

June 12, 2011

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *You Search the Scriptures*

John 5:30 – 47

In verse 30, Jesus continues His testimony of who He is: *"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.* John 5:30 Here He restates what He said in verse 19: *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.* John 5:19 **What He is not saying is that He lacks the inherent power within Himself to do anything independently. What He is saying is that all that He does do, is in concert with the Father's will.** And when He judges, His judgement is just because He is not judging according to His own arbitrary will, but the solid, sovereign will of His Father. Although Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct and individual persons, they always act in concert with one another. There is a single game plan and they all work together at it.

I just want to say a word here about the study of Scripture. It is incredibly important that we know how to study the word of God. I say this because I was reading a book the other day in which the author, a well-know pastor, takes this passage in verse 19 and literally stands it on its head. And when he does that he paints a radically different picture of Jesus than the Bible portrays. Incidentally, I am reading the book to try and help a friend of mine who is taken up with this man's teachings, but I will admit, I almost didn't make it past the first page. Here is how he begins: *"Jesus could not heal the sick. Neither could He deliver the tormented from demons or raise the dead. To believe otherwise is to ignore what He said about Himself, and more importantly, to miss the purpose of His self-imposed restriction to live as a man. Jesus Christ said of Himself, 'The Son can do nothing' [John 5:19]...He had NO supernatural capabilities whatsoever...He performed miracles, wonders and signs, as a man in right relationship to God...not as God."*

Several things stand out to me in this statement, but it all begins with his poor exegesis of John 5:19. he takes the first part of this verse – cuts it out of the text, and uses it as proof for his point that Jesus was merely a man who could only perform miracles because it was God working through Him. I found myself telling the author at this point 'Read the rest of the verse – in fact, do yourself and others a favor and read the whole chapter' Of course I didn't get a reply but you get the point. He never goes beyond this point because to do so would invalidate the rest of his book. When Jesus says that He can do nothing on His own initiative, He does not mean that He is powerless. In fact we saw last week that His testimony of Himself was that just like the Father has life in Himself, to raise the dead, the Son also has life in Himself to also raise the dead. [verse 21].

And in verse 26 we read: *"For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;* John 5:26 It is not as though the Father is the spring and the Son is a stream that flows from that stream – He doesn't say that the 'Father is the source and the Son is a channel of that source.' He says that just as life is inherent in the Father, He has granted from all eternity that life inherent in the Son. So when we think of Jesus raising the dead by His death-defeating voice, John wants us to know that He does this by the power of the divine life that He has in Himself absolutely – the same way the Father has life in Himself absolutely. The testimony of the Bible and the testimony of the Scriptures is that Jesus is God and He is man. He is the God-man, and as such has the power and ability inherent within Himself to do miracles, signs and wonders – to heal the sick, cast out demons, open blind eyes and give life to the dead. To say otherwise is unbiblical and heretical. And if you noticed – it all begins with poor interpretation of Scripture – that is why it is crucial that we not do violence to the text in our bid to prove some new revelation that we think we have.

Jesus goes on in verse 31-36: *"If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true.* John 5:31 What Jesus was saying is that His claim to be the Son of God does not rest on His own testimony – but there are others who have testified to who He is. If someone comes and tells you *'I am the Son of God'*, you would probably want a little more proof than just their say-so. And so He mentions John the Baptist: *There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth.* John 5:32-33 So we have the testimony of Jesus and the testimony of John. *But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.* John 5:34

In other words, human testimony alone is never decisive for who God is – nevertheless Jesus says, I am speaking this way about John because for a time you gave his testimony some credibility, and that just might lead you to truth and salvation. *He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.* John 5:35 Even though they rejoiced for a little while in John's testimony of the coming Messiah, they didn't believe in Him when He arrived. In other words, they were happy to hear that a Messiah was coming in theory, but when they got a look at Him, they couldn't accept that Jesus was who John was talking about.

