

A Killer Truth: Jesus is God

John 5:18-47 (page 890); January 10, 2016

Introduction: As many of you know, I'm a huge college football fan (I know, I know...most people up here only care about the NFL). I played football in college at Appalachian State University but I grew up a huge, and I mean huge, Clemson Tiger fan. I still pull for ASU (they had a great year and won their first ever bowl this year) but Clemson is ranked #1 in the country and tomorrow night plays for the National Championship. How appropriate is it that I get to preach today? The last time they won a National Championship was 1981, the year that I was born. One of the questions I've been thinking about this past week is this: "What's at stake?"

- A nice trophy. Accolades. Praise. A nice raise for the coaches. A nice ring for everyone associated with the team. Bragging rights with Will Pope and Amanda and Erric Price.
- These are all really cool and fun, but eventually, they are going to wear off. In just a few months, everyone will be talking about next year. In a few years, most people won't even remember who won the national championship in the 2015-16 season (who won it last year? Yep, Ohio State).
- I'd like for you to ask a similar question about our text today concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ. What's at stake? Why does it even matter? What implications does it have for my life? As we will see, the stakes concerning the truth about Jesus have far lasting effects than those that will be gained from winning the National Championship. For, as we are going to see, it is in Jesus the one truly experiences eternal life.

The Context (5:1-17):

- Jesus' healing on the Sabbath sets the stage for us to rightly understand one of the greatest, Christological discourses in all of Scripture.
- Jesus heals a man at the Pool of Bethesda who had been an invalid for 38 years. Pause and let that sink in for second (38 YEARS!!!). And all Jesus does to heal him is speak: "Get up, take up your bed, and walk," and it says, "At once the man was healed."
- Right after this the author, John, gives us a parenthetical comment, "Now that day was the Sabbath." Uh Oh.
- Here's the problem, according to the Jewish rulers: It wasn't lawful for this man to take up his bed because they had created a law that forbade people to move an object on the Sabbath. There's no biblical command concerning this. It was solely a law of the Jews.
- Here's what happens: Jesus is accused, not of violating the law himself, but of enticing someone else to sin by issuing a command that would have caused that person to break the law. To be clear: Jesus' command of the man to rise and walk was not in conflict with Scripture, but Jewish tradition. Thus, according to the Pharisees, Jesus is a lawbreaker.
- It's Jesus' response to the Pharisees when accused of breaking the Sabbath that prepares the way for this awesome Christological defense that we're going to explore today. He says, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (5:17).

The Killer Implication and Truth: Jesus is God (Read 5:18):

- Jesus' comment really ticked the Pharisees off to the point that now they're wanting to even *kill* him, the first recorded attempt on Jesus' life in the Gospel.

- Why did this tick the Pharisees off?
 - The consensus among the Jews was that God did work constantly, even on the Sabbath, but he's not guilty of breaking the Sabbath because the entire world is his domain.
 - What Jesus does is places his own Sabbath working activity on the same level as God. Jesus in essence says, "If God is above Sabbath regulations, so am I." And the only way this can be true is if the same factors applied to God also apply to Jesus. He's either above the law, like God, or the entire universe is his, like God.
 - The implications of Jesus' statement were clear to the Pharisees: "he was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (5:18). Jesus posed as a threat to their monotheistic belief in one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 40:18, 25). In fact, this charge of blasphemy is what John says ultimately leads to his crucifixion (19:7).
- Thus, Jesus' explanation of his work on the Sabbath was even more offensive than his effort to heal on the Sabbath. As a result, the controversy of the Sabbath takes a back seat to the more important dialogue concerning Jesus' relationship with God the Father.
- Here is the irony: According to the Pharisees, Jesus is guilty as charged, because he claims to be equal with God, and yet he is completely innocent.
- What follows is an uninterrupted defense by Jesus of his divinity and equality with God.

But let's ask the question: What's the big deal? Why does it matter if Jesus is God? What's at stake? This passage is broken down into two sections, the first is Jesus' self-testimony (19-30) and the second is the testimony of others (31-47). Here's a sample of what's at stake:

- Read 5:21 - The Son gives life.
- Read 5:24 - Hearing and believing results in eternal life.
- Read 5:26 - The Son has life in himself.
- Read 5:39-40 - Life is found in Jesus.

The Point: Hear and believe the truth about Jesus and experience eternal life in him now.

If you want to experience true life now and forevermore, then you must:

I. Hear and Believe the Testimony of Jesus (19-30).

How did Jesus respond to their accusation of blasphemy?

