

Notes on John 5

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The Healing of an Infirm Man – Chap. 5

The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda — 5:1-18

Verses 1-4

1. Where did the events beginning in 5:1 occur (be specific)?
2. Why had people gathered at this pool?

Jesus in Jerusalem at the pool of Bethesda

The event recorded here occurred back in Jerusalem after the healing of the nobleman's son (end of chap. 4). Jesus had again gone there for a feast. We are not told how much time had transpired or what feast this was. So apparently these facts are not important to the story.

What is important is the miracle that John records. He tells the story, because it gives opportunity for him to describe another miracle that Jesus did to confirm John's claims regarding Him. This is another miracle that is not recorded by the other writers, so it adds new information that confirms Jesus' claims.

In Jerusalem was a pool called Bethesda. It was near the Sheep Gate, and had five porches. This is where the healing occurred.

Some claim that the fact John used present tense ("there is") in describing the pool as proof that John wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. However, King points out that John could simply be using the present tense relative to the time of the event he describes (not relative to the time when he wrote). And further, pools were unlikely to have been destroyed when the city fell. King points out that the pool is referred to as being visited by people even into the third and fourth centuries.

The sick people at the pool

In the porches around the pool lay various sick people (blind, lame, paralyzed, etc.) waiting for the water to move. It is said that an angel came down and stirred the pool, and when this happened, the first person to step into the pool was healed of his disease.

It is unclear to me whether the reference to the angel and the healings describes what really happened or whether it simply describes the belief of the people. (Note that the description of the angel, etc., is omitted in ASV, etc.) If the account is genuine, John might simply be describing the people's view without affirming it is true. Compare v18, where John says, "He broke the Sabbath"; yet this clearly refers to what the people thought, not to the truth of what happened.

If this was just a superstition believed by the people, we may wonder why so many people would stay there obviously hoping for a healing? Clearly, they believed the miracles occurred. Maybe the water did possess some natural healing properties. Or maybe the people just received psychosomatic "healings." Desperate people today flock by the thousands to faith healers, despite the fact they perform no real miracles. The people here were said to be blind, lame, or paralyzed. But obviously none of them could quickly step into the water. The person who was quick enough to jump into the water first must not have been in terrible shape to begin with.

Furthermore, the event described is very much unlike real Bible miracles. The account has some characteristics of a superstition like modern belief in faith healers. Why heal only those who could step in first? Wouldn't that mean that, almost invariably, the most severely ill people - who needed the miracle the most - would not be healed, like the man Jesus healed in this account? And why do such miracles repeatedly, but only occasionally? I know of no genuine Bible miracle that fits such a pattern.

However, the important point of John's story is not the question of whether or not these miracles really occurred. The point is that Jesus unquestionably here did a genuine miracle.

Verses 5-7

3. Describe the difficulty confronting the man Jesus met there.
4. What did Jesus ask him?

The infirm man Jesus found

Jesus, coming there, found a man who had suffered for 38 years from a certain infirmity. We are not told what it was, but it was evidently quite severe; he had been troubled by it for 38 years, and it evidently rendered him so incapacitated that he needed someone else to put him into the water. Note how these facts demonstrate beyond doubt the reality of the man's infirmity. This was no imagined, psychological, or psychosomatic disease.

When He realized the man's illness and how long he had suffered, Jesus asked if the man wanted to be made well. This appears to be, like many other questions asked by Jesus and God, a rhetorical question designed mainly to get the person's attention and to introduce what Jesus intended to do. It was obvious the man wanted to be healed. Jesus was simply making an opening remark to call attention to the man's need.

The man said his problem was that, when the water was troubled, he could not get into the water quickly enough. Someone else always stepped in before he did. Jesus evidently chose this man to concentrate on, because his case was so obviously severe. He did not pick one of the easier cases, but one that was obvious and otherwise could not be cured.

Verses 8,9

5. Describe what Jesus did for the man.
6. List 3 characteristics of this miracle that are characteristics of all miraculous healings.

Jesus heals the man.

Jesus solved the man's problem without the pool or any other method. He simply told the man to get up, take up his bed, and walk. It is obvious that the man had not been able to walk before: he could not get to the pool before others did. Yet when Jesus told him to do so, he got up, took his bed (pallet) and walked. This happened immediately.

Here, as in all Bible miracles for which we are given the details, we see convincing evidence that what happened was impossible by natural law and must, therefore, have happened by the supernatural power of God.

(1) There was no doubt about the existence of the ailment. The man had this infirmity for 38 years. He was so disabled he could not get to the pool without help. (2) He was healed immediately. (3) His healing was so complete and obvious that he was able, not just to walk, but to carry away the pallet on which he had previously been confined. He surely could not walk before, and he had the infirmity for many years. Even if the cause of his ailment was removed, he would naturally need time to regain strength and coordination to walk. Yet he could do so immediately, proving the miraculous nature of the healing. (4) Note further that there is absolutely no evidence that this man had faith before he was healed. In fact, even after the healing occurred he was still not sure who had healed him (v12f) (though no doubt the people following with Jesus would have known who did it).

Where are the modern faith healers who can duplicate such healings repeatedly and without a failure, as Jesus did? Yet they claim to have the same power from God that Jesus possessed.

This verse closes by telling us when this happened: the Sabbath day. In so saying, John introduces the controversy that followed, as described in subsequent verses.

Verses 10,11

7. On what day did this healing occur? What objection did some Jews raise as a result (v10)?
8. What answer did the healed man give the Jews?

Jewish leaders criticize the man regarding Sabbath law.

Certain Jews found the healed man and told him it was not lawful for him to carry his bed on the Sabbath. The man explained that he was carrying the bed, because he had been told to do so by the one who had healed him.

The Jews should have been impressed by the fact the man who gave this instruction had done a great miracle. If He could do a miracle, He must have been from God (cf. 3:2 etc.). The purpose of miracles was to confirm a man to be a teacher from God. If Jesus could do such a great miracle and then told the man to carry away his bed, that of itself should have proved that carrying the bed was in harmony with God's law. Otherwise, God would not have confirmed Jesus' teaching by the miracle.

