

WHY SHOULD WE STUDY THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF NUMBERS? John 5:30-47

INTRODUCTION

There is a small piece of land a mile west of Minong, WI that holds a special place in my heart. My grandfather, John Swanson, emigrated from Sweden and homesteaded that land in 1908. After building a house and a barn and silo and clearing some of the land he wrote home to his childhood sweetheart, Anna Carlson to come to America and marry him. She left Sweden and her family and came to the USA. They were married and began their new life together in this new land. My dad was the first child they had. He was followed by two sisters, Martha and Jenny. However, when my dad was four, Martha was two and Jenny was a baby my grandfather died in the great flu epidemic of 1918. So my grandmother was left to raise three small children in a foreign land. I grew up hearing the stories of survival, of the good times and the bad that my dad and his sisters shared in that place with their mother.

In the mid-1990's my dad, my brothers and my sister and I built a garage about 50 feet from where the old house had stood, where my dad and aunts were born and raised. We converted the garage to a cabin which we travel to about 4 times a year to hunt and hike and fish in the north woods of WI. This cabin and this land have my heart. I want this land and this cabin to capture the hearts of my family as well. This weekend my son Jordan, his wife Stephanie and two of my daughters, Julia and Joelle are at our cabin. I have been so excited about their trip because Stephanie has never been there, Julia has only been there twice but long ago and Joelle was only there one time as a little girl. I am so eager for them to see and to enjoy the beauty and solitude and family history that I see and associate with this place. I don't just want them to see our place but I want them to love it. Therefore, I have spent this last week talking with them about all that they need to know in order to have maximum pleasure in the glory of our place in Minong.

In a way that is infinitely more intense, more passionate, more enthusiastic than me in relation to our land; God the Father desires that the glory of God the Son be seen and admired and delighted in and rejoiced in. You can see this ambition of the Father towards the Son in v. 37 in our text this morning: "And the Father who has sent me has himself borne witness about me." God the Father both during the earthly ministry of the Son and to this day continues to show off, to reveal, to display, to demonstrate, to prove the greatness of the Son of God who became a man, whose name is Jesus. John 5 is, from beginning to end a description of how God does this. This chapter begins with Jesus healing a man who has been unable to walk for 38 years. He picks him out of a crowd of disabled people and commands him to get up and to take the mattress he was lying on and to go home. The man immediately obeys Jesus. However, as he is walking home, carrying his mattress, he is confronted by the morality police, the religious folks of his day and asked why he was carrying his mattress on the Sabbath. In the fourth commandment of the 10 Commandments, God commanded the people of Israel to do no work on the Sabbath day. Thus, those Jewish people who believed the Bible, who took it literally, believed that carrying your bed on the Sabbath was a breaking of the law of God because it was work. The man replied that he was carrying his bed on the Sabbath because the man who healed him from being a paraplegic for 38 years commanded him to carry his bed. The man didn't know who Jesus was. In the excitement and thrill of being healed he had failed to get the identity of Jesus and Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. Later, the man identified Jesus and informed the authorities that it was Jesus who had healed him. So the Bible believing, religious Jewish people persecuted Jesus because he healed this man on the Sabbath and told him to carry his bed.

At this point Jesus could have gotten into a debate with these religious people as to what sorts of work were permissible on the Sabbath. The literature of the Jewish people of this time is full of these sorts of discussions. However, Jesus did not debate Sabbath keeping rules he simply said, "My Father is working until now and I myself am working." This immediately enraged these already incensed people for they knew that Jesus was not

simply teaching a different way of Sabbath keeping but that he was claiming to be God. Do not miss this: Jesus was a man, just like us and he was claiming to be God. If you or I met someone who was claiming to be God, we would simply think they were crazy and try to get them some medical help. But Jesus is obviously not mentally deranged but is sincerely and honestly claiming that the work he does is the work God, who is his Father, does and the work God does is the work he does. To these Jewish people this would rank as one of the most evil things a person could say or do. Thus, they determined that he must die and began seeking a way to kill him.

In vv.19-47 Jesus is speaking to these hate-filled, hostile people. He does not tell them that they have misunderstood him; that he was not claiming to be God. Rather, in vv. 19-29 he intensifies and makes plainer his claim to be God himself in human flesh. He tells them that he personally can see everything that the Father does and then he, the Son does everything he sees his Father doing. He tells them that like the Father he raises the dead. He says that the Father has entrusted all judgment into his hands, knowing full well that there is only one judge described in the OT. He says that the Father's goal is that everyone should honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. In other words, Jesus is saying that in exactly the same way that the God of the OT is worshipped and praised and adored, so he is to be worshipped and praised and adored. Indeed, if you do not honor this human Jesus, who is the Son of God, in this way, then you are not and cannot honor the Father.

