

Sermon on What are you searching for?

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Text:

John 5:31 - 47 ³¹ "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. ³² There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. ³³ "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. ³⁵ John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. ³⁶ "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸ nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹ You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ⁴¹ "I do not accept praise from men, ⁴² but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵ "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

1 Introduction

When I was a child growing up in Ghana we used to go in the nearby bush in the town we lived in to look for mini-snails called Alokoto. When we searched for Alokoto in the bush we found it. My mother also used to go to the same bush to look for herbal medicine. When she searched for it in the same bush she found it. This reveals a principle: what you search for is what you find. If you are not searching for gold you may stumble upon it and miss it. Also, nobody goes into the bush just to look around. They go with a preconceived notion as to what they are looking for. In other words, your search is guided by your preconceived notions. This

principle is even used in scientific research! In scientific research, your search is guided by your hypothesis – what you believe you might find in the bush!

The Bible, excuse me to say, is like a big bush containing all kinds of things. If you search for a particular thing you may find it but miss the things that you are not searching for. Our passage is pivoted on verse 39 & 40, in which Jesus says, “You search the Scriptures because you believe they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me so that I can give you this eternal life.” He is referring to the religious establishment of his day who were very faithful in searching the scriptures. They came to the search with some preconceived notions. What should they have been looking for in the scriptures? What should have been their hypotheses? What goal should they have set for searching the scriptures? Let’s explore what our passage tells us they should have been searching for and hence teaches us what we should be searching for in the scriptures.

2 The Religious establishment search of scripture was based on their sinful motives

In Ghana, the tribal kingdoms operate side-by-side with the civil government even though sovereign authority rests with the civil government. The chiefs are allowed to govern matters of culture and traditional life. In the same way in the 1st century the Roman empire allowed the Jewish religious establishment to govern matters of Jewish religion and culture. Since Jewish religion encompasses most aspects of the life of a Jew the religious establishment had much power over the Jewish person. The religious establishment organized itself into groups such as the overall body – the Sanhedrin, and sects like the Sadducees and Pharisees. These groups used scripture as the basis for governing. They studied the scriptures diligently, searching, however, for things that will enable them to perpetuate their position, maintain their status, and enrich their pockets.

In so doing they searched for things in scripture to use to expound the Mosaic law unreasonably and outside the spirit of the law as delivered by Moses. This is why Jesus accused them of using the law to oppress and enslave the people. But the major problem with using their sinful motives to search for things in the Bible is that they missed the most important thing they should have been searching for: Jesus the Messiah! Their hypothesis excluded Jesus as the Messiah, their preconceived notion excluded Jesus as the Messiah. They were not looking for

the messiah. They were looking for how to make themselves comfortable in this world and missed how to make themselves comfortable in the world to come. They searched for the here and now rather than for the hereafter. In this search they missed the key thing they should have been searching for: Jesus the Messiah.

But you would ask, perhaps they had good intentions but just did not know what to look for. That is, did they legitimately make a mistake and come up with the wrong hypotheses? But our passage tells us that, that is not the case and that they had three strong opportunities to get the hypotheses right. Let's examine these three opportunities.

3 The Religious establishment's search should have been based on what John the Baptist said about Jesus

Jesus said in verses 33-34 of our passage, "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved." So this means that John the Baptist had clearly told them what to search for. In fact, he pointed directly to Jesus when the religious establishment sent a delegation to query him. John the Baptist said in **John 1:26-27**, "I baptize with water but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." And then again on the next day he said in **John 1:29**, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" So, if they accepted John the Baptist as a prophet then they should have taken his words and used them to formulate their hypotheses as to what to search for in scripture. But they didn't because their sinful motives will not let them.

Are you searching for things in scripture guided by godly ministers or by your sinful motives? When you go to church and hear the sermon are you hearing the exhortation to be Christ-like? Are you hearing the exhortation to follow Christ or are you looking for something in the sermon to justify your sinful behavior in your marriage, at home, and at work? What are you searching for? What are you looking for?

