

December 14/15, 2019

## Believe and Live

*These Things are Written that You May Believe Series*

**John 5:18-30**

Pastor Bryan Clark

John writes, “These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and in believing, you might have life in His name.” There is no credible reason to doubt the authenticity or the reliability of the Gospel of John as a historical document. Therefore, the question we end up with is, “Does Jesus tell the truth? In your heart of hearts, do you think Jesus tells the truth or do you think Jesus is a liar?” It's got to be one or the other. It's not an insignificant question because the way you answer that question will determine your eternal destiny. We understand this is the Christmas season, but if Jesus is a liar, then I find myself at a loss in trying to figure out then, “What is it we're celebrating?” So that's the question we want to wrestle with this morning. I invite you to turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 5. This is our last time in the Gospel of John this year; we'll pick it up again about mid-January.

Last we saw Jesus, Jesus had come to Jerusalem, did a healing at the pool of Bethesda, but He did the healing on the Sabbath, which has now created a great deal of conflict. So, the two accusations being made against Him by the religious leaders are: number one, He broke the Sabbath, and number two, He's claiming to be equal with God. The tension has now reached a level where they're persecuting, probably better translated prosecuting Jesus with the intent to put Him to death. This passage that we will look at this morning begins with Jesus' defense to the charges. It's referred to as the third discourse of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The first one was with Nicodemus, the second one with the woman at the well, and this is the third one. In order to really understand the point of this conversation, though, we have to keep reminding ourselves that the context is Jesus speaking to the religious leaders. The religious leaders have accused Him of things so serious that they're plotting to put Him to death. Jesus' defense will not be, “I didn't do it!” Jesus' defense will be, “I did do it, and I **am** God,” with the thought that if He's actually God in the flesh, maybe the religious leaders should rethink their position.

So, we will pick it up in verse 19, but before I launch this, this discussion does have the potential of getting really confusing, and I'm going to work really hard to avoid that. But it routes back to how John opens his Gospel in chapter 1, verses 1 through 5. It's a very difficult, kind of tedious, theology that opens the Gospel. I don't want to go back through all of that, so I'll just give you the simple summary. John identifies that before there was anything, there was God, and God has always been. There is *one* God, but that *one* God manifests Himself in three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It's this wondrous, mysterious doctrine we call the Trinity. Now if trying to comprehend that gives you a charley horse in your brain, and you say, “I just don't get that,” join the club; nobody does! It's wonderfully mysterious. But John goes out of his way to make sure we understand that there is this member of the Godhead—the Son—who is referred to as the *Word* because He will reveal God to the world. He is the One that created the universe. He is the One that took on human flesh, that became a man. John will say in verse 18 that Jesus came literally to exegete, to unveil, to reveal God to the world. Paul, in writing to the Colossians, would say, “Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God.” So Jesus now is affirming that to be true. That was John's description. John didn't say, “Just trust me, it's true.” What John said is, “I'm going to show you overwhelming historical evidence that validates the claim that this is God in the flesh.” So now the charge against Jesus by the religious crowd is, “You're claiming to be equal with God,” and again,

Jesus's response is not going to be, "I didn't do it;" it's going to be, "Yes, I did," because that's true. So, verse 19:

**Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly..."** (So this is a favorite phrase Jesus uses; we would probably say something like this is absolutely true.) **"...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.**

(\*NASB, John 5:19)

So what Jesus is saying is that He is the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, who has become flesh and, because that's true, there is perfect unity, perfect alignment between Him and the Father. It's just simply not possible for Jesus to ever be out of alignment or unity with the Father.

