

EXPLANATION OF 43RD BIBLEBOOK

JOHN 5 (A.D. 70-95)

INTRODUCTION

John 5:1-47 describes Jesus Christ rejected by the Jews in Judea after the miracle at Bethesda.

John 5:17-30 contains the claims of Jesus Christ with respect to God the Father.

John 5:31-47 speaks about the witnesses of Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE

(I) 5:1-9a. Jesus heals a disabled man at the Pool of Bethesda (Bethzatha).

- The time and location of the miracle (5:1-3a).
- A later addition (5:3b-4).
- The healing of the paralyzed man (5:5-9a).

(II) 5:9b-13. The Sabbath.

- What the Jews taught about the Sabbath.
- What the Bible teaches about the Sabbath.

(III) 5:14-15. The real purpose of physical healing.

(IV) 5:16-23. The claims of Jesus Christ.

- Jesus claims that he is *equal in essence* with God the Father (5:16-18).
- Jesus claims that he is *equal in works* with God the Father (5:19-22).
- Jesus claims that he is *equal in honour* with God the Father (5:23).

(V) 5:24-29. The spiritual resurrection and the physical resurrection.

- The word (voice) of Jesus causes the spiritual resurrection (5:24-25).
- Only God has life-in-himself. Jesus gives eternal life to believers (5:26-27).
- The word (voice) of Jesus will cause the physical resurrection (5:28-29).
- The word (voice) of Jesus will cause the final judgement (5:30).

(VI) 5:31-47. The five witnesses of Jesus.

- The first witness of Jesus is John the Baptist (5:33-35).
- The second witness of Jesus is the works of Jesus (5:36).
- The third witness of Jesus is God the Father himself (5:37-38).
- The fourth witness of Jesus is the Scriptures (5:39-40).
- The fifth witness of Jesus is Moses (5:45-47).

EXPLANATION

(I) 5:1-9a. Jesus heals a disabled man at the Pool of Bethesda.

a. The time and location of the miracle (5:1-3a).

5:1. After this there was (viia) a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up (viaa) to Jerusalem.

5:2. Now there is (vipa) in Jerusalem at the Sheep's Gate a pool, called (vppp) in Hebrew 'Bethzatha' (Bethesda), having (surrounded by)(vppa) five roofed colonnades.

5:3a. In these were lying (viin) a great number (crowd) of sick people (invalids)¹ (vppa): the blind, the lame, the shrivelled up (disabled).

Time: The Passover of April A.D. 28. The Old Testament Law made it compulsory for Jews to go up to Jerusalem three times every year:

- in April for the Feast of Unleavened Bread of which the Passover was the beginning,
- in May for the Feast of weeks or Pentecost
- in October for the Feast of Tabernacles².

Because in later times the Passover was the only feast where Jews had to travel to Jerusalem, the feast in John 5:1 was probably the Passover of the year A.D. 28 between the Passover of the year A.D. 27 in John 2:13 and the Passover of the year A.D. 29 in John 6:4. The church father Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200) confirms this. Although the disciples are not mentioned, they probably travelled together with Jesus (cf. 3:22; 4:2).

Location: The pool of Bethzatha or Bethesda. Bethzatha means 'house of the olive tree' and Bethesda means 'house of mercy'. This pool was north of the Sheep's Gate, which was in the northern wall of the temple. The sheep needed for the temple sacrifices were brought to the temple through this gate. There were many disabled people: the blind, the crippled (in hand or feet) and the paralysed.

b. A later addition (5:3b-4).

5:3b-4. They waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.

This verse is a later addition to the text and is only found in a few later and less important Greek manuscripts. In the later days of the apostle John the belief in angels had become very important among the Jews.

These words were probably a later explanation written in the margin of a manuscript. A later copier of this manuscript copied these words into the text of his manuscript. What is important is that this addition only represents the opinion of

¹ G: astheneó

² Deuteronomy 16:16

the disabled man (5:7b) and not the teaching of the apostle John or of the Holy Spirit. Also important is that the healing of the disabled man had nothing to do with the stirring of the water, because Jesus healed him in a sovereign way.

c. The healing of the paralyzed man (5:5-9a).

5:5. And there was (viia) a certain man, having (suffering)(vppa) thirty-eight years in his disability.

5:6. When Jesus saw (vpaa) him lying (vppn) there and knew (learned by inquiry)(vpaa)³ that by then he had been (suffering)(vipa) a long time, he said (vipa) to him, “Do you want (vipa) to get (vnad) well?”

5:7. The sick man (vppa) answered (viao) him, “Sir (Lord), when the water is stirred (vsap) I have (vipa) no one that would throw (i.e. bring with haste)⁴ (vsaa) me into the pool; and while I am coming (vipn) another steps down (vipa) ahead of me.”

