

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Series: Meeting Jesus ***

*** Topic: Jesus the Savior of our Sins (Jesus Heals the Lame Man) * Scripture: John 5 * 12/10/23 ***

MAIN POINT

Jesus the promised Messiah saves us from our sins.

INTRODUCTION

Think back to your school days (elementary, high school, college, etc.). Who was your favorite teacher? What was it about that teacher that made them your favorite? What impact did they have on you?

Sometimes it's merely our love for the subject they are teaching, other times it's their technique or helpful teaching methods. Regardless of the reasons, we all have teachers who made a real difference in our life.

In today's lesson, we will look at Jesus the Messiah healing a lame man, and then look at how this physical healing pictures how Jesus the Messiah spiritually heals us from our sins. We will also see how Jesus was the perfect teacher for his disciples and is the perfect teacher for us. His teachings and his miracles demonstrated that he is the Messiah who came in the authority of God and spoke clearly and profoundly about the Father. And even as he performed miracles and taught deep spiritual truths, we see people's free will, choosing either to embrace his ministry and teaching, or reject it.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 5:1-9a

Why did people come to this pool, day in and day out?

One can only imagine the desperation of the people coming to the pool of Bethesda each day. These were people with, as John told us, a multitude of infirmities. They were sick or blind or lame or paralyzed. They'd nearly given up all hope—but they believed an angel stirred the water of the pool each day at a certain time, and when it did, those who got into the pool first would be healed. Whether this was actually happening or not, we don't know. But it does tell us the state of mind of many people there.

Note to study leader: Verse 4, which is included in the KJV translation, adds back-story about the pool and why the people came here. This verse is not included translations such as the ESV and NIV. The reason it is left out of many translations is it does not appear in any of the earliest manuscripts and appears to have been added at some later point, perhaps by a scribe trying to provide background information about the pool.

What would make this man choose to spend all of his time here? Why might Jesus have chosen this specific man to heal?

This man had been an invalid for 38 years. Maybe the pool gave him some sort of hope. We don't know why Jesus chose this particular man. We read nothing of him having faith, as he didn't even know who healed him. And it doesn't appear he was a particularly righteous man, as Jesus challenged him later to move on from his life of sin. But one thing would be demonstrated by healing this man, he wasn't "a plant", as he had been here for longer than Jesus had been alive as a man on earth.

What do you think of Jesus' question in verse 6?

Sounds like Jesus was not going to force the man to be healed against his will.

Based on the man's response in verse 7, how was the man interpreting Jesus' question?

The man didn't seem to consider the possibility that Jesus was offering him anything else other than maybe helping him into the pool if the waters became stirred up again.

What attributes of Jesus do you see in these verses?

We see Jesus' power, compassion, and ability to heal. We also his willingness to challenge the religious leaders in his day.

What do you think was going through the man's mind as he picked up his mat and walked away?

Hard to imagine ☺

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ ROMANS 5:6 AND EPHESIANS 2:1 and 12-13

What similarities do you see between Jesus healing the lame man and Jesus saving us from our sins?

The man was completely helpless and unable to save himself. Jesus sought the man out. Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed, giving him the chance to say no. Tragically, many people today refuse the offer.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ISAIAH 35:5-6

There is another group of people that Jesus is giving a chance to choose to be spiritually healed based on this event, the religious leaders. Based on this messianic prophecy from Isaiah, what does this miracle demonstrate about who Jesus is?

One of the signs by which the Messiah would reveal himself would be by healing various infirmities, including healing the lame. Jesus was giving the religious leaders a clear sign that he was the Messiah.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 5:9b-16

Do you think Jesus chose to heal this man on this day purposefully? Why or why not?

Jesus often healed people on the Sabbath, teaching an important lesson to the religious leaders. While the Old Testament Law required Israel not to work on the Sabbath, there was no requirement forbidding helping someone, or carrying a mat. The issue with carrying the mat was part of the oral tradition of the Jewish leaders, which they had pretty much elevated in their minds to the same importance as the scriptures.

Why do you think the Jews in this passage were more focused on the man's carrying the mat on the Sabbath than they were on the fact that a man had miraculously healed him?

