

“Jesus’ Defense”
February 22, 2026
John 5:19-47

I. Introduction

Last week we looked at Jesus’ healing of the paralytic man at the pool of Bethesda. Initially, Jesus caused problems with the Jewish leadership by healing on the Sabbath and then by telling the man to **“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”** But the problems escalated when Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees and He said, **“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”** It may not be clear to us, but to the Pharisees it was crystal clear that Jesus was calling Himself God. **John 5:18** says, **“For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.”**

To the Jews, for a mere man to claim to be God was an act of blasphemy; punishable by death. So, if they had misunderstood Him, Jesus surely would have immediately denied making such a claim. But instead, He became even more forceful and emphatic, introducing His next statement with the solemn phrase, **“I tell you the truth”** or **“Truly, truly.”** In response to their accusations, as if on trial, in **John 5:19-47** Jesus made 3 significant claims to prove that what He had said to them was true; **“making himself equal to God.”** Because of the length of Jesus’ defense, we will look at His claims individually. So, **turn to John 5:19-23.**

II. Jesus’ Three Claims

A. In these verses, Jesus made His first claim: **He claimed to be equal with God.** In particular, Jesus gave 4 areas where He and God were equal or identical.

1. First, Jesus claimed to be equal to God in His works. Jesus did nothing **“by Himself”** but as He said in **verse 19** **“only what he sees his Father doing;”** i.e., **“Whatever the Father does, the Son does also.”** Since God the Father heals on the Sabbath, it was right that Jesus heal on the Sabbath. Obviously, only someone who is equal to the Father could do everything He does. Jesus was claiming to be equal with God. Later in **John 10:30** Jesus was more direct as He said, **“I and the Father are one.”**

Back in [John 5:20](#), Jesus described the oneness of the Father and the Son as a union of love. Here the word “love” is the Greek word *phileo*—the love of deep feelings; the warm affection that a father feels for his son. This love is an all-knowing love, a complete understanding love that leaves no room for ignorance. With such love, it is impossible for Jesus to have been unaware of God’s will—whether about the Sabbath or about anything else.

2. Then, when Jesus said in [verse 21](#), “**So the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it,**” **He claimed to be equal to God in His power.** The Bible teaches that only God has the power to give life to the dead. In [Deuteronomy 32:39](#) God said, “**See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.**” But now Jesus said that just like the Father He is able to give life. As well as raising several from death to life (like Lazarus); Jesus was also referring to His gift of spiritual life for those who are spiritually dead.

3. **Jesus then claimed to be equal to God in judgment** when He said, “**The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.**” In [Genesis 18:25](#) Jehovah God is called “**the Judge of all the earth.**” Now Jesus applied that title to Himself. He claimed to be equal to God in judgment. [Turn to Acts 17:29-31.](#) “**The man God appointed**” is Jesus Christ. Jesus is equal to God in judgment.

4. **Finally, Jesus claimed to be equal to God in honor:** “**All may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.**” It is only right that those equal in works, power, and judgment should be given equal honor. Jesus said that the Father’s honor is enhanced when He is honored; “**He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.**” Those who say that they worship God but deny Jesus Christ, honor neither the Father nor the Son. Apart from Jesus Christ, we cannot know the Father, worship the Father, or serve the Father. Jesus claimed to be equal with God, since He does the work of God, has the power of God, judges as God, and has the honor of God.

B. Then Jesus claimed to have authority to raise the dead. [Turn back to John 5:24-29.](#) Jesus introduced this section by again saying, “**I tell you the truth.**” In this section, Jesus spoke about 4 different resurrections.

1. The first resurrection is the resurrection of lost sinners into eternal life. “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.” 1 Timothy 1:15 says, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Turn to Colossians 2:13-14.

The reason Jesus came to the earth was to offer eternal life to the spiritually dead. Romans 8:1 adds, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

2. The second resurrection is the resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself. “The Son has life in himself.” Turn to John 10:17-18. Because He has life in Himself--John 1:4 says, “In him was life,”—the grave could not hold Him. He can share that life with all who trust Him. Although Jesus “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant” (Phil. 2:7), God the Father granted Jesus the authority to give life (both physical and spiritual) even during His self-limited earthly ministry.

3. The third resurrection is the future resurrection when believers are raised from the dead— Jesus said, “Those who have done good will rise to live.” 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 says, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever.” When Jesus talked of “those who have done good,” He wasn’t teaching salvation by works. Jesus clearly taught that as John 3:36 says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” Good works are simply evidence of salvation—in Luke 6:43-45 Jesus called them “fruit.” Ephesians 2:10 says that “we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” The third resurrection is the resurrection of believers.

4. The fourth resurrection is the resurrection of the condemned—the unsaved. “Those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” Isaiah 64:6 says, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” This 4th resurrection involves those who have rejected Jesus and His gift of eternal life. It takes place just before Jesus ushers in the new heaven and the new earth. Turn to

Revelation 20:11-15. That Jesus has the authority to raise the dead is another proof that He is equal with the Father, and therefore He is God.

