

Life in the Son, “That All May Honor the Son”, John 5:16-47

In the prologue John writes that “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (1:5) and then, “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (1:10-11). With the healing of the paralyzed man on the Sabbath day, opposition to Jesus begins to rise.

This passage answers these three questions: “Who is Jesus? Why should I believe him? And, what does he want from me?” So we want to look at who he claims to be; why we should trust him; and what he wants from us.

Background: John 5:1-15. The occasion is the healing of the paralytic (last week) on the Sabbath, the seventh day, the *Shabat*, which Jews still observe on the Saturday. Because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, what we call Sunday, this is why most Christians around the world, and the example of the early church, met for worship and teaching on Sunday.

How the Jews viewed the Sabbath: The Sabbath, a day of rest on the seventh day, was given to Israel as a covenantal sign (Ex 31:13-17) and a way to rest and refresh oneself by contemplating God’s works specifically in his revealed Word. So that was the day to gather and honor God by hearing his Word taught. Prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC (and the subsequent exile to Babylon), the Jews often ignored Sabbath observances (as seen in the prophets’ writings), and in Jerusalem it was often business as usual 7 days a week. After return from exile, however, they became very scrupulous about Sabbath observance, and in a good sense, as seen in Ezra and Nehemiah, out of honor to God and to keep themselves distinct from the nations. Yet over time the rabbis felt a need to answer and rule on the many “what ifs” about Sabbath observance. Is walking to see my neighbor considered work, and if I walk how far can I walk, can I travel... these sorts of questions. There were obvious exceptions, that everyone agreed on, like if your livestock need watering (Luke 13:15) or someone is in need of help or rescue (Luke 14:5). But it was felt that detailed restrictions needed to be spelled out in order to protect the Sabbath from defilement. These were called *seyagim*, or “fences” around the Law. In time these became as important as the Law itself. (Adin Steinsalz, *The Essential Talmud*, chapter 15)

Interestingly, according to the Talmud the practice of medicine was forbidden on the Sabbath, unless it was needed to save a life. The idea was that God refrained from all creative work on the seventh day and so his followers should refrain not only from works of commerce but works of creative energy, including writing. Now when Jesus came along, the rabbis had no problem with his teaching on the Sabbath, but healing was a different thing. Instead of viewing his healing works as a work of rescue or necessity, they viewed his actions as a continuation of his day job (Luke 13:14). In other words he healed on six days, and so on the seventh he shouldn’t be doing any healing. Of course this sounds silly to us but they are unaware of this distorted thinking. And even more, they balked at Jesus doing good on the Sabbath because of how he

described his work and it made it seem like he was above the Sabbath like God. God works seven days a week in upholding the universe, caring for his creation and his children, answering prayer, and giving deliverance. (Can you imagine if you prayed for something you really needed and God said, "I can't help you I'm off today.") A fallacy lay at root of their thinking: that God on the seventh day, after the six days of creation, did not work. But if he did not work at all, caring for and sustaining the universe, then it would have disappeared or fallen apart. This is why Jesus said, *"My Father is working until now, and I am working."* (5:17)

Jesus' healing on the Sabbath pointed to a deeper issue, about who he claimed to be.

Who is he: the unique Son of God in essence and relationship with the Father.

1. This unique relationship is seen in (16-30):

- He does whatever the Father does (19)
- He knows all that the Father is doing (20)
- He gives life like the Father gives (21, 24-26)
- He is the Judge of all (22, 27-30)
- He is to be honored in the same way as the Father (23)
- His word believed gives eternal life and rescues from judgment (24)

"Jesus never claimed to be God, but the Son of God." This is not actually true. The Jews understood what he was saying and we'll see later in this gospel an even stronger statement, but granted he calls himself the Son, but it's obviously a different kind of sonship. In one sense we are all descended from Adam the direct creation of God and are God's children through the creation imprint of the image of God. Believers who are redeemed out of lostness become more than citizens in God's kingdom, they become adopted sons and daughters in God's family and heir of his creation.

But what **Jesus says throughout the gospels is different**. Here is an identification of the Father and Son which is mirror-image, seemingly identical, and a relationship between Father and Son which is unique. We are born here on earth and become sons and daughters by creation and by redemption, but he comes from above, from the Father, with an eternal Sonship, and does what the Father does, and to see him is to see the Father, and he is to be honored as the Father. He knows all that the Father is doing, receives God's honor, and will be final judge of all. There is an identification of Jesus with the Father that the Jewish leaders were very uncomfortable with.