5:8. Jesus said (vipa) to him, “Get up (vmpa)! Pick up (vmaa) your mat and walk (vmpa) (imperatives)!”

5:9. And at once the man was healed (viad); he picked up (viia) his mat and was walking (viia).

Thirty-eight years. How did Jesus know that this man had been disabled for thirty-eight years? The disabled man or someone else could have told this to him or to the apostle John. Or God the Father could have revealed this to Jesus. Or his divine nature revealed this to his human nature in a way we cannot understand⁵.

Who stirred the water? Who stirred the water in the pool (5:7)? *The people believed it was done by an angel.* More probable is the natural explanation: much such kind of mineral water springs in the world has sudden bursts of warm water and people like to lie in the warm water of such springs.

Healing by the Word. A paralysed man cannot move himself, cannot stand up or pick up something or walk. This paralysed man complained that there was no one to help him.

Why does Jesus ask the disabled man whether he wanted to be healed? Maybe the man had already given up all hope of healing. More probable is that Jesus wanted the disabled man to realise his miserable condition and his inability to change his situation and to acknowledge that *he needed a Saviour and not a miracle.*

Important to remember is that the disabled man was healed, not when the water was stirred, but after the powerful word of Jesus: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk”. This was a great challenge to a man who had just said that he could not walk!

The spoken word of Jesus Christ is authoritative: powerful and effective⁶. *Jesus never commands anything that would be impossible.* When Jesus speaks, it means that he wants this to happen. Here, Jesus wants this paralysed man to walk again. The paralysed man believed the word of Jesus. *To show that he believed, he obeyed⁷.* He was immediately cured, picked up his mat and walked! The recovery of the man was not gradual or partial, but instant and complete! Again the glory of Jesus is revealed.

(II) 5:9b-13. The Sabbath.

5:9b. It was (viia) the Sabbath on that day.

5:10. So the Jews were saying (viia) to the healed man (vprp), “It is (vipa) the Sabbath and it is not lawful (vipa) for you to carry (vnaa) your mat.”

5:11. But he answered (viao) them, “The man who made (vpaa) me healed, it was he who said (viia) to me, “Pick up (vmaa) your mat and walk (vmpa).”

5:12. So they asked (viia) him, Who is (vipa) the man that said (vpaa) to you “Pick up (vmaa) and walk (vmpa)”?

5:13. The healed man (vpap) did not know (by intuition or reflexion)(vila)⁸ who it was (vipa), for Jesus had slipped away from (dodged) (viia)⁹ the crowd that was (vppa) in that place.

a. What the Jews taught about the Sabbath.

For the Jews the Sabbath day was a day in which they must not work. The Pharisees gave a list of 39 prohibitions on the Sabbath day. They taught that this was the way to earn their righteousness before God. For Jesus the Sabbath day was a day for Christians to do constructive things in God’s Kingdom in gratitude for their complete justification by God’s grace.

For the Jews man was created to keep the Sabbath day. For Jesus the Sabbath day was created for the wellbeing of man. The Pharisees prohibited carrying anything on the Sabbath day, even a sleeping mat. But the Old Testament only prohibits the carrying of goods/merchandise on the Sabbath¹⁰.

³ G: ginóskó

⁴ G: balló

⁵ cf. Matthew 24:36

⁶ cf. Matthew 4:4

⁷ cf. Hebrews 11:6-8

⁸ G: oida édei (pluperfect of defective perfect verb)

⁹ G: ekneuó

¹⁰ Jeremiah 17:21; Nehemiah 13:19

The Jews made one exception: the circumcision of boys on the eighth day had precedence above keeping the Sabbath. Jesus rejected the hair splitting and hypocrisy of the Pharisees by saying that healing a person was more important than circumcision (7:22-23).

This disabled man told the Jews that a man who had the power to heal someone that had been paralysed for 38 years surely had the authority to tell him what to do (carry) on the Sabbath (4:11). By healing on the Sabbath Jesus proved that he was indeed the Lord of the Sabbath¹¹!

b. What the Bible teaches about the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was the one day (the last day) in every week when God's people were required to rest from their work or job during the week and do things that refresh them. Also their employees, their animals and other foreigners were required to rest (i.e. not to do regular labour)¹².

The Sabbath was also the day of sacred assembly, to meet together to worship God and learn from God¹³.

The Sabbath was also intended as a time to do good and save the lives of other people, physically as well as spiritually¹⁴.

The Sabbath was not created as a day in which man must serve the Sabbath day, but was created to serve the interests of man. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath and he may determine what you do on that day or not¹⁵.

