



John 5:16-30 (16-47)  
 So That You May Believe: John  
 “Jesus’ Equality with His Heavenly Father”

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As we go through the gospel of John, today’s passage follows right on the heels of what we looked at last week, where Jesus healed a guy who had been an invalid for 38 years. The healing took place on a Sabbath, and this raised the hackles of the Pharisees, who were the Jewish religious leaders of the day. So, let’s read **John 5:16-30**.

The Pharisees were particularly known for their religious “law keeping.” They sought to carry out every Jewish religious law. But many of those laws had been added onto beyond just what Scripture says, so that there were all kinds of additional rules around a given Biblical rule.

**Keeping the Sabbath as a day of rest (Exodus 20:8-11) was one of those laws that had received all kinds of additional rules tied to it, and Jesus had run-ins with the Pharisees in regards to the Sabbath on several occasions.** The Sabbath initially is given in the 10 Commandments. It’s a God-ordained thing for us to take a day of rest and get re-centered on God. But rules around what was “rest” and what was “work” had developed and been handed down over the centuries, and they’d grown to the point that on the Sabbath you almost couldn’t do anything. For instance, this guy who got healed had picked up the mat he’d been sitting on and carried it with him when Jesus told him to do exactly that. But carrying your mat was considered work, and was outlawed on the Sabbath.

**So: A good thing (rest) that comes to us from God got twisted and mis-used by the Pharisees.** They essentially made an idol of the Sabbath, elevating it above other commandments. For instance, it was used as an excuse not to show compassion on the Sabbath or to help people in need. In fact, the healing that Jesus did was considered work and was not allowed by the Pharisees. A doctor could not help a person in need of medical attention unless it was life-threatening. And even then, the Pharisees’ rules only allowed the doctor to do what was necessary so the patient would live until after the Sabbath was over, at which point truly helpful medical work could be done.

Jesus, however, was not against the Sabbath. He simply wanted to return it to its proper place. He understood the spirit of the Sabbath, the intent of the Sabbath, and **Jesus advocated for a third way – the way God originally intended: Not “no Sabbath”...and not “Sabbath to the detriment of people”...but Sabbath as a day from regular work responsibilities to rest, engage in other activities that bring joy, to be with family, and to reconnect with God.**

So, the Pharisees were so focused on their idolatry of the manmade sabbath rules that they couldn't celebrate the grace of God in this guy's life as he's healed. Similarly, but conversely, some people today in America have made such an idol out of what we might call a “manmade law” that they are missing the pain and anguish it is causing people. In light of the events in Uvalde, Texas this past week, I cannot help but draw that comparison to our United States' Second Amendment: the Right to bear arms. Like the Pharisees' fixation on the manmade rules around the Sabbath, some people have become so fixated on the manmade Second Amendment, and created such an idol out of it, that sensible guardrails and rules that could save lives are never put in place. And some of those people – not all of them, but *some* of them – are Christians who ought to know better.

Now, I hear and absolutely resonate with the call of Christians who say, “The problem is deeper. The problem is sin. We've walked away from God, as a nation. If we confessed our sin, repented, and had Jesus at the center of our lives across this country, then this wouldn't be a problem.” And to that, I say “Amen and amen.” Absolutely. In fact, in regards to sin and its impact on our nation, let me quote my own sermon from just last Sunday (don't think I've ever done this!), before this week's tragedy. I said: **“I don't think it is a coincidence at all that as our nation has gotten further and further away from the Christian faith, and as sin has been endorsed, encouraged, and embraced rather than hated and stopped – as that has happened in our nation, I don't think it's any coincidence that we are getting more hostile as a nation, more broken, more divided; and not just at the macro level, but also at the level of our families, our marriages; Even in the Church, we struggle with buying what the world is selling, rather than turning to**

**Jesus.”** I’m sorry to say that those words about being more hostile were unintentionally prophetic with another round of preventable violence in a school once again. So yes: Our nation needs Jesus; He is the answer. I totally, 100% agree.

**But Scripture tells us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:14-26).** Did Jesus have *faith* that the guy could be healed? Absolutely. Did he stop there? No. He did something about it. He “worked,” and he healed the guy, and told him to pick up his mat and walk. It’s not an either/or situation, but a middle road that is “both/and.” Similarly, we can express our faith in “thoughts and prayers” all we want, and we should do that...it is definitely an expression of faith to pray...*and* we need to put that faith into action to save lives.