Instead of assuming Jesus was wrong because He told someone to do something on the Sabbath, the Jews should have known that He was from God because He did miracles. Why pit their views against His? They surely could not do any such miracle! They should have been amazed at the miracle, joyful for the healed man, and grateful to God. No such qualities characterized them. Their selfish, evil motives become more obvious as their conflict with Jesus continued.

Note that the Jews began by questioning the man's conduct, but they soon switched to questioning Jesus' conduct. They ended up opposing Him because He **healed** on the Sabbath (vv 16,18 — see notes later). But the original question concerned the act of the healed man in carrying his pallet.

Verses 12-14

9. Why could the man not identify Jesus to them?
10. What did Jesus do that identified Him to the healed man?

Jesus' identity revealed to the healed man

The Jews then turned their attention to the one who had told the healed man to carry his bed. They asked who he was. But the healed man did not know, because there was a great multitude and Jesus had left. Though Jesus had done a great miracle for him, he evidently did not even know Jesus' name and could not otherwise identify Him to the Jews. Compare this to the modern "faith healers." Do they leave after doing their "miracles" without making sure everyone involved knows they were the ones who did the "miracle" (and asking for a financial gift)?

Later, however, Jesus met the man again in the temple and told him that he should turn from sin or he would suffer something worse than the disease he had. This shows how Jesus viewed sin and its consequences. It is a greater problem with more severe consequences even than serious physical diseases. It leads to eternal punishment, which Jesus warned was worse than death. Physical suffering and death are in fact not a major concern compared to the consequences of sin (Luke 12:4,5).

Bad as serious illnesses are, there is "a fate worse than death," and that is sin. Yet many people today are easily moved to compassion about people who have serious illness, but seem to care little or nothing about the problems caused by sin.

Verses 15,16

11. How did the Jews treat Jesus as a result?
12. What should Jesus' miracle have taught these men? (Think: What does this tell you about their intentions?)
13. Did Jesus ever violate God's law? Give Scripture for your answer.
14. List other passages where Jews claimed Jesus violated the Sabbath.
15. Special Assignment: Study the passages in which Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath. Did Jesus violate the Sabbath here? Explain and prove your answer.

The healed man identifies Jesus to the Jews.

Jesus' second encounter with the man He had healed served to identify Jesus to the man. Since the Jews had asked who had healed him, the man then told them it was Jesus. There is no evidence that the man did this with any malice or ulterior motive toward Jesus. It is probable that he did not know why the Jews wanted this information. Perhaps he even thought they would honor and respect Him when they knew.

What really happened, however, is that the Jews persecuted Jesus and even wanted to kill Him, because He had healed on the Sabbath day. Note the evil and sinister attitudes of these Jews. Instead of respecting Jesus as a prophet from God because He could do such great miracles, they wanted to kill Him! Such was their zeal for their human traditions that they would seek to kill a man for doing a deed that ought to have proved to them that He was from God!

Note also, as mentioned before, that they no longer seem concerned about the conduct of the man who was carrying his bed on the Sabbath. The issue now is what **Jesus** had done on the Sabbath in healing the man.

Was this truly a violation of the law?

Consider Ex. 31:14,15; Num. 15:32-36; Jer. 17:21-23; Neh. 13:15-22. These verses forbid working on the Sabbath, especially carrying burdens. But it is not at all clear from the passages that a case such as this one was included.

The Nehemiah passage makes clear that men were condemned for carrying burdens in their business for personal profit, just like they did on other days of the week. In Jeremiah, carrying a burden into the gates of the city or out of the house is condemned. This man did none of those things. But the issue here is not a mere technicality or loophole in the law; rather, the intent of the activity must be considered in determining whether or not the law was violated. The man was not working for personal gain or profit, nor was he doing ordinary work such as could be done on a weekday. What he was doing related to a special act of mercy and healing from sickness. It was not an everyday work activity and was not part of his business activity for personal profit. Jesus had already shown that such acts as these were not condemned by the law (see notes on Matt. 12:1-14).

Not all human effort was forbidden on the Sabbath. Men on the Sabbath would chew food and swallow, carry clothes on their bodies, breathe, pump blood throughout their bodies, digest food, etc., just like on other days. They also did work in the temple offering animal sacrifices. If an emergency arose in which even an animal needed special care to save it from death or danger, they met the emergency even though work was involved on the Sabbath. In 7:21-23 Jesus pointed out that the Jews would do the work of circumcising a child, even if the day for doing so fell on the Sabbath. The command to circumcise constituted spiritual work which did not violate the command to do no work on the Sabbath. No one considered these acts to be wrong, though they could technically fit some definitions of "work." The conclusion is clear that the Sabbath law never did forbid all kinds of "work," just certain kinds for certain purposes. The Jews had great detailed restrictions in their human tradition that defined what work was and was not acceptable on the Sabbath, so even they knew that not all work was condemned.

The real problem here was, not that Jesus violated God's real law, but that He violated man-made human traditions (see Matt. 15:1ff). In simple fact, Jesus never broke the Sabbath law nor any other Divine law, nor did He ever teach others to do so. Had he broken the law, He would have been a sinner. But the Bible clearly and repeatedly states that He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; etc.).

Note that the Jews never did pursue the issue of the "work" this man did. This shows that, either they knew that what the man did was not wrong, or else they did not really care about that. What they were concerned about was proving Jesus' wrong, so they moved on to that issue.

Verse 17

16. What answer did Jesus give them?

17. Explain what Jesus' statement demonstrates about His Deity.

18. Note that open conflict had begun between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. What can we learn from this example about Christians' involvement in conflict?

Jesus compares His work to that of His Father.

Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath was one of the main objections the Jews had toward Jesus. On nearly every other point on which they confronted Him, He so completely disproved them that they were forced to drop the issue. But this one came up over and over again. Jesus answered their objections often, using various different arguments - all of them valid, of course (see notes on Matt. 12:1ff).