The first coming of Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial aspect of the fourth commandment: the seventh day¹⁶. The early Church combined the good principles from the Old Testament mentioned above with the first day of the week, which celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

(III) 5:14-15. The real purpose of physical healing.

5:14. After these things Jesus found (vipa) him at the temple and said (viaa) to him, "See, you have become (vira) healed. No longer continue in sin (vmpa)(imperative) so that not something worse¹⁷ may happen (vsad) to you."

5:15. The man went away (viaa) and told (viaa) the Jews that it was (vipa) Jesus who had healed (made healthy)(vpaa) him.

Sin is to miss God's purpose, namely, a relationship with God. Some people think that the former disabled man must have committed some terrible sin in his past and that God had punished him with 38 years of disability (paralysis?). Now Jesus warned him not to continue that sin. But this event contains no reference to the cause of his disability, just as with respect to the man born blind (9:1-3). Jesus says nothing about any specific sin allegedly committed in his past, but only, "Do not *continue* to sin!" The word 'to sin' means to miss God's purpose in life, which is to live as God intended one to live. Jesus does not refer to his condition in the past, but to his condition in the present. His past physical condition was healed, but his present spiritual condition was not yet healed. He still had not been reconciled to God. Jesus could see in his heart that God had no place in his heart or was not central in his heart. He had changed physically, but not spiritually. Jesus warned him that if he continued to live a life that misses God's purpose, something worse would happen: he would miss eternal life¹⁸!

Physical and spiritual healing. *Physical healing on this side of the grave is always temporary healing!* And physical healing without spiritual healing is no real healing at all! Only spiritual healing is eternal and would also include eternal physical healing at the resurrection of the dead! So after Jesus had healed the paralytic physically, he proceeded to heal him spiritually. Jesus transformed not only his physical and temporal life, but also his spiritual and eternal life!

(IV) 5:16-23. The claims of Jesus Christ.

Jesus made certain claims about himself that were not misunderstood by the Jews.

a. Jesus claims that he is equal in essence with God the Father (5:16-18).

5:16. And for this reason the Jews were persecuting (vija) Jesus, namely, that he was doing (vija) these things on the Sabbath.

5:17. But he answered (viad) them, "My Father is working (vipn) until now; also I am working (vipn)."

5:18. For this reason the Jews were seeking (vija) more to kill (vnaa) him: not only was he breaking (vija) the Sabbath, but was calling (vija) God his own Father, thus making (vppa) himself equal with God.

Jesus is attacked for violating the Sabbath. The Jews attacked Jesus for violating the Sabbath. The Jews regarded the essence of the Sabbath as idleness and maintained that all work on that day was wrong. But Jesus said that if that were true, then the Jews also accused God the Father of violating the Sabbath, because God the Father is always at his work

¹¹ Mark 2:27-28

¹² Exodus 23:12

¹³ Leviticus 23:3; cf. Hebrews 10:25

¹⁴ Mark 3:4

¹⁵ Mark 2:27-28

¹⁶ Matthew 5:17

¹⁷ G: cheiron, comparative of 'kakos'

¹⁸ Matthew 25:46

of preserving the creation and of saving his people! If God would stop doing these things, no one would continue to breathe, eat or drink; and no one would be saved. These works of God are continuing day after day.

What God the Father is doing, also Jesus is doing. The Person of God the Father and the Person of God the Son stand in the closest possible relationship within *the unity of the divine being*. God the Father executes his work through God the Son (he is the Mediator)¹⁹. That is why God the Son is working continuously, also on the Sabbath! Because God the Son is equal in essence with God the Father, whoever condemns God the Son (Jesus Christ) for whatever he says and does, condemns God the Father (5:23)! Thus whoever condemns God the Son for violating the Sabbath, also attacks God the Father for violating the Sabbath.

Jesus is attacked for making himself equal with God. The Jews attacked Jesus for making himself equal to God. Jesus called God ‘my Father’. The Jews immediately understood that Jesus claimed for himself deity in the highest sense of that term and that he claimed that he was equal with God the Father. The claim of Jesus is either the most wicked blasphemy against God which should be punished with death, or it is the most glorious truth, which should be accepted by faith! God the Father and God the Son have the same nature. They are equal in essence. This was the real reason why the Jews wanted to kill Jesus (cf. 7:1,19,25,30,32,44; 8:37,40,59; 10:31,39; 11:8,53,57). Jesus Christ is destined to cause the falling of many who reject his claim, but also the rising of many who accept his claim²⁰!

b. Jesus claims that he is equal in works with God the Father (5:19-22).

5:19. Jesus answered (viad) and was saying (viia) to them, “I tell (vipa) you the truth, the Son can (vipn) do (vnpa) nothing whatever of himself, unless he sees (vspa) what his Father is doing (vppa). The things he (the Father) does (vspa), those things the Son does (vipa) likewise.

