

Who is Jesus

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[0 : 00] My name is Gordon Reid. I've been coming here to St Silas now for nine years. I'm a retired Church of Scotland minister and before that a maths teacher.

That's really just to put you off me totally. However, I got out and started doing better things. This is a very interesting little passage in John.

There's an outline in your sheet. If you look at that you'll see roughly where we're going at least for the first part. I think that will be very helpful.

Also, if you have kept your Bibles open I'll be referring to verses and so you'll be able to have a look at them. Chapter 5 begins a new section in John's Gospel and it's really the start of a trial between Jesus and the Jews.

John just refers to them as the Jews. It's really the Jewish leaders who want to oppose Jesus. The question is who Jesus really is.

[1 : 16] The leaders were always looking for a Messiah. Could Jesus be that Messiah? Who is he? But it would seem now that Jesus has gone too far. He's said that God is his father and this has got the Jewish leaders very, very upset.

So it's like a trial now from now on in John's Gospel. And I want you to just think of this as a trial. I want you to think of Jesus. I was going to ask Craig to come up and be Jesus but no. I looked at him twice. No, no. Nobody's suitable. So we've got Jesus for the defense and the Jews for the prosecution.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth. I'm now in probably round about the age of 30, 31, something like that.

He's become famous or, if you want, infamous, depending on what you think about him. Crowds are following him. They love his teaching. They listen to him.

[2 : 25] But they love also his miracles. And so crowds gather wherever Jesus is. The other Gospels describe crowds of 4,000, 5,000 just coming to hear Jesus.

And the miracles are attracting a lot of attention as well, particularly the healings. For the prosecution, we have the Jews.

The Jewish leaders are very much in control. The Pharisees set the tone for the Jewish nation, which is a lot about keeping the law, obeying the law.

And they want to challenge Jesus over who he is and what he has said. Who is he? And what does he claim to be?

Now, eventually, this trial, as it continues, throughout John's Gospel, eventually ends up being a real trial in a real courtroom. And Pilate is a judge.

[3 : 23] And Jesus is found guilty and is sentenced to death. But the trial really starts now. So we have the main characters. But to have a trial, you have to have a crime.

So what's a crime? What is Jesus accused of? Well, it's two things. It's in two parts. The Jewish system, being all about keeping the rules, involve what you do on the Sabbath.

The Ten Commandments said, keep the Sabbath because it is holy to the Lord. Now, that's been translated as being, you must not work in the Sabbath. But what is work? Every time you've got a definition, you just get another question.

What is work? Is walking work? So they said you could only walk so far, but if you walk past that, you'd be working. Can you help someone in the Sabbath? Well, you can in certain circumstances, but not in other circumstances.

And so on. The Sabbath rules were endless. And Jesus has broken this totally. Before we rush to our judgment on life in those times, let me just say that in Scotland, the Sabbath was kept in my youth.

[4 : 50] There were no shops open. You maybe got your newspaper shop, and that was it. You bought your goods on Saturday. No supermarkets open. Sunday was a different day.

And that was good. That was good. And I would love it to return to that, frankly. I think we all need a day that's totally different. We all need a Sabbath. That wasn't just what it was, though.

Once you have a different day, then you've got different rules for that day. I was told I should not whistle on the Sabbath. I should not run upstairs. What else was there? Oh, yes, we didn't watch the television once we finally got one.

You did not watch the television on the Sabbath. And you didn't buy the Sunday post. We always bought the Sunday post. So you had to buy it on Saturday night when it came out so that you didn't buy it on the Sunday.

I always thought, even as a young teenager, it was a bit strange that we could buy it on the Saturday night and then read it on the Sunday. I thought there was maybe something wrong there. But that was the Sabbath.

[5 : 55] And throughout Scotland, it was like that. We had a holiday up in Stornoway once. Lovely Isle of Lewis up there on the northwest.

And we had been warned. We were doing a house exchange with another Christian family. And we had been warned there were certain things we should not do. Don't hang out your washing on the Sabbath because an elder will be round.

And the elder will speak to you about this. Do not put out your washing. You can go to the beaches with your family. We had a young family. You can go to the beach, they whispered to us, because nobody else is there.

So that was fine. We could just quietly break this kind of rule. As we were leaving, we were leaving on a Monday, so I went to get money from the hole in the wall at the bank and discovered that, no, it doesn't work on a Sunday either.

So I had to wait until Monday morning. Another instance of Sabbatarianism in Scotland was when with a friend we visited a man up in the north, round about Loch Ness, I think it was round about there.