They had bought into a false religion where they were going to obtain righteousness through obedience to the Law, which is impossible. They were missing the fact that this truth was demonstrated in the Law by the sacrificial system included in the Law. Innocent, unblemished animals were sacrificed to cover the people's sin since they couldn't comply with the Law. This is a beautiful picture of Jesus (John 1:35-36). These religious leaders weren't so much interested in finding the Messiah as maintaining their position of authority and prestige as religious leaders in Israel.

What can we learn from the fact that Jesus later followed up with the man who had been physically healed and challenged him about his spiritual condition?

Jesus followed up the physical healing with a challenge to spiritual healing.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 5:17-30

The religious leaders began persecuting Jesus because he healed the man on the Sabbath. In Jesus' response in these verses, does he seem to be backing down to appease them?

Definitely not! He went on to make it clear he was equal with God.

List seven points Jesus makes while explaining his actions.

1. Whatever the Father does, the Son does also (vs 19). 2. The Father loves the Son (vs 20). 3. The Father shows the Son all he does (vs 20). 4. As the Father gives life, so the Son gives life (vs 21). 5. The Father judges no one but entrusts judgement to the Son (vs 22). 6. That all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father (He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father) (vs 23). 7. As the Father has life in himself, so the Son has life in himself (vs 26).

Why do you think Jesus chose to share these truths with the Jewish leaders?

This miracle and the discussion that follows showed them (and us) Jesus is equal to the Father (vv. 17-18).

How does Jesus describe the true means of our redemption and salvation in verse 24?

Salvation is through faith, not works.

What is the difference between the judgments of Jesus and the judgements of the religious leaders?

Jesus claimed God gave him the right to judge, and then He backed this up by saying that His judgment was the very judgment of God. When we judge others, we might make all kinds of mistakes. We might judge based on pride, bias, lack of logic, or lack of information. But the judgment of Jesus is perfect. When we approach God, we should know that not only does he love us; He is the righteous Judge of all humanity.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 5:31-47

What are some of the witnesses Jesus talked about in these verses that validate who He is? Why do you think the religious leaders still chose to reject him?

John the Baptist, Jesus' works, God the Father, and the Scriptures all bear witness to who Jesus is. But people have always refused to believe in Jesus. But it's not really Jesus who is on trial. The world is on trial, and these witnesses that testify to the truth that Jesus is who he says he is testify against those who reject him.

In what way is Moses the religious leaders' accuser?

Per Romans 3:20, no one will be declared righteous through the works of the Law. Rather the Law demonstrates that there is not one righteous person.

APPLICATION

Follow up physical help with an offer of the gospel (verse 14). If a church goes to help dig wells in Haiti, this should be accompanied with spiritual help. Otherwise, we only help them for this short life.

Seek the glory that comes from God, not man (verse 44).

"If I understand this correctly, Christ taught here the alarming doctrine that the desire for honor among men made belief impossible" A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God.

PRAYER

Jesus, we thank you that you became a man, lived a perfect life, and were slain, purchasing with your blood people from every tribe and language and people and nation for God. God, we thank you for our redemption through Christ's blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of your grace that you lavished on us. To you Jesus, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by your blood, to you be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 5

5:1–3. As chapter 5 opens, John made a geographical switch from Galilee to Jerusalem and specifically the Pool of Bethesda, a gathering place for invalids. Apparently the pool was located in the northeast corner of the old city. It functioned under considerable local superstition as a place with miraculous healing powers. John also dropped a vague chronological note when he observed it was feast time. Many interpreters argue this was a second Passover, but Tasker warns, “If we adopt the better-attested reading a feast in v. 1, which now has the additional support of the Bodmer Papyrus, the reference could be to any feast, and there is no need to assume, as many commentators do, that the chapters have been dislocated, and to attempt to restore the ‘original’ order by placing chapter 4 before chapter 5.

Many suggestions have been offered as a substitute for the Passover—Pentecost, Purim, Dedication, Trumpets. But two arguments persist: a recognition of this feast as the Passover would stretch the record of John through three and one-half years, a figure commonly preferred by most evangelical Bible scholars for the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Also, it was an important enough feast to draw Jesus back to Jerusalem and we must consider that impact. Borchert indicates that the strong emphasis on Sabbath in this chapter may be the key to recognizing a Passover feast here. He says, “The problem with searching for a name for the unnamed feast is that it involves filling in what is perceived to be a chronological gap in John, failing to realize the theological nature of these festival statements and the cyclical pattern that focuses these chapters on Passover.”