So now stop and think about this. These are the religious leaders who claim to be representing God, who claim to know the ways of God, who claim right and wrong according to God. They're claiming that when God became flesh, that He somehow was disobedient to God by His behavior. This is the clash between religion and Jesus. It's really important to remember that Jesus healed on the Sabbath on purpose. There was no moment when Jesus said, "Oh, what have I done? I just lost track of what day of the week it was." He's doing this on purpose, to expose the fallacy of Judaism and religion. This is so messed up that those who claim to be representing God are now actually in conflict with God who has become flesh, to such a degree they're plotting to kill Him. So that's the tension. I would suggest to you this is the problem with religion because we tend to think, "If it's religion, it's of God." And yet, when God became flesh and walked on the earth, religion didn't align itself with God in the flesh. Religion was at war with God in the flesh. And that's what Jesus is trying to expose. Verse 20:

**For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.**

So again, nobody's asking these people just to believe it. The miracles will validate the claim, "This is God in the flesh." So, in 21st century language, what Jesus just said to the religious leaders is, "You ain't seen nothing yet. There's going to be so much more that will give you evidence that I am indeed God in the flesh," and this is flowing out of a love relationship between the Father and the Son. Again, this idea that before anything existed, there was God, and God existed as one God, but in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is, at His essence, a relational God. So the Father loves the Son; the Son loves the Spirit; the Spirit loves the Father. You might use the language, "The Father celebrates the Son; the Son celebrates the Spirit; the Spirit celebrates the Father." There is this dynamic relationship that has defined God forever—and that is the very essence of life.

Well, Jesus and John are fond of using the term *eternal life*, not just talking about a duration of life, but about a quality of life. The life that defined God has defined God forever. So, then, when God created men and women, He created them in His image, with the capacity to experience relationship with God and experience that eternal life. Theologians like to refer to that relationship that God had with Himself as *the dance of God*. If you think of it that way, then when God created people in his image, essentially He was inviting them to *join the dance*. "This is where you're going to find life. This is where you're going to find joy. This is the essence of life!"

But when sin entered into the picture, then people were cut off from that relationship with God because sin is a barrier. People then feel this longing for something different. People identify this feeling in their souls of longing for something different, something more. "It just seems like I was

made for a different world than this; I was made for something more.” And the reason you feel that is because you *were*; you were made to dance with God. But because of sin, we're separated from God, and there's this longing deep within. People spend a lifetime trying to fill that emptiness with something that will satisfy, but only that relationship with God will ultimately satisfy. So, this is all a part of that love relationship between the Father and Son, and why Jesus came to reveal God and His plan of salvation to the world. Verse 21:

**For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.** (Vs. 21-23)

So Jesus is saying that God is the One with authority over life and death, and He's given that authority to Jesus. God has the authority to judge; He's given that authority to Jesus. So again, picture this scene where the religious leaders, supposedly representing God, are prosecuting Jesus. They're judging Jesus! And what Jesus is saying is, “Oh, by the way, I *am* God in the flesh, and at the end of the story, you don't judge Me, I judge you!” That's what He just said there.

So again, this message to the religious leaders is, “If Jesus is who He says He is, maybe they should back up and rethink some things.” In verse 23, then, He essentially says, “*If you don't honor Jesus for who He is, and what He came to do, you stand no chance of honoring the Father.*” In other words, there's no way to the Father except through Jesus. Now this is really important to understand in a 21st century world, where people want to convince themselves that all roads eventually lead to God. It's easy to start thinking one religion is as good as the next religion. It's common to hear people say that all religious claims are equally valid; even those that contradict one another are both equally true. “As long as it's religion, religion has some way of eventually the path leading to God.” What Jesus just said is, “That's *not true*; the only possibility is to honor the Son.” In other words, identifying Jesus for who He is and what He came to do is the only way to honor the Father. If you don't go through Jesus, you have no chance of getting to the Father. That's what Jesus just said.

So, the question we're wrestling with this morning is, “Does Jesus tell the truth or is Jesus a liar?” Because you can't have it both ways. Either it's true or it's not. Again, Jesus is having this conversation with the religious leaders of His day who claim to be representing God and God's Law and the way to God, and in the process of that, they are at war with Jesus, who is God in the flesh, come to be the Savior of the world. Again, this is the problem with religion. People tend to think as long as it's religion, it gets to God. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, said that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. If you look up the context, he's clearly talking about religion. I would suggest to you that when the story of the world is finally told, more people will miss Jesus and His plan of salvation because of religion than any other reason. Jesus intentionally healed on the Sabbath to bring up this conversation, to be clear that religion is not representing God or His plan or His way of salvation. They're so opposed to one another—the religious leaders actually are plotting to kill Him—which gets us to verse 24:

**“Truly, truly, (It's absolutely true.) I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. “**

It's very clear he who hears and believes, not “*will have*” eternal life. It's not future tense but “**has**” eternal life; its present tense. Eternal life doesn't start someday; it's not a duration of life; it's a quality

of life. It starts the moment we believe, the moment we trust Jesus as Savior and believe that Jesus has forgiven our sins, and that Jesus then makes it possible for us as sinful men and women to stand right before a holy God.