But there is another testimony to the truth of Christ's claims, because Jesus goes on to say: *But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish -the very works that I do -testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.* John 5:36 All the miracles, the water turned into wine, all the healings, all the demons cast out, the lame healed, the blind eyes opened – and all the signs, like the temple cleansing in chapter 2 – all these were conscious, intentional fulfillment of Scripture that should have told the Jews with whom they were dealing. The works He did testified to the reality of who He was – they should have known that – they should have listened.

And if the testimony of John and the testimony of His works were not enough, there was the further testimony of God the Father: *"And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.* John 5:37 Three times we are told that the Father's voice was heard from heaven – the first time it was at Jesus' baptism, the second was at the mount of transfiguration, the third time we read about in John 12. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and even Peter in his second letter, testify to the fact that the Father's voice was heard from heaven. However, by those who were rejecting Jesus, it simply sounded like thunder – they didn't recognize the Father's voice.

The point was, there was plenty of evidence that proved that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God and yet, there were many who simply would not believe. **There was John's testimony, the works Jesus did, and the testimony of the Father.** And strangely enough, it was mainly those who thought they knew all there was to know about God. And Jesus tells them: *You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.* John 5:38 This was very ironic because it was these devoutly religious people who were the ones who poured over Scripture and studied it and cherished it to whom Jesus said – 'All that study has done you no good since you don't believe the One about whom the Scriptures speak. Their problem was that they thought the Bible was only a book **about** God. But they didn't believe it was a book **from** God.

What is the difference you say? The difference is that if the Bible is merely a book **about** God, then we mine its contents to see how we ought to behave in relationship to this God, we don't read as though we had a personal relationship with the author. But if it is a book **from** God, then we read it as we would a letter from someone we know. Look at it this way, if you want to have a personal relationship with me, then we have to talk. We have to sit down and tell each other about ourselves, share stories and talk about our triumphs and tragedies, we share life together. On the other hand, if you just want to know about me, then a biography will work just as well, or talking to someone else about me. If all you know is something about me, you might get to the place where you respect me – perhaps. You might get to the point where you want to imitate me – I really don't know why you would. And you might even get to the place where you would want to meet me – I know, the scenario gets more and more unlikely. But you won't have a personal relationship with me. All you would have are facts.

If on the other hand, if we have a relationship – we have shared life together, then a letter from me would mean so much more. For example, when you get a letter from someone you love, someone who is far away in space but close in your heart, you don't just read the letter for the facts – you read every line looking for the heart of the one you love. You linger over every line, you examine every phrase for meaning and nuance, you hold the letter up and smell it, hoping for a scent of your lover. You study it - 'I wonder what she means by that?' If the Bible is a book from the One we love, we won't mine it for facts, we'll mine it for glimpses of Him.

It was 1898 and Ben had left the East 8 years ago to head out West in hopes of making his fortune. Well he wasn't rich, but he had accumulated over 300 acres of good land and built a comfortable farm house on it. He raised wheat, corn, and all of his vegetables. He had managed to build his herd of cattle to over 200 head. Having accomplished all of this in only 8 years, he decided that it was now time. The ad that he placed in the New York newspaper said, "Wanted: A good woman willing to be a pen pal. Marriage is a possibility for the right woman." Before long, he began receiving letters from Molly. Their correspondence soon turned into love for each other. Now, here he stood in the Kansas City train station waiting to finally meet her. When the train arrived, there were a lot of women getting off. Suddenly, he yelled, "Molly -- over here!"

She looked his way, walked over to him, smiled and held out her hand. He took it for a moment, then let it go. She said, "How did you know who I was?" He then reached into the back pocket of his overalls and said, "From these here letters." "But there are no pictures in them." He dropped his head a bit and said, "Oh yes there are! There are lots of pictures in your words." You see, he had spent hours reading every word -- looking for every little clue that would tell him who Molly really was. He had fallen in love with her words -- words that had painted her portrait. ***Is the Bible a biography of God – or is it actually the word of God?*** Is it a book written by men about God – or is it the word for word revelation of God's heart and mind and will for us?

