

Water, Blood and Spirit

Without a Doubt, Part 3

1 John 5:6-8

A cable channel by the name, Court TV, debuted a little more than 10 years ago. It has since been rebranded as TruTV.

When it began, skeptics abounded. The prospects of courtrooms, trials and gavel to gavel coverage didn't seem appealing to network consultants.

But Court TV debuted July 1, 1991, with trials already in progress. Robert Scott Hill was being tried in Florida, charged with killing his mother-in-law 25 years earlier, a case in which Robert Hill's own son, now a detective, was the star witness against him.

Teacher Pamela Smart was on trial in New Hampshire for persuading her 17-year-old student/lover to murder her husband – but not in front of the dog, she instructed – she didn't want to traumatize the family dog. I suppose it's okay to kill your husband, but whatever you do, have the decency not to traumatize your dog.

Robert Hill was found innocent and Pamela Smart was found guilty.

To the surprise of many in the industry, Court TV took off. In fact, ten years later, Nielsen ratings found that Court TV, now called TruTV was the fastest-growing cable network in the country – with 65 million viewers worldwide and advertising revenues exceeding \$50 million dollars a year.

There's evidently something intriguing to watching a trial unfold – to effectively join a jury in weighing the evidence.

It might be circumstantial evidence or demonstrative evidence – like pictures or videos; physical evidence such as a murder weapon; forensic evidence like DNA or carpet fibers; add that to character evidence or testimony and eyewitness accounts and you've got all the courtroom drama you need.

All of it builds so that viewers worldwide along with a jury, most importantly, finally reach a verdict based on the evidence.

John the Apostle happens to be playing the role of divinely inspired trial lawyer . . . building a case for the truth of Christianity, one piece of evidence at a time.

If you were with us in our last study – John made the amazing, audacious claim that Christians were actually victorious.

Do you remember the Greek word that John applied to the Christians from our study last Lord's day? We pronounce it a little differently, but we see it everywhere today.

What's that word? Nike.

And it means? Overpriced tennis shoes . . . no, it means victory.

And on what basis does the Christian claim victory? Look back at *First John 5:5 where John writes, And who is the one who overcomes the world* – there's the word – *the one who overcomes the world* – [is] *he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

In other words, the person who arrive at the verdict that Jesus is God the Son has achieved the victory of faith.

Now John immediately senses the need to provide some evidence to back up that verdict.

Can you give us some evidence, John, about Jesus?

Can you give us some character evidence; some demonstrative evidence – some physical evidence, some eyewitness testimony to lead us to the verdict without any doubt that that Jesus really is the Son of God?

I mean, this isn't just the trial of the year – or the trial of the century – this isn't cable TV – this is the determination of our eternal destiny.

And John seems to anticipate that – and since these verses are dedicated to removing all doubt from the Christian's mind and heart – to reinforce what we as believers can know for certain – the Apostle takes the next step here and provides 3 forms of evidence.

Evidence that Jesus is the true Messiah:

- Evidence number 1 is water.
- Evidence number 2 is blood.
- Evidence number 3 is Spirit.

Now notice *verse 6. This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. . .*

The first thing I want you to notice is the phrase – *this is the one who came. This is the one*

immediately follows the statement about *Jesus, the Son of God – verse 5*, also described as *the Christ* – which means, the Anointed One – *or the Messiah – verse 1*.

I want you to underline in your text or at least in your thinking the verb tense – this is *the one who came*.

He came. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, already came.

John uses the aorist tense to clearly declare that the coming of the Messiah's coming has already become an historical reality.ⁱ

Technically speaking, we're not waiting for the Messiah to *come*, we're waiting for the Messiah to come *again* – because He already came once.

And what's the evidence, John?

Notice *verse 6* again, *This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood*.

The water and the blood – John uses the definite article before each of these – *the* water and *the* blood – making them separate events in history.ⁱⁱ

In other words, there are two distinctive moments in history marking Jesus as uniquely the Son of God, our Messiah.

These two events had to do with water and then blood – and clearly in that order.

So what were they?

Augustine, the church father and theologian believed they were a reference to the blood and water issuing from the side of Jesus when that Roman soldier pierced the Lord as he hung upon the cross (John 19:34).

The problem with that view, among others is that it doesn't relate to two separate events; and it doesn't answer the claim from false teachers that John is attempting to answer that Jesus was the Son of God. It's possible for any other human being to issue forth water and blood from a pierced heart.

However, Augustine is partly right in that he identifies the crucifixion as one of the key evidences.

Others, such as the reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin believed John the Apostle was referring to the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper.

Again, they were partly right in that they identified the waters of baptism – but this text isn't given to prove something about our testimony through baptism – it's a reference to prove something about the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John is insisting here that water and blood somehow served as evidence to reveal the Messianic identity of Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

Were there two separate events in the biography of Jesus's earthly life uniquely related to water and blood?

