

March 6th, 2016

IS YOUR JESUS TOO SMALL?

John 5:30-47

Chapter 5 of John's gospel is one cohesive event. Two weeks ago we saw Jesus come to the pool of Bethesda and heal the crippled man. He did this on a Sabbath. And He commanded the man to carry his mat. This brought the fury of the Jews against him, and they immediately started persecuting Him. To this he responded in v.17 "My Father is working until now, and I am working."

What follows in v. 18 is *the central verse* in this chapter. "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." Jesus then dominates the rest of this chapter. In v.19-29, He teaches that the Jews were right to conclude that He is equal with the Father. All that the Father does, the Son does. Jesus has equal authority with God the Father. This was chiefly demonstrated in His Lordship over salvation in v. 25-27, and the final resurrection in v.28-29.

Now beginning in v.30, Jesus calls in witnesses to testify on his behalf that what the Jews heard him to say in v.18 was absolutely correct: "He was... making himself equal with God." Jesus Christ is equal with God. Which means that all peoples of all nations will either bow before Him or burn. There can be no doubt that Jesus Christ has absolute claim on planet earth. He will either be your blessed Savior, or He will be your damning Judge. There is no middle ground.

The Jews in this chapter refused to bow the knee to Jesus Christ. Jesus was too small in their eyes. They regarded him as a *mere* man making audacious claims. My question today is this: is our Jesus too small? Our Savior is making claims in this passage that cannot be dismissed. Claims that define our very existence.

- I. WITNESS 1: JOHN THE BAPTIST—‘JESUS...IS THE LAMB OF GOD’ (v.33-35)
- II. WITNESS 2: JESUS’ WORKS ARE THE WORKS OF GOD (v.36)
- III. WITNESS 3: JESUS IS THE TESTIMONY OF THE FATHER (v.37-38)
- IV. WITNESS 4: JESUS IS THE ENTIRE MESSAGE OF THE SCRIPTURES (v.39-47)

Our Big Idea is an *implication* of these truths:

The Big Idea

If Jesus Christ is not the dominant and defining Person of your life, your
Jesus is too small

In v.30, our Lord restates the truth found in v.19-20. “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” The Jews were trying to pit Jesus against God. They saw him heal on the Sabbath, and heard him say that He is equal with God (v.18) and so they conclude that Jesus is opposed to God. But Jesus turns their argument on them. When He says “I can do nothing on my own”, He means ‘I can’t do *anything* that the Father doesn’t want me to do.’ In other words, ‘It is impossible that I *not* do His will. As I act, it is as if the Father Himself were acting.’ Therefore, reflecting back on v.18, anyone who does not agree that Jesus is equal with God is **opposed** to the Father.

v.31 If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

v.31 is a curious verse, for Jesus just finished asserting that He is God. How now could He say that His testimony is not true? What God speaks is true *because* He speaks it. He doesn't need any more convincing proofs other than His bare authority. So what does Jesus mean here? Especially if we consider **John 8:14** where Jesus seems to give the opposite answer: "Even if I do bear witness about myself, **my testimony is true.**" How do we reconcile?¹ Here He is simply saying that in all these claims that He is making about Himself, *if* He were to assert these *alone—outside of what the Father gave Him to say and do*—then of course His claims would be false.² *But* Jesus knows that that His claims are in perfect accord with the Father: **v.32** "There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true."³ What the Father claims about Jesus, Jesus claims about Himself. That's His point.

¹ Chrysostom gives a slightly different perspective along these lines: First of all, we have to recognize that in this place, like many other places, Jesus is reading their suspicious thoughts. And he is beating them to their objection. He's saying in effect 'to **you** my testimony is not true.' Remember what Jesus just claimed: in verses 19-29: whatever the Father does, I do (v.19); just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, I also give life to whoever I choose (v.21); that all judgment belongs to Me (v.22); that whoever doesn't honor Me doesn't honor the Father (v. 23); that whoever believes Me will never come into judgment but has everlasting life (v.24); that all the final day of resurrection it will be Me that will demand an account from all mankind for their sins (v.28).' Jesus leaves no room for dissent. He asserts absolute authority over all mankind. So of course, He knows what they are thinking at this point. v.31 is Jesus uncovering their suspicions. In effect, He's saying 'You will say to Me: Jesus you are asserting all these things, but you are not a credible witness, because **you alone** are testifying of yourself.' So Jesus entertains this low evaluation of Himself in order to call forth more witnesses to show that in fact the whole universe testifies that He is equal with the Father. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 14*, Ed. Phillip Schaff, (Peabody, MA,: Hendrickson Publishers, 5th Printing 2012), pg. 143-144

² D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pg. 259

³ I believe this interpretation better lines up with Jesus' meaning later on in 8:13-14. There is seems clear that the Pharisees misunderstood what Jesus was saying here, thinking He meant that He actually needs other witnesses to collaborate His words.

