

John 5:37-42

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[0 : 00] Our passage today is John 5, verse 37 to 42.

Let me start by asking a question. What is the most important skill that we, as children of God, can and should acquire?

Let me ask it again in a different way. What is the most important thing that we must learn how to do and do well as we approach God in prayer and in his word?

And we might say things like pray and love, the things that usually pop first in our minds, to believe, to witness, those sorts of things.

Those are obviously quite valid and very valuable. Things. To consider. But yet there is still something, I think, more fundamental than these for the child of God.

[1 : 26] And so the word, there is one word I would like for you to keep in your mind this morning as we go through the passage. And that word is listening.

Listening. Particularly listening to the voice of God in scripture. I heard in the local news the other day that an Aberdonian is suing an American quiz show for \$50,000.

He lost the game when he incorrectly answered the final question. But he thought he got the answer correct.

I'll let you be the judge whether he got it right or not. Okay. The question was, where is Santa Fe? His answer, the North Pole.

Listening is important. Listening is important. And the passage here illustrates why listening is important. And so that you can have a sense of where we're going in this message, the first thing I'm going to do is give an overview of the passage.

[2 : 44] Then I'm going to give an exposition, an explanation, and then an application. Okay. So that's our outline. So let me reread this passage as we get going.

John 5, verse 37 to 42. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard.

His form you have never seen. And you do not have his word abiding in you. For you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

And it is they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people.

But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. So in the overview, let's ask a few questions.

[3 : 51] A few simple questions about this passage. Number one, who are the primary actors? Who are the supporting cast? What is happening?

And what is the point? First, notice the people. The primary actors are Jesus and the Jews.

We know who Jesus is. But who are the Jews? That term is used in John in different ways, the Jews. It can mean the people in general.

It could also mean the Jewish authorities. In this context, I think it means, and it seems to most likely mean the Jewish authorities. Now who are they?

That would be members of the Sanhedrin, such as the Pharisees, the scribes, priests, and Levites. These people were the ruling class of Israel at the time, or the Jews.

[4 : 54] They were aristocrats. They held enormous power over the people. They could determine who got to stay in the synagogue. They could, as we see in the Gospels, persuade political authorities to do certain things if they felt need be.

They were important people. And they were the human driving force behind Jesus' crucifixion. The supporting cast are the Father, Moses, and the Scriptures.

And we see in previous contexts, we could also add in John the Baptist. Second, notice what is happening. The context leading into the passage shows a scandal.

That sets up a court-like deliberation. Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. And then he named God his own father.

And so, the Jewish authorities took exception and a fits to this. And I think rightly so.

[6 : 03] Because what happened was, as a result of Jesus' claim, was a disruption in their understanding, or in their perceptions, of who God is. It messed with the calibration in their minds of what they understood the Scriptures to say.

Remember what we read just a moment ago with Deuteronomy 6. What we call the Shema, the hero of Israel. The listen. It says, the Lord our God, the Lord our God, our Lord is one.

One, in their minds, for Jesus to claim to be God's son, would have been to say, the Lord is not one, but two.

At least in their minds, that's what they would have thought. And perhaps we can understand, if we lived at the time, that that would have caused some confusion for us as well. I think that we can see evidence that the disciples were not exactly clear on many of the teachings that Jesus had until after he was resurrected.

And so, perhaps here, there may have been some questions in their minds as well. So, we can understand then why the tension was there, and why they may have seen Jesus at that point as nothing more than an attention-seeking, blaspheming sinner that didn't know God.

[7 : 23] And it wasn't until much later that God's people really grappled with the idea of the Trinity. It was centuries later. But what we need to notice about this, this text, is that Jesus says to them directly, whereas they thought that Jesus was exhibiting something that denied the central confession of their faith, he turns that back around on them in these verses and says, but you have never heard God's voice, and you have never seen his form, and you do not have God's word abiding in you.

