

# CHAPTER 5

We have in the gospels a faithful record of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, ~~400~~Acts 1:1. These two are interwoven, because what he taught explained what he did, and what he did confirmed what he taught. Accordingly, we have in this chapter a miracle and a sermon.

**I.** The miracle was the cure of an impotent man that had been diseased thirty-eight years, with the circumstances of that cure (v. 1-16).

**II.** The sermon was Christ's vindication of himself before the sanhedrim, when he was prosecuted as a criminal for healing the man on the sabbath day, in which,

1. He asserts his authority as Messiah, and Mediator between God and man (v. 17-29).
2. He proves it by the testimony of his Father, of John Baptist, of his miracles, and of the scriptures of the Old Testament, and condemns the Jews for their unbelief (v. 30-47).

## ~~411~~ JOHN 5:1-16

### THE CURE AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA

This miraculous cure is not recorded by any other of the evangelists, who confine themselves mostly to the miracles wrought in Galilee, but John relates those wrought at Jerusalem. Concerning this observe,

**I.** *The time when* this cure was wrought: it was at a *feast of the Jews*, that is, the passover, for that was the most celebrated feast. Christ, though residing in Galilee, yet *went up to Jerusalem* at the feast, v. 1.

**1.** Because it was an *ordinance of God*, which, as a *subject*, he would observe, being made under the law; though as a *Son* he might have pleaded an exemption. Thus he would teach us to attend religious assemblies. ~~805~~Hebrews 10:25.

**2.** Because it was an *opportunity of good*; for,

(1.) there were great numbers gathered together there at that time; it was a general rendezvous, at least of all serious thinking people, from all parts of the country, besides proselytes from other nations: and Wisdom must cry in the places of concourse, <sup><310></sup>Proverbs 1:21.

(2.) It was to be hoped that they were in a *good frame*, for they came together to *worship God* and to spend their time in religious exercises. Now a mind *inclined to devotion*, and sequestering itself to the exercises of piety, *lies very open* to the further discoveries of divine light and love, and to it Christ will be acceptable.

**II.** The *place where* this cure was wrought: at the *pool of Bethesda*, which had a miraculous healing virtue in it, and is here particularly described, v. 2-4.

1. Where it was situated: *At Jerusalem, by the sheep-market; epi te probatike*. It might as well be rendered the *sheep-cote*, where the sheep were kept, or the *sheep-gate*, which we read of, <sup><309></sup>Nehemiah 3:1, through which the sheep were *brought*, as the *sheep-market*, where they were *sold*. Some think it was near the temple, and, if so, it yielded a melancholy but profitable spectacle to those that went up to the temple to pray.

2. How it was called: It was a *pool* (a pond or bath), *which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda — the house of mercy*; for therein appeared much of the *mercy of God* to the sick and diseased. In a world of so much misery as this is, it is well that there are some *Bethesdas — houses of mercy* (remedies against those maladies), that the scene is not all melancholy. An *alms-house*, so Dr. Hammond. Dr. Lightfoot's conjecture is that this was the *upper pool* (<sup><310></sup>Isaiah 7:3), and the *old pool*, <sup><321></sup>Isaiah 22:11; that it had been used for *washing* from ceremonial pollutions, for convenience of which the porches were built to dress and undress in, but it was lately become medicinal.

3. How it was fitted up: It had *five porches, cloisters, piazzas, or roofed walks*, in which the sick lay. Thus the charity of men concurred with the mercy of God for the relief of the distressed. Nature has provided *remedies*, but men must provide *hospitals*.

4. How it was frequented with sick and cripples (v. 3): *In these lay a great multitude of impotent folks*. How many are the afflictions of the afflicted in this world! How full of complaints are all places, and what multitudes

of impotent folks! It may do us good to visit the hospitals sometimes, that we may take occasion, from the calamities of others, to thank God for our comforts. The evangelist specifies three sorts of diseased people that lay here, *blind, halt, and withered* or *sinew-shrunk*, either in one particular part, as the man with the *withered hand*, or all over paralytic. These are mentioned because, being least able to help themselves into the water, they lay longest waiting in the *porches*. Those that were sick of these bodily diseases took the pains to come *far* and had the patience to wait *long* for a cure; any of us would have done the same, and we ought to do so: but O that men were as wise for their souls, and as solicitous to get their spiritual diseases healed! We are all by nature *impotent folks* in spiritual things, *blind, halt, and withered*; but effectual provision is made for our cure if we will but observe orders.

**5.** What virtue it had for the cure of these impotent folks (v. 4). *An angel went down, and troubled the water; and whoso first stepped in was made whole.* That this strange virtue in the pool was *natural*, or *artificial* rather, and was the effect of the washing of the sacrifices, which impregnated the water with I know not what healing virtue even for *blind* people, and that the angel was a *messenger*, a common person, sent down to stir the water, is altogether groundless; there was a room in the temple on purpose to wash the sacrifices in. Expositors generally agree that the virtue this pool had was supernatural. It is true the Jewish writers, who are not sparing in recounting the praises of Jerusalem, do none of them make the least mention of this *healing pool*, of which silence in this matter perhaps this is the reason, that it was taken for a presage of the near approach of the Messiah, and therefore those who denied him to be come industriously concealed such an indication of his coming; so that this is all the account we have of it. Observe,

**(1.)** The *preparation* of the medicine by an angel, who *went down into the pool, and stirred the water*. Angels are God's servants, and friends to mankind; and perhaps are more active in the removing of diseases (as evil angels in the inflicting of them) than we are aware of. Raphael, the apocryphal name of an angel, signifies *medicina Dei* — *God's physic, or physician* rather. See what mean offices the holy angels condescend to, for the good of men. If we would do the will of God as the angels do it, we must think nothing below us but sin. The *troubling of the water* was the signal given of the descent of the angel, as the *going upon the tops of the mulberry trees* was to David, and then they must *bestir themselves*. The

waters of the sanctuary are then *healing* when they are put in *motion*. Ministers must *stir up the gift* that is in them. When they are cold and dull in their ministrations, the waters *settle*, and are not apt to *heal*. The angel descended, to *stir the water*, not daily, perhaps not frequently, but *at a certain season*; some think, at the three solemn feasts, to grace those solemnities; or, *now and then*, as Infinite Wisdom saw fit. God is a free agent in dispensing his favours.

(2.) The *operation* of the medicine: *Whoever first stepped in was made whole*. here is,

[1.] miraculous extent of the virtue as to the *diseases* cured; what disease soever it was, this water cured it. Natural and artificial baths are as *hurtful* in some cases as they are useful in others, but this was a remedy for every malady, even for those that came from contrary causes. The power of miracles *succeeds* where the power of nature *succumbs*.

[2.] A miraculous limitation of the virtue as to the *persons* cured: He that first stepped in had the benefit; that is, he or they that stepped in immediately were cured, not those that lingered and came in afterwards. This teaches us to observe and improve our opportunities, and to *look about us*, that we slip not a season which may never return. The angel *stirred* the waters, but left the diseased to themselves to *get in*. God has put virtue into the scriptures and ordinances, for he would have healed us; but, if we do not make a due improvement of them, it is our own fault, we *would not be healed*.

Now this is all the account we have of this *standing* miracle; it is uncertain when it began and when it ceased. Some conjecture it began when Eliashib the high priest began the building of the wall about Jerusalem, and sanctified it with prayer; and that God testified his acceptance by putting this virtue into the adjoining pool. Some think it began now lately at Christ's birth; nay, others at his baptism. Dr. Lightfoot, finding in *Josephus, Antiq.* 15.121-122, mention of a great earthquake in the seventh year of Herod, thirty years before Christ's birth, supposed, since there used to be earthquakes at the descent of angels, that then the angel first descended to stir this water. Some think it ceased with this miracle, others at Christ's death; however, it is certain it had a gracious signification. *First*, it was a *token* of God's good will to that people, and an indication that, though they had been long without prophets and miracles, yet God had not *cast them off*; though they were now an oppressed despised

people, and many were ready to say, *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of?* God did hereby let them know that he had still a kindness for the *city of their solemnities*. We may hence take occasion to acknowledge with thankfulness God's power and goodness in the mineral waters, that contribute so much to the health of mankind; for God *made the fountains of water*, <sup>(414)</sup>Revelation 14:7. *Secondly*, It was a type of the Messiah, who is the *fountain opened*; and was intended to raise people's expectations of him who is the *Sun of righteousness*, that arises *with healing under his wings*. These waters had formerly been used for purifying, now for healing, to signify both the *cleansing* and *curing* virtue of the blood of Christ, that incomparable bath, which *heals all our diseases*. The waters of Siloam, which filled this pool, signified the kingdom of David, and of Christ the Son of David (<sup>(2386)</sup>Isaiah 8:6); fitly therefore have they now this *sovereign* virtue put into them. The laver of regeneration is to us as Bethesda's pool, healing our spiritual diseases; not at certain seasons, but at all times. *Whoever will, let him come*.

**III.** The patient on whom this cure was wrought (v. 5): one that *had been infirm thirty-eight years*.

**1.** His *disease was grievous*: He had an *infirmity*, a weakness; he had lost the use of his limbs, at least on one side, as is usual in palsies. It is sad to have the body so disabled that, instead of being the soul's instrument, it is become, even in the affairs of this life, its burden. What reason have we to thank God for bodily strength, to use it for him, and to pity those who are *his prisoners*!

**2.** The duration of it was *tedious*: *Thirty-eight years*. He was lame longer than most live. Many are so long disabled for the offices of life that, as the psalmist complains, they seem to be *made in vain*; for suffering, not for service; born to be always dying. Shall we complain of one wearisome night, or one fit of illness, who perhaps for many years have scarcely known what it has been to be a day sick, when many others, better than we, have scarcely known what it has been to be a day well? Mr. Baxter's note on this passage is very affecting: "How great a mercy was it to live thirty-eight years under God's wholesome discipline! O my God," saith he, "I thank thee for the like discipline of fifty-eight years; how safe a life is this, in comparison of full prosperity and pleasure!"

**IV.** The cure and the circumstances of it briefly related, v. 6-9.

**1.** *Jesus saw him lie.* Observe, When Christ came up to Jerusalem he visited not the palaces, but the hospitals, which is an instance of his humility, and condescension, and tender compassion, and an *indication* of his great design in coming into the world, which was to seek and save the sick and wounded. There was a great multitude of poor cripples here at Bethesda, but Christ fastened his eye upon this one, and singled him out from the rest, because he was *senior* of the house, and in a more deplorable condition than any of the rest; and Christ delights to help the helpless, and hath mercy *on whom he will have mercy*. Perhaps his companions in tribulation insulted over him, because he had often been disappointed of a cure; therefore Christ took him for his patient: it is his honour to side with the weakest, and bear up those whom he sees *run down*.

**2.** He knew and considered *how long he had lain* in this condition. Those that have been long in affliction may comfort themselves with this, that God keeps account *how long*, and knows our frame.