5:20. For the Father loves (likes)(vipa) the Son and shows (vipa) him all the things he is doing (vipa). He will show (vifa) him greater works than these, so that you may be amazed (vspa).

5:21. For just as the Father again and again raises (vipa) the dead and again and again gives (them) life (vipa), so also the Son gives life (vipa) to whom he wills (vipa).

5:22. For the Father judges (vipa) no one, but has committed (vira) all judgement to the Son,

The Mediator. *The activity that originates with the invisible (and omni-present) Father²¹ is manifested visibly in the visible (and earthbound) Son. The Son sees what the Father shows him, and then by his audible word and visible action in his human nature he reveals the Father’s mind. The Son perceives the will of the Father and then in his human nature puts it into effect. That is why Jesus Christ is called the Mediator of God’s creation, the Mediator of God’s salvation and the Mediator of God’s judgement. He mediates between the uncreated reality of the unapproachable Father and the created reality of mankind. This is not the same as mediating between two personalities within creation. The unity between the Father and the Son is not perceived as the duality of two parties in mediation on earth can be perceived. Christians believe in one Divine Being who manifested himself as the Father in heaven, as the Son on earth and as the Spirit within his people on earth.*

Jesus assures the Jews that he has the authority to perform much greater works than healing the disabled man. The things that would cause them to marvel even more are:

- giving life to the physically dead
- giving life to the spiritually dead
- executing judgement on the rest.

The authority and power to raise the dead. Jesus claims, “Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.” Jesus does not claim simply to be the instrument in God’s hand for restoring the dead to life, like the prophets Elijah and Elisha were. He claims that he has authority to raise the dead, not merely to resume their mortal life on earth, but to raise people to the life of the age to come! He claims to have the same authority as the Father has to impart eternal spiritual life to spiritually dead people now and to impart immortal physical life to the physical dead people at the resurrection in the future.

The authority and power to judge everyone. Jesus also claims, “The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son”. Throughout the Old Testament God has been acknowledged as the Judge of the earth²². Now Jesus claims that God the Father has given all authority in heaven and on earth to God the Son²³ and has given the final judgement to God the Son²⁴. The purpose why God the Father committed all judgement to God the Son is that God the Son may receive the same honour as is given to God the Father (5:22-23)!

c. Jesus claims that he is equal in honour with God the Father (5:23).

5:23. In order that all may continually honour (vspa) the Son as they continually honour (vipa) the Father. He who does not continually honour (vppa) the Son does not continually honour (vipa) the Father, who once for all sent (vpaa) him.”

¹⁹ cf. Hebrews 1:3

²⁰ Luke 2:34

²¹ The spiritual reality of heaven cannot be comprehended by the mind of natural man who is limited to the three-dimensional created universe.

²² Genesis 18:25

²³ Matthew 28:18

²⁴ Psalm 2:6:12; John 5:22

Every person who does not honour God the Son does not honour God the Father, who sent him”²⁵!

In Philippians 2:9-11, as a reward for his obedience unto death, God the Father has given Jesus a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. In Isaiah 45:22 this same honour belongs only to the LORD. Therefore, when Jesus Christ receives these honours, the glory of God is not diminished or given to ‘another’, because Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God (14:9)²⁶. The glory of God is rather enhanced, because Jesus Christ receives these honours “to the glory of God the Father”²⁷. Whenever the Son is exalted, the Father is glorified. Whenever people bow their knees before Jesus Christ and confess with their mouths that Jesus Christ is their Saviour and Lord, God the Father is glorified!

(V) 5:24-29. The spiritual resurrection and the physical resurrection.

The word (voice) of Jesus gave physical healing to the disabled man. That was a miraculous sign pointing to the word (voice) of Jesus that gives spiritual healing and eternal healing to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ.

a. The word (voice) of Jesus causes the spiritual resurrection (5:24-25).

5:24. I tell (vipa) you the truth, whoever continually hears (vppa) my word and continually believes (vppa) him who sent (vpaa) me has (vipa) eternal life and does not come (vipn) into condemnation (of the final judgement)²⁸, but has passed (vira) out²⁹ of death into³⁰ life.

5:25. I tell (vipa) you the truth, the time ³¹is coming (vipn) and now is (present)(vipa) when the dead will certainly hear (vifa) the voice of the Son of God and those who once for all heard (vpaa) will certainly live (vifa).

The spiritual resurrection. The time for the spiritual resurrection began at the first coming of Christ and takes place during the whole New Testament period until the second coming of Christ. Through the proclamation of the gospel people hear the word (voice) of Jesus Christ calling them to repent and believe³². Those people who hear his voice and believe in him immediately receive eternal life (regeneration by God’s Spirit): they will never be doomed in the final judgement; but have effectively been translated from the realm of spiritual death and eternal death to the realm of spiritual life and eternal life. The spiritually dead³³ are able to hear the word (voice) of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (14:26; 16:13-15)³⁴.