And he said to them, they searched the scriptures for eternal life, but they have not received it, and that they don't have God's love within them, the love of God, love for God within them.

And they thought, perhaps, that their response to Jesus was in obedience to the Shema. But Jesus informs them that actually quite opposite is true.

So that's the overview. Now let's go into the actual text a little bit deeper. So notice the way this section breaks down. We have in verse 37, if I may break it down this way, perceiving God's real presence.

And then verse 38, abiding in his word. Verses 39 to 40, searching the scriptures for him.

[9 : 00] And verses 41 to 42, loving God from within. And these provide us an encouragement and an exhortation to know what listening looks like.

So in verse 37, he says, and the Father, who has sent me, he has testified for me.

Neither have you at any time heard his voice, nor have you seen his form. So the Father here is the one who sent Jesus. He's the one that testifies on Jesus' behalf to show these ones who he is.

Now what does it mean to testify? Here it refers to the prophets. The Father is working in the prophets to communicate and to share who Jesus was beforehand and in John the Baptist.

It refers to Jesus' signs, his works. It also refers to Jesus himself and his voice. Use his presence. It's very interesting that he says they had never seen God, but they had read the scriptures.

[10 : 11] Because it's in the scriptures of Israel that they had read that at the foot of Mount Sinai, what happened? God descended on the top of the mountain and they heard the thunderous voice of God and they were frightened.

These ones had no doubt heard and read those verses. They had knew the voice of God and they could read in the scripture the revelation from scripture that is in the very words of scripture. And yet Jesus says they don't know God's voice.

And as far as his form is concerned, they weren't aware that in human form God was right there with them. They could not perceive.

And they could not recognize what was happening right in front of them at the time. So why was that perhaps? Look at verse 38. The word of God was not abiding in them.

Because they had not listened to the word of God and did not have it within them, when their own Savior, when their own Lord came to them, they did not recognize him.

[11 : 23] They did not recognize his voice. They did not recognize his presence. And so there it was. God was speaking to them in Jesus. God was standing in front of them in Jesus.

And Jesus had said in verse 24, anyone who hears my words and believes has eternal life. He says, those who hear the voice of God's Son in verse 25 will live.

And there we have the inherent power and inherent authority that's in Jesus' voice. They didn't hear that. They weren't ready. They were not prepared in their hearts to hear it.

It was not in a place, they were not in a place spiritually where the word was entering into them and taking residence. And yet, in verse 39 and 40, we see he says to them, you search the scriptures because you think in them to have eternal life.

And yet, they are my witnesses. They are my witnesses. That's a literal reading from the Greek. And what does it mean to search?

[12 : 40] Have you ever thought about that? What it means to search the scriptures? Have we ever done that? Have we ever actually searched the scriptures for him? We're talking about Pharisees.

We're talking about scribes. People we would consider lawyers, attorneys, experts in the law who memorize the Hebrew scriptures. They memorize the first five books of the Bible.

they knew as soon as they heard a certain word where it came from. Every jot and tittle, they were very dedicated people.

And yet, in the midst of all those, all that study time, all that research time, all that reading time, not once did they ever hear God's voice.

What an indictment. What an indictment. Never hearing God's voice in the scriptures. And so, they weren't able to recognize him when he came.

[13 : 51] They were not ready. even though God had put his own revelation in the very word of those scriptures, they were not ready.

The closest thing we have in our Western Anglo world to what the type of searching they did and the type of reading they did is what we're learning to do over at the Uni, the University of Aberdeen, in the Divinity Department, with biblical exegesis.

We go through, we analyze every part of the text, we get the meaning out, all the syntax, we master the language, and yet I can tell you today that there are scholars who have not heard God's voice.

And when they do try to listen to God's voice or read this word, they're not interested in hearing God's voice. They just want the knowledge.

They don't want the truth. They don't want the life. That's not what they seek. They're just like the Pharisees. They seek the praise of men. I pray that I never become one of those, honestly.