- He didn't refute their accusation that he claimed to be God. He didn't say, "No, no guys. You've misunderstood me." Rather, he affirmed their statement and left no doubt concerning the claims that he was making.
- But Jesus was also clear that he was not equal with God as another god or as a competing god.

1. Jesus does everything that God does (19-20).

- Whatever "making himself equal with God" might mean, it doesn't mean complete or even partial independence from his Father (so Carson). Jesus was not presenting himself as another god or as a competing god. He works in accordance and submission to the Father. This unity with the Father governs everything Jesus is about to say (see 5:30).

- But this is also clear: if Jesus can do whatever the Father does, he must be as great as and as divine as the Father.
- The reason that Jesus can do everything that the Father does is because the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does (20). In response, the Son loves the Father as shown in his perfect obedience, even to death on a cross.

2. Jesus raises the dead and gives life just like God does (21, 24-26, 29).

- Jesus is no mere instrument of divine power. He gives life to whomever he wills (21) and even has life in himself (26), a divine attribute. God is the fountain of life (Ps. 36:9).
- The life that Jesus gives is accessible, in part, now (24).
 - See the present tense: “has eternal life;” “has passed from death to life.”
 - If you have placed genuine faith in Jesus, then you have already been acquitted. As Rom. 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus.” For you, it’s as if the judgment as already passed and you are now experiencing life.
 - Additionally, you don’t have to wait until the very end to start experiencing life. In a very real sense, though not in its fullest, the believer can experience true life in Christ and not just simply an anticipation of something that’s still to come. The believer “has eternal life” and “has passed from death to life” - present tense.
- The life that Jesus gives will be consummated at his return (25, 29).
 - When Jesus returns, those who have believed in him will experience resurrection life in glorified bodies for all eternity. This is what we all long for - the day when all brokenness has been wiped away everything, including our bodies, is as it was meant to be. We see an anticipatory picture of this day when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead in John 11.

3. Jesus judges with the judgment of God (22, 27, 29-30).

- God had long been recognized as the judge of all the earth (cf. Gen. 18:25).
- Now, God has determined that it will be the direct task of Jesus to judge.
- Why has God done this? Because Jesus is the Son of Man (27), probably a reference to the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:13-14. But his authority to judge is also because the revelation that he has shared has been ignored and rejected. Yet, Jesus’ judgment is not independent of the Father. His judgment is just because, in his judgment, he’s simply carrying out the will of the Father (30).
- What is Jesus’ judgment based upon? Hearing and believing his word (24).
 - The primary purpose of Jesus’ coming was salvific (3:16-17) though the result of his coming is that those who reject him will face him as their judge.
 - We should be careful to not read John as juxtaposing salvation by works with salvation by faith (cf. John 3:16; 6:29).
 - ◆ “Those who have done good” are those who have come to the light and believed.
 - ◆ “Those who have done evil” are those who have rejected the light and loved darkness.

4. Jesus should be worshiped as God is worshiped (23).

- Given everything else Jesus has claimed, this claim comes no surprise. Jesus is one with the Father not only in activity but in honor. The next step flows from this premise: if you don't honor the Son, you don't honor the Father (cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Sidebar: Isn't it arrogant to claim that Jesus is the only way to God? How could there be just one true faith? Religious exclusivity is dangerous. It may be the greatest enemy of peace in the world today.

- Let's be honest. We don't like to think about our neighbor who doesn't follow Jesus but is a super nice person who even serves his community and sacrifices for others. We don't like to think about him dying and facing eternal judgment. As one author says, "We'd rather give everyone a gold star for effort and celebrate our spiritual diversity. In short, we like inclusivity" (Alex McFarland).
- "It is no more narrow to claim that one religion is right than to claim that one way to think about all religions (namely that all are equal) is right. We are all exclusive in our beliefs about religion, but in different ways" (Tim Keller).
- How should a Christian receive and respond to these exclusive claims? "We tolerantly extend people the dignity of their own beliefs. We don't minimize the differences between religions. We honor them. The life of Christ produces in us true humility. But it also produces in us true enlightenment. We've come to grasp grace that God works His way down to us, dies for our moral and religious failures and offers us life. If this is true, we must lovingly, humbly try to persuade others to believe in Jesus, who alone offers the wonderful promise of the way to God, the truth of God and life of God" (Jonathan Dodson).

5. Jesus' word should be received as the Word of God (24, 28).

- In the same way that Jesus' word (i.e. his message) healed the invalid by the pool, his word brings eternal life. His voice is that which gives life even to dry bones (Ezek. 37).
- Our response is to receive his heard, to hear his word and to believe his word.
- Have you ever heard someone say, "My child doesn't listen very well." What do they mean by this statement? They don't obey. Similarly, hearing here includes obedience.