The word of Jesus is enabling and life-giving. In John 5:24, Jesus Christ, the Son of God says, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life”. Jesus Christ gives life to people by his word. ‘His word’ is his whole message to the world. And he speaks his word by his Father’s authority. The incident of *the healing of the paralysed man at Bethesda (5:11)* is ‘a sign’ of how Jesus gives spiritual life to people by his word. The paralysed man received physical healing through *the enabling word* of Jesus Christ. Likewise, people will receive spiritual healing only through *the life-giving word* of Jesus Christ³⁵.

The word of Jesus causes the Holy Spirit to work. In John 5:25, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when *the dead* will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” How can ‘the dead’ be expected to hear? In Ezekiel 37:4, the Israelites in exile in Babylon are compared to dry bones lying scattered in a valley. The prophet says, “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!” And the breath of God entered the dead bodies and they were able to respond! They came to life! This was a prophecy about ‘the exiled Israelites’ returning from exile. In John 5 it is the same Spirit of God who now enables ‘the spiritually dead’ people to hear the voice of Jesus and enter into eternal life!

The word of Jesus comes only to those whom he chooses in a sovereign way. Which spiritually dead people will hear his voice and live? In John 5:21, Christ says that he gives life to whomever he is pleased to give it. Jesus Christ gives eternal life to those he chooses in a sovereign way. The Holy Spirit will cause them to hear his voice and will regenerate them.

b. Only God has life-in-himself. Jesus gives eternal life to believers (5:26-27).

5:26. For just as the Father continually has (vipa) life in himself, so he has once for all given (viaa) the Son to continually have (vnpa) life in himself.

²⁵ cf. Matthew 10:40; Luke 9:48; 10:16; 1 John 2:23

²⁶ Colossians 1:15

²⁷ Philippians 2:11

²⁸ G: krisis

²⁹ G: ek

³⁰ G: eis

³¹ G: hóra

³² Mark 1:15

³³ Ephesians 2:1-3

³⁴ cf. Ezekiel 37:4

³⁵ cf. Hebrews 4:12

5:27. And he has *once for all* given (viaa) him authority to execute (vnpa) the judgement (i.e. to function as the Judge) because he *always* is (vipa) the Son of Man.

None but God the Father possesses inherently this life-in-himself, because only he is unbegotten and uncreated. Only the Living God is eternal and completely self-sufficient.

Now Jesus says, “As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself”. *God the Father has from all eternity imparted his prerogative to have life-in-himself to God the Son. This is the meaning of only-begotten with respect to the Son. Jesus Christ is begotten, but not created. The term ‘only begotten Son’ does not refer to anything akin to the human world. It does not refer to any beginning somewhere in the past. It is a term that describes Christ’s Trinitarian Sonship.*

John 3:16 proves that Christ was the only begotten Son of the Father *before his incarnation*. God the Father’s bestowal of *life-in-himself* to God the Son did not happen at the incarnation or at the baptism of Jesus. This is an eternal act and a part of the unique Father-Son relationship that already existed in the beginning. *In the eternal order, God the Father imparted this life-in-himself to the Son, and in the temporal order, the Son reveals this life-in-himself to people on earth.*

In 1 John 1:2, God the Son (the Word) is depicted as the embodiment of that life-in-himself which “was with the Father from all eternity and was made manifest to us” in human history at the incarnation.

Human beings and all other created beings do not possess this life-in-himself, because they are created. Created life (1:3), spiritual life (eternal life) (5:25-26) and resurrected life (5:21,28-29) are derived from Jesus Christ.

c. The word (voice) of Jesus will cause the physical resurrection (5:28-29).

5:28. Do not be amazed (vmpa)(imperative) at this, for a time³⁶ is coming (vipn) when all in the graves will hear (vifa) his voice

5:29. and will come out (vifd): those who have done (vpaa) good to the resurrection of life, and those who have practised (vpaa) evil³⁷ to the resurrection of condemnation³⁸.

The physical resurrection. The time for the physical resurrection is at the second coming of Jesus Christ and takes place on the last day in history. Through the loud command from Jesus Christ as he comes from heaven all the physical dead in history will hear the word (voice) of Jesus Christ calling them to rise from the dead³⁹. All the dead, both believers and unbelievers, will hear his voice and will be physically resurrected on the same day⁴⁰. But only believers in Jesus Christ will possess eternal life in their spirits⁴¹ and their bodies⁴². Unbelievers will be cast spirit and body into the condemnation (doom) of hell⁴³.

d. The word (voice) of Jesus will cause the final judgement (5:30).