[15 : 05] Not to sound pointing the finger because that ability is within me just as much as anyone else to ignore that, to read the scriptures and not hear him, not pay attention.

when it says they're his witnesses, it means that the entire deposit of God's word on the whole witnesses to Jesus.

Now, there might be that there are certain points, certain specific points that don't necessarily directly speak of Jesus, but on the whole, it is a witness to Jesus himself because Jesus was with Moses in this process.

If you read certain sections of John, particularly in the early going, like verses 14 to 18, there's this idea that emerges out of those passages that if you read it closely, you can see that what is being suggested and said is that when Moses went into the tent that he was meeting with Jesus.

So he knew Jesus. He knew, Moses knew God's voice. He knew Jesus before Jesus was in human body. But these ones didn't recognize him.

[16 : 24] And Jesus says later that the scriptures were witness of him and they think, these Jewish authorities, they think that Moses is going to intercede for them. But Jesus says, no, they're going to accuse you.

He is going to accuse you, not intercede for you. He's not going to defend you. He is accusing you. Even now, he is accusing you in your unbelief.

Deuteronomy 31, 26. Moses' own words. Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God that it may be there for a witness against you.

That is, a witness against them in the event that they rebel against God. the very word of God was there to testify against the people if they turned away in unbelief.

There it is. Jesus says it. And Moses, like I said, was acquainted with the Lord. Let's contrast that with what 1 Peter 1, 10-11 says about how the prophets responded to God's word.

[17 : 30] It says there in 1 Peter 1, 10-11, concerning the salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

When the prophets searched, it's the very same word that we have here, searched. And it says that the Spirit of Christ was within them predicting. That word predicting there is actually, the root of it is actually the same word where it says here in John 5, speaking of the Father bearing witness, testifying.

And it actually means in 1 Peter, to pre-witness. The Spirit of Christ was pre-witnessing the sufferings of Christ and his glory. And he was doing that for the prophets.

But the Jews were more preoccupied with memorizing the law that they ignored the prophets. They did not seek the understanding that the prophets can give and the enlightenment that they had.

And so here, these Jewish authorities needed Jesus' guidance. Jesus' guidance. They needed his understanding of Scripture. They needed to receive it to help illumine their minds to the truth.

[18 : 56] But they wouldn't have it. What they saw was a man who was an attention-seeking sinner and blasphemer. Second, excuse me, yeah, second, we have in the Gospel of John a demonstration of this very principle that Peter speaks of.

The Apostle John has taken the prophets, taken the Old Testament Scriptures and shown us how they relate to Jesus.

Think about how Jesus is seen, I spoke a minute ago of it, Jesus as the tabernacle, the human dwelling of God. He is the temple. He is God's presence among his people.

Jesus is the Lamb of God, John 1.29. John 6, he is the manna from heaven, the true manna, the true bread of life. So what John is doing in this Gospel is he's taking the Old Testament witness and placing it next to Jesus' testimony and saying, so that when we read it, we say, aha, Jesus is the one.

We have that aha moment. We have that aha moment when God is speaking through the Spirit in the Scriptures, in our hearts and minds are alive and enlightened to the truth.

[20 : 20] I wonder if any of us have had one of those moments when we're reading Scripture. I trust that if you have the Spirit of God with you, that you have. now, verses 41 to 42, loving God from within.

It says, I do not receive glory from men, but I know that you, I know you, that you do not have the love of God within you.

So we see, Jesus is not seeking his own glory. What he effectively says to them, he says, I'm not an attention seeker.

I'm not after your praise, I'm after God's praise. It doesn't matter to me whether you like me. It doesn't matter to me whether you approve or agree. It doesn't change who I am.

But this episode tells me who you really are. It tells me that you don't love God. As an aside, sometimes when we're doing God's work and we're serving, our pride is hurt when we're not affirmed or praised.

[21 : 41] Let me encourage you that as children of God, God is pleased with us as his children and that when we serve him, we have his approval.

