

Who Is Jesus?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 May 2020

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] Well, greetings to all of you who are watching or listening today. We're still in the midst of this strange time with COVID-19. It hasn't touched upon this particular community of Davidson yet, but all of us continue to be affected in some way.

But I hope and I pray that you have been finding peace and joy in the Lord in the midst of all this. It's in times like these and through our troubles that I'm reminded of those words of David, which he said about God, He is my rock.

He is my refuge. I will not be shaken. And if we have the Lord, we can say the same as long as we are putting our trust in Him.

Well, today as we look into God's Word, my hope and prayer is that we would see something of Jesus that would lift our eyes off of maybe some of our circumstances and the things going on around us and remind us of what is most important.

So, it's with that intention that we open the Word today. If you have your Bible with you, please open it up to John chapter 5.

[1 : 28] John chapter 5. Last Sunday, we saw Jesus at the pool in Jerusalem. And we watched as he healed a man who was lying there, who had been unable to walk for the past 38 years.

He said to him, Pick up your mat and walk. And an amazing miracle happened.

He did. He got up. He picked up his mat and he walked. But unfortunately, he was pulled over by the religious leaders. They questioned him as to why he was carrying his mat on the Sabbath.

That was considered work. He kind of deflected the blame a little bit to Jesus. The man who healed me.

He told me to pick up my mat, to be carrying it on the Sabbath. He didn't know who Jesus was at the time. But later, after he bumped into Jesus at the temple, he reported back to the religious leaders that it was Jesus who had told him to pick up his mat and Jesus who had healed him.

[2 : 42] So, John has already set the scene in what we looked at last week for a bit of a clash between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. So, let's pick up the story in verse 16 of John chapter 5.

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.

So, we see the tension beginning to rise between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. And all of this is sparked by this healing of the man at the pool and telling him to carry his mat on the Sabbath.

John says, Because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. Notice that he says, These things. Plural.

[4 : 03] It wasn't just this one minor infraction. There was a number of things that Jesus was doing on the Sabbath. And to really get the full picture, we kind of have to look at some of the other gospel records.

They tell us of some of the times where Jesus has already had run-ins with the Pharisees, the religious leaders, back in Galilee, and over this particular issue of keeping the Sabbath.

You may remember some of those encounters. You may remember the time when Jesus and his disciples were in a sense pulled over by the religious leaders because they were, Jesus' disciples were picking grain out of the field while they were walking along on the Sabbath.

They considered that work. So, there was that run-in. Then there was the time when Jesus was at the synagogue with, and there was a man who had a shriveled hand there.

And the Pharisees, the religious leaders, they were just hovering like vultures, waiting to see, is Jesus going to do the work of healing this man on the Sabbath day?

[5 : 15] If he does, we'll nail him to the wall for it. There was that encounter. And already back then, the gospel writers, the other ones, tell us that the Pharisees were plotting to kill Jesus.

And so, probably these things are in the backdrop as we come to our passage today. And then, this healing of the man at the pool in Jerusalem just kind of adds to the kindling and sparks the flame, which causes the fire that this head-on collision is going to bring about.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, these kinds of things, and repeatedly, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.

Now, that word persecute, that's a strong word. They began to go after him with intensity, with intentionality.

And what was their goal? I mean, certainly they harassed him. They said all kinds of things to him. They tried to humiliate him in public, in front of other people.

[6 : 33] But their goal was to kill Jesus. And John tells us this in verse 18. After he said what's in verse 17, for this reason, for saying this, they tried all the more to kill him.

So, they were already trying to kill Jesus before he said what's in verse 17. And now that he said that, they're trying all the more. So, persecute is the right word.

The Jewish leaders were persecuting him. They wanted to do anything that they could to get to him and to see him killed. Now, of course, they were also religious leaders.

And so, they didn't just go and hire hit men and all that kind of stuff. They were going to start by using the tools that they had available to them. Mainly, at this point, it's the legal challenge.

Breaking the Sabbath law. So, they were going after Jesus. And in my Bible, my translation, it says, they began to persecute him. And that word's not actually in the original.

[7 : 44] That's, it's an interpretive decision that they've made. Literally, it's the Jewish leaders were persecuting him. Probably more of a sense of continuously over an unspecified period of time.

They were going after him. Verse 17, In his defense, Jesus said to them, My father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.

So, some of the language here is thought to have a bit of a legal sense to it. In his defense, my translation says, I don't think Jesus was actually on trial in a formal sense, but certainly in an informal sense, he was.

I mean, the religious leaders had come around, and they were bringing an accusation against Jesus. And it's not written out for us here, but you can just hear it.

You can imagine the kind of thing that they're saying to Jesus. Who gave you the authority to be working, to be doing these kinds of things like you're doing on the Sabbath?

