



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Don't Shoot the Messenger

APRIL 15, 2010

SHAUN LEWIS / PO BOX 2351, SPRINGFIELD, IL 62705 / SHAUN.LEWIS@CAPITOLCOM.ORG

John 5:18-47. John 5 records Jesus' healing of a paraplegic, a confrontation from the authorities and a defense of His actions. Jesus explains He is God's messenger. To reject what He has done is to reject the One who sent Him. Though healing was a wonderful display of God's heart for the weak and helpless, the religious leaders respond by persecuting Him from this day forward.

As our legislative session winds down, make a point to join some of your colleagues on Thursday morning for a time of study and prayer.

It was Sophocles who first said, "No one loves the messenger who brings bad news." Whether the message was loved or hated, safe passage was the expectation. From antiquities to the present, diplomatic immunity has been the standard. Even the cruel warlord Genghis Khan understood and strictly upheld it.

However, safety does not always follow. Should the message strike with such distaste, the messenger might be sent back dead as a declaration of war. As he was received or rejected, so was the nation or empire that sent him. This is the same idea that Jesus presents in John 5—He is God's diplomat. To reject Him is to reject the One who sent Him.

Hebrews 1:1-2a—Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

Six times in this chapter, the Lord says He has been sent from the Father. Jesus wanted His accusers to know He is God's representative to man. Doing only what the Father does, He is a faithful messenger. Having three witnesses, His authority to speak on behalf of the Father is credible.

It was bad enough that Jesus chose to heal on the Sabbath; it was an outrage that He claimed equality with God (cf. John 5:18). He was being accused of blasphemy. How did He respond?

EQUALITY WITH GOD

Starting with Abraham around the nineteenth century B.C., Judaism was founded as a monotheistic religion. It is unfortunate, but an anti-Semitic bias dominates the scholarly landscape today, denying even this much. Though the Jewish people wandered at various points, worship of the one true God has been Judaism's most central tenet for nearly four millennia.

Moses wrote the Pentateuch in the fifteenth century B.C., and within it is the *shema* (cf. Deut 6:4-9). Jews have recited these words day and night for more than three-thousand years as part of their daily worship.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6—Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

As opposed to the gods of other nations, "our God" or Israel's God was one. The *shema* was a powerful reminder that the true God does not coexist with other deities—He is alone.

Polytheistic religions surrounded Israel, and as the people became more like their neighbors, it eventually engulfed them. After centuries of worshipping other deities alongside God, judgment came in the form of exile. By Jesus' time, those exiles had not been forgotten, and the religious authorities were highly sensitive to any hint of polytheism or idolatry. God is one.

Thus, when Jesus asserted His deity (cf. John 4:26, 5:18, 8:58), He was often accused of insanity or demonic possession (cf. John 10:20). Why? Because no normal person would ever think He is deity; certainly no one sent from God would say such a thing. It was the hilt of blasphemy (cf. John 10:33).

Though their forefathers had tolerated and even worshipped other deities, the religious leaders of Jesus' day would not. In their estimation, Jesus was a blasphemous heretic. And as His popularity grew, so did their drive towards capitol punishment. It is sad, but if they had sincerely listened to Him and searched their Scriptures, they would have followed.

JESUS RESPONDS (JOHN 5:19-30)

Authority is in question. Who was Jesus to do the things He did? He answers: "I have divine authority, and I do exactly as the Father does" (cf. John 5:19-30). But what does it mean to have divine authority or to do what the Father does? Here Jesus elaborates...

AUTHORITY OVER LIFE

The Lord healed a paraplegic and defended Himself by claiming He has the authority to give or to take life. Life is a gift only God can give (cf. Deut 32:39), and here is Jesus in front of a hostile crowd saying He has that kind

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: THURSDAYS @ 7:30 A.M. CAPITOL CHAPEL

STAFF: MONDAYS @ 12:30 P.M. STRATTON BUILDING ROOM 205-N

Don't Shoot the Messenger

of power. He has it because the Father gave it to Him (cf. John 5:21, 25-26). Creating or restoring life is a divine ability—something no man can do, and the religious leaders understood exactly who Jesus was claiming to be.