Our joy is not to be based upon anyone else's praise because we already have God's praise. And so we live accordingly. We bear his name. He is utterly pleased with us in Jesus.

So what we have here, we have unbelieving Jews that could not perceive God's presence in their midst because the word of God did not abide within them.

And though they searched the scriptures for eternal life, they were unwilling to come to Jesus. And Jesus was able to recognize that within them there was no love for God.

So let's take a moment to think about what this means. If the Jewish ruling class was well attuned to God's voice and word, again, they would have recognized Jesus was God's presence with them.

[22 : 57] And instead of reverently listening to scripture and entrusting themselves to it, they trusted their own understanding. The passage tells us that Jesus speaks at a frequency that the Father's true children will hear.

God's voice and form are directly revealed in the witness of the Old Testament and in Jesus. And Jesus' words and Moses' writings are so clearly aligned that to believe one is to believe the other.

And this suggests that what was revealed to Moses should clearly and obviously reveal who Jesus is. St. Augustine once said, famously said, that the new is in the old concealed and the old is in the new revealed.

The scriptures actually reveal, the New Testament scriptures reveal what the Old Testament has to say. But the Old Testament foretells us, pre-witnesses to us what is to come.

And the problem is not with the scriptures or with the truth, but with the man or woman in whom God's word and life has no place. What does this mean for us who are truly God's children?

[24 : 23] The Westminster Confession, excuse me, the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever and that the word of God in the Old and New Testaments directs us in how we are to do this.

If we listen to God's word, it will direct us in how to enjoy God and how to enjoy his life and how to glorify him. If I make the Bible primarily about me and my glory, I'm distracted from its real meaning and its real message.

And it's going to be harder for me to receive that word and to listen to it. We have misused scripture if we study merely to gain knowledge of the Bible for the phrase of people.

And like I said a moment ago, folks in scholarship are in particular danger of doing this biblical scholarship because they seek the world's praise and not the truth itself and not the life that comes from it.

So in principle, if we reverently listen to scripture in its context and entrust ourselves to it, it will open itself up to us. We will know it is God's voice, God's witness speaking to us.

[25 : 51] So at this point, we've seen that the Jews did not perceive God's presence in their midst because the word of God was not abiding within them. And they searched the scriptures for eternal life but they were unable to attain it because they didn't seek after Jesus.

And Jesus was able to see that on account of that, the love of God was not within them. So what's that say to us in application?

We need to recognize God's real presence with us. We sit down and read the scriptures, recognize that God is with us.

Reverence, reverence, listening, patience. It's hard to do. In those days, in John 5, hearing God, man, hearing his voice and seeing his form in Jesus and in the scriptures.

But for us, particularly, God speaks and reveals himself to us in the scriptures guided by the Holy Spirit. And that is not always a comfortable thing because at times we may find that the scriptures speak to us the same way that the prophet did to King David when he said, what did he say?

[27 : 25] You're the man. Sometimes the spirit will convict us. But that's when we need to listen the most. and I'm going to be painfully blunt.

We're not going to grow thirsty for God if I'm following entertainment or reading books that put me at the center of God's universe. I don't necessarily see that as much of an issue here as it is in the States, I'll be honest with you, which is quite pleasant actually.

But it is very important that we don't put ourselves at the center of God's universe. That's like putting a black hole at the center of the universe. Black holes are so powerful that they draw and bend the light into themselves.

God is the exact opposite of that. Darkness cannot penetrate his presence and when it does come into his presence he purifies and he renews, gives life. His light purifies and renews the soul.

Zoe has this toy. I don't know if you guys have seen it. I thought it was really cool. Well, part of it. It's a girl toy. The fairy garden.

[28 : 57] Is that? Is that? Yeah, the fairy garden. And it comes with dirt that you put in and grass seed and you water it and the grass grows.

I thought the grass and the dirt part was really cool. But our little one got a hold of it and got the dirt all over the place.

