



## The Gospel of John - Chapter Five

### **II. John 1:19-12:50 - The Signs of the Messiah (continues)**

#### Summary of Chapter Five

In this transitional section that follows, grace is given to one who betrays Jesus (vv.1-15), bringing to a climax this opening series of stories and initiating the conflict that follows. As God's scandalous grace is offered not just to the kosher but to the un-kosher, the glory is revealed with increasing intensity until it provokes a reaction (vv.16-18).

At this point Jesus delivers his keynote address (vv.19-30), provides a list of witnesses to the truth of what he is saying (vv.31-40), and adds his own accusation against his opponents (vv.41-47). Thus Chapter 5 brings to a head the opening revelation of the glory and introduces the conflict that will then dominate the rest of the story.

#### **II.c John 5:1-10:42 - Mounting Jewish opposition, additional signs**

The festival cycle in John's Gospel is characterised by escalating conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. In the course of Jesus' defence of his ministry, he cites several major witnesses on his behalf.

#### **II.c.i John 5:1-47 - A Sabbath Controversy**

Jesus is once again in Jerusalem, although not necessarily following directly on to what had just happened in Galilee in John's account for his story does not follow true chronology, nor does it need to.

The healing of the man by the pool on a Sabbath day (vv.1-15) reveals the glory at its brightest and triggers the conflict (vv.16-18) that will dominate the rest of the story. The challenge of the Jewish opponents leads to Jesus' keynote address (vv.19-30), a statement by Jesus that is fundamental to understanding him and all of his activity. There follows a series of confirming witnesses (vv.31-40), and Jesus' condemning accusation of his opponents (vv.41-47).

## II.c.i.1 John 5:1-18 - Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

Whilst in the Temple Complex on a Sabbath day, Jesus encounters a disabled man waiting for a chance to enter a pool famed for its healing powers. After a brief dialogue with the man, Jesus simply tells him to get up and he is instantly healed even though he had been disabled for nearly 40 years.

The man is stopped by some of the religious leaders, who find out that he has been healed by Jesus and, rather than being filled with awe and thanksgiving for this miracle, they are incensed that Jesus should do this 'work' on a day of rest!

<sup>1</sup> After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

### John 5:1

After this marks the passing of an indefinite period of time and is used by John on other occasions to indicate that, although these are a sequence of events, they do not necessarily occur in chronological order.

There is no way to be certain which feast is indicated by the unnamed festival of the Jews, but this event occurred on one of Jesus' visits to Jerusalem. As noted in the previous chapter, there were three compulsory festivals for Jewish men to attend in Jerusalem: <<*Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed*>> (Deuteronomy 16:16).

<sup>2</sup> Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes.

### John 5:2

A pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha. Beth-zatha often referred to as Bethesda, means 'house of mercy', a fitting term given the desperate state of the people lying there in hope of a miracle cure. Various spellings of the name of this pool are found in the Greek manuscripts. Nevertheless, there remains strong reason to identify this pool with a single large two-pool complex near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem and adjacent to the modern Church of St. Anne. The two pools are separated from each other by a partition. The remains of columns found around this site help confirm that the partition between the pools, along with each of the four sides surrounding the pool complex, likely contained the five roofed colonnades, i.e. five porticoes, which are covered walkways; a colonnade is a row of columns. A 5<sup>th</sup> Century Byzantine basilica was built over this site. Although the area was rebuilt when the Jews returned from Babylon: <<*Then the high priest Eliashib set to work with his fellow-priests and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set up its doors; they consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of Hananel*>> (Nehemiah 3:1), it was probably refashioned during the time of Herod the Great.



**The Ruins of the Pool at Beth-zatha.**

<sup>3</sup> In these lay many invalids – blind, lame, and paralysed.

### John 5:3

Many invalids either came or were carried to the poolside in the hope they would receive a miraculous healing from God. That they were blind, lame, and paralysed indicates that it was mostly for physical healing that the people came.

Verse 4 is not included in the NRSVA translation and is taken from the ASV.

[[<sup>4</sup> For an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the waters stepped in was made whole, with whatsoever disease he was holden (ASV)]].