**3.** He asked him, *Wilt thou be made whole?* A strange question to be asked one that had been so long ill. Some indeed would not be made whole, because their sores serve them to beg by and serve them for an excuse for idleness; but this poor man was as unable to *go a begging* as to *work*, yet Christ put it to him,

**(1.)** To *express* his own pity and concern for him. Christ is tenderly inquisitive concerning the desires of those that are in affliction, and is willing to know *what is their petition*: “What shall I do for you?”

**(2.)** To try him whether he would be beholden for a cure to him against whom the great people were so prejudiced and sought to prejudice others.

**(3.)** To teach him to value the mercy, and to excite in him desires after it. In spiritual cases, people are not willing to be cured of their sins, are loth to part with them. If this point therefore were but gained, if people were willing to be *made whole*, the work were half done, for Christ is willing to heal, if we be but willing to be healed, ~~408~~ Matthew 8:3.

**4.** The poor impotent man takes this opportunity to renew his complaint, and to set forth the misery of his case, which makes his cure the more illustrious: *Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool*, v. 7. He seems to take Christ's question as an imputation of carelessness and neglect: “If

thou hadst had a mind to be healed, thou wouldest have looked better to thy hits, and have got into the healing waters long before now.” “No, Master,” saith the poor man, “It is not for want of a *good will*, but of a *good friend*, that I am unhealed. I have done what I could to help myself, but in vain, for no one else will help me.”

(1.) He does not think of any other way of being cured than by these waters, and desires no other friendship than to be helped into *them*; therefore, when Christ cured him, his imagination or expectation could not contribute to it, for he thought of no such thing.

(2.) He complains for want of friends to help him in: “*I have no man, no friend to do me that kindness.*” One would think that some of those who had been themselves healed should have lent him a hand; but it is common for the poor to be destitute of friends; *no man careth for their soul*. To the sick and impotent it is as true a piece of charity to work for them as to relieve them; and thus the poor are capable of being charitable to one another, and ought to be so, though we seldom find that they are so; I speak it to their shame.

(3.) He bewails his infelicity, that very often when *he* was coming *another stepped in before him*. But a step between him and a cure, and yet he continues impotent. None had the charity to say, “Your case is worse than mine, do you go in now, and I will stay till the next time;” for there is no getting over the old maxim, *Every one for himself*. Having been so often disappointed, he begins to despair, and now is Christ's time to come to his relief; he delights to help in desperate cases. Observe, How mildly this man speaks of the unkindness of those about him, without any peevish reflections. As we should be thankful for the least kindness, so we should be patient under the greatest contempts; and, let our resentments be ever so *just*, yet our expressions should ever be *calm*. And observe further, to his praise, that, though he had waited so long in vain, yet still he continued lying by the pool side, hoping that some time or other help would come, ~~311~~Habakkuk 2:3.

5. Our Lord Jesus hereupon cures him with a word speaking, though he neither asked it nor thought of it. Here is,

(1.) The word he said: *Rise, take up thy bed*, v. 8.

[1.] He is bidden to *rise and walk*; a strange command to be given to an *impotent* man, that had been long disabled; but this divine word was to be the vehicle of a divine power; it was a command to the disease to *be gone*, to nature to *be strong*, but it is expressed as a command to him to *bestir himself*. He must *rise and walk*, that is, attempt to do it, and in the *essay* he should receive strength to do it. The conversion of a sinner is the cure of a chronic disease; this is ordinarily done by the word, a word of command: *Arise, and walk; turn, and live; make ye a new heart*; which no more supposes a power in us to do it, without the grace of God, *distinguishing* grace, than this supposed such a power in the impotent man. But, if he had not attempted to help himself, he had not been cured, and he must have *borne the blame*; yet it does not therefore follow that, when he did rise and walk, it was by his own strength; no, it was by the power of Christ, and he must have all the glory. Observe, Christ did not bid him rise and go into the waters, but *rise and walk*. Christ did that for us which the law could not do, and set that aside.

[2.] He is bidden to *take up his bed*. *First*, To make it to appear that it was a *perfect cure*, and purely miraculous; for he did not recover strength by degrees, but from the extremity of weakness and impotency he suddenly stepped into the highest degree of bodily strength; so that he was able to carry as great a load as any porter that had been as long *used* to it as he had been *disused*. He, who this minute was not able to turn himself in his bed, the next minute was able to carry his bed. The man sick of the palsy (<sup>4006</sup>Matthew 9:6) was bidden to *go to his house*, but probably this man had no house to go to, the hospital was his home; therefore he is bidden to *rise and walk*. *Secondly*, It was to *proclaim* the cure, and make it public; for, being the sabbath day, whoever carried a burden through the streets made himself very remarkable, and every one would enquire what was the meaning of it; thereby notice of the miracle would spread, to the honour of God. *Thirdly*, Christ would thus witness against the tradition of the elders, which had stretched the law of the sabbath beyond its intention; and would likewise show that he was *Lord of the sabbath*, and had power to make what alterations he pleased about it, and to over-rule the law. Joshua, and the host of Israel, marched about Jericho on the sabbath day, when God commanded them, so did this man carry his bed, in obedience to a command. The case may be such that it may become a work of *necessity*, or *mercy*, to carry a bed on the sabbath day; but here it was more, it was a work of *piety*, being designed purely for the glory of God. *Fourthly*, He



would hereby try the faith and obedience of his patient. By carrying his bed publicly, he exposed himself to the censure of the ecclesiastical court, and was liable, at least, to be *scourged in the synagogue*. Now, will he run the hazard of this, in obedience to Christ? Yes, he will. Those that have been *healed by Christ's word* should be *ruled by his word*, whatever it cost them.

**(2.)** The efficacy of this word (v. 9): a divine power went along with it, and immediately he was *made whole, took up his bed, and walked*.

**[1.]** He felt the power of Christ's word healing him: *Immediately he was made whole*. What a joyful surprise was this to the poor cripple, to find himself all of a sudden so easy, so strong, so able to help himself! What a new world was he in, in an instant! Nothing is too hard for Christ to do.

**[2.]** He obeyed the power of Christ's word commanding him. He *took up his bed and walked*, and did not care who blamed him or threatened him for it. The proof of our spiritual cure is our rising and walking. Hath Christ healed our spiritual diseases? Let us go whithersoever he sends us, and *take up* whatever he is pleased to lay upon us, and *walk before him*.

**V.** What became of the poor man after he was cured. We are here told,

**1.** What passed between him and the Jews who saw him carry his bed on the sabbath day; for on that day this cure was wrought, and it was the sabbath that fell within the passover week, and therefore a *high day*, ~~John~~ John 19:31. Christ's work was such that he needed not make any difference between sabbath days and other days, for he was always about his Father's business; but he wrought many remarkable cures on that day, perhaps to encourage his church to expect those spiritual favours from him, in their observance of the Christian sabbath, which were typified by his miraculous cures. Now here,

**(1.)** The Jews quarrelled with the man for carrying his bed on the sabbath day, telling him that *it was not lawful*, v. 10. It does not appear whether they were magistrates, who had power to *punish* him, or common people, who could only *inform* against him; but thus far was commendable, that, while they knew not by *what authority* he did it, they were jealous for the honour of the sabbath, and could not unconcernedly see it *profaned*; like Nehemiah. ~~Nehemiah~~ Nehemiah 13:17.

(2.) The man justified himself in what he did by a warrant that would bear him out, v. 11. “I do not do it in contempt of the law and the sabbath, but in obedience to one who, by *making me whole*, has given me an undeniable proof that he is greater than either. He that could work such a miracle as to *make me whole* no doubt might give me such a command as to carry *my bed*; he that could overrule the powers of nature no doubt might overrule a positive law, especially in an instance not of the essence of the law. He that was so kind as to make me whole would not be so unkind as to bid me do what is sinful.” Christ, by curing another paralytic, proved his power to *forgive sin*, here to *give law*; if his pardons are valid, his edicts are so, and his miracles prove both.

(3.) The Jews enquired further who it was that gave him this warrant (v. 12): *What man is that?* Observe, How industriously they *overlooked* that which might be a ground of their *faith in Christ*. They enquire not, no, not for curiosity, “Who is it that *made thee whole?*” While they industriously caught at that which might be a ground of reflection upon Christ (*What man is it who said unto thee, Take up thy bed?*) they would fain *subpoena* the patient to be witness against his physician, and to be his betrayer. In their question, observe,

[1.] They resolve to look upon Christ as a *mere man*: *What man is that?* For, though he gave ever such convincing proofs of it, they were resolved that they would never own him to be the *Son of God*.

[2.] They resolve to look upon him as a bad *man*, and take it for granted that he who bade this man carry his bed, whatever divine commission he might *produce*, was certainly a delinquent, and as such they resolve to prosecute him. *What man is that* who durst give such orders?

(4.) The poor man was unable to give them any account of him: *He wist not who he was*, v. 13.

[1.] Christ was *unknown* to him when he healed him. Probably he had heard of the name of Jesus, but had never seen him, and therefore could not tell that this was he. Note, Christ does many a good turn for those that know him not, <sup>3804</sup>Isaiah 45:4, 5. He enlightens, strengthens, quickens, comforts us, and we *wist not who he is*; nor are aware how much we receive daily by his mediation. This man, being unacquainted with Christ, could not actually believe in him for a cure; but Christ knew the dispositions of his soul, and suited his favours to them, as to the blind man

in a like case, <sup>(406)</sup>John 9:36. Our covenant and communion with God take rise, not so much from our knowledge of him, as from his knowledge of us. We *know God*, or, rather, are *known of him*, <sup>(409)</sup>Galatians 4:9.

[2.] For the present he *kept himself unknown*; for as soon as he had wrought the cure he *conveyed himself away*, he *made himself unknown* (so some read it), *a multitude being in that place*. This is mentioned to show, either, *First*, How Christ conveyed himself away — by retiring into the crowd, so as not to be distinguished from a common person. He that was the chief of ten thousand often made himself one of the throng. It is sometimes the lot of those who have by their services signalized themselves to be levelled with the multitude, and overlooked. Or *Secondly*, Why he conveyed himself away, because there was *a multitude* there, and he industriously avoided both the *applause* of those who would admire the miracle and *cry that up*, and the censure of those who would censure him as a sabbath-breaker, and *run him down*. Those that are active for God in their generation must expect to pass through *evil report* and *good report*; and it is wisdom as much as may be to keep out of the hearing of both; lest by the one we be *exalted*, and by the other *depressed*, above measure. Christ left the miracle to commend itself, and the man on whom it was wrought to justify it.

2. What passed between him and our Lord Jesus at their next interview, v. 14. Observe here,

(1.) Where Christ found him: *in the temple*, the place of public worship. In our attendance on public worship we may expect to meet with Christ, and improve our acquaintance with him. Observe,

[1.] Christ *went to the temple*. Though he had many enemies, yet he appeared in public, because there he bore his testimony to divine institutions, and had opportunity of doing good.