So we had to put it out of reach. When we did, well, we had to take it out of the light. What happened? The grass had grown. We had watered it. The grass had grown. When we took it out of the light, the grass died.

And we were all very sad about that with the grass that died. So what we did is we took it. We put it. I said, let's see what happens when we put it back in the light. See if the grass will come back. In fact, into some sunlight.

It came back. The grass started growing again. And that's the way God's presence is. That's the way God's presence is. His light brings life.

[30 : 05] His water restores the soul. What effect might this have on Ron Accord's witness in Aberdeen? Is this a place?

It's not for me to answer. It's for you to answer. Or us to answer, I should say. as a community. What effect might that have if the community knows that God's presence is here?

Because ultimately, that's what everybody seeks. All these runners are going to be looking for water. And here's where they find the living water.

Here's where they find the presence of God. God. And I pray, I honestly pray every day that that's the community we are in.

The one where God is truly present. And perceivably present among people that really love God and have buried his word in their hearts. God. God.

[31 : 16] So we got to get the word abiding in us and we do that by listening. Another word might be meditation. Dwelling on the word.

It's like eating. It's like drinking. You take it into yourself, becomes a part of who you are and it changes you. And then we all together, the word of God we change together.

So out of listening comes life and then understanding. And out of understanding comes doctrine and worship. True worship. Life. Not doctrine first, but God first, Jesus first.

But the right things first and everything else will come out of it. This principle is illustrated in John 56 where he says that we may abide in Christ if we feed on his flesh and drink his blood.

Now he doesn't mean that to be taken literally, of course. Even though some in the context there took it literally. But what he's saying is that if we are to abide in him, that means we are to abide in his word.

[32 : 33] That means we receive his word into ourselves and it is to us spirit and life. And it transforms.

When I was 16 and I was only saved for about a year, I remember sitting in my room watching TV and for the first time in my life, I felt the spirit of God prompt me to turn off the TV, open a Bible, and read it.

Now, that might not strike anybody as odd, but for me it was because I was an athlete at the time. I played football. I was always playing basketball. You may not look at me and see that now, but in those days, I was actually in decent shape.

I was in high school. Don't blame me. Then I got married. Then I had kids. At any rate, for the first time in my life, I opened a Bible.

Turned off the TV, opened a Bible. I'd heard it all my life. I grew up in the South, been to church, heard the Bible reading. My mom would read it to me occasionally. Read it, would try to read it myself. It would never make any sense.

[33 : 56] Opened the Bible the first time, myself, 16 years old, for the first time I could say that it actually started making sense. One small step, because over 20 years later I'm at the University of Aberdeen working on a PhD in biblical studies.

I cannot claim a bit of credit for that. It's not me. It's simply a desire that God put within me. And I responded to his prompting and that led to a very interesting series of events.

I would not have placed myself here 20 years ago. Let me tell you, I would not have. If somebody said 20 years you're going to be in Scotland studying scripture at a PhD, I would have said no. I'm not capable of that.

It's just not me. I was thinking I was going to be a mechanic or some sort of engineer. Not this. may have been a teacher or a coach. All I have to say is that Martin Luther was right when he said the Bible is a remarkable fountain.

The more one draws and drinks of it, the more it stimulates thirst. Let's pray. Our Father, once again we pray that your word is fruitful today.

[35 : 37] It has been met with softened hearts that we all have received it. And teach us, Lord, how to listen. How to listen to you again. Many of us are, I'm sure, really good listeners.

But are we listeners? Do we listen to you? Are we obedient to you? Are we studying your scripture because we want to know you?

And we want to be faithful to you. Are we studying it so that we could have genuine and fervent worship in our hearts that we can bring to the body and encourage one another to praise you?

And Father, I pray that your presence is known here and that Aberdeen will know that you are here in the midst of the people.

as we come together to read your word and sing your praise.

[36 : 50] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.