It was believed that an angel of the Lord stirred up the water and the first person who stepped in would be healed. This is found in some early manuscripts, but not the earliest. Therefore the omitted v.4 should not be considered part of Scripture, although v.7, which is in all manuscripts, shows that people believed in something similar to what this statement reports.

<sup>5</sup> One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

## John 5:5

John uses the Greek *astheneia*, translated Invalid in v.7, to describe the man who had been ill which probably means he was paralysed, lame, or extremely weak, and the Greek term is the general expression for a disabled condition.

He had been an invalid for thirty-eight years, longer than many people in antiquity lived. For a similar type of healing see Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26.

<sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’

## John 5:6

Knew probably indicates Jesus’ divine knowledge of the man’s situation, similar to Jesus’ knowledge of Nathanael (1:48) and the Samaritan woman (4:18).

Do you want to be made well may seem a strange statement from Jesus but it shows that it will take the active participation of the individual who is ill. Not the act of climbing into the pool but having faith in God through his Son.

This Gospel stresses both divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and here both Jesus’ sovereign approach to this man and the importance of the man’s own will is revealed. This is another of Jesus’ questions that are intended to reveal the heart. As he did with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus takes the initiative in commencing the dialogue between the two of them.

<sup>7</sup> The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.’ <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ <sup>9a</sup> At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

## John 5:7-9a

I have no one to put me into the pool. Initially, the man does not realise that Jesus is asking for a response of faith and thinks only in physical terms, as did the Samaritan women when Jesus spoke of giving out life giving water (4:10-11). This situation is one of despair and hopelessness. Perhaps the man hoped that Jesus would have compassion and would help him into the pool the next time it was stirred up, he certainly seemed to have some expectation that he would help. However, Jesus then gave him a plain command, stand up, which the man did and found that he was made well immediately. The apostle Paul was given the gift to perform a similar miracle: <<*In Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and had never walked, for he had been crippled from birth. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said in a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet.’ And the man sprang up and began to walk*>> (Acts 14:8-10).

When the water is stirred up indicates that some form of natural occurrence took place, perhaps from an underground stream or mild seismic activity, which tradition said was caused by an angel. It was generally believed that at least the

first person entering the troubled water would be healed, perhaps indicating that some people had been made well by entering the water.

**Take your mat and walk.** The Jews often carried a small mat rolled up so they could sit or lie on the dusty ground and remain relatively clean. In a similar healing, Jesus also instructed the man to pick up his mat: <<‘*For which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven”, or to say, “Stand up and walk”?* But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ – he then said to the paralytic – ‘Stand up, take your bed and go to your home’>> (Matthew 9:5-6).

**At once** shows the immediacy of God’s power in performing many of the healing miracles, although some do take longer. It is not only healing that happened immediately but many other actions as well, which is best seen in Mark’s Gospel where the word is used 27 times in a variety of situations.

<sup>9b</sup> Now that day was a sabbath. <sup>10</sup> So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, ‘It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.’ <sup>11</sup> But he answered them, ‘The man who made me well said to me, “Take up your mat and walk.”’ <sup>12</sup> They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, “Take it up and walk”?’ <sup>13</sup> Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there.

### **John 5:9b-13**

**It is the Sabbath.** Nothing in the OT specifically prohibited such an innocent activity as carrying one’s bedroll on the Sabbath day, but the man was violating later Jewish traditions that had developed hundreds of minutely detailed and burdensome rules about what kind of work was prohibited. This included a code that forbade carrying an object ‘from one domain into another’ (Mishnah, Shabbat 7.2), a regulation based on Scripture: <<*Thus says the Lord: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem*>> (Jeremiah 17:21), but taken out of context in later traditions, which is why they said **it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.** Nevertheless, Jesus does not defend himself by getting into a rabbinic discussion on the nature of work. Rather, he claims he is working, just like God (v.17), and hence is, as the Synoptics teach, the lord of the Sabbath.

**The man who made me well said to me, “Take up your mat and walk”.** Some have taken this man’s actions to be a betrayal of Christ by deflecting his own responsibility for his actions onto the one who had just healed him. Even though the man’s ingratitude may seem apparent, it is more likely to have been simply a human response to the question, for the man had clearly been overwhelmed by his healing. Whether the man was a betrayer of Jesus or not misses the point, it is the compassion of Christ and the desire to see him spiritually as well as physically healed that is the main point of the story.

