

Jesus Is Precious Because His Biblical Portrait Is True, Part 2

by John Piper

Jesus is precious because his biblical portrait is true, and his love for the glory of God and utter indifference to the praise of men is the basis of genuine saving faith.

Duration: 34:24

Scripture: John 7:1-8, John 7:16-18

Topics: "Preciousness Of Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker aims to illustrate how Jesus authenticates himself from the Word and how confidence in Jesus spreads to the whole Bible. The basis of the meditation is John chapter 7, where Jesus' brothers try to get him to go to Jerusalem to show his miraculous works. However, it is revealed that they do not actually believe in him. The speaker emphasizes the importance of having solid reasons to trust the Bible's portrait of Jesus and plans to explore various aspects of Jesus' preciousness in the upcoming weeks.

Transcript

This morning's text is from the Gospel of John, chapter 7. I invite you to follow along in your Bibles. John 7, verses 1 through 18. After this, Jesus went about in Galilee.

He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. So his brothers said to him, Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing.

For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world. For even his brothers did not believe in him.

Jesus said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify of it that its works are evil. Go to the feast yourselves.

I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come. So saying, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly, but in private.

The Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, Where is he? And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, He is a good man. Others said, No, he is leading the people astray.

Yet for fear of the Jews, no one spoke openly of him. About the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews marveled at it, saying, How is it that this man has learning when he has never studied? So Jesus answered them, My teaching is not mine, but him who sent me.

If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God, or whether I am speaking on my own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory. But he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

My aim in the messages of February and March is to give reasons why Jesus Christ is precious. In the hopes that believers will be moved from lukewarm love to white-hot love for Jesus Christ, and that unbelievers will be persuaded that this Jesus Christ is true and worthy of trust. In the weeks to come, I want to try to show that Jesus is precious because through his death and resurrection, he has taken away our guilt and stood us clean and justified before God.

I want to try to show that he has taken the sting out of death and has offered us eternal life, resurrection, glory, and joy forevermore. I want to try to show that he transforms fearful, greedy hearts into peaceful, loving hearts, and makes phoniness into authenticity in the people who believe in him. And I want to try to show that he puts all relationships on a new footing, especially relationships of husband, wife, parent, child.

And then finally, I want to try to show that Jesus satisfies the deepest longings of the human heart for beauty and wonder in the world. But the only place that we can learn any of that portrait of this Jesus is from the Bible. Therefore, if we're going to have a sound confidence in that portrait of Jesus, we need some good, solid reasons for why we can trust this Bible and its portrait of Jesus.

And so today, I want to go beyond last Sunday. Last Sunday, I began the series with an argument that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and I did not assume that the Bible was true. I tried to make that case wholly from a historical standpoint for people who may or may not believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

And today, I want to move us a step farther to enlarge that confidence to include the whole Bible. Jesus is precious not only because his biblical portrait is true in the sense that he was raised from the dead, but also because the rest of all his features are accurate as they are portrayed in the Scripture. The reason that I ordered these two messages this way, rather than putting my argument for the Bible first, is because I don't think most people believe in Jesus because they have first been persuaded that the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

I think it's just the other way around. People's confidence in the Bible begins to grow precisely because this Jesus in its pages comes alive for them, starts to take hold of their heart, and then out from that center point spreads the confidence in his Word and in the Word that went before him. The foundation of our confidence in the Bible is the self-authenticating person of Jesus Christ.

The outstanding features of that portrait of Jesus can be seen in the Word, whether you believe that Word is the Word of God and is infallible or not. He's there and can be seen. And therefore, the portrait that

emerges, even for the skeptic, has a moral power that can persuade and convince even the skeptic so that he is drawn to Jesus as a person and then out from that relationship can spread, perhaps only gradually, a confidence in the full revelation in Scripture.

So this morning, I want to do two things. I want to try to illustrate how Jesus authenticates himself from the Word. And then, on the basis of that self-authenticating portrait of Jesus who wins our trust, show how confidence spreads out to the whole Bible.

A big order for 30 minutes, but we'll do the best we can. The basis of my meditation is John chapter 7. And I'd like you to look at that with me. In John chapter 7, verses 1 to 18, there's some very, very strange and powerful things.

In verses 1 to 4 of John 7, Jesus' brothers try to get him to go up to Jerusalem so that more people can see his miraculous works than can see them up here in the Galilean sticks. No man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.

