

John: I've No Idea Who He Was

John 5:16-25

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For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true. There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the

works which the Father has given Me to accomplish--the very works that I do--testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me. And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. I do not receive glory from men; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. "But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

Amen. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy and inerrant word. Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we bow now in Your presence and pray for Your blessing on our study of the Scriptures which speak of Christ, and above all else, we want to see Jesus, in the word, to behold His wonder and His glory and His deity. We ask that You would help us by Your Spirit, so to bow before You as Your servants, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

The great question in John's gospel, on every page and in every line, is the question: "Who is Jesus?" Who is Jesus? What kind of person is He? Now when we come to the second part of John's gospel, from chapter 13 forward, we are going to be the last week of Jesus' life, immersed in the words He will be speaking to His disciples. But in the first half, John has been selecting stories, miracles, out of the life of Christ in order to bring before us the very question that is uppermost as he writes this gospel: "Who is Jesus?" There could hardly be a more important question, could there? Who is Jesus? What kind of man was He? What kind of claims did He make? Who, in the world, or out of the world, is Jesus Christ?

We're on the verge of Christmas. Singing those beautiful, beautiful Christmas carols. You love them not because of the sentimentality that is often associated with them, but you love them because they speak of Jesus, because they take you with wonder and astonishment and awe and worship, like the shepherds on the hillside of Bethlehem, like the wise men that came from the east bearing gifts, they bring you to the feet of the baby Jesus, asking the question, "Who is this child?" Who is He in yonder stall, at whose feet the shepherds fall. 'Tis the Lord, the Lord of glory, 'tis the Lord, the King of glory.' 'O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, o come ye o come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold Him, born the

king of angels. O come let us adore Him, o come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.'

The story in the first part of John 5 was the healing of this paralytic man who was unable of himself to go to the waters. Whoever got to those waters first, as they were stirred, was healed. This miracle which Jesus performs in healing this man, saying to him, "Take up your bed and walk. He had been in this condition for 38 years, and as he was walking around Jerusalem, carrying his mat underneath his arm, the only thing that the Pharisees, collectively called here, the Jews, but the Pharisees, the only thing on their mind was, Jesus had done this on the Sabbath. And they had written the book on Sabbath keeping, in which it said, "Thou shalt not pick up thy bed and walk on the Sabbath day." And the problem arises as a result of that. Who do you think that you are, they are saying to Jesus. Who do you think you are, coming from the north, as He did, down to southern Jerusalem, you understand the sensitivities? Of course you do. Who did He think that He was, to come down to Jerusalem and upset the traditions that had kept this city together for decades and centuries. And they are on Him like a pack of hounds, desiring to kill Him. Verse 16, this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. Verse 17, Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." Now let's look at that response, because that's what takes us into the rest of chapter 5. One, what is the truth about Jesus. The second thing I want us to see, is what are the implications of the testimony of Jesus.

I. What is the truth about Jesus?

The first thing is, "What is the truth about Jesus?" That's the unspoken question behind the whole of this fifth chapter of John's gospel, "Who do You think that You are?" Because Jesus has said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." He's saying, "I have a unique relationship with My heavenly Father, so unique that I call Him, 'My Father.'" And they recognized that to be a claim on Jesus' part to be the Son of God, sharing in the very privileges and prerogatives of God. He's claiming a unique relationship to God, and then He's claiming to share the exclusive prerogatives of God Himself. "My Father is working to this very day and I too am working." My Father, who created the world, My Father who gave us the Sabbath Day, My father who sustains us and blesses life even on the Sabbath day, and since I am His Son, I am only imitating what My Father has been doing. And they get the message. And they want to persecute Him, and they want to destroy Him. Verse 18, "This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him."