It is because of language like this that we know that the only God who exists has eternally existed as a Trinity of being. The Son is clearly God but he is also clearly distinct from the Father. Thus in the one God there are three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and each person is fully God, but there is only one God. In this Trinity of being the Father sent the Son into the world, where he took on human flesh and it has been the purpose of the Father since the sending of the Son to bear witness to his glory. That is the main point of the second half of this speech that Jesus makes to this enraged people. We are going to see four ways that the Father bears witness to or sets forth the glory of his Son and then we are going to reflect on four of the ten things that Jesus says will happen for all those who truly see the glory of the Son.

MAIN POINT

*The Father sets forth the glory of his Son, Jesus Christ **by...***

A. Confirming to the Son their unity (vv. 30-32)

In v. 30 Jesus affirms the unity of his will with the Father's will in the matter of judging people. He and the Father are in perfect accord in their standards of judgment and in applying those standards to particular people. Jesus' judgment, like the Father's judgment is always just, that is, always in accord with what is good and right and fair. Again, this is an outlandish claim for any human being to make, even if he were God's highest and best prophet. Moses, David, Isaiah, Elijah, none of these men ever said anything that even came close to this kind of a claim. Thus, Jesus is here again asserting his deity by emphasizing his unity with the Father in judgment. Notice in v. 31 he makes an obvious statement. If he alone is making this claim to have just judgment and to judge always in perfect unity with God the Father, then obviously his claim is false. Simply saying that he is united in judging with God does not make it so, in fact, if he alone makes this claim, then it is a false claim because he is claiming to be speaking what God speaks when he judges. This claim must be endorsed by God the Father if it is a true claim. Then in v. 32 he says that there is another who bears witness about him. Clearly, he is thinking here of God the Father. Jesus does not identify what sort of testimony God is bearing. He simply says that the Father is bearing witness to the fact that he and Jesus judge in exactly the same way.

Now notice, this witness that the Father is giving is not for anyone but Jesus. Jesus says, "I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true." Jesus is certain that he is hearing what the Father says and judging in exact accord with what the Father says because the Father, in some way is bearing witness to this fact for the sake of Jesus himself. Jesus himself is absolutely convinced and fully aware of who he is as the divine Son of God who is also the Messiah because the Father has born witness to him of this fact. The point isn't that Jesus was uncertain as to his identity but now he is certain because of the Father's testimony. Rather, the point is that

it is due to Jesus' union with the Father that he is able to know and do all that he does. While Jesus does not tell us here what testimony the Father is giving, we are to understand that the first witness the Father bears is for the sake of the Son himself. This shows the complete dependence of the Son upon his Father. Jesus relies upon the Father for everything including the assurance that he and the Father are one God. It is because of this Father wrought assurance that Jesus acts and speaks as if God himself were acting and speaking because when Jesus speaks and acts it is God himself speaking and acting.

B. Sending John the Baptist to the Jews (vv. 33-35)

Next, Jesus reminds these Jewish listeners that God sent to them a prophet whose name was John who came to bear witness to the truth about Jesus. John was not sent for the sake of Jesus but for their sake. Jesus does not need John's testimony about himself, he only brings it up so that they can be saved. John was sent as a lamp to burn and shine light so that the Jewish people would understand that Jesus is the Son of God and thus believe in him. Jesus reminds them that John's appearing caused no little stir and they enjoyed his ministry for a time. The point Jesus is making is that they should remember what John said about Jesus and thus recognize Jesus for who he is. His healing of the man on the Sabbath, rather than making them mad, ought to cause them to re-evaluate how they think about the Sabbath. They ought to remember what John said about Jesus and see a confirmation of John's testimony in this miracle.

C. Giving Jesus works which he finishes (v. 36)

Jesus does not need the testimony of John because he has far greater testimony from a far greater person. The Father has given Jesus works to perform. He is, he says, in the process of completing or finishing those works and it is those works themselves that bear witness to the fact that the Father has sent him into the world. This afternoon one football team is going to demonstrate by their works on the field that they are the best football team in the NFL this year. Both are currently making that claim, but only one will prove it by their works. In a similar way the Father proves that Jesus is the glorious Son of God by giving him works to do which he then completes. The evidence of the glory of Jesus is not merely in word alone but in work as well. The works to which Jesus refers are the miracles he performed, such as the healing of man at the pool of Bethesda. These works include his dying on the cross and then rising from the dead on the third after he was killed. The crucial point for Jesus is that these works were given to him by the Father and thus it is in doing these works that the Father bears witness to the glory of Jesus.