**Who is the man who said to you, “Take it up and walk”?** On one level they are simply asking for his name. But on another level this question epitomises their basic problem: nothing that Jesus does makes godly sense to them because they do

not know who he is. The major question of this Gospel is 'Who is this fellow?' One's answer to that question makes the difference between eternal life and death.

Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was. The description of the healing gives the impression that it happened quite suddenly and surprisingly, right after Jesus had approached the man. But in his complete ignorance of Jesus, not even knowing his name, this man is like those who earlier had seen Jesus' signs in Jerusalem but had no true faith (2:23-25). This man does not just see signs but is himself the one who receives the benefit of Jesus' action. Yet like those others he fails to receive that which the sign points to, the revelation of God in Jesus.

<sup>14</sup> Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.'<sup>15</sup> The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

### John 5:14-15

Jesus meets the man again in the temple, that is, the larger temple complex rather than the actual building as discussed in comments on 2:14, just a short distance from where the original healing had taken place, for the pool of Beth-zatha is located just north of the Temple Mount. Again Jesus takes the initiative. It is almost as if this were a two-stage miracle with an interval separating the healing and Jesus' manifestation of himself to the man.

Do not sin any more may imply that the man's suffering was due to sin, without suggesting that all suffering is due to personal sin, as Jesus will later reveal: <<*His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him'*>> (John 9:2-3). Thus believers should never assume the presence of sin in anyone's afflictions nor should they assume a lack of faith when healing does not occur. Jesus' curt statement to the man indicates that he had been forgiven for his past sins. Future sins and transgressions still need to be repented of and put to death by the power of the Spirit: <<*for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live*>> (Romans 8:13).

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. It is this action by the man that many see as the betrayal of Jesus. However, in context, it must be remembered just how much influence and power the religious leaders had over the ordinary person and if he had been reported as speaking with Jesus and not telling them, then he could have faced sanctions.

Failing to turn to this new life will result in something worse happening, something worse than being an invalid for thirty-eight years! Jesus is offering the man life and threatening him with judgment. These are two sides of a single coin, and together they are the hallmark of all Jesus' ministry, as will be stated shortly in his keynote address (vv.24-29).

<sup>16</sup> Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath.

## John 5:16

The Jews started persecuting Jesus. Jesus' Jewish opponents, both the religious leaders and ordinary people who followed their teaching, were putting their merely human religious tradition above genuine love and compassion for others, against which the OT commanded: <<*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:18) and Jesus exemplified. It was Jesus, not these Jews, who was truly obeying the Scriptures.

Because he was doing such things on the sabbath. The law said that no work could be done on the Sabbath: <<*But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns*>> (Exodus 20:10), and the traditions upheld by the religious leaders viewed even this type of compassionate act as work. Jesus would teach them that they had misunderstood the purpose of the law which was to help mankind not hinder them: <<*Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath'*>> (Mark 2:27).

<sup>17</sup> But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is still working, and I also am working.'

## John 5:17

My Father suggests a far closer relationship with God than other people had. Jesus does not say 'I must work because God is working', which would imply compulsion. Therefore, when Jesus says my Father is still working, and I also am working, he implies that he, like the Father, is lord over the Sabbath. Therefore this is a claim to deity. These Jews recognise what he is claiming (v.18). While Genesis 2:2-3 teaches that God rested, Hebrew *shabat*, on the seventh day of creation, Jewish rabbis agreed that God continually upholds the universe, yet without breaking the Sabbath. In John 7:22-23 Jesus makes a different argument about healing on the Sabbath: <<*Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath?*>>.

<sup>18</sup> For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

## John 5:18

Making himself equal to God. Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God, not in the way that ordinary human believers are sons of God but in the sense of one who was equal to God in his nature and in every way, yet who related to God in a Father-Son relationship, refer to the comments made on 1:14. If Jesus had been merely a man, as his Jewish opponents thought, and was also calling God his own Father, then this claim would have been blasphemy on Jesus' part, a crime worthy of

death. Hence, the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him: <<*The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God'*>> (John 19:7).

