

Dr. David Turner, Gospel of John, Session 7, John 5

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This is Dr. David Turner and his teaching on the gospel of John. This is session 7, Controversy, Jesus' Second Trip to Jerusalem. John 5:1-47.

Hello, I'm David Turner. We're doing another John video here. This one is on John chapter five, and John five I think looms large in the gospel of John because it sets up issues that keep coming back from here on out in Jerusalem for Jesus.

So, this is the chapter where we're going to see Jesus healing the lame man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. The lame man ends up sort of ratting Jesus out to the Pharisees as the narrative has it and becomes something of an unsympathetic character. We'll be noticing as we study later in John chapter nine how the person Jesus heals there is a more sympathetic character and sides with Jesus against the Pharisees in a sense, whereas this character here in John chapter five becomes a person who is more aligned with the Pharisees because he tends to bring them down on Jesus.

And when Jesus speaks with him, Jesus tells him to sin no more, contrasting his situation with that of the blind man in chapter nine who is said to have been ill for no reason other than to bring glory to God, not having anything to do with sin. So just a little teaser to have in the back of your mind comparing what happens here to what happens in John chapter nine, but let's get into it and see how Jesus' testimony to himself is augmented by that of Moses and of John the Baptist and of his works and of the Father himself through the works and how the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem that is invoked here brings up themes that will continue all the way through the end of the book. So we look first as has been our habit to the narrative and the way it flows together in chapter five.

And so, Jesus has begun his second trip to Jerusalem. We last saw him up north in Cana of Galilee. So, he is healing the paralyzed man at the pool.

We alluded to this incident a bit in our second video on textual criticism because of the textual problem here. So perhaps you remember some of the details from that. After healing the man at the pool, through a sort of convoluted set of circumstances, there develops a controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees.

And the issues that they have are first that Jesus has healed this man on the Sabbath. And I think in their view he has led this man to break the Sabbath because he asked him, told him to get up and to take his bed, if you will, with him. His bed certainly

was not something that we would think was made by Sirta, but was just like a mattress of straw or just a rolled-up sleeping bag sort of arrangement.

Certainly not anything major like a bed. So, Jesus was telling him to just to leave, to take his belongings with him, his bedroll, if you will, his knapsack, whatever. And this was used by the Pharisees as Jesus telling him to work on the Sabbath.

In response to that, Jesus not only didn't apologize for quote-unquote working on the Sabbath, he said that his father worked on the Sabbath as well. So this of course was viewed as, you know, exacerbating problem by the religious leaders. And so Jesus was viewed as making himself equal with God, which hopefully by now the reader's perspective, the literary scholars talk about the omniscient narrator.

From the perspective of the narrator, Jesus indeed was equal to God. This was not something that the religious leaders were going to accept, however. So, things go from bad to worse, not only healing on the Sabbath but making himself equal with God.

So, you have up then through verse 18, the controversial incident that leads to what I guess you could sort of call a discourse in the rest of the chapter, a teaching of Jesus that emanates from the controversy where he defends his ministry and speaks of himself as speaking only for the Father, going no further than what the Father has given him to do and to say. So if he's saying, if you have a problem with me, you have a problem with my father, and then this begins a section of the chapter where he speaks about his bearing witness for himself. And they will no doubt say you can't bear witness for yourself, but there are other witnesses.

So, we basically have five witnesses to Jesus in this section, not only Jesus himself, but he alludes back again to the witness of John the Baptist, the works, that would be the signs that he's doing, the works. They're the Father's works through him. So, the Father is testifying through the works to Jesus.

And ultimately, I think the most important witness to Jesus here is Moses because this is essentially what the problem is about. Jesus is being accused of breaking the Sabbath, and disobeying Moses. And if Jesus has done that, then all bets are off, the discussion is over.

Jesus does not accept that characterization of his ministry. He says you are the people who don't understand Moses. What I'm doing is fully in keeping with Moses.

And if you had believed Moses, properly understood him, you would have already believed in me as well. So as the old saying goes, it really hits the fan here in chapter five. And these issues that are being discussed here are certainly seminal issues in the controversy between Jesus and the disciples in the book.

So, we turn from this just overview of the flow of thought here to some geographical background and what's going on. Of course, this is going on in Jerusalem, and it is going on likely in the Pool of Bethesda, which as near as we can tell is north of the Temple Mount. And this Pool of Bethesda was evidently quite a large installation, five porches, evidently the four sides and one going across the middle.