[2.] The man that was cured *went to the temple*. There Christ found him the same day, as it should seem, that he was healed; thither he straightway went, *First*, Because he had, *by his infirmity*, been so long *detained* thence. Perhaps he had not been there for thirty-eight years, and therefore, as soon as ever the embargo is taken off, his first visit shall be to the temple, as Hezekiah intimates his shall be (<sup>(2382)</sup>Isaiah 38:22): *What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?* *Secondly*, Because he had *by his recovery* a good errand thither; he went up to the temple to return

thanks to God for his recovery. When God has at any time restored us our health we ought to attend him with solemn praises (<sup><488></sup>Psalm 116:18, 19), and the sooner the better, while the sense of the mercy is fresh. *Thirdly*, Because he had, by *carrying his bed*, seemed to put a contempt on the sabbath, he would thus show that he had an honour for it, and made conscience of sabbath-sanctification, in that on which the chief stress of it is laid, which is the *public worship* of God. Works of necessity and mercy are allowed; but when they are over we must *go to the temple*.

(2.) What he said to him. When Christ has cured us, he has not done with us; he now applies himself to the healing of his soul, and this *by the word* too.

[1.] He gives him a *memento* of his cure: *Behold thou art made whole*. He found himself made whole, yet Christ calls his attention to it. *Behold, consider* it seriously, how sudden, how strange, how cheap, how easy, the cure was: *admire it*; behold, and wonder: *Remember it*; let the impressions of it abide, and never be lost, <sup><280></sup>Isaiah 38:9.

[2.] He gives him a caution against sin, in consideration hereof, *Being made whole, sin no more*. This implies that his disease was the punishment of sin; whether of some remarkably flagrant sin, or only of sin in general, we cannot tell, but we know that sin is the procuring cause of sickness, <sup><447></sup>Psalm 107:17, 18. Some observe that Christ did not make mention of sin to any of his patients, except to this *impotent* man, and another who was in like manner diseased, <sup><415></sup>Mark 2:5. While those chronic diseases lasted, they prevented the outward acts of many sins, and therefore watchfulness was the more necessary when the disability was removed. Christ intimates that those who are *made whole*, who are eased of the present sensible punishment of sin, are in danger of *returning* to sin when the terror and restraint are over, unless divine grace dry up the fountain. When the trouble which only dammed up the current is over, the waters will return to their old course; and therefore there is great need of watchfulness, lest after healing mercy we return again to folly. The *misery* we were *made whole from* warns us to sin no more, having felt the smart of sin; the *mercy* we were *made whole by* is an engagement upon us not to offend him who healed us. This is the voice of every providence, *Go and sin no more*. This man began his new life very hopefully *in the temple*, yet Christ saw it necessary to give him this caution; for it is common for

people, when they are sick, to *promise much*, when newly recovered to *perform something*, but after awhile to *forget all*.

[3.] He gives him warning of his danger, in case he should return to his former sinful course: *Lest a worse thing come to thee*. Christ, who knows all men's hearts, knew that he was one of those that must be *frightened* from sin. Thirty-eight years' lameness, one would think, was a thing bad enough; yet there is something *worse* that will come to him if he relapse into sin after God has *given him such a deliverance* as this, <sup>403</sup>Ezra 9:13, 14. The hospital where he lay was a melancholy place, but hell is much more so: the doom of apostates is a worse thing than thirty-eight years' lameness.

**VI.** Now, after this interview between Christ and his patient, observe in the two following verses,

**1.** The notice which the poor simple man gave to the Jews concerning Christ, v. 15. He told them it was Jesus that had *made him whole*. We have reason to think that he intended this for the honour of Christ and the benefit of the Jews, little thinking that he who had so much power and goodness could have *any* enemies; but those who wish well to Christ's kingdom must have the *wisdom of the serpent*, lest they do more hurt than good with their zeal, and must not cast pearls before swine.

**2.** The rage and enmity of the Jews against him: *Therefore did the rulers of the Jews persecute Jesus*. See,

(1.) How absurd and unreasonable their enmity to Christ was. *Therefore*, because he had made a poor sick man well, and so eased the public charge, upon which, it is likely, he had subsisted; *therefore* they persecuted him, because he did good in Israel.

(2.) How bloody and cruel it was: *They sought to slay him*; nothing less than his blood, his life, would satisfy them.

(3.) How it was varnished over with a colour of zeal for the honour of the sabbath; for this was the pretended crime, *Because he had done these things on the sabbath day*, as if that circumstance were enough to vitiate the best and most divine actions, and to render *him* obnoxious whose deeds were otherwise most meritorious. Thus hypocrites often cover their real enmity against the *power* of godliness with a pretended zeal for the *form* of it.

## <487> JOHN 5:17-30

### CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH THE JEWS

We have here Christ's discourse upon occasion of his being accused as a sabbath-breaker, and it seems to be his vindication of himself before the sanhedrim, when he was arraigned before them: whether on the same day, or two or three days after, does not appear; probably the same day. Observe,

**I.** The doctrine laid down, by which he justified what he did on the sabbath day (v. 17): *He answered them.* This supposes that he had something laid to his charge: or what they suggested one to another, when they sought to slay him (v. 16), he *knew*, and gave this reply to, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.* At other times, in answer to the like charge, he had pleaded the example of David's eating the show-bread, of the priests' slaying the sacrifices, and of the people's watering their cattle on the sabbath day; but here he goes higher and alleges the example of his Father and his divine authority; waiving all other pleas, he insists upon that which was *instar omnium* — *equivalent to the whole*, and abides by it, which he had mentioned, <488> Matthew 12:8. *The Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day;* but he here enlarges on it.

**1.** He pleads that he was the Son of God, *plainly intimated in his calling God his Father;* and, if so, his holiness was *unquestionable* and his sovereignty *incontestable;* and he might make what alterations he pleased of the divine law. *Surely they will reverence the Son,* the heir of all things.

**2.** That he was a worker together with God.

**(1.)** *My Father worketh hitherto.* The example of God's resting on the seventh day from all his work is, in the fourth commandment, made the ground of our observing it as a *sabbath* or *day of rest.* Now God rested only from such work as he had done the six days before; otherwise he *worketh hitherto,* he is every day working, sabbath days and week-days, upholding and governing all the creatures, and concurring by his common providence to all the motions and operations of nature, *to his own glory;* therefore, when we are appointed to rest on the sabbath day, yet we are not restrained from doing that which has a direct tendency *to the glory of God,* as the man's carrying his bed had.

(2.) *I work*; not only therefore I *may* work, *like him*, in doing good on sabbath days as well as other days, but I also *work with him*. As God created all things by Christ, so he supports and governs all by him, <sup><300></sup>Hebrews 1:3. This sets what he does above all exception; he that is so great a worker must needs be an uncontrollable governor; he that does all is Lord of all, and therefore *Lord of the sabbath*, which particular branch of his authority he would now assert, because he was shortly to show it further, in the change of the day from the seventh to the first.

II. The offence that was taken at his doctrine (v. 18): *The Jews sought the more to kill him*. His defence was made his offence, as if by justifying himself he had made bad worse. Note, Those that will not be enlightened by the word of Christ will be enraged and exasperated by it, and nothing more vexes the enemies of Christ than his asserting his authority; see <sup><300></sup>Psalms 2:3-5. They sought to kill him,

1. Because he had broken the sabbath; for, let him say what he would in his own justification, they are resolved, right or wrong, to *find him guilty* of sabbath breaking. When malice and envy sit upon the bench, reason and justice may even be silent at the bar, for whatever they can say will undoubtedly be over-ruled.

2. Not only so, but he had said also *that God was his Father*. Now they pretend a jealousy for *God's honour*, as before for the sabbath day, and charge Christ with it as a heinous crime that he made himself equal with God; and a heinous crime it had been if he had not really been so. It was the sin of Lucifer, *I will be like the Most High*. Now,

(1.) This was justly inferred from what he said, that he was the *Son of God*, and that God was *his Father*, *paterna idion* — *his own Father*; his, so as he was no one's else. He had said that he worked with his Father, by the same authority and power, and hereby he made himself equal with God. *Ecee intelligunt Judaei, quod non intelligunt Ariani* — *Behold, the Jews understand what the Arians do not*.

(2.) Yet it was unjustly imputed to him as an offence that he equalled himself with God, for he was and is God, equal with the Father (<sup><300></sup>Philippians 2:6); and therefore Christ, in answer to this charge, does not except against the innuendo as strained or forced, makes out his claim and proves that he is equal with God in power and glory.

**III.** Christ's discourse upon this occasion, which continues without interruption to the end of the chapter. In these verses he explains, and afterwards confirms, his commission, as Mediator and plenipotentiary in the treaty between God and man. And, as the honours he is hereby *entitled to* are such as it is not fit for any creature to receive, so the work he is hereby entrusted with is such as it is not possible for any creature to go through with, and therefore he is God, equal with the Father.

**1.** *In general.* He is one with the Father in all he does as Mediator, and there was a perfectly good understanding between them in the whole matter. It is ushered in with a solemn preface (v. 19): *Verily, verily, I say unto you; I the Amen, the Amen, say it.* This intimates that the things declared are,

**(1.)** Very awful and great, and such as should command the most serious attention.

**(2.)** Very sure, and such as should command an unfeigned assent.

**(3.)** That they are matters purely of divine revelation; things which Christ has told us, and which we could not otherwise have come to the knowledge of. Two things he saith in general concerning the Son's oneness with the Father in working: —

**[1.]** That the Son *conforms to the Father* (v. 19): *The Son can do nothing of himself but what he sees the Father do; for these things does the Son.* The Lord Jesus, as Mediator, is *First, Obedient to his Father's will;* so entirely obedient that he *can do nothing of himself,* in the same sense as it is said, *God cannot lie, cannot deny himself,* which expresses the perfection of his truth, not any imperfection in his strength; so here, Christ was so entirely devoted to his Father's will that it was impossible for him in any thing to act separately. *Secondly,* He is *observant of his Father's counsel;* he can, he will, do nothing *but what he sees the Father do.* No man can *find out the work of God,* but the only-begotten Son, who lay in his bosom, sees what he does, is intimately acquainted with his purposes, and has the plan of them ever before him. What he did as Mediator, throughout his whole undertaking, was the exact transcript or counterpart of what the Father did; that is, what he designed, when he formed the plan of our redemption in his eternal counsels, and settled those measures in every thing which never could be *broken,* nor ever needed to be *altered.* It was the copy of that *great original;* it was Christ's faithfulness, as it was



Moses's, that he did all *according to the pattern shown him in the mount*. This is expressed in the present tense, what he *sees the Father do*, for the same reason that, when he was here upon earth, it was said, *He is in heaven* (<sup>488</sup>John 3:13), and *is in the bosom of the Father* (<sup>418</sup>John 1:18); as he was even then by his divine nature present in heaven, so the things done in heaven were *present* to his knowledge. What the Father did in his counsels, the Son had ever in his view, and still he had his eye upon it, as David in spirit spoke of him, *I have set the Lord always before me*, <sup>468</sup>Psalms 16:8. *Thirdly*, Yet he is *equal* with the Father in working; for *what things soever* the Father does *these also does the Son likewise*; he did the *same* things, not *such* things, but *tauta*, the *same* things; and he did them in the *same manner*, *homoios*, *likewise*, with the same authority, and liberty, and wisdom, the same energy and efficacy. Does the Father enact, repeal, and alter, positive laws? Does he over-rule the course of nature, know men's hearts? So does the Son. The power of the Mediator is a divine power.

