

John 5:19-47

This (long) passage continues where last week's left off. The Jews were giving Jesus a hard time because he healed a man on the Sabbath. They also gave the man who was healed a hard time for picking-up his mat on the Sabbath (ignoring that he was miraculously healed). Jesus elevates the situation by claiming that he was equal with God (by calling God his... but not their... Father). The Jews were now looking to kill Jesus. And that brings us to our text for today.

5:19

Good thing we're sitting on the receiving end of 2000 years of Biblical Theology! What we have here is an application of the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus can only do what he sees the Father doing; and what the Father does the Son does. Why? Because they are united in the Godhead; the same divine being. They are not just close to each other, the Lord is One.

5:20

What would one of these "greater works" be?
What does it mean for us that the Father loves the Son?

5:21

The Lutheran Study Bible notes say that this "raising" has to do with raising those who are "spiritually dead." What does it mean (from the text) to be "spiritually dead?" Follow-up question: is there anything in the context at all about being "spiritually dead?"

When did Jesus raise someone from (the point of) death?

The question here is whether John is equating or contrasting the work of the Son and the Father. Judging from the context, I'd say John is equating their work. The Son sees and does what the Father does. So: "raises the dead" is the same as "gives life." So far, the healings Jesus has performed (the 2nd and 3rd signs) are both physical. John is upping the ante to say that, not only can Jesus (and his Father) heal the sick and cure the lame, but they can raise the dead!

The question is: can they? Stay tuned... Lazarus is right around the corner. Kind of.

5:22-23

Judges, not just at the end of the age, but in this age as well. In other words: what Jesus says is TRUE because he has the authority and ability to judge.

The second half of 23 cuts the legs out from under any religion or world-view that denies the claims of Christ. He has just claimed himself to be one with the Father, doing the works of the Father, and given authority to judge by the Father. Anyone who would question or deny any of those ends up dishonoring the Father who sent Jesus.

5:24

Judgment is compared to condemnation. And condemnation is compared to death. Those who believe in the words of Christ have eternal life (already NOW... although is hidden under the cloud of sin), they are not condemned, they are not judged.

The life that we have entered as a result of belief in the words of Christ is, currently, spiritual. It will be physical at the end of the age when we are raised to life, glorified bodies and all. But it can be said NOW that we have entered eternal life.

Paul says the same in 1 Corinthians 15:[35-49] 50-58.

5:25

Notice that Jesus calls himself the “Son of God” in this verse. He much more commonly refers to himself as the “Son of Man.” We have heard his voice and, as a result, live.

How is the “voice of the Son of God” heard today?

5:26

Again, the closeness of the Son and the Father is highlighted. The Father has life in himself (it does not need to be given to him), he is self-sustaining and self-existing. Our life has been given to us. Not so Christ. He, like the Father lives in a way that is different and better than how we live. To say that he Son is therefore “eternal” does not go far enough. His very nature is life. (Jesus will talk more about this when he says that no one takes his life, but that he lays it down of his own accord.)

5:27

Didn't we just read this? About 5 verses earlier? Yes, I think we did.

Do you think that, because this theme of the Judgment of the Son is repeated, it might be important?

(It's also worth noting that “judging” here is not one of guilt or innocence, but of life or death.)

Also, note that it is not because of what he did but because of who he IS that the Son is given the responsibility to “judge.” (Which, if you go back to 5:22 has to do less with rendering a sentence than it does with giving life... or not.)

5:28-29

If your head’s not spinning yet, maybe this will help:

The distinction between soul and body is a Greco-Roman invention. And while Paul does talk about the dual-nature of man (he is both a spiritual and a physical being), our essence is often not so easily divided. What our body does effects our soul; what our soul does (or believes) effects our body.

The giving of spiritual life (mentioned in the passage above) manifests itself most fully in a BODILY RESURRECTION. (Feel like throwing in the towel yet? Good! Let’s press on...)

This may, at first, come across a little like works-righteousness. But notice that the good works or evil works are not the CAUSE of life or judgment (more on John’s choosing this word to represent condemnation/ the opposite of life later). They are descriptors of the person who is raised to LIFE or the person who is raised to JUDGMENT. Good works do not produce life; they come from it.

5:30

This verse does not point to any indecision the Son might have were he to act independently from the Father, but rather highlights the connection the Son has with the Father. The Father has given authority to judge to the Son. The Son, in turn, does not judge independent of the will of the Father. The two work together in this most important of tasks.

