

Sermon outline and notes:

© Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor (swiftcreek.church)

Swift Creek Baptist Church, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

Sunday, May 15, 2016

John 5:16-46 “Is Jesus the Son of God?”

Intro. I want to remind you of the background of my text. Jesus had healed a lame man on the Sabbath Day. He also told him to “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (v.8). Well, Jesus caused quite a stir, not so much because of the greatness of the miracle. Instead, v.16 says, “For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.” They had no concern that the suffering of this man had ended. They would not acknowledge that the miracle proved that Jesus was the Messiah, or at least a great prophet. Instead, they were quite sure that doing this miracle on the Sabbath proved His wickedness. Who was right?

But Jesus vindicated His action by claiming something that stirred them up even more. He said in v.17, “My Father” instead of the usual “our Father,” commonly used by the Jews. Thus He claimed a unique relationship with God the Father. The Jewish leaders instantly understood His claim. Notice what v.18 says, “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His own [*idios*] Father, making Himself equal with God.”

So this morning we are going to examine the claim of Jesus that He is uniquely the Son of God, and see if the claim is indeed true. This is more relevant today than in the past. Muslims and Jehovah Witnesses are growing in numbers here in America. They deny that Jesus is the Son of God. Mormonism believes that Jesus is *a* son of God, but they do not believe that He is equal to God the Father. Belief that Jesus is the Son of God is in decline in our country. According to a 1990 survey by George Barna, an amazing 91% of Americans said they believed that Jesus is the Son of God.¹ Yet at 2013 Harris poll shows that the percentage has declined to only 68%!² So this message is needed now more than a long time here in America.

So let's see first of all:

I. THE PROPOSITION: JESUS IS DIVINE

A number of liberal theologians deny that Jesus ever claimed to be the Son of God. After all, if today a man made this kind of a claim, we would probably conclude that he was joking or mentally disturbed. But I believe that the apostle John accurately reported the words of Jesus as aided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And even though Jesus did not come out and flatly say, “I am God,” we can nevertheless conclude from our text that He affirmed His deity rather than deny it. This is based on the following. First of all, He claimed divinity because:

A. He Claimed to Do what God the Father Does – Jesus said in v.17, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” Then He said in v.19, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.” Here we see that Jesus defended His action by claiming that He was only doing what His Heavenly Father was doing. He claimed He was sent by God on a mission for God, doing the works of God. In v.20 He claimed to know intimately what God the Father was doing! The Father does not keep secrets from the Son. And so in v.19 He said that He can do nothing of

¹ George Barna, *The Church Today* (Glendale, California: Barna Research Group, 1990), 11.

² <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/susan-jones/poll-americans-belief-god-strong-declining>.

Himself. This does not have reference to a weakness in His humanity, but He is simply saying that He did nothing apart from the direction of His Heavenly Father. In v.30 we see a parallel, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” The limitation on what Jesus could do was solely a matter of the will of God the Father. He is saying, “I cannot act independently of the Father.” Jesus is saying that He is only doing what His Father would have Him do. Thus, He healed the lame man on the Sabbath by the direction of His Heavenly Father. Obeying God is never a sin!

Now this meant that God the Father was ultimately responsible for healing the man on the Sabbath! Jesus did nothing “of Himself,” but only that which the Father was doing. It is impossible to express fully the perfect unity between God the Father and God the Son. The Father works benevolently on the Sabbath, and the Son does likewise. Actually, He says in v.17 that His Father “keeps on working” (present tense), even on the Sabbath, “and I keep on working.”

Some may object saying, “Didn’t God rest on the Sabbath when He created the world?” Yes, but the original seventh day of rest was not needed by God to recuperate from the toil of the 6 days’ labor, for as Isa. 40:28 says, “the Lord... neither faints nor is weary.” However, it is otherwise with us. Work tires us, and rest is a physical and moral necessity. So God, at the beginning, set before His creatures a Divine *example*. That was the *only reason* He rested at that time.