The ruins of the pool have been studied by archaeologists and the Jerusalem model that you'll be able to see if you go to Jerusalem as a tourist portrays it in this fashion. Sitting there north of the Temple Mount, this view is somewhat to the south, perhaps a bit to the southwest, with the Fortress Antonia sitting on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount itself. This will be the Holy of Holies in the Temple Mount, so you can see the perspective.

Another angle on it with the various paths leading to and from the pool. The pool was perhaps used to wash animals for the sacrificial feasts but was also used evidently as a mikveh, a Jewish pool of ritual purity. So, we get the impression that it's quite an amazing installation.

So, we're disappointed if we visit Jerusalem today and are treated to this site near the Church of St. Anne, where we're without having a real grasp of archaeological strata and the various installations built over this site, Byzantine churches and this and that, we have no real capacity to understand what the original looked like. Those who have excavated it and understand what they're doing have given insight to the people who do the model, and so the model is a good educated guess at what it would have looked like. Unfortunately, when we go there, we're not able to really get a whole lot out of that site.

But if you go, don't forget to go into the Church of St. Anne and sing, because the acoustics there are amazing. So, we now turn to some selected issues in John 5 that develop when we look at the passage in its context and survey the flow of thought there. We're told as John chapter 5, verse 1 begins, that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.

The festival is not really named, and the debate that comes up is not so much about a festival, but it has to do with the Sabbath. Those who have studied John carefully realize that there's a great deal about the Jewish festivals going on in John. In fact, there are commonly used the term festival cycle in John chapters 5 through 10.

So, this sort of gets that going. So let's survey for a moment the way these festivals work in the Gospel of John. Here in chapter 5, the debate is over the Sabbath.

We have, of course, extensive teaching in Exodus chapter 20, Deuteronomy, and throughout the Old Testament about the Sabbath. This was one of the issues, one of

the areas that the Mishnah, the earliest codification of rabbinic teachings, a great deal to say about the Sabbath, how to keep the Sabbath, how not to keep the Sabbath, what constitutes a valid Sabbath, what constitutes a violation of the Sabbath. Here is one of the key areas that Jesus disagreed with the Pharisees about.

We read more about this in John later on in chapter 7 and in chapter 9. We highlight John 9 here, along with John 5, because the stories are interestingly similar, yet different, and are fun to compare and contrast. In our next chapter, chapter 6, there's a great deal going on about the Passover, and Passover feast, and it is the reason why Jesus went to Jerusalem. We find in John references to Passover on more than one occasion.

We find three different Passover visits of Jesus to Jerusalem in John. This is why most people are of the opinion that the Gospels portray Jesus as having a three-year ministry, data that we glean from the Gospel of John. It's sort of interesting that John, the gospel whose historicity is most in doubt by scholars, is the book that seems to give scholars who accept what it's saying, an understanding that Jesus' ministry lasted around three years.

We read about Passover and how it should be done in the book of Exodus originally, as well as in Deuteronomy chapter 16, and many other texts in the New Testament. Booths or tabernacles is the issue in John chapter 7 and really goes all the way through John 8. We're still, I think, dealing with Jesus' disagreements with the Jewish folks based on his original visit, which begins in chapter 7, all the way into chapter 9. Even the first part of chapter 10, the Good Shepherd discourse, I think is really flowing out of what was going on when he first came to visit in John chapter 7 and verse 1. So, the Feast of Tabernacles, as it's sometimes called, perhaps a better word for it is booths because, in our Western parlance, a tabernacle is a large building made of stone with marble decorations. Perhaps a tabernacle is a very austere, huge building, whereas, in Scripture, tabernacles would be the portable presence of God before the temple was built.

The feast of tabernacles or booths, the Hebrew word *sukkot*, is essentially a festival celebrating the harvest and reminding people of the wilderness wanderings, I guess, all at the same time, a fall festival where the Jewish people lived outside. We'll have more to say about the background of the *sukkot*, especially when we get to John chapter 7. In the middle of chapter 10, there is a reference to the Feast of Dedication, dedication being the feast where the temple was rededicated after it was desecrated by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes in the mid-160s BCE. This is not a feast, obviously, that is spoken of directly in the Old Testament, so we have to look at 1 Maccabees chapter 1 to find information about it.

So, this was a time of celebration and the dedication of the temple, and it's alluded to briefly, not a whole lot going on about it there in John chapter 10. Finally, there is

the feast of Pentecost. This one is not mentioned all in John 10, obviously, but has importance for Luke-Acts and the way Luke is structuring the book of Acts in particular.

