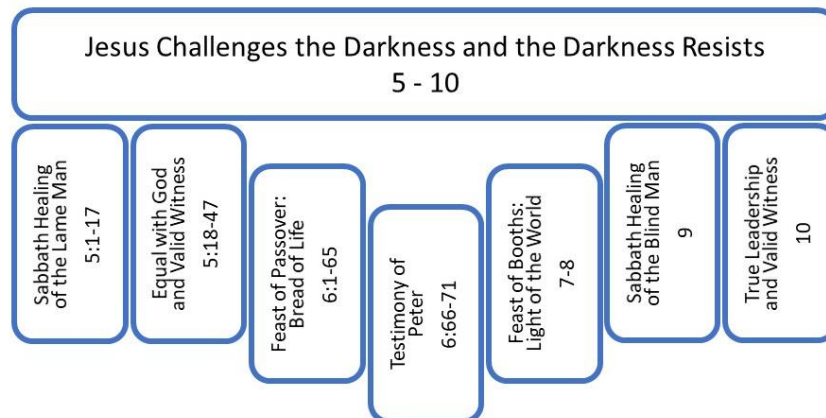


Lesson 10: John 5:1-30 Healing of the Lame Man and Equality with God

Introduction



Do you consider Jesus offensive? There is a lot about Jesus that is not offensive. Jesus as the baby in the manger is not offensive, Jesus inviting children to himself, Jesus forgiving sinners who come to him, Jesus who did not come to judge but to save. There is a problem for us presented by Jesus. Jesus makes the true nature of God concrete and less abstract. To say that God is love is abstract. What do we really mean by that? To say that God is love, so he became a man and died on a cross gives concrete reality to the assertion that God is love. But it also gives you a choice. Now you are not faced with belief of an undefined abstract principle about God. "God is love." Everybody can claim to believe that if they want to. Jesus forces you to go further. Do you believe God is love inevitably ends with God becoming man and dying on a cross? Do you believe in that particular, concrete act of love? If you reject that act of love, you are rejecting the biblical vision of God. The physical presence of Jesus in the world forces us to make a choice about who God is. Is he the God of Jesus Christ? Or is he some other god? The two cannot be the same. There is no God who is not one with Jesus Christ. To reject God the Son is at the same time to reject God the Father.

Are the claims of Jesus offensive to you? His claims were offensive to many in his day. After Jesus heals the lame man in John 5, he makes some claims about himself which draws anger from some who hear him. John records that response in 5:18.

¹⁸ 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.

We have not encountered much by way of opposition to Jesus in the first four chapters of John. That changes in this second major section of John, starting right here at the beginning with the first story. This section of text, chapters 5-10, is marked off by two Sabbath healings, which provide pretext for the Jewish rulers to go on the attack against Jesus whose ministry increasingly challenged their authority. The theme of opposition against Jesus indicated in the very first verses of chapter 1 is now being addressed by John and will carry through the rest of the Gospel. The light of the world has come, but the darkness does not comprehend the light and seeks to overcome the light.

I have titled this larger second section of John, "Jesus Challenges the Darkness and the Darkness Resists." And I have divided the chapters according to the parallelism that seems apparent in the text. We will have seven divisions, like our last section, but not purely chiastic. Almost chiastic, but not quite. The structure can be seen as chiastic if we only have five divisions of text. This structure would be bounded at beginning and end by the two Sabbath healings which are the healing of the lame man in chapter 5, and the healing of the blind man in chapters 9-10. These are also the third and sixth signs reported by John. After the healing of the lame man we have the Feast of Passover in chapter 6 paralleled with the Feast of Booths in chapters 7-8. I am recognizing the Testimony of Peter

in 6:66-71 as the center of the section. So, we have two signs, two feasts, and a central testimony. That's five divisions. But the two healings really divide into two divisions each. Both healings are followed by teaching from Jesus in response to opposition. After the healing of the lame man, we have Jesus asserting his equality with God and stating his witnesses. After the healing of the blind man, we have Jesus asserting true leadership and again stating witnesses. Dividing these two divisions gives us our seven divisions for the larger section. We have a Sabbath healing on one end, followed by the claims of Jesus, and a Sabbath healing on the other end, followed by claims of Jesus, moving in we have the dialogue that occurs at two feasts, Passover and then Booths. And in the center, we have the testimony of Peter.