If you want to experience true life now and forevermore, then you must also:

II. Hear and Believe the Testimony of Others (31-47).

At this point, Jesus points that if the burden of evidence supporting his claims falls solely on himself, then his testimony shouldn't be trusted. It would be insufficient. We're the same way. We want multiple attestation for outrageous claims and this was the pattern in the OT, that required two to three witnesses to establish the truthfulness of one's claims (Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

1. John the Baptist (33-35).

- John the Baptist identified Jesus as the lamb of God and Spirit-anointed Son of God (1:29-34). He said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30). He was not the light but came as a witness to the light (1:6-8).

- Jesus clarifies his purpose in mentioning these witnesses: it's not so that he can make up his own mind on who he is but so that his hearers may believe and be saved.

2. Jesus' works (36).

- But Jesus says there is a testimony "greater" than that of John's. He's referring to the witness of the Father, which takes several forms. Ultimately, the Father is behind all of these witnesses. He sent John the Baptist. He enables Jesus to perform his works. He sent Moses and the Scriptures are his words.
- First, the works that Jesus has done (water to wine, cleansing the temple, healing the official's son, healing the invalid at the pool) testify that the Father has sent him. Jesus' works are divine - they are works of God.

3. The Father (37-38).

- This witness referred to here is a general reference to all of the Father's revealing work.
- Jesus offers a damning indictment on them:
 - You have never heard his voice - unlike Moses (Ex. 33:11).
 - You have never seen his form - unlike Jacob (Gen. 32:30, 31).
 - His word does not dwell in you - unlike Joshua (Josh. 1:8-9) or the Psalmist (Ps. 119:11).
- Why such harsh statements? If God, from the beginning, has been preparing the way for Jesus and testifying concerning him, anyone who rejects Jesus reveals that they don't really know God. For Jesus is the very word of God (1:1), revealing the glory of God (1:14) and they have rejected him.
- Jesus' opponents had not grasped the point of previous revelation. Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that has previously been revealed.

4. The Scriptures (39-44).

- This verse, along with a few others (cf. Luke 24:27, 44-45), was instrumental for me in unlocking the mystery of the OT. According to this verse, "Scripture," referring to the OT, is to be understood to point to Christ. The purpose of the Scriptures were to testify concerning Jesus Christ (from the very beginning). And I'm not just referring to individual sayings of Scripture. All of Scripture is oriented toward Jesus. All of the "stories" of Scripture must in some way be connected to "the Story," the meta-story of God's redemption found in Christ. Go read Acts and just watch how the Apostles use the OT Scriptures to share the gospel and convince people that Jesus is the Messiah.
- I think that this reality, the unity of the Scriptures, is one of the greatest apologetics for Christianity. How can you explain the consistent unity in the storyline of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation given the number of human authors in the Bible? The only explanation is that the same God must have inspired it all.
- Their failure is clear in how they approached the Scriptures, not in their negligence of the Scriptures. They were diligent students. They were not reading the Scriptures as they were meant to be read. They refuse to accept Jesus though they were prepared to accept false prophets (43-44), seeking praise from man.

5. Moses (45-47).

- The irony is that the very one whom they esteem, Moses, will even accuse them because he wrote about Jesus.
- Jesus could be referring to the prophet of Deut. 18:15 but most likely he's referring to a certain way of reading the Pentateuch.
- These Jews received the law as being an end in itself but Moses knew that the law served to point to Christ (cf. Matt. 5:17-20). "The story of the Pentateuch is, for the most part, a story of failure" (Sailhamer). God gave the law to reveal sin (Rom 3:19-20; 7:7-12) and to imprison Israel, and by extension, all people, under sin (Rom 7:23; Gal 3:10, 13, 22). Thus, the law was given not to save Israel but to supervise and preserve her from straying from God until he could send the promised Messiah (Gal 3:24). The law was supposed to last only until faith in Christ becomes reality (Gal. 3:23). The Mosaic covenant was a means to a better and greater covenant, found in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

- There is an implicit invitation to understand and believe in Jesus in a way that many of the Jews in Jesus' day didn't. You should hear and respond to Jesus because he's not the only one witnessing concerning these truths. In fact, all of Scripture is pointing to him.

What's at stake?

- If Jesus is God, then you should respond to Jesus just as you would God.
- You should receive his word as the word of God.
- You should honor and worship him as God.
- You should come to him and find life.
- You should lovingly, and humbly plead with others to come to him as well.