I referred to it a couple of weeks ago as the ultimate miracle that Jesus offers. When He talks about **passed out of death into life**, we learned in John chapter 3 that there's not just a judgment coming one day, but we're *already* judged. We're born spiritually dead because of our sin. We are cut off from a relationship with God. We're already judged, and that's why we feel that longing. That's why we feel like something's missing, like we were made for something different. We're already under judgment. We are spiritually dead. Once we believe; we receive; we trust Jesus as Savior. (The Greek language there would describe it as going over a mountain pass). It's a great description—you're spiritually dead but, because of Jesus, you pass out of death and into life. Who has the authority to give life? God! And God has given that to Jesus, and Jesus gives it to those who believe. Verse 25:

**Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.**

I think he's referring to those who are spiritually dead, and what he's saying is there is an hour coming, and it's already here. This is before Jesus died on the cross. This is before Jesus rose from the dead. This is before He has brought the fulfillment of the promises of the old covenant. So He's headed there to usher in the new covenant and all of its promises. But already people are listening to what He has to say and what He promises. And already they're experiencing new birth—new life—because they choose to believe Jesus tells the truth. The best example of that would be the Samaritans. Before Jesus even gets to the cross, they're believing what He's saying. They're believing what He came to do. The text even told us they believe this is the One who has come to be the Savior of the world. So, Jesus is saying it's already happening, and it's going to happen a lot more, of course, after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Verse 26:

**For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because he is *the* Son of Man.**

(Vs. 26-27)

The language **life in Himself** goes back to John chapter 1, verse 4. Where does life come from? It would have to come from someone who has always been alive—eternal life. Life originates in God, so only God has the authority to give life. So when Jesus promises eternal life, it's because He's been given the authority by the Father to give life. Only God could do that.

So think of it this way. What sense does it make to think that by doing some religious works, by doing some religious rituals, by doing some good works, by a handful of practices, somehow that behavior makes you spiritually alive? I mean, that's ridiculous! The only possibility is it comes from someone who has the authority to give life. Jesus is identifying that's Him. He also again identifies that the Father has given Him authority to be the judge.

Think of it this way. The world is full of religion. People have different ideas about God, about who He is, and about Jesus. "Jesus was a good teacher." "Jesus was a Prophet." "Jesus was a good man." "Jesus became a god." There are all these different views. So let's imagine we take all of the leaders of these world religions, and we put them right down here in the front section. They're going to stand in judgment before God, and they're going to explain what they believed about Jesus. What Jesus is saying is that when that moment comes—and it will—that the One that you'll stand before is Jesus.

Imagine the surprise in that moment, when people have believed all kinds of things about Jesus that aren't true. The One that they're going to stand in judgment before will be Jesus, and that's why Jesus says, "If you don't honor Me, you have no chance of getting to the Father. There's no way to get there, but through me." Verse 28:

**Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, and those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment. 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.** (Vs. 28-30)

So again Jesus closes this part of it by reminding them He's in perfect alignment with the Father—God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. Jesus is God the Son, taken on human flesh—perfect alignment—it couldn't be any other way. And He identifies that when the time comes—now He's talking about life after death, and there is judgment—people will stand before Jesus.

Now verse 29 can get a little confusing. It's not saying that you'll be judged on the basis of your works. As a matter of fact, that would be contrary to everything that we've learned in the Gospel of John. It's simply saying that *when* you become spiritually alive—born again in Jesus—then out flow the works consistent with that—the *good works* consistent with that. Someone who is spiritually dead outflow the works consistent with that. The judgment will be reflective of whether someone is spiritually alive or spiritually dead, and that has to do with their view of Jesus.