Here Jesus answered by showing that it is just as valid for Him to work on the Sabbath as it was for the Father to work, and the Father had been working continually up till that time. The Jews correctly understood that the "Father" referred to God, the Heavenly Father (v18).

Jesus' point is that the Sabbath institution related to the fact that God rested on the seventh day of creation. If in fact God - whose conduct is the very basis for the Sabbath - actually continues to work on the Sabbath, then that would prove that not all work on the Sabbath was forbidden. Note that Jesus was the One who did the work of creation and therefore was the One who rested on the seventh day (John 1:1-3), so He ought to know what happened then! If He says that, both He and His Father continue to work, even on the Sabbath, who can successfully dispute it?

While I may not understand all the implications of Jesus' argument here, it would surely include the following: Gen. 2:3 does not say that God rested from **all** work on the seventh day, but only from the work of creation. Other passages describe works of God that He has continued to do since creation, including on the Sabbath. He gives to all life and breath and all things, and in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:25,28). He gives rain and fruitful seasons (Acts 14:17), and sends the rain and makes the sun shine on the just and unjust (Matt. 5:45). He is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). He upholds all things by the word of His power (Col. 1:17; Neh. 9:6; Heb. 1:3). In all these ways, God is working every day, even on the Sabbath day. Were He to cease working for even one day - any day - we would cease existing! Hence, every day that we receive these gifts, that is proof God is working on that day. Hereby Jesus proved by the example of God Himself that not all work was forbidden on the Sabbath - especially works of mercy and provision for the needs of others were not forbidden.

But more specifically, the Jews here and elsewhere objected to the fact Jesus did a miracle on the Sabbath. To them that was a forbidden form of "work." But from what source came the power to do the miracle? Why all miracles are by the power of God. In fact, miracles are often called "works" of **God**. Hence, the very fact that a miracle occurs, in and of itself proves that God is working. And if a miracle occurs on the Sabbath, then that proves God is working on the Sabbath. But the Jews objected to miracles being done on the Sabbath. Hence, Jesus here proved that they were objecting to the work of God Himself!

The very fact that the miracle in question had occurred on the Sabbath, in and of itself proved that God believes in doing works of mercy and kindness on the Sabbath. If God did not believe in and approve of it, it could not have happened! The purpose of the gifts was to confirm the word of the one through whom the miracle was done (see John 4:42). If Jesus taught that this kind of work could be done on the Sabbath and then did miracles, that was God's confirmation on His teaching.

Hence, the work of the Father, specifically in doing the miracle in question, in and of itself served to prove Jesus' right to so work (see v19). If God provided on the Sabbath day the power to do the work, then Jesus had the right on the Sabbath day to do the work. The very nature of the work in question ought to have silenced the opponents. To condemn Jesus' work was to condemn the Father. To accept the right of the Father to do miracles on the Sabbath, however, was to accept the right of Jesus (or any one) to allow that work to be done through Him on the Sabbath.

Verse 18

19. What did the Jews think of Jesus' answer?

The Jews then opposed Jesus for claiming equality with God.

Jesus' argument, however, just turned the Jews more fully against Him. This is often true when forceful arguments are given to those who have ulterior motives and are determined to continue their preferred course of action regardless of the evidence. The more powerful the evidence, the more upset they become when it is presented (see on 3:19ff). Instead of concluding that Jesus was wrong because He healed on the Sabbath, they should have considered the miracle to be evidence that He was right and they were wrong.

But instead of admitting the force of Jesus' evidence, the Jews became all the more determined to kill Jesus. But now they chose this course, not just because (they thought) He broke the Sabbath, but also because He called God His Father, making Himself equal with God (blasphemy). Violation of the Sabbath and blasphemy were both capital crimes under the law. Had Jesus been guilty of either, He would have been worthy of death. But in truth He was guilty of neither.

There is a sense in which God is the spiritual Father to all who obey Him (2 Cor. 6:16ff; Matt. 12:49,50; 6:9; etc.). But the Jews were right in concluding that Jesus' language here was claiming a unique relationship with the Father that no one but Him possesses. And it is true that this unique position means that Jesus possessed Deity. This is confirmed by other Scripture (see on John 20:28; Phil. 2:5-8). In fact, remember that John 1:1-3 shows that Jesus' work in creation proves that He possesses Deity along with the Father.

However, it must be remembered that John 5:18 is stating the conclusion the Jews reached about what Jesus had said. They also concluded that He broke the Sabbath, but in that they were in error. Hence, someone might likewise suspect that their conclusion that Jesus was claiming Deity, being a human conclusion, *might* have been in error. Such an approach, however, overlooks the force of Jesus' argument.

While v18 states the conclusion of fallible, erring men, the fact remains that the *evidence* Jesus presented in the context does prove that Jesus was claiming Deity with the Father. He was claiming to work like the Father worked. In fact, He claimed that, He Himself did the work of creating (John 1:3) and so understood the Sabbath from the beginning. Note that He did not deny their conclusion about His claim to Deity, though He did deny their claim that He broke the Sabbath.

This is a claim to Deity, and the Jews properly so understood it. But it was not blasphemy, for the simple reason that the claim was true! And Jesus' miracles – including the one He had just done - proved the claim to be true.

Jesus Presents His Claims – 5:19-30

Verse 19

20. Where did Jesus learn and get authority for His works?

21. What would this prove regarding His miracles, including the miracle that began this discussion with the Jews.

Jesus does what the Father does.

Jesus here begins a lengthy statement answering the Jews' objections to His claims (v18). This becomes a summary of the points John is trying to make about Jesus. First Jesus states His claims (vv 19-30), then He gives the evidence for those claims (vv 31-47).

Jesus did nothing of Himself, but did what He saw the Father do (v19). This is not said to belittle Jesus' authority and work, but to exalt it. ***Jesus does whatever God the Father does!***

There is apparently a sense in which Jesus is subject to the Father even in the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3). But when He came to earth, Jesus took on the form of a ***man*** to learn ***obedience*** — i.e., to experience what it is like to be fully subject to Deity as a servant, just as men have to be subject (Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 5:8,9; 4:15). While on earth, Jesus could act only by God's authority.

