

**JESUS' DEFENSE AGAINST SABBATH BREAKING AND BLASPHEMY**  
(John 5:16-30)

We saw last time that Jesus healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda. And we said there were three reasons why he healed this man on this day.

First of all, he healed him just because he was merciful. God likes to show off his attributes. And one of his great attributes is his mercy. So, I am sure that when Jesus looked down on this man lying on his mat, and he knew that this man had been a long time in this condition, he was full of compassion. And he was merciful to him in healing him.

Secondly, Jesus healed this man to demonstrate that he was the Messiah. The Old Testament had prophesied that the Messiah would cause the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the lame to walk. And so, healing this poor man was a sign that the Messiah was here.

Thirdly, Jesus healed this man to provoke the unbelieving Jews into a controversy. Jesus was here not just to perform miracles, but to teach men as well. And he used his miracles to gain a platform for his doctrine.

Now when Jesus healed this man it was the Sabbath day. (John 5:16) Of course, we understand that it wasn't just per chance. Rather, it was per God's providence. It was per God's predetermined plan. It was by design that Jesus healed on the Sabbath day.

So, on the Sabbath Day, Jesus healed this man and told him to take up his bed and walk. The only trouble is, it was illegal to carry your bed on the Sabbath Day. Now God never forbade such a thing, but the Jews did by their interpretations. And when the Jews saw this man walking off with his mat rolled under his arm they detained him for questioning.

*The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.*

John 5:10

These cold, dead-hearted Jews were not too interested in this man's good fortune. They would just as soon that he was still lame, lying back there around the pool. But they were zealous about their traditions. And they would just as soon put this man to death as to let him walk home in peace and joy.

But when the man told them that a miracle worker had told him to carry his bed on the Sabbath, their attention became more focused on finding that miracle worker and punishing him. Now there were two supposed Sabbath breakers – the man carrying his bed and Jesus. And when the Jews finally identified Jesus as the miracle worker, notice what they did.

*And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day.*

John 5:16

It says they persecuted him. It doesn't say how they persecuted him. Perhaps they yelled obscenities at him. Perhaps they pushed him or spat on him. But it is clear that their persecution was fierce. Their intent was to kill him. They were stirred up with evil intent against Jesus and it says they persecuted him.

Now Jesus is at this time perhaps in the temple where he has just found this healed man and encouraged him to sin no more. Or, as Matthew Henry suggests, he may be in the court of the Sanhedrin. Wherever he is, the Jews have called Jesus into court. Now it is not a formal court setting yet, but it is a preliminary questioning. And I think we can picture that the Jews have surrounded Jesus and they want to know why he has performed work on the Sabbath day.

Now these kinds of confrontations were very intimidating. A person would be surrounded by religious authorities. And he would be accused of a crime. And it wasn't unusual for a kangaroo court to be called on the spot and a person may find himself in the stoning pit in short order. And these angry Jews, with murderous intent in their hearts, confronted Jesus and questioned him. And they charged him with a serious Jewish offense – breaking the Sabbath.

This offense of Sabbath breaking was rigorously punished in the Old Testament.

*And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.*

See Numbers 15:32-36

So, you understand that the Jews are now ready to put Jesus to death. In their opinion he has violated a most sacred Jewish law by doing work on the Sabbath day.

### The Answer of Jesus to the Charge of Sabbath Breaking

I want you to notice that Jesus answered them. (v.17)

*But Jesus answered them . . .*

This, in itself, was an act of condescension. Jesus owes no man an answer. Jesus could have struck them all down in an instant with a whisper like he did later with the soldiers who came to arrest him in the Garden. But Jesus was gracious enough to answer them.

Now the first defense that Jesus offers to the charge of Sabbath breaking is that God the Father works on the Sabbath.

*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*

John 5:17

Here is what Jesus said. The Father continues to work day after day. He works "hitherto." That is, he works "up until now." Whatever the Sabbath requirements of man may be, those requirements have not stopped the Father from continuing to work. Now we should know that when God rested on the seventh day, he didn't stop working. He stopped creating. His creative

work was complete. But his other work continued right on. His work of governing; his work of managing the affairs of the world; his work of life-giving; his work of judging; all of this went right on.

Now this was quite a theological question that the Jews wrestled with even in the day of Jesus. Does God stop working on the Sabbath? Does God work Sunday through Friday and then stop working on Saturday? The Jews actually had a conference near the end of the first century and four imminent rabbis met to discuss this issue. And they rightfully decided that God himself did not stop working on the seventh day, otherwise, God's strong arm of providence would control for six days and then on the seventh day, all things would be left to chance.

Now we know from the Scriptures that the very power of Christ holds all things in the universe together.

*And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*  
Colossians 1:17

Wouldn't it be strange if Christ stopped holding the universe together every seventh day. It seems to me that the planets would simply fly off course. The earth would begin to wobble out of control. And all things would fall into disorder. That's what the laws of Science tell us. So the Jews ultimately decided that by the very nature of things, God cannot stop working on the Sabbath day.