Yes.

First of all, His own baptism and the events surrounding it – miraculous events that proved He was about to begin His messianic career.

And what about the blood? There was nothing more bloody than His cross work on our behalf – the shedding of His blood – by which we have been justified through faith. (Romans 5:1)

John is effectively giving us the bookends to the ministry of Jesus Christ. It began with His baptism and ended with his crucifixion – obviously consummated by His resurrection.

One author put it this way; Jesus was inducted into His saving ministry by the water of baptism; and He accomplished His saving work by the blood of His crucifixion.

His baptism marked His perfect life

His crucifixion marked His saving death.

Or to put it another way:

The water was the evidence of His divine life

His blood was the evidence of His divine work.^{iv}

So what John does here is point us to the demonstrative evidence of Christ's authenticity by showing us to these two signature events.

One event initiated His ministry; the other event culminated His ministry.

So let's go back in time to these two events – and look at the evidence surrounding them that clearly and miraculously proved He was the Son of God.

Evidence #1: The Water

Turn back to the Gospel by Matthew and chapter 3 and let's take a closer look at this first evidence – the evidence of water.

An Old Testament prophet named John – not the Apostle John, but John the Baptizer, appears on the scene, demanding the Jews identify with his message of repentance in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

John the Baptist has no idea that on this particular day – *notice verse 13 – that Jesus will arrive from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him*.

Now, John knows Jesus doesn't need to evidence repentance by being immersed in the Jordan.

But Jesus is going to be baptized for different reasons – He says in *verse 15* that it will *be fitting to fulfill all righteousness*.

Jesus says, “at this time, this is fitting . . . this is appropriate.”

In other words baptism was appropriate for Jesus – why?:

- Jesus is identifying with the people of God
- He's meeting the outward sign of obedience to the message of God through His prophet –
- He's meeting the requirements of Old Testament law that a priest be consecrated by the cleansing of water as they were effectively ordained into the ministry of the priesthood^v
- He's signaling the beginning of His public ministry
- He's also creating a public scene where He is able to be introduced as the Lamb of God by the prophet of God (John's Gospel account adds);
- Finally, and most importantly to the evidence John the Apostle has in mind in First John 5, this event – this baptism by water – is about to provide eyewitness, demonstrative, physical, character testimony and undeniable evidence from the Triune God as to Who Jesus is.

Notice verse 16. And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove coming upon Him (there's the presence of the Holy Spirit, further anointing Jesus) – and **behold** – literally, look at this – **a voice out of the heavens, saying, “this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**

The voice of God the Father echoes down from above to all present at the Jordan – this man is My Son.

Jesus is the Son of God – **First John 5**.

And get this . . . God the Father, recorded here in **Matthew 3**, is actually quoting from His own inspired word here – intentionally - strategically.

The first part – **this is my beloved Son** is a quote from **Psalm 2:7** – a Psalm every Jew accepted as a description of the Messiah – the mighty King of God who was to come.

The second part – **in whom I am well pleased** – comes from **Isaiah 42:1** where the description of the

suffering Messiah culminates in **Isaiah 53** – the Messiah who will come as a Lamb to the slaughter.

In fact, in **Isaiah 42:1**, God the Father says that He will **put His Spirit upon the Messiah**.

And here is the Spirit descending in the form of a dove while the Father quotes a couple of Old Testament messiah-describing verses and effectively saying – He's here!

How obvious to the nation Israel can it be?

The Son of God – the Messiah destined to suffer – the Lamb of God who came to die for the sins of the world is here!

The King has come – but His first crown will be made of thorns and His first throne will be a cross.^{vi}

This signature, miraculous moment just so happens to be evidence number 1.

Evidence #2: The Blood

John makes very clear back in **First John 5:6** that the evidence of Jesus as the Son of God – the Messiah – was not only this event involving water; but in a separate event involving blood.

Nowhere in scripture is the term “blood” used alone to designate the Lords supper.^{vii}

Certainly His blood is pictured metaphorically in the element of the wine – grapes crushed and squeezed in surrender.

But John is referring here, not to the metaphor in the wine of communion, but to the reality of an historical event so clearly associated with bloodshed that none of his readers would need any further commentary.

Blood represents life. In shedding His blood, Jesus gave His life. The blood refers to Jesus' death on the cross.^{viii}

But John has more in mind by bringing up the crucifixion.

The false teachers were telling the church that the true Son of God couldn't die. But Jesus – already proven to be the Son of God at His baptism certainly did die – He shed His blood!

But there's even more here at stake with this piece of evidence.