Verse 4. So his brothers are very excited that their brother Jesus has these marvelous, miracle-working powers. They've seen him heal the sick person, turn the water to wine, feed 5,000 people with just a few loaves and fishes. And so they say, get on about the business, show yourself to the world.

And then verse 5 comes as an awful shock. John says that the reason they urged him to go up to Jerusalem and show his miraculous power is because they didn't believe on him. Isn't that strange? You can believe in a miracle-working Messiah and not have the faith that Jesus is looking for.

There is evidently a kind of believing unbelief, isn't there? Now, this happens several other places in the Gospel of John. I'll mention one. In chapter 2, verses 23 to 25, here's what it says.

Now, when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed on his name when they saw the signs which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself to them because he knew all men needed no one to bear witness for. He himself knew what was in man.

In other words, in spite of this enthusiastic response to this miracle-working man from Nazareth, Jesus wouldn't have anything to do with them because he could see inside and he saw that that outward confidence in his miracle-working power had left their inside untouched, unchanged, and that's not what he's after. It's a kind of believing unbelief. They get all excited why he could heal all our diseases, he could raise our dead, he could even be our Messiah, liberate us from the Romans.

This is great! Jesus isn't interested. In fact, in chapter 6, verse 15, it happened again. Remember, the crowds surged towards him and it says, they were going to take him and make him king by force.

What does he do? He hightails it for the mountains. He will not have it. It is not enough to believe that Jesus can work miracles and even to believe he's the Messiah.

There's something about genuine saving faith that requires something more, something deeper. Therefore, in chapter 7, verse 5, John says that Jesus' brothers were unbelieving when they urged him to go up to Jerusalem to show his powers to the world. So, just as he had refused to entrust himself to the so-called believers in chapter 2, just as he has hightailed it for the mountains in chapter 6 when they wanted to make him king, so here he refuses.

I will not go up with you to Jerusalem. And they go by themselves. But, look at verse 10.

After they had gone, he does go up. But notice how he goes. They had said in verse 4, no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly.

And verse 10 says that Jesus went up, and it uses the very same words, not openly, but in secret. In other words, he wanted to go to Jerusalem, but not the way they wanted him to go to Jerusalem. And his going to Jerusalem in the way that he went was a statement to them.

Watch out, brothers. Watch out for your love of glory. Watch out for your love of applause in Jerusalem.

Watch out for wanting to be following a glorious Messiah in his train just to satisfy your worldly craving for praise and applause. The kingdom of heaven now is quiet. It's small, like a mustard seed.

It's unostentatious and silent like leaven working in a lump of dough. And the only people, brothers, who are going to see it are those whose hearts have been humbled and weaned away from that craving for the crowds in Jerusalem. Take heed, brothers.

If all you see is miracles, and if all you want is to have your worldly longings for attention and praise and applause gratified, you don't believe me, that's not my way. Now, what is Jesus teaching us then about the true basis of faith? If it's not the miracles, what is it? He's saying it isn't enough to be convinced of my power. It isn't enough to be convinced that I'm the Messiah.

Something deeper is needed. Now, that doesn't mean the miracles are unimportant. He had said in chapter 14 verse 11, Believe on me, that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.

And if not, believe on me for the works' sake. And in chapter 10 verse 25, Jesus had said, The works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness concerning me. The works are important.

The miracles are crucial. They ought to lead us to believe. But, nevertheless, John's brothers believed the miracles, and yet were called unbelievers.

Why? I think the reason is this, that the brothers of Jesus, so much like us, have eyes for the outward show of power, but not the inner character of the power worker. They focused their attention on the raw display of might, and didn't see the way, and the character, and the spirit of the Mighty One, The sign that pointed to Jesus' truthfulness was not the raw miracle, it was the way of His working, the motive, the heart with which He did these miraculous works. I like to think of the miracles as a body that have a soul.

And they didn't see the soul of the miracle. They only saw the body of the miracle. Hundreds and hundreds of people saw the bodies of the miracle.

They walked after Jesus all over. They wanted their tummies filled because He could multiply the loaves and fishes, but they didn't see what it meant. They didn't see the inner life, which is the real basis of genuine saving faith.

Now, the question is then, what's this soul? What is this soul of the miracles? And I think the answer is given in chapter 7, verses 16 to 18. His brothers had wanted Him to go up to Jerusalem to do miracles and show Himself to the world, get famous, so they can be famous. Instead, Jesus goes up secretly, quietly, and instead of doing miracles, He goes into the temple and He begins to teach.