[2.] That the Father *communicates* to the Son, v. 20. Observe,

*First*, The inducement to it: *The Father loveth the Son*; he declared, *This is my beloved Son*. He had not only a good will to the undertaking, but an infinite complacency in the undertaker. Christ was now hated of men, one whom the nation abhorred (<sup>288</sup>Isaiah 49:7); but he comforted himself with this, that his Father loved him.

*Secondly*, The instances of it. He shows it,

**1.** In what he *does* communicate to him: *He shows him all things that himself doth*. The Father's measures in making and ruling the world are shown to the Son, that he may take the same measures in framing and governing the church, which work was to be a duplicate of the work of creation and providence, and it is therefore called *the world to come*. He shows him all things *ha autos poiei* — *which he does*, that is, which the *Son* does, so it might be construed; all that the Son does is by direction from the Father; he *shows* him.

**2.** In what he *will* communicate; he will *show him*, that is, will appoint and direct him to do *greater works than these*.

**(1.)** Works of greater *power* than the *curing of the impotent man*; for he should raise the dead, and should himself rise from the dead. By the

power of nature, with the use of means, a disease may possibly in time be cured; but nature can never, by the use of any means, in any time raise the dead.

(2.) Works of greater *authority* than warranting the man to *carry his bed on the sabbath day*. They thought this a daring attempt; but what was this to his abrogating the whole ceremonial law, and instituting new ordinances, which he would shortly do, “*that you may marvel!*” Now they looked upon his works with contempt and indignation, but he will shortly do that which they will look upon with amazement, <sup><4076></sup>Luke 7:16. Many are brought to marvel at Christ's works, whereby he has the honour of them, who are not brought to believe, by which they would have the benefit of them.

2. *In particular*. He proves his equality with the Father, by specifying some of those works which he does that are the peculiar works of God. This is enlarged upon, v. 21-30. He does, and shall do, that which is the peculiar work of God's sovereign dominion and jurisdiction — *judging and executing judgment*, v. 22-24, 27. These two are interwoven, as being nearly connected; and what is said once is repeated and inculcated; put both together, and they will prove that Christ said not amiss when he made himself *equal with God*.

(1.) Observe what is here said concerning the Mediator's power to *raise the dead and give life*. See

[1.] His *authority* to do it (v. 21): *As the Father raiseth up the dead, so the Son quickeneth whom he will*. First, It is God's prerogative to raise the dead, and give life, even his who first *breathed* into man the *breath of life*, and so made him a *living soul*; see <sup><5520></sup>Deuteronomy 32:30; <sup><0016></sup>1 Samuel 2:6; <sup><4980></sup>Psalms 68:20; <sup><4017></sup>Romans 4:17. This God had done by the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and it was a confirmation of their mission. A *resurrection from the dead* never lay in the common road of nature, nor ever fell within the thought of those that studied only the compass of nature's power, one of whose received axioms was point blank against it: *A privatione ad habitum non datur regressus* — *Existence, when once extinguished, cannot be rekindled*. It was therefore ridiculed at Athens as an *absurd thing*, <sup><4073></sup>Acts 17:32. It is purely the work of a divine power, and the knowledge of it purely by divine revelation. This the Jews would own. *Secondly*, The Mediator is invested with this prerogative: *He quickens whom he will*; raises to life whom he pleases, and when he

pleases. He does not enliven things by natural necessity, as the sun does, whose beams revive of course; but he acts as a free agent, has the dispensing of his power in his own hand, and is never either *constrained*, or *restrained*, in the use of it. As he has the power, so he has the wisdom and sovereignty, of a God; has the *key of the grave and of death* (<sup><418></sup>Revelation 1:18), not as a servant, to open and shut as he is bidden, for he has it as the *key of David*, which he is master of, (<sup><417></sup>Revelation 3:7. An absolute prince is described by this (<sup><279></sup>Daniel 5:19): *Whom he would he slew or kept alive*; it is true of Christ without hyperbole.

[2.] His *ability* to do it. *Therefore* he has power to quicken whom he will as the Father does, because *he has life in himself, as the Father has*, v. 26. *First*, It is certain that the Father *has life in himself*. Not only he is a *self-existent* Being, who does not derive from, or depend upon, any other (<sup><414></sup>Exodus 3:14), but he is a sovereign giver of life; he has the disposal of life in himself; and of all good (for so *life* sometimes signifies); it is all derived from him, and dependent on him. He is to his creatures the fountain of life, and all good; author of their being and well-being; the living God, and the God of all living. *Secondly*, It is as certain that he has *given to the Son to have life in himself*. As the Father is the original of all natural life and good, being the great Creator, so the Son, as Redeemer, is the original of all spiritual life and good; is that to the church which the Father is to the world; see (<sup><406></sup>1 Corinthians 8:6; <sup><509></sup>Colossians 1:19. The kingdom of grace, and all the life in that kingdom, are as fully and absolutely in the hand of the Redeemer as the kingdom of providence is in the hand of the Creator; and as God, who gives being to all things, has his being of himself, so Christ, who gives life, raised himself to life by his own power, (<sup><508></sup>John 10:18.

[3.] His *acting* according to this authority and ability. Having *life in himself*, and being authorized to *quicken whom he will*, by virtue hereof there are, accordingly, two resurrections performed by his powerful word, both which are here spoken of: —

*First*, A resurrection that *now is* (v. 29), a resurrection from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, by the power of Christ's grace. *The hour is coming, and now is*. It is a resurrection begun already, and further to be carried on, *when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God*. This is plainly distinguished from that in v. 28, which speaks of the resurrection at

the end of time. This says nothing, as that does, of the dead in their graces, and of all of them, and their coming forth. Now,

**1.** Some think this was fulfilled in those whom he miraculously raised to life, Jairus's daughter, the widow's son, and Lazarus; and it is observable that all whom Christ raised were *spoken to*, as, *Damsel, arise; Young man, arise; Lazarus, come forth*; whereas those raised under the Old Testament were raised, not by a word, but other applications, <sup><1172></sup>1 Kings 17:21; <sup><1264></sup>2 Kings 4:34; 13:21. Some understand it of those saints that rose with Christ; but we do not read of the *voice of the Son of God* calling them. But,

**2.** I rather understand it of the power of the doctrine of Christ, for the recovering and quickening of those that were *dead in trespasses and sins*, <sup><497></sup>Ephesians 2:1. The *hour* was *coming* when dead souls should be made alive by the *preaching* of the gospel, and a spirit of life from God accompanying it: nay, it *then was*, while Christ was upon earth. It may refer especially to the *calling of the Gentiles*, which is said to be as life from the dead, and, some think, was prefigured by Ezekiel's vision (<sup><2571></sup>Ezekiel 37:1), and foretold, <sup><2369></sup>Isaiah 26:19. *Thy dead men shall live*. But it is to be applied to all the wonderful success of the gospel, among both Jews and Gentiles; an hour which still *is*, and is still *coming*, till all the elect be effectually called. Note,

**(1.)** Sinners are spiritually *dead*, destitute of spiritual life, sense, strength, and motion, dead to God, miserable, but neither sensible of their misery nor able to help themselves out of it.

**(2.)** The conversion of a soul to God is its resurrection from death to life; then it begins to live when it begins to *live to God*, to breathe after him, and move towards him.

**(3.)** It is by the *voice of the Son of God* that souls are raised to spiritual life; it is wrought by his power, and that power conveyed and communicated by his word: *The dead shall hear*, shall be made to hear, to understand, receive, and believe, the *voice of the Son of God*, to hear it as his voice; then the Spirit by it gives life, otherwise the *letter kills*.

**(4.)** The voice of Christ must be heard by us, that we may live by it. They that hear, and attend to what they hear, shall live. *Hear and your soul shall live,* <sup><28B></sup>Isaiah 55:3.

*Secondly,* A resurrection yet to come; this is spoken of, v. 28, 29, introduced with, “*Marvel not at this,* which I have said of the *first* resurrection, do not reject it as incredible and absurd, for at the end of time you shall all see a more sensible and amazing proof of the power and authority of the Son of man.” As *his own* resurrection was reserved to be the final and concluding proof of his personal commission, so the resurrection of *all men* is reserved to be a like proof of his commission to be executed by his spirit. Now observe here,

**a.** When this resurrection shall be: *The hour is coming;* it is *fixed* to an hour, so very punctual is this great appointment. The judgment is not adjourned *sine die* — *to some time not yet pitched upon;* no, *he hath appointed a day. The hour is coming.*

**(a.)** It is *not yet come,* it is not the hour spoken of at v. 25, that is coming, and *now is.* Those erred dangerously who said that the *resurrection was past already,* <sup><28B></sup>2 Timothy 2:18, But,

**(b.)** It *will certainly come,* it is coming on, nearer every day than other; it is at the door. How far off it is we know not; but we know that it is infallibly designed and unalterably determined.

**b.** Who shall be raised: *All that are in the graves,* all that have died from the beginning of time, and all that shall die to the end of time. It was said (<sup><28B></sup>Daniel 12:2), *Many shall arise;* Christ here tells us that those *many* shall be *all;* *all* must appear before the Judge, and therefore *all* must be raised; every person, and the whole of every person; every soul shall return to its body, and every *bone to its bone.* The grave is the prison of dead bodies, where they are *detained;* their furnace, where they are *consumed* (<sup><28B></sup>Job 24:19); yet, in prospect of their resurrection, we may call it their *bed,* where they sleep to be *awaked* again; their treasury, where they are laid up to be used again. Even those that are not *put into graves* shall arise; but, because most are put into graves, Christ uses this expression, *all that are in the graves.* The Jews used the word *sheol* for the grave, which signifies *the state of the dead;* all that are in that state *shall hear.*

**c.** How they shall be raised. Two things are here told us: —

**(a.)** The efficient of this resurrection: *They shall hear his voice*; that is, he shall cause them to hear it, as Lazarus was made to hear that word, *Come forth*; a divine power shall go along with the voice, to put life into them, and enable them to obey it. When Christ rose, there was no voice heard, not a word spoken, because he rose by his own power; but at the resurrection of the children of men we find three voices spoken of, <sup>2516</sup>1 Thessalonians 4:16. The Lord shall descend with a *shout*, the shout of a king, with *the voice of the archangel*; either Christ himself, the prince of the angels, or the commander-in-chief, under him, of the heavenly hosts; and with *the trumpet of God*: the soldier's trumpet sounding the alarm of war, the judge's trumpet publishing the summons to the court.