5:30. “I can (vipn) do (vnpa) nothing whatever of myself (cf. verse 19-20); as I hear (vipa) I judge (vipa), and my judgement is (vipa) just, because I do not seek (vipa) my own will, but the will of him who once for all sent (vpaa) me.”

All people must know that in criticising God the Son they are at the same time criticising God the Father. As Mediator God the Son received from God the Father the definite information as to the standards of judgement throughout the New Testament period and in the final judgement. Inasmuch as the Sonship of Jesus Christ as Mediator in history rests on his eternal Sonship, it is clear that Jesus Christ desires to do the wholly righteous will of God the Father, with whom he is forever ontologically and essentially united in one divine being.

The activity that originates with God the Father is manifested visibly in God the Son. Whatever God the Son sees and hears from God the Father in heaven and the eternal order, he expresses within creation and within history to mankind. Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. In his words and actions Jesus Christ perfectly reveals God’s mind (will). He perceives the will of God and then puts it into effect.

(VI) 5:31-47. The five witnesses of Jesus.

5:31. “If I testify (vspa) concerning myself, my testimony is (vipa) not true (valid)(as a testimony).

5:32. It is (vipa) another who continually testifies (vpaa) concerning me, and I know (by intuition and reflexion)⁴⁴ (vira) that the testimony which he testifies concerning me is (vipa) true (valid).

In verse 31, Jesus says that his own witness concerning himself, although true, is not valid in the estimation of the Jews. Of course, a testimonial to oneself is no testimonial, because no one can witness his own signature. If the claims of Jesus were made without the authority of the Father, then nobody would be obligated to accept his claims.

³⁶ G: hóra

³⁷ G: phaula

³⁸ G: krisis

³⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:16

⁴⁰ cf. Acts 24:15

⁴¹ 1 John 3:1-3

⁴² 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; Philippians 3:21

⁴³ cf. Matthew 10:28; 24:46

⁴⁴ G: oida

However, the testimony of Jesus is true, because his testimony was confirmed by the testimony of God the Father (8:13-18). Nevertheless, the Jews deny its reliability and validity. In their estimation it is not true and thus not valid.

Therefore, Jesus calls attention to five other very important witnesses on his behalf! The Jews cannot regard these witnesses for Jesus as invalid.

a. The first witness of Jesus is John the Baptist (5:33-35).

5:33. You have sent (vira) (a delegation from Jerusalem) to John and he has testified (vira) to the truth (1:19-27).

5:34. But, on my part, do not accept (vipa)(i.e. do not depend on) the testimony going out from⁴⁵ (mere) men. I say (vipa) these things that you may be saved (vsap).

5:35. He (John) was (viiia) the lamp that continually burned (vppp) and gave light (vppa), and you were willing (viaa) to rejoice⁴⁶ (vnap) for a while⁴⁷ in his light.

Jesus introduces John the Baptist as his witness. The calling and task of John the Baptist was to testify as a witness concerning the light (1:7). To the delegation of Jews who came from Jerusalem, he testified: that Jesus was “the true light that gives light to every man” (1:9); that he was ‘the coming LORD, whose way he prepared’ (1:23)⁴⁸; that he was ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (1:29); that he ‘baptises with the Holy Spirit’ (1:33); and that he is ‘the Son of God’ (1:34)! John was not the light, but the light-bearer or lamp, who attracted the crowds to Jesus Christ. John fulfilled his task well. Now Jesus Christ, the Light himself, was here with even greater accreditation (weightier testimony) than even John the Baptist could supply.

b. The second witness of Jesus is the works of Jesus (5:36).

5:36. I have (vipa) testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given (vira) me so that I may fulfil (finish)(vsaa) them; these very works that I am doing (vipa), testify (vipa) concerning me that the Father has sent (vira) me.

Jesus introduces the very work which God the Father had given to God the Son as a witness. The work which God the Father gave Jesus Christ to do was: revelation, salvation and judgement. He had to make the invisible God known. And he had to die as an atonement for sins, thus saving people and reconciling them to God. And he will judge the world in the final judgement. All the other individual works of Jesus, like his preaching, teaching and miracles/healing contribute to this great work of Jesus. His miracles were signs that pointed to the reality of God and the reality of salvation. All these miracles were a visible proof that God the Father had sent Jesus Christ and approved him.

c. The third witness of Jesus is God the Father himself (5:37-38).

5:37. And the Father who sent (vpaa) me has himself has testified (vira) concerning me. But his voice you have never heard (vira)(and so it never keeps ringing in your ears), his form you have never seen (vira)(and so it is never before your eyes)⁴⁹.