So while it is true that God rested on that first 7th day from all His creative work, He has never rested from work since then. Have you ever thought about that? Aren’t you glad that God never takes a day off? Psa. 121:4 says, “Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” He sustains the universe every day. So that means you can call on God 24 hours a day, seven days a week! He never stops supplying the need of His creatures. Therefore, if the Father ministered to the wants of His needy creatures on the Sabbath day, then it must also be right for God the Son, the Lord of the Sabbath, to engage in works of necessity and mercy on the weekly Rest Day. Since Jesus was the Son of God, one with the Father, whatever the Father did was right for Him to do. Besides, God did not intend that there should be a cessation of the works of mercy or necessity on the Sabbath. Jesus said in Luke 14:5, “Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” and the man that Jesus healed had suffered for 38 years, and he was more valuable to God than a donkey!

B. He Claimed to Exercise the Prerogatives of God - Jesus goes on to substantiate His claim by saying in the last of v.20 that He will do greater works than causing the lame to walk. If they marvel at Jesus healing a crippled man, they will have occasion to marvel more. He will exercise divine prerogatives; things that only God has the right and ability to do. You see, there are two prerogatives that only God has the right or the ability to do:

1. He Gives Life – Jesus says in v.21, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.” The Jews believed that only God could give life (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 16:11; Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6), and even open the grave and raise the dead (Ezek. 37:13). As far as the Gospel records are concerned, Jesus had not yet raised anyone from the dead, but He was predicting that He would, and sure enough, He did!³ He, as God, can also give spiritual life now! Eternal life begins immediately. Only God can give eternal life! For God to raise men spiritually (in the new birth) and then raise them physically (in the 1st resurrection) is far greater work than Jesus had just wrought on the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years! Jesus speaks more in detail on this subject in vv.24-29. The key in these verses is to see that Jesus is expanding His divine claim. His authority over the Sabbath leads now to authority over eternal life.

That being the case, you should come to Jesus ask seek the eternal life that only He can

³ The widow’s son (Luke 7:13-15), Jairus’ daughter (Mt. 9:25), and Lazarus (John 11:43-44).

give!

2. He Judges – To the orthodox Jew, the Lord God was “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25; cf. Judg. 11:27); and no one dared to apply that august title to himself. But Jesus did! Now when Jesus says in v.22 “the Father ... has committed all judgment to the Son,” He especially has in mind spiritual and eternal judgment. It was Jesus the Son who died for sinners, and it is Jesus the Son who will judge sinners (cf. Acts 17:31).

Because all judgment has been given to Him, men should take heed as to how they relate themselves to Him. Believers will be judged by Him at the judgment seat of Christ regarding the reward we will receive (2 Cor. 5:10). According to John 3:19 & 36, unbelievers are already judged and condemned. They will come before Jesus at the Great White Throne to hear their condemnation (Rev. 20:11).

Thus we see that Jesus is God the Father’s premier agent in the world. Jesus is His ultimate representative and Mediator. Six times in this chapter Jesus refers to the fact that the Father “sent” Him (vv. 23-24, 30, 36-38).

The reason Jesus will exercise these divine prerogatives is in order that both the Father and the Son will be equal in honor. Jesus says in v.23, “that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” In these words Jesus claimed the right to be worshiped and honored along with the Father. So I suggest that you honor Jesus. He is your judge!

So it should be clear that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. His enemies understood His claim, and not only did Jesus not correct what they said in v.18, but He made it even clearer. He even called Himself “the Son of God” in v.25.⁴ So don’t ever let anybody tell you that Jesus never claimed to be equal with God!

Now it’s one thing to claim deity; it’s another thing to prove it. In fact, I remember doing some street witnessing in Dallas, TX while in Bible College, and one man told me that he was the son of God! He even said he was Jesus! But anyone who claims to be the Son of God had better do more than just say words. So let’s see next from our text:

II. THE PROOFS OF DEITY

Here in chapter 5 the apostle John recalls how the Jewish leaders declared that Jesus was worthy of death, not only for breaking the Sabbath, but also for claiming to be “equal with God.” V.16 says they “persecuted Jesus.” Here it carries the meaning that they were prosecuting Jesus.⁵ They presented their charges before the crowd and said He was worthy of death for breaking the Sabbath and for blasphemy (see 10:33).