**(b.)** The effect of it: *They shall come forth* out of their graves, as prisoners out of their prison-house; they shall *arise out* of the dust, and shake themselves from it; see <sup>2517</sup>Isaiah 52:1, 2, 11. But this is not all; they shall *appear* before Christ's tribunal, shall *come forth* as those that are to be tried, *come forth* to the bar, publicly to receive their doom.

**d.** To what they shall be raised; to a different state of happiness or misery, according to their different character; to a state of retribution, according to what they did in the state of probation.

**(a.)** *They that have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life*; they shall live again, to live for ever. Note,

**[a.]** Whatever name men are called by, or whatever plausible profession they make, it will be well in the great day with those only that have *done good*, have done that which is pleasing to God and profitable to others.

**[b.]** The resurrection of the body will be a resurrection of life to all those, and those only, that have been sincere and constant in *doing good*. They shall not only be publicly *acquitted*, as a pardoned criminal, we say, has *his life*, but they shall be *admitted* into the presence of God, and that is life, it is better than life; they shall be *attended* with comforts in perfection. To live is to be *happy*, and they shall be *advanced* above the fear of death; that is *life* indeed in which *mortality* is for ever *swallowed up*.

**(b.)** *They that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation; they shall live again, to be for ever dying.* The Pharisees thought that the resurrection pertained only to the just, but Christ here rectifies that mistake. Note,

**[a.]** *Evil doers*, whatever they pretend, will be treated in the day of judgment as *evil men*.

**[b.]** The resurrection will be to evil doers, who did not by repentance undo what they had done amiss, a *resurrection* of damnation. They shall come forth to be publicly convicted of rebellion against God, and publicly *condemned* to everlasting punishment; to be *sentenced* to it, and immediately *sent* to it without reprieve. Such will the resurrection be.

**(2.)** Observe what is here said concerning the Mediator's *authority to execute judgment*, v. 22-24, 27. As he has an almighty power, so he has a sovereign jurisdiction; and who so fit to preside in the great affairs of the other life as he who is the Father and fountain of life? Here is,

**[1.]** Christ's commission or delegation to the office of a judge, which is twice spoken of here (v. 22): *He hath committed all judgment to the Son;* and again (v. 27): *he hath given him authority.*

*First*, The *Father judges no man*; not that the Father hath resigned the government, but he is pleased to govern by Jesus Christ; so that man is not under the terror of dealing with God immediately, but has the comfort of access to him by a Mediator. Having made us, he *may* do what he *pleases* with us, as the potter with the clay; yet he does not take advantage of this, but draws us *with the cords of a man*.

**2.** He does not determine our everlasting condition by the *covenant of innocency*, nor take the advantage he has against us for the violation of that covenant. The Mediator having undertaken to make a *vicarious* satisfaction, the matter is referred to him, and God is willing to enter upon a new treaty; *not under the law* of the Creator, *but the grace* of the Redeemer.

*Secondly*, *He has committed all judgment to the Son*, has constituted him *Lord of all* (<sup>408</sup>Acts 10:36; <sup>409</sup>Romans 14:9), as Joseph in Egypt, <sup>440</sup>Genesis 41:40. This was prophesied of, <sup>471</sup>Psalms 72:1; <sup>211</sup>Isaiah 11:3,

4; <sup><2275></sup>Jeremiah 23:5; <sup><3111></sup>Micah 5:1-4; <sup><5504></sup>Psalms 67:4; 96:13; 98:9. All judgment is committed to our Lord Jesus; for

**1.** He is *entrusted* with the administration of the *providential kingdom*, is *head over all things* (<sup><4011></sup>Ephesians 1:11), head of every man, <sup><4113></sup>1 Corinthians 11:3. All things consist by him, <sup><5017></sup>Colossians 1:17.

**2.** He is empowered to make laws immediately to bind conscience. *I say unto you* is now the form in which the statutes of the kingdom of heaven run. *Be it enacted* by the Lord Jesus, and by *his* authority. All the acts now in force are touched with his sceptre.

**3.** He is authorized to appoint and settle the terms of the new covenant, and to draw up the articles of peace between God and man; it is God in Christ that reconciles the world, and to him he has given power to confer eternal life. The book of life is the Lamb's book; by his award we must stand or fall.

**4.** He is commissioned to carry on and complete the war with the powers of darkness; to cast out and *give judgment against the prince of this world*, <sup><6121></sup>John 12:31. He is commissioned not only to *judge*, but to *make war*, <sup><6911></sup>Revelation 19:11. All that will fight *for God against Satan* must enlist themselves under *his* banner.

**5.** He is constituted sole manager of the judgment of the great day. The ancients generally understood these words of that *crowning act* of his judicial power. The final and universal judgment is committed to the Son of man; the tribunal is *his*, it is the judgment-seat of Christ; the retinue is his, *his* mighty angels; he will try the causes, and pass the sentence. <sup><4473></sup>Acts 17:31.

*Thirdly, He has given him authority to execute judgment also, v. 27.*  
Observe,

**1.** What the authority is which our Redeemer is invested with: *An authority to execute judgment*; he has not only a legislative and judicial power, but an *executive* power too. The phrase here is used particularly for the judgment of condemnation, <sup><6115></sup>Jude 1:15. *poiesai krisin* — *to execute judgment* upon all; the same with his *taking vengeance*, <sup><5108></sup>2 Thessalonians 1:8. The ruin of impenitent sinners comes from the hand of Christ; he that *executes judgment* upon them is the same that would have *wrought salvation* for them, which makes



the sentence unexceptionable; and there is no relief against the sentence of the Redeemer; salvation itself cannot save those whom the Saviour *condemns*, which makes the ruin *remediless*.

2. Whence he has that authority: the Father *gave it to him*. Christ's authority as Mediator is delegated and derived; he acts as the Father's Viceregent, as the Lord's Anointed, the Lord's Christ. Now all this redounds very much to the honour of Christ, acquitting him from the guilt of blasphemy, in making himself *equal with God*; and very much to the comfort of all believers, who may with the greatest assurance venture their all in such hands.

[2.] Here are the reasons (reasons of state) for which this commission was given him. He has all judgment committed to him for two reasons: —

*First*, Because he is the *Son of man*; which denotes these three things: —

1. His humiliation and gracious condescension. Man is a worm, the son of man a worm; yet this was the nature, this the character, which the Redeemer assumed, in pursuance of the counsels of love; to this low estate he stooped, and submitted to all the mortifications attending it, because it was *his Father's will*; in recompence therefore of this wonderful obedience, God did thus dignify him. Because he condescended to be the *Son of man*, his Father made him *Lord of all*, <sup><1818></sup>Philippians 2:8, 9.

2. His affinity and alliance to us. The Father has committed the government of the children of men to him, because, being the *Son of man*, he is of the same nature with those whom he is *set over*, and therefore the more unexceptionable, and the more acceptable, as a Judge. *Their governor shall proceed from the midst of them*, <sup><2810></sup>Jeremiah 30:21. Of this that law was typical; *One of thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee*, <sup><4575></sup>Deuteronomy 17:15.

3. His being the Messiah promised. In that famous vision of his kingdom and glory, <sup><2073></sup>Daniel 7:13, 14, he is called the *Son of man*; and <sup><3904></sup>Psalms 8:4-6. Thou has made the Son of man have *dominion over the works of thy hands*. He is the Messiah, and therefore is invested with all this power. The Jews usually called the Christ the *Son of David*; but Christ usually called himself the *Son of man*, which was

the more humble title, and bespeaks him a prince and Saviour, not the Jewish nation only, but to the whole race of mankind.

*Secondly, That all men should honour the Son*, v. 23. The honouring of Jesus Christ is here spoken of as God's great design (the Son intended to glorify the Father, and therefore the Father intended to glorify the Son, ~~John~~ John 12:32); and as man's great duty, in compliance with that design. If God will have the Son honoured, it is the duty of all to whom he is made known to honour him. Observe here,

**1.** The *respect* that is to be paid to our Lord Jesus: We must *honour the Son*, must look upon him as one that is to be *honoured*, both on account of his transcendent excellences and perfections in himself, and of the relations he stands in to us, and must study to give him honour accordingly; must *confess that he is Lord*, and worship him; must honour him who was dishonoured for us.

**2.** The degree of it: *Even as they honour the Father*. This supposes it to be our duty to *honour the Father*; for revealed religion is founded on natural religion, and *directs* us to *honour the Son*, to honour him with *divine* honour; we must honour the Redeemer with the same honour with which we honour the Creator. So far was it from blasphemy for him to make himself *equal with God* that it is the highest injury that can be for us to make him otherwise. The truths and laws of the Christian religion, so far as they are revealed, are as sacred and honourable as those of natural religion, and to be equally had in estimation; for we lie under the same obligations to Christ, the Author of our being; and have as necessary a dependence upon the Redeemer's grace as upon the Creator's providence, which is a sufficient ground for this law — *to honour the Son as we honour the Father*. To enforce this law, it is added, *He that honours not the Son honours not the Father* who has sent him. Some pretend a reverence for the Creator, and speak *honourably* of him, who make light of the Redeemer, and speak *contemptibly* of him; but let such know that the honours and interests of the Father and Son are so inseparably twisted and interwoven that the Father never reckons himself *honoured* by any that *dishonour* the Son. Note,

**(1.)** Indignities done to the Lord Jesus reflect upon God himself, and will so be construed and reckoned for in the court of heaven. The Son having so far espoused the Father's honour as to take *to himself* the

*reproaches cast on him* (<sup>451B</sup>Romans 15:3), the Father does no less espouse the Son's honour, and counts himself struck at through him.

(2.) The reason of this is because the Son is sent and commissioned by the Father; it is the *Father who hath sent him*. Affronts to an ambassador are justly resented by the prince that sends him. And by this rule those who truly *honour the Son honour the Father also*; see <sup>451B</sup>Philippians 2:11.

[3.] Here is the rule by which the Son goes in executing this commission, so those words seem to come in (v. 24): *He that heareth and believeth hath everlasting life*. Here we have the substance of the whole gospel; the preface commands *attention* to a thing most weighty, and *assent* to a thing most certain: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, I, to whom you hear all judgment is committed, I, in whose lips is a divine sentence; take from me the Christian's character and charter.*”

*First, The character of a Christian: He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me.* To be a Christian indeed is,

1. To *hear the word of Christ*. It is not enough to be within hearing of it, but we must *attend on* it, as scholars on the instructions of their teachers; and *attend to* it, as servants to the commands of their masters; we must hear and obey it, must abide by the gospel of Christ as the fixed rule of our faith and practice.

