

6. As you consider Jesus' indictment, do you think he was harsh and condemning, or gracious and compassionate?

7. Jesus had a sharp edge but a soft purpose. What truth would cut their hearts? To what end? What did Jesus hope to achieve?

8. As a believer, in what ways am I tempted to manifest the attitudes of the religious leaders?

9. Jesus was addressing unbelievers. His message was to believe and be saved. But what about those of us who believe? In what ways do we adopt the assumptions and thought processes of the religious leaders?

10. In the following passages from 1 John, identify the marks of true Christianity: 1 John 2:9, 2:15, 3:9, 3:17

11. Do you have religion, or a relationship with the Triune God?

12. Jesus ends this passage with a question (5:47): "But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" Speculate about how might they have answered.

John 5:31-47

Lesson 9
For November 23 2008

Dr. Jerry Nelson

LEADER'S GUIDE

For discussion following the sermon on November 23, 2008

Witnesses for Jesus

Imagine Jesus surrounded and confronted by angry religious leaders. These were people who were indignant that Jesus not only broke one of their Sabbath laws, but he also implied that he was one with God the Father. For them, this claim was the ultimate blasphemy. How could they ever be persuaded to turn from their self-righteous anger and sin of unbelief to belief in Jesus as the true Son of God? As Jesus confronts them, observe the ways he challenges them:

Key Points

- The Evidence
- The Indictment
- The Call to believe in Jesus

The Evidence

As Jesus addresses his hostile audience he begins to present the evidence of his claims. In John 5:31, Jesus says: "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid." He then draws their attention to other people and means that testify on his behalf. If John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus was not enough, then surely the works of Jesus, performed before their very eyes, would attest to his deity. And if Jesus' works were not enough, the scriptures themselves (which these leaders would have known and studied for years) should have convinced them that Jesus was/is in fact, the Christ. And if all of these testimonies were still not enough, then truly what God the Father would say and do to testify about his Son should be enough to convince them. With all that evidence, any reasonable person would conclude "This *is* the Christ!" Yet they

denied and ultimately rejected the truth of what they had seen and heard. Why? Were they *unable* to see? Or did they *refuse* to see? Was it that they could not or would not accept these claims? Or, was it both?

The Indictment

Jesus turns from the evidence to the indictment. Even though they knew the scriptures, the Word did not dwell in them. The scriptures had never taken root, resulting in a change of heart. Jesus knew full well they did not have the love of God in their hearts (v. 41). Their vast knowledge never translated into relationship with God. Their expertise did not result in belief, transformation, and ultimately love for God and others. Why did they fail to understand the connection? Unbelief. Jesus was standing right in front of them, and yet, they rejected him.

The Call

If we had witnessed this exchange, our response to the leaders (in defense of Jesus) might have been frustration, anger, or the arrogance/self-righteousness (I have the truth and you just don't "get it"). Yet Jesus didn't respond that way. He responded in love. His purpose was not to condemn them, but to save them (John 3:17). He issued and continues to issue the call: Believe and be saved! Do you believe?

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

- Look up the following verses in 1 John: 2:9, 2:15, 3:9, 3:17. As you reflect upon these verses, is the Spirit bringing conviction in any area? If so, take time to ask for his forgiveness, and thank him for the work he is doing in your heart. Enjoy his great gift of grace!
- As you contemplate these marks of true change, consider how God has given you the grace to believe. What work has he accomplished in you? Take time to thank him and worship him for his great love!

Group Preparation

- The religious leaders knew the scriptures. They were religious experts. They trusted in their knowledge to give them eternal life, but somehow missed the relationship with God. Likewise, there may be some among your group who have settled into a comfortable, perhaps even arrogant form of religion without developing their relationship with God. Their lives display little (if any) fruit of the Spirit. If any such person comes to mind, pray that the Spirit will use this lesson to bring conviction, and pray that you will have wisdom and grace to gently guide them to the truth.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you know something is true? Name some processes or steps you use to discover the truth.
2. What makes a witness credible to you? What makes you believe he/she is being deceptive or truthful?
3. How many witnesses (testimonies) does it take for you to believe something? What adds weight? What finally convinces you?
4. Were the religious leaders unable to believe, or unwilling to believe? Did they lack understanding, or did they deliberately choose not to believe?
5. The religious leaders knew the scriptures but didn't know God (even though he was standing right in front of them). They missed the point. How is this possible? Similarly, do we ever miss the point when confronted with the truth of the Scriptures?