

JESUS IS GOD

John 5:18-23

As Christians we make some bold claims, among which are statements such as: Jesus is God and that there is only one way to Heaven. In a culture that has become obsessed with political correctness and “tolerance” those bold claims are not very popular. On what basis do we dare say such things? We will look at one passage today that explains why we hold to the truth that Jesus is God.

If you have missed our study in the first part of John chapter five, we will do a quick review of verses 1 through 17 and then move on to verses 18-30. In verses 1 through 9 we see Jesus arriving in Jerusalem for one of the three main festivals that required all male Jews to attend. Jesus undoubtedly knew His purpose for being at this festival and headed directly for the pool at Bethesda. It was believed that this pool had miraculous healing powers for the first person to get into the pool when the waters began to stir. It was further believed that an angel was sent to stir the waters, but in reality it was very likely caused by an underground spring. The reality of this story however has nothing to do with what Jesus did there. Many people who were sick and lame spent their days and maybe even their nights huddled around the pool waiting for the waters to stir so that they might get into the pool first and be healed.

One of the invalids was a paralytic who had not been able to walk for thirty-eight years. Jesus healed Him instantly and told him to pick up his mat and walk, which the healed man did gladly. However, when the Jewish leaders saw this man walking down the street with his mat, they had a collective fit. “What are you doing carrying a load on the Sabbath?” they asked. “You must know it is against our law to do any work on the Sabbath.” The healed paralytic told them that the man that healed him told him to pick up his mat and walk, so he did. After all anyone who had that kind of healing power should be obeyed or who knows what could happen.

They asked him who this man was. But he did not know because Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. Later the healed man went to the Temple, very likely to give thanks to God for his being healed. It was there that he again encountered Jesus and Jesus told him: “*Now you are well; don’t sin as you did before, or something even worse may happen to you.*” Jesus was probably not referring to another physically crippling disease. It would follow knowing what we know about Jesus that He was referring to the man’s soul. He wanted him to know that sin could bring eternal death in the worst place imaginable and that suffering as a paralytic would be a walk in the park compared to an eternal Hell. Are we reading between the lines here? Perhaps one might think that but we believe that knowing the Jesus of the Bible as we know Him, He would have made certain that this man knew exactly what the miracle of his healing meant so that His faith and trust in

Jesus could bring him eternal life. Not that Jesus is not interested in our physical health but we know that He is far more interested in the health of our soul.

Then the man went to find the Jewish leaders and told them that it was Jesus who had healed Him. This was rather a strange thing for him to do, was it not? In fact it seems to me that this was almost a betrayal by this healed paralytic. If it were me whom Jesus had healed, and in fact in a different way He has, I would never go back to the Jewish leaders and squeal on the person who had given me a new life. But as I searched through many of the commentaries looking for a possible answer to why the healed man would do this, I could not find a single one that even raised the question. Then I did what I should have done in the first place, I prayed for an answer and I believe I received one. I would never have squealed on Jesus unless He had told me to do so, and that is what may well have happened. After all Jesus did want these men to know who He was and the power He brought and that the era of their man-made laws had come to an end. Jesus was ready to confront them so why not simply have the healed paralytic go back and tell them what they wanted to know? There were occasions in Scripture where Jesus instructed the recipient of a miracle not to tell others, but there were specific reasons for those occasions. Jesus did not want the people in general to know who He was too early on in His ministry because they would then have tried to make Him their earthly king and that would have interfered with His teaching. The man who performed the miracle of healing, however, was none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

So the leaders went after Jesus and when they found Him they accused Him of being a Sabbath breaker. And in effect Jesus told them that both He and His Father both do good things on the Sabbath. There was no doubt in anyone's mind what this meant. Jesus was telling them that He and His Father were One, making Himself equal with God, and that He, Jesus, had authority over the Sabbath to do with it as He saw fit. The Jewish leaders were fit to be tied over what they considered to be the worst possible blasphemy. It was at this point that Jesus signed His own death warrant. From this time until the crucifixion, the Jewish leaders searched for the right time and place to have Jesus killed. Now let us pick up the story in John 5:18:

John 5:18-23 ESV:

18 This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

19 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.