2. To *believe on him that sent him*; for Christ's design is to *bring us to God*; and, as he is the first original of all grace, so is he the last object of all faith. Christ is our *way*; God is our *rest*. We must believe on God as *having sent* Jesus Christ, and recommended himself to our faith and love, by manifesting his glory in *the face of Jesus Christ* (<sup>401B</sup>2 Corinthians 4:6), as *his Father and our Father*.

*Secondly, The charter of a Christian, in which all that are Christians indeed are interested.* See what we get by Christ.

1. A charter of pardon: *He shall not come into condemnation*. The grace of the gospel is a full discharge from the curse of the law. A believer shall not only not *lie under* condemnation eternally, but shall not *come into condemnation* now, not come into the danger of it (<sup>451B</sup>Romans 8:1), not *come into judgment*, not be so much as arraigned.

2. A charter of privileges: He is *passed out of death to life*, is invested in a present happiness in spiritual life and entitled to a future happiness in eternal life. The tenour of the first covenant was, *Do this and live*; the man that doeth them shall live in them. Now this proves Christ equal with the Father that he has power to propose the *same* benefit to the *hearers of his word* that had been proposed to the *keepers of the old law*, that is, life: *Hear and live, believe and live*, is what we may venture our souls upon, when we are disabled to *do and live*; see ~~672~~ John 17:2.

[4.] Here is the righteousness of his proceedings pursuant to this commission, v. 30. All judgment being committed to him, we cannot but ask *how he manages it*. And here he answers, *My judgment is just*. All Christ's acts of government, both *legislative* and *judicial*, are exactly agreeable to the rules of equity; see ~~2088~~ Proverbs 8:8. There can lie no exceptions against any of the determinations of the Redeemer; and therefore, as there shall be no repeal of any of his statutes, so there shall be no appeal from any of his sentences. His judgments are certainly just, for they are directed,

*First, By the Father's wisdom: I can of my ownself do nothing, nothing without the Father, but as I hear I judge*, as he had said before (v. 19), The Son *can do nothing but what he sees the Father do*; so here, nothing but what he hears the Father *say: As I hear*,

1. From the secret eternal counsels of the Father, *so I judge*. Would we know what we may depend upon in our dealing with God? *Hear the word* of Christ. We need not dive into the divine counsels, those *secret things* which belong not to us, but attend to the revealed dictates of Christ's government and judgment, which will furnish us with an unerring guide; for what Christ has adjudged is an exact copy or counterpart of what the Father has decreed.

2. From the published records of the Old Testament. Christ, in all the execution of his undertaking, had an eye to the scripture, and made it his business to conform to this, and *fulfil* it: *As it was written in the volume of the book*. Thus he taught us to do *nothing of ourselves*, but, *as we hear from the word of God, so to judge* of things, and act accordingly.

Secondly, By the Father's will: *My judgment is just*, and cannot be otherwise, *because I seek not my own will*, but *his who sent me*. Not as if the will of Christ were contrary to the will of the Father, as the flesh is contrary to the spirit in us; but,

**1.** Christ had, as man, the natural and innocent affections of the human nature, *sense of pain and pleasure*, an inclination to life, an aversion to death: yet he *pleased not himself*, did not confer with these, nor consult these, when he was to go on his undertaking, but acquiesced entirely in the will of his Father.

**2.** What he did as Mediator was not the result of any *peculiar* or *particular* purpose and design of his own; what he did *seek* to do was not for his own mind's sake, but he was therein guided by his Father's will, and the purpose which he had *purposed to himself*. This our Saviour did upon all occasions *refer himself to* and govern himself by.

Thus our Lord Jesus has opened his commission (whether to the conviction of his enemies or no) to his own honour and the everlasting comfort of all his friends, who here see him *able to save to the uttermost*.

## ⌄ JOHN 5:31-47

### CHRIST PROVES HIS DIVINE MISSION

In these verses our Lord Jesus proves and confirms the commission he had produced, and makes it out that he was sent of God to be the Messiah.

**I.** He *sets aside* his own testimony of himself (v. 31): “*If I bear witness of myself*, though it is infallibly true (⌄ John 8:14), yet, according to the common rule of judgment among men, you will not admit it as *legal proof*, nor allow it to be *given in evidence*.” Now,

**1.** This reflects reproach upon the sons of men, and their veracity and integrity. Surely we may say deliberately, what David said in haste, *All men are liars*, else it would never have been such a received maxim that a man's testimony of himself is suspicious, and not to be relied on; it is a sign that self-love is stronger than the love of truth. And yet,

2. It reflects honour on the Son of God, and bespeaks his wonderful condescension, that, though he is the *faithful witness*, the truth itself, who may challenge to be credited *upon his honour*, and his own single testimony, yet he is pleased to *waive his privilege*, and, for the confirmation of our faith, refers himself to his *vouchers*, that we may have full satisfaction.

II. He produces other witnesses that bear testimony to him that he was sent of God.

1. The Father himself bore testimony to him (v. 32): *There is another that beareth witness*. I take this to be meant of God the Father, for Christ mentions *his* testimony with his own (~~408~~ John 8:18): *I bear witness of myself, and the Father beareth witness of me*. Observe,

(1.) The seal which the Father put to his commission: He *beareth witness of me*, not only has done so by a voice from heaven, but still does so by the tokens of his presence with me. See who they are to whom God will bear witness.

[1.] Those whom he *sends* and *employs*; where he gives commissions he give credentials.

[2.] Those who *bear witness* to him; so Christ did. God will own and honour those that own and honour him.

[3.] Those who decline *bearing witness of themselves*; so Christ did. God will take care that those who humble and abase themselves, and seek not their own glory, shall not *lose by it*.

(2.) The satisfaction Christ had in this testimony: *“I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true*. I am very well assured that I have a divine mission, and do not in the least hesitate concerning it; thus he had the *witness in himself*.” The devil tempted him to question his being the Son of God, but he never yielded.

2. John Baptist witnessed to Christ, v. 33, etc. John came to *bear witness of the light* (~~409~~ John 1:7); his business was to prepare his way, and direct people to him: *Behold the Lamb of God*.

(1.) Now the testimony of John was,

[1.] A *solemn* and public testimony: “You sent an embassy of priests and Levites to John, which gave him an opportunity of publishing what he had to say; it was not a popular, but a judicial testimony.”

[2.] It was a *true* testimony: *He bore witness to the truth*, as a witness ought to do, the *whole truth*, and *nothing but the truth*. Christ does not say, *He bore witness to me* (though every one knew he did), but, like an honest man, *He bore witness to the truth*. Now John was confessedly such a holy, good man, so mortified to the world, and so conversant with divine things, that it could not be imagined he should be guilty of such a forgery and imposture as to say what he did concerning Christ if it had not been so, and if he had not been sure of it.

(2.) Two things are added concerning John's testimony: —

[1.] That it was a testimony *ex abundanti* — *more than he needed to vouch* (v. 34): *I receive not testimony from man*. Though Christ saw fit to quote John's testimony, it was with a protestation that it shall not be deemed or construed so as to prejudice the prerogative of his self-sufficiency. Christ needs no letters or commendation, no testimonials or certificates, but what his own worth and excellency bring with him; why then did Christ here urge the testimony of John? Why, *these things I say, that you may be saved*. This he aimed at in all this discourse, to save not his own life, but the souls of others; he produced John's testimony because, being one *of themselves*, it was to be hoped that they would hearken to it. Note, *First*, Christ desires and designs the salvation even of his enemies and persecutors. *Secondly*, The word of Christ is the ordinary means of salvation. *Thirdly*, Christ in his word considers our infirmities and condescends to our capacities, consulting not so much what it befits so great a prince to say as what we can bear, and what will be most likely to do us good.

[2.] That it was a testimony *ad hominem* — *to the man*, because John Baptist was one whom *they* had a respect for (v. 35): *He was a light among you*.

*First*, The character of John Baptist: *He was a burning and a shining light*. Christ often spoke honourably of John; he was now in prison under a cloud, yet Christ gives him his *due praise*, which we must be ready to do to all that faithfully serve God.

1. He was a *light*, not *phos* — *lux, light* (so Christ was *the light*), but *lyknos* — *lucerna, a luminary*, a derived subordinate light. His office was to enlighten a dark world with notices of the Messiah's approach, to whom he was as the *morning star*.

2. He was a *burning light*, which denotes *sincerity*; painted fire may be made to shine, but that which burns is true fire. It denotes also his *activity*, zeal, and fervency, burning in love to God and the souls of men; fire is always working on itself or something else, so is a good minister.

3. He was a *shining light*, which denotes either his *exemplary conversation*, in which our light should shine (<sup>4156</sup>Matthew 5:16), or an *eminent* diffusive influence. He was illustrious in the sight of others; though he affected obscurity and retirement, and was *in the deserts*, yet such were his doctrine, his baptism, his life, that he became very *remarkable*, and attracted the eyes of the nation.

*Secondly*, The affections of the people to him: *you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light*.

1. It was a *transport* that they were *in*, upon the appearing of John: “*You were willing* — *ethelesate*, *you delighted to rejoice in his light*; you were very proud that you had such a man among you, who was the honour of your country; you were willing *agalliasthenai* — willing to *dance*, and make a noise about this light, as boys about a bonfire.”

2. It was but *transient*, and soon over: “You were fond of him, *pros horan* — *for an hour*, for a *season*, as little children are fond of a new thing, you were pleased with John awhile, but soon grew weary of him and his ministry, and said that *he had a devil*, and now you have him in prison.” Note, Many, that seem to be affected and pleased with the gospel at first, afterwards despise and reject it; it is common for forward and noisy professors to cool and fall off. These here rejoiced in John's light, but never walked in it, and therefore did not keep to it; they were like the stony ground. While Herod was a friend to John Baptist, the people caressed him; but when he fell under Herod's frowns he lost their favours: “*You were willing to countenance John, pros horan* that is, for *temporal ends*” (so some take it); “you were glad of him, in hopes to make a tool of him, by his interest and under



the shelter of his name to have shaken off the Roman yoke, and recovered the civil liberty and honour of your country.” Now,

(1.) Christ mentions their respect to John, to *condemn* them for their present opposition to himself, to whom John bore witness. If they had continued their veneration for John, as they ought to have done, they would have embraced Christ.

(2.) He mentions the passing away of their respect, to justify God in depriving them, as he had now done, of John's ministry, and putting that light under a bushel.

