

Be Thankful for the Trustworthy Testimony of the Trinity!

A sermon based on 1 John 5:5-12

Imagine the defendant sitting in court. The prosecuting attorney is grilling hard. The mounds of evidence are piling up. There is no doubt at all in the minds of the jury or the judge; the defendant is guilty of heinous crimes.

Now imagine **you** are that defendant. Feel your body temperature rise as accusation after accusation is brought against you. Feel yourself get jittery as you see the evidence and see the jury. Feel the sweat start to pour as you know your guilt—that there is no defense—and as you think about the punishment you deserve.

Now imagine that it's not a court of people, but you're in God's court. The charge is you're a sinner. You've rebelled against a holy and loving God. The prosecuting attorney is Satan who knows and can testify as to how many times you've sided with him. Unbelievers take the witness stand and tell how you and they behaved the same. And the sentence is execution—eternal execution where the pain will never end. You deserve a sentence of hell.

How do you feel? Nervous? Timid? Downright terrified?

But wait! There are more witnesses yet to be heard. There is one more witness.... Or are there three? This morning we listen to the trustworthy testimony of the Trinity. And we're thankful for them. As we hear God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit witness on our behalf, we can rest assured; we will not be condemned to death, but will be given eternal life.

Who overcomes the world, according to our verses? The one who believes. The one who has faith. But faith in what? The one who overcomes is the one who has faith in the persons and the work of the Triune God. So, what does the Triune God say? Let's look at the testimony of each person and rest assured that we do overcome...

I. The Father Testifies

First, let's look at God the Father. John writes, ***"We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son."***

We trust man's testimony often. We trust when someone says "This car will run just fine and is likely to give you few problems." Even if you don't trust the salesman, you do trust the mechanic who looks it over before you buy. We trust when someone says, "This house is sturdy. It won't fall down around you in your sleep." You trust the contractor, the construction crew, and maybe you especially trust the inspector. All the time, every day, we operate with trust—trusting even untrustworthy men who make mistakes.

But don't trust men in matters of religion—not ever!—when they contradict God. There man is simply not trustworthy. God's testimony is much greater than man's.

Man's testimony says that the Bible is unreliable. God says it's inspired by him and therefore true and flawless. And he backs it up with the evidence: the thousands of prophecies fulfilled centuries later, the

miracles and the empty tomb proving Jesus' divinity, the honest reporting of the authors who portray themselves in a less than favorable light, the thousands of copies of the text found in one generation.

Man's testimony says you're good enough. You're a decent person who tries hard to behave. But God says you are a sinner and cannot overcome the world by your efforts. John wrote: **"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."** (1 John 1:8,10)

Man's testimony says you can earn favor with God. You can do something to make things right with him. But God says you are **given** eternal life through faith. **"Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God... the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son... overcomes the world... has life."**

If two witnesses in court offer contradictory testimony, you know they cannot **both** be right. One tells the truth. The other lies. But how do you know which one is telling the truth and which is telling lies? Well, the character of the witness is important. And so is the evidence which backs up the testimony. God's character is greater than any man's since he alone is sinless, holy, and perfect. God's evidence far outweighs man's faulty reason.

So don't follow your heart. Don't trust your feelings. Don't listen to your reason, if any of these ever contradict the much more trustworthy testimony of God. Don't make God out to be a liar. But trust the trustworthy testimony God gives in his Word. You know the truth. You are a sinner who deserves condemnation, but by faith in that true testimony, you are a saint who overcomes the world and has eternal life!

It's truly trustworthy testimony the Father gives, but that's not the only testimony there is. In Deuteronomy 17:6 God gave this law for a civil court: **"On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness."** And God has not left us with only one witness to take the stand. After we heard God the Father's testimony there are two more that speak. Next, is God the Son...

II. The Son Testifies

⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. ⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood.