Jesus then presents His defense. Don’t you like a good courtroom drama? Well, we have one here! In v.31 He anticipates the Jews’ objection that He cannot bear witness of Himself. It is generally accepted that self-interest skews personal testimony. Therefore the Old Testament Law required the testimony of two or three witnesses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6). So the Lord met that requirement by giving the testimony of not one, or two, or three, but four witnesses to His Deity:

A. John the Baptist – He was still ministering at this time and was fresh on the minds of the audience. So Jesus said in v.33, “You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.” Then in v.35 Jesus said, “He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.” Just as many in Jesus’ audience had accepted John as unquestionably truthful,

⁴ This is one of only three times He does so in this gospel (10:36; 11:4; cf. 19:7).

⁵ Acts 22:4 says, “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.” *dioko* was used in Greek literature for a legal prosecution.

a light from God (v.35), the logic of the situation demanded that they should believe his verdict concerning Jesus. He had pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). He also testified that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:34).⁶ The testimony of John the Baptist, a great prophet, should have carried some weight.

Yet surprisingly, Christ goes on to say in v.34, “Yet I do not receive testimony from man.” His purpose in mentioning John’s testimony was, “...that you may be saved” (v.34b). John’s testimony was designed to arouse men’s attention and to produce in them a sense of their deep need of the One who was about to be manifested. Yet John was a sinner. He was considered fallible. So Jesus said in v.36, “But I have a greater witness than John’s....” What were these greater witnesses? Jesus appealed to 3 other witnesses that were independent of man and superior to man. So the next witness of behalf of Jesus’ deity was:

B. Jesus’ Works – Jesus said in v.36, “But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish — the very works that I do — bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.” Jesus’ claim to be equal with God rested on surer ground than the testimony of a man. The Father’s own testimony, by means of the miracles of Christ, certainly surpasses the testimony given by John the Baptist. Jesus later said in John 10:25, “...the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me.”⁷ Jesus’ works bore unmistakable witness to Him. These miracles were seen by multitudes of people numerous times. The number of eye witnesses to these miracles would probably number in the tens of thousands.

The day came when John the Baptist found himself in prison because of his faithfulness to Jesus. And there in that prison, John began having a few doubts about Jesus. So Matthew tells us in Matthew 11:2-5 that John “...sent two of his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.’” Furthermore, He gave speech to the dumb and deliverance to the captives of the devil. He walked on the water, calmed the storms, turned the water into wine, and fed a great multitude with a few loaves and fishes. It was all done by His Father’s will and the power of His word! If Jesus were mistaken in His claim of deity, God the Father certainly would not have given Him the power to perform these miracles.

Oh, the works of Jesus do indeed bear strong witness to His deity. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles....” God not only did miracles through Jesus, but He also granted miracles to be done through His apostles.

So we have the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the miracles of Jesus. Next, Jesus refers to:

C. The Father’s Own Witness— In v.37 Jesus said, “And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me....” As He has already said, God the Father was testifying through the miracles of Jesus. But this must refer to an additional kind of testimony. This could refer back to Jesus’ baptism, when God the Father said to Him from heaven, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am

⁶ More of His witness is also recorded in 1:20-27.

⁷ John 10:37-38 says, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

well pleased” (Lk. 3:22). But in light of the second half of the verse,⁸ that may be unlikely. Based on what follows in v.38, it could refer to the witness that the Father had borne to His Son through the prophets during Old Testament times.⁹

This leads to the last witness that confirms the testimony of Jesus:

D. The Scriptures – Jesus said in v.39, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” This last witness that our Lord cites is the most important to us today. You and I have never seen the miracles of Jesus, but we have a record of the eyewitness accounts [hold up Bible], and we have a record of how Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies. So the witness of the Bible continues, even today. The Holy Writings, given by inspiration of God, were the final court of appeal. There is no higher appeal than the Word of God! What importance and authority does He attach to them!

Now let’s look into the details of v.39. The KJV translates the words of Jesus as a command, “Search the scriptures...” However, it seems unlikely that it should be a command, for it would form a strange introduction to the clause, “because you think.” Jesus was just stating the fact that the Jewish people were jealous for searching the Scriptures, for they highly revered the written Word of God. They thought that a careful study of the Old Testament would give them eternal life. Here Jesus does not condemn them for their study, but for the method and purpose that they used.¹⁰ Indeed, we should *search* the scriptures. A mere casual reading is often not enough. Most people own a Bible, but most people rarely read it, and fewer people study it! We ought to be like the Bereans who “searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Many times I had given my own testimony in this regard. I was challenged by the witness of some friends, so I searched the Scriptures, looking for ways to refute them, but instead, the Scriptures led me right to Jesus!