D. Displaying his glory in the OT Scriptures (vv. 37-47)

The fourth way that the Father sets forth the glory of the Son of God and the way which occupies most of Jesus' speech to these people is set forth in vv. 37-47. I want you to notice in v. 32 and in v. 36 that the witness that the Father bears about Jesus is stated with present tense verbs. The Father is bearing witness during the life of Jesus. However, in v. 37 Jesus says the Father has borne witness. This is a perfect past tense. In other words, God began bearing witness to the glory of Jesus in the past and this witness continues into the present. In what way has the Father borne witness to the Son in the past that continues to bear witness to him in the present? Look at v. 39. He tells these Bible reading and Bible believing people that while they eagerly and diligently study the OT Scriptures they completely miss the voice of God, the glory of God and the word of God because they do not see the Son of God revealed there. God began to bear witness to Jesus thousands of years prior to his arrival in and through the OT Scriptures and he was continuing to bear that witness during the life of Jesus and he continues to do so to this day.

Then in vv. 46-47 he goes back to the first five books of the OT, the writings of Moses. It is the writings of Moses that these people revere above all of the OT. The first five books, the Law of Moses, is their favorite part of the Bible. The reason they criticized the healed lame dude for carrying his bed on the Sabbath and the reason they criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and the reason they were seeking to kill Jesus for claiming to be God is because they loved the writings of Moses. It is the Law of Moses upon which their hopes for eternal life are based. Yet, Jesus says, that Moses will not save them, rather Moses is going to condemn them at the final judgment because Moses wrote about Jesus. Jesus is the theme of the Law of Moses and thus their refusal to believe in Jesus is evidence that they do not really believe what Moses said. Their apparent love

for the Law of Moses is a sham, a charade because if they truly believed the Law of Moses they would believe in Jesus. The whole OT and in particular, the first five books of the OT are about Jesus. This is why we are going to study the OT book of Numbers. God, through Moses, began to bear witness to the glory of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God when Moses wrote down the book of Numbers. God continues to reveal the glory of Jesus through the book of Numbers and so we are going to study it together so that we might see the witness that the Father has borne to the Son in the book of Numbers.

...so that we will...

Our goal is not merely to see the person and work and salvation of Jesus as he is revealed in the book of Numbers anymore than it is my desire for Stephanie and Julia and Joelle merely to physically see the land and the cabin. I want them to enjoy and love and appreciate the glory of this place just west of Minong, WI which they see this weekend. So, in this speech of Jesus he reveals the Father's goal in bearing witness to the Son. I've identified at least 10 ways that Jesus describes God's purpose in revealing the glory of Jesus, there may be more. In the sermon notes in your program I've listed the 10 purposes for which God displays the glory of Jesus to us. Nine of these purposes I've deduced by looking at what Jesus criticized the religious folks for not doing. For example in v. 38 he says that the Jewish people for all their vaunted love for the Bible do not have God's word living in them because they refuse to believe in Jesus. Thus, two of the purposes of God in revealing the glory of Jesus are that people would have his word dwelling in them and believe in Jesus. I am not going to comment on all ten of these purposes but only make a few comments about four of them.

1. Be saved (v. 34)

In v. 34 Jesus tells these hate-filled, murderous, self-righteous people that the reason he is telling him these things, especially his mentioning of John the Baptist's testimony is so that they may be saved. This is remarkable love, amazing grace, overwhelming kindness. These people hate Jesus. They want him dead. They have witnessed him heal a man who was crippled for 38 years and rather than falling on their faces in dread and wonder they can only see that he did it on the Sabbath day. They are so blind that they only take offense at Jesus' claim to be God rather than re-evaluate their own presuppositions. Yet, Jesus seeks their salvation. He wants them to be saved. He appeals to them to turn from their blindness, their self-righteousness, their hostility and receive him so they can be saved.