21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

22 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever

does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

When the Jewish leaders heard Jesus equate Himself with God, they blew their tops. Now the accusation against Him not only included Sabbath breaking, but also the most severe of all violations of the law, blasphemy. Most of you probably have an idea of what blasphemy means, but just so we can all be clear on this, here is the meaning given in Harper's Bible Dictionary:

“Blasphemy, a term derived from a Greek word meaning to injure the reputation of another. In the Bible it means showing contempt or a lack of reverence for God (Leviticus 24:16; Mark 2:7) or something sacred (Matthew 26:65), including claiming for oneself divine attributes by word or deed (Mark 14:64; John 10:33).”¹

Jesus was claiming that He was God. *“Blasphemy”* they must have all shouted in unison. The penalty for blasphemy among the Jews was death. Just imagine, they ignored the miracles He performed that only God could accomplish, and zeroed in on condemning Him for being who He was. He was God and could prove it in any number of ways. The two things that initially convinced me that Jesus was God were **miracles** and **fulfillment of prophecy**, and both have been clearly documented, not only by Jesus' followers but also by secular historians. The same evidence should have convinced the Jewish leaders if they had any knowledge of their own Old Testament. There is simply no way, in fact it is a statistical impossibility, for over a hundred **prophecies** given about Jesus from the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden, thousands of years before His birth, up until a time four hundred years before His birth, to come true as they all did simply by chance. You would have to very foolish or hate the thought about Christ being the one and only God to believe these predictions concerning the future could have simply come true by mere chance. It is much harder to convince yourself that these prophecies came true by chance than it is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the only way to salvation and eternal life in Heaven. You can deny that truth if you choose because God has given us all the free choice to accept or reject His truth. But if you do not accept it before you die, the Bible is clear that your eternity will be spent in the Lake of Fire, or the term most commonly used, Hell. And if you have been experiencing difficulties in this life, those difficulties will seem like nothing when you experience Hell and know that you must be there forever.

Then there are the **miracles**. No one else in recorded history, in any other religion, has been documented to perform the kind of miracles that Jesus performed. Most religions do not even suggest that their deity performed any miracles. Only someone with true supernatural, that is, out of this world powers, could perform such miracles. How much more evidence could someone want? What this means simply is that anyone with an open mind who is searching for the truth about God will come to an acceptance of the evidence that Jesus Christ is the one and only God. Anyone who rejects Him as such has no solid evidence, other than opinion, on which to conclude that Christ was a phony.

¹ Achtemeier, Paul J.; Harper & Row, Publishers; Society of Biblical Literature: *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985, S. 135.

In the days that followed this initial confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, Jesus often confronted them about their desire to kill Him and He was not very complimentary toward them in the things He had to say: John 7:19: *“Moses gave you the law, but none of you obeys it! In fact, you are trying to kill me.” (NLT)*

John 8:37 NLT:

Yes, I realize that you are descendants of Abraham. And yet some of you are trying to kill me because there’s no room in your hearts for my message.

John 8:59 NLT:

At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple.

These Jewish leaders (Pharisees) hated Jesus without even testing whether He was the promised Messiah, without even exercising the responsibility they held for the Jewish people. Jesus told His disciples in John 15:18–25 NLT:

18 “If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first.

19 The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.

20 Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you.

21 They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the One who sent me.

22 They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin.

23 Anyone who hates me also hates my Father.

24 If I hadn’t done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father.

25 This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: ‘They hated me without cause.’

This last statement in verse 25 comes from Psalm 69:4 NLT:

4 Those who hate me without cause outnumber the hairs on my head.

Many enemies try to destroy me with lies, demanding that I give back what I didn’t steal.

“Psalms 22 and 69 are psalms of lament, portraying an innocent sufferer’s cry to God for vindication from his enemies. These allusions show that Jesus died in the pattern of suffering like that of the saints of old.² It also shows that He trusted in God the Father for

² Thus, the use of the Old Testament here is a case of typological-prophetic fulfillment, where Jesus fits the patterns

vindication.”³

The Jewish leaders cast aside the good things that Jesus did for those in need and directed all their energy toward eliminating Him. He frightened them. If He kept doing these miracles the people would come to accept Him as their promised Messiah. If that happened, the Jewish leaders would lose their power and influence over the people. Jesus made Himself equal with God because He is God. This is the theme of John’s Gospel. The Jewish leaders could not disprove His claims, so they tried to destroy Him and get Him out of the way. Both in His crucifixion and His resurrection, Jesus without doubt proved His deity and turned the tables on those who persecuted Him. By killing Him they gave Jesus the opportunity to prove to the world without a doubt that He was God, because He rose from the dead as was prophesied in the Old Testament. Do you think they were surprised when Jesus rose from the dead? They must have been. Why would they kill Him if they thought He would come back to life? But on the other hand, they must have wondered if there was any possibility that Jesus could be God because after His death they requested guards be placed at Jesus’ tomb. What do you think ran through their minds when they received the news that Christ was no longer in His grave? Do you think they thought “*Oh my goodness, what a terrible mistake we made! We must find Jesus and tell Him how sorry we are*”? Not on your life. They tried to cover up the resurrection⁴ and we will find out more detail on this later on in this study. In spite of undeniable evidence that Jesus was God, the Jewish leaders still would not accept Him. That is probably a good reason for explaining why it is so hard for unbelievers to accept the truth of God’s Word no matter how convincing it might be.