And guess what: when we do that, people who aren’t Christian are then more likely to turn to Jesus, the one who heals all our ills. If you question the importance of Christians putting their faith in action to curb this problem in our nation, maybe this will help: An article in the Seattle Times yesterday, that actually came from the New York Times, which means it unfortunately has a wider audience, said this about the company that made one of the guns the shooter used this last week, **“The week before the Texas shooting, Daniel Defense [the gun-maker] posted a photograph on Facebook and Twitter, showing a little boy sitting cross-legged, an assault rifle balanced across his lap. ‘Train up a child in the way he should go,’ the caption reads, echoing a biblical proverb. ‘When he is old, he will not depart from it’” (Seattle Times, May 28, 2022).** That’s not just *echoing* a biblical proverb, it’s quoting Proverbs 22:6 verbatim to promote assault rifles – with a kid at the center of it. I don’t get offended at much, but I find that an offensive use of Scripture, even if it is intended to communicate training a child how to use a gun responsibly and ethically. I’m not sure what its intent is – but it’s from a gun company, who wants to sell guns, using a child and the Judeo-Christian faith to sell an instrument of death.

When we Christians say we’re pro-life – I’m in that camp, our church and our denomination are in that camp – when we say we value life in the womb but then won’t support changes to save students’ and teachers’ lives, or

people shopping in a grocery store or people gathered in church... When we won't support some changes that would save lives because we love unrestricted access to an instrument of death more: that turns people away from Jesus. It turns them away from the solution we believe and proclaim is needed.

**How can we expect our neighbors and a whole nation to turn to Jesus, when we won't put our faith into action and do something to save lives?**

We end up perpetuating the unfortunate man-made tradition of Christians being one of the top reasons people refuse to follow Jesus. We have to put our faith into action – even when it breaks (or bends) our beloved man-made rules. Jesus did it right here on the Sabbath. He broke the man-made idolatrous Sabbath rules. Not because he hated the Sabbath or wanted to do away with the Sabbath, but because this guy's health and well-being were more important. Jesus is upholding the Sabbath, and he's upholding life. Can't we do the same thing for our fellow beings who are made in the image of God? *Shouldn't* we do the same thing? Doesn't Scripture tell us to do the same thing? Isn't this the kind of thing Jesus meant when he said, **“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds, and glorify your father in heaven” (Jesus, in Matthew 5:16)**. Jesus lives this out in healing this man, and he calls us to do the same thing.

Now, when Jesus defends his action against the Pharisees, it ticks them off. And because Jesus calls God his Father, which to their way of thinking was equating himself with God, they get even angrier and John tells us that they tried all the more to kill him. Verse 19 says, “Jesus gave them this answer,” though we don't actually get a question from the Pharisees here. Elsewhere – like earlier in John's gospel when Jesus overthrew the money-changing tables in the temple – they asked him what his authority was to do that. And there seems to have been the same question asked here, or at least it was going through their heads, because that's the question that Jesus addresses. And essentially: **Verse 19 through verse 47 consists of two themes: 1) Jesus gives evidence for why he has the authority – not only to heal on the Sabbath, but to put himself on equal footing with God. 2) Jesus gives the implications of believing, or not believing, who Jesus says he is.**

So, I know we read only through verse 30, but all of this ties together, and the rest of the sermon will take us through verse 47. Let me pull out some key verses that summarize Jesus' points.

First, in verse 21, Jesus says that he can only do what the Father does. They work closely together – hand-in-hand, we might say. So, the healing that just happened that the Pharisees are upset about? It comes from God the Father, the giver of the Sabbath. The fruit of this is given in verse 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” (John 5:23)**. This emphasizes the centrality of Jesus. To acknowledge that God exists, to say “I believe in God” like in a generic way, but then not to say the same thing about the Son – Jesus – is to in effect negate one's belief in God. Jesus is saying that belief in him, in Jesus, matters. If you want to honor God, then honor the Son, Jesus. If you won't honor Jesus, then you can't honor God.

Verses 24-30 then flesh out the ramifications of this for those who honor Jesus or who don't. Those who do will rise to life, and those who don't will rise to condemnation. This kind of teaching from Jesus is what gives rise to Paul's famous words in Romans 8:1-2, **“For there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2)**. Jesus has taken that condemnation upon himself on the cross, and the penalty for our sin has been paid by him. This opens the door to eternal life with him.