Probably not many in here are right now angry with Jesus and would like to see him dead, but there may be some. There are billions of people in this world who want to see the divine Son of God dead and gone. But here, it is more likely there are many who are living their lives indifferent to Jesus, preferring other pleasures, other saviors, other salvations to him. You may be giving lip service to Jesus but in your heart, you are not all that impressed with Jesus. You are far more impressed with money and job and friends and sex and computers and movies and music and whatever than you are with Jesus. You need to know that God the Father is bearing witness to the greatness of God the Son this morning, through this word so that you may be saved. You do not need to suffer separation from God forever; you do not need to keep living on the temporary and tasteless trivialities of this world but can be rescued from sin and death and hell and brought to God through Christ. You, no matter what you have done or how you have treated Jesus, can be brought into the glorious joy of being loved by God, that is, you can be saved.

2. Hear God's voice, see God's form & have God's word dwell in us (vv. 37-38)

3. Believe in the Son (vv.38 & 46)

The way that this salvation is obtained is by believing in the Son. When you see the glory of the Son as the Father bears witness to him through this word you will see him to be a trustworthy savior. It is in Christ alone that the fullness of God dwells in bodily form. It is Christ alone, as a fully human being, who obeyed God's law and gave himself up to death as the perfect, unblemished Lamb of God for the sins of all who will believe in him. This faith that God wants is not merely agreeing to the facts about Jesus. Rather it is a personal reliance upon and dependence upon Jesus to do for you all that he promises to do. You can understand how an airplane flies and you can talk about how much you admire airplanes flying but until you get on the airplane and

so trust it to take you into the air, you are not trusting it. It is God's aim and ambition that all who see the glory of Jesus revealed by the Father in his word have faith in this Jesus.

4. Come to the Son (v. 39)

5. Have eternal life (v. 39)

6. Love God (v. 42)

7. *Seek and obtain the glory that comes from God (v. 44)*

In v. 44 Jesus says that the fundamental reason these people do not trust in him is because they care far more about what people think of them than they care about what God thinks of them. Their religious activity is motivated by a desire to win the approval of men, not God, even though they say they are doing what they do so that God will accept them. Thus, when you trust in Jesus it is proof positive that you care more about God's approval, about being accepted by God than you care about man's approval, about being accepted by other people. Everyone is either living for the approval of people or for the approval of God. If you want God's approval, there is only one way to get it, trust in Jesus as the one who always pleased his Father. Thus God will be pleased with you because of Jesus, not because of you. You will enter into the joy of being loved and approved of by God because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. Do not miss the point here. The reason to trust in Jesus is so that you can be known and loved and accepted by God, not so that you can be healthy or wealthy or not lonely anymore. In the same way that being loved and accepted by others makes you happy and thus motivates you to do certain things so also a desire to be accepted and approved of by God is the reason to trust in Christ. Stop living your life to obtain the approval of others and seek the glory of being loved by God, being approved of by God by trusting in Jesus.

8. Not be accused by Moses or Jesus at the final judgment (v. 45)

9. *See Jesus Christ when we read the OT (vv. 39 & 46-47)*

In v. 39 Jesus says that these people are diligent students of the Bible because they believe that by studying and memorizing the Bible they will obtain eternal life. Then in v. 45 he says that they have set their hope on Moses and that is why they read the Law of Moses. These people read the Bible as an act of religious and moral performance. They believe that God will approve of them and reward them with eternal life because they read their Bibles. In addition they believe, based upon their false reading of the Law of Moses that because they are physical descendants of Abraham and because they obey the rules of the Law of Moses that God will accept them into his eternal kingdom. What these people did is a warning to us. It is possible to read the Bible for the wrong reasons, with the wrong objective. It is possible to believe that the Bible is God's book and study it as God's word and yet go to hell. The Bible is not given to us so that we can prove our religious sincerity by reading it. It is not given to us so that we can be moral people. It is not give to us so that we can find out how to have a good marriage or have a good government or run a good business or have good children or live healthy lives or know the age of the earth. It is given to us so that we can see and know and thus trust in and rejoice in and love our great and glorious Savior Jesus Christ. If you do not read the Bible with this as your first and primary purpose you will read it wrong. The Bible is a dangerous book in our hands because we by nature want the inside scoop on how to get along in this world when God's aim is to impress us with his own glory and the glory of his great salvation in Christ. I pray and I trust you will join me in praying that as we journey through the book of Numbers we will see and rejoice in Christ and his glorious salvation. I pray that God will rescue us from reading his word in order to impress others or to impress God with our goodness. I pray that we will read it in order to see our need for a Savior and to see the glory of Christ as the one who is the Savior of every believing sinner.

10. Have faith in the words of Jesus (v. 47)

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