### II.c.i.2 John 5:19-29 - The Authority of the Son

The prologue began with the relation of the Father and the Son, and now Jesus' first major public teaching recorded in this Gospel, his keynote address, begins with the same topic. It is this relationship that makes sense out of everything Jesus says or does, and so this rich passage requires special attention.

This keynote section states clearly the scandal of particularity that some Christians find discomfiting today. The complex language of these verses shows the struggle to guard the truth of monotheism while claiming that Jesus is God. The concerns of monotheists such as Jews and Muslims are legitimate, and this Gospel reveals that God is indeed one, although not in the way these other religions understand.

This Gospel encourages monotheists to understand their truth in light of what has now been revealed by the Son of God about himself and the Holy Spirit. This Gospel, however, offers no encouragement to Christians who wish to say that Jesus is not the unique Son of God with exclusive and ultimate authority over every person on earth. All judgment has been given to him, and all are to honour the Son just as they honour the Father. John allows for no syncretism, for that would deny the uniqueness and exclusivity of Jesus.

<sup>19</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.'

#### John 5:19

In this expression of humility, obedience and dependence the Semitic version of the ideal son is revealed, since a son is to reproduce his father's thought, action and words: <<*Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me*>> (John 14:24). He does nothing by himself, or more literally, from himself; his source of being and activity is not himself but his Father. Jesus' claim that the Son can do nothing on his own, taken with vv.17-18, affirms two themes:

1. Jesus is equal to God, i.e. he is fully divine (vv.17-18).
2. The Father and the Son have different functions and roles (v.19), and the Son is subject to the Father in everything he does, yet this does not deny their fundamental equality.

Only what he sees the Father doing may imply that Jesus had a unique ability to see the Father's providential activities in the events of everyday life, activities that are ordinarily invisible to human beings.

<sup>20</sup> The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished.

## John 5:20

The Father shows to Jesus all that he himself is doing, i.e. Jesus perceives God's hand and purpose in every event in this world. It is this love that motivated God to send Jesus (3:16), and this eternal relationship is the source of Jesus' activity for it leads the Father to show the Son all he does.

You will be astonished. The signs and wonders, including the healing on a Sabbath, would amaze those who witness or hear of such things. These greater works are initially the raising of the dead (11:1-45). Even more, they include Jesus' own death and resurrection described in chapters 18-20, then the voice of this same Jesus summoning all mankind to final resurrection and judgment (vv.27-30). Jesus would go on to promise that the work of his disciples would be greater still: *<<Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father>>* (John 14:12), and that for some their works will continue to grow with their faith: *<<I know your works – your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first>>* (Revelation 2:19).

Jesus works miracles that, like the miracles of Moses in Exodus Chapter 3, will make people sit up and take notice in order to recognise that it was God who has sent him. But on a deeper level God seeks an amazement that comes from recognising the Father in the Son, for the miracles actually reveal the identity of Jesus and the character of the Father. This amazement is a part of faith, as seen, for example, in the case of Nathanael (1:49-50), where he was amazed, and Jesus promised him he would see even greater things.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes.

## John 5:21

Jesus' statement that so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes is another claim to deity, showing that Jesus does what only God can do, for the OT makes clear that raising the dead and giving life are the sole prerogatives of God: *<<See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand>>* (Deuteronomy 32:39), *<<The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up>>* (1 Samuel 2:6), and: *<<When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me'>>* (2 Kings 5:7).

This life is both the new life now given to believers (v.24): *<<Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'>>* (John 11:25-26), and: *<<So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!>>* (2 Corinthians 5:17), and the resurrection of the body at Christ's Second Coming; refer to Daniel 12:2, 1 Corinthians 15:42-57, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

<sup>22</sup> The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son,  
<sup>23</sup> so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.  
Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.

### John 5:22-23

Jesus' assertion that the Father has given all judgment to the Son is yet another claim to deity, since judgment is the exclusive prerogative of God: <<*Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*>> (Genesis 18:25), and: <<*It is not I who have sinned against you, but you are the one who does me wrong by making war on me. Let the Lord, who is judge, decide today for the Israelites or for the Ammonites*>> (Judges 11:27). The Father judges no one but has delegated the work of final judgment to the Son.

The statement that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father in effect establishes Jesus' right to be worshiped and also amounts to a claim to deity. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him shows that religions such as Judaism and Islam that consider Jesus merely a great prophet do not represent the truth about God, because they fail to worship and honour Jesus.

