

39. The Gospel of John—5:16-23 (Introduction)

“Jesus Declares His Divinity” Pt.1

(8/12/18)

John 5:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For this reason [healing a man on the Sabbath and telling him to carry his bed away with him] the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." ¹⁸ Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

When we first started John's gospel, we said that the reason John wrote his gospel (as he himself declared in chapter 20 verses 30-31)—was to prove that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) and the Son of God—

John 20:30-31 (NKJV)

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

The Jewish people believed that Messiah, when he came, was going to be a man like Moses—a deliverer who would free them from Roman oppression and establish a Kingdom.

This would be a glorious Kingdom where Messiah would reign over the world from Jerusalem.

It would be an age of peace and prosperity for all mankind—especially for the Jewish people who would reign with Him as prime ministers over the whole earth.

And yet, when Jesus presented Himself to the nation as Messiah their leaders (and most of the Jewish people) rejected Him—why?

Why didn't they accept Jesus as their Messiah—for two main reasons (both come out of our text this morning): *1) He violated the Sabbath; 2) He claimed that God was His Father thus making Himself divine and equal with God.*

For the last couple of weeks, we have studied the Sabbath and why it was so beloved and revered by the Jewish people and why the leaders were so furious with Jesus for His seeming disregard for it.

You see, they had come to associate the keeping of the Sabbath as one of the signs of Messiah when He finally arrived—that He would be known because He would lead the nation in perfectly keeping the Sabbath.

One historian observed—

“The Sabbath had become a pervading theme in Jewish life.... So significant was the Sabbath that a major section of the Mishna was devoted to Sabbath rules. Sabbath obedience became in fact an eschatological issue because it was thought, at least minimally, that the coming of the Messiah was linked to the perfect keeping of one Sabbath. The actions of Jesus were thus regarded by Sabbath-oriented Jews as being diametrically opposed to the expectations of the rabbis who probably would have categorized Jesus as an antinomian libertarian. He did not seem to be concerned for the precious rules of the rabbis.”

So, first of all the Jewish leadership rejected Jesus as their Messiah because in their minds He went out of His way to violate the Sabbath—and they believed the true Messiah would never do that!

However, as we've already pointed out, Jesus never violated or broke Sabbath Law as God intended it—only their faulty man-made interpretations of what constituted Sabbath Law.

But secondly, the Jewish leadership rejected Him as their Messiah because He claimed to be God in human form.

Now, in all fairness to these men, as the religious leaders of the day (members of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling council)—it was their responsibility to guard the purity of the Jewish faith.

Which meant they routinely investigated any new preachers and teachers who appeared in the land and tested their teachings against the Law of Moses lest a false prophet come along perverting the faith and lead people astray.

You remember they did this with John the Baptist who showed up in the wilderness, preaching his message of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

And in response to John's preaching, the Jewish leadership sent a delegation of leaders out to question John (chapter 1:19-27).

And now they started to do the same thing with the ministry of Jesus—scrutinizing everything He said and did as to whether or not He was a false prophet.

And again, one of the main sticking points, one of the 'red flags' that turned them off to Jesus as the true Messiah was that—He claimed to be God's Son thus making Himself equal to God.

Now as we said when we started John's gospel—understanding Who Jesus is, is not only foundational to the Christian faith—it is the difference between eternal life in heaven and eternal destruction in hell—no small issue to say the least!

And because it is so pivotal to the gospel (the good news that alone can save us) the devil has sought to confuse and deceive people thru the centuries as to the true nature and Personhood of Jesus Christ—starting with the Jewish leadership who believed He was anything but the Son of God.

One historian observed—

*“The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day, motivated by their own bitter jealousy, accused Him of being a **Samaritan** (8:48) who was **demon-possessed** (7:20; 8:52), **insane** (10:20), and of **illegitimate birth** (8:41). Although they could not deny Jesus’ astonishing power, they discounted it as being of satanic origin (Matt. 12:24). Their successors similarly reviled Jesus as “a transgressor in Israel, who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, [and] led the people astray.”*

So, this became one of the ‘hot-button’ issues of Jesus’ earthly ministry—was He the son of a man (like Moses) or was He the Son of God?

Many believed He was, at very least, a great prophet, maybe even the Messiah—but far less believed He was the Son of God (divine).

This question was so important that Jesus Himself asked His own disciples to answer it—

Matthew 16:13-17 (NKJV)

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" ¹⁴ So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

So we know that Jesus’ own disciples had come to believe that He was the Son of God—but what about the religious leaders of Israel, like the Pharisees?

Matthew 22:41-46 (NKJV)

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "*The Son of David.*" ⁴³ He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him '*Lord,*' saying: ⁴⁴ '*The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"*' ?" ⁴⁵ "If David then calls Him '*Lord,*' how is He his Son?" ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

This whole passage hinges on the question Jesus posed to the Pharisees—“**Who is the Christ?**”

Do you realize, that all four of the world’s main religions are looking for a “Christ” to come to the earth who will end all wars, all injustice, all hunger, heal all disease, and basically bring the earth into a paradise state.