3. Christ's own works witnessed to him (v. 36): *I have a testimony greater than that of John; for if we believe the witness of men sent of God, as John was, the witness of God immediately, and not by the ministry of men, is greater,* <sup>GRB</sup>1 John 5:9. Observe, Though the witness of John was a less *cogent* and less *considerable* witness, yet our Lord was pleased to make use of it. We must be glad of all the supports that offer themselves for the confirmation of our faith, though they may not amount to a demonstration, and we must not *invalidate* any, under pretence that there are others more *conclusive*; we have occasion for them all. Now this greater testimony was that of the *works* which *his Father had given him to finish*. That is,

(1.) In general the whole course of his life and ministry — his revealing God and his will to us, setting up his kingdom among men, reforming the world, destroying Satan's kingdom, restoring fallen man to his primitive purity and felicity, and shedding abroad in men's hearts the love of God and of one another — all that work of which he said when he died, *It is finished*, it was all, from first to last, *opus Deo dignum* — *a work worthy of God*; all he said and did was *holy* and *heavenly*, and a divine purity, power, and grace shone in it, proving abundantly that he was *sent of God*.

(2.) In particular. The miracles he wrought for the proof of his divine mission witnessed of him. Now it is here said,

[1.] That these works were *given him by the Father*, that is, he was both *appointed* and *empowered* to work them; for, as Mediator, he *derived* both commission and strength from his Father.

[2.] They were given to him to *finish*; he must do all those works of wonder which the counsel and foreknowledge of God had before

determined to be done; and his finishing them proves a divine power; for *as for God his work is perfect.*

[3.] These works did *bear witness of him*, did prove that he was sent of God, and that what he said concerning himself was true; see <sup><30E></sup>Hebrews 2:4; <sup><40Z></sup>Acts 2:22. That the Father had sent him as *a Father*, not as a master sends his servant on an errand, but as a father sends his son to take possession for himself; if God had not sent him, he would not have *seconded* him, would not have *sealed* him, as he did by the works he gave him to do; for the world's Creator will never be its deceiver.

4. He produces, more fully than before, his Father's testimony concerning him (v. 37): *The Father that sent me hath borne witness of me.* The prince is not accustomed to follow his ambassador himself, to confirm his commission *viva voce* — *by speaking*; but God was pleased to bear witness of his Son himself by a voice from heaven at his baptism (<sup><40T></sup>Matthew 3:17): *This is my ambassador, This is my beloved Son.* The Jews reckoned *Bath-kol*; — *the daughter of a voice*, a voice from heaven, one of the ways by which God made known his mind; and in that way he had owned Christ publicly and solemnly, and repeated it, <sup><40E></sup>Matthew 17:5. Note,

(1.) Those whom God *sends* he will *bear witness of*; where he gives a commission, he will not fail to seal it; he that never *left himself without witness* (<sup><44H></sup>Acts 14:17) will never leave any of his servants so, who go upon his errand.

(2.) Where God demands belief, he will not fail to give sufficient *evidence*, as he has done concerning Christ. That which was to be witnessed concerning Christ was chiefly this, that the God we had offended was willing to accept of him as a Mediator. Now concerning this he has *himself* given us full satisfaction (and he was fittest to do it), declaring himself well-pleased in him; if we be so, the work is done. Now, it might be suggested, if God himself thus bore witness of Christ, how came it to pass that he was not universally received by the Jewish nation and their rulers? To this Christ here answers that it was not to be thought strange, nor could their infidelity weaken his credibility, for two reasons:

[1.] Because they were not acquainted with such extraordinary revelations of God and his will: *You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor*

*seen his shape, or appearance.* They showed themselves to be as ignorant of God, though they professed relation to him, as we are of a man we never either saw or heard. “But why do I talk to you of God's bearing witness of me? He is one you know nothing of, nor have any acquaintance or communion with.” Note, Ignorance of God is the true reason of men's rejecting the record he has given concerning his Son. A right understanding of *natural religion* would discover to us such admirable congruities in the *Christian* religion as would greatly dispose our minds to the entertainment of it. Some give this sense of it: “The Father bore witness of me by a *voice*, and the *descent of a dove*, which is such an extraordinary thing that you never saw or heard the like; and yet for my sake there was such a voice and appearance; yea, and you might have *heard that voice*, you might have *seen that appearance*, as others did, if you had closely attended the ministry of John, but by slighting it you missed of that testimony.”

[2.] Because they were not affected, no, not with the ordinary ways by which God had revealed himself to them: *You have not his word abiding in you*, v. 38. They had the scriptures of the Old Testament; might they not by them be disposed to receive Christ? Yes, if they had had their due influence upon them. But, *First*, The word of God was not in them; it was *among them*, in their country, in their hands, but not *in them*, in their hearts; not ruling in their souls, but only shining in their eyes and sounding in their ears. What did it avail them that they had the oracles of God *committed* to them (~~ERR~~ Romans 3:2), when they had not these oracles *commanding* in them? If they had, they would readily have embraced Christ. *Secondly*, It did not *abide*. Many have the word of God coming into them, and making some impressions for awhile, but it does not *abide* with them; it is not constantly in them, as a man at home, but only now and then, as a *wayfaring man*. If the word *abide* in us, if we converse with it by frequent meditation, consult with it upon every occasion, and conform to it in our conversation, we shall then readily receive the witness of the Father concerning Christ; see ~~ERR~~ John 7:17. But how did it appear that they *had not the word of God abiding in them*? It appeared by this, *Whom he hath sent, him ye believe not*. There was so much said in the Old Testament concerning Christ, to direct people when and where to look for him, and so to facilitate the discovery of him, that, if they had duly considered these things, they could not have avoided the conviction of Christ's being sent of God; so that their not believing in Christ was a

certain sign that the word of God did not abide in them. Note, The indwelling of the word, and Spirit, and grace of God in us, is best tried by its effects, particularly by our *receiving what he sends*, the commands, the messengers, the providences he sends, especially Christ whom he hath sent.

**5.** The last witness he calls is the Old Testament, which witnessed of him, and to it he appeals (v. 39, etc.): *Search the scriptures, ereunate.*

**(1.)** This may be read, either,

**[1.]** “*You search the scriptures*, and you do well to do so; you read them daily in your synagogues, you have rabbies, and doctors, and scribes, that make it their business to study them, and criticize upon them.” The Jews boasted of the flourishing of scripture-learning in the days of Hillel, who died about twelve years after Christ's birth, and reckoned some of those who were then members of the sanhedrim the *beauties of their wisdom* and the *glories of their law*; and Christ owns that they did indeed search the scriptures, but it was in search of their *own glory*: “*You search the scriptures*, and therefore, if you were not *wilfully blind*, you would *believe in me*.” Note, It is possible for men to be very studious in the letter of the scripture, and yet to be strangers to the power and influence of it. Or,

**[2.]** As we read it: *Search the scriptures*; and so, *First*, It was spoken to *them* in the nature of an *appeal*: “You profess to receive and believe the scripture; here I will *join issue* with you, let this be the judge, provided you will not *rest in the letter*” (*haerere in cortice*), “but will *search* into it.” Note, when appeals are made to the scriptures, they must be searched. Search the whole book of scripture *throughout*, compare one passage with another, and explain one by another. We must likewise search particular passages *to the bottom*, and see not what they *seem* to say *prima facie* — *at the first appearance*, but what they say *indeed*. *Secondly*, It is spoken to *us* in the nature of an *advice*, or a command to all Christians to search the scriptures. Note, All those who would *find Christ* must *search the scriptures*; not only read them, and hear them, but search them, which denotes,

**1.** *Diligence* in seeking, labour, and study, and close application of mind.

2. *Desire* and *design* of finding. We must aim at some spiritual benefit and advantage in reading and studying the scripture, and often ask, "What am I now searching for?" We must search as for *hidden treasures* (<sup>3102</sup>Proverbs 2:4), as those that *sink* for gold or silver, or that *dive* for pearl, (<sup>8381</sup>Job 28:1-11. This ennobled the Bereans, (<sup>4471</sup>Acts 17:11.

(2.) Now there are two things which we are here directed to have in our eye, in our searching the scripture: *heaven* our end, and *Christ* our way.

[1.] We must search the scriptures for *heaven* as our *great end*: *For in them you think you have eternal life*. The scripture assures us of an eternal state set before us, and offers to us an eternal life in that state: it contains the *chart* that *describes* it, the *charter* that *conveys* it, the *direction* in the way that leads to it, and the *foundation* upon which the hope of it is built; and this is worth searching for where we are sure to find it. But to the Jews Christ saith only, *You think you have eternal life* in the scriptures, because, though they did retain the belief and hope of eternal life, and grounded their expectations of it upon the scriptures, yet herein they missed it, that they looked for it by the bare reading and studying of the scripture. It was a common but corrupt saying among them, *He that has the words of the law has eternal life*; they thought they were sure of heaven if they could say by *heart*, or rather by *rote*, such and such passages of scripture as they were directed to by the tradition of the elders; as they thought all the *vulgar* cursed because they did not thus know the law (<sup>4149</sup>John 7:49), so they concluded all the *learned* undoubtedly *blessed*.

[2.] We must *search the scriptures* for *Christ*, as the new and living way that leads to this *end*. These are *they*, the great and principal witnesses, *that testify of me*. Note, *First*, The scriptures, even those of the Old Testament, *testify* of Christ, and by them God *bears witness* to him. The Spirit of Christ in the prophets testified beforehand of him (<sup>4111</sup>1 Peter 1:11), the purposes and promises of God concerning him, and the previous notices of him. The Jews knew very well that the Old Testament testified of the Messiah, and were critical in their remarks upon the passages that looked that way; and yet were careless, and wretchedly overseen, in the application of them. *Secondly*, *Therefore* we must *search the scriptures*, and may hope to find eternal life in that search, because they testify of Christ; for this is *life eternal, to know him*; see (<sup>4151</sup>1 John 5:11. Christ is

the treasure hid in the field of the scriptures, the water in those wells, the milk in those breasts.

**(3.)** To this testimony he annexes a reproof of their infidelity and wickedness in four instances; particularly,

**[1.]** Their *neglect of him* and his doctrine: “*You will not come to me, that you might have life*, v. 40. You search the scriptures, you believe the prophets, who you cannot but see testify of me; and yet you will not *come to me*, to whom they direct you.” Their estrangement from Christ was the fault not so much of their *understandings* as of their *wills*. This is expressed as a complaint; Christ offered life, and it was not accepted. Note, *First*, There is *life* to be had with Jesus Christ for poor souls; we may have life, the life of *pardon* and *grace*, and *comfort* and *glory*: life is the perfection of our being, and inclusive of all happiness; and Christ is our life. *Secondly*, Those that would have this life must *come* to Jesus Christ for it; we may have it for the coming for. It *supposes* an assent of the understanding to the doctrine of Christ and the record given concerning him; it *lies in* the consent of the will to his government and grace, and it *produces* an answerable compliance in the affections and actions. *Thirdly*, The only reason why sinners die is because they *will not come* to Christ for life and happiness; it is not because they *cannot*, but because they *will not*. They will neither *accept* the life offered, because *spiritual* and *divine*, nor will they *agree* to the terms on which it is offered, nor *apply* themselves to the use of the appointed means: they will not be cured, for they will not observe the methods of cure. *Fourthly*, The wilfulness and obstinacy of sinners in rejecting the tenders of grace are a great grief to the Lord Jesus, and what he complains of. Those words (v. 41), *I receive not honour from men*, come in a parenthesis, to obviate an objection against him, as if he sought his own glory, and made himself the head of a party, in obliging all to come to *him*, and applaud him. Note,

**1.** He did not *covet* nor *court* the applause of men, did not in the least affect that worldly pomp and splendour in which the carnal Jews expected their Messiah to appear. He charged those whom he cured not to make him known, and withdrew from those that would have made him king.