Verses 31-47 then continue the theme of his authority – where it comes from, proof of this, and so forth. There are three “testimonies” to Jesus' authority that he cites, which is no accident on his part, as it meets an Old Testament requirement for convicting someone of certain crimes: 1 witness wasn't enough. It took at least two, and three was much preferred. So, Jesus gives three.

**First, is the testimony of John the Baptist (John 5:33-35)**. You'll recall that the first chapter of John spent quite a bit of time on John the Baptist. When John burst onto the scene as a “voice of one crying out in the

wilderness” there was a lot of speculation in the Jewish community that he was the long-expected Messiah. The Jewish religious leaders went out into the wilderness to investigate and see what he was all about. And John told them straight up, “I’m not the one, but there’s another who’s coming after me who is.” And then he very specifically pointed people to Jesus, saying that he was the one they’re looking for. Now, here, Jesus kind of discounts John’s testimony because from his perspective it’s the least powerful of the three he gives, but he also knows his audience, and his audience values human opinion. So, he includes it here.

**Second, is the testimony of Jesus’ heavenly Father (John 5:36-38).** So now the pendulum swings from human testimony, to supernatural testimony...to heavenly testimony. This takes the shape of works that his Father gives him to do, and things the Father has done that directly testify. In the latter category we might count Jesus’ birth, his baptism where the voice of God declared that Jesus was his son, with whom he was well-pleased; Jesus’ transfiguration; and of course Jesus’ resurrection. All of these are things that God the Father does to testify to who Jesus is.

The works that Jesus does are the miracles that he does. There are too many in that Jesus does to list them all here, but there are more since Jesus’ day, of course. I’ve experienced a miracle healing in my lower back – not 100% but 50% at least, and I literally felt things moving in my back as people prayed for me. It’s one of the things I hold onto as a reminder of Jesus’ work in my life. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century scientist, mathematician and scholar Blaise Pascal had an incredible, 2-hour miraculous encounter with Jesus that changed his life. He wrote his experience down, and here’s what he wrote:  
 “Monday, 23 November, feast of St. Clement...From about half past ten at night until about half past midnight,

FIRE.

GOD of Abraham, GOD of Isaac, GOD of Jacob  
 not of the philosophers and of the learned.  
 Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace.  
 GOD of Jesus Christ.

My God and your God.

Your GOD will be my God.

Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except GOD.

He is only found by the ways taught in the Gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

Who knows exactly what he experienced, but it was a miracle presence of God that he could only describe as “Fire.” He wrote this down on a piece of paper that he then sewed into his coat, so he would never forget how God had met him in that event. The miracles that God works through Jesus testify to who Jesus is.

**Lastly (5:39-47), is the testimony of the Scriptures.** Keep in mind, when Jesus says this, he’s speaking of the Old testament – verses and passages that he fulfills. He’s not even counting the New Testament because it hadn’t been written yet. But clearly, the New Testament is also Scriptural testimony to who Jesus is. So, going all the way back to Moses’ writings – which takes us all the way back to Genesis – all of it points to, and testifies about, Jesus. And Jesus closes it out by saying that those who won’t accept what Moses wrote as looking ahead to Jesus, won’t come to faith in Jesus. The Scriptures are the key testimony to who Jesus is, and ultimately, they point us to him.

You put it all together, and **Jesus is saying: “I matter more than any human rules, regulations, concoction of spirituality, or efforts at works righteousness. You say you believe in God? Then believe in me. Not just because I say so, but because of how God the Father works through me and because of the testimonies to who I am.”** As Jesus says to his disciples at the end of Matthew’s account of his life: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” We see this claim of Jesus’ in so many places.

So, let’s receive him, believe him, and live for him as lord of our lives in such a way that others will be drawn to him. It will mean setting priorities differently, like valuing life over death, and doing so enough to put our faith into action. It will mean ordering our life around his word and his will and his way. It will mean confessing our sin when we fall short of his glory. It will mean setting a side our pride and our personal desires, and instead: daily taking up our cross and following him, as he invites his disciples to do. But

the joy, the abundant life, the grace, the peace and comfort that he brings in this life and into eternity are so much better than trying to live on our own, by a bunch of man-made rules. He has that power and that authority because he is one with the God of the Universe. Let's live for him – on the Sabbath and every single day we have on earth, even as we trust in him for eternal life. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.churchpop.com/2016/04/19/night-fire-blaise-pascals/>