

John 5:18-47. After healing a paraplegic, Jesus is confronted by the authorities. Though healing was a wonderful display of God's heart for the weak and helpless, those in power respond by persecuting the healer from this day forward.

It was Sophocles who first said, “No one loves the messenger who brings bad news.” Regardless of his news, safe passage was expected. Diplomatic immunity has been the standard throughout history. Even the cruel warlord Genghis Khan strictly upheld it.

Diplomacy wasn't without its risks though, for the messenger could be sent back dead as a declaration of war. He symbolized the people who sent him. How he was received is how they are received. And the same idea is seen with Jesus in John 5. He's God's diplomat. To reject Him is to reject the One who sent Him.

Hebrews 1:1-2a—Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

Six times in this chapter Jesus says the Father sent Him. This was His credential to speak on behalf of the Father—I was sent by Him to you.

To the religious leaders, it was bad enough that Jesus healed on the Sabbath. It was an outrage that He claimed equality with God (John 5:18). They accused Him of blasphemy. How did He respond?

EQUALITY WITH GOD

Abraham lived sometime around the 19th century BC. From God's calling of him, Judaism was centered around this one God and none others. Though the Jewish people wandered away from the Lord at different points, worship of the one true God has been Judaism's most central tenet for nearly 4,000 years.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6—Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

This verse is known to the Jews as the *Shema*. Moses wrote it down in the 15th century BC, and Jews have recited it day and night ever since as part of their worship. Notice the oneness of God?

The *shema* was a powerful reminder that the true God doesn't coexist with other deities. As opposed to the gods of other nations, Israel's God was one. This wasn't a problem until the people looked beyond their borders and desired to be as the surrounding nations. Everyone believed in multiple gods... except Israel.

Centuries of compromise, allowing other gods a place next to the Living God, led to judgment. So severe is an exile that hundreds of years couldn't erase the pain. By the 1st century AD, God's judgment hadn't been forgotten. *Our God is one!*

It didn't go over well when Jesus asserted His equality with God (John 5:18). He was often accused of insanity or demonic possession (John 10:20)—no normal person would ever claim to be God. His enemies couldn't deny His miracles, but they could reject or twist His words. *Sure, Jesus healed, but it couldn't be of God.* And why? Because anyone truly from God wouldn't claim to be God. It was the hilt of blasphemy (John 10:33).

Though Jewish history had tolerated other deities, the leaders of Jesus' day wouldn't. To them, Jesus was a blasphemous heretic or a false messiah. It burned them to see His popularity grow, and they wanted Him dead. It's sad in so many ways. If these men had paused to listen to Jesus as Nicodemus had done... if they searched their Scriptures, they would have seen the truth and followed.

JESUS RESPONDS (JOHN 5:19-30)

It's a question of authority—who was Jesus to do the things He did? We could sum up His respond as: *I have divine authority, and I do exactly as the Father does* (John 5:19-30). But what does this mean? Here Jesus elaborates...

AUTHORITY OVER LIFE

The Lord healed a paraplegic and defended Himself by claiming He has authority to give or to take life. Life is a gift only God can give (Deut 32:39), and here is Jesus in front of a hostile crowd saying He has that kind of power. The Father gave it to Him (John 5:21, 25-26). Creating life is a divine ability. No one can create life or restore it with a touch.

Shooting the Messenger

The argument is this: If Jesus has the ability to give life, He has the right to heal it. His authority comes from God the Father. Of what authority are the religious leaders? None. Jesus warns by condemning Him, they're condemning the One who sent Him.

AUTHORITY TO JUDGE

The Old Testament teaches God is judge of all the earth (Psa 50:3-4). Human authorities have a God-given right to make judgments, but their jurisdiction is limited. No one has the authority to judge every living thing, and yet, Jesus says He has that kind of authority. He can stand in judgment of every sinner who has ever lived (John 5:22, 27). And if He has that kind of authority, can't He judge what is lawful on the Sabbath? Standing within earshot of the Almighty Judge, those who accused Him of wrongdoing stood on thin ice.

John tells us the religious leaders "marveled" that Jesus healed on the Sabbath (John 5:20, 28). It's hard for us to understand the gravity of what took place that day. It was unbelievable to see the lame walk and then to hear the healer claim equality with God. The reactions to this miracle were a foretaste of the rejections to come.

Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead perhaps two years later and then rise from the dead Himself. Beyond this a day is coming when He will return in judgment. Some will be raised to life; others will be raised to condemnation (Dan 12:1-3; John 5:28-30; 1 Thes 4:13-18). Consider that if men marveled during Jesus' first coming, what will they do when He returns?

CALL IN THE WITNESSES (JOHN 5:31-40)

Every person who heard Jesus understood He claimed to be God. Why should they believe Him? Why not dismiss Him as a cult leader or a lunatic? Because of His witnesses: John the Baptist, His own miracles and the Old Testament Scriptures. Each of these testify that what He said in verses 19-30 is true.

Jesus first calls upon the witness of John the Baptist. John was faithful and thousands throughout the region believed his message. The authorities accepted him for a time—even King Herod wanted to hear John preach (Mark 6:20). Four-hundred years had passed since a prophet walked the earth. However, John's message became harder to accept, and he was eventually rejected the same as any other true prophet.

As a second witness or proof, Jesus appeals to His miracles (John 5:36). He had changed water into wine, healed a Galilean boy from 20 miles off, and commanded a paraplegic to walk. He would soon restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead. What does all this say about Him?

The greatest witness of all wasn't John or Jesus' miracles but God's Word itself. What do the Jewish Scriptures say about the messiah (John 5:37-40)? The Pharisees and scribes had devoted their lives to interpreting it, and Jesus says their vast learning was for nothing. Why? Because they never understood what it was all about—Him. Education is only valuable to the degree it's rightly applied.

TWO KINDS OF GLORY (JOHN 5:41-47)

Jesus had been a faithful messenger sent to earth from the Father. Despite anything He ever said or did, the authorities felt threatened and refused His offer of salvation (John 5:43). To Jesus may have been a good political move, but it was a rejection of God Himself (John 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5).

John 5:44—How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Why were the authorities so indignant? What did they want so much that made believing in Jesus impossible? A desire for personal glory. They studied, kept the Law, taught the people, fasted, prayed, and tithed all so they could be exalted and praised by others (Matt 6:1, 5, 16). They wanted to be important and would give anything including their own salvation just to be somebody.

Jesus, however, refused to exalt Himself (John 5:43). He humbled Himself by taking on human flesh to become the sinner's sacrifice. The self-exaltation of the religious leaders despised the self-denial and humility seen in Jesus. They would not accept that God had sent a self-denying Messiah to them.

Love of personal glory masks itself in a host of ways, but in the end it's a sure path to eternal destruction.