Donald Grey Barnhouse pointed out the Pharisees' fundamental motivation:

“Why all this viciousness? Why this desire to destroy the meek and lowly Jesus? Why this murderous attempt to do away with God? The answer is here in the Sabbath question. They wanted rules, they did not want God's grace. They wanted human merit. They did not want the simplicity of divine pardon. They wanted to do something for themselves. As believers we know we are saved by grace, but because of the human tendency of wanting to do everything ourselves, we create a list-giving, list-keeping Christianity that is far removed from the grace under which we entered into new life.”⁵

of suffering of the earlier era, but in a unique way because of the nature of His work. So when Jesus completed the typico-prophetic pattern, the way in which He fulfilled the text is true only of Him. Many New Testament texts, when utilizing this type of fulfillment, speak of a unique fulfillment in Him and note that the text does not refer to anyone else. This is true in the sense Jesus “fully fulfills” the text in a way no one else does. So He is the “righteous Sufferer” or the “Servant.” On this category of Old Testament fulfillment, see Darrell L. Bock, “*The Use of the Old Testament in the New*,” in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman, 1994).

³ Zuck, Roy B.: *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*. Electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994; Published in electronic form, 1996, S. 128.

⁴ Matthew 28:11-15.

⁵ *Preaching the Word*.

John 5:19 ESV:

19 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

Jesus obeys His Father. If Jesus is God, why does He need to obey His Father? That is simply one of the mysteries of the Triune God that is beyond our ability to understand. It appears that this behavior somehow involves submission within the Trinity, but if you want a better understanding of it, you will have to wait until you get to Heaven and then perhaps Jesus will explain it to you.

Think about this for a moment. If someone walked in here off the street and claimed that He was Jesus and He had returned as the Bible says He will one day, we could either consider Him insane, a liar, or that we were standing before Jesus at His second coming. How would we know? We would ask Him how we could know that He was telling the truth. If perhaps we had someone in our group who was in a wheelchair, Jesus might heal him/her. Perhaps another would be suffering from severe depression and Jesus would take that depression and cast it away so that we could see the joy visibly evident in the person's words and actions. Then perhaps He would redecorate the room in an instant with new carpeting, drapery, furniture, beautiful new windows, and a replica of Buckingham fountain right in the middle of it all. Surely this would be confirmation that it is true, He is who He says He is. We can know that Jesus has returned to lead us home, right?

Not so fast. Do you remember the duel between Pharaoh and God with Moses being God's human representative? God allowed Satan's representatives to perform miracles, as in the case of the Egyptian magicians who were His representatives in hardening Pharaoh's heart. As Aaron's rod was changed into a serpent, so were those of the Egyptian magicians. Aaron turned the water into blood; so did the magicians. Aaron brought up frogs; so did the magicians. With the *frogs*, however, their power ceased. God has permitted Satan and His demons to perform miracles in the past and we are told that He will also allow this to happen in the future.⁶ Revelation 16:14 NLT:

They are demonic spirits who work miracles and go out to all the rulers of the world to gather them for battle against the Lord on that great judgment day of God the Almighty.

Do not be deceived by signs and wonders alone. In the end times all the power of Hell will be released upon the earth and many false prophets will appear working signs and wonders, so do not be deceived by such apparent miracles alone. Paul tells us this information about the Antichrist:

2 Thessalonians 2:9 NLT:

⁶ Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A. R.; Fausset, A. R.; Brown, David; Brown, David: *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: 1997, S. Re 16:14.

This man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles.

So how would we determine if this man who claims to be Christ was actually Christ or a false prophet controlled by Satan? Well, He could have someone like me, who cannot carry a tune in a basket, break forth into a beautiful hymn. That would undoubtedly be a miracle. But you could tell whether or not the hymn came from God by whom the hymn glorified. Everything that comes from Christ would glorify the Father. Everything that is from Christ would be backed up with reference to the Bible. And that would be the key in the scenario I painted a few minutes ago. A man walking into this room as the self-declared Christ does not fit the biblical description of Christ's Second Coming. This is another reason why it is so important for you to know for yourself what the Bible teaches. (Let me put in a plug here for our Sunday night Bible study that is currently going through the Book of Revelation.) When Jesus returns it will be in the air and many will be with Him.

