

John 5:16 – 47

^{5:16} 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.’ 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. ³¹ If I alone testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies of me, and I know that the testimony which he gives about me is true. ³³ You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴ But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given me to accomplish--the very works that I do--testify about me, that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me, He has testified of me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. ³⁸ You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he sent. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about me; ⁴⁰ and you are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive glory from men; ⁴² but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?’

Cultural Background

- Long ago, near the start of the Babylonian Exile of Israel (586 BC), the prophet Ezekiel had spoken of God's renewal of Israel using 'resurrection' language:

^{Ezk.37:12} Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. ¹⁴ I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,' declares the LORD.'

Recall that Jesus had already drawn on Ezekiel 36 – 37 in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:5 – 8, and that numerous connections between John's Gospel and Ezekiel exist.

- Towards the end of the Babylonian Exile (516 BC), the prophet Daniel had spoken of God's renewal of Israel using 'kingdom of the Son of Man' language:

^{Dan.7:9} I kept looking
Until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days took His seat;
His vesture was like white snow
And the hair of His head like pure wool.
His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.
¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before Him;
Thousands upon thousands were attending Him,
And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him;
The court sat,
And the books were opened.
¹¹ Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.
¹³ I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
¹⁴ And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.

Questions

1. For simplicity's sake, break the passage up in 5:16 – 30 and 5:31 – 47. The first part is about Jesus' source of authority and his role. The second part is about the testimony about Jesus.
2. *The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders*
 - a. Recall that this was a time when all Israel was hoping for God to somehow do something that would bring them out of the long Exile that started with the Babylonian Exile, the first portion, which had been extended under the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. Everyone expected God to bring some kind of 'new resurrection life' to Israel, as Ezekiel had said, with a Messiah who would somehow become victorious over Israel's enemies, as Daniel had said. Jesus differed with the Jewish leaders over the details of who would do what, and what the real problem was.
 - b. Recall that 5:1 – 15 was a scene in which Jesus healed a crippled man who was waiting beside a pool hoping to be healed in it. There was a belief that the pool contained water that was miraculously empowered by an angel to heal. Jesus showed that he was the real living water by healing that man. Also, the Sabbath represented the 7th day of creation when God declared the creation finished. In what way was this appropriate or not to do on the Sabbath?
 - c. Why don't 'the Jews' (i.e. the Jewish leaders) like what Jesus did?
 - i. The Jewish leaders have 'set their hope on Moses' (5:47). What did this mean?
 - ii. They believed that their religious observance of the Mosaic Law would trigger God's action on their behalf. So they always evaluated self and others on merely behavioral criteria. They didn't look deeper to the human nature problem.
 - iii. What does Jesus mean that they 'seek glory from one another' and not 'the glory that comes from God' (5:44)? Is this a mutual 'patting each other on the back' society?
3. *The Son and Father discourse.* According to Jesus in 5:16 – 30, what does it mean for him to be the Son of the Father?
 - a. In what ways do we 'see the Father working' as Jesus heals the man?
 - b. What do the Jewish leaders seem to think the Father should be doing? Evaluating their good behavior and judging other people's bad behavior.
 - c. In what ways are the Jewish leaders condemning and judging themselves? If there is a doctor who is offering us a cure for our fatal sickness, and we refuse it, is he condemning and judging us? No: He is condemning and judging our sickness. But we refuse to be treated. In the same way, Jesus does not condemn and judge us as *persons*. He condemns and judges our sickness, our sinful nature.
 - d. What is the 'resurrection life' that is 'in' the Father and the Son? The 'life' that is 'in him' (1:4) which, connected to the Spirit, would transform/baptize others (1:33), which is pouring out from him like abundant wine (2:6 – 11), satisfying people's deepest thirst, the thirst for God (4:19 – 24). It is the new life that will raise Jesus from the dead and begin a new humanity in him, a healed, transformed, God-soaked humanity.
 - e. How do we see the Father working nowadays? How do we participate in that?
4. *The testimony pointing to Jesus.* In 5:31 – 47, Jesus says that others testify about him. Who or what else testifies about him?
 - a. John the Baptist (5:32 – 35)
 - b. The works God said He would do, which Jesus is now doing (5:36 – 38). For example, the things that Ezekiel and Daniel said that God would do, Jesus is now doing. For example, Jesus just healed the crippled man. He is fulfilling prophecies that the Messiah would be a healer (Isa.35:5) and would start a flow of cleansing water (Ezk.36:25) and healing water that will make people live (Ezk.47:9).
 - c. Moses (Jn.5:45 – 46)
 - d. What's different about how these Jewish leaders seem to be approaching the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and how the earliest disciples did in John 1? Remember Andrew and Philip said, 'We have found the Messiah...the One written about in the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament).'

- i. It's not that the disciples 'know for sure' at this point who Jesus is. They certainly don't understand exactly who Jesus is. Jesus won't give complete proof of himself until his death and resurrection. But the disciples actually spend time with Jesus before that. They get to know him.
 - ii. They hold up the Old Testament to Jesus and keep going back and forth between them.
- e. Illus: In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn very slowly and very carefully disclosed his true identity as the rightful king of Gondor. After the great battle outside the City of Gondor, he chose to camp outside the City to avoid any controversy about whether he was entering as its king at that point. But because so many lay wounded and dying within the City, Aragorn was persuaded to enter because he had skills at healing. Curiously, an old saying had circulated in the City from ages past, saying, 'The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known.' Aragorn stepped into that hope and began healing people:

'Now Aragorn knelt beside Faramir, and held a hand upon his brow. And those that watched felt that some great struggle was going on. For Aragorn's face grew grey with weariness; and ever and anon he called the name of Faramir, but each time more faintly to their hearing, as if Aragorn himself was removed from them, and walked afar in some dark vale, calling for one that was lost...Then taking two leaves [of a healing herb], he laid them on his hands and breathed on them, and then he crushed them, and straightaway a living freshness filled the room, as if the air itself awoke and tingled, sparkling with joy. And then he cast the leaves into the bowls of steaming water that were brought to him, and at once all hearts were lightened. For the fragrance that came to each was like a memory of dewy mornings of unshadowed sun in some land of which the fair world in Spring is itself but a fleeting memory. But Aragorn stood as one refreshed, and his eyes smiled as he held a bowl before Faramir's dreaming face... Suddenly Faramir stirred, and he opened his eyes, and he looked on Aragorn who bent over him; and a light of knowledge and love was kindled in his eyes, and he spoke softly, 'My lord, you called me. I come. What does the king command?'...Whether Aragorn had indeed some forgotten power of Westnesse, or whether it was but his words..., as the sweet influence of the herb stole about the chamber it seemed to those who stood by that a keen wind blew through the window, and it bore no scent, but was an air wholly breathed by any living thing and came new-made from snowy mountains high beneath a dome of stars, or from shores of silver far away washed by seas of foam.'¹

This is very similar to Jesus. Jesus disclosed his identity slowly and carefully. He stepped into the prophecies of the Old Testament that said the Messiah would heal his people as the representative of the one true God who will heal His people of the fundamental disease that has entered human nature (Gen.6:5 – 6; Dt.30:6; Ps.51:10; Jer.31:31 – 34; Ezk.36:26 – 36; Mt.15:18 – 20). May we too say, 'My lord, you called me. I come. What does the king command?'

¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, New York: Ballantine Books, p.172 – 173, 176