The point is that if Jesus has the right to give and take life, then He certainly had the right to heal a paraplegic. His authority comes from God the Father; of what authority are the religious leaders by comparison? None. They are entirely out of line, and Jesus warns that by condemning Him, they are condemning the one who sent Him—God the Father.

AUTHORITY TO JUDGE

The Old Testament teaches that God is judge of all the earth (cf. Psa 50:3-4). While human authorities have a God-given right to make judgments, their jurisdiction is limited. No man has ever had the authority to judge every living thing, and yet, here is Jesus saying He has the authority to condemn or to pardon every sinner who has ever lived (cf. John 5:22, 27). If Jesus has that kind of authority, can He not judge what is lawful on the Sabbath? Standing within earshot of the Almighty Judge, those who accused Him of wrongdoing suddenly stood on very thin ice.

John tells us the religious leaders “marveled” that Jesus healed on the Sabbath (cf. John 5:20, 28). Yet, this was but a small foretaste of what was to come. The Lord would soon raise Lazarus from the dead, rise from the dead Himself, and a day is coming when He will call the living and the dead to stand before Him. Some will be raised to life; others will be raised to condemnation (cf. Dan 12:1-3; John 5:28-30; 1 Thes 4:13-18). Consider that if men marveled during Jesus’ first coming, what will they do when He comes again?

CALL IN THE WITNESSES (JOHN 5:31-40)

Jesus did not explicitly say He is God here, but anyone with the kind of power and authority He claimed to have must be God. Every person who heard Him that day understood at least this much, but why should they believe Him? Why not dismiss Him as a cult leader or a lunatic? Because of His witnesses: John the Baptist, His own miracles and the Old Testament Scriptures. Each of these testify that what He said in verses 19-30 is true.

First, Jesus calls upon the witness of John the Baptist. John was a faithful to the truth and thousands throughout the region believed his message. For a time, the authorities accepted him—even King Herod wanted to hear John

preach (cf. Mark 6:20). It had been 400 years since a prophet arose, but as John’s message became harder to accept he was eventually rejected.

Greater than John’s words were Jesus’ miracles (cf. John 5:36). He had changed water into wine, healed a Galilean boy from 20 miles off and commanded a paraplegic to walk. He would soon restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and life to the dead. What does all this say about Him?

Still greater than Jesus’ miracles were the Old Testament Scriptures (cf. John 5:37-40). If John’s words meant nothing and Jesus’ miracles were demonic, what about the Word of God? The Pharisees and scribes devoted their lives to reading and interpreting it, and yet Jesus says their vast learning was all for nothing. Why? Because they never came to know Him. Education is only valuable to the degree it is rightly applied.

TWO KINDS OF GLORY (JOHN 5:41-47)

Jesus was a faithful messenger sent to earth from the Father with credible witnesses. Yet, despite anything He ever said or did, the religious authorities remained defiant and refused His offer of salvation (cf. John 5:43). They have now been warned that to reject Jesus is to reject God Himself thereby leaving no hope of salvation (cf. John 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5).

John 5:44—How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

Why were the religious authorities so indignant? What did they want so much that made believing in Jesus impossible? It was not an intellectual barrier that stood in the way, but a desire for personal glory. They studied, kept the Law, taught the people, fasted, prayed and tithed so they could be exalted and praised by men (cf. Matt 6:1, 5, 16). They wanted prominence and would give anything—including salvation—just to be somebody.

Jesus, however, refused to exalt Himself coming to earth not even in His own name (cf. John 5:43). He humbled Himself and took on human flesh in order to become the sinner’s sacrifice. The self exaltation of the religious leaders despised the self denial and humility seen in Jesus. As a result, they would not accept that God had sent a self-denying Messiah to them. Love of personal glory masks itself in a host of ways, but in the end it is a sure path to eternal destruction.