Not just in Judaism, but Jesus is unique among all religious founders, whether prophets, teachers, gurus, avatars ... he is fully human and fully God. Other religions speak of seeking truth, knowing truth, attaining truth, revealing truth... Jesus alone says "I am the Truth." Comparative religion classes may teach the similarities of world religions, like prayer, giving to the poor, doing good. But they differ fundamentally on how a person is to come to God and to

find eternal life. Only in Christianity do you have God coming to humanity as a man, and accomplishing in his death and resurrection a salvation than none of us could accomplish.

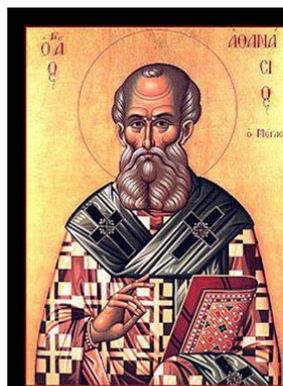
Note on John 5:19 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. Amazing: here in one verse both the equality of the Father and Son ("whatever he does, I do") and his submission ("do nothing of his own accord"). This is why Christians believe that equality and submission are not contradictory. How do we put this together? *"Mystery is the lifeblood of doctrine."* (Herman Bavinck)

"The Son's will is to please his Father, not just to save us; and the Father's will is to have all men honor the Son, not just to forgive us. To grasp the divine relationships in the drama of redemption is to humble our pride and heighten our sense of speechless privilege. To be saved and renewed, to be recipients of new life, to be forgiven, all because we are caught up in the perfection of love among the Persons of the Godhead, is unutterably solemn, ecstatically wonderful." — D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 1980), 85

Applications: Because he is God this is why we can have a present-tense salvation (5:24) that does not depend upon us but the great and marvelous power of Jesus Christ. If Jesus were only a prophet or great teacher, and salvation ultimately salvation would depend upon us, so that you could never say that you had it. If you kept at it maybe in the future you would pass judgment and enter life. But here he says, all in the past or present tense... "has eternal life... does not come into judgment... has passed from death to life." This is of the greatest comfort to all believers in Christ, and this verse 24 is only possible because of the truths stated in verses 16-23. It is because he gives life, and he is the Judge, that he can say these things.

Secondly, if this is the nature of our Savior, then we must publicly stand by his claims. These teachings about himself, more than the issue of how to spend the Sabbath is why many were opposing Jesus. His claims are radical and exclusive today as they were then. But we should stand beside him. We cannot water down his claims.

Example: the earliest centuries of Christianity accepted this without reservation, it was later in the late third and fourth centuries that a **challenge came in the form of Arianism**, which said Jesus was a very great being, the highest next to God, but that he was not quite God, more like the mightiest angel. A debate about this arose in the church and the champion for the deity of Christ was a man named Athanasius, who took



"Jesus that I know as my Redeemer cannot be less than God" (Athanasius)

"...of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God..."

(The Council of Nicaea, AD 325)

people back to the Word, to the words of Jesus, to understanding the complete work of Christ in salvation, but often he was in a very small minority. He was told, “the world is against you Athanasius!” And he replied, “Then it is Athanasius against the world.” But due to his writing and reasoning over many decades and his defense of the council of Nicaea we have today the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed to which all branches of historic Christianity agree.

Why should we believe him? Because of the testimony of the Scriptures before Jesus, the works done by Jesus, and the eyewitness accounts about Jesus.

2. Those who testify to the Son (31-47):

- John the Baptist (33-35)
- The Father, through his works (36-38)
- The Scriptures (39-44)
- Moses (45-47)

How important is testimony! God has willed that his saving gospel come to us through witnesses. And the witnesses listed here are of three kinds: one the historical, contemporary: John the Baptist, and by extension we can include the apostles and writers of the NT. Secondly, the works of Jesus (the miracles and signs) which only God could do. And thirdly, the testimony of the Scriptures prior to Jesus’ coming, specifically Moses, but we can place the prophets here...

Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Acts 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

2 Peter 3:1-3 This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, ³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life- ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us- ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Sometimes people say, **“I won’t believe unless I see a miracle”** or “I only believe in things that I can see, taste, touch, or measure.” It is unfair to dictate to God how the good news of salvation shall come. And for someone to say that they only believe in things seen, touched, or measured is itself a position that cannot be verified by seeing, touching, or measurement. In fact much of what people, even very skeptical people hold, cannot be verified empirically.