However, Jesus' point here is that He had power to do miracles (and other works) that He learned from the Father, authorized and empowered by the Father. This included healing on the Sabbath (v17). The Father did a miracle on the Sabbath (through Jesus) and did other work on the Sabbath. Jesus was just doing as the Father does, hence He was acting by the highest authority. For the Jews to accuse Him of doing wrong by healing on the Sabbath would be folly, since He could not have done it except by the authority of Deity (see on v17).

But Jesus is claiming to do any work the Father can do: creation, miracles, and forgiveness of sins. And He will eventually claim power to raise the dead and judge all men. Imagine a mere human or even an angel making such a claim. Such would be blasphemy, but Jesus made the claim and proceeded to provide the evidence that it was valid.

The Father and Son (and the Holy Spirit) are one in their works and power. The Son does not act independently from the others, but they also do not act independently from Him. They work together in complete unity and agreement. This is the sense in which there is one God, yet three separate individuals. And while Jesus is, in some sense led by the Father and especially on earth was a servant to the Father even as we are, yet He here claims power to do whatever the Father can do.

Verse 20

22. What did Jesus promise they would see in the future (v20)?

The Father's love for the Son will lead to even greater works.

There was no antagonism or opposition between Jesus and the Father, as the Jews thought. Instead, the Father loved Jesus and (by implication) approved of all He did. Jesus knew the works of the Father because, in His relationship with the Father, He was able to witness first-hand what He did. Jesus then did as the Father did.

The Jews had just seen evidence that Jesus had healed a man of an infirmity he had for 38 years. So great was the man's ailment that he needed help to move from the porch to the pool of water. But great as were the miracles the people had already seen in Jesus, there would be yet greater works than these that Jesus would do as He had seen the Father do (v19). This would truly amaze the people. Some of these works are alluded to in the subsequent verses, including raising the dead and judging all mankind.

Again, Jesus is describing the unity or oneness between the Father and Himself. The Father did not condemn Jesus but approved of Him. How else could His miracles be explained? As a result, Jesus deserved to be exalted, not criticized by the people.

Verse 21,22

23. Name two specific works the Son has power to do (vv 21,22).

24. List other **passages** regarding those works.

25. Study the context and parallel passages and explain how and when Jesus does/will use these powers.

Jesus gives life to whom He will.

One particular work done by Jesus, even as the Father does, is to raise the dead, giving life to them. The record does not show that Jesus had yet done this, but He here assured them He could. Later He did raise people on earth (see John 11), and someday He will raise all the dead (see vv 28,29).

However, He not only raised people physically from the dead, He also can raise men from sin and give them spiritual life (see notes on vv 24,25).

Again, these are truly amazing claims. That is John's point in quoting them. But Jesus (and John) will yet give proof for these claims. Specifically, Bible accounts show that He did raise the dead. The Father had this power and had demonstrated in through Old Testament prophets. Jesus here claims the same power. He and His Father shared the same power to do miracles. What amazing claims!

Jesus has power to judge men's lives.

What is more, another great work Jesus will do is to judge all men. He had not come to earth (the first time) to do this (3:17). But the Father had committed to Him the responsibility to judge all men. Someday later He will come and fulfill this duty (Acts 17:31; Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10).

This is clearly a work of Deity, yet the Father will leave it entirely up to Jesus. Again, Jesus is claiming power that no one but God could rightly claim. It is folly to read this and still try to argue that Jesus claimed to be just a good man or that He did not claim Deity for Himself.

Verse 23

26. How should men honor Jesus, and what happens if they refuse to so honor Him?

27. What does this teach about Jesus' deity?

Having Divine power, Jesus deserved Divine glory.

Since He has all these powers of Deity, Jesus flatly asserted that all people should honor Him "even as" they honor the Father. He ought to receive the same kind and degree of honor that the Father does. But the Father is worshipped as Deity, and none can receive that honor who is not deity (cf. Isa. 42:8; Matt. 4:10; Acts 10:25,26; Rev. 22:8,9; etc.). The fact that Jesus should be honored "even as" the Father proves that He is equal with the Father as Deity. See also Jesus' claim in John 17:5.

Further, if people refuse to give Christ this honor, then they are likewise refusing to honor the Father, since the Father sent the Son. Jesus represented the Father, spoke the will of the Father, and revealed the Father. This was proved by His miracles and other evidence He would yet provide. When He claimed the power and honor of God, therefore, it must be true. To deny, belittle, or refuse to honor Him is to treat the Father in the same way, since the Father sent Him and confirmed His claims. Such was the state of these Jews who criticized Jesus despite the evidence of His miracles. And such is also the state of any today who deny Jesus' Deity and fail to worship Him as Deity.

These are truly amazing claims Jesus made. And He made them in the face of people who were criticizing Him for claiming equality with God (v18). Just in case anyone had mistaken His intent and thought His critics were mistaken and He was not claiming Deity, Jesus adds claims that remove all doubt. Had the Jews mistaken His meaning and if He believed He did not possess Deity, by all means Jesus should have made His true views clear at this point. But instead of

denying that He was claiming Deity along with the Father, Jesus' explanation confirmed it (see also on John 1:1-3; 20:28).

Verse 24

28. What blessings do believers in Jesus have (v24)?

Faith in Jesus leads to eternal life.

Since Jesus possesses Deity and was God in the flesh on earth, He further affirmed that people must hear His message and believe His claims in order to have eternal life. Those who do so will not stand condemned, but will pass from death to life. We pass from death to life in a spiritual sense, passing from spiritual death to spiritual life — being born again as in John 3:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:26,27; 1 Pet. 1:23; etc.

This does not mean righteous people will not even be judged, for we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, good and bad (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12). It means we will not stand condemned when we are judged.