Starting with this first Sabbath healing, we will consider closely the claims Jesus makes about himself. What has gotten the Jewish leaders so riled up? Why do they want to kill Jesus? Are their charges against him accurate? Do they really understand the claims of Jesus? We are going to see that they do understand what Jesus is saying. And that is precisely what makes them so mad. Jesus offends them.

We have three parts to the text in chapter 5: the sign, the claims, and the witnesses. Jesus' claims and explanation of witnesses are quite important and worth careful thought. So, we will address the sign and claims in this lesson and then hold off the witnesses until the next lesson.

We begin with the sign in John 5:1-17.

The Third Sign: Healing of the Lame Man (5:1-17)

¹ After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. ³ In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; ⁴ for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.] ⁵ A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" ⁷ The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." ⁸ Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." ⁹ Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. ¹⁰ So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." ¹¹ But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" ¹² They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up *your pallet* and walk?'" ¹³ But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in *that* place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." ¹⁵ The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

This is our third feast if we count the wedding feast. And I like to count the wedding feast because that gives us a total of seven feasts reported in John's Gospel. This is an unknown feast. Some think it should be read as "the feast," which is the way some Greek manuscripts have it. "The feast" would indicate the Passover. But we do not know for sure. So, we'll just leave it as an unknown feast.

Except for the wedding feast, which was in Cana, and the Passover in chapter 6 which was in Galilee, every other feast is a reason to find Jesus in Jerusalem. In this scene, Jesus is at a pool credited with healing qualities. It is not clear what the word sheep refers to in the Greek text. Most likely it is not the sheep pool, but the sheep gate. Nehemiah referred to a sheep gate in Jerusalem's wall. If this is

what sheep indicates here, then the pool is by a small gate on the north wall of Jerusalem. The name Bethesda means “house of outpouring.”

The second half of verse 3 and all of verse 4 may or may not be in your Bible. The ESV has left it out. My NASB has marked it off with brackets. And the footnote explains that many manuscripts do not have this text. The part marked off is this,

[waiting for the moving of the waters; ⁴ for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.]

Some scholars believe this part of the text did not appear in a number of manuscripts because it was added later to explain the tradition behind the healing power of the disturbed waters. Whether this text is original or not, I think we are supposed to take the belief that the waters had healing power as folk religion. John reports what was believed about the pool, but neither Jesus nor John affirms the truthfulness of the belief. Every religion has various kinds of healing myths. Christians in many different parts of the world have developed their own extra-biblical beliefs and practices. When you are suffering, maybe even dying, and you have no hope for healing through conventional means, the motive to try unconventional means can understandably become quite strong. It is not surprising to find the sick of Jerusalem gathered by a pool with a healing myth and supposed healing properties.

Jesus asked the man a rhetorical question, “Do you wish to get well?” The question draws out a response. The man explains that the problem is not with his wishing, and apparently not with the power of the pool, but simply because he cannot get into the pool in time.

Jesus has no limitations on his healing power. He simply says, “Arise, take up your pallet, and walk.” Sometimes God requires the human element of faith to be present for healing to take place. If a person will not believe in Jesus, the person will not receive the blessing of healing. This is not one of those times. Jesus is only limited by human faith when he chooses to be limited by human faith. Here he chooses to act in power regardless of what the lame man knows or believes. The result: the man immediately becomes well, takes up his pallet, and begins to walk.

You have to imagine that someone noticed what just happened. The man had been lame for 38 years. And he had been lying here a long time. Now he just gets up and walks. Somebody must have noticed. The surprising part of the story is what some religious people noticed. Their first instinct is to judge the problem with the healing. That may have been the essence of their religion. Honor comes from the ability to appear in complete compliance with the law. Shame belongs to those who fail to keep the law. This man deserves shame because he has failed to keep the Sabbath rules.

