

Believe the Writings

John 5:16-47

Pastor Russ Kennedy

¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." ¹⁸ 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.

Our story opens with verse 15. Imagine this scene with me. This handicapped man has wallowed in his self-pity all these years. Suddenly, out of the blue, a man comes and asks if he wants to walk. His whining answer almost seems to provoke this man. "Get up, take your bed and walk." And he does. For the first time in 38 years, he walks. By the time his joy has settled into sensibility, the man has melted into the crowd.

So here he is, walking around with his bed mat and suddenly the whole thing goes sour. It is the Sabbath. Now, we who mow lawns and wash cars and build homes on Sunday can hardly appreciate the quivering disfavor of the Pharisees. After all, in the Old Testament, a man was taken out and stoned for collecting sticks for cooking on the Sabbath. It was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. Besides, the religious leaders had spent almost 2,000 years interpreting and piling up all sorts of idiotic rules. And now this guy is carrying his bed. What's the deal?

"I'm just doing what the man who healed me told me. And no, I do not know who He is." Well he found out because later, Jesus caught up with him in the Temple and warned him about his sinning. To me, it is just in character for this guy to go running to the religious leaders (in John's vocab, "The Jews") and blame Jesus. Some might even call this tattling.

Well, here we go. There is no doubt that word of other of Jesus' supposed violations of the Sabbath had circulated among all the religious leaders. So they began to persecute and pursue and pressure Him. What is Jesus referring to here? If the question is, "Why are you working on the Sabbath?" How is this an answer or an explanation? Without going into details, here is I what think Jesus and John are referring to.

God worked for seven days in creation.

God rested on the seventh day from His work of creating.

Man fell into sin so God went work in salvation until the cross.

God rested in the resurrection beginning His new creation Sabbath.

We enter that Sabbath rest by receiving life and believing.

In other words, Jesus is saying that HE IS GOD. Now don't miss this. All through the Bible, all the Bible writers insist that Jesus believed He Himself was God. People who heard Him speak understood that He was making this claim.

And the religious leadership and most of the common people rejected this as blasphemy. This man walking around with dust on His clothes and sandals on His feet

and maybe a breadcrumb in His beard simply cannot be God. What if I suddenly started to claim to be God? What would you think? What if I healed someone's blindness and then said I could do this because I was God, equal with Him and existing in Him from all eternity? Except when Jesus said it, it was so.

So Jesus responds to them. Why is this massive answer given by Jesus recorded for us?

Jesus is showing them why they have rejected Him. This is the beginning of the opposition to Jesus that ends in their sending Him to the cross.

John is showing us how we can believe in Jesus. This text is a part of His presenting of the truths of the gospel so that we will believe and have life through His Name.

To reject Jesus or to have life, there were three crucial issues that faced the Jews, the religious people and the disciples. And these same three crucial issues face us today.

By Honoring Christ

(v.19-23)

The Jews thought that they were honoring God by all their detailed rules about keeping the Sabbath. They thought this pleased God. But they were wrong. Jesus is going to show them how to truly honor God.

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

His Essential Unity with God

(v.19-20a)

Jesus explains how essential and necessary His union with God is. He is not acting independently. He is doing what the Father does. He is doing what He sees the Father doing. Because the Father loves the Son, he will show or demonstrate all that the Father does.

Now I do not pretend to understand fully all that Jesus is giving us here. I wonder if Jesus did not use an analogy here because there is none that really pictures this. So I am going to do this with great trembling. What happens when you stand in front of a mirror? What does the reflection in the mirror do? It does exactly what you are doing. Raise your arm, it raises its arm. So God shows Jesus exactly what God does and Jesus reflects it back, not as a mere image, but as a fully living person in the Godhead. Don't you love the mysteries of the Trinity?

So the life He lives and the miracles He does and the truths He teaches are exactly on earth what God the Father in heaven wants Him to do.

His Divine Authority from God

(v.20b-22)

"But there's more," He says. "There are greater things yet to come." When we begin to unpack the rest of the passage, it seems that Jesus is saying that there is yet an age to come. It will be an age of life giving grace and judgment receiving

justice that is greater than the age of Law and Sabbaths. Jesus is the One whose life and death and resurrection usher in the age in which we live.

Clearly, the greater works Jesus will do prove He is God because only God can exercise this sort of Divine authority.

Jesus is Sovereign over life (v.21). To Jesus has been given the authority to give life to whomever He chooses. John is saying that whether you receive life is God's choice, not yours. Jesus gives life to whomever He chooses.

Jesus is Supreme in judgment (v.22). Whether you have life or reject Christ, you will be judged by Him. You will stand before Jesus who executes the justice of God.

His Central Purpose by God (v.23)

Why has God done this? Why is Jesus Sovereign over life and supreme in judgment? Because God has purposed that *He will be glorified when Jesus is honored*. Do you see it? The Jews wanted to honor God with all sorts of detailed religious rules added to the Law of the Sabbath. But their religion brought them to the point that they rejected Jesus. And honoring Jesus is how you honor God.

For you today, how much of your religion causes you to reject Jesus when you ought to be honoring Him?

By Hearing Christ (v.24-30)

Why does this happen? Why did the Jews reject Jesus? That is what these verses are all about.

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an 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. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. ³⁰ 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 and all of us as well, reject Jesus because we do not hear. How do I get that? I get this from just marking the word *hear* in verses 24, 25, 28, and 30 with the final punch in verse 37. It seems to me then that there is something pivotal about *hearing*.

The Challenging Principle (v.24)

This verse is where the argument turns from *exposing* the rejection of Christ to *explaining* the reasons for it. I cannot escape the way this is put together. Some would read this to say that when you hear and believe you get eternal life. The problem is that it isn't what it says. It says that whoever hears and believes has eternal life and no condemnation. This is so because *he has already passed over from death to life*.