1. Hindus

Hindus, and their western counterparts the **New Agers**, are looking for the coming of Maitreya Buddha who will be the next reincarnation of the 'Christ' spirit.

They believe that Jesus was the reincarnation of the Christ spirit for this present age, the Piscean Age, whereas Maitreya Buddha will be the latest reincarnation of the Christ spirit for the new age that is coming—the Age of Aquarius.

They believe when he comes he will bring the world into a complete state of enlightenment and mankind will reach godhood (except for the mono-theists who refuse to evolve and must be destroyed like cancer cells in a human body).

2. Muslims

Shiite Muslims are waiting for the coming of their 'messiah' or Mahdi whom they believe will be the 12th Imam.

According to Shiites, the 12th Imam disappeared as a child in the year 941 A.D.

When he returns, they believe, he will reign on earth for seven years, before bringing about a final judgment and the end of the world.

They also claim the Mahdi will reappear on Earth with Jesus—

"We read in the book Tazkarat ol-Olia, 'the Mahdi will come with Jesus son of Mary accompanying him.' ... Imam Mahdi will be the leader while Prophet Jesus will act as his lieutenant in the struggle against oppression and establishment of justice in the world. Jesus had himself given the tidings of the coming of God's last messenger and will see Mohammad's ideals materialize in the time of the Mahdi."

3. Jews

The **Jews** are looking for the Jewish Messiah promised by God in their Holy Scriptures the Tanakh (our Old Testament.)

When he comes, they believe, he will conquer Israel's enemies and establish a kingdom upon the earth—at which time war will cease, disease will be cured, hunger and poverty will come to an end and the world will enter a glorious utopian period known as the Kingdom Age.

4. Christians

And lastly, **Christians** are looking for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ Whom we believe is the true Messiah and Savior of mankind.

We believe, like the Jewish people, that when He comes He will establish a Kingdom upon the earth—a thousand-year kingdom known as the Millennial Kingdom.

So the question—“**Who is the Christ (the one and only true Christ)**” is a very important one—especially when you remember that Jesus Himself went on to warn us in Matthew 24 that many false Christ's would come in the last days having supernatural power to deceive.

This He said would lead up to the coming of the ultimate deceiver and false christ whom we know as the Antichrist.

This man will have supernatural power, charisma and wisdom and most of the people in the world will embrace him, thrust him into power and support him as he establishes a global one-world government.

The people of this world are ripe to receive a global leader who will unite the world and bring about a utopia of peace and prosperity for all mankind.

However, as Paul the apostle prophesied in 1Thessalonians 5—when the people of this world finally think utopia has arrived and they say among themselves, *‘Finally our messiah is on the throne and he has brought peace and prosperity to the earth’*—

1 Thessalonians 5:3 (NKJV)

³ For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

But understand, that when Jesus asked this question **“What do you think about the Christ”**—He adds, **“Whose Son is He?”**

This is the supreme question when it comes to understanding and therefore believing in the one and only true Christ—will He be the son of a man or the Son of God?

Why is the question so important? —

John 8:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴ Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins." (Explain)

Matthew 22:42 (NKJV)

⁴² ... "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" **They said to Him, "The Son of David."**

The response of the Pharisees to Jesus’ question was the standard belief held by the Jewish people as to whom the Messiah would be when he finally came to the earth.

As I said earlier, they believed that He was going to be a deliverer like Moses—

"I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him." (Deut.18:18)

So, the Jewish people believed that Messiah would be a great Prophet and Deliverer like Moses—and since Moses was a man and not divine, the Jewish people believe Messiah will also be a man and not divine.

And then later, in 2Samuel 7, God told David that Messiah would be his descendant, Who would sit on the throne of His father David forever.

And again, since David was a man and Messiah would be one of his descendants—the Jews believe that Messiah will also be a man like His father David and not the Son of God.

This happens to be the standard response of many people today when asked who Jesus Christ is (or *was* if they don't believe He's God and eternal).

If you were to take to the street and canvas people as to who they believe Jesus Christ was—for many today the conversation would go something like this—

“Who is Jesus Christ?”

“Well I believe he was a great religious teacher sent here by God to teach us truth.”

“Do you believe He was God in human form?”

“No, not really. In fact, I believe we're all on our way to godhood...”

“Well do you believe that He is the Savior of the world who came into the world to save us from sin?”

“No, I don't believe we're sinners, I don't believe there is any right or wrong—it's just whatever is right for you.”

“Do you believe He’s the only way to heaven?”

“No, I believe there are many roads that lead to heaven.”

So, many believe Jesus was a good man, even a great man—but just a man not the Son of God.

Whenever we talk about those who believe Jesus was a great man but not God—the words of C.S. Lewis, in his famous book, *Mere Christianity*, come to mind:

“...I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him, ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

How anybody can say that Jesus was a great religious teacher and yet reject everything He taught about Himself and salvation is ridiculous.

Which brings us back to the confrontation Jesus had with the religious leaders of His day over this very issue—was He simply the son of a man, or was and is He the Son of God?