He is walking around with his pallet. That is his failure. It is not a prohibition of Old Testament law. The Old Testament prohibition is broad with room for interpretation. Jews are not to work on the Sabbath. It is not at all clear at all that a lame man who has just been healed and who picks up his mat is doing the kind of work prohibited by the law. But the elders of Israel had added rules upon rules to make sure everyone knew exactly what is defined as work and what is not defined as work. Picking up your pallet and walking with it apparently falls into the culturally defined category of work.

And we might be surprised that these Jewish watchdogs jump on the lame man for working on the Sabbath instead of rejoicing that he was healed on the Sabbath. But let’s assume that these religious policemen did not know the lame man, and they did not see him healed. They just saw a man walking under the colonnade, openly breaking a known Sabbath rule. So, we get why they accused the man. But then the man responded, “He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Take up your pallet and walk.’”

I can’t tell if the man was embarrassed by being called out. He must be pretty excited that after 38 years he is walking. If shamed, he may have shifted blame to Jesus. But maybe he is just responding with enthusiasm, “The man who made me well, told me.” I assume his emphasis was on “the man who made me well.” This is where we have to stop being gracious to the religious men who have

stopped him. Up to this point, we get that they are focused on the flagrant Sabbath breaking. He is going against a social convention. It is really obvious. Somebody needs to put a stop to this. But didn't they hear what the man just said. He said, "the man who healed me."

But they are so fixated on the minor infraction of carrying a pallet on the Sabbath, it does not even seem to register in their brains that this man is claiming to be healed. They should have paused and asked, "What do you mean the man who healed you? Healed you from what?" Instead, they say, "Who told you to pick up your mat?" Like they didn't even hear he just said he was healed. They are stuck in their religious rut, intent on finding someone to blame for this blatant Sabbath breaking. They demand to know, "Who said to you to pick up your mat?" not because they want to know about the healing, but because they have a grievance.

This man did not even know who healed him. That's how well he knew Jesus when he was healed. He did not know him at all. But Jesus knows the man. And Jesus comes to him. Three things stand out to me here. First, Jesus finds him. Jesus knew what he was doing when he told the man to pick up his pallet and walk. He knew that the man would experience antagonism for the act. He also knew this would be good for the man. Jesus sometimes puts us in tough situations. He is the shepherd. We obey his lead. But he did not abandon the man. Jesus allowed the man to face opposition and then came to him. Jesus sought him out to guide him in the right way forward.

Second, I find it interesting where Jesus found the man. Where did the man go after being healed? He did not go home. He did not go to the market. He went to the temple. I am not sure what to make of that, but it seems like a positive mark in the man's favor. He may have gone there to report to the priests so that he could go through ceremonial cleansing, or he may have gone to the temple to give thanks to God.

Third, I find it interesting what Jesus said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." We might question here whether the man's lameness was due to his sin. That question will be addressed in the parallel account in chapter 9. Without reading too much into this statement, I see Jesus pointing the man from physical sickness and healing to the more important reality of spiritual sickness and healing. Jesus is willing to heal physically. But that is not the most pressing need of any person. True, eternal life comes by addressing the more fundamental problem of human sin. Jesus is pointing the man toward what is more essential so that his physical healing would not be an end goal but would instead be a turning point.

Jesus' command not to sin brings up again the ethical dimension of faith. We encountered this in the testimony of John the Baptist when he made a similar connection. That was in 3:36. He said, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John makes a connection between faith and obedience. Jesus is directing this healed man towards obedience. The connection between moral obedience and faith is just hinted at in this early chapters of John. John keeps his focus on the nature of Jesus and the nature of faith, John does not provide us with any of the moral teaching that we encounter throughout the other Gospels. We don't get the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of John. We don't get, "Be salt. Be light." And what that should look like. John's focus is on the nature of Jesus and the nature of faith. In John, we are going to have to wait for development of obedience in context with Jesus' final preparation of his disciples. So, it is going to come in John. But that is going to be in chapters 13-17. Prior to that the emphasis is on faith alone.