So, His teaching is a substitute for His miracles at this point. And what does He say? His teaching reveals the soul of His miracles, I think. Namely, His unswerving love of the glory of God and utter indifference to the praise of men.

Let's read it. My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me. If any man's will is to do His will, he'll know whether the teaching is from God or whether I'm speaking on my own authority.

He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but he who seeks the glory of Him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood or unrighteousness. If you ever meet a man who loves the glory of God more than everything in all the world and is devoted to that glory 100% and cares nothing for the glory of men, believe that man. He is true.

Jesus said. This is what His brothers should have seen in His miraculous works. Not the mere display of power, but the all-consuming love of the glory of God that moved the demonstration of that power and freed Jesus from all those typical human cravings for glory and praise and approval and applause.

He does not speak on His own authority, nor does He seek His own glory, the text says, nor does He do these mighty works in His own name. For chapter 10 verse 25 says, The works which I do in my Father's name, they bear witness concerning me. That's the kind of work that bears witness concerning me.

The kind of works that are done for my Father's sake and in His name and by His power. The basis of faith in Jesus Christ is not just the raw show of miraculous power, it's the soul of the power, the heart and the motive and the spirit with which those miracles are done. And only the people who saw beyond or through or into the heart of that miracle worker and saw what made him tick, only those people could see the genuine ground and basis for saving faith.

It was the shining out of this inner life that was the basis of faith, not just the working of the power. Love, Paul taught us, seeks not its own glory, but is consumed with the glory of God. And so Jesus lived not for the praise of men, He lived wholly for the glory of God and sought one thing in His life, the glory of God through the salvation of men.

And that's the kind of man we can trust. That is the kind of man that when you see him, you believe him, you want to follow him because he is not a phony, he is not self-seeking, he is real, he is true and that is the basis of an authentic trust in Jesus. But notice something, the very ground of faith is a hindrance to faith because in order to trust this Jesus, you've got to be willing to at least want to be like Him.

Right? To want to live wholly for the glory of God. To want to care nothing for the praise of men. But most people don't want to give up their quest for the praise of men.

We long for the praise of men. To be thought great, to be thought powerful, to be thought intelligent, to be thought beautiful, to be thought clever. That's not easily given up.

And therefore it's hard to believe on this Jesus. The very thing that evidences Him as set-apart, distinct, unique, divine and therefore provides a basis for faith is the biggest hindrance to faith in all the world because our hearts so much crave not to be like that. No! No! I want the praise of men.

I don't want to give all that up, go to a cross, take up my cross and follow a loser. Listen to how Jesus puts it in John chapter 5 verse 41. He says, I do not receive glory from men, but I know you, you do not have the love of God within you.

I have come in my Father's name and you do not receive me. Oh, if another comes in His own name, Him you will receive. Give us a Cassius Clay.

We'll follow Him. How can you believe who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Turn that last question around into a statement. Does it not mean you can't believe on me while you love the glory of men? In other words, the character of Jesus that distinguishes Him from all sinners, namely His authentic love for the glory of God and utter indifference for the praise of men and devotion to the good of humanity for the glory of the Father, that is both the ground of our faith.

We want that and yet a hindrance to faith because we don't want that. It lays too big a claim on us. If we value Him, we probably will have to give up a lot of glory in this world.

Jesus' life is devoted to the glory of God and the salvation of men and therefore He's indifference to all applause and approval and that is a beautiful, evidential, distinguishing mark of truthfulness. It is a self-authenticating portrait that wins the faith of people who are not so blinded by the love of this world that they can't see it. In John 7, verse 17, I think Jesus said what I've been trying to say, namely that there has to be a turning away from the love of human glory to the glory of God.

A turning away from what most humans want to what God wants if we're going to know that Jesus is real. Look what He said in verse 17, if any man's will is to do God's will, and you know what God wills, He wills His own glory, then He's going to know whether the teaching is from God or whether I'm just a pushover. If the will is freed from the shackles of the love of human glory, the will frees the mind to see the evidence of this self-authenticating Jesus.