We could just basically tease you, I guess, with the idea that Pentecost is not mentioned in John, and this gives us some issues with the way in which Jesus dispenses the Spirit to the disciples in chapter 20 by breathing upon them, laying his hands upon them, and saying, receive the Spirit. We'll have more to say about that later when we get to chapter 20, about what Jesus was doing there, whether we have sort of a historical contradiction between John 20 and Acts chapter 2 and the rest of the synoptic tradition. More on that later.

All this to say that it serves us well to have a deeper understanding of the Old Testament feasts in order to understand what John is telling us here as we begin looking at John chapter 5, really all the way through John chapter 10, and ultimately when Jesus comes to Jerusalem at Passover time in chapter 12. In John chapter 5, one thing that stands out, I think, more than anything else as far as the relationship with the Father and how he identifies his ministry is how he portrays himself in his relationship with the Father. So, when Jesus uses the very expression, my Father, his audience sort of viewed that as an affront to them.

Evidently, they thought he had no right to speak to the Father as having any special bearing upon him, and they thought their relationship with God was just as good as his. So, when we then look at how this phraseology is used from chapter 5, verse 17, we get an understanding, I think, of what John was talking about in the prologue when he spoke of how Jesus was the Father's agent. The word became flesh, dwelt among us, we beheld his glory, and that magnificent statement in chapter 1, verse 18 about how Jesus is the one who is at the side of the Father or in the Father's embrace, in the bosom of the Father, if you will.

So, we start looking then particularly here in John chapter 5, verse 17, because Jesus is being encountered by the Jewish leaders, according to verse 16, and they are in some sense, in other words, persecuting him because he did what he did on the Sabbath. So, in his defense, Jesus says to them, my Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working. So, this was quite an astounding statement for Jesus to make, not only to affirm that the Father is at work but to say, I am working with him.

So, Jesus not only in their mind takes too much on himself by affirming that he and the Father have this cooperative relationship, but the way they spoke of working on Sabbath was a problem as well. So, verse 18 says, for this reason, they tried all the more to kill him, all the more to kill him, not only because he was breaking the Sabbath, but because he was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. So those of us who have the benefit of reading this passage in light of the

prologue, and in light of other things that have happened between the prologue and this chapter, are fully aware of Jesus' special relationship to God.

In the beginning, was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was in fact God himself. So, we have then no surprise in our minds, perhaps, that Jesus would say such an astounding thing as this. However, his audience has many difficulties with it.

So, he goes on to express to them how he and his Father are working here and gets into a theme that you can find developed later on here in John chapter 6, John 8, and John 10, and all the way into John 15, and finally and even into a John chapter 20. So the bottom line here is, as the Father's agent, perhaps the rabbinic teaching about a person's shaliach, a person's agent as the same as the person who sins, is relevant to this as well. So Jesus essentially affirms that he is not out there sort of making it up as he goes along.

He is simply doing what the Father has led him to do, essentially by the Holy Spirit. Truly I say to you, verse 19, the Son can do nothing by himself. He can do only what he sees his Father doing because what the Father does, the Son also does.

So in the midst of this teaching, he even speaks of raising the dead, and we get into some eschatology that's quite interesting here as well. Talk about that in a moment. So Jesus says that he needs to be honored, verse 23, in the same way that the Father is honored.

The Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son so that everybody might honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. So, this elevates Jesus' status in the eyes of those who are hearing him talk, and these are fighting words to those who don't really believe in Jesus yet or are not drawn to faith in him.

And this is going to be picked up in verse 31 and following about the testimonies to Jesus, and how these correlate to show that he is indeed who the Father has claimed him to be. So, Jesus does nothing on his own initiative. Perhaps we should pause a moment here and just apply this information to the way systematic theologians speak of Jesus and the doctrine of the kenosis and all these types of things.

The doctrine of the two natures of Christ. I hear some theologians making some statements that to me seem very suspicious. When they speak about Jesus acting in his human nature to do this, or acting in his divine nature to do that.

And we sometimes hear people use language like, when Jesus does a miracle he's acting in his divine nature, and when he is doing other things he's acting in his human nature. I have to say this seems very odd to me, because it's apparent from John

chapter 5 and other texts in Scripture for that matter, that Jesus attributes everything he does to the Father. So, I think we have to be honest here and take Jesus at his word that as a human being, Jesus is not operating naturally as he goes on one side of the street acting divinely and then acting humanly on the other side of the street.

Jesus says there's nothing that he does that's not the work of the Father in him. Apparently, Jesus is able to do the works of the Father because the Father gives the Spirit without measure to the Son. John the Baptist of course pointed out to us in chapter 1 that the Lamb of God is the one upon whom the Spirit descends and remains.