C. Finally, Jesus claimed that there are valid witnesses to support His claim to be deity. **Turn to John 5:30-47.** **Deuteronomy 19:15** says, “**One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.**” So, Jesus said, “**If I testify about myself, my testimony would not be valid.**” Satisfying the letter of the Law, Jesus called three other witnesses to support His claim.

1. Jesus’ 1st witness was John the Baptist. The purpose of John the Baptist’s ministry was to prepare the nation for the Messiah. John knew who Jesus was—in **John 1:23** he told the people that Jesus was “**the Lord,**” in **John 1:29** he called Jesus “**the Lamb of God**”, and in **John 1:34** he said, “**I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.**” John’s testimony supported Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah.

Jesus went on to say that John was “**a lamp that burned and gave light.**” John’s zeal made him a shining lamp in a dark world. Jesus is Light itself; John was a lamp who lit the way to Jesus. Like moths attracted to a lamp, “**for a time**” people flocked to hear John—the first real prophet after nearly 400 years. But the enthusiasm soon wore off and when John was arrested and executed, no one raised a finger.

2. Jesus’ 2nd witness was the witness of His miracles. More convincing than the greatest prophet’s testimony to Jesus Christ were the very works that Jesus did. Jesus made it clear that His works were the works of the Father. In **John 4:34** Jesus said, “**My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.**” Because Jesus’ works were in harmony with the will of His Father, they testified “**that the Father has sent me.**” Even Nicodemus had to admit in **John 3:2** that Jesus’ miracles identified Him as one “**who has come from God.**”

Other men had done miracles—men like Moses, Elijah, and Paul and these miracles proved that they were also sent by God. But none of these men ever claimed to be the very Son of God. The fact that Jesus made this claim, backed up by His mighty works and perfect life, was evidence that His claim was true.

Jesus indicated that the Father gave Him a specific ministry to finish while He was here on earth. In [John 17:4](#) He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” Jesus wasn’t only on a divine timetable; He followed a divine agenda. He had specific works--miracles to accomplish in the Father’s will.

3. Jesus’ 3rd witness was the Word of God. The Jewish people revered the written Word of God—especially the Books of Moses. The Jewish scribes sought to know the Word of God intimately—they studied every line, every word, they even counted the very letters of the text, but they missed the spiritual truths that the text contained. They didn’t know the God of the Word.

They received and preserved the Word of God, but they were blind to their own Messiah. In their blind pride, they didn’t see Christ in their own Scriptures. Paul wrote in [2 Cor. 3:14-18](#) that there was a veil over their minds. Instead of trusting in the Savior, they continued to rest in their self-righteousness by works. They ignored verses like [Isaiah 53:5-6](#) which say, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all.” In their own stubborn unbelief Jesus said, “You refuse to come to me to have life.”

These leaders also had a lack of love in their hearts; Jesus said, “I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.” They neither experienced God’s love for themselves nor did they have a love for God or anyone else. They claimed to love God, but their attitude toward Jesus proved that their love was a fake. Their attitude toward God’s Word hindered their faith, but also so did their attitude toward themselves and one another. The Pharisees enjoyed being honored by men and they did not seek for the honor that comes from God alone. They didn’t honor the Son because He did not honor them.

Jesus closed His defense by warning the Jewish leaders that Moses, whom they honored, would be their judge, not their savior. The very Scriptures that they used to defend their religion would one day bear witness against them. The evidence was clear from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Messiah. As

Galatians 3:24 says, “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

The Jews knew what Moses wrote, but they didn’t really believe what he wrote. The witness of John the Baptist, the witness of Jesus’ miracles, and the witness of the Word of God—including the writings of Moses—all combine to declare that Jesus Christ is one with the Father and the very Son of God.

III. Conclusion

In several ways, Jesus proved that He was and is God, but the Pharisees refused to believe. But before we judge them, perhaps we ought to examine our lives and our church. Are we allowing religious tradition or cultural changes or teachings from some particular person to blind us to the truth of God’s Word? Are we so involved in studying the Bible that we fail to see Jesus Christ in the Word or how these words apply to our lives today? Does your knowledge of the Bible give you a “*big head*” or a “*burning, loving heart*” to tell others? It is one thing to have the Word in our hands or our heads, but quite another thing to have it in our hearts.

During Lent, especially the last week called Passion Week, in our humanness we tend to focus on the humanity of Jesus as we try to identify with what He went through for us—and there’s nothing wrong with that. But we must not forget, as these verses remind us, that as God Incarnate, Jesus was also God.

Colossians 1:15-17 says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” The awesome Creator God “made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death even death on a cross!” (**Phil. 2:7-8**). What is your response to the awesome love of God for you? The first part of **Romans 12:1** gives the appropriate answer: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” **1 Cor. 6:19b-20** adds, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.” A question we need to ask often: “Is Jesus my Lord as well as my Savior?”