

THE WORK & THE WITNESSES OF JESUS

(Hear Jesus, Believe & Have Life)

John 5:16-47

Key Verse: 5:24, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

Today we will think about Jesus’ life-giving work, as well as the witnesses that testify about him. May God help us all to hear Jesus’ words, believe and have life in him.

I. The Work of Jesus (16-30)

First, the work of Jesus is the work of God the Father (16-23). In the previous passage, Jesus healed an invalid man on a Sabbath day. The ruling Jewish leaders regarded this as breaking the Sabbath law. This got Jesus into trouble with them. Look at verses 16-18:

“So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

Jesus healed a cripple on the Sabbath and told him to carry his mat. According to the teachers of the Jewish law, this violated the Sabbath day of rest on two counts: Jesus’ healing and the man carrying his mat. Rather than acknowledging a wonderful and powerful miracle of Jesus, the Jewish leaders persecuted Jesus for doing work on the Sabbath.

Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working” (NASB). The Jewish leaders accused Jesus of breaking one of the Ten Commandments which was to do no work on the Sabbath day. Jesus pointed out that the Father God is always working. God is not idle. God is not a passive observer of human beings. God is always working to this very day. Likewise, Jesus was doing the good work of God day after day. To Jesus, it did not matter if it was the Sabbath or not. He was always doing the good work of God, even and especially on the Sabbath day. In another place and time Jesus taught, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Mt 12:12). By declaring God as his Father and claiming that his work was the same as the Father’s work, Jesus was claiming a close inseparable intimacy with God the Father. For this, the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him for blasphemy. Indeed, for any normal man to say such a thing would be blasphemy. But Jesus was no ordinary man. And the work of Jesus was the work of God.

Jesus was not afraid of their intimidation and threats. Rather, Jesus used this moment to explain more about the work that the Father and the Son were doing (see verses 19-23):

Jesus answered: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”

Here Jesus speaks of his inseparable relationship with the Father. Simply said, Jesus was doing the Father’s work. The Father’s work is raising and giving life to the dead. The Father’s work is also judging, which only God is qualified to do. Jesus is worthy of all honor and glory. Whoever does not honor the Son Jesus, does not honor God the Father who sent him. Jesus says more about his work of giving life and of judging.

Second, the work of Jesus is to give life to the dead through his words (24-26). See verses 24-26:

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”

In these verses, Jesus says the word “death” or “dead” twice and the word “live” or “life” five times. Jesus’ point is clear: the work of Jesus is to give life to the dead through his word. Jesus’ word is the word of life. Jesus’ word is life-giving to all who believe. We saw this when Jesus said to the royal official: “Go, your son will live” (4:50). Jesus’ word gave life to his dying son. Jesus said to the 38-year invalid man: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk” (5:8), and the man was cured at once. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: “I, the one speaking to you—I am he,” and a radical change took place in her heart. She was spiritually dead, but the word of Jesus made her alive. Jesus’ word gives new life.

Look at verse 24 again. “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” This is one of the most amazing verses in John’s gospel. Note the tenses of the verbs, which are very significant. Whoever hears Jesus’ word and believes that God the Father sent him (both present tense) has eternal life (at the present time) and will not be judged (in the future) but has crossed over from death to life (perfect tense: a completed event with ongoing results).

The same truth is declared for Christians in 1 John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

The same promise has already been given us in John 1:12, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...”

Again John 3:16 echoes the same promise: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

In Romans 10:9-10 Apostle Paul gives similar words of promise: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

So here’s an important question for all of us: Have you received Jesus and believed in his name? Do you trust him now? Do you have the assurance that you belong to him? No one can do this for anyone else. Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Have you committed your life to Jesus Christ to live in him, through him and for him?

Third, the work of Jesus is to judge justly (27-30). The work of Jesus is the work of God. The work of Jesus is to give life to the dead through his word. The work of Jesus is also to judge all people one day.

Look at verses 27-30:

“And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”

Jesus Christ will judge all people one day. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” Jesus says that those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

John is not introducing another way of salvation here, that is, by good works, which would contradict other statements. John’s gospel has already made it clear that whoever does not believe in Jesus Christ stands condemned already (3:18) and whoever rejects Jesus remains under God’s wrath (3:36). Real faith in Jesus will result in good deeds done in faith and love in Jesus.

II. The Witnesses of Jesus (31-47)

Throughout the gospel of John, the author speaks in trial terms: defense, judge, verdict, condemn, testimony, testify, truth. Here, Jesus introduces four witnesses

which testify on his behalf. Consider the four witnesses and the corresponding verses of each one:

First, the testimony of the Father (31-32, 37-38).

(31-32) "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true."

(37-38) "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent."

Jesus is probably referring to the voice of God which spoke at Jesus' baptism.

Second, the testimony of John the Baptist (33-35).

(33-35) "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light."

We have already heard the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus is: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and God's Chosen One (1:29,33,34).

Third, the testimony of Jesus' works (36).

(36) "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me."

These works included his miraculous signs of healing and giving life.

Fourth, the testimony of the Scriptures (39-40, 45-47). Jesus gives the testimony of the Scriptures in these verses to show that they missed the point in their studies of Scripture.

(39-40) "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

(45-47) "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

We need to know that all Scripture points to Jesus our Savior and Lord. If we miss Jesus in our Bible studies, then we have missed the point. These four witnesses pointed and testified to Jesus as the One to listen to and believe in for eternal life.

Finally, look at verses 41-44 to see why some people missed the point and rejected Jesus:

“I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

Here, Jesus tells us to seek glory not from people but from God. Also, we must have the love of God in our hearts. In other words, we must repent and confess our sins, receive God’s love, and love and thank Jesus. Believing in Jesus is loving him, more than the things in this world.

In this passage, we learned about the work of Jesus Christ. The work of Jesus Christ is the work of God. It is to give life to the dead through his word. It is to judge all people one day. We also learned about four of the witnesses that have testified about Jesus: God the Father, John the Baptist, the works of Jesus, and the Scriptures. The author has another witness not mentioned here: himself and the community of Christians. John 21:24 says, “This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.”

Since the time of Jesus, the gospel has continued to spread through all of these witnesses. We also, as Christians, are called not only to believe in Jesus, but to testify to him, his grace, love and mercy, as well as his righteousness, holiness and truth. Can you testify to his grace and mercy? Has he brought you from death to life?

I grew up going to church, but I did not know or trust in Christ personally. More and more, I pursued my own worldly desires based on human glory, lust and vanity. Outwardly, I was a nice guy. But inwardly, sin and rebellion and the power of death were controlling my life. I began Bible study, and began to experience joy and freedom, peace and light on the inside. My first Easter Bible conference was a turning point. I discovered the living hope in Jesus Christ in my mind and heart. It was life-changing. I heard the word of Jesus and believed. I crossed over from death to life. Still, how easy it is to fall into worldly thoughts and desires and emotions, as if being pulled toward death and darkness. I need Jesus to save me, over and over. Jesus is my light and hope. Jesus brings me from death to life. I praise and thank Jesus. I belong to him.

May we all remember the word of Jesus: “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” This is the promise of Jesus Christ, the judge of all people, whether they are dead or alive. Jesus will judge the living and the dead. Jesus’ judgment is right and just. Jesus implores us to hear his word and believe in him, that is, to trust in him, knowing that he is the Savior and the Judge. Whoever believes in Jesus has the assurance of eternal life, and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.