So, it's apparent to me then that when we read about Jesus attributing all of his works to the Father, at no time in his human ministry, in his incarnate state, was he ever acting on his own volition directly or on his own divine nature. Everything that he does is what the Father is leading him to do. So, to me this solves a lot of problems and makes Jesus more of a human being.

Of course, that is who he is. So if Jesus of course only does what the Father gives him to do as someone who was in the beginning with God, what does that say to those who follow Jesus? Are we to follow him in this respect as well, trying to mold our lives around the Father's will and trying to do only what the Father is giving us to do? I think there's something here to ponder as we consider these statements that in this context caused big problems for Jesus with the religious leaders. We've noticed before that this information gives them about his Father's work and his own work speaks about judgment.

It's a very interesting move on Jesus' part here in chapter 5 where he says to them in chapter 5 verse 24, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but is crossed over from death to life. Truly I say to you, and here's the key phrase, a time is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. So, the time is coming and now is.

The dead are hearing the voice of the Son of God. As the Father has life in himself, so he's also granted the Son to have life in himself. He has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Don't be amazed at this. He says in verse 28, a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done good will rise to life.

Those who have done what is evil to rise to be condemned. So, notice the second time when Jesus said a time is coming, he didn't say and now is. So, we compare verse 28 back to verse 25 and notice this expression, a time is coming and now is.

So, Jesus here is not denying that there will be a future judgment. He is affirming that there will be a future judgment, but he's saying that judgment has already begun. God has in a sense moved eschatology into the present and as Jesus preaches about his identity and teaches about what God is doing through him, people's responses to him are in a sense harbingers of the final judgment.

And when Jesus brings people to life when they have faith in him and they come out of death into life in that sense, a sense that we've already seen discussed in John chapter 3, a couple of places there, that when people are coming to faith in Jesus, they're coming out of death and into life. They're leaving a life that is a living death of separation from God into a life of fellowship with the living God. And Jesus is speaking of this in eschatological terms here in verses 24 and 25, saying this is already happening.

So, judgment isn't something that's way off in the distant future. What is happening in the future is not being denied here, but what is happening in the future is used as the model for people coming to faith in Jesus or indeed of rejecting Jesus. Because if you reject Jesus, you are condemned already in the words of John chapter 3. And what we find here in John chapter 5 is reaffirming this.

So, theologians, when they try to get a handle on this and describe what's going on, have some language for it. We often hear the biblical texts which speak of future judgment described as future eschatology. Some religious groups and denominations are more oriented toward eschatology as a strictly future thing.

Others think of this in terms of realized eschatology, which is say they're much more comfortable with saying the kingdom has already come in Jesus and God has already begun to manifest his future power. So perhaps the best way to describe this is a term that you hear a lot out there called inaugurated eschatology. This is to say that what God will do in the future, he is already showing us in bits and pieces in the present.

And what God has already done in calling us out of death into life, calling us into a life of fellowship with him, is a taste of what God will do in the future completely with the world. So, a very fine book written some time ago by G.E. Ladd called *The Presence of the Future*, I think explains this very well, and the title sort of nails what's going on here in John. Jesus is saying that the future is already present in the sense that people's eternal destinies are being set by their response to him.

You don't have to wait till the final judgment to find out where you're heading. Jesus says that's already being determined now by your response to me. Jesus had already said words to this effect in our previous chapter when he spoke to the woman in Samaria and said the time is coming and now is when the Father seeks people to worship him in spirit and in truth.

Later on, as well in chapter 16, Jesus uses language that an hour is coming and does not say now is when he's speaking about the future. So, this hour coming and now is something that we need to think about and we're planning to do a lecture near at the end of all this on John's eschatology. That may be number 21 or 22 as we set it up.

We'll see how that turns out. We'll come back to this topic and try to develop it more fully then. Another thing that's quite striking here in John chapter 5 is how Jesus is forced to speak about how many witnesses there are to him.

This information begins to be in verse 31 and follows which is sort of his extended conclusion to the debate he's having with religious leaders earlier in the chapter. When he says if I testify to my about myself my testimony is not true, that's pretty much an admission of knowing what they were thinking as he was testifying about himself. They're probably thinking to themselves you can't bear witness to yourself, you need a better testimony than that.

So, Jesus is pretty much cutting their legs off from under them by acknowledging by what they were thinking about him. So, he says there is another who testifies in my favor and I know that his testimony about me is true and he's referring to John the Baptist evidently there verses 32 through 35. Then he says I have testimony even weightier than John's.