So, let's go back and pull a few of these pieces together. When John the Baptist was baptizing people, he actually said, "My baptism is nothing more than ceremonial. I'm doing nothing more than washing the dirt off your body. But there is One coming after me who will have the power to change you, to give you new birth from the inside out." We moved to a conversation with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was highly religious—one of the most righteous people in the community in terms of religious standards—but he knew something was missing, something was lacking. So he comes to Jesus by night and he's trying to figure it out. And what does Jesus tell Nicodemus? "What you need can never be experienced through religion. As a matter of fact, you're going to have to repent of that, and understand that you *must be born again*. And the only way that happens is you *must believe*." Jesus identified that He'd be lifted up on a cross to make payment for sin, and that if, and only if, Nicodemus was willing to believe, would Jesus give him new life from the inside out—*born again*. Then we moved to the conversation of the Samaritan woman. She was a sinner; she was an outcast. But she got into a conversation with Jesus where Jesus identified what she's been looking for her whole life is Jesus. He offers her the *living water*—that is a well of water that bubbles up in her soul to satisfy her dry and thirsty soul. The only chance that she had was Jesus. As so often happens, the outcast, the sinner who had no self-righteousness to offer, understands and believes. And there was a great harvest of souls in Samaria of people who believed Jesus had come to be the Savior of the world. Nicodemus, the self-righteous, highly religious leader, walked away confused. As so often happens, people that are so engaged in religion are so convinced their religion can make them right, they struggle to comprehend that they need a savior.

Again, you can't miss that this conversation was happening with the religious leaders of first century Judaism. The people would have believed that the Pharisees were the most righteous among them, the most religious among them, that they were the closest to God among them, and if anyone was going to make it to God, it was them. But the irony is, it's these religious leaders that are now at war with God in the flesh, He who has come to be the Savior of the world. Religion does not get us to

God; religion keeps us from God. This is the whole point Jesus is trying to help people understand—that you can't get to God unless you come through Jesus.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, talks about the fallacy of some who believe that Jesus was a prophet; Jesus was a wise teacher; Jesus was a good moral teacher, but He was not who He claimed to be. Lewis says this:

*I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a really great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God."*

*That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic—on a level with a man who claims he is a poached egg—or else he'd be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up as a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to. \**

\**Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis, Copyright 1943, 1945, 1952 by Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.; pgs 94-95.

So the question we're wrestling with is a simple question: Do you believe Jesus tells the truth, or do you believe Jesus was a liar? It's not an insignificant question. How you answer that question will determine your eternal destiny. Now there are those today—many today—who would say this message that Jesus is the only way to God is exclusive. You hear that language all the time. And in one sense, it is exclusive. It's *only Jesus*. That's not what I say; that's what Jesus said. Either He's telling the truth or He's a liar. But I would also suggest to you that the message of Jesus is the most inclusive message out there. So think of it this way. If religion is true, then what I have to offer you this morning is, no matter how much you're hurting, no matter how much you're confused, no matter how sinful your past is, no matter how messed up you are, all you can do is go out there and get religious. You need to go out there and try harder. You need some more rituals; you need some more practices; you need to somehow, some way, convince God you're worthy of something God has to offer. But we all understand that if it worked that way, like everything else in life, only a few might get in. Not every athlete makes it to the NFL. Not every musician becomes famous. Not every businessman or woman becomes a millionaire. So, religion would be just another way that we fall short and have no hope. Jesus actually said, "Even the best of the best can't even come close." That *is* exclusive! The message of religion is, "Try harder, but, by the way, no one gets it." The message Jesus offers is, "It doesn't matter if you're the woman at the well or you're highly religious Nicodemus. It doesn't matter if you're the worst person in the room or if you're the best person in the room. It doesn't matter where you've been; it doesn't matter what you've done; it doesn't matter what's been done to you—none of that matters. It's the most inclusive message of all—that God became flesh to die on the cross to make payment for your sin, to offer you salvation freely as a gift if you simply choose to believe. It could not be any more inclusive than that. What you have to wrestle with is whether or not you think Jesus tells the truth, or whether you think Jesus is a liar.