The essential problem of hearing is not deafness, but deadness. The reason people do not hear and do not believe is not because they are spiritually deaf or handicapped—no, it is because they are spiritually dead. The dead cannot hear. The dead cannot believe. They are spiritually dead. This is the consistent testimony of Scripture. The horrible condition of the lost is that men and women, boys and girls are dead in their trespasses and sins. So there must be an impartation of life with the effect that one hears and believes.

The Life Giving Person

(v.25-28)

Why is this so? Jesus is the One who gives life.

First, He gives life in REGENERATION (v.25) This is the giving of life into a dead soul. People hear the voice of Jesus and by the Holy Spirit they are brought to life. This is what we call the new birth or regeneration.

Second, He explains the REASON (v.26-27) Jesus gives life because He is God just as the Father is God. Jesus exercises judgment because God has given Him the authority to. Now this sounds all normal and ordinary to those who have been brought up with Christianity, but it was quite shocking to the Jews and is challenging to many people groups today.

Finally, He gives life in the RESURRECTION (v.28) Jesus distinguishes this giving of life from that of verse 25. This is a giving of life to those who are in the grave and who will come to life to receive their eternal reward and eternal condemnation.

The Judging Power

(v.29-30)

There can be no questioning of the justice of Jesus. He is judging on what He hears from God. And He is doing the will of God to please God and not Himself.

Verse 30 falls like a hatchet on the neck of the religious lost.

These Pharisees were doing their own spot of judging, but they were not hearing from God. If they had, they would have been honoring Christ.

These Pharisees, while living by the Law, were not doing God's will. It pleases God for us to do His will in honoring Christ.

All this sounds like grace doesn't it? This is sheer, amazing grace. God is glorified when the Son is honored. The Son is honored when He gives life to dead sinners so that they hear and believe and have eternal life. All of this is because Jesus is God. All of this is to bring God pleasure and delight. All this magnifies God and is the good news of gladness to a lost and dying world.

By Believing Christ

(v.31-47)

The third great issue in rejecting Christ or having life is believing Jesus. Not that these three are separate. They are like three sides of a single triangle. All three must be present. All three were absent in the Pharisees. They did not honor Christ because they could not hear Him, being spiritually dead. Since they could not hear, they will not believe.

The Despised Witnesses

(v.31-37a)

There were plenty of witnesses whose testimony affirmed what was to be believed.

³¹ If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. ³² There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. ³³ You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. 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. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me.

We must believe the testimony of John's witness. John the Baptist had been clear in his message and even somewhat enjoyed for a season. Human testimony to Divine truth is not necessary for Divine truth to be true. But it is necessary for men to be saved.

We must believe the testimony of Jesus' works— The aim of Jesus' miracles was to certify His deity. The whole of Jesus' saving work in His holy life and sacrificial death announce clearly that God sent Him.

We must believe the testimony of His Father words – Throughout Jesus' life and ministry, God the Father spoke directly and audibly to authenticate Jesus as God's Beloved Son.

The Decisive Indictment

(v.37b-40)

His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. ³⁹ You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

In the face of all this direct and personal testimony, the Pharisees simply didn't get it. They never believed. They never heard, nor saw nor did God's Word settle down in them and change them. They were immensely religious, but lost.

In fact, they were diligent students of the Bible. They thought that Bible knowledge was sufficient for salvation. Though they studied the Scriptures and the Scriptures are all about Jesus, they would not come to Jesus.

What a sad indictment of these Pharisees. But it is no less true today. There are men and women filling church pews and chairs all around the world today who are even diligent students of the Bible, *but who will not come to Jesus*. Now they think they are. They have manufactured their own Jesus. The Jesus of the Bible is the Divine Son of God, who is the Sovereign over life and Supreme in judgment. Listen to me. If you are not coming to the Jesus and to the God of the Bible, you are simply coming to an idol.

Saving belief hears the testimony that Jesus is God, sees it in the Scripture and then inwardly and spiritually comes to Jesus for life.

The Dangerous Obstacles

(v.41-47)

⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵ 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. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

The key question repeated twice points to the two great obstacles to believing. Verse 44, "How can you believe if you accept praise from men?" and verse 47, "How are you going to believe what Jesus says if you do not believe the Scripture?"

Wanting the Praise of Men

(v.41-44)

Desiring the applause of men keeps us from delighting in the praise of heaven. Let Jesus' question sink down deep in your heart? How can you believe when you accept man's praise and do not hunger for the kind of praise that only God can give? The answer? You cannot.

Rejecting the Word of God

(v.45-47)

The Pharisees had placed their hope in Moses. The idea here is that they thought that law keeping would save them. They were seeking to come to God by works instead of by grace. This is not possible, the Bible tells us. Good works cannot and do not save. If I understand this correctly, someday the very good works that you are depending on to be saved will be brought out to accuse and condemn you.

How are we going to believe in Jesus when we do not believe the Bible? We cannot. The only way to believe in Jesus is to believe His Word.

Reflect and Respond

Do you agree with Scripture on two essential truths?

Do you affirm with the Scriptures the Jesus is God, the one and only true God, the Son?

Do you affirm with the Scriptures that any and all who deny this are lost, unsaved and condemned to go to hell?

Many of us need a fresh sense of coming to Jesus and honoring Him and hearing Him when we take up our Bibles for study.

How we need the mercy of God. How we must fall on our knees and cry out for the grace of God. How we are dead and depraved and decaying in our sin. How we need Jesus to give us life by His Word and Spirit.

My plea with you this morning is to honor Christ, to hear His voice and to believe in Him today. Be reconciled to God. Turn away from setting your hope on what you do to trusting only in what Jesus has done.

May we glorify God by honoring Christ!