5:4. The fourth verse has no significant textual support and is therefore omitted by many translations, although some will be familiar with wording from the KJV describing the angel who would stir up the waters and the hope that the first person in the pool after such a swirling would be healed.

5:5–7. As in Sychar and Cana, Jesus focused on a single individual, this time a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. He asked the crucial question, “Do you want to get well?” The man responded by raising the obvious problem. He could not get well because he could not get down to the healing pool fast enough. The man had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. Why did Jesus choose him now, and why him from among all the other disabled people gathered around the pool? The only possible answer is God’s sovereign grace. In the Father’s timing, this was the time, the place, and the way he would heal this man. The length and extent of the man’s illness presented no problem for Jesus, and he clearly was not a plant who faked his own healing.

We tend to think that time produces hopelessness. Surely the longer a person is sick, the less likely that he or she will get well. The longer a person has lived in sin, the less likely that person will come to Christ. We have all the statistics to show that we must win people to Christ when they are young or the chances diminish. The argument is sound on the basis of what we know, bolstered by human experience. But God is the master of difficult situations just like this one. What is humanly impossible, God loves to do. Perhaps Jesus intentionally chose the veteran Bethesda-pool invalid to prove his divine grace. Even today God may choose difficult people through whom he will prove his grace.

5:8–9. These verses describe the miraculous cure. The original question in verse 6 focused on the man’s infatuation with magical powers and traditional superstition. If the pool had really been God’s healing agent, Jesus could have just helped the man in the water first after the angelic stirring. But the words Get up! Pick up your mat and walk emphasize that Jesus was the source of divine healing, not some kind of pool. When you are really sick, miracle is preferable to magic.

We dare not miss the absence of faith here. The man did not ask for help; he showed no faith that John reports; and he did not even know who Jesus was. Contrast this miracle with the royal official’s son in John 4. Let us notice too that the Lord’s ministry was not primarily social, just as ours is not. He had the power to clean out the entire pool area. Not a single invalid could have survived the power of God. But he healed only one man, and that seems to have been done to form a basis for the message to follow. Throughout this book I will refer to this process as the miracle-message method in which a “selective” miracle lays the groundwork for a

sermon. We see it here regarding authority over the Sabbath, in chapter 6 where the feeding of the five thousand forms the basis for the sermon on the bread of life. We also see it in chapter 9 where the healing of the blind man leads to a sermon on spiritual blindness followed by the sermon on the good shepherd in chapter 10, and finally in chapter 11 where the healing of Lazarus leads to a sermon on life.

The man's response to Jesus' question, "Do you want to get well?" (v. 6), revealed both his poor understanding of God and his sense of hopelessness. Instead of answering the question, he gave his gloomy testimony and his perception of how God works. The only hope evident in his testimony was his commitment to a myth of a periodic miraculous troubling of the pool, which allegedly brought healing to the first person able to jump in. The reader should recognize that vv. 3b–4 (present in the KJV) are a later scribal addition to the story, probably inserted into the text by an early copyist who believed in such mythical manifestations and who sought to support the man's belief pattern by such a statement. In terms of an explanation, it is possible that the man's theory here may have been based on the occurrence of an interesting natural phenomenon in which at high water times the pool apparently was infused by a periodic influx of spring water that stirred the pool with excess water. The important thing to notice first is the man's poor view of God's grace. Over the long period of time of living with his problem the man had seemingly become convinced that God operated on the basis of "first come, first served." Another of his problems was that he undoubtedly felt a sense of abandonment because of his helpless condition and his lack of support from others, particularly in times when he thought healing might be possible. He apparently had become negative, as some sick people do, and he was ready to blame others. This attitude did not change after his healing and was likely part of the reason for Jesus' later warning (5:14). In response to the man's perception of God and of God's grace, it is interesting that Jesus is not portrayed here as a theological logician or debater. Jesus did not dispute the man's poor theology or his view of angelic visitation. He simply told him to get up and take his mattress or bedroll (*krabbaton*) out of that place

A mat (*Gk krabattos*; as distinguished from "bed," *Gk klinarion*, e.g., *Ac 5:15*) was the poor man's bedding. Made of straw, it could be rolled up and carried. We are not told this day was the Sabbath until the miracle was performed. This sets the context for the tensions with the unbelieving Jews (*cp. 9:14*).