But these wicked men like unbelievers today, would not receive this testimony. So Jesus piles up more witnesses for their sake, and ours that we might believe Him.

Witness 1: John the Baptist—‘Jesus...is the Lamb of God’ (v.33-35)

v.33 You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.

The Jews were fascinated by all the signs and wonders that John the Baptist performed in the wilderness. So much so, that they sent a delegation to him, pretending to treat him as a prophet. He spoke the truth about Jesus Christ: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) Jesus is telling them to listen to John’s witness. But He immediately follows this up with...

v.34 Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

In other words, ‘Because I am God, I don’t need John’s witness to establish that fact.’⁴ Jesus isn’t a needy God. Those two words—needy God—are utter foolishness. **Deuteronomy 10:14** “Behold, to the LORD your God [that is Christ] belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.” John’s testimony doesn’t add anything to Jesus. So why does Jesus point to him? He does so for our sake. The end of v.34 says “but I say these things *so that you may be saved.*” Oh consider the infinite patience of Christ! Here He, the King of all glory, is getting persecuted by these rebels, these worms of the

⁴ cf. John 2:24-25

dust, and yet He is still patiently enduring. He is patiently pointing to preachers, like John the Baptist, so that his listeners might avoid the great day and terrible day of judgment. Jesus Christ sends preachers into the world, not because He needs their validation. But so that lost and dying sinners can hear the good news that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If you have not bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, receiving Him as your only comfort in life and death, you are presently under the infinite condemnation of a holy God. You are blind, ignorant, and lost groping around in this present darkness. And Christ Jesus has sent you a preacher to point you to Him. **v.35** “He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.” Jesus built a blazing fire named John the Baptist in order to lead blind sinners out of the darkness to Himself. He doesn’t delight in the death of the wicked, He wants to grant life to those who will believe. **Ezekiel 18:23** “Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? Jesus sent John and all faithful preachers of His Word into the world so that we could live. And yet the world shows it’s wickedness today in it’s absolute hatred of preaching. ‘Tell us stories, make it shorter, entertain me, but give me no more of this Jesus.’ You are dying. Your dead in your sins. If Jesus is not preached, if you do not cling to that burning and shining lamp you will everlastingly perish. Give me Jesus or give me death should be what the world cries. **The seeing and savoring of the glory of Christ in preaching is life.**⁵ The Jews only rejoiced in John’s preaching for a while. The more John preached, the more they realized that if they believed,

⁵ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6

they must step off their own self-appointed throne, and bow before Christ. That's the first witness that Jesus points to.

Witness 2: Jesus' Works are the Works of God (v.36)

v.36 But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

As great as the testimony of John was, Jesus points to His own works as a far greater testimony. Fast forwarding to **John 15:24** "If I had not done among them the works *that no one else did*, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father." Did you catch that? Jesus did performed works *that no one else did*. How since the Bible is full of miracles by both prophets and apostles that were very similar. Three ways 1) Jesus didn't have to pray to perform any work⁶ (cf. 1 Kings 17:21). He simply commanded the paralytic at the beginning of this chapter " "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." 2) Jesus didn't have to do perform any work under another person's name. (cf. Acts 3:6). He spoke each miracle into existence by the authority of His own name. 3) Jesus performed every work in order to bring all attention to Himself (cf. Deuteronomy 13:1-5) As we will see in the next chapter, the point of feeding the five thousand was to demonstrate that He was the true bread that came down from heaven (cf. John 6:32-35)

These three qualities, 1) that He didn't have to pray to perform a work; 2) that He didn't perform any work under another's name and 3) that He was what each work pointed to, *showed that He was equal to the Father*. Why? Because

⁶ Although at certain times He did in fact pray.

God has no need to do any of those things. That's Jesus' point here in bringing up His works. 'Only God can do the things that I am doing.'

Witness 3: Jesus is the Testimony of the Father (v.37-38)

v.37-38 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent.