Scripture says that, "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Deuteronomy 19:15) So let's examine the next witness.

4 The Religious establishment's search should have been based on what God the Father said about Jesus

Jesus introduced the second witness, God the Father, when he said, in verses 36-37 of our passage, "The very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me." Jesus is saying the nature of his teachings and the miracles he has performed show that his authority over nature and over the spiritual world should have been a clue that the religious establishment needed to change their hypothesis for their search. Once again they didn't change what they were looking for because their sinful motives stood in the way. Preservation of their religious position in the eyes of the people prevented them from seeing the finger of God in the teachings and miracles of Jesus. They rather saw Belzebug because they were looking for Belzebug in the miracles.

What are you looking for when you go to church? Are you seeing God's hand powerfully in the teachings? Are you seeing God's hand in the deliverances and testimonies of the members? Are you seeing God's hand in transformed lives of your fellow Christians? What are you searching for? What are you looking for?

Even though two witnesses is enough to establish a matter, Jesus presented a third witness.

5 The Religious establishment's search should have been based on what Moses said about Jesus

Jesus introduced Moses as the third witness when he said in verses 46-47, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" Jesus called on Moses as the final witness because the religious establishment operated their establishment based on the writings of Moses. Certainly then they must accept what Moses thinks they should be looking for in scripture. For Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 18:17-18**, "The LORD said to me: 'What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.'"

They refused to modify their search criteria to look for what Moses was telling them because Jesus' prophetic actions and teachings threatened their religious authority. Instead they looked at the ceremonial and ritualistic laws, which are a foreshadow of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and used these laws to oppress the people to submit to their religious standing. They looked past Jesus to their peril because Jesus then told them that since they invoke Moses for their spiritual authority and have ignored Moses they will be accused by Moses himself on judgment day. That is, they will have no excuse for missing the proper hypothesis, for missing the true search target, for missing Jesus as the Messiah.

When you come to church are you the policeman enforcing the legalistic traditions of the church or are you looking at the spirit behind the traditions? Do you come to hear the prophetic voice of God in the teachings, sermons, and prophecies or are you looking for someone to provide fortune telling service to you?

6 Conclusion

What are you searching for when you come to church? Is your search directed by God? Is your search directed by godly ministers? Are you looking for the right person when you search scripture? Are you looking for the right person when you search sermons? Are you looking for the right person when you search teachings?

I met a man many years ago whose language was littered with Bible quotations. I was so impressed until I discovered that it was just a learned habit. Nothing he did actually reflected an intimate knowing of Christ, a personal relationship with the Word – Jesus Christ. There are people who hold PhD's in various aspects of the Bible and yet do not know Christ, they don't have a personal relationship with the Word made flesh even though they can give a stimulating intellectual discourse about the Bible. Are you searching for intellectual knowledge or are you searching for Christ?

What are you searching for in your Christian walk? Are you searching for God to supply your needs? Are you searching for God to heal your sickness? Are you searching for God to give you a spouse? Are you searching for God to give you peace in your marriage? These are not bad things to look for but they are bad if that is what you are searching for as a Christian. You should be searching for the Christ, to know him, to have a personal relationship with him, to revere him, to obey him, and to love him. Because once you have an intimate relationship with him then all other things shall be added.

If you search for Jesus in scripture:

- you will find Jesus in Exodus as the Passover Lamb who serves to mark you as God's protectorate;
- you will find Jesus in Numbers as the cloud and fire who lights your path and separates you from your enemies;
- you will find Jesus in Deuteronomy as the prophet who reveals God's mind to you;
- you will find Jesus in Joshua as the captain of the Lord who fights the battle for you;
- you will find Jesus in Psalms as the Shepherd who provides for you and protects you;
- you will find Jesus in Daniel as the ever present son of God in your fiery trials; and
- you will find Jesus in Nahum as your avenger.