God has given us what we need. Many prophecies preceded Christ’s coming; many signs and miracles were performed both by him and his disciples. And today by his Spirit he testifies to

the truthfulness of the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament eyewitnesses, and of the recorded miracles, supremely of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Application. It is our part and privilege to also be witnesses and to add our testimony to theirs. This is how salvation comes to the nations and to the generations.

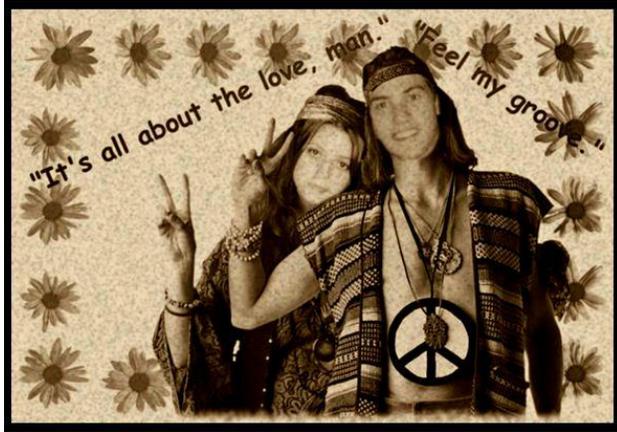
Acts 1:8 ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Romans 1:16 ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

3. What he wants from me: faith! Three lessons on faith...

- a. **Faith means believing all that Christ says about himself** and about eternal life. **John 5:24** *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.* Faith means believing that Jesus is all that he says he is, and taking him at his word, and believing that "God sent his Son..." We could never ascend to him, but He came to us, and he is mighty to save. All other religions tell people how to reach God, how to follow a way. But Jesus says, "I am the Way." In Christianity God comes down to save man, to redeem. This is unique and true faith believes this! We do not fashion a Jesus after our own liking. You either trust this Jesus or you make up your own.
- b. **Faith means coming to Jesus for life.** **John 5:39-40** *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.* True faith is more than believing things about Jesus. It is more than just saying the Bible is true. It is coming to the person of Jesus, crucified for our sins, risen from the dead, ruling from heaven. It is to go to him to receive life from him.
- c. **Faith means finding my source of significance in God.** **John 5:44** *How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?* True faith is to seek the glory that comes from God. What does this mean? We seek glory, or perhaps we might say meaning, validation, honor from others. We all do this by nature. We want to be liked, to be approved, to be validated, to be lifted up by those we value as givers of meaning. To believe means we now embrace not human-valued centeredness, but we embrace God-centeredness.

Illustration. When in the 1960s I thought I was such an individual, counter-cultural. (Picture of hippies) And yet we all looked alike, listened to the same music, held the



same values. I really was not objective and independent but had just begun to seek my validation from another group.

Application. Professing Christians who treat their faith as one compartment of life, and become different people around others. We think we are objective, and independent, and free, but really we all are influenced by our peer group. People act differently in different groups... fear, intimidation, desire for their approval. This is the glory of man! As long as

we are seeking the honor, glory of other people, or live in fear of their disapproval we are under bondage and not living by faith. Jesus lived for his Father's will and glory. We cannot be one thing in one crowd and another with another group. We like Jesus must live for the honor and pleasure of God rather than the crowd. If man-pleasing is not dethroned we cannot live by faith.

Look at Jesus! How he desired to please his Father, and to do his will, and to speak truth even if it meant he would be rejected and ultimately crucified. He was able to do this because of his love for this Father. Likewise we are able to be truly counter-cultural when we look to God as our center and the one who validates us. Jesus' greatest joy was honoring and serving and pleasing his Father in heaven. We cannot fully walk in the freedom God has for us as long as we are seeking our main validation, the pleasure, the honor, the esteem of others. How can we not seek the glory of the God who sent his Son to die, to bear all our ugliness and broken-ness and guilt and evil and to make us his children, and then say, "I don't really want to please you or have you validate my life, I want these people to do that." As long as we have that viewpoint we are not walking in faith. It means to become God-centered rather than man-centered.

Ability to stand against the tide... Martin Luther and Reformation Sunday. Oct 31, 1517.

"There is no other rule or test for who is a member of the people of God or the church of Christ than this: where there is a little band of those who accept this word of the Lord, teach it purely and confess against those who persecute it, and for that reason suffers what is their due." (Martin Luther, commentary on Psalm 110:3)

Concluding hymn "A Mighty Fortress"



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