

The Fourfold Witness

by J.C. Ryle

Christ presents fourfold witness to His divinity, including the Father in heaven, John the Baptist, miraculous works, and the Scriptures, to demonstrate His authority and power.

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, Exodus 12:21-27, Psalm 22:16-18, Psalm 56:8, Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 28:6, Luke 24:27, John 5:32-39, John 11:47, Romans 10:17

Topics: "Witness of Christ", "Importance of Scripture"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the fourfold witness to Jesus Christ as the Messiah, highlighting the testimonies of God the Father, John the Baptist, Christ's miraculous works, and the Scriptures. He points out that these witnesses collectively affirm Jesus' divine mission, yet many remain unmoved due to their unwillingness to believe. Ryle honors the faithful servants of Christ, like John the Baptist, and underscores the significance of miracles as evidence of Christ's authority. He also stresses the importance of the Scriptures in revealing Christ, urging believers to diligently search them for understanding. Ultimately, Ryle concludes that the heart's obstinacy is the true barrier to faith, not a lack of evidence.

Transcript

"There is another who bears witness of me, and I know that the witness which he witnesses of me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth . . . But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of me that the Father has sent me. And the Father himself, who sent me, has testified of me . . . You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me." (John 5:32-39)

In these verses from the fifth chapter of John's gospel, we see the proof of our Lord Jesus Christ being the promised Messiah, set forth before the Jews in one view. Four different witnesses are brought forward, four kinds of evidence are offered: His Father in heaven, John the Baptist, the miraculous works He had done, and the Scriptures which the Jews professed to honor. Each and all are named by our Lord as testifying that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Hard must those hearts have been which could hear such testimony and yet remain unmoved! But it only proves the truth of the old saying that unbelief does not arise so much from lack of evidence, as from lack of will to believe.

Let us observe for one thing in this passage, the honor Christ puts on His faithful SERVANTS. See how He speaks of John the Baptist. "He bore witness of the truth"--"He was a burning and a shining light." John

had probably passed away from his earthly labors when these words were spoken. He had been persecuted, imprisoned, and put to death by Herod with none interfering, none trying to prevent his murder. But this murdered disciple was not forgotten by his Divine Master. If no one else remembered him, Jesus did. He had honored Christ, and Christ honored him.

These things ought not to be overlooked. They are written to teach us that Christ cares for all His believing people and never forgets them. Forgotten and despised by the world, perhaps, they are never forgotten by their Savior. He knows where they dwell, and what their trials are. A book of remembrance is written for them. "Their tears are all in His bottle." (Psalm 56:8.) Their names are engraved on the palms of His hands. He notices all they do for Him in this evil world, though they think it not worth notice, and He will confess it one day publicly, before His Father and the holy angels. He that bore witness to John the Baptist never changes. Let believers remember this. In their worst estate they may boldly say with David, "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me."

Let us observe, for another thing, the honor Christ puts upon MIRACLES, as an evidence of His being the Messiah. He says, "The works which the Father has given me...bear witness of me that the Father has sent me." The miracles of the Lord receive far less attention, in the present day, as proofs of His Divine mission than they ought to do. Too many regard them with a silent incredulity, as things which, not having seen, they cannot be expected to care for. Not a few openly avow that they do not believe in the possibility of such things as miracles, and would like to strike them out of the Bible as weak stories, which, like burdensome lumber, should be cast overboard in order to lighten the ship. But, after all, there is no getting over the fact that in the days when our Lord was upon earth, his miracles produced an immense effect on the minds of men. They aroused attention to him who worked them. They excited inquiry, if they did not convert. They were so many, so public, and so incapable of being explained away, that our Lord's enemies could only say that they were done by satanic agency. That they were done, they could not deny. "This man," they said, "does many miracles." (John 11:47.) The facts which wise men pretend to deny now, no one pretended to deny eighteen hundred years ago.

Five things should always be noted about our Lord's miracles. (1) Their number: they were not a few only, but very many indeed. (2) Their greatness: they were not little, but mighty interferences with the ordinary course of nature. (3) Their publicity: they were generally not done in a corner, but in open day and before many witnesses, and often before enemies. (4) Their character: they were almost always works of love, mercy, and compassion; helpful and beneficial to man and not mere barren exhibitions of power. (5) Their direct appeal to men's senses: they were visible and would bear any examination. The difference between them and the boasted miracles of the Church of Rome, on all these points, is striking and instructive.

Let the enemies of the Bible take our Lord's last and greatest miracle--his own resurrection from the dead--and disprove it if they can. When they have done that, it will be time to consider what they say about miracles in general. They have never answered the evidence of it yet, and they never will. Let the friends of the Bible not be moved by objections against miracles until that one miracle has been fairly disposed of. If that is proved unassailable, they need not care much for quibbling arguments against other miracles. If Christ did really rise from the dead by His own power, there is none of His mighty works which man need hesitate to believe.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, the honor that Christ puts upon the SCRIPTURES. He refers to them, in concluding his list of evidences, as the great witnesses to him. "Search the Scriptures," he says. "These are they which testify of me." The Scriptures of which our Lord speaks are, of course, the Old

Testament. And his words show the important truth which too many are apt to overlook, that every part of our Bible is meant to teach us about Christ. Christ is not merely in the Gospels and Epistles. Christ is to be found directly and indirectly in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. In the promises to Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David--in the types and emblems of the ceremonial law--in the predictions of Isaiah and the other prophets--Jesus, the Messiah, is everywhere to be found in the Old Testament.

How is it that men see these things so little? The answer is plain. They do not "search the Scriptures." They do not dig into that wondrous mine of wisdom and knowledge, and seek to become acquainted with its contents. Simple, regular reading of the Bible is the grand secret of establishment in the faith. Ignorance of the Scriptures is the root of all error.

And now what will men believe, if they do not believe the Divine mission of Christ? Great indeed is the obstinacy of infidelity. A cloud of witnesses testify that Jesus was the Son of God. To talk of lacking evidence is childish folly. The plain truth is, that the chief seat of unbelief is the heart. Many do not wish to believe, and therefore remain unbelievers.

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