5:10 Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath and that became the point of argument in the next four chapters. Why the fuss over a day? Because people want rules, not grace. They want to boast about what they did to earn merit from God. This attitude opposes the gospel. Luke mentioned the Sabbath only nine times in Acts, and not once in connection with Christian worship. But the Pharisees could not get over this hurdle which troubled them during the entire time of Jesus' life on earth.

The Sabbath, of course, was always the seventh day (and is so today) never the first, though we sometimes incorrectly refer to Sunday in this way. This issue dominates the next four chapters of John as the hypocrisy and formalism of religious observance link the first century with our modern time.

This was no accident—Jesus did not just forget it was Saturday. He was not ignorant of the provision that the rabbis had added to God's Sabbath law: "Whoever on the Sabbath brings anything in or takes anything out from a public place to a private one, if he has done this inadvertently, he shall sacrifice for his sins; but if willingly, he shall be cut off and shall be stoned." The scribes had come up with thirty-nine tasks prohibited on the Sabbath. Certainly Jesus knew that healing on the Sabbath would upset the religious leaders. He knew that by commanding the man to carry his mat out of a public place he would anger them even more. So why did he do it? The dialogue rages over the next several chapters, but the central idea has to do with the authority of Jesus as the Son of God.

In a petty display of religious legalism, the Jewish leaders objected to the man's picking up his mat on the Sabbath. While not actually breaking any biblical Sabbath regulations, the man was violating a rabbinical code that prohibited the carrying of an object "from one domain into another" (*m. Sabb. 7:2*). Hence Jesus was accused of enticing the man to sin.

This dramatic healing attracted the typical reaction from the Jews—a phrase uncommon to the Synoptics but used seventy times in John, usually to describe religious leaders opposing Christ. The New Testament is not anti-Semitic. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and constantly proclaimed the Gospel to any Jews who would listen. Paul went from synagogue to synagogue offering salvation to his own people first.

5:11–13. In these three verses we see how little the man actually knew. This startling stranger had walked into his life, given him back normality in his legs, and then disappeared. The man’s reply to the Jews (doubtless the leaders of the Sanhedrin) reflected his willing obedience, reminiscent of the royal official in chapter 4. The exchange betrayed the Jewish leaders’ shallow understanding of theology; they focused on the carried mat, not the new legs.

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5:14–15. Jesus met the man again in the temple complex, a short distance from the site of his healing. Jesus’ words may imply that the man’s suffering was due to sin but do not suggest that all suffering is caused by personal sin. Something worse may refer to eternal judgment for sin (vv. 22-30).

The opponents of Jesus, here designated purposely as “the Jews,” pounced on the helpless man who had just experienced the incredible joy of entering the promised land of a new existence. But these Jews were not interested in the man’s joy. The term “the Jews,” when used by the evangelist, defines Jesus’ religious opponents in the Gospel (cf. also 1:19 concerning the Baptizer). The term is not used merely as a racial designation because the man here was also a Jew. The Jews in this story were not interested in the well-being of people but merely in their rules and traditions. They serve the author’s literary art as symbols or flat literary figures representing a certain perspective (namely rigid, doctrinaire, noncaring, religious leaders). These doctrinaire religious figures are the ones who were responsible for the death of Jesus, and this chapter defines their role. All they could see was a man carrying a bedroll and breaking the Sabbath law, which was formulated to support their understanding of the Torah principle in Exodus 31:12–14.

The confused man had been caught in the very act of breaking the rules of the rabbis and did not know how to deal with his problem. So he sought for a quick defense by blaming the healer (John 5:11), even though he did not know who he was (5:13). It is doubtful that the man in this story really understood the significance of Jesus. The blaming, self-centered, self-preservation pattern of his former life continued after the healing as he turned from the Healer to investigators (the Jews) and reported Jesus to these authority figures. One implication of the story is that no one should be surprised by the responses of people. Not everyone accepts merciful acts with gratitude (cf. the nine lepers of Luke 17:17–18).

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5:16–18. The innocent response is followed by the final warning—a brief section of a verse which fits significantly into the miracle-message method John records so carefully. Indeed, John 5:14 must be compared theologically with John 9:3. In the first case, one must conclude that the lameness was caused by sin; and in the second, clearly the blindness was not. The Greek text might better be translated, “Give up sinning.” The something worse could refer to a physical illness more burdensome than the one the man had carried for so many years, or it might suggest spiritual disaster, even eternal condemnation.