The main purpose of the story we have here seems to be to highlight the antagonism against Jesus that comes from men determined not to see the message of the healing sign. After the first sign, the disciples believed. After the second sign, the nobleman and his household believed. After this sign, no one is said to believe.

A miracle of great power has been performed. Isaiah specifically prophesied that the Messiah would heal the lame. And yet, there is no investigation into the miracle at all. No one is even trying to read the sign. They have already made their mind up about Jesus. They just want to shut him down. It is not clear whether the lame man is complicit in this. He does go to tell Jewish leaders that he has identified Jesus. We do not know if there was malice in that action. Was the man acting against Jesus? Or was he witnessing to Jesus? The text leaves me wondering. I am not sure.

The intent of the leaders is not in doubt. Verse 16 tells us, "For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath." Jesus knew quite well what he was doing when he told the man, "take up your pallet." That did not need to be part of the healing command. But it was. Jesus knew he was commanding the man to break the Sabbath rules. And I say rules because I do not believe Jesus was commanding the man to break the Sabbath law of Moses, but he was willing to break the additional tradition of the Jewish elders. Jesus is not at all bound by our favorite religious traditions or rules. Having the man break those rules set up a faith challenge for religious people. Would the power of the miracle move them to question their own tradition and assumptions or were they so confident in the rightness of their perspective that they would disregard any possible sign communicated through the miracle?

The Jewish leaders were not ready at all to reconsider their own position. Jesus had poked a hornet's nest. And in doing so on the Sabbath, he gave the Jewish leaders ammunition for accusation. And when they did come to charge Jesus, he gave them even more. Jesus challenges the darkness in their hearts when he answers their charge with these words, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." This is how the darkness responds.

¹⁸ 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.

That's the charge of the Jews. He is making himself equal with God. Jesus claims to be doing the work of the Father as justification for breaking their Sabbath rules. Jesus claims to be over the Sabbath and he places himself on the level of God. At least, that's how the Jews heard it.

Those who deny that Jesus elevated himself to the level of God, like Jehovah's Witnesses for example, they would read this as though the Jews misunderstood what Jesus really meant. They would say that when Jesus says he is doing what the Father does, he is modeling what we should all strive to do. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth as in heaven." We should all try to follow the will of God; all try to do to the works the Father is doing. They would argue that the Jews have misunderstood what Jesus was saying.

And that is not a bad argument because the Jews often and regularly misunderstand what Jesus is saying. So, they would say that Jesus is not saying he is the same as God. Jesus is just promoting true relationship with God. Jesus is the model. We can be like Jesus. We do the works of God and that does not make us equal to God. The argument is that the Jews just misunderstood what Jesus was saying.

When we consider the Jews misunderstood, it is not a bad argument. Our point about the Jewish leaders is that they are in the dark. They do not see. They do not understand Jesus. So, it is quite possible that they have misunderstood Jesus on this point. We cannot automatically take their declaration about Jesus to be accurate. So, how do we know what Jesus was saying?

Well, fortunately for us, in this case, all we have to do is read on and let Jesus tell us whether or not he is claiming equality with God. The claims of Jesus come in the middle section of chapter 5, verses 19-30. So, we are going to move on to those claims now. This is an incredibly important section of Scripture. It often gets passed over. Let's read the text, 19-30,

Claims of Equality with God (5:19-30)

- A ¹⁹ 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.
- B ²⁰ 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**.
- C ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them **life**, even so the Son also gives **life** to whom He wishes. ²² For not even the Father **judges** anyone, but He has given all **judgment** to the Son, ²³ 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.
- D ²⁴ **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**.
- D’ ²⁵ **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**.
- C’ ²⁶ For just as the Father has **life** in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have **life** in Himself; ²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute **judgment**, because He is *the* Son of Man.
- B’ ²⁸ **Do not marvel** at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ 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.
- A’ ³⁰ **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.”