[7 : 11] And our friend took us to visit him. Very interesting character. After we had spoken for a wee while, he said, Would you like to come out to my barn?

So he went out to his barn, and here this looked a bit dilapidated old barn was full of big chest freezers, and in these freezers was Lord Lovett's venison.

He was a poacher. That got him excommunicated from the Church of Scotland, from the Free Church of Scotland, I have to say. Why? Because that's such a bad thing?

Shooting Lord Lovett's deer? No. He wasn't excommunicated for that. He was excommunicated because he was too late on the Saturday night, and he was seen by an elder of the Church carrying venison back to his house on Sunday morning at 1 o'clock.

And he was excommunicated. Really? Genuinely? Genuinely. So the Jews were like this. The Sabbath was very, very important, and you had not to break it under any circumstances.

[8 : 21] And Jesus, of course, had just done that. Rules are interesting. You know, Jesus brings freedom, and Christianity brings freedom.

But there is always a temptation that we have to put rules in. And it's part of the problem. It's why there is a trial between Jesus and the Jews. Because Jesus doesn't stick to these rules.

I always get worried when Christians start to bring rules into their faith or into their churches. I remember once at a big rally in Glasgow, overhearing two of the stewards discussing how many steps there were to becoming a Christian.

And they couldn't decide whether it was eight or nine. And I wanted to say to them, there's one step. You accept Jesus. End of story. We can hide behind rules.

But Jesus didn't. And so he broke the Sabbath. Worse. His crime was healing on the Sabbath. He actually healed a man at the start of the chapter.

[9 : 42] Read it a couple of weeks ago. He healed someone on the Sabbath. And the Jews are so concerned about this that all they see, all they think, all they hear is it was on the Sabbath.

Just like my poacher friend. Not that he healed someone. Not that that was a wonderful act of God. So the scene is set. Sorry, the second thing that he's accused of is blasphemy.

If your Bibles are still open and you go back to verse 18, we can see what the charge is here. For this reason, the Jews tried all the harder to kill him.

To kill him. That's even more extreme than my friend's excommunication. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

So that's the charge. And it's serious. The scene's set, and Jesus is ready to call his first witness. But not quite yet.

[10:51] Before he calls anybody, Jesus makes it quite clear that he cannot testify about himself. Verse 31. If he testifies about himself, it's not valid.

Anybody can testify about themselves. Anybody can stand up and say anything about themselves. But because they're the person that said it, it's not valid. I could tell you that I am the greatest chess player in Scotland.

And you're all going to go out and say, hey, the preacher was the greatest chess player in Scotland, aren't you? No, you're not. You're not going to say that because you need more than that.

You need to know if I even play chess. Or if I've done anything worthy of being called the greatest chess player in Scotland. I did get a draw with an international master.

I say I do play chess. And then you might ask, well, how long ago was that? And I would have to say, yes, over 30 years. So no matter what I say, there is no validity to it.

[11:55] If someone says, I will make America great again, I refuse to use his name. It's just what he's saying. He's testifying about himself.

And that's not valid. Unfortunately, as it says later in the passage, unfortunately, we listen to people when they talk about themselves like that. And if they're persuasive enough, then we give them credit and believe them.

Jesus says he does not testify about himself. You need other things. Other things that will validate Jesus and who he is.

And so he calls his witnesses. The first one is a mystery witness, verse 32. There is another one who testifies on my behalf.

And I know his testimony about me is valid. It's not put into detail exactly what that means.

[13:01] But I think, and other people think, that he's either referring to God, who at his baptism said, this is my beloved son. A voice from heaven came and said, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Or he's testifying about the spirit. At his baptism, the spirit descended and rested on him, remained with him. Is it the spirit who testifies?

Well, you can hardly bring either God or the Holy Spirit to the witness stand. So he moves on. You can't very well cross-examine them. So Jesus goes on to other witnesses.

First of all, John the Baptist, verse 33. The wild man in the desert, the voice crying in the wilderness, the man that everybody's coming to see because he's baptizing and everybody wants to know about this.

Might not all want to be baptized, but you know, we love to spectate. There's a car that's pulled off on the motorway. You notice everyone slows down as they go past it because we all want a wee look.

[14:02] They were all out to see John the Baptist. The question was, could this be the Messiah? Is this him? That was what everybody wanted to know.

But when John was asked, are you the Messiah? John made it absolutely clear, no, I'm not. And he pointed to Jesus and he said, this is the one.

This is the one. John is a witness, but does his witness convince the Jews? And then Jesus mentions the miracles.