Yet in spite of the fact that the Jews did search the Scriptures, noticed the indictment that Jesus gives in v.40, “But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” Had they searched the Scriptures with spiritual discernment, they would have known that their own Scriptures were pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. He is the promised Savior, and yet they missed Him! If you search the Old Testament with a sincere heart and mind, you can find Jesus on just about every page! Jesus is the central focus of the entire Bible. Jesus Himself showed to His disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:27), as well as His apostles (Lk. 24:44-46) that He fulfilled the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies! He is seen in Old Testament types, in the feasts, and in the sacrificial ceremonies. If your knowledge of the scriptures hasn’t brought you to Jesus, then you have missed the purpose of the Scriptures.

The climax of Jesus’ argument was the testimony of the Scriptures written by Moses. Jesus said in vv.45-46, “Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you — Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.” The Jews claimed to follow Moses’ teachings to the letter. They contended earnestly for the law. Yet they missed the fact that Moses own words pointed to Jesus. For example, in Dt. 18:15 Moses predicted that God would send a great prophet, like Moses himself. Let’s compare Moses and Jesus. Moses did great miracles by the power of God, and so did Jesus. Moses brought about a great deliverance, and so did Jesus. Moses prefigured Jesus in the Passover Lamb (1:29), in

⁸ “You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.”

⁹ In reference to the works, Jesus uses the present tense “bear witness” (v. 36). But here He uses the perfect tense “has testified,” a common tense in reference to the Scriptures.

¹⁰ It was like a Calvinist or Arminian studying the Scriptures with a preconceived theological viewpoint that affect their interpretation.

the serpent raised in the wilderness (3:14), and in many other ways. But the fact that they did not believe in Jesus, whom Moses wrote about, showed that they did not truly follow Moses.

Conclusion: Jesus has been put on trial in this chapter. What is your verdict? Is He the Son of God, or is He a law breaker and a blasphemer? All four witnesses confirm His claims! So I believe your choice is between these options: Jesus was God; or He was insane; or He was an evil deceiver. Don't say He was merely a good teacher or a prophet. That is not an option in light of the evidence. If He were a lunatic, then pity Him. If He is a liar, then ignore Him. But if He is Lord and God, then worship Him & obey Him. I suggest to you that the evidence weighs heavily in favor of the fact that Jesus is Lord, God, Savior, and Judge! If you have not done so, come to Him by faith and receive the eternal life that only He can give.

Why is it, that in spite of the evidence, many do not believe with true faith? Well after Jesus completes His defense, He turns the tables and puts his opponents on trial for their spiritual failures. First of all, v.40 says, "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." Even so, many are just not willing to be saved. The problem is not lack of evidence. The problem is their will. The Jewish leaders would not give up their pride. They would not admit the failure of their pre-conceived religion. Many others are unwilling to come to Jesus because they do not want to give up their sin.

Then, v.42 indicates another spiritual problem that hinders people from getting right with God. It was not lack of evidence but lack of love that caused these men to reject the Christ. The Jewish leaders loved their religion, but they forgot how to love God, which is the greatest commandment (Deut. 6:5). Do you love God, or do you just love your religion, or love your sin? Think of what Jesus did for you. Love Him, and you will believe in Him.

Yet as you make your decision about Jesus, I must acknowledge a reality that I must warn you about. We live in a world of pluralism and tolerance that exerts enormous pressure on us to make Jesus one way to God, but not The Way. If we insist that Jesus is *the* Judge, and the only One who can give eternal life, we will be persecuted just as Jesus was.¹¹ Well, I would rather be in step with God and out of step with the world. Will you join me?

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Dr. Ernest L. Easley (notes from his sermon on 5:31-47 dated 3/18/01); Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966), vv. 17-23 only; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); Herschel H. Hobbs *John: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948); Warren W. Wiersbe "Be" *Series: New Testament Volumes 1 & 2, John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may listen free at www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker. Dr. Felker's email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).

¹¹ Jesus said in John 15:20, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."