5:38. and you do not have (vipa) his word continually dwelling (vppa) in you, because the one he himself sent (viaa), him you do not believe (vipa).

Actually, God the Father is the first and eternal witness of Jesus Christ (5:19,30,32).

In John 5:19,30, Jesus says that the Son does nothing on his own initiative. He follows the example of the Father. For all eternity, the relationship between the Father and the Son was characterised by the Son doing the will of the Father, speaking what the Father speaks⁵⁰, judging like the Father judges and pleasing the Father. Because of this unchanging principle of action, Jesus can safely leave his vindication in the Father’s hands. And the Father indeed vindicated the Son and provided credentials for him⁵¹.

In John 5:32, Jesus introduces ‘another witness’. From John 5:36-37 we know that this witness is God the Father. God the Father is constantly bearing witness to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. God the Father bears witness about God the Son in three ways: in the Old Testament Scriptures, in speaking directly from heaven at his incarnation, and by the works God the Father has given God the Son to fulfil on earth and after his enthronement in heaven. The other four witnesses are subordinate to the testimony of God the Father.

d. The fourth witness of Jesus is the Scriptures (5:39-40).

5:39. You continually investigate (search, examine, diligently study)(vipa or vmpa) the Scriptures because you continually think (vipa) that by them you have (vnpa) eternal life, and these (Scriptures) are (vipa) those that continually testify (vppa) concerning me,

⁴⁵ G: para

⁴⁶ G: hagalliaomai

⁴⁷ G: pros hóran

⁴⁸ Mark 1:3; Isaiah 40:3

⁴⁹ cf. 1 John 1:1

⁵⁰ cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12

⁵¹ cf. Matthew 3:17

5:40. And you continually do not want (vipa) to come (vnaa) to me in order that you may have (vspa) life.

The Scriptures as a witness. Jesus introduces the Old Testament Scriptures as his witness. Jesus says that although the Jews possessed the written Word of God, they did not have the Word of God in their hearts. Although they possessed the Old Testament Scriptures, they did not believe or obey its words. Although the Old Testament speaks very much about the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Jews did not see Jesus Christ in it and when he came they did not come to Jesus Christ to receive eternal life.

In Luke 24:27 and 44, Jesus explained to his disciples what was said in all the Old Testament Scriptures concerning himself. And 2 Timothy 3:15 teaches that the holy Scriptures are able to make a person wise with regard to salvation. The Bible very clearly teaches that salvation only comes through faith in Jesus Christ! Jewish teachers have many times written in their books that the study of the holy law (the Torah) is the way to the life of the coming age. The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ is the end of the Law, so that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ may be justified and have this life⁵².

Mere human praise never counts as a witness.

5:41. Praise from men I do not accept (vipa).

5:42. but I know (by study, observation and experience)⁵³ (vira) you, that you do not continually have (vipa) the (self-sacrificial) love for God (objective genitive) in you.

5:43. I have come (vira) in the name of my Father and you do not receive (in the sense of recognising his authority) (vipa) me; but if someone else comes (vsaa) in his own name, him you will receive (in the sense of recognising his authority)(vifd).

5:44. How can (vipn) you believe (vnaa) when you continually accept (vppa) praise (glory) from one another and do not continually strive for (seek)(vipa) the praise (glory) from the only God?

What was the reason for the clash between Jesus and the Jews?

The answer of the Jews would probably be that Jesus was irked because the Jews criticised him for breaking the Sabbath and for calling God his Father, and for refusing to give God glory or praise for the miraculous signs he performed.

The real reason for Jesus' controversy with the Jews was not his yearning for the praise of people, but their lack of love for God! If they had loved God, they would have accepted the Father's testimony concerning his Son.

The Jews easily received people and their authority when they came in their own name, that is, without proper credentials and without external witnesses. For example, they received two false messiahs, Theudas and Judas of Galilee⁵⁴ and later Bar Kochba (A.D. 132-135) whom the distinguished rabbi Akiba called 'the Star of Jacob'⁵⁵.

Throughout the centuries people of many nations have received such political leaders and religious prophets who came in their own name. These false leaders and false prophets:

- had no Scripture as a witness: they had no prophecies in the Old Testament concerning them⁵⁶!
- had no forerunner that announced their coming⁵⁷!
- received no visible and audible confirmation from God Himself in the sight and in the hearing of very many witnesses⁵⁸!
- performed no miraculous signs that pointed to who they were⁵⁹!

In short, they came in their own name, that is, without any proper credentials and without any external witnesses!

The Jews and the followers of other religions accepted the authority of these false leaders and false prophets without question and yielded themselves to them. But they were consequently misled by these same false political and religious leaders. The final deceiver who will mislead many in the world will be the final antichrist⁶⁰!