Verse 36. It's often said that you'll know a person by their deeds. So Jesus calls upon the miracles he has performed. Jesus says, these testify in my behalf that the Father has sent me.

Many followed Jesus because of this witness, because of the miracles. But is that enough proof?

Well, it certainly doesn't seem so for the Jews who have already just ignored the miracle at the pool of Bethesda.

[15:05] And then there's the scriptures. Verse 39. The Jews diligently study the scriptures. The Jews still diligently study the scriptures today. Hasidic Jews in Israel actually study the scriptures as a job, as a paid job, paid by the government.

But the scriptures point to Jesus. I remember once when I was with a group studying Isaiah chapter 53, and it was young Christians.

And one young man said, this is about Jesus. But how can it be? It was written hundreds of years before he was born. It is so descriptive.

That passage describes Jesus. And any Christian reading it immediately thinks Jesus as they read it. And that's just one. There are many, many passages throughout scripture that point us to Jesus. There's your witness, Jesus says. The scriptures are your witness. But do you believe them? Do you believe the very scriptures that you claim to study?

[16:18] And if you do, why don't you come to me? And then finally, the last witness is the ancestors, and Moses in particular.

Verse 45 in the passage refers back to Deuteronomy chapter 18, verse 15, where Moses says, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers.

You must listen to him. And Jesus says to the Jews, are you listening? This is the ancestors. This is who you believe in.

This is Moses, the father of the nation. These are all witnesses to Jesus, and he lays them out before the Jews, one by one, and yet they fail to be convinced.

Why? Because there's only one of these witnesses that can convince you. All of a sudden, the scene changes. Jesus turns prosecutor.

[17:19] Before they get a chance to question him at all, Jesus challenges them. He says, I know you. I know what you're like. I know that you do not love God. I know that you accept praise from one another.

I know that you do things to get praise from people, and you don't do things that bring praise from God alone. They stand accused now, not by Jesus, but by these witnesses, and particularly by Moses.

The trial ends for now. But before we go on, let's think about these witnesses again. Let's think about them today, because they're still around, these witnesses to Jesus.

Jesus is still talked about 2,000 years later. He's still saying that he doesn't testify about himself.

Jesus does not get you in a corner, appear out of nowhere, and say, you know who I am.

You must bow down and obey me. You must follow me. He doesn't do that. He doesn't testify about himself, but he keeps pointing us to these witnesses. He says, come and see. Come and see.

[18:29] Look at the witnesses. The first one is Christians. It's 2,000 years almost since Jesus' death, and people still live for him, and people still die for him.

For me, that is absolutely amazing. 2,000 years. He was a carpenter up in Galilee, a nobody from nowhere.

Or was he more than that? Surely, this is a witness to Jesus being more than that. When I taught RE, which I did for a few years, I would ask the first years when they come up, all these innocent little children from primary, when they come up, I would say, who is Jesus?

Who is Jesus? And they'd write it down. Then I asked them what they'd written. And almost unanimously, the whole class, every class in a poor area of Glasgow said he's the son of God. 2,000 years later, and these children, none of whom have gone to church, or very, very few, say Jesus is the son of God. Isn't that absolutely amazing?

[19:49] The second one is the miracles. 2,000 years on, and people are still being healed in Jesus' name.

Lives are still being transformed in Jesus' name. Miracles, thousands of them, happen all the time, far beyond coincidence. All witnessing to Jesus being exactly who he says he is, the son of God, the savior.

I have a friend in Dunfermline, lovely lady. I was back preaching there a couple of years ago in her church, and she was giving out the leaflets at the door, and she was so full of life.

I knew that lady when she was absolutely crippled with MS, where she could hardly walk and was almost at the stage of being permanently in a wheelchair.

She went to a meeting, where a man was preaching, and she went out for healing, and she walked out of that room, a completely different person. And there she is.

[20:57] I believe. So when I see her, I just say, God, you are absolutely wonderful. And miracles are still happening. Healings are still happening. Because the name of Jesus is still powerful.

Because Jesus was not just the son of a carpenter, not just a nobody up in Galilee. He was the son of God.

He is the son of God. The third witness is scripture. 2,000 years on, and this book that we're looking at tonight is still the bestseller year after year after year.

This is a witness to Jesus. It's studied, not just by people at universities, as I was at one time, studying Old Testament and New Testament.

It's studied in small groups, in house groups, in two people meeting in a cafe. This book is a witness to Jesus. 2,000 years on.