The Father has put everything into the Son's hands (3:35), including the most fundamental realities of human existence, the giving of life and judgment. These two activities are at the heart of everything Jesus does in this Gospel, and these verses spell out his right to such responsibility and power.

The next section of the keynote address (vv.24-29) deals with how the Son exercises these two divine prerogatives. The first two verses (vv.24-25) mention a present experience of life and judgment; the second two verses (vv.26-27) return to the relationship between the Father and the Son, which lies behind this activity of the Son; and finally, the Son's divine activity in the future is referred to in vv.28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.

### John 5:24

Has eternal life is one of the most striking statements in John regarding the present possession of eternal life. Eternal life begins immediately, in a partially realised but significant way, when one hears the word of and believes in Jesus. Those who believe can face the last judgment with confidence: <<*And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life*>> (1 John 5:11-13).

Has passed from death to life indicates the spiritual transition that takes place when a person is reconciled back to God through his Son, since without that relationship with God, people are spiritually dead, but Jesus brings life to the mortal soul: <<*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*>> (John 10:10).

<sup>25</sup> ‘Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

### John 5:25

The great events of the last day are already taking place. The judge they were expecting has come surprisingly, before the final end of this age; the life of the age to come is already available. However, Jesus is not emphasising the final resurrection but the present reality and experience of eternal life, for he says the hour is now here, with the phrase the dead referring to the spiritually dead who hear Jesus’ message and believe.

Therefore, those who hear will live, refers to those who hear and believe in Jesus’ words: <<*Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God*>> (John 8:47).

<sup>26</sup> For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; <sup>27</sup> and he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man.

### John 5:26-27

For. This verse explains why the voice of Jesus is able to speak to dead people and grant them life.

Just as the Father was never created and was never given his life by someone else, but has life in himself, he can impart that life to others, so the Son has life in himself and is able to call the dead to life.

He has granted the Son also to have life in himself does not mean that the Father created the Son but that the Father authorised the Son to be able to give life to other people, thus this verse explains v.25. God gives life and light to and through the Son: <<*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*>> (Deuteronomy 30:19-20), <<*You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit*>> (Job 10:12), <<*The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life*>> (Job 33:4), and: <<*For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light*>> (Psalm 36:9).

This statement about life in himself echoes the affirmation in the prologue that, speaking of Jesus, <<*in him was life*>> (John 1:4a).

Jesus' grounds for such audacious claims are within the Father's authorisation of the Son. The earlier thought (vv.19-23) is repeated with two new developments. First, the deity of Christ is clear from the fact that the Father has granted the Son to have life in himself. That is, the Son himself is the source of life and not just an agent of God's power of life. Yet this possession of life was given by the Father. So again this gives glimpses into the mystery of the relationships within the Godhead and an emphasis on the gracious giving of the Father, who is the source of everything that is good.

He has given him authority to execute judgement. John has already recorded that it will not be God who judges but the Son (v.22), something that he would write about again: <<*Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war*>> (Revelation 19:11).

Because he is the Son of Man echoes: <<*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence*>> (Daniel 7:13 NIV). Because Jesus is not only the divine Son of God but also the truly human Son of Man who is the eternal world ruler prophesied in Daniel 7:13-14, the Father has given him authority to carry out the final judgment of every human being.

Jesus is saying that if they recognised him as the eschatological Son of Man and if they understood this identity correctly, they would know they were facing their judge. In passing judgment on Jesus they were condemning their ultimate judge and thus passing judgment on themselves. The irony of this situation comes up over and over in this story.

The Son of Man's present activity does not preclude his acting again at the end of the age. John, like the rest of the NT authors, believes that the Jews' eschatological timetable has become more complex with the coming of Jesus. Instead of the Jewish notion of two ages, this age and the age to come, Christians saw an overlap in these ages. The age to come has already begun while the old age continues on for a while. John emphasises this inaugurated eschatology, the presence right now of the age to come, 'the now but not yet' of the Kingdom, more heavily than any other author in the NT. However, he does not reject the belief in a future expectation as well.

<sup>28</sup> Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

### John 5:28-29

For the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out. Jesus reaffirms the resurrection on the last day: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2).