In our last chapter, with the Samaritan woman, the Samaritan villagers, the Galileans and the Nobleman, we focused on the second great theme of John, the nature of faith. Here, we return to the first great theme of John, the nature of Jesus. Who does Jesus claim to be? What is his own revelation about himself?

What stood out to you when we read through the passage? Were there any phrases that just jumped out? I have found this text hard to get a hold of mentally when I read it straight through. I know there are a lot of important truths here. But it is difficult to get it organized in my head. And so, as I read it through it is kind of like one thing pushes out the other. There is a lot of repetition in the text. And my mind struggles to put it all together. The repetition is the key to the organization of the text. And understanding the organization of the text highlights the key points of emphasis. And it should not be a surprise to us by now that the repetition in the text might indicate a chiasmic structure. And it does.

I’ll give you an overview of the pattern and then address the parallel pairs together. If you would like a visual of this pattern, check out the text in the transcript for this lesson at observetheword.com.

The passage begins and ends with Jesus telling us, “the Son can do nothing on his own initiative.” That is one of the more apparent repetitions. That is in verse 19, and it is in verse 30. So, that is our A and A’, beginning and end. In verse 20, Jesus says, “You will marvel.” Then in verses 28-29 he says, “Do not marvel.” That is our B and B’. In verses 21-23, Jesus tells us God has given him power over life and authority to judge. He repeats both claims in 26-27. That is C and C’. Then in the center of the passage, both verse 24 and 25 begin with “Truly, truly,” and both declare that the one who hears has life. That is D and D’.

Let’s consider each pair together starting with A and A’. These are the first and last verses.

A and A' Separate and Submissive

This is verse 19.

¹⁹ 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.

And verse 30.

³⁰ **“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.

Ok. So, you probably caught the phrases this time that stand out. These are “the Son can do nothing of Himself” and “I can do nothing of My own initiative.” In the first verse, Jesus links this to what He sees the Father doing. Jesus must act in harmony with what he sees. In the second verse, Jesus connects his limitation to the will of the Father. Jesus will not act based on his own will but only in harmony with the will of the Father. These statements emphasize the separateness or uniqueness of Father and Son and also the submission of the Son. This is the reality expressed in the phrase from John 1:1, “the Word was with God.” The Father and the Son are two different persons acting in complete harmony. They are able to be with each other because they are separate. In the separate unique roles of Father and Son, Jesus declares his own submission to the Father. Harmony is achieved as the Son acts according to what he sees in the Father and according to what the Father wills.

We have to be very careful in how we interpret this because we do not want to lessen the Son’s equality with the Father. But, at the same time, we do not want to eliminate the distinctiveness of the Son from the Father. I think we can say that Jesus could act on his own apart from the Father in a theoretical sense. Jesus has a will and he can act. But in actual practice, the Son is in such harmony and submission to the will of the Father that the Son will never, in fact, act contrary to the Father. The perfect consistency of the Son’s own character constrains him to always choose to act out of love and submission to the Father, such that, he will never act on his own initiative independently from God the Father. He can do nothing on his own by the constraint of his own character. The character of the Son is such that he must always choose to do right in relationship with God the Father. According to his own nature “the Son can do nothing of Himself.”

I like very much how Jesus bookends this speech. He is getting ready to claim great power and authority on the level of equality with God. But on either side of those claims, at our beginning and our end, Jesus asserts both the uniqueness of personality between Father and Son and also his submission as Son to the Father. The tension created by the outer frame and the center of the passage is the tension of the trinity. The Word is both with God, that is distinct from God, and the Word is God, that is equal to God.

Moving on to B and B’, Jesus creates a contrast between marveling and not marveling.

B and B’ Marvel at the works and accept the claims.

This is verse 20.

²⁰ “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.**

And then verses 28-29.

