world, so His servants are not going to take up military weapons and fight a physical war. The word he uses for *servants* is an interesting one. It literally means *under-rowers*, and it refers to the slaves in the hull of an ancient naval vessel, who moved the oars to propel the ship into battle.

Application: Jesus's servants do not fight with battleships today, but we still have a lot of rowing to do when it comes to moving the boat of gospel good news forward into a battle for truth. John is clear that we as Jesus's disciples must be His witnesses, multiplying His witness to the ends of the world.

John the Baptist did so. To his witness we can add the Samaritan woman of John 4, the man born blind of John 9, the family and friends of Lazarus in John 11, and most importantly of all

for our author, the Apostle John: “This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24). “And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe” (John 19:35). Who needs a faithful witness from us that they might believe?

Conclusion: John testifies that God’s Witness in Christ must be believed. We must believe that He is the Son of God, that He died for our sins, and that He arose again. Jesus once said to his own brothers who were refusing to believe on Him, “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.” What would He say to you?

God’s Witness must be known with the heart of God’s gift of faith, it must be seen with the enlightenment of God’s light, and it must be heard by those who can hear because they are of the truth. Do you know, can you see, will you hear God’s truth through His Witness Jesus Christ this morning?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*