Again, we see the absolute need for faith in order to be saved. Those who lack faith have no hope of salvation. But please note (and if necessary restudy) our discussion on John 3:16. In this context, Jesus was speaking to Jews who demonstrated disbelief in Him, so He assures them they must have faith to have eternal life. Other passages show that the faith here described must be obedient faith to save. Nothing here is intended to deny the need for obedience; it simply affirms the need for hearing and faith. But other passages show that faith must be a comprehensive faith, including obedience.

And as in our discussion on John 3:36, this is not teaching once saved, always saved. The passage states a clear condition one must meet to have everlasting life: he must hear Jesus' teaching and believe the message of God with obedient faith. But people can cease to hear and believe (with obedience); if they do, then they cease to be destined for eternal life.

Again, what amazing claims! Jesus is saying He is equal with the Father as Deity, and we must hear and believe this to be saved! Who but God would dare to make such claims?

Verse 25-27

29. What power does Jesus have? Describe how He will use this power.

Jesus has power to give life to those hear His voice.

In v24, Jesus had said that those who hear and believe Him will receive eternal life. Here He continued saying about the same thing. He says the hour is coming "and now is" when the dead would hear His voice and live. See the parallel to v24: those who hear His voice and believe will pass from death to life. "And now is" means it is very near at hand — cf. John 4:23. This appears to mean that this would be the effect of the gospel; the hour had come that the gospel was about to take effect so that men could be saved.

This does not refer to the final coming of Jesus and the physical resurrection, as in vv 28,29. There He said that hour "is coming," but He did not say it "now is," as in this verse and in John 4:23. The dead coming to life in v25 then must be the same as in v24, and is a further explanation of it. One must hear Jesus' word and believe it. If so, he has eternal life and will not be condemned because he **has** passed from death to life. This occurs in this present life. It is the spiritual rebirth and resurrection to newness of life (see verses cited above plus Col. 2:12ff; Eph. 2).

V25 repeats the concept of v24 saying that those who are dead and hear Jesus voice will life. V26 then continues this thought.

Jesus has the power to give life, even as the Father does.

"For" shows that this verse gives the reason why the statements of the previous verses are true. The Father has life in Himself. Life is such an inherent part of His character that He can give life to others. In the same sense, the Father has given the Son power to have life in Himself — i.e., the Son was empowered while on earth, and as a result of His life on earth, to cause peo-

ple to spiritually pass from death to life (as described in vv 24,25). The Son can give life to whom He will, just as the Father can (v21).

This explains why Jesus can enable people to pass from spiritual death to life. By Him they can be forgiven and become children of God, born again, having spiritual relationship with Him and hope of eternal life. This does not deny that Jesus inherently had power of life. But on earth He took the status of a servant and did only what the Father empowered Him to do (see on v19).

Again, Jesus claimed the power to execute judgment.

And not only can Jesus give people spiritual life instead of death, He also has authority to judge all men because He is the Son of Man. This is the same point as in v22. Note how vv 26,27 parallel vv 21,22.

As a “son of man,” Jesus experienced the temptations of living as people must live. He can understand our problems (as described in the book of Hebrews), yet without sin. This makes Him uniquely qualified as our Judge. This does not mean He would not have been qualified to judge had He not come as a man. But He now has personally experienced what we face here, so we can be assured that He understands and that He cares about us. As the Son of God, He has the infallible wisdom to judge. As the Son of Man, He has the personal experience to assure us that He will judge with fairness and justice.

Verses 28,29

30. Name two different destinies in the resurrection, and tell what determines the destiny each one receives.

31. Case Study: Premillennialists say there will be two separate resurrections, one for the righteous and another 1000 years later for the wicked. Is this correct, and how do you know?

Jesus will raise all men at the resurrection.

Apparently some in the audience were amazed at Jesus’ claims, as we ourselves are amazed. But Jesus said that they should not be surprised that He will raise men spiritually from the dead (vv 24,25) when, in fact, He is also going to raise them physically from the dead!

These verses are a further explanation of His ability to give life and raise the dead; yet it is also a contrast in that this refers to a different kind of resurrection. His previous statement was that only those who hear and believe the gospel would thereby pass from death to life (vv 24,25). But the resurrection described here is for all men, good and bad. It refers to all who are in the graves – physically dead. And it will happen sometime in the future (the hour “is coming,” in contrast to “and now is”).

Note that **all** in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth. Those who did good will be raised to eternal life. Wicked people will be raised to condemnation.

Jesus here directly contradicts the premillennial theory, which teaches there will be two different resurrections – one for the righteous and another for the wicked - occurring at two different times, separated by 1000 years. Jesus’ teaching instead is that **all**, both good and bad will come forth at the same “hour.” Compare Acts 24:15 – a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

The difference is not in **when** they will occur, but in the **reward** each receives. Good people receive life and evil people receive condemnation. But it is the same resurrection at the same hour. Many other passages describe this resurrection and judgment — Heb. 9:27; Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12; Rev. 20:11ff; 1 Cor. 15; etc.

Note the plain and undeniable statement of Jesus that all people will be raised from the dead. Death is not the end of man’s existence. He who has the power of life will bring them back to life. There can be no denying that Jesus plainly believed in life after death.

Likewise, Jesus plainly taught that men will be rewarded eternally after this life: life or condemnation. And note that there are only two eternal destinies: no middle ground and no second

chance. This is Jesus teaching. All who teach otherwise need to submit to the will of Him who has the power of life.

Verse 30

32. Whose will did Jesus seek to accomplish (v30)? What does this show?

Jesus judges according to the will of the Father.

Jesus then explained the standard by which He was acting. He did not act alone or simply by His own ideas. He was judging according to what He heard. His judgment was righteous because He was seeking the will of His Father who sent Him, not His own will.

Jesus came to live as a man, though He possessed Deity from the beginning (Phil. 2:5-8; John 1:1,14). As a man, He learned obedience (Heb. 5:8,9). He knew by experience what it was like to have to obey God's will as people do.