Those who have done good, those who have done evil does not imply that people's deeds in this life are the basis on which judgment is pronounced, for that

would contradict John's strong emphasis on belief in Jesus as the way to gain eternal life. Instead, good works function as evidence of true faith, and if good works are lacking they show an absence of true faith: <<***But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith***>> (James 2:18). All those who truly believe will be brought 'from death to life' (v.24), and as a consequence will do good and will therefore enjoy the resurrection of life.

### II.c.i.3 John 5:30-47 - Witnesses to Jesus

Jesus speaks of several witnesses who bear testimony concerning him. The Johannine witness theme, in turn, is part of the larger trial motif, according to which it was not Jesus who was put on trial and condemned by the world but rather the world that was put on trial by Jesus. In order to demonstrate Jesus' innocence and the world's guilt, John parades before the reader a multitude of witnesses who bear testimony to Jesus' true messianic identity and hence establish the world's guilt in rejecting Jesus.

A list of witnesses presented in John's Gospel is available in the supplementary material on the website.

<sup>30</sup> 'I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

#### John 5:30

I can do nothing on my own. As he did in v.19 and v.22, Jesus again reiterates that he only operates under the authority of his Father. This is not because he does not have a will of his own, he clearly does but chooses not to exercise it for he states: I seek to do not my own will. His mission is only to do the will of him who sent me: <<*And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want'*>> (Mark 14:35-36).

As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just. Divine judgement is always true and justified: <<*And I heard the altar respond, 'Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgements are true and just!'*>> (Revelation 16:7), and: <<*After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God, for his judgements are true and just; he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants'*>> (Revelation 19:1-2).

Some commentaries have v.30 as the concluding passage of what has gone before since it rounds out the section and prepares for the next. Jesus judges by his very presence, i.e. the light comes and exposes. Since people judge themselves by their response to the light, Jesus can say that he himself does not judge or condemn. But in a sense Jesus does judge in that he draws peoples' attention to how they respond to him. By exposing their response he makes them all the more culpable. Thus, in what follows he will say that their

rejection of him means they do not know God (vv.37-38). He says this not to condemn them and harden them in their sin, but so they may be saved (v.34).

However, there is something wrong with their hearts, they do not have the will to come to him (v.40). It is not their will to do God's will, no matter how much they claim the contrary. Jesus will keep pointing this out in various ways from here through to the end of Chapter 12.

<sup>31</sup> 'If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.

### John 5:31

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. Jesus' statement is in keeping with OT teaching regarding the need for multiple witnesses: <<*If anyone kills another, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses; but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of a single witness*>> (Numbers 35:30), and: <<*On the evidence of two or three witnesses the death sentence shall be executed; a person must not be put to death on the evidence of only one witness*>> (Deuteronomy 17:6). I, or I alone in some translations, represents the inclusion of the pronoun *egō* in Greek, which makes testify or bear witness emphatic; such witness is not considered true in court.

<sup>32</sup> There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true.

### John 5:32

The Jews may think another refers to the Baptist (vv.33-35), but Jesus is talking about God the Father (v.37), later confirmed by: <<*I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf*>> (John 8:18). There is not dispute therefore that his testimony to me is true.

<sup>33</sup> You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. <sup>34</sup> Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

### John 5:33-34

You sent messengers to John. This was recorded earlier: <<*This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'*>> (John 1:19).

Jesus as the truth fulfils the teaching of the OT and reveals the true God.

Not that I accept such human testimony is not so much a statement that Jesus does not believe what people say, although that would be a fair judgement in many cases: <<*But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone*>> (John 2:24-25), but that he has no need for human testimony when he has God's. However, human testimony given by those who have experienced God's love and grace is an excellent witness to others and should be encouraged.

I say these things so that you may be saved. The main purpose of Jesus' ministry was to restore the relationship between God and his creation, and the Father had put Jesus in place to be the world's only Saviour: <<*Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household'*>> (Acts 16:30-31), <<*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*>> (Ephesians 2:8), and: <<*he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour*>> (Titus 3:5-6).

<sup>35</sup> He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. <sup>36</sup> But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.