The whole of the rest of this passage surrounds this issue. Who is Jesus, and who does Jesus think that He Himself is. I want us to try and take that in this evening. He was making Himself equal with God. Now there's a key statement, and I want to pick up some key verses in the rest of this chapter. First of all,

verse 20, "The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all that He Himself is doing." And what Jesus goes on to say is, that everything that He does, everything that He says, everything that He knows, all His wisdom, comes from the fact that He has been in the presence of His Father. All He is doing is imitating His Father. "Like Father, Like Son," we sometimes say. I remember being at the Twin Lakes Conference Center just a few weeks ago, and met a young man, 18 or 19 years old, lining up to get his dinner. And I looked at him and said, "That's John Reeves' son." I don't think I'd ever seen him before. But I only had to look at him for one second and what I saw was his father. It was his son. But he looked, as we sometimes say, "the spitting image" of his father. Do you see what Jesus is saying here? Once you see Me, what you hear from Me, is that which I've learned from My Father. I've been learning My Father's trade, if you like. I've been watching Him. I've learned to talk the way He talks. I've learned to see things and view things He sees things and views things. I just do what My Father does. My Father's working, and I'm working. I like to copy My Father, that's basically what Jesus is saying.

Do you see how infuriating that must have been to the Jews? You see, rather than temper His claims, rather than rein in His claims, He extends them. He says, more or less, verse 20, "and greater works than these will I do." You're going to persecute Me for what I've done healing this man on the Sabbath day? You're going to persecute Me for that? You haven't seen the half of it. You don't even know so much as one percent of it. Let Me tell you who I am. You want something to get angry and incensed about? Well, let me give you something. And He goes on to make new claims: Verse 19, He never acts independently of the Father on any day; verse 20, He possesses intimate knowledge of the Father's ways; verse 21, He's able to give sinners new life; verse 22, He's going to raise the dead on a future day and judge them on the final day; and here's the jugular, in verse 23, if that doesn't upset them, "That all may honor the Son as they honor the Father." Let Me tell you how equal with God I really am. Forget about this healing on the Sabbath day, that's a mere incidental, that's not even the half of it. On that glorious day when they will be honoring God, they will be honoring the Son likewise. What a claim.

What an astonishing claim. I'm sure you're never seen *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and you don't want to; it's a piece of blasphemy. But in it, Mary Magdalene sings the song, "He's just a man, I tell you, He's just a man." And what Jesus is saying here is that He performs divine deeds, He possesses divine knowledge, He has divine prerogatives, He has divine authority, and He calls for divine worship. Now, if that isn't putting Himself on the same footing as God, then you haven't been listening to what Jesus has been saying. Let Me tell you how Godlike I really am, if you want something to be incensed about.

You see, it doesn't do, my friends, to say about Jesus, "I just love some of the things that He said. I just love the Sermon on the Mount. I just love it when He says things like, 'Turn the other cheek,' or 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' or

'Sell whatever you have and give to the poor.' Isn't that wonderful?" People say that sort of thing, you know. They say, "I don't want any of those miracles or supernatural, I just want the Sermon on the Mount." And you know, my friends, you can't have just a part of it. Because He is more than just a good man and a wise man. He's God, I tell you. And that's why, in the Christmas story, in the Nativity story, they're coming to a cradle, they're coming to an infant child, they're coming to a child that's a day old, He's just been born, being cradled in the arms of Mary, this little child. And I don't buy it, in the carol when it says, "And no crying He makes." That doesn't make any sense. He was a real, human child. It wasn't a selfish, pouting sort of cry, but to this baby Jesus, men and women came and bowed down and worshiped Him, and they worshiped Him as God, as the Lord, as the Creator of the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that it contains. Let Me tell you, Jesus is saying, how Godlike I really am.

II. Implications of the divinity of Jesus.

In the second place, what are the implications of this testimony to Jesus? Look at what He says in verse 31, "If I alone bear witness about Myself, My testimony is no deemed true." Now, Jesus isn't saying that His testimony is not true. That's not what He's saying. He's making a distinction between something being true and something being valid in a court of law. What you have here is a trial. They are accusing Him of blasphemy, and Jesus is defending Himself as though He were in a court of law. And according to the law code of the Old testament and Judaism, something was not regarded as valid unless it was supported by at least two witnesses. Now Jesus mentions, of course, that He bears the testimony and witness of John the Baptist.

And there's a little bit of testimony here in verses 35-36 to John the Baptist, for he had born testimony that He was the Messiah, that He was the Christ. But that's a human testimony, a testimony from men. And Jesus is saying, while that testimony is true, at this point it's not a valid testimony. Jesus, being God, needs the testimony of two sources that are divine.