These verses represent the formal introduction to the controversy scenes of the Festival Cycle. The focus is on Jesus’ identity and his relation to the Sabbath. The man’s report to the authorities is pictured as transferring the investigation committee’s hostility from the paralytic to Jesus (5:16). Indeed, the statement that the Sabbath issue was the reason why the Jews “persecuted” Jesus is John’s way of formally defining for the first time in this severe way the authorities’ relationship to Jesus. But the issue of the Sabbath is transposed into an even more serious charge in the discussion that follows. That charge will become the reason for the crucifixion. As a result, the argument that follows is strategic to Johannine theology. There is an interesting presuppositional agreement between the rabbis and Jesus. Both recognize the sense of God’s constant working in the world (defined by Christian theologians as the doctrine of providence). It is assumed that God continues to work on the Sabbath or the world would collapse. Yet the issue for the rabbis revolved around the fact that humans are not God and therefore must not try to act like God. But here is the point the evangelist was making. The working of Jesus is precisely the Johannine proclamation: Jesus is the Son of God and therefore the representative of God (cf. 20:28). So (a) if God can continue to work positively in creation on the Sabbath and not totally rest, and (b) if one can recognize that the works of Jesus are the works of God, then the question follows: Why are not the works of Jesus on the Sabbath legitimate?

The battle was thus joined. In fact, it was moved to a more intense level when Jesus called God his Father (5:17). The Jews recognized the argument immediately and from that point pursued him not merely for Sabbath breaking but also for blasphemy (5:18). They understood that he was not merely claiming to be a child of God in the general sense but in a very special way. Accordingly, they charged him with “making himself equal with God” (5:18). Jesus’ claim would violate their understanding of monotheism and would surely have reminded them of the serpent’s temptation to “be like God” (Gen 3:5). Such a claim, therefore, would undoubtedly be categorized by the rabbis as sinning with the high hand (a direct challenge to God), unless the claim was true. And that was precisely the claim of Jesus and the early church. That claim, however, must be carefully understood. Jesus did not claim to take the place of God or be an alternative to God, which is what the Jews meant by “making himself equal with God” (5:18; cf. the charge at 10:33 and “claimed to be the Son of God,” 19:7). What Jesus, as the One and Only Son of God (1:14, 18), claimed was to be sent by God, on mission for God, doing the works of God, obedient to God, and bringing glory to God. That is not the role of one who displaces God but one who is a representative or emissary of God. It is in fact the *pros ton theon* of the Prologue in the context of being *theos* (1:1). Here then is both the equality and the subordination that will be the focus of this chapter.

While Gen 2:2-3 teaches that God rested (Hb *shabath*) on the seventh day of creation, Jewish rabbis agreed that God continually upheld the universe, yet without breaking the Sabbath. If God was above Sabbath regulations, so was Jesus (Mt 12:1-14). What is more, even the Jews made exceptions to the rule prohibiting work on the Sabbath, most notably in cases where circumcision occurred on a Sabbath (Jn 7:23).

Making Himself equal with God seemed to violate the OT teaching that there is only one God (Dt 6:4). Thus the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy, which became the primary charge leveled against Jesus before Pilate (Jn 19:7).

5:19 Jesus’ claim that the Son is not able to do anything on His own echoes Moses’ affirmation that “the Lord sent me to do all these things and that it was not of my own will” (Num 16:28).

5:20-21 Jesus’ statement that the Son also gives life to anyone He wants is significant since raising the dead and giving life are the prerogatives of God alone (Dt 32:39; 1Sam 2:6; 2Ki 5:7).

5:22 Like life (v. 21), judgment is the exclusive prerogative of God (Gen 18:25; Jdg 11:27).

5:23 Jesus characterized Himself as God's authorized messenger. This is similar to Moses and the prophets, who served as God's agents and spokesmen. Of designated messengers (Hb shaliach), Jews held that "a man's agent is like the man himself" (m. Ber. 5:5). The statement so that all people will honor the Son just as they honor the Father in effect established Jesus' right to be worshiped and amounted to a claim of deity.