And this is the first building block of the defense that Jesus offered. "My Father worketh hitherto." Now a good attorney will build his case by first stating those elements of his case that are indisputably true. And Jesus states that God works on the Sabbath. Babies are conceived on the Sabbath and therefore God creates life on the Sabbath. God holds the universe together on the Sabbath day. If a disaster falls upon you on the Sabbath day, God will answer your call on the Sabbath day. God does many works on the Sabbath Day.

So, Jesus infers, it is alright for God to work on the Sabbath Day. Who can possibly argue against that postulate? God is obviously greater than the Sabbath. He created the Sabbath. Furthermore, it would be disasterous if God ever

stopped working for one moment. It is an impossibility that God should ever stop working. And so, Jesus says, "God worketh hitherto."

Now the next phrase is the one that pierces the hearts of these legalistic Jews.

*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*

John 5:17

Jesus tells these Jews, "Since it is alright for God to work, then it is alright for me to work. If God works on the Sabbath, then I work on the Sabbath!"

What a fantastic defense to working on the Sabbath! Jesus didn't bother to argue that doing good on the Sabbath was allowed or that a law against bed-carrying on the Sabbath was just a taboo of tradition. Rather, he says, I can work on the Sabbath day because God is allowed to work and therefore I work.

Now when Jesus made this statement, "God works up to now, and I work," he was clearly suggesting that he had the same prerogative as God the Father.

But also notice that he referred to God as "My Father." When Jesus said this, he was referring to God as his Father in a way that God is not their father. He didn't say, "Our Father works." Rather, he said, "My Father works." Do you see the inference?

**Example: It reminds me of Joseph in the Old Testament who infuriated his brothers because he was his father's favorite son.**

And Jesus told these Jews that he is the Father's Son in a way that no other human being can be. Jesus is the only Son of the Father in this sense. Believers are sons in an adoptive sense. But Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Jesus existed before the world was created. Jesus was eternally with the Father. Jesus is the only human being who has ever shared the same divine nature with the Father. And so, Jesus rightfully referred to God as "My Father."

This lit the fuse of the Jews. And you see their reaction in the next verse.

*Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*

John 5:18

You can see that the Jews knew exactly what Jesus was saying. Jesus was saying, "I am God." And, and he said it in two different ways. He said it by asserting that God works on the Sabbath and therefore I work on the Sabbath. And he said it by referring to God as "My Father."

There are many cults and religions that teach that Christ is not fully God and that Christ is not the one and only Son of the Father:

Jehovah's Witnesses: Jesus is not God. He is a created being who was formerly Michael, the archangel.

Mormonism: Jesus is a created being. He is a god, but not the God. He is separate from and less than the Father.

Christian Science: Jesus was just a man.

Scientology: He is not the creator. He is irrelevant.

Islam: Jesus was a prophet, but not the Son of God.

Hinduism: Jesus is just a teacher.

Hare Krishna: Jesus is unimportant. He may have been a teacher who taught meditation.

Buddhism: Jesus is not a part of their worldview. If anything, he was a teacher.

Judaism: Jesus was a false messiah. He was not God.

And isn't that what we find in our text about the Jews?

*They sought the more to kill him because he said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*

John 5:18

You will notice that now the Jews have two charges against Jesus. The first is violation of the Sabbath. The second is blasphemy. Now blasphemy can take many forms, but generally, it is cursing God or showing contempt for God. It is flagrantly disrespecting Him. And when Jesus implied that he was equal with God, this was blasphemy in the eyes of the Jews.

Blasphemy, like Sabbath breaking, was punishable by death.

*And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him . . .*

Leviticus 24:16

#### The Answer of Jesus to the Charge of Blasphemy

*Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*

John 5:19

You will notice that Jesus prefaces this statement with the words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." This is a way of giving advance notice that the words that follow are most certainly true and carry great importance. Jesus says, "Perk up your ears, because I am about to tell you some great truth." And Jesus then tells them,

*The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*

And here we learn from this statement,

- I. There is a perfect, one-to-one divine union of the nature and work of the Father and the Son.

Jesus is telling them that it is absolutely impossible that he could ever act at cross purposes to the Father. They are accusing him of blasphemy. And Jesus is telling them that every single thing that he does is in conjunction with the Father's will.

This means that it was absolutely impossible for Jesus to act independently from the Father. There is such a union of nature between Father and Son that the Son can do nothing of himself. Far from being a statement of weakness, this is a statement of absolute authority. Jesus is saying, if I do something, you can be sure that it is what the Father does. If I work on the Sabbath, you can be sure it is the work of the Father. Such is the intimacy of the union between the Father and the Son that their actions are always concurrent and agreeable. If you see Jesus doing it, then you can be sure it is the will of the Father and is to teach us that the Father and the Son are one in nature.

*I and my Father are one.*

John 10:30

We should never diminish the stature of Jesus. Yes, he humbled himself and became a man. But he never became less than God. Jesus is to be honored at all times as very God.