Jesus is not here denying His Deity, for He has repeatedly affirmed it (1:1-3; 20:28; etc.). It is true that, even today, Jesus is subject to the Father (1 Cor. 11:3; see notes on John 5:19). But this seems to refer, here in 5:30, as in 5:19, to the fact that Jesus was submitting to the Father's will as a man (son of man —v27). (Note that the verbs are in the present tense: "I judge," "I seek," etc. This refers, not to the final judgment, but to what He was doing even at the time He spoke.)

In any case, there is complete harmony between Jesus' will and that of the Father, hence there is no conflict or disagreement.

Jesus Presents His Witnesses – 5:31-47

Verse 31,32

33. Should Jesus' claims be accepted as valid just because He made them (vv 31,32)? Does He have other witnesses?

Jesus claims to have other witnesses.

Having stated His claims, Jesus proceeded to call a series of witnesses that His claims are valid.

He admitted, first, that they should not accept His claims as true simply because He made the claims. He is not here denying that He Himself is a valid witness. At other times He called upon Himself as one of His witnesses. See our notes on John 8:13-18, where Jesus' point is explained more fully. He is a witness, but people should not believe just one witness if there were no other witnesses to confirm the claims. Many people make claims they cannot prove. In particular, many people have claimed to be Messiahs. Jesus did not expect people to accept His claims without proof.

Faith must be based on convincing evidence (Romans 10:17). This is Jesus' approach, and is the approach emphasized in John's gospel. It is also the approach we should use to convince doubters. Do not expect people to believe in God, Jesus, the Bible, or in any particular doctrine without proof. Give them the evidence and let them make their own choice.

Hence, Jesus was not His only witness, but He had another witness, who told the truth about Him. This probably refers primarily to the Father, whose testimony will be described more fully soon. But first Jesus refers to John's testimony.

Verses 33-35

34. Who gave witness to Jesus, and to what did Jesus compare him in vv 33-35?

John the Baptist's testimony

The first witness Jesus calls upon is John the Baptist. The Jews had asked John expressly what he said about Jesus, and John had borne witness. He had said that Jesus was a man from God, a man much greater than himself, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the Son of God (see John 1:6-15,19-36; 3:22-31).

John's testimony may not fully describe Jesus' greatness, but it would surely show that Jesus was from God and was far greater even than John. Since John was a prophet, then we ought to consider him a witness who confirmed that Jesus' claims are true.

Jesus did not rest His claims primarily on the testimony of John or of any human, since He had even greater testimony (v36). He did not reject John's testimony, for John was sent by God to testify regarding Jesus. Yet, He affirmed that there is even greater testimony than John's.

In a sense, Jesus did not need any man's testimony to prove who He was. He was who He was regardless of what men think about it. Truth is truth, regardless of who does or does not believe it. Yet, in order for people to be convinced of the truth so they could be saved, they needed evidence. So, Jesus listed John as a witness.

John was more than just a man; he was a prophet. As such, he revealed light from God like a lamp burning and shining in the dark. (The word for "light" here refers to a lesser light than the word used for Jesus in 1:8, etc.) People rejoiced in that light and benefited from it. So, let them now consider the significance of that light. John was a forerunner to testify of Jesus. These people needed to accept the conclusion of John's testimony regarding who Jesus was. If so, they would quit rejecting Jesus and finding fault.

Verse 36

35. What witness did Jesus call in v36, and what does it prove?

36. To what works did Jesus refer, and how do they bear witness of Him?

The testimony of Jesus' miracles

Jesus then went beyond John's testimony by calling upon a still greater witness. This witness would give even more convincing evidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be. The very works He did proved that He is from God, sent by God and empowered by God to do what He was doing. How could He do such great miracles as He had done without the power and approval of God (John 3:2; 4:48)?

The purpose of miracles was to confirm the teaching and give people evidence that the one through whom the miracle was worked was really from God (Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31). This was taught in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. These Jews should have clearly understood this from the case of Moses, Elijah, and other Old Testament prophets.

Since Jesus did miracles, the Jews should not have been finding fault with His teaching but should have realized it was from God. Specifically, they should not have objected to His healing on the Sabbath, but should have realized it would not have happened had God not been working through Him.

In this way Jesus returned to the claim He had made in v17 that He worked as the Father worked (see notes there). This was the claim that led to their charge that He was making Himself equal with God. He has now shown how His works proved that claim to be true.

Verses 37,38

37. Who else bore witness of Jesus (vv 37,38)?

38. Explain how this Witness gave His testimony.

39. Why did the people not accept this testimony? What proved this to be true?

The Father as a witness

Jesus affirmed that the Father had sent Him, and the Father Himself had testified that Jesus was from God. He did this through the miracles Jesus did (as in v36). Perhaps Jesus also referred here to the direct testimony, given at Jesus' baptism, that Jesus was God's beloved Son in whom He was well pleased (Luke 3:22). This was direct testimony from the Father in heaven as to who Jesus was, confirmed by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus. John the Baptist had

already told them of this event (1:29-34), and said it was the concrete evidence that Jesus was the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. No doubt many other people also witnessed the event, since it occurred at the time and place that many were coming to John for baptism. The Father gave similar testimony at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5).

Jesus then pointed out that the Jews were in no position to disprove His claims. They had not seen God, they were not prophets who had received a voice or revelation from God. So what evidence could they present to disprove His claims?

Jesus had cited John the Baptist, who was generally recognized as a prophet. Now He had cited His own miracles, which could only have come from God. He had affirmed that the Father Himself had testified of Jesus. In the light of this evidence, the only way these Jews could still reject His claims would be if they themselves were prophets and had some revelation telling them that He was not from God. But such was not the case (and if they had claimed it they could not have proved it). Hence, they had no basis to dispute His claims at all.

So Jesus proceeded to explain the real reason they were rejecting His claims: They did not have God's word in them. They were not receptive to God's truth, but had rejected the evidence from God Himself. And that is why they were rejecting Jesus. Had they been obedient to God, they would have received Jesus.