And on that basis, our faith can rest solid and sure. And this Jesus won't just be a threat, He'll be our salvation. Now, when we put that self-authenticating portrait of Jesus together with last week's picture of the risen Jesus, does there not begin to emerge a foundation for faith that is solid and unshakable and joyful? Does this Jesus not win your trust? Does He not enamor your heart and your mind? Is He not worthy of our confidence? He is of mine, and I pray that God opens all our hearts to credit this Jesus.

And if He is credited, if Jesus Himself, apart from all the trappings of Scripture that might be a stumbling block to your faith, if He is true, then His view of everything changes everything, including His view of the Bible. So as we conclude, let me show you what Jesus' view of the Bible was. Jesus stood right at the middle, right at the middle of God's self-revelation in Scripture.

Before Him came the Old Testament, and He looked back upon it completed. After Him, in the next 40 or 50 years, would come the New Testament, completed by His apostolic spokesman. Jesus believed that the Old Testament was the Word of God.

And there is no doubt about that. The most radical biblical critics in the world believe that's what Jesus believed. They may think He was mistaken.

Mark 7, verse 13. He accuses the Pharisees of using the traditions to make void the Word of God. That is the Old Testament law.

Matthew 5, verses 17 and 18. Think not that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets. I have not come to destroy them, but to fulfill them.

Truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not a hook, not a dot will fail until all is accomplished. Then again, in Matthew 22, verse 29, He says to the Sadducees, You err because you do not know the Scriptures. And then in John 10, verse 35, He says, The Scripture cannot be broken.

Jesus believed in the Word of God, the Old Testament. And if we have been won by this Jesus, if He has our lives and our hope and our trust, what shall we say but yes to the Old Testament? If we understand it, it will never lead us astray. The New Testament is different.

It hadn't been written yet. What could He say? How could He endorse it for us? I don't think He left us without a witness. He said in John 14, 25 and 26, These things have I spoken to you.

And He's talking now at the Last Supper to His apostles. I think these words have a very special point for the apostles rather than for us. These things I have spoken to you, men, while I'm yet with you.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. And then in John 16, 12 to 14, He said, I have yet so many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now. When the Spirit, and it means Spirit of Jesus, clearly, because He has more things He wants to say, He says, and I'm going to tell you after the resurrection.

When the Spirit comes, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears, He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you. The point of those two promises in the Gospel of John, I think, is that Jesus will not leave His apostles without help in their teaching office.

He's going to come back to them in the form of the Holy Spirit. He's going to continue teaching. There were so many things He said while He was here, but so many things that they were not yet able to understand until the resurrection had occurred.

What could He do? He will come to them. He will come in the form of the Holy Spirit, and He will guide them into truth. He will bring to remembrance His teachings, and He will open to them all the future that they need to know.

John understands his own Gospel as a part of that inspired production. The apostle Paul, who wrote 13 out of the 27 books of the New Testament, said more clearly than anybody, the Spirit of Jesus has in fact spoken through me. Listen to how he puts it in 1 Corinthians 2. We have not received the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God, and we impart this... Now listen to this sentence.

Paul was either outright lying here, deluded, or he was inspired. He said, we impart this wisdom in words taught not by human wisdom, but by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. Paul had once been a Pharisee, a wholehearted persecutor of the church, and the grand reversal that resulted in a lifelong servant of Jesus Christ and a martyr for the Gospel is best explained by his own testimony.

The risen Jesus Christ appeared to me on the road to Damascus and appointed me to be an authoritative spokesman for the risen Christ and to teach with an apostolic authority all that he wanted taught. And that's the way the church has viewed his writings and the writings of the apostles ever since. And I conclude therefore that if Jesus was raised from the dead and if his character is self-authenticating and

wins our trust and our confidence, then we will also gain a growing confidence in the Old Testament, which he endorsed, and in the apostolic writings, which he promised to inspire in his followers.

Therefore, in the weeks to come, when I preach the preciousness of Jesus from these writings, I am not asking for a leap of faith. I'm not asking for a shot in the dark. I'm not asking for the flip of a coin.

I'm not asking for any irrational or unreasonable commitment. I am asking for a reasonable persuasion that these things are so and should be believed by those whose minds are not blinded by the love of this world. Faith is not a leap.

Faith is not a leap. It is a resting in the evidences. It is a being persuaded, head and heart, that Jesus is true and there is no unrighteousness in him.

And it is a cordial trust in the Son of God, whose life and death and resurrection make for salvation. They were dedicated to the glory of God through winning the salvation of men.

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