²⁸ **“Do not marvel** at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ 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.

B, which is verse 20, serves as a transition from the idea of separateness and submission in A to the idea of equality in C whereas B’, which is 28-29, transitions from equality in C’ back to separateness and submission in A’

Verse 20 emphasizes that because of the love of the Father, the Son sees all things that the Father sees. Jesus has said he does the works of the Father and here he asserts that he is aware of all the works of the Father, even greater works not yet done. He is aware because the Father, motivated by love, holds nothing back from the Son. These greater works to come are going to make us marvel. If you have not marveled yet at the miracles of Jesus, just you wait.

But after Jesus says that. After he tells us, “The works should make you marvel,” he is going to go on in the center of this passage to make claims, amazing claims, about himself. And then he is going to come back in verses 28-29 to tell us the opposite, “Do not marvel.” Having marveled at the greatness of his works, do not marvel at his claims. Jesus is playing on two different aspects of marvel here. The first aspect of marveling is simply to stand in awe and wonder at the great things we see that are beyond physics, it is impossible, but Jesus is doing them. We marvel.

The second aspect includes a refusal to accept these things that have shocked us. This marveling is an inability or unwillingness to accept the claims that Jesus has made about himself. And Jesus says, “Don’t do that.” If you have marveled at the healing of the lame man or the feeding of five thousand or the walking on water or even what’s to come, the raising of the dead, and my own resurrection from the grave, when that has happened, and you marvel at these things, as you should, do not marvel at my claims. The works prove the claims. And if I claim the authority to have life and I prove it by taking my own life up again, then do not remain resistant, marveling in unbelief at the claims proven by the works. That is the play of words that I believe is going on with the marveling.

If we continue to marvel at the miraculous works of Jesus, but we suspect his claims, we refuse to admit that he is indeed God, then we are left unable to account for his power, but worse than that, we are excluded from relationship with him. The sign does not work. It does not actually take us into faith in Jesus. Once you have marveled, accept the witness of the works and marvel no longer. The Word is among you. Behold his glory and believe.

We also get in verse 29 another connection between righteous behavior and belief. Jesus has insisted that eternal life comes by faith in him and here he indicates that faith in him is in line with a resurrection of life to those who did good and a resurrection of judgment to those who do evil. But as I have already said, we are going to have to wait for chapters 13-17 for John to explain how he understands the connection that exists between eternal life that comes through faith alone and the requirement of righteous living. So, how do faith and obedience work together. We are going to have to wait for that. But it is here.

We are now ready to hear the claims of Jesus in C and C’.

C and C’ Power to Give Life and Authority to Judge

This is 21-23. These are the claims.

²¹ “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them **life**, even so the Son also gives **life** to whom He wishes. ²² “For not even the Father **judges** anyone, but He has given all **judgment** to the Son, ²³ 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.

And then 26-27.

²⁶ “For just as the Father has **life** in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have **life** in Himself; ²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute **judgment**, because He is *the* Son of Man.

If we wondered whether Jesus’ claim about doing the works of the Father is really a claim to equality with God or if we wonder when Jesus talks about being submissive to God and not being able to do anything on his own, whether he is separate from God, these verses strongly swing us back the other way to recognize that Jesus is claiming nothing less than equality with the Father. And if A and A’ align better with “the Word was with God,” the distinctiveness, C and C’ align better with “the Word was God,” equal, one.

C' restates the two assertions of C. First, Jesus asserts that his power to give life is equal to that of the Father. "For just as the Father...even so the Son." Second, Jesus claims that all judgment has been given into his hands. This is the other side of the truth stated back in John 3:17 where we were told "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world." Well, that is because the Son already holds all humanity under judgment with the Father. The world did not need to be judged. The world needed to be saved.

Power to give life and the authority to judge all men, those are not works that humans do in the attempt to model their lives after God. Those are works appropriate to God alone. What human has the right to give anyone life? Or can give himself life? What human truly has the right to judge other men, much less all 7 billion men. These are claims of equality with God.