**2.** He *had not* the applause of men. Instead of *receiving honour* from men, he received a great deal of *dishonour* and disgrace from men, for he made himself of no reputation.

**3.** He *needed* not the applause of men; it was no addition to his glory whom all the angels of God worship, nor was he any otherwise pleased with it than as it was according to his Father's will, and for the happiness of those who, in giving honour *to him*, received much greater honour *from him*.

[2.] Their *want of the love of God* (v. 42): “*I know you very well, that you have not the love of God in you. Why should I wonder that you do not come to me, when you want even the first principle of natural religion, which is the love of God?*” Note, The reason why people *slight Christ* is because they do not *love God*; for, if we did indeed love God, we should love him who is his express image, and hasten to him by whom only we may be restored to the favour of God. He charged them (v. 37) with *ignorance* of God, and here with *want of love to him*; *therefore* men have not the love of God because they desire not the knowledge of him.

Observe, *First*, The crime charged upon them: *You have not the love of God in you*. They pretended a great love to God, and thought they proved it by their zeal for the law, the temple, and the sabbath; and yet they were really without the love of God. Note, There are many who make a great profession of religion who yet show they want the love of God by their neglect of Christ and their contempt of his commandments; they hate his holiness and undervalue his goodness. Observe, It is the love of God *in us*, that love seated *in the heart*, a living active principle there, that God will *accept*; the love *shed abroad* there, <sup>415</sup>Romans 5:5. *Secondly*, The proof of this charge, by the personal knowledge of Christ, who *searches the heart* (<sup>412</sup>Revelation 2:23) and knows what is *in man*: *I know you*. Christ sees through all our disguises, and can say to each of us, *I know thee*.

- 1.** Christ knows men better than *their neighbours know them*. The people thought that the scribes and Pharisees were very devout and good men, but Christ knew that they had not the love of God in them.
- 2.** Christ knows men better than *they know themselves*. These Jews had a very good opinion of themselves, but Christ knew how corrupt their inside was, notwithstanding the speciousness of their outside; we may deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive him.
- 3.** Christ knows men who do not, and will not, know him; he looks *on* those who industriously look *off* from him, and calls by their own name, their true name, those who have not known him.

[3.] Another crime charged upon them is their readiness to entertain false Christs and false prophets, while they obstinately opposed him who was the true Messiah (v. 43): *I am come in my Father's name, and you receive me not. If another shall come in his own name, him you will receive. Be astonished, O heavens, at this* (<sup>200</sup>Jeremiah 2:12, 13); *for my people have committed two evils, great evils indeed. First, They have forsaken the fountain of living waters, for they would not receive Christ, who came in his Father's name, had his commission from his Father, and did all for his glory. Secondly, They have hewn out broken cisterns, they hearken to every one that will set up in his own name. They forsake their own mercies, which is bad enough; and it is for lying vanities, which is worse. observe here,*

1. Those are false prophets who come in their own name, who run without being sent, and set up for themselves only.

2. It is just with God to suffer those to be deceived with false prophets who receive not the truth in the love of it. (<sup>500</sup>2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11. The errors of antichrist are the just punishment of those who obey not the doctrine of Christ. They that shut their eyes against the true light are by the judgment of God given up to wander endlessly after *false lights*, and to be led aside after every *ignis fatuus*.)

3. It is the gross folly of many that, while they *nauseate* ancient truths, they are *fond* of upstart errors; they loathe manna, and at the same time *feed upon ashes*. After the Jews had rejected Christ and his gospel, they were continually haunted with spectres, with *false Christs* and *false prophets* (<sup>400</sup>Matthew 24:24), and their proneness to follow such occasioned those distractions and seditions that hastened their ruin.

[4.] They are here charged with pride and vain-glory, and unbelief, the effect of them, v. 44. Having sharply reproved their unbelief, like a wise physician, he here searches into the cause, lays the axe to the root. They *therefore* slighted and undervalued Christ because they *admired* and *overvalued* themselves. Here is,

*First, Their ambition of worldly honour. Christ despised it, v. 41. They set their hearts upon it: You receive honour one of another; that is, "You look for a Messiah in outward pomp, and promise yourselves worldly honour by him." You receive honour: —*



1. “You desire to receive it, and aim at this in all you do.”
2. “You give honour to others, and applaud them, only that they may return it, and may applaud you.” *Petimus dabimusque vicissim* — *We ask and we bestow*. It is the proud man's art to throw honour upon others only that it may rebound upon himself.
3. “You are very careful to keep all the honours to yourselves, and confine them to your own party, as if you had the monopoly of that which is honourable.”
4. “What respect is shown to you you *receive* yourselves, and do not transmit to God, as Herod.” Idolizing men and their sentiments, and affecting to be idolized by them and their applauses, are pieces of idolatry as directly contrary to Christianity as any other.

*Secondly*, Their neglect of spiritual honour, called here *the honour that comes from God only*; this they sought not, nor minded. Note,

1. True honour is that which *comes from God only*, that is real and lasting honour; those are honourable indeed whom he takes into covenant and communion with himself.
2. *This honour have all the saints*. All that believe in Christ, through him receive the honour that comes from God. He is not partial, but will give glory wherever he gives grace.
3. This honour that comes from God we must *seek*, must aim at it, and act for it, and take up with nothing short of it ([Romans 2:29](#)); we must account it *our reward*, as the Pharisees accounted the praise of men.
4. Those that will not come to Christ, and those that are ambitious of worldly honour, make it appear that they seek not the honour that comes from God, and it is their folly and ruin.

*Thirdly*, The influence this had upon their infidelity. *How can you believe* who are thus affected? Observe here,

1. The difficulty of believing arises from ourselves and our own corruption; we make our work hard to ourselves, and then complain it is impracticable.

2. The ambition and affectation of worldly honour are a great hindrance to faith in Christ. How can they believe who make the praise and applause of men their idol? When the profession and practice of serious godliness are unfashionable, are *every where spoken against*, — when Christ and his followers are men wondered at, and to be a Christian is to be like a *speckled bird* (and this is the common case), — how can they believe the summit of whose ambition is to *make a fair show in the flesh*?

6. The last witness here called is Moses, v. 45, etc. The Jews had a great veneration for Moses, and valued themselves upon their being the *disciples* of Moses, and pretended to adhere to Moses, in their opposition to Christ; but Christ here shows them,

(1.) That Moses was a witness against the unbelieving Jews, *and accused them to the Father: There is one that accuses you, even Moses*. This may be understood either,

[1.] As showing the difference between the law and the gospel. Moses, that is, the law, *accuses you*, for by the law is the knowledge of sin; it *condemns you*, it is to those that trust to it a ministration of death and condemnation. But it is not the design of Christ's gospel to *accuse* us: *Think not that I will accuse you*. Christ did not come into the world as a *Momus*, to find fault and pick quarrels with every body, or as a *spy* upon the actions of men, or a *promoter*, to fish for crimes; no, he came to be an advocate, not an accuser; to reconcile God and man, and not to set them more at variance. What fools were they then that adhered to Moses against Christ, and *desired to be under the law!* ~~AND~~ Galatians 4:21. Or,

[2.] As showing the manifest unreasonableness of their infidelity: “Think not that I will appeal from your bar to God's and challenge you to answer there for what you do against me, as injured innocency usually does; no, I do not need; you are already accused, and cast, in the court of heaven; Moses himself says enough to convict you of, and condemn you for, your unbelief.” Let them not mistake *concerning Christ*; though he was a prophet, he did not improve his interest in heaven against those that persecuted him, did not, as Elias, *make intercession against Israel* (~~AND~~ Romans 6:2), nor as Jeremiah desire to *see God's vengeance on them*. Nor let them mistake concerning Moses, as if he would stand by them in rejecting Christ; no, *There is one that accuses you, even Moses in whom you trust*. Note, *First*, External privileges and advantages are commonly

the vain confidence of those who reject Christ and his grace. The Jews *trusted* in Moses, and thought their having his laws and ordinances would save them. *Secondly*, Those that confide in their privileges, and do not improve them, will find not only that their confidence is disappointed, but that those very privileges will be witnesses against them.

**(2.)** That Moses was a witness for Christ and to his doctrine (v. 46, 47): *He wrote of me*. Moses did particularly prophesy of Christ, as the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Shiloh, the great Prophet; the ceremonies of the law of Moses were *figures of him that was to come*. The Jews made Moses the patron of their opposition to Christ; but Christ here shows them their error, that Moses was so far from writing against Christ that he wrote *for him*, and *of him*. But,

**[1.]** Christ here charges it on the Jews that they *did not believe Moses*. He had said (v. 45) that they *trusted* in Moses, and yet here he undertakes to make out that they did not believe Moses; they trusted to his name, but they did not receive his doctrine in its true sense and meaning; they did not rightly understand, nor give credit to, what there was in the writings of Moses concerning the Messiah.

**[2.]** He proves this charge from their disbelief of him: *Had you believed Moses, you would have believed me*. Note, *First*, The surest trial of faith is by the effects it produces. Many say that they believe whose actions give their words the lie; for had they believed the scriptures they would have done otherwise than they did. *Secondly*, Those who rightly believe one part of scripture will receive every part. The prophecies of the old Testament were so fully accomplished in Christ that those who rejected Christ did in effect deny those prophecies, and set them aside.

**[3.]** From their disbelief of Moses he infers that it was not strange that they rejected him: *If you believe not his writings, how shall you believe my words?* How can it be thought that you should? *First*, “If you do not believe sacred *writings*, those oracles which are in black and white, which is the most certain way of conveyance, *how shall you believe my words*, words being usually less regarded?” *Secondly*, “If you do not believe Moses, for whom you have such a profound veneration, how is it likely that you should believe me, whom you look upon with so much contempt?” See <sup>(102)</sup>Exodus 6:12. *Thirdly*, “If you believe not what Moses spoke and wrote of me, which is a strong and cogent testimony for me, how shall you believe me and my mission?” If we admit not the premises,

how shall we admit the conclusion? The truth of the Christian religion, it being a matter purely of divine revelation, depends upon the divine authority of the scripture; if therefore we believe not the divine inspiration of those writings, how shall we receive the doctrine of Christ?

Thus ends Christ's plea for himself, in answer to the charge exhibited against him. What effect it had we know not; it would seem to have had this, their *mouths* were *stopped* for the present, and they could not for shame but drop the prosecution, and yet their *hearts* were *hardened*.