Matthew 22:42-45 (NKJV)

⁴² saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "*The Son of David.*" ⁴³ He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him '*Lord*,' saying:

⁴⁴ '*The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool*'" ? ⁴⁵ "If David then calls Him '*Lord*,' how is He his Son?"

Jesus doesn’t argue with these men—He simply appeals to the Scriptures (Psalm 110:1).

Every orthodox Jewish scholar in that day interpreted this to refer to the Messiah—only the Messiah could sit at the right hand of Yahweh (Father God).

Jesus believed in the inspiration and accuracy of the Old Testament Scriptures, for He said that David spoke these words—**“in the Spirit”** (in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit).

Jesus knew the Pharisees would never dare to question the accuracy or the authority of the Scriptures—which meant they were caught on the horns of a dilemma.

“If Messiah is David’s Son,” Jesus asked, **“then how could Messiah also be David’s Lord?”**

You see they lived in a strong patriarchal society—and as such the son always called his father ‘lord’ but the father never called his son ‘lord’ since the father was greater in authority than his children.

And so, the question had them completely stumped—there was no answer they could come up with that would have solved this apparent contradiction in Scripture.

And we would have to agree that the problem was unsolvable—that is if you believe Jesus was only a man.

However, the problem is easily solved if you understand and believe that Jesus was both the Son of David (a man) but also the Son of God (second Person of the Trinity) and therefore as God He was greater in authority than David which meant the David rightly referred to Him, the Messiah, as ‘Lord’.

The fact that Jesus was fully God and fully man is what theologians have called the ‘hypostatic union’.

The hypostatic union is the mysterious joining of the divine and the human in the one person of Jesus.

One author—

“Jesus has two complete natures: one fully human and one fully divine. What the doctrine of the hypostatic union teaches is that these two natures are united in one person in the God-man. Jesus is not two persons. He is one person. The hypostatic union is the joining (mysterious though it be) of the divine and the human in the one person of Jesus.”

Why couldn't Messiah be just a man—why did He have to be the 'God-Man'? (Explain)

And yet, down thru the centuries Satan has deceived millions who regard Jesus as one of many religious leaders (mere men) that have come down the pike of human history—a great teacher who was a wonderful example of virtue and servanthood for all of us to follow.

As one author and historian recounts:

“Throughout the centuries, scholars and skeptics have given many different answers to the query, “Who is Jesus Christ?” His life is the most influential ever lived, and its impact continues to escalate. Still, Jesus’ true identity is still hotly debated by modern historians and theologians. Countless opinions have appeared as unbelievers have attempted to explain away the truth about Him.

The theological skeptics and liberals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were intent on denying Jesus’ deity. They viewed Him as the quintessential strictly human moral teacher, in whom the spark of divinity inherent in all people burned most brightly. In their minds, Jesus’ sacrificial life provided mankind with a model that all should follow, but not with a means by which men might be saved. Thus, He was “an example for faith, not the object of faith”.

Other conceptions of Jesus range from the crusading socio-political revolutionary of liberation theology, to the cynical Jewish sage of the Jesus Seminar, to the countercultural hero of the rock musicals Godspell and Jesus Christ Superstar. But all such fanciful and blasphemous viewpoints are far removed from the God-man revealed in holy Scripture. They say more about the obstinate unbelief and perverted imaginations of the people who created them than about Jesus’ true identity.

Ironically, in all the debate over Him, Jesus’ own self-testimony is seldom considered reasonably. Did He, as historic Christianity has always maintained, claim to be God incarnate in human flesh? Or, as skeptics argue, did His followers later invent those claims and attribute them to Him? All this unbelieving pseudo scholarship ignores the biblical account of His life and ministry, which leaves no legitimate doubt about who Jesus declared Himself to be, and who He was.”

This then leads directly into the opening text (v.17) of the series we've entitled, "*Jesus Declares His Divinity.*"

Let me end this morning by asking you the question—"what do you think about the Christ—whose son is he?"—and understand that *saving* faith is *personal* faith.

Matthew 16:13-15 (NKJV)

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" ¹⁴ So they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "**But who do you say that I am?**"

John 11:25-26 (NKJV)

²⁵ Jesus said to her [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. **Do you believe this?**"

Most church goers would immediately respond by saying, "*I believe in Jesus—I always have!*"

Well, that's great but the Bible says that Satan and his demons believe everything about Jesus that we evangelicals believe.

In fact, if Satan applied for membership into a Christian church like ours today and the leaders interviewed him—it would go something like this:

- "*Satan do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?*"
- "*Do you believe He was born of a virgin?*"
- "*Do you believe that He died on the cross?*"
- "*Well do you believe He rose the third day from the dead?*"

- *“Do you believe He is coming again to judge the world in righteousness and to establish His Kingdom?”*
- *“Are you saying that you believe the Bible is the Word of God?”*

So, what do you think folks—should we let him join?

I mean he believes everything we believe about Jesus and the Word of God.

(Finish by talking about saving faith which is not just head knowledge but a life commitment to Jesus—something Satan has refused to do)

→ John Payton missionary to the New Hebrides story

Have you put “all your weight on Jesus”?