He has moved from the lesser witnesses of John the Baptist, and His own works, to now the Father Himself. 'You persecute me for claiming equality with the Father, but it is the Father Himself who has bore witness about me' Some take Jesus to be referring to when the Father spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism. But that was just one event. The Father has always bore witness about Jesus. He began in Genesis 3:15, when He promised that the seed of the woman would crush the seed of the serpent. He then spoke through every prophet "Thus says the LORD" and the main substance of His words was to hold out the hope of salvation to His people in the person of the Messiah. Jesus Christ is the main thing that the Father has always witnessed to. There was no higher thing that the Father pointed to than His glory in the coming of His Son.

For the Jews to miss this brings 3 damning indictments from Jesus.⁷ 1) "His voice you have never heard." This is metaphorical. Since the Jews do not hear the voice of God *in* Jesus' voice, Jesus declares: "You don't hear God." 2) "His form you have never seen." Also metaphorical. Since the Jews do not see that Jesus is the very manifestation of God (John 1:18), Jesus declares: "You

⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pg. 262

don't even know who God is. 3) "You do not have his word abiding in you" Since Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1), and they completely reject Jesus, Jesus declares: "You are alienated from God's word." Jesus sums up these three indictments by saying "you do not believe the one whom he [the Father] has sent." Is it any wonder why the Jews hated Jesus so much?

Witness 4: Jesus is the Entire Message of the Scriptures (v.39-47)

v.39-40 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

The Jews thought that diligently studying the Scriptures would bring them eternal life. Oh how we can do the same thing. It is true that God gives us the Scriptures so that we can find eternal life. Without the Scripture we would be lost in the world, shut off from hope of eternal life. However, if we don't meet Christ in the Scriptures, all the Bible study in the world cannot save us. "There is nothing intrinsically life-giving about studying the Scriptures."⁸ The Scriptures do not point to themselves as the end goal, they point to Jesus Christ. Scripture without Christ is like the body without a soul. That's what the Jews were studying, a dead corpse of written words, because they refused to see .⁹

⁸ D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pg. 263

⁹ Fellow Christian, beware how you read the Bible. It is a test of who is on the throne in our hearts. If we come to the Scriptures out of mere duty, offering only a cursory and superficial read over the text, have we come to Christ? Or have we simply 'done our duty' so that we can remain on the throne of our own sense of righteousness? If we don't read the Scriptures the way they were meant to be read-to meet Jesus-our reading is in vain.

Let's pause and consider again the forest of this chapter so that we can see the trees properly. This controversy began because Jesus showed Himself to be God in His works and in His words. (v.18 is our central verse in this chapter). Jesus has provided four witnesses that demonstrated He was telling the truth. But the Jews would not believe. The end of v.40 says "...yet you *refuse* to come to me that you may have life." 'You don't want to come to Me.' Why wouldn't they come to Jesus? He had all the credentials of being the Messiah. The Messiah that they said they were waiting for? Was this just a simple case of mistaken identity? Like they misunderstood what the text was saying? No. It was a refusal to see what the Scripture said, it was a refusal to come to Jesus because they wanted *something* else more. And this is the same problem that all unbelievers have. This is not *merely* a Jewish problem, this is a human problem.¹⁰ Human beings will not come to belief in Jesus Christ, apart from the new birth, because they want else more than what Jesus offers. What is it? What do they want?

v.41 I do not receive glory from people.

Jesus doesn't receive glory from people, meaning He doesn't look to people to find His satisfaction. He's not waiting on man's praise in order to be fulfilled. He's satisfied in God. He loves God

v.42 **But** I know that you do not have the love of God within you.

¹⁰ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-love-of-human-praise-as-the-root-of-unbelief>

Jesus is saying ‘that is not how you operate.’ This “but” here puts receiving glory from people *against* loving God. In other words, ‘you don’t love God, *because* you, unlike Me, pursue glory from people.’

v.43-44 I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

‘How can you believe’ means you can’t believe. These Jews, like all unbelievers can’t believe in Christ, because they loved the glory of man more than the glory of God. What’s stopping you from believing right now? What’s stopping you from receiving Jesus Christ? Your love affair with yourself. That’s what sin does. It puts self at the center. It puts self on the throne. It makes much of self. v.44 helps us to understand v.43. Why were the Jews eager to receive false prophets and false teachers, but not Christ? Why are unbelievers today ready to receive a thousand Oprah’s and a thousand Joel Osteens before they receive Christ? Because those “messiahs” are like them. In worshipping those “messiahs” they are worshipping themselves. Those “messiahs” flatter and schmooze and tell their followers how great they are. They make unbelievers “...feel okay with the their love of their own name and their own self-exaltation.”¹¹ Jesus Christ does the opposite. He hangs on a cross because we are not ok. His crucifixion is a monument to the world that man’s love affair with himself leads to death and hell. That’s what stops people from believing in Jesus Christ. Anyone who comes to Christ must renounce self. He must be humbled, humiliated, made low. He must feel the shame of his own sin and

