

“Ample Evidence to Convict”

The fifth chapter of John is like a courtroom scene.

Healing on the Sabbath and the Hypocrisy of the Jews

In verses 1-15 Jesus commits a crime, supposedly. He heals a man on the Sabbath who has been paralyzed for thirty eight years.

This man had been hanging out at a pool known for its healing water but he could never get in because other people would cut in front of him. It was everybody for himself. But along comes Jesus and heals the man on the Sabbath.

God had set aside one day a week for worship and rest. “You shall remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” But as years passed by the Jewish religion began to go overboard by heaping burdensome laws on top of the OT law so that it became a sin to do anything, so even as to twitch a muscle (so to speak) on the Sabbath.

Jesus had great respect for the OT law. He and his disciples worshipped God on the Sabbath and they did **not** do unnecessary work to make a living on the Sabbath. But if he had an opportunity to do good, to help his neighbor, to bless someone with the love of God on the Sabbath he did it. This was not wrong and it was not in violation of God’s Word.

When Jesus was criticized for doing things like this on the Sabbath he often pointed out the hypocrisy of his detractors.

For example, in Matthew 12:1-14 he was criticized for picking grain to eat on the Sabbath. Jesus pointed out how David actually ate bread **in** the temple on the Sabbath. That bread had been dedicated to God for use in worship (today it would be like eating the bread for Holy Communion) and if that was ok then why wasn’t it ok for him to do what he did? Or how the priests worked on the Sabbath (By leading God’s people in worship) and how that was ok. Or how it was ok for someone to help another person whose sheep had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath (today it would be like fixing a flat tire for someone on Sunday).

If all of that was ok then why was it not ok for Jesus to do what he did on the Sabbath?

The Father Is Always at Work and So Is Jesus

After all, the priests and theologians of Jesus’ day acknowledged that though God did rest on the Sabbath He did not entirely stop working. Because if God did then world would cease to exist. Life is dependant upon the work and will of God to cause the rising and setting of the sun, the sending of rain, and the birth of new life.

This is what Jesus was referring to in v. 17 when he said that “My Father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

How much more this is true when we consider the fact that God's chief mission in the world is to save fallen sinners. The Father never stops doing that, not even on the Sabbath. Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath also so that he could ultimately address his spiritual poverty. "Stop sinning, so that something worse does not happen to you." (v.14)

Jesus' Claim to be God and His Enemies Desire to Kill Him

Even so, this **is** part *a* of the crime that Jesus committed. Part *b* is his implicit, but very clear claim to be God in human flesh. Jesus doesn't directly say this in the text but it is obvious that his detractors have heard him rightly. Look at v. 18. "Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was calling God his own Father (not in the sense that God was his benevolent provider but in the sense that he came from the bosom of the Father), thus making himself equal with God."

Remember, the text tells us that Jesus' grounds for doing what he does are rooted in the Father. If the Father is sovereign (Lord) over the Sabbath then so is Jesus! If the Father can work on the Sabbath then so can the Son. If the Father raises the dead then so does Jesus, because Jesus gives life (v.21). In fact, Jesus even says that the Father has entrusted the judgment of every human soul to himself (v.22-29). Only God can judge. Jesus is God.

No wonder they were so mad at him; mad enough that they could kill him (v.18) because Jesus had claimed to be God in human flesh. But in the mind of the Jew nobody was equal to God. God stands alone.

So in our text today we have our crime- healing on the Sabbath and Christ's claim to be God. And we have Jesus' defense against his accusers- the Father is always at work (even on the Sabbath) and since "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30) I too work on the Sabbath.

Four Witnesses on the Stand- John the Baptist, God the Father, the Bible, and Moses

Next we have our witnesses; this would be v. 31-47.

In Jesus' day, just as it is in our day, you have no chance in a court of law without witnesses to corroborate your testimony. Your word is not good enough. It must be backed up with some type of external evidence or proof. "If testify about myself, my testimony is not valid, but there is another who testifies in my favor." (v. 31-32)

In these verses Jesus offers up four witnesses. That was twice as much than was actually needed to prove your case. It only took two witnesses to prove your innocence in the OT Law.

First on the stand- John the Baptist. (v.33-34)

John the Baptist preceded everything that happened in Christ's earthly ministry.

- As a way of preparation for Jesus, John preached a message of repentance- turn away from your self and turn toward God. Repentance was the essence of Jesus' preaching ministry. "Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand." (Mt. 4:17)

- John baptized converts as the outward sign of a person's repentance. Baptism was at the heart of Jesus' ministry as well. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Mt. 28:19
- John even preceded Jesus in his death, thus he foreshadowed the cross. John was thrown in prison and put to death for calling King Herod on his sin and for having the guts to tell the truth. The same would be true of Christ (a million times more so) when he was crucified on the cross.

This was the testimony that John offered on the stand and it had all been predicted in the preaching of the OT prophets.