To reject those who have clear evidence that they come from God is to reject God and prove we are not following His word. If we are following His word, then we would accept those who can prove they are from God.

The same explanation applies today when people are shown what God's word says, yet they reject it. They have not rejected just the messenger who shows them the teaching. They have rejected God Himself because they rejected His message.

It is a contradiction to claim to follow God and yet reject His words. If God is God and we believe He is God, then we must accept what He reveals, when we have been given the proof that He has really revealed His will. God cannot be separated from His message; Jesus cannot be separated from His message. To reject God's message is to prove that we do not really believe in God Himself. The reason people do not accept truth, when it is clearly proved to be the truth, is that they do not really love and respect God. It is not the messenger they have a problem with, but God Himself.

Note how plainly Jesus here rebuked the Jews. To some extent, He could know His conclusion to be true, because they had rejected the plain evidence of His miracles. They had seen the proof, yet ignored it and claimed Jesus was in error because He did not follow their manmade traditions. Such proves they did not have God's word in them. It is possible that Jesus spoke so also because He could read their hearts (2:23-25).

In any case, we are still relatively early in Jesus' public ministry and already He has entered into strong conflict with the Jewish leaders, in which He boldly rebuked their error. Jesus clearly did not sympathize with the modern view that preachers should preach a "positive" message that does not boldly confront sin.

Verses 39,40

40. What witness testified to Jesus according to v39? How did this witness bear testimony for Jesus?

41. What consequences follow if we do not come to Jesus (v40)?

The Scriptures (fulfilled prophecy) as a witness

Now another witness is called to testify for Jesus — **Scripture**. The Jews searched the Scriptures, because they recognized them as the source of life. That is good, and we ought to do the same. The Scriptures give testimony of Jesus, and we can benefit from that testimony by accepting Jesus' will for our lives and so be saved (cf. Luke 24:27,44-46; Acts 2:25ff; 3:18ff; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; etc.).

How did the Scriptures testify of Jesus? By the prophecies, which He fulfilled. Hence, Jesus here makes the argument that they can know He is the Son of God, because He fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture. The accounts of Jesus' life are filled with examples of Old Testament prophecies that He fulfilled. Jesus had not cited any of them here, but they are cited in many other places.

The Jews, however, for all their professions of respect for Scripture, had ulterior motives (cf. vv 41,44; Matt. 6:1ff; 23:1ff; 27:18; John 12:41-43). Though they studied the Scriptures, they rejected the One to whom the Scriptures pointed. As a result, they did not have the life which the Scriptures predicted and which they hoped to have through the Scriptures.

Perhaps the Jews thought that they could have eternal life simply by observing the Old Testament law. But life was not in the Old Testament itself. As taught much more fully later, everyone under the law violated that law, and as a result all stood condemned by the law (Gal. 3:10; Rom. 3:20). The law served to tell people they were sinners, but it could not really forgive the sins committed (Heb. 10:3,4; Acts 13:39). So the law could not give life; it gave only condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7-11). In fact, life truly came, not by the Old Testament law which the Jews trusted in, but by means of the One predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures (vv 21,24-26; 1:4). But the Jews had rejected the One who was predicted; as a result, they failed to obtain life in the only way their Scriptures could have led them to it.

We today ought also to use fulfilled prophecy as a proof of who Jesus is. If we so believe, we too can have life through Him (John 14:6). But if we reject the evidence of the Scriptures about who Jesus is, then like the Jews, we cannot have life.

Verses 41,42

42. What problem did the Jews have that explained why they rejected Jesus (v42)?

Jesus does not need human honor.

This passage is best understood by comparing it to v44. The Jews glorified one another, instead of seeking honor from God. That is why they rejected Jesus. This is the sense in which Jesus is saying He did not receive honor from men.

He does not mean that men should not honor Him or that He would reject the honor if they truly gave it. His point is that, unlike the Jewish leaders, pleasing the people was not the goal He emphasized. His determination was to do the Father's will (v30) regardless of what people thought, whether it be the Jewish leaders or anyone else. Failure to maintain this motivation is what led to the Jews' downfall (see notes on v44).

The Jews' conduct showed they did not really love God.

Jesus had the ability to read the hearts of men (John 2:25). As a result, He knew that these Jews did not have the love of God in them. He could also tell by their conduct, since those who love God will keep His commands (John 14:15,21-24; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6). Had they loved God as they should have, they would have obeyed Him.

Specifically, these were the reasons why these people were rejecting Jesus and opposing His work. They claimed to reject Him on the grounds that He broke the Sabbath and made Himself equal to God (v18). But that was not the root cause of their problems. Their problems were caused by an improper attitude toward God and too great a desire to please themselves and one another.

Note that it is important to establish the truth by evidence, as Jesus had already done. It is also important to disprove the arguments of those who disagree, as Jesus had also already done. But it is also important in teaching to challenge the root causes that keep people from accepting the truth.

Often the real reason people do not accept truth is, not that there is a lack of evidence nor that the evidence has not been clearly presented, but rather it is because their motives are not right. The problem is not evidence, but attitude. People generally make arguments to defend

their view, but the real problem is they have motives for not wanting the truth (2 Timothy 4:2-4). This needs to be challenged.

Verse 43

43. In whose name did Jesus come, and how did the people react?

44. What does it mean to act in the name of God? What lesson can we learn?

They rejected Jesus but accepted others with less proof.

Jesus came in His Father's name — by His authority, acting as He directs, as His representative, having His stamp of approval and proof of authenticity (see vv 19,30; cf. Acts 4:7-11). He had given the proof of His authority by His miracles and other evidence He had just cited. Yet despite the evidence, they had rejected Him. This is what proves that they did not love God and their hearts were not right (v42). The problem was not lack of evidence, but an improper attitude toward evidence.

Yet the same people, in many cases, will accept men as being from God, even when those men have no such proof as Jesus had. Men might come acting in their own name — i.e., God had not given them their message, and they could not prove they were from God. Yet, the people would honor such men as being from God and would accept their teachings! Why was this so? Because the men said what the people wanted to hear (2 Tim. 4:2-4)! In the case at hand, if men would honor the Jewish leaders, teach what they wanted to hear, meet their expectations, and play by their rules, then the Jews would accept them as good teachers despite the lack of evidence.