¹¹ *ibid*

brokenness and flee to the mercy seat. He must admit that all his own glories are filthy rags in light of the blinding light of Christ's holiness. That is the great stumbling block to belief. Self-Renunciation. Jesus glorification. He must increase and I must decrease. The human heart hates decreasing.

v.45-47 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

No specific reference is given here as to where Moses wrote about Christ in the OT. That is on purpose. Because Christ was all that Moses wrote about. When He recorded of burning bush, He gave us a picture of the Divine joining with the human, two natures, one person. The one not consuming the other. When he recorded striking the rock in the wilderness, he was pointing to the striking of Christ. When he recorded the manna coming down from heaven, he was pointing to the true bread that would one day come down from heaven. In all of Moses' writings, he invited men to go straight to Christ.¹² But these Jews could not see it. They used the Scripture to exalt self. What a paradox. That the Scripture can be the source of the exaltation of God or the exaltation of self. They were using the Scripture as a mirror of their own performance as opposed to a window into the glory of Christ. And because of this they could not believe.

¹² John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. XVII* (Grand Rapids, MI,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 217

Application

Our Doctrine: If Jesus Christ is not the dominant and defining Person of your life, your Jesus is too small

Is there anyone more important than Jesus Christ in your life? Does Jesus Christ define how you do life? Meaning do you look to Him as Lord over every sphere and make choices primarily because you want to honor Him? When you watch a movie or pick up a book, or get sick, or have a baby, or bury a loved one, do you look to Him to define and sanctify those events? Our biggest problem in life, as believers, is that we are constantly making Jesus too small, and ourselves too big. All of our anxieties, all of our pride, all of our self-exaltation springs from a low view of Jesus Christ. That is what Jesus was prosecuting in this passage. The Jews thought that Jesus was just like one of them (cf. Psalm 50:21). How often do we do the same thing? Ask yourself:

*Is Jesus the main and chief business of my life or is my Jesus is too small?*¹³ “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” **Galatians 2:20**

Am I a forgiving person, not willing to hold on to grudges or is my Jesus too small?

Do I long for death to be with Christ, or is my Jesus too small?

Do I consider greatest privilege this side of heaven as beholding the glory of Jesus Christ, or is my Jesus too small?

¹³ He who would taste the fullness of the sweetness of Christ, and perceive the total measure of his excellence, must be willing to make the pursuit of the knowledge of him the main and chief business of life. <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/is-your-jesus-too-small>

Our Duty: To consider what faith in Jesus Christ looks like

Let's look at v.44 again, Jesus said "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" Connect the first part of the verse to the last part "How can you believe when...you do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" In other words, saving faith is seeking the glory of God. What does it mean to seek the glory of God? It means to admire Jesus Christ in the gospel. Isaiah promised us that in the days of the gospel "Your eyes will behold the King in his beauty" (Isaiah 33:17) Beholding and admiring the beauty and glory of Christ is saving faith looks like. So how do you know if you're saved? Do you see Jesus Christ as infinitely beautiful? Do you long to be nearer to Him? Do you long to long? The Jews in this passage had no stomach for the glory of Christ. If you never entertain any serious thoughts of gaining a view of the glory of God in Christ, you are an unbeliever.¹⁴ Jesus told the Jews in v.37 that they did not hear God and did not see God. Meaning that they had no accurate knowledge of God, because they had no view of His glory. Real acquaintance with God is having a spiritual view of His glory. "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3) Know God how? As infinitely glorious. As the delight of our souls. As the heaven of heaven. Do you know God like that? That's what saving faith looks like, to admire and esteem Jesus Christ above all other things. Unbelief is being blind to that. **2 Corinthians 4:3-4** says "...if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

¹⁴ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ: His Office and Grace*, (Scotland,: Christian Focus, Reprint 2008), pg. 63

Our Delight: Christ died for our devaluing Him

Every body can find themselves in today's passage. The Jews devaluing of Jesus is the same resistance that all of either currently have, because we are an unbeliever, or that we did have when before we became believers.