[22 : 05] And I find that absolutely astonishing. And then there's the ancestors. 2,000 years of churches being built. 150 years ago, people come over from Ireland and they built this church for the glory of God so that people could come in here freely and worship Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Our ancestors have been faithful to Jesus and they've passed it on. My grandfather lived in the east end of Glasgow and with some friends, he physically built a stone church near Parkhead Cross. That church stands today. I was brought up in it. Evelyn and I were married in it. I became a Christian in it at the Youth Fellowship.

My grandfather passed on his faith from generation to generation. Our ancestors are witnesses to the truth about Jesus Christ.

All these witnesses, not just here in Glasgow, but all over the earth, all over the world. How can anyone not believe? I think is my question.

[23 : 17] And yet there is still opposition. There is still violence against Christianity, against Jesus, and against his followers. Why? Why when Russian communism took over the country did they close the churches and tried to get rid of Christianity?

Why did the same thing happen when the Chinese became communists and they subdued Christianity so that it had to live underground? Why underground did the Chinese church continue to grow rapidly?

Because if Jesus says who he is, this is the crunch. If Jesus is who he says he is, it changes everything. If this is true, if God came down to earth to live as one of us and then died and then rose again, it changes the world.

You know, it's like a long, narrow X. Everything before Jesus speaks of Jesus down to this one place of the cross and everything after that is different.

Everything after that is what we say it in our date. Anno Domini after Christ and everything is changed. And so the question is there for everyone to ask.

[24 : 45] Who is Jesus? Can we deny these witnesses? As with the Jews, Jesus turns it around.

He did it with the disciples as well. He says, who do you say that I am? Sadly, the witnesses are not enough. They weren't enough for the Jews and they're not enough now.

Because this is not a battle of ideologies. This is not a case of, well, I'll choose this lifestyle rather than that lifestyle. I think it would be better to be a Christian rather than a Muslim or a Jew. This is about the age-old battle between good and evil.

God is good and God sent his son to be not just good but perfect. And on the cross, good died so that evil would not succeed.

in the resurrection, Jesus came alive so that we can conquer with him. Why did the witnesses fail?

[25 : 53] Why did the Jews still crucify him? And what hope is there for Jesus and his message?

The only one of the witnesses, you may have noticed, there were five witnesses at the start and then I only mentioned four.

I missed out the first one. Because the answer lies with this mystery witness in verse 21. John later calls him the counselor, the Holy Spirit. And he changes everything.

Of all the gospels, John's the one that embraces the Holy Spirit. John describes the Holy Spirit resting in Jesus and remaining with him. The Holy Spirit had not remained with any person up to that time.

He says, Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit in chapter 3. A Jewish teacher is told he can't get into heaven unless he is born of the Spirit. And then in chapter 20 verse 22, Jesus, now risen, now alive, now ready to return to heaven, breathes on his disciples and says, receive the Holy Spirit.

The ultimate witness to Jesus is the Spirit. Jesus states it clearly in chapter 15 verses 26 to 27.

When the Spirit comes, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

[27 : 17] The witnesses fail because without the Spirit they are not recognized. Without the Spirit the preacher's words are dead. Martin prayed for me before this service and he prayed that the Holy Spirit would fill me because my words are empty unless the Holy Spirit fills them and speaks.

The preacher's words are dead. Without the Spirit miracles are dismissed as coincidence. I've often heard that. I've often mentioned a miracle and someone said, oh, it's just coincidence.

That woman with MS, maybe she didn't really have MS. What nonsense. Without the Spirit this Bible remains on the shelf unopened, unread, a dead book of dead words.

Only the Spirit makes it the living Word of God. Without the Spirit the ancestors who built the churches and took the good news of Jesus around the world are just dismissed as part of history. But the good news is this. The wind of the Spirit that Jesus talks about in chapter 3 is still blowing all around this world. In every corner the Holy Spirit is reaching out to witness to Jesus.

[28 : 37] To testify that He is the Son of God. It's God's Spirit who draws people to Jesus. It's the Spirit who convinces and convicts.

It's the Holy Spirit who moves people to say, yes, Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord of my life. And it's the Spirit who asks each one of us, who is Jesus?

Who is He to you? We can argue and dismiss all the witnesses, but when the Spirit speaks to your heart, it's time to listen and time to obey.

Let's pray. Thank you Lord Jesus for all these witnesses to who you are back then in the time of John's Gospel.

Right now, 2018, in this city of Glasgow. Help us to listen to your Spirit and to give Jesus the only place in our lives that is right, which is at the very center of everything we say and everything we do of every hope that we have for ourselves and our friends and our world.

[30 : 04] Speak to us of Jesus, Holy Spirit, and help us to say, yes, He is for me. He is my Lord.

Amen.