We've been at this since September, and I'm going to guess, at this point, there are three categories of people. One category would be the people that believe, who say, "I believe; I'm in; I believe that's true." There'd be a second category of people that would say, "I'm still confused; I don't get this; I

don't really even know what you're talking about.” That's fine. I understand that; I respect that. We're really glad you're here. I want you to keep coming. We'll be back at it in January and try to better understand all of this. But I do believe there's a third category of people that, since we started in September, somewhere over the course of our study, God has spoken to your heart and you've concluded, “I do believe this is true. I do believe Jesus tells the truth. I do believe He came to be the Savior of the world. Like the Samaritans, I do believe this—and I'm in.”

We don't do this often, but every once in a while it's helpful to give people the chance to respond in some way, to put a stake in the ground. In other words, it's possible week after week after week to be like, “I think I believe this... I think I believe this,” but at some point you have to settle it. At some point you put a stake in the ground and say, “I understand it, I believe it, I'm in, count me in.” So we're going to give you an opportunity to do that this morning. I'm going to invite the band to go ahead and come back up on the stage. And here's how we'll do this. In just a moment I'll invite us to stand and sing, and during this song, if you would say somewhere over the last four months you've come to understand this, you've come to believe it, you believe Jesus tells the truth, “I believe Jesus came to be the Savior of the world, I believe I'm a sinner in need of a Savior. I get all that, and I believe it and I'm in,” I want you to put a stake in the ground and say, “Yes,” and then I would invite you to just come on down to the front. You can kneel on the steps; you can stand—whatever is most comfortable for you. It's just your way of making a decision—putting a stake in the ground—and saying, “Yes, I believe it. I'm in!” After that, I will just offer a quick prayer and you go back to your seat. We'll have one final song, and immediately after the final song, there will be staff up front. (You can identify them by their lanyards.) They're just there to help. If you want somebody to pray with you, if you have some questions, if you want to talk to someone, you'll be able to easily identify them. They're here to help, if you wish that.

So, again, this is the Christmas season. If Jesus is a liar, I am at a loss to figure out what it is we're celebrating this time of year. But if Jesus tells the truth, I can't imagine a better time of year to say, “I understand it. I believe it and want to put my stake in the ground. Count me in.” I trust you to do that this morning. Let's stand and we'll sing together. I invite you to come forward anytime during this song. Let's pray together.

*Father, I'm so thankful for our brothers and sisters here who have had the courage to step out, put their stake in the ground, and say they believe. Lord, if all we had to offer this morning was religion, the message would be, “Go out and try harder; you're probably not going to make it.” So, Lord, we're so thankful that that's not what Jesus offers. Jesus offers new life—to be born again through His death, burial and resurrection—to those who believe. God, I pray that You would make Your presence known in the heart of each one of these men and women, that they would walk away today with a sense that there is new life that begins now, and will reach its fulfillment in the world to come, where the world will be everything our souls long for it to be today. God, I commit these men and women to You this morning, In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE  
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,  
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.  
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512  
Copyright 2019 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.



**Believe and Live**  
*That You May Believe*  
John 5:18-30  
Pastor Bryan Clark

**Opening Discussion**

1. John states that these things are written “that you may believe...” (20:31). What evidence has John recorded to support his claim that Jesus is the Christ?
2. What are some common beliefs about Jesus in our culture today?
3. Can someone “celebrate” Christmas and Easter yet fail to understand who Jesus is and what He came to do?

**Bible Study**

1. Read John 5:18. What are the Jews seeking to do and why?
2. Do a quick review of John 1:1-3. Who does John claim Jesus to be?
3. Read John 5:19-24. Try to summarize what Jesus is saying about Himself in this text and how does it align with what John said in 1:1-3. Also compare with Colossians 1:15 and John 1:18.
4. What does Jesus say in 5:24? (Compare with 3:12-15, 16-21, 36). Rewrite 5:24 in your own words. What do you understand Jesus to be saying?
5. Read John 5:25-30. How does Jesus remove any possible claim that Jesus is just one of many ways to God?
6. Read John 20:31. How do Jesus’ words in John 5:18-30 line up with what John identifies as his purpose for writing his Gospel?