### John 5:35-36

Jesus' characterisation of the Baptist as a burning and shining lamp echoes Psalm 132:17b, where in it God says: <<*I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one*>>, something another apostle draws attention to: <<*So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*>> (2 Peter 1:19). John the Baptist was a lamp, but not the light: <<*He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world*>> (John 1:7-9); his witness was small, although important and of a temporary nature. The past tense may imply that John is now dead or at least in prison.

You were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. John's proclamation that the Messiah was about to be revealed had stirred up a great deal of anticipation and excitement, with many people flocking to John for baptism, including religious leaders. However, when Jesus came, they failed to recognise him or reconcile his humility with their expectations of a warrior king from the line of David. Their rejoicing at John's proclamations soon turned to controversy and disappointment.

The works that the Father has given me testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. The signs and wonders, the teaching and eventually Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension are all testimony to Jesus' claims to be the Messiah. This is indeed a testimony greater than John's.

<sup>37</sup> And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, <sup>38</sup> and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

## John 5:37-38

The Father has himself testified on my behalf refers to the whole of the Father's witness, including all of Jesus' miracles and teaching as directed by the Father: <<He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God'>> (John 3:2), as well as all of God's witness in Scripture: <<Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures>> (Luke 24:27), <<Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognise him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him>> (Acts 13:27), and: <<If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son>> (1 John 5:9). Aspects of this are seen elsewhere in this chapter especially in vv.19-20 and vv.45-47.

You have never heard his voice or seen his form. Few, of course, have even had a glimpse of God, perhaps only Moses: <<Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen'>> (Exodus 33:18-23). Their forefathers heard his voice on the mountain and feared him: <<Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire. (At that time I was standing between the Lord and you to declare to you the words of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain)>> (Deuteronomy 5:3-5a), and Paul heard him on the road to Damascus: <<He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'>> (Acts 9:4), but in their generation few, if any, had heard God speak so plainly. So Jesus' condemnation of the opponents cuts to the heart of their own identity. Both rabbinic and mystical strands of Judaism are judged at this point. Whatever they have heard or seen, whether in Scripture or in visions, it has not been revelation of the true God, or at least has not really benefited them, for they do not recognise the truth himself when he stands before them.

You do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. By saying that they do not have God's word dwelling in them Jesus is denying they have a relationship with God. They need to come to him to have life, yet they are refusing to do so (v.40). Their problem is a matter of their own will. They are being given a chance to enter into life, but by rejecting it they condemn themselves. Here is an affirmation of Jesus' earlier claim to be the giver of life (v.21), as well as an example of his judgment (v.22). In their rejection of Jesus they stand self-condemned; they are not on the side of truth.

<sup>39</sup> ‘You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.

### John 5:39

The study of Scripture does not by itself impart eternal life. The Scriptures rather bear witness to the One who gives life, namely, Jesus (vv.46-47). Consequently, the study of the Bible ought to result in genuine faith in Jesus, followed by obedient action and transformed lives, not merely acquisition of Bible knowledge. Paul provides a stark warning to the Jewish Christians in Rome about their reliance on Scripture without proper interpretation: <<*But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples?*>> (Romans 2:17-22).

It is they that testify on my behalf. People, like Jesus’ Jewish opponents, who read the OT without seeing that it all points to Jesus, fail to understand its message. Conversely, those who do believe in Jesus because of Scripture do bear witness to him as the Saviour of the world.

Both rabbinic and mystical strands of Judaism focused on the Scriptures. But they missed its testimony to the Christ and thus missed its main point. In Jesus’ reference to this fourth witness there is the clearest expression of the Christian view of the OT. This Christ-centred understanding of the Scriptures is affirmed throughout the NT and throughout the history of the church. Jesus is the Word, the point of reference for all the words of Scripture. The importance of the Scripture is here affirmed, but Scripture is presented as a means to an end, as a witness to Jesus the Christ. For the NT authors, Jesus is the key to the interpretation of the OT, and this passage confirms that they got this view from Jesus himself.

<sup>40</sup> Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. <sup>41</sup> I do not accept glory from human beings. <sup>42</sup> But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. <sup>43</sup> I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him.

### John 5:40-43

Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. Jesus was God’s solution for reconciliation, forgiveness and redemption, yet many people were not accepting this free gift of grace and were facing eternal separation from God.