The people Jesus was talking to evidently viewed the Bible as merely a book about God because He says: *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.* John 5:39-40 These guys had devoted their lives to studying the Scriptures, and yet they had come away without encountering Christ. Because they viewed it as a book about God, all they were interested in was finding out facts about Him and how to behave. He wasn't chastising them for studying the Bible – He was taking them to task for missing Him in their study. If we are those who see this book as a book from God and not merely about God, then three things need to be part of our life.

**First of all we need to search the Scriptures.** Jesus was not faulting them for being diligent searchers. Searching is commended. Some translations say 'You diligently study the Scriptures' and the word means to trace out, examine, investigate. This is not casual. Searching involves time and effort. If you lose a contact lens while you're out walking – how do you search for it? Do you simply retrace your route, casually looking down on the ground once in a while, or do you get down on your hands and knees and scour the path? I would ask you, which of those two scenarios best describes your study of God's word? Do you walk through the Scriptures every so often, looking for inspiration or comfort? Or are you down on your hands and knees pouring over it?

Searching assumes at least three things: **first, searching assumes that it will be easy to overlook the important stuff.** When you lose a contact lens, you get down on your hands and knees and scour the ground because you assume it will be easy to miss. You have lost at least half of your vision, so you are only looking with maybe one eye to begin with and so you search. You are diligent about it – you're not looking for a penny – you are looking for a valuable contact lens. You are going over every inch of the path so you don't miss anything. Is that how you search the Scriptures? Is that the kind of effort you put into it?

Secondly, **searching implies spending time.** You have to spend the time. Nothing else will do. But someone might say, 'That's all well and good for you professional types – you get paid to spend the time. But I just don't have the time to spend.' Is that true? Of course it's not true. ***You always make time for the stuff you find important and valuable.*** Is that what you say when your boss gives you that technical manual and tells you to have it read by tomorrow because your job depends on it? No, of course not. You'll skip eating and watching T.V. to read that manual. You'll put stuff you thought was important on the back burner. You put in the time. Your job's at stake. Pastor Tim Keller said that 'On the last day, your bank accounts will rise up out of their vaults and say, You broke your back for us, you trudged and drudged for us and now we're rust and dust'. But you never spent serious time in the word of God in which imperishable treasure lies. You must take the time.

Searching not only assumes that it will be easy to overlook the important stuff, and that it takes time, **searching also assumes that what we are looking for is valuable.** You only search for things that are valuable. Nobody goes chasing down a penny that popped out of their pocket. You should be studying Scripture the same way a gold miner looks for gold. Every bit of dirt and gravel is sifted so that he doesn't miss a single ounce of gold, because the next pan of gravel could change his life forever. Is that how you study the word of God? Do you love and savor and treasure this book from God? Do you study this as if your life depended on it? You should never approach the word, or even come to where the word is being taught, without that sense that God's word is so valuable that any minute I could hear something that would change the way I think and live forever, and that in its pages we would come face to face with the one we love and treasure.

We need to search the Scriptures, **but we also need to let the Scriptures search us.** It is not enough just to go the first step – a lot of people may go the first step – the Pharisees went the first step. Jesus confirms that by saying, '*You diligently search the Scriptures...*' They did search the Scriptures – and quite honestly, most of us have not even gotten to the Pharisee level. They searched, but Jesus says that is not enough – because He goes on to say, *For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?* John 5:46-47 Jesus says that they do not believe Moses which must have sounded crazy to these guys who spent their lives in the Pentateuch. But He says that they don't believe because the searching they did made no discernable impact on their lives.

He says, *"I do not receive glory from men; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?"* John 5:41-44 First of all, if they had believed Moses, if the word that they had searched through so diligently had in turn searched them out, they would have realized that the love they professed for God was in reality hostility toward Him. If they had recognized as well that that the One whom they were looking to kill was actually the very Savior sent from the Father to save them, it would have been evident that they had not only searched the word but that the word had searched them. And the very fact that their highest ambition was to receive praise from men and not glory from God was proof that they had never let the word search their innermost thoughts and motives.