So the first one, He says, in verses 36 and 37, the first testimony that I have is greater than that of John, for the works that the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing bear witness about Me that the Father has sent Me. Testimony number one is that He does divine works. Isn't that what John has been doing? He's been giving us miracle story after miracle story, and John isn't done, for he's going to be doing that all through until chapter 11 of the gospel account. These signs, as John calls them, indicative, pointing to the fact that Jesus really is God. They manifested His glory. Isn't that what John said about the miracle in Cana of Galilee, when He turned the water into wine, "This sign manifested forth His glory." It showed Him to have come from out of this world, it revealed and disclosed that He truly was divine and Godlike. God is My witness, in the first place.

But then, in verse 39, this is the second witness to His claims, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness of Me." My works bear witness of Me. And the Scriptures, which come from God and are inspired by God, they too bear witness of Me.

There was renowned 19th century French artist, Paul Gustave Dore, who was known for his neoclassical scenes of Bible stories, such as Jacob's Ladder and the Tower of Babel. And when he was traveling through Europe once, he lost his passport. When he came to the customs clerk, he thought he might get through because everyone would know him. He was a well-known figure, his picture was often displayed, but when he got to the station, they didn't believe he was Dore, the famous artist. But what they did was to give him a piece of paper and some pencils and asked him to draw some peasants standing nearby. So he drew this little sketch and they recognized that he truly was the artist Dore. His work confirmed his word, and Jesus is saying here, "I've got two testimonies that make My claim valid in a court of law." God Himself testifies through the miracles that I do, and Scripture testifies, because Scripture speaks about Me.

And yet these testimonies are rejected, verse 40, "And yet you refuse to come to Me, that you may have life." You refuse to come to Me. Do you remember what Jesus had asked the man in the earlier miracle who can't get to the pool in time, because someone else gets there first. And you remember the question He asks him in verse six, 'Do you want to be healed'? What an astonishing question that is, to a man who has been sick for 38 years. Do you want to be healed? And yet Jesus, the infallible pastor that He is, put His finger right on the very source of this man's problem; that his most intense problem was a problem of desire. And here in verse 40, "You refuse to come to Me." It's the same word, saying that the real problem with these Jews in their rejection of Jesus, in their desire to persecute Him and kill Him because they accuse Him of blasphemy, their real problem was one of desire. It lay in their wills. The reason why they did not see Jesus as the Son of God and believe the claims that He made, is that they had no desire to believe. They were determined to reject His testimony. Look at what He says in verse 38, you are determined to reject the testimony because "the word of God doesn't dwell in you." Verse 40, they refuse to come to Jesus. Verse 42, they do not have the love of God in their hearts. And verse 44, they are enslaved by a desire for the praise of men. The word of God doesn't indwell them, coming to Christ is refused by them, the love of God doesn't possess them, desire for praise enslaves them, and so He says in verse 45, "Do not think that I will accuse you to your Father; there is one who accuses you, Moses on whom you have set your hope." The very Scriptures that they thought they held so dear would rise up and condemn them. How can you believe, He says in verse 44. That's the real problem.

The real problem is the issue of ability. They did not believe because they could not believe. Sin had so enslaved them, so brought their hearts and their wills to

bondage, that they weren't at liberty to believe. That's how serious sin is. That's how serious a thing it is to be an unbeliever.

To be an unbeliever means that you cannot believe, unless God in His sovereign grace and mercy does something extraordinary and powerful to change our hearts and to change the way we think, and to change our wills to enable us in the day of His power to believe and respond. To the broken who have come to the end of themselves, Jesus is gentle and full of grace. But to those who are high-minded, Jesus is nothing but a stumbling block. The great question in this chapter, "How is Jesus?" Is He the one at whose feet you bow and exclaim, "He is my Lord." That, John in saying, is the only real issue tonight. Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we thank You for this beautiful chapter. We thank You that by Your grace and ministry of Your Spirit You have brought us to acknowledge that Jesus Christ truly is the Lord. Amen.

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