The Gnostic false teachers were saying that the Christ was just some divine spirit which only descended on Jesus at His baptism, but that same Christ left Him at the cross and Jesus died, a simple, ordinary man.

Watch how John dismantles their false teaching, in **verse 6** again – **This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus** – who - ? **Christ** – now

notice for emphasis John continues – ***not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.***

In fact, when Jesus Christ resurrected from the grave, He suddenly appeared to two very discouraged disciples who were making their way back from Jerusalem to their little village called, Emmaus. And Jesus said to them, ***“Was it not necessary for the Christ – the Messiah – to suffer these things?” (Luke 24:26).***

Jesus the Christ was baptized with water . . . and Jesus the Christ was crucified on a cross where He shed his blood.

Listen, Christianity is a bloody religion – it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin (I John 1:7).^{ix}

Christianity isn't a religion where mankind sacrifices his life for god – Christianity is the only religion where God sacrifices His life for mankind.

- Christ's sacrifice was pictured in the Passover lamb centuries earlier;
- Christ's shed blood was illustrated in the sacrifices daily in the temple – where priests were splattered with blood and their arms stained red;
- Christ's bloodshed summarized and consummated the gospel of atoning sacrifice.

The Bible presents consistent evidence about the Lamb:

- The Passover illustrated the sacrifice of the Lamb
- Isaiah 53 prophesied of the suffering of the Lamb
- John the Baptist identified the person of the Lamb
- The cross of Calvary bore the blood-drenched sacrificial Lamb
- And the hosts of heaven even now sing at the throne of the resurrected and exalted Lamb.

And we with them one day will sing – as John the Apostle heard them singing;

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain – to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing; And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, I heard them saying – chanting – singing – To Him who sits upon the throne and unto the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and power forever and ever . . . Amen. (Revelation 5:11-14)

Listen, the most important decision you'll ever make is the verdict you deliver concerning this Lamb. Is He your dying sacrificial Lamb?

The music doesn't just begin in heaven. You can find yourself among those in the church who glory in the atoning blood-soaked cross of Christ and sing;

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stain.

Is that you?

Is He your Lamb?

You say, oh, but I've done a little studying of my own. Crucifixion was common in the days of Jesus – Rome was infatuated with this particularly, cruel, painful sentence.

In fact, Josephus the first century historian writes that more than 1,000 people were crucified in that region the same year Christ was crucified.

We know from historical accounts that by the time of Christ, the Romans had already crucified more than 30,000 men in Palestine alone.^x

Many of them on that hill we call Calvary. Where's the evidence that His bloody death meant anything more than anyone else's death?

Well, travel back with me for a few moments to that scene, described in ***Matthew's Gospel and chapter 27.***

We're told in verse 45 that as Christ hung on the cross, suddenly at 12:00 noon and until 3:00 pm, darkness literally fell.

The language here emphasizes the totality of the darkness.^{xi}

Torches are no doubt called for – the heckling of Jesus evidently ceased – an eerie blackness covered everything.

Darkness for three days had been one of the Egyptian plagues – forever linked to the first Passover and the judgment of God.^{xii}

These three hours are clearly parallel to that judgment – only this time, Jesus is vicariously experiencing on our behalf the judgment of God the Father as the atoning sacrifice for our sin.^{xiii}

Then Jesus cries out this cry of abandonment as Father and Son are separated.

- He's been abandoned by His disciples;
- Betrayed and then denied;
- He's been rejected by the Jewish nation and their leaders
- He's condemned by the High court of His own people

- He's taunted by His enemies –the soldiers, the Jewish leaders – even the criminals;
- He suffers absolutely alone and now He is forsaken by His Father.^{xiv}

And then He cries out in victory – It is finished – bound up in *verse 50*.

Listen, you might be abandoned, rejected, betrayed, denied, condemned, taunted and even killed, but His bloody death means you will never, ever be forsaken by God the Father.

Then *verse 51* informs us that the temple veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was ripped in two – from the top to the bottom.

I love this – think of what it meant to the religious establishment that had concocted this means to crucify Him.

That curtain was 60 feet high and 6 inches thick. Heavy fabric with beautifully embroidered cherubim – angels – embroidered in beautiful shades of blue.

The language depicts violence – not a slow ripping of fabric but a sudden, miraculous, ripping of that curtain from the top to the bottom.

There were no ladders there – no scaffolding – the only hand that could have ripped that veil away as if to say all may enter into my presence through the veil which is the sacrificed flesh of Christ (was the hand of God).

Imagine, the priests did nothing more than sew that curtain back together and continue on their empty traditions.

But the message had been delivered.

The *Matthew* records that an earthquake shook that entire region.

And if that wasn't enough demonstrative evidence that Jesus was exactly who He said He was . . . one more thing occurred while Christ's blood soaked body hung on that cross.