5: 24. In the Greek text our verse begins with the words, amen, amen, translated in the familiar KJV with the words "verily, verily." Actually, this entire equality-with-God section began the same way back in verse 19. The theme of this entire section of John's Gospel centers in the unity of the Father and the Son. John emphasized that both life and condemnation are present possessions with eternal consequences. This verse challenges all readers to trust Christ through faith. Let us remember, too, that hearing and believing are almost synonymous in John's use.

The second response of Jesus in this conflict exchange involves two of the twenty-five uses of the double amēn (lit., "truthfully, truthfully, I say to you"; 5:19, 24) sayings in John. The use of this form is an obvious Johannine signal that the words are extremely important in the understanding of Jesus and his ministry. But the reader should notice that at this point (5:19) the story moves away from dialogue to monologue. The reader, therefore, receives the impression of being in a courtroom scene where Jesus is delivering an address that is a kind of combination defense summation and judge's decision.

Although the Jews had focused their hostility on the equality aspect of Jesus' relation to the Father (5:18), Jesus countered their anger by highlighting his dependency on the Father (5:19). Here then are two perspectives about Jesus: the powerful divine Son of God and the humble Messenger of God. Christian theology always struggles with these two aspects (sometimes called the two personae) of Jesus. The dangerous tendency today of some is to de-emphasize the divine exalted nature, and the tendency of others is to de-emphasize the self-effacing human nature of Jesus. The key is to find the balance between the two. The quest for this key was evident in the early Christological debates and the ensuing attempts to formulate the early creeds.

5:25. Jesus' words are reminiscent of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek 37). He talks about spiritual resurrection, life in the Son through regeneration (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 John 5:11ff.). But I can almost hear someone thinking, "Why wouldn't this verse refer to the resurrection at the end of time?" The answer lies in the little phrase, and has now come.

This verse also contains the phrase Son of God, so common in our Christian vocabulary that we think it must appear everywhere in the New Testament. But then we think the same thing about the word Christian which only appears three times in Acts. And in the same manner, John uses the Son of God only three times in this Gospel (10:36; 11:4). Actually, it appears two other times in contexts other than the Lord's direct claim—the Jews' complaint in 19:7 and John's purpose statement in 20:31. So life (zoe) comes through regeneration and a person can claim it now. What is the basis for this broad invitation?

5:26 The claim that Jesus had life in Himself echoes the affirmation in the prologue of John's Gospel that "life was in Him [Jesus]." It is further supported by Jesus' statement, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). Because He is "the life" and has life in Himself, Jesus is able to give life (abundant life now; eternal life in the future) to all who place their trust in Him (3:16; 10:10).

5:27 Of all the gifts the Father has given to the Son, eternal life is surely important. Some interpreters believe this life was given after the ascension (Godet), but surely the Son had it eternally and only immortality occurred after his resurrection. John's point centers in more than just the life Jesus possessed. It includes the life that he passed on to believing humanity. Since the life resides in the Son, John directs others to Jesus for this life. Jesus calling himself the Son of Man may be a reference to Dan 7:13.

The word given in this context refers to permission, privilege, and power. The Father appointed the Son to give eternal life to those who believe. During his time on earth, the Christ gave up the independent exercise of his attributes and placed himself under the Father's direct will. In taking upon himself the position of a human being, Jesus looked to the Father for the authority to give life.

In verse 27 the theme changes to judgmental authority, and “Son of God” of verse 25 now becomes again the Son of Man (see also 1:51; 3:14). In the Old Testament we know that God is the judge of the earth (Gen. 18:25; Judg. 11:27). This makes this passage all the more dramatic.

5:28-29. Jesus switched suddenly to physical resurrection and identified a major doctrine of the New Testament—the concept of two resurrections, one for the righteous and one for the wicked. The second resurrection is a resurrection to damnation (Rev. 20:13), but many interpreters believe there are three parts to the first resurrection outlined in Scripture: Christ the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20, 23); the saints (church) at the rapture; and Old Testament believers at the beginning of the millennium. Passages like this should lay to rest the false doctrine that death ends all life and essentially serves as a cessation of existence. There will not only be resurrection; resurrection will be followed by judgment. Compare these verses with Dan 12:2.

5:30. Having announced this forthcoming event and the major hope of Israel proclaimed in the Old Testament, Jesus reminded his hearers again that he came only as the Father’s representative. This verse transitions into the next section about testimony and truth.