You may say that you believe the Bible, you may even study the Bible, but if you do not let the word of God search you out, pour through you, if you don't let it argue with you, confront you, correct you, then you don't really believe the Bible. You just have a Pharisee's understanding of the word and if there is one thing I do understand from this text, it is that I don't want to be standing in their shoes on judgment day.

If you search the Scriptures but you don't let them search you, you are not giving God's word any functional authority in your life. You may give the word formal authority, lip service, but you are not letting it change anything about you. When you are making decisions, when you have questions, when you are going through tests, when difficult circumstances arise, are you letting Scripture search you out? Hebrews 12 tells us that the word of God comes to argue with us, converse with us, debate with us as His children. A lot of people use the word of God as a binky – a pacifier. Problems arise, difficult circumstances come their way and they run to Psalm 23 – The Lord is my shepherd, green pastures, cool water, no wants – Ah that makes me feel good.' But that is not letting the word search you. That is using the Bible as a sort of pacifier, even an incantation – it makes you think of happier times, better places, woolly sheep.

Don't get me wrong – the word of God does bring peace and comfort and well-being in the midst of trying and difficult days. But we need to understand that God ordered those days for our good and His glory and in the midst of our trials He is searching the innermost parts of our being to transform our thinking and conform us to the image of His dear Son. That is why we must let the Bible search us out – argue with us, converse with us, debate with us. How do we deal with worry, fear, with temptation and people who don't like us and with losing our job or house or how do we deal with death and dying? ***You let the truth of the word of God search you out and rearrange your understanding of the situation.*** When you are suffering do you simply read the Psalms until you get this soothing feeling? Or do you let the truth of Romans 8 pour over you: *'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed.'* Romans 8:18 Paul is saying, ***'When you're suffering, tell yourself about the glory!'***

If you have a God and a Bible, that only ever soothes you, that never confronts you, that never says, 'This relationship is wrong', 'those motives are wrong', 'this attitude is wrong', that practice is wrong', if the Scriptures never search you out, you have a God made in your own image. Who wants to be married to someone whose every answer to them is 'Yes dear', and yet a lot of you have a God like that. Unless you let the word of God confront you, search you out, you don't have a real God. And what you may hear on that last day is what the Pharisee's heard from Jesus: *"Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.* John 5:45 ***If you do not let the word search you out now, be sure it will do so finally one day.***

Finally, **we need to meet Christ in the Scriptures.** Jesus said: *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.* John 5:39-40 All of Scripture testifies to Jesus. All that Moses wrote concerned Christ, all the prophets spoke of Him, He is disclosed in the Psalms and wisdom literature – and everything in the New Testament points to Him. Unless we come face to face with the Son of God in our searching – all our study is vain. And it is not that these guys simply failed to see Christ in the word – that is, they did not just miss the references to Him. Jesus says that they were **unwilling** to come to Him. They **refused** to believe. They didn't **want** to believe. They studied a book they thought was about God, not a book from God. They were unwilling to let the Scriptures search them out, they refused to let the word confront them, argue with them, change them. And they missed Christ.

Are you diligently searching the Scriptures? Are you letting the Scriptures search you? Are you reading the Bible as a book about God or do you see this as a book from God? Are you meeting Christ in the Scriptures? Do you see the face of the one you love there? Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, let it pour over you and through you, let it confront and argue with you, let it live in you, and transform you into the image of the Father's dear Son.

*Our gracious God and heavenly Father,*

*Grant that we would be those who love and treasure Your word – who count it worth more than all the riches of this life. Incline our hearts to this word and break our bondage to other things. Let it search us, confront us, change us. Let it pierce through our souls and awaken us to the glory of Christ. Forbid it Lord that we would see the Bible as merely a book about You, but that we would read it and savor it and mine it as a word from You and in its pages we would come face to face with the Living Word. May we delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.*

***May the Lord bless you and keep you  
and make His face shine upon you.  
May the Lord be gracious unto you;  
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you  
and give you peace.***