Jesus connects himself so closely to God that he is able to say in verse 23, "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."

I began this lesson with the strong assertion that Jesus makes the nature of God more concrete and to reject Jesus is to reject God. I base that statement on claims Jesus makes throughout this Gospel such as the one we have just read in verse 23, "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."

When I hear someone suggest that the God of Jews, Muslims and Christians is the same God, this is the passage I think of first. There are other places we could go to. We should show how the Jewish and Muslim visions of God make too little of human sin, suggesting that human beings can somehow be pleasing to God through religious ritual and moral behavior. We should also show how the Jewish and Muslim visions of God, making too little of human sin, also misunderstand the immensity of God's mercy and grace. And I would make those arguments to anyone who suggests that Jews, Muslims and Christians worship the same God, protesting that, "No, really the character of the God of the Bible is very different from the character of the God presented by Jews or the God presented by Muslims." But before I made those arguments, I would simply come to this passage.

"He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father." Anyone who claims to believe in God and yet, dishonors the Son, does not truly believe in God, at least not in the God of Jesus Christ. They may believe in a god that has some of the same characteristics as the biblical God. But they do not know the true God.

The divine qualities of justice and love find full expression in Jesus. If a person truly knows God the Father, then even if that person had not known God the Son, when they learn about the Son, they will see the Father in him and receive him. If they do not see the Father in the Son, then they did not really know the Father after all.

There are attributes of God that Jewish, Muslim and Christian theology all agree on. Those theological beliefs can provide common ground that we can use as a bridge to discuss what we believe about who God is. We agree on some things. But just because our understanding of a person includes some important similarities, that we agree about some attributes, that does not mean that any one of us truly knows the person about whom we speak. If a person hears the truth about Jesus and determines that Jesus cannot be God, then that person has decided not to believe to know God as he has revealed himself. God has revealed himself in Jesus. To reject Jesus is to reject God. If you reject Jesus, you cannot know God. You cannot go further. In rejecting Jesus, you reject the essential nature of the God of the Bible of the Father. And you choose to accept a different version of God, one that is inspired by human thought and human philosophy.

When the eyes of the human heart are opened, when a person begins to see with saving faith, that person sees God the Father in Jesus and marvels. They say, "Now I see. Now I understand. This is truly who God is!" That is the claim of Jesus. And it is in full agreement with what he is going to tell Philip later in chapter 14.

⁸ Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

Having claimed the power to give life and the authority to judge, Jesus goes on to make the audacious claim that we find in D and D’, this is verses 24-25.

D and D’ Eternal Life to all Who Hear and Believe

²⁴ **“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**.

And again,

²⁵ **“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**.

Both verses start with “Truly, truly, I say to you” and both use the parallel terms hear and live. Verse 24 adds the word believe. In this context hearing is more than sound waves vibrating in the ear. Hearing in this sense includes both understanding and submission to that understanding. A child knows what their mom means when she says, “Look at me. Did you hear what I said? Did you hear me?” Submission to the hearing is expected. Hearing, understanding, receiving, truly believing in Jesus Christ leads to eternal life. The one who has power to give life and the one who has authority to judge says that if you believe in him then you have eternal life and do not come into judgment. These are the claims of Jesus.

Reflection questions

1. Read the story of the healing of the lame man in John 5:1-18. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. How would you describe the difference between the healing the man hopes for from the pool and the healing the man receives from Jesus?
3. How do you explain the animosity of the Jews against Jesus that seems to irrationally ignore the possibility of a miraculous sign?
4. Read the speech of Jesus in John 5:19-30. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
5. How do you understand the proclamation by Jesus that the Son can do nothing apart from the Father? Why does Jesus say that in this context? What does he mean by that?
6. Do you agree or disagree that Jesus claims here equality with God? Why or why not?
7. How would you respond to the claim that Muslims, Jews, and Christians worship the same God? Would you agree or disagree with that statement? Why or why not?