Jesus' miracles were miracles not only because of their supernatural power, but also because of their purpose. Jesus' miracles always pointed to God. That is how you can tell the real Jesus from cheap impersonators.

John 5:21-23 ESV:

21 For as the Father raises the dead⁷ and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

22 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

In terms of Twenty-First Century phraseology these three verses are the ultimate expression of delegation of authority. Not only does God give all power to His Son, He even makes He and the Son one, which is confirmed elsewhere in Scripture. In John chapter 10 Jesus is surrounded by people in the Temple who ask Him: "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered them in verses 25-30 NLT:

25 Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name.

26 But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep.

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me,

29 for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than

⁷ *As the Father raises up dead.* God has power to raise the dead. By his power it had been done in at least two instances-by the prophet Elijah, in the case of the son of the widow of Sarepta (1 Kings 17:22), and by the prophet Elisha, in the case of the Shunamite's son, 2 Kings 4:32-35. The Jews did not doubt that God had power to raise the dead. Jesus here expressly affirms it, and says he has the same power.

anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand.
30 The Father and I are one."

For Jesus to claim to have the power **to give life to the dead** (John 5:21) was yet another claim that He was God, or at least equal with God because that power was God's alone (Ezekiel 37:7-10). And Jesus had not yet performed a miracle where He brought someone out of a grave and restored them to life. This must have only fanned more the flames of hatred that were developing among the Jewish leaders for Jesus. It would not be long, however, before Jesus would raise the dead: the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), followed by the message to John the Baptist which speaks of this same power (Luke 7:22), and the raising of Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:18, 22-26). Jesus exercises this power on those "*whom he wills.*" Christ can provide eternal life, therefore, to both body and soul.⁸

Then in verse 22 Jesus says that He is **equal to God His Father in judgment**. Genesis 18:25 declares God to be judge of all the earth. God has given Jesus complete authority to judge people and implement appropriate punishment or reward and determine who will go to Heaven and who will go to Hell.⁹ The power of judging the world implies the ability to search a person's heart, and a supernatural power to understand the motives of everyone's actions. This is something that only a divine being could accomplish and it proves that the Son is equal with the Father.

Then in John 5:23 Jesus adds that He deserves to be **honored equally with the Father** because He and the Father are one. By this time the Jewish leaders must have been tearing their hair out. *'This peasant thinks He is God. Who does He think He is?'* A little play on words there. *"Stone Him, beat Him, kill Him!"* Such must have been their reaction to what under any other circumstances involving any other person would have been the worst of blasphemies. If a person considers themselves religious and they say something like, *"Oh, I've always believed in God, but I can't believe that Jesus was the Son of God,"* such a person is writing his or her own obituary because you cannot have one without the other, as the old song goes.¹⁰ Jesus and God are one. They both have equal power within the structure of the Triune God along with the Holy Spirit. If you cannot accept that then you believe yourself to have wisdom beyond that of the Creator of the universe and everything that is in it. Therefore you should be able to, when the time comes, raise yourself from the dead and convince whomever it is you think is in charge that you should go to Paradise. We wish you the best of luck but we know where you will actually end up.

To look at Jesus was to see God the Father in action according to John 1:18. The fact that Jesus did the will of his Father without question established the reason for the glory of His ministry and His being a stumbling block for those who would not accept Him for who He truly was.¹¹

⁸ Robertson, A.T.: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Oak Harbor: 1997, S. Jn 5:21.

⁹ Acts 17:31; Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 11:27.

¹⁰ Love and Marriage.

¹¹ Hughes, Robert B.; Laney, J. Carl; Hughes, Robert B.: *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.:

We would like to close with a story:

"'I know men,' said Napoleon in exile on the island of St. Helena to Count Montholon, 'I know men, and I tell you that Jesus was not a man! The religion of Christ is a mystery, which subsists by its own force, and proceeds from a mind which is not a human mind. We find in it a marked individuality which originated a train of words and actions unknown before. Jesus is not a philosopher, for His proofs are miracles, and from the first His disciples adored Him. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires but on what foundation did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded an empire upon love, and at this hour millions of men would die for Him. I die before my time, and my body will be given back to the earth, to become food for worms. Such is the fate of him who has been called the great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and is extending over the whole earth!' And turning to General Bertrand, the Emperor added, 'If you do not perceive that Jesus Christ was God, I did wrong to appoint you general!'¹²

If you do not believe that Jesus Christ is God, may God help you!

Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 471.

¹² Bible Illustrations.