Next up is God the Father and the work that He had given Jesus to do. (v.36-38)

The work that the Father has given Jesus to do is the cross. The Father has testified about this for a long time. Two thousand years before the time of Christ, God gave Abraham a special promise to bless all the nations of the world through his offspring. Then the Lord God put Abraham to the test by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac, but in the end God provided a substitute for his life, a ram. Because Abraham did not withhold his only son, God assured Abraham that the promise to bless the world through his offspring would come true. What we see in Christ's death on the cross is **God's willingness to do** what he **did not** require Abraham to do; the Father gave up his only Son for the sins of the world. Even in Genesis, through Abraham, God was pointing us to the cross.

Or how about the explicit word of the Lord (given 600 years before the time of Christ) concerning the suffering servant in Isaiah 53? This servant would be "smitten and bruised, pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities." He would be "afflicted" beyond human recognition and he would be "led like a lamb to the slaughter." This was the clear testimony of the work that the Father had assigned to the Son all along, yet the people were missing it. Not much has changed today. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God." (I Cor. 1:18)

Next on the stand is the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, the Word of God. (v. 38-39)

This witness is closely related to the previous witness of God the Father. Why? Because we can not know God apart from the scriptures. This is how God has revealed himself to the world and it is how Christ is revealed to us today. Without the witness of scripture we have no witness to Christ.

What Jesus says to his detractors about the witness of scripture is that they have "missed the forest for the trees." They go to the scriptures seeking something, eternal life, yet they refuse to come to the One who stands at the very core of scripture-Jesus Christ himself.

People still have this problem today. They go to the Bible seeking something, but they come to the scriptures with blinders on, not open to the truth, and prone to wander off on tangents, missing the central message of its teaching. Which is "The preaching of Christ crucified- a

stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Jews, but those whom God has called the power and wisdom of God.” (I Cor. 1:23)

Why is **this** so hard for us to believe? (Christ crucified) Because man in his state of sin **will not** and **can not**- apart from the illuminating and convicting power of the Holy Spirit- bring himself to admit that he deserves death for his sin and that his sin would require that God pay that penalty for us, on our behalf, within himself, if we are to ever have our guilt absolved and be reconciled to God. Oh, the love of the Father for the world, and oh, how we still miss it.

The final witness to come to the stand is Moses (v.45-46)

His witness **stung** because Moses- the one whom his detractors always believed- would also be the one who would accuse them on judgment day. “Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set.” (v.45) For Jesus to level this charge against his critics was the ultimate slap in the face.

Moses accused Jesus’ detractors on several fronts. First, one of the main reasons God gave the Law to Moses was so that the Law would reveal to people that they were sinners, with no hope of saving themselves. The Law is meant to show us our need for a Savior. Keeping the Law is good but its also frustrating because we know that we can’t come anywhere close to keeping it. It can not save us. We fail. We need someone who can keep it for us, on our behalf, so that we can be saved.

Moses knew there was a need for someone to do this. He couldn’t do it and he saw that his people couldn’t do it. They were always messing up. That’s why Moses spoke of God raising up a prophet who was to come, who would do this. (Deut. 18:15) This person would be Jesus. He would be the One who would keep the law for us, on our behalf, so that we might be declared righteous before God (sinless, perfect) when we trusted in him for our salvation.

In I Corinthians 10:2-3 the apostle Paul says that “Moses drank from the rock and that rock was **Christ**.” (Though he never knew Christ, literally speaking.) The writer of Hebrews tells us that Moses embraced the disgrace of leading a lowly slave people (the Hebrews) out of Egypt, instead of seeking the earthly treasures of Egypt (Which he could have done living in Pharaoh’s court) all for the sake of **Christ**. “He was looking **forward** to his reward.” (Heb. 11:24-28)

The point here in all of this is that Moses and all the OT prophets were saved by “believing in a Savior to come,” as the children’s catechism teaches us. (Q.61) Yet Jesus’ accusers missed it. They thought salvation was found in keeping the Law.

We too often think the same thing. If I live a good life, if I do good, I will get to heaven, maybe. But it does not work that way. “No one is righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands, no one who seeks after God,” says the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. (Rom 3:10-11)

Conclusion and Application

So there you have it, four witnesses who come to the stand- John the Baptist, God the Father, the Bible, and Moses- to testify on behalf of Jesus' work as the Son of God.

The evidence they bring to the table is more than sufficient to convict. To convict man that he is a sinner and that he needs a Savior and that Savior is Jesus; the One whom God the Father sent into the world, at just the right moment in history, in order to die for the sins of the world so that we could get a free pass and have life with God, if we would but trust him. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (v.24)

Yet for some it is not good enough. How about you? What will you do with Jesus? Will you accept the evidence or reject it? You have to make a decision for him or against him with your life. You can't just do nothing- "Choose this day whom you will follow." (Joshua 24:15)

I love what C.S. Lewis said about Christ in his book *Mere Christianity* and I will close with this.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must **not** say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said **would not** be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic- on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. – *Mere Christianity*, pages 40-41.

What will you do with Jesus?

Amen.