Now, I'll admit that I had a tough time with this text this week. That phrase **"by water and blood,"** is a difficult phrase. Each commentary on verse 6 offers a different way of understanding that phrase. One possible way to understand it is within its historical context. You see, when John wrote his Gospel there was a false teacher named Cerinthus who said since God could not suffer or die (because he's God), Jesus, who clearly suffered and died, must not have been God. He taught the divine nature of God, which he called the *Logos* or the *Word*, possessed the man Jesus (who he taught was born of a natural birth by Joseph and Mary) when the dove descended on him at his baptism. Then that divine nature left Jesus at his death, so that it was not God who died, but just the man Jesus.

Of course you recognize the danger of that heresy. If that were true, that it was just some sinful guy like you or me who died on the cross, we would all still be in our sin, and we would all be damned because no man can pay for the sins of another. But it wasn't just a man who died for you and me. It was the Son

of God, who came not just by water (at his baptism) but by water **and blood** (in his death). Jesus was (and is) true God who died for you.

You know, the first line of verse 2 of Hymn 137, *O Darkest Woe*, reads, "**Oh, sorrow dread! God's Son is dead!**" But in the original German it read: "**O grosser Not, Gott selbst ist Tot!**" Literally: "O great dread, God himself is dead!" And while you can understand the discomfort of saying, "God is dead," nevertheless at the cross it was true. Jesus is God. And Jesus died for you. When Paul was leaving Ephesus he charged the elders there: "**Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.**"

Jesus' blood is *God's* blood. God the Son died for you. And because he is God he can pay for the sins of the whole world. So trust the trustworthy testimony of the Son! Your sin is forgiven! And you have life in his Son! Now, live to serve the Son in thanks!

III. The Spirit Testifies

But finally, another way "**[Jesus] came by water and blood,**" can be understood it's not a reference to how he came to earth, but how he came to you. How do you know about the testimony that God the Father sent his Son, that God the Son died for you? By the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus came **to you** by water at your baptism. Jesus comes **to you** by his blood, shed on the cross that gives baptism its power. (Right? Baptism would accomplish nothing had Jesus not shed his blood to pay for your sin.) (That's how Martin Luther understood it.) Or Jesus came **to you** by water at your baptism. And Jesus comes **to you** by his blood, "**poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins,**" in the Lord's Supper. (That's how many understand it today.)

But either way you understand it, it's not by your own reason, by your thinking or by your choosing that you figured this all out. It's by the Spirit of truth. The thoughts of our text for this morning weren't John's ideas, but were inspired by God. That is, it was the Spirit who revealed these truths to him and to us. And he is trustworthy. His testimony is not just true, mind you, but he *is* the truth. He embodies the truth of salvation. And the Holy Spirit, operates through the means of Grace. These three are in agreement: the Word of God the Spirit teaches, the water of Baptism that makes us clean, the blood of the Lord's Supper that forgives all our sin. All three "Means (instruments) of Grace" declare you to be a sinner in need of forgiveness. All three declare you who believe to be forgiven in Christ.

These three witnesses of the Holy Spirit, these three means of Grace, are visually represented for us here each Sunday. Obviously, from the pulpit, the Word of God is read and taught in lessons and in sermons. But even on non-communion Sundays we see the altar under the cross which reminds us of Jesus' blood shed for us—the same blood that we drink in the Sacrament. And even when there is no baptism, the font stands at the front giving its silent testimony that you are a forgiven and redeemed, baptized child of God. You were washed clean by water and the Word. You were made God's victorious child.

So trust the trustworthy testimony of the Holy Spirit. Believe the truth he's made known to you and make use of these means of grace often—as often as you can! Hear and read the Word. Remember your baptism often. Receive Jesus' blood, "**poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins,**" as often as you can.

"Who is it that overcomes the world?" Literally it's "Who is he who has the nike?" or "victory?" The shoe company, *Nike*, would have you believe the victory goes to one with the most expensive shoes. But the one who has victory over the world is the one who has faith in the faithful and trustworthy testimony of the Trinity: That the Father gave us his Word, that the Son paid for our sins, that the Spirit led us to believe and keeps us in the faith. In other words, it's you and it's me. We have the victory! And to the victors go the spoils! To the victors go eternal life! Trust that! Be thankful for that! Amen.