5:31-32. Throughout this section the key word testify or testimony appears ten times. And Jesus offered four answers to the unasked question he read in the minds of the Jews: “Who will give evidence of who you are?” Jesus admitted that if his own words represented all he could bring to the witness stand, his accusers would have every reason for their doubt and scorn. Nevertheless, any accused man might speak in his own defense if he wished. That is exactly what Jesus did in verses 17-30.

The resumé has been submitted, and it has come not only with references but with the testimony of another who testifies in my favor. This probably refers to the Father whom Jesus mentioned several times in his own report. The word translated valid means “true.” This mention of the Father at the beginning of the testimony list indicates that Jesus believed all his words and actions were already approved and did not need any further word.

5:33-35. From the testimony of Jesus we move to the testimony of John the Baptist, the first entry on the resumé. The Greek grammar implies that John the Baptist was the Jews’ own witness, a prophet highly regarded by those who now challenged Jesus’ authority. Human testimony should not be necessary, but since they obviously considered it important, we start with a lamp that burned and gave light. Our first thought here tends to focus on light. This is no doubt an important component of the metaphor. But the word burned may suggest a candle or torch that burned itself out. Devout Jews were happy to see their Elijah, delighted at his message of a coming Messiah. But they cared nothing for what he delivered. Now they are accused of not taking his message seriously.

5:36. The third testimony is the testimony of Jesus’ works which should be even stronger in the eyes of the Jews than the prophecy of John. The word appears in the plural (works), not work as the NIV has it—a term John used frequently to describe Jesus’ miracles (5:20; 9:4; 10:25, 32, 37-38; 14:10-11; 15:24).

5:37-38. Having already introduced the Father earlier in this section, Jesus now added him to the resumé, focusing on his will and his word. The idea of a universal fatherhood of God applies only to creation and humanity. When it comes to spiritual sonship, the issue is personal faith. Note how the rejection of Jesus is a “catch twenty-two” kind of problem. These denying Jews never grasped the Father’s testimony about Jesus because they refused Jesus’ testimony about the Father.

5:39-40. The fifth testimony is one you may have in your hands right now—the Scriptures. Some people have quoted this verse as a command: “Search the Scriptures”—but that is not permissible according to the grammar of the text. Jesus essentially told these combatants, “You are serious Bible students and study the Old Testament carefully in order to gain eternal life. Yet you have been unable to see how your Scriptures prophesied my coming and, therefore, refuse the life that I bring.” An open heart and open eyes will produce an open mind—but we begin with an open Bible.

5:41-42. The final two paragraphs close the sermon by condemning Jesus’ accusers. The people with whom he spoke had studied the Scriptures for several thousand years. From the writings of Moses to the appearance of the Messiah, they revered God’s writings, but they never understood them. Indeed, if they had grasped only the

Pentateuch they would have been ready to receive Jesus as God's Son and Messiah. They searched to find life and life was in Christ, but they never made the connection. Without the love of God in their hearts, they would be quite willing to accept imposters who claimed only their own testimony and denied Jesus in the face of all the evidence that attested the truth of his message. Verses 41 and 42 remind us of the Lord's reaction to the "believing" Jews at the end of chapter 2: "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man" (2:24-25).

The word translated in the NIV as praise is *doxa*, the common Greek word for glory or honor. The word appears three times in four verses, indicating John's emphasis on the rejection of Christ's glory by his accusers.

5:43-44. Bogus messiahs had crowded the Jewish scene for at least two hundred years before Christ. Like some modern religious leaders, they drew attention to themselves—an attitude for which Jesus condemned his own disciples (Luke 22:25). And the attitude continued. Let us remember the people to whom these remarks were addressed. Pharisees, Sadducees, and Jewish religious leaders of the first century made a big show of public worship, ostentatiously praying and giving in public (Matt. 23:5-7). But the true glory of God was present in Jesus whom they rejected. True glory comes only from God, and this entire discourse has to do with Jesus as the true representative of that glory.

5:45-47. This entire chapter stems from the issue of Sabbath-breaking that John introduced as early as verses 9-10. Therefore, this question of Mosaic Law both begins and ends the chapter. The Jews were proud of their tradition, their knowledge of Scripture, and certainly proud of Moses. But according to Jesus, they really did not believe Moses. If they had, they would have believed and accepted the Christ of whom Moses wrote. Rejecting Moses therefore, they also rejected Jesus.