I do not accept glory from human beings. This does not mean that Jesus does not accept the praise and worship of genuine believers. He is to be honoured in the same way that the Father is honoured: <<*When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*>>

*They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.'* Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice, *'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!'*>> (Revelation 5:8-12). However, he is not looking for praise as a petty king or politician would do. A believer's praise of Jesus does not add to the glory he already has from the Father and therefore he does not seek it for its own sake.

I know that you do not have the love of God in you. This statement would have been hard to bear for those in authority who genuinely thought that their whole life's work was God-centred, focused on teaching his people to live a life to God. These were not bad people, they had just failed to understand the Scriptures they were then teaching the people, often focusing more on tradition than truth.

I have come in my Father's name means that Jesus came in the authority of the Father and, in a deeper sense, represented the entire character of the Father, for his name in an OT sense represented all that was true about him.

If another comes in his own name. Jesus predicted the proliferation of false christ: <<*For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect*>> (Matthew 24:24), as a sign of the end times: <<*For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Messiah!" and they will lead many astray*>> (Matthew 24:5), and the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish historian Josephus reports a whole string of messianic pretenders before the destruction of the temple in AD70. Even when the antichrist appears many will accept him.

<sup>44</sup> How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?

#### John 5:44

You accept glory from one another. One reason people fail to believe is that they long for the approval and favour of others instead of seeking the approval and favour of God. In other words, they lack love for God in their hearts. Paul indicates how it should be: <<*Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God*>> (Romans 2:29).

The one who alone is God? Despite the strong teaching on a triune God, John's belief is rooted in the fact that there is and only ever will be one true God, yet in three distinct persons, all equally and fully God.

<sup>45</sup> Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. <sup>46</sup> If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?

## John 5:45-47

Your accuser is Moses. God, through Moses, was quite clear in his instructions to the forefathers of the leaders of Jesus' day: **<<I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable>>** (Deuteronomy 18:18-19), showing that the Father is also the accuser of such people.

On whom you have set your hope. Moses was one of Israel's greatest heroes who had faithfully answered God's call to lead his people out of Egyptian slavery and towards the Promised Land. It was through Moses that God had given his people the law and the statutes on which their lives were based, and it was the teaching of Moses that formed the basis of their hope of a Messiah.

If you believed Moses, you would believe me assumes that genuine believers have a heart that is receptive to the true words of God, and therefore those who believe the words of God as written by Moses, that is, Genesis to Deuteronomy, will also recognise and eagerly receive the words of God as spoken by Jesus. Those who disbelieve Moses' writings will also disbelieve Jesus.

For he wrote about me applies not only to specific predictions like Deuteronomy 18:15 but also to all the ways in which the history of salvation in these writings points to Christ, for example: **<<Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures>>** (Luke 24:27), **<<Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad>>** (John 8:56), **<<After they had fixed a day to meet him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets>>** (Acts 28:23), **<<For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ>>** (1 Corinthians 10:4b), **<<By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward>>** (Hebrews 11:23-26), **<<Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look!>>** (1 Peter 1:10-12), and: **<<Now I desire to remind you, though you are fully informed, that the Lord, who once for all saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those who did not believe>>** (Jude 5).

Here again is a great blow to their Jewish identity. Jesus has undercut the views they hold of themselves as zealous for God and loyal to his revelation. Now he says Moses will be their accuser, although they have believed that Moses would be their intercessor, as he was in the past: <<On the next day Moses said to the people, 'You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.' So Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin – but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written'>> (Exodus 32:30-32), and: <<The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people>> (Numbers 21:7).

God had used Moses as a witness against the people in the past (Deuteronomy 31:19-29), and this role will be fulfilled and expanded. In his witness to the Christ, Moses is a witness against the Jewish opponents' rejection of Jesus. Indeed, John makes a point of countering every Scripture-based argument made against Jesus with counterarguments from Scripture. Thus, despite their claims, they do not really believe Moses. If they are not open to Moses, whom they desire to honour, how much less will they be able to put faith in Jesus! Here it is clearly taught that an understanding of the OT which is not centred in Jesus Christ is a deficient understanding. Once again, John shows that people can honour someone as a teacher, yet reject his teaching.