The Jews loved the praise of other people. They performed their religious duties to the only God at least twice every day⁶¹. They prayed, fasted, gave money, went on pilgrim's journeys, dressed and ate to be seen by other people⁶². Although the Jews had theoretical knowledge about God, they did not personally know God or love God. Their lack of love was evident from the fact that they loved the praise of other people, but not the praise of God. The word 'Jew' is

⁵² Romans 10:4

⁵³ G: ginóskó

⁵⁴ Acts 5:36-37

⁵⁵ Numbers 24:17

⁵⁶ Matthew 1:22-23

⁵⁷ Matthew 3:1-3

⁵⁸ Matthew 3:16-17

⁵⁹ Matthew 8:16-17; cf. John 6:8-14,35

⁶⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10

⁶¹ Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁶² Matthew 6:1-18

derived from the word 'Judah', which means 'praise'⁶³. Romans 2:28-29 says that a real Jew is one whose praise is not of men, but of God!

⁶³ Genesis 29:35; 49:8

e. The fifth witness of Jesus is Moses (5:45-47).

5:45. Do not think (vmpa)(imperative) that I will accuse (bring charges before God’s tribunal)(vifa) you before the Father. Your accuser (vppa) is (vipa) Moses on whom you have set your hope (vira).

5:46. For if you believed (viia) Moses, you would believe (viia) me, since he wrote (viaa) about me.

5:47. But if you do not believe (vipa) his writings (books), how will you believe (vifa) my words⁶⁴?

In John 5:45-47, Jesus introduces Moses as his witness. The Jews regarded Moses as their highest prophet. However, Jesus points out that the Jews did not believe what Moses wrote. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses prophesied, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” The New Testament confirms this prophecy⁶⁵. Moses himself prophesied that God commanded all people to obey the coming Messiah. However, the hostile Jews did not see in Jesus the coming Messiah, the voice of God and the form of God. In their hardness of heart, they rejected Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

APPLICATIONS

- 5:1-7. ‘Bethesda’⁶⁶ means ‘house of mercy’, but the elbowing and shoving of the sick people made it into a place of mercilessness. Don’t allow your home or congregation to become a home of mercilessness.
- 5:8-10. The governor Nehemiah tried to stop merchants from entering Jerusalem on the Sabbath to sell their goods⁶⁷. However, the Jewish teachers of the law changed the fourth commandment about keeping the Sabbath holy into many human laws like not carrying anything on the Sabbath. Beware of the warning of Jesus to “nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition”, because such “worship is in vain” and such “teachings are but rules taught by men”⁶⁸.
- 5:23. Honour God the Son as you honour God the Father. He, who honours Christ, honours God (5:23). He, who knows Christ, knows God (8:19). He, who believes in Christ, believes in God (12:44). He, who accepts Christ, accepts God (13:20). He, who receives Christ, receives God⁶⁹. He, who rejects Christ, rejects God⁷⁰. He, who rejects Christ, does not come to God the Father (14:6). He, who has seen Christ, has seen God the Father (14:9-10). He, who obeys the words of Christ, loves God (14:21,23). Everyone whom God the Father gives to Jesus Christ, will come to Jesus Christ and will never be driven away (6:37,44; cf. 17:2,6,9). He who acknowledges Christ, acknowledges God⁷¹.
- 5:24. Proclaim the gospel! Whoever hears the gospel and believes, immediately receives eternal life, will never be condemned in the final judgement day and has already crossed over from the state of death to the state of life.
- 5:28-29. Be prepared for the second coming of Christ. Then all the living and the dead people will hear his voice and come out of their graves in order to receive their eternal punishment or their eternal salvation.
- 5:31-47. Make sure that you believe and have received the testimony of God the Father concerning Jesus Christ.
- 5:39. Study the Bible, because it testifies about Jesus Christ! And it makes you wise to receive salvation⁷².
- 5:44. What is more important for you: to receive the praise of your family, friends and countrymen or to receive the praise of the only God?

QUESTIONS

- 5:8 Why was the paralysed man healed immediately?
- 5:9-13. What should believers do on the Sabbath?
- 5:14-15. What was the real purpose of his physical healing?
- 5:16-23. What are the claims of Jesus Christ?
- 5:24-25. How does the Son give life to the dead?
- 5:26. What does it mean that the Son has life in himself?
- 5:31-47. Who are the witnesses of Jesus Christ?

⁶⁴ G: réma

⁶⁵ cf. Acts 3:22-23

⁶⁶ Aramaic: ‘bet hisdah’

⁶⁷ Nehemiah 13:15-22

⁶⁸ Matthew 15:1-9

⁶⁹ Matthew 10:40

⁷⁰ Luke 10:16

⁷¹ 1 John 2:23

⁷² 2 Timothy 3:15