In truth, the Jews leaders themselves **were** the very kind of people Jesus was here describing: men who claimed to be from God yet had no proof of it. Yet, many people honored and accepted them as men of God. Meanwhile, the Jews would reject Jesus, despite the fact He had proved Himself to be from God. This shows the people had an attitude problem.

The principle of Divine authority

Note how this passage demonstrates the principle of Divine vs. human authority. As taught in many Scriptures, we must have God's authority in order to act in His service. In order to know we should not participate in an activity in God's service, we do not need a passage that specifically forbids the act. If God has not authorized an activity, then that alone is reason enough not to do that act. See Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13.

Jesus here expresses this principle in terms of whose name we may act. He came in the Father's name — i.e., the Father authorized Him to teach and practice as He did. The Jews were wrong because they rejected what the Father had authorized. But Jesus went further. He said that they would receive one who came in his own name — i.e., one who acted by human authority without Divine authorization. His point is clearly that these people would be just as wrong to follow someone who acted without Divine authority as they were to reject one who had Divine authority. So, Jesus Himself here proclaims the principle that we must not act by human authority without Divine authority. One who acts on his own authority is wrong, and the rest of us must not follow him. Furthermore, we should not "receive" him — do not encourage him or accept him as having Divine approval. Cf. 2 John 9-11.

For further discussion of our need for Bible authority, see articles on this subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verse 44

45. In v44, what other problem kept the Jews from believing in Jesus?

46 Find and list other passages confirming that this was a problem the Jews had.
(Thought question: How does v44 help explain the sense in which Jesus did not receive glory from men (v41)?)

The Jews honored one another, but rejected true honor.

Jesus was not amazed that the Jews rejected and disbelieved Him. How could they possibly believe, when their motives were not right? They were seeking honor and praises from men and from one another, patting one another on the back, rather than being primarily concerned about pleasing God. People with such motives will necessarily reject truth on some critical point(s), and that is exactly why these people had rejected Jesus.

Other passages show that the desire to please men was a common problem with these Jews (cf. vv 39,40,41; Matt. 6:1-18; 23:1-12; John 12:42,43; 2 Cor. 10:12,18). We need to take warning and make sure our own motives are pure. Jesus was primarily concerned about pleasing His Father, and that likewise must be our goal. Otherwise, we too will be led astray like the Jews.

Note again that today, as then, there will be people who will argue as if the reason they disagree with a teaching is that they find some fault in it according to God's word. Yet when evidence is shown to prove the teaching is in harmony with God's word, they will continue to reject it. The problem in such cases is not that the evidence is weak or unclear. The problem is the motives and attitudes of the people. Until those change, no amount of evidence will produce obedience. We need to understand this in our teaching (see notes on v42).

Verses 45-47

47. Who would accuse the Jews of their errors, and what does this mean (vv 45-47)?

48. Special Assignment: Explain the connection between believing (or not believing in Moses) and believing (or not believing) in Jesus.

The writings of Moses testified regarding Jesus.

The Jews had argued that Jesus was wrong because He disobeyed the Sabbath command, which had been taught by Moses. They rested their case on the teachings of Moses (or so they pretended). Jesus here responded by himself appealing to Moses and showing that Moses did not justify their views. On the contrary, it was the teachings of Moses that showed these men were in error!

Jesus said He was not the one (i.e., not the only one or even necessarily the main one) accusing them of being in error. The people did not need to take Jesus' word for it that He was from God and these Jews were in error. He had other evidence. Moses himself — the very one in whom they all trusted and claimed to follow — was the one who accused them! How so?

Moses had predicted the Messiah and prepared the people for his coming. Jesus had fulfilled these predictions; so, in rejecting Jesus, the Jews were also rejecting Moses. See for example Deut. 18:15-19 and compare to Peter's comments in Acts 3:22ff. Consider also the promise God made to Abraham, recorded by Moses in Gen. 12:1ff, and fulfilled by Jesus (Acts 3:25,26). The Book of Hebrews also shows how Jesus thoroughly fulfilled the Old Testament types and shadows. This illustrates what Jesus meant when He said that the writings of Moses and the Scriptures testified of Him (v39).

To truly accept Moses, therefore, all of us must accept Jesus, since Jesus fulfilled these prophecies about the coming Messiah, prophet, etc. But if, like the Jews, one claims to believe in Moses and yet rejects Christ, then such an one stands condemned, not just by what Jesus says, but also by the testimony of Moses.

Note how Jesus concludes His defense to these Jews by showing that, not only did His position not contradict the commands of God, but neither was it in conflict with Moses' teaching. Contrary to the Jews' ideas, both the Father and Moses approved of Jesus.

This also, incidentally, shows that Jesus approved of what Moses wrote. Jesus in fact claimed that Moses' writings proved Him to be who He claimed to be. Though Jesus removed the law given by Moses, there was no conflict between Him and Moses. They worked in harmony according to God's plan. If someone today denies the inspiration or accuracy of anything Moses wrote, therefore, he is also contradicting Jesus, just as surely as rejecting Jesus would constitute rejecting Moses.

Finally, note the skill of the Teacher in using the evidence accepted by His opponents to show how that very evidence proves the opponents to be wrong and the Teacher to be right. We should use this approach in teaching as well. Often those who oppose what we teach are themselves in contradiction to the authorities they appeal to. They claim that certain authorities prove their view is correct; but properly used, those same authorities may often demonstrate that in fact the position taken by those very people is in error. If so, it is effective to point this out, especially since they have already accepted the authority.

And once again note how plainly and boldly Jesus rebuked error. When people teach like this today, they are often accused of not having "the spirit of Christ," or not being "Christ-like." Those who make such accusations prove that they do not even understand the spirit or nature of Christ. He Himself clearly believed in rebuking sin firmly.

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