Also from verse 19 we learn,

II. There is perfect knowledge of the Father by the Son.

*The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do.*

This phrase says that the Son sees the actions of the Father. The Son has an eternal presence with the Father and sees everything that the Father does. The Father doesn't act behind closed doors as to the Son. All of the Father's acts are known to the Son by clear and perfect vision.

III. There is perfect love of the Father for the Son.

The reason why there is perfect communication between the Father and the Son is found next.

*For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth:*

John 5:20

There is a special love of the Father for the Son. He loves the Son as he loves no other. There is no jealousy, no resentment and no withholding of knowledge from one to the other. And notice that the Father,

*Sheweth him all things that himself doeth.*

This is why Jesus sees everything that the Father does. It is because the Father loves his Son with a perfect love and shows him all things.

So, we find from our text that it is absolutely impossible for Jesus to do any act outside the parameters of the acts of the Father or the will of the Father. The Son does only those things which the Father does. Anyone who accuses the Son of a misdeed is accusing the Father of a misdeed.

Now Jesus has just demonstrated miraculous power by healing this man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. And surely, anyone who personally witnessed this healing would have marveled at the work which the Father gave the Son to do. If they knew this impotent man, they must have been agape with amazement. But look what Jesus says,

*. . . and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.*

Jesus tells these Jews, "You just saw me heal this man, but I am going to show you even greater works than this."

### The Greater Works that Jesus Will Do

*For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.*

John 5:21, 22

You see from these two verses that the power of Jesus extends beyond merely healing the lame. And, it extends beyond

the authority over the Sabbath day. The power and authority of Jesus extends to raising the dead and to executing judgment. These two acts are exclusively in the domain of God.

The Jews were familiar with two bodily resurrections in the Old Testament. By God's power Elijah raised the son of the widow in I Kings 17:22 and Elisha raised the Shunamite's son in II Kings 4:32-35. And furthermore, there was an understanding among the Jews that there would be a final resurrection unto judgment and into the Messianic Kingdom. And so, they had no doubt that it was God who had the power to raise the dead and no other. And only God had authority to judge.

But Jesus tells these Jews, "Even so the Son quickeneth whom he will and all judgment is committed unto the Son."

Now let's take a look at these two great works of God that are performed by Jesus.

### The Resurrection of the Dead

*For the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.*

John 5:21

#### I. Jesus quickens.

Notice first that the Son quickens. That is, he imparts life. He makes the dead alive. This is not doable except by God himself. Imparting life is only possible by the One who is the source of life.

*For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.*

John 5:26

Now when it says that Jesus quickens, it refers first of all to a quickening in which he gives spiritual life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. This seems to be the sense in verses 24 and 25.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall*

*not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*

John 5:24, 25

Notice who it is that Jesus quickens. He quickens whom he will. (John 5:21) Jesus quickens by sovereign grace. He doesn't quicken everyone. He doesn't quicken indiscriminately. He doesn't quicken arbitrarily. But he quickens whom he will. Men are made alive by God's will. He purposes to do it and He does it. And in our text it says that Jesus quickens whom he will.

What else can be said about Jesus except that he is very God himself? He has all the power of God and all the authority of God. Though he is a separate person from the Father, they are one in nature and all authority is given unto him.

But when Jesus said the Son quickens, he also referred to raising the dead from their graves before the final judgment. And this is mentioned in our text in verse 28.

*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.*

John 5:28

Jesus tells these prosecuting Jews that he is the very one who will call the dead bodies out of their graves. Jesus tells them, the day is coming when all dead bodies are going to hear my voice. Oh how these Jews must have been ready to stone him now!

Notice how many dead bodies will hear his voice. It will be all of them. Every last one will hear his voice and will come out. Did you know that both the righteous and the wicked will be raised?

*And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*

John 5:29

But there is another great work that has been committed into the hands of Jesus.

### Final Judgment

*For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.*

John 5:22

In the end of all things, Jesus is going to call every dead body out of the grave. And there is going to be a final execution of righteousness. There is going to be a judge on the throne. And his name will be Jesus. And he will determine the final fate of every man.

Some will go unto the resurrection of life and some will go unto the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:29) Those very men who surrounded Jesus on this occasion and who accused him of breaking the Sabbath and of blasphemy will be there. You and I will be there. And Jesus will separate us to the left and to the right for all judgment has been committed unto him.

Let's count the ways in this text that Jesus has claimed deity for himself.

1. He claimed authority to work on the Sabbath day. (v.17)
2. He called God "My Father." (v.17)
3. He claimed unity of action with the Father. (v.19)
4. He claimed perfect knowledge of the Father's actions. (v.19)
5. He claimed a special love from the Father. (v.20)
6. He claimed perfect and complete revelation from the Father. (v.20)
7. He claimed the ability to give spiritual life to those dead in trespasses and sins. (v.24, 25)
8. He claimed the ability to raise the dead from the grave. (v.28)
9. He claimed the authority to judge. (v.22)

There is one final admonition found in our text. Because Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and because he is the one who quickens. And because he is the one who judges all things, we have one supreme duty in this life.

*That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hat sent him.*

John 5:23