Look at verse 52. And the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

How's that for evidence?

People you know were buried years ago, are raised from the dead and show up on your front porch.

They don't look like zombies . . . they're not eating people.

They are evidently given glorified bodies – serving as illustrations of the resurrecting power of Jesus Christ for all who believe in Him – the language implies that they, like Christ after His resurrection appeared to many – for a time – before ascending to the Father's house.

Can you imagine being one of them? One day you will be.

I love the faith of Jedediah Goodwin, who according to one author I have in my library, was a believer. His career had been that of an auctioneer. According to his desires, he had carved into his tombstone after he died in 1876 the words,

Born 1828

Going

Going

Gone!^{xv}

Jesus had said it earlier . . . standing outside the tomb of Lazarus . . . were they listening then? He said, ***I am the resurrection and the life – he that believes in me will live even after he dies. (John 11:25 paraphrased)***

Let Me give you some evidence . . . Lazarus, come out here!

And this is for all of us one day . . . going, going . . . gone!

Here is the evidence that supports that kind of verdict:

The miraculous evidence at the water of Christ's baptism:

The miraculous evidences at the bloody cross of Christ's crucifixion

These were external evidences.

Evidence #3: The Spirit

John adds one more piece of evidence before moving on.

The first two were physical, external evidences of Christ's authenticity; this third evidence is invisible and internal.^{xvi}

Go back for a moment or two longer to First John chapter 5 and *verse 7. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth.*

In other words, the very nature of the Holy Spirit is to tell the truth. And the Spirit informs us in numerous scenes in the New Testament that Jesus Christ is to be exalted and followed and trusted.

There is a phrase in the King James version that was added into verse 7 by a man named Erasmus in the 16th century. He adds a phrase regarding the heavenly witness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – a

phrase that has since created a tremendous amount of unfortunate debate.

And it's unfortunate because it's inclusion in the English translation doesn't change the doctrine of the Trinity; the doctrine remains the same.

But this phrase was added by men who wanted to strengthen the doctrine of the Trinity.

Because of their pressure, Erasmus reluctantly added the phrase into his third edition of the Greek New Testament – it became a part of the received text.

In or out, the doctrine of our triune God is substantiated in other texts.

As we've already discovered – go back to the baptism of Jesus and what do you find? The Father, speaking from heaven; the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus, the Son of God.

But notice, as we've spent all this time observing today, John the Apostle isn't referring to the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit here.

That's not his point. He's referring to a trinity of undeniable evidence in the water baptism and the bloody crucifixion and now, the testimony of truth bound up in the person of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, he goes back to tie up that theme in the very next phrase – notice **verse 8. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.**

Literally, these all say the same thing.

John writes that the **Spirit bears witness** – and by the way, He doesn't just tell the truth – John emphasizes here in **verse 7 – notice – He is the truth.**

He doesn't have to put His hand on a Bible and swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth . . . because His very nature is truth.

And it is His role to bear witness to Christ – to lift Christ up – to exalt the Savior before mankind – to lead the believer into submission to the sovereign leadership of Jesus Christ.

So verse 8 concludes – there are three witness that bear witness – they are in agreement – in other words, if you separate them – they will tell you the same story.

And the present tense of the verb informs us that the continual activity of these witness is to reveal the truth that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

On the witness stand they will all point to the same facts.

Not like those proverbial boys who came to school late one day claiming that their car had gotten a flat tire. The principal immediately separated them into four different rooms and then asked them one by one the same question – Which tire was it?

And he got four different answers.

These are the witnesses called before you today, my friend – and they tell the same story – that Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God – the Savior who really lived and really died and really rose again to give us life . . . so that by faith in Him alone we will all one day say with that old auctioneer . . .

Going . . . going . . . gone!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/29/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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ii Herschel H. Hobbs, The Epistles of John (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p. 126

iii Hiebert, p. 234

iv Roy L. Laurin, First John: Life at its Best (Kregel, 1987), p. 170

v Joel Beeke, The Epistles of John (Evangelical Press, 2006), p. 194

vi Adapted from William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1 (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 60

vii Hiebert, p. 240

viii Hobbs, p. 128

ix R. Kent Hughes, John: That You May Believe (Crossway Books, 1999), p. 46

x John MacArthur, Matthew 24-28 (Moody Press, 1989), p. 266

xi Grant R. Osborne, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew (Zondervan, 2010), p. 1036

xii Ibid

xiii Ibid

xiv Adapted from Osborne, p. 1037

xv Charles R. Swindoll, The Darkness and the Dawn (Word Publishing, 2001), p. 305

xvi Adapted from Sam Gordon, Living in the Light: 1, 2, 3 John (Ambassador, 2001), p. 195