If you haven’t noticed by now, two intertwining themes have emerged in the reading so far: the inseparable connection between the Son and the Father; the right of the Son to judge in eternal life/death matters.

Quite a different feel than the somewhat light-hearted healings from chapters two, four and five. Things are starting to get serious... and personally applicable.

5:31

So far, Jesus has been testifying about himself. The Jews who were seeking to kill him would have dismissed his claims: there needs to be the testimony of 2 or more witnesses for it to be valid. Jesus heads off any objections to his self-testimony in what he says next...

5:32

John (the Baptist) also bore witness about Jesus. (At this point, it would be smart for us to go back and examine the testimony of John that John allows in his gospel. But seeing as how we only have one hour...)

5:33

The Jews Jesus is speaking to need no reminder of what John had to say. They sent people to John to listen to his testimony. (Jesus is trapping the Jews here: they acknowledged John was a prophet, he testified about Jesus... but they are out to get Jesus.)

5:34

Jesus does not NEED John's testimony in order for his testimony about himself (what he has said previously) to be true. BUT in order to appease those who are hostile to what he has said about himself, Jesus introduces it here. Even when he plays by their own rules, the truth about who Jesus is (and what he has authority to do) is clear.

5:35

Apparently the Jews liked what John had to say: calling people to repentance. (Remember, it was the godless Herod who had John put to death in prison. He wouldn't have been put in prison if he wasn't a considerable threat to Herod. He wouldn't be a considerable threat if he didn't have a following.) But the reason for the cause of the repentance is the coming of Christ... the Savior and Judge of the world. (Back to the themes Jesus has been talking about.) The very testimony Jesus is calling them to remember.

5:36

The Father sent John to testify about Jesus. Jesus speaks the words of the Father and testifies to himself. His message (and his miracles) is of an order greater than that of John. (John himself says as much in 1:15, 30.)

John had a testimony that, while from God, was inferior to that of Jesus. In addition to the testimony he was given by the Father, Jesus also has the authority to perform signs.

5:37-38

Jesus doesn't let up. If there was a race to incur the ire of the Jews, Jesus just pushed the pedal to the metal.

This goes back to chapter 1 (again), where John the Baptist says: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know

him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’.”

“Well, Jesus, why don’t we hear the testimony of the Father on your behalf?”
“Because you do not listen to God. In fact, you never have.”

Ouch! It’s one thing to tell the Jews that they’re missing it when it comes to the identity of Jesus; it’s quite another to say that they don’t know the word of God. But notice what the determining factor is in whether or not the Jews know God’s Word: it’s Jesus. What people say about Jesus is the litmus test as to whether or not they know God.

5:39

In other words: those who deny the deity of Jesus, his relationship to the Father, and his authority to judge do not have the authority to comment on the contents of Scripture. In other words: who cares what the Jesus Seminar, etc has to say?

This is also why it’s important that we place ourselves (clergy and laity) under teachers who profess Christ according to what Christ has said about himself. Christians can disagree on the application of Scripture (Can we fight in wars? When should divorce be allowed? Who should we vote for?); but the one thing we cannot disagree on and claim to be “one” is the identity and work of Christ.

5:40

The tragedy in the rejection of Jesus by the Jews is that they are rejecting what is GOOD FOR THEM! They are trying to attain eternal life, but have rejected the only source of eternal life revealed to man. It would be one thing to reject Christ if here were a divine tyrant or a powerful source of evil... but he is none of those things, he is good for us, better than the Law, better than the patriarchs... better than the Old Covenant.

5:41

...just look at how Jesus is spoken of in our culture!

5:42

And there’s that “L” word! In this case, an outward manifestation of an inward condition. (Remember what 5:29 said? They are preparing themselves for judgment.)

5:43

The Jews were awaiting a Messiah. Jesus is telling them: “what more do you want!? If I’m not the Messiah, what more will the Messiah do than what I have

been doing?” The standards the Jews were inventing concerning the Messiah effectively ruled out anyone being identified as the Messiah. The way in which they rejected Jesus effectively rejected their belief in the possibility of there ever being a Messiah.

5:44

The goal of the Jews was to receive accolades and atta-boys from their cronies. Jesus says that their goals should have been to receive atta-boys from the Father.

Now, who wants to talk about the “practical application” of this verse?

5:45-47

Jesus wraps up this hostility-raising sermon by saying that even if the Jews reject him and his message, they are still condemned by one they consider authoritative: Moses. (John has a favorable view of Moses: the Law came through him.) He condemns people who use religion to advance themselves in the eyes of others. Even on their own standards, Jesus point out that the Jews are condemned.