The works that my father has given me to finish, these works that I am doing testify concerning me, testify the father is with me. So, he's referring to what has just happened, he's just healed this paralyzed man at the pool and this is indeed a work of God that Jesus has been doing. He says everything I do is a work of the father through me and these works testify to me, verse 36.

So, a third witness to Jesus would be the Father's witness. And finally, he says the father himself has himself testified concerning me. You haven't seen his voice or heard his voice or seen his form nor does his word dwell in you for you don't believe the one that he sent.

So, Jesus is saying the father testifies through me but you're not paying attention to his witness. Finally, the witness of Moses through the scriptures becomes the emphasis in verse 39 and following. You study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life.

These are the very scriptures that testify about me. You may find some Bible translations that take verse 39 as an imperative. This is an aspect of Greek grammar that's ambiguous and difficult to translate and the context has to determine it.

But those of us who've looked at some Greek now and then are realizing that the second person plural present imperative is the same exact form as the second person plural present indicative. So there are translations I think the King James does it this way taking verse 39 as a command. Search the scriptures, study the scriptures diligently because you think in them you have eternal life.

It makes better sense to me to acknowledge that Jesus didn't need to tell the Pharisees to study the scriptures. They certainly were scripture students. Jesus is acknowledging that here and turning that against them sadly by saying you are scripture students.

You study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life and Jesus would agree with that point in the scriptures they did have eternal life. However, they misread the scriptures. He says these are the very scriptures which testify about me.

You refuse to come to me that you might have life. Verse 41 then develops this a bit further in terms of their desire to have human glory rather than God's glory. And in the end, verses 45 through 47 he comes back to this idea of Moses and says you don't even need me to accuse you before the Father.

Your accuser is Moses on whom your hopes are set. How ironic it is that they studied Moses because they thought they were studying about life eternal and the more they studied Moses the more they evidently were missing Jesus. If you believe Moses you would believe me for he wrote about me.

Since you don't believe what he wrote how are you going to believe what I say? So, here's a fundamental problem between Jesus and religious leaders. Their understanding of the Old Testament particularly of the Torah is not one that's susceptible to the teaching of Jesus.

His understanding of the Torah is diametrically opposed to theirs in many ways, particularly in reference to the issue that brought up the problem here that of the Sabbath. So, we've turned to that as the final thing we want to talk about at this point the way in which Jesus spoke of the Sabbath. So, what would be the upshot of chapter 5 is how would we basically think of this chapter in terms of its impact upon us as individuals who want to be followers of Jesus.

Jesus is described in the Gospel Mark chapter 12 and Luke chapter 6 as the Lord of the Sabbath. That is to say, he is greater than the Sabbath because he's the one who instituted the Sabbath. This is an indirect implicit claim for deity apparently.

Who else but God would have the right to do what they wanted to do on the Sabbath? Jesus also taught according to Mark chapter 2 verse 27 that humans were not made to serve the Sabbath but the Sabbath was created in order to help humanity. This I think tells us something about the entire Torah of Moses that the Moses law God's covenant with his people is there to aid them to make their lives better by making their lives more conformity to God's will and God's character.

So those who rightly understood Moses and the law and theologians today who rightly understand it would not be saying negative things about the law in and of itself. The law is a good and just and holy thing Paul tells us in Romans chapter 7. That would all even go with what Jesus is saying about the Sabbath not being something that was created to crimp the style of humans but something that was given to them to help them. So as Jesus is speaking here he's apparently thinking from the standpoint that the religious traditions of the Pharisees are mistaken and they are making the Sabbath more of a burden than a blessing for human beings.

Jesus as the incarnation of the Father does his works and utters his words. He does things that only God can do. Only God has a right to work on the Sabbath and God does that in various ways and so Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

He's the one who can interpret it as he sees fit against the way the Pharisees do. So as we conclude we begin to think I guess as the might of this text that perhaps the central part of chapter 5 is uttered in these words. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father.

We can't really honor God appropriately unless we honor the Lord Jesus Christ. Interesting that in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 we have a picture of the angelic beings worshiping the one who sits on the throne in chapter 4. In chapter 5 of Revelation, the Son of Man is introduced. Jesus is introduced there as the Lamb and by the time the praises are finished in Revelation chapter 5 same praises that have been given to the one on the throne in chapter 4 are now being applied to the one to the Lamb as well.

So, all creation is portrayed in chapter 5 as praising the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb in the very same words which seems to be a more powerful proof of the deity of Jesus and the fact that he is the Father's authoritative agent illustrating exactly what Jesus was teaching here, perhaps showing us some affinity between the theology of the gospel of John and the theology of the apocalypse.

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