[8 : 54] And Jesus' response is not what we would expect him to say. At least it's not what I expect him to say. I would expect Jesus to say something like, Well, with all due respect, I have not been breaking the Sabbath law.

I'm not guilty, because the stuff that I'm doing is not regular work. And the way that work has been defined by the elders over the years in tradition goes way beyond what God originally intended when he first gave the law or the command to keep the Sabbath day holy.

That's what I would have said. And I think that that is probably true. We can kind of piece that together from other places as well. But it's not what Jesus says.

Maybe he did say it. Maybe that isn't recorded here. This is just the part we get, though. This is the thing that stood out the most from what Jesus said. You've been working on the Sabbath.

Who gave you the authority to be doing this? What are you doing? Breaking the law. Jesus says, My Father is always at his work to this very day.

[10 : 20] And I, too, am working. Now, if Jesus wasn't at trial and we were his lawyers, this is the moment where we go, Oh, boy.

I imagine Peter just thinking to himself, I mean, we don't know what he's thought. This is speculation. But, oh, man, Jesus, like, this is not going to help our case.

I mean, Jesus doesn't deny that he has been working on the Sabbath. I am working, he says.

So this is not the response that we're expecting. What does Jesus mean when he says this? My Father is always at his work to this very day.

And I, too, am working. Well, it seems as though Jesus is admitting to the fact that he's been working on the Sabbath.

[11 : 24] And at the same time, it seems as though he's offering a reason for why he's not guilty of breaking the Sabbath law. But it's maybe not the reason that we were expecting.

For sure, it's not the reason the religious leaders were expecting. So what does Jesus mean when he says this? My Father is always at his work to this very day.

And I, too, am working. I think to kind of get at that, it probably is helpful for us to first answer the question, did Jesus actually break the Sabbath law?

And I would say the answer to that is no. We can remember those words of Jesus, which he said in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, verse 17.

He said, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. In verse 19 of that same passage, Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands of the law and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

[12 : 46] So Jesus already has this mentality, this attitude, and has been teaching that we are to obey the law.

Absolutely you are. The law was given by God. If we think back to how the law was given to Moses, specifically when it comes to this commandment pertaining to the Sabbath, that was one of the Ten Commandments.

And God himself etched those words onto the stone tablet with his finger and gave them to Moses. So Jesus is saying, Don't think that I've come to say that we just ignore that.

Absolutely you are to obey the commands that God has given. And it's a big no-no to teach someone else to just set those commands aside.

So was Jesus telling this man to disregard the Sabbath and do what was unlawful on the Sabbath when he told him to pick up his mat?

[13 : 58] My answer is no. Because he knew that the way that the elders and the rabbis had defined work went way beyond what the Sabbath law was intended to involve as it was originally given by God.

Now at this point we might wonder, well, maybe, I mean, as it comes to the Sabbath law, isn't Jesus above the Sabbath law? I mean, is he expected to keep it anyway?

Or can he do as he pleases on the Sabbath because of who he is? This is a trickier question. We do hear from the other Gospels, Jesus say that the Son of Man, referring to himself, is Lord of the Sabbath.

And even the way he talks here, my Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working. We could get this sense that Jesus is above the law, that this law doesn't pertain to him.

But I think it's so important that we remember that Jesus is truly God, and at the same time, he is truly man, truly a human being.

[15 : 21] And that comes with implications. And probably the place that we see this most clearly and how it relates is in Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 and 5, where Paul says this.

He says, But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that he might redeem those who were under the law.

So what Paul is telling us there is that Jesus was born of a woman. He was sent by God into this world and born as a physical, flesh and blood human being.

Not only that, but he was born under the law. As a man, as a human being, he was under the authority of God's law, which he had given a long time ago through Moses.

And so, yes, he had to submit to the law of God as a man. That was required. In fact, the plan of salvation depends upon it.

[16 : 43] Look at what Paul says in Galatians chapter 4. He was born, sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that he might redeem those who were under the law.

So he needed to keep the law perfectly in order to be that spotless lamb who would take the place, who could be a substitute and take the curse of the law upon himself so that we might be redeemed and set free from the penalty of the law, which we deserve because of our sins.

The third thing to consider here is that Jesus knew better than anyone else what it meant to keep the Sabbath holy.

Jesus has already had a number of run-ins with the religious leaders over this issue, which we've talked about already. There was the man with the shriveled hand in Mark chapter 3.

Look at what Jesus said to the Pharisees there as they were ready to pounce on him for working on the Sabbath by healing this man. He said, which is lawful on the Sabbath?

[17 : 59] To do good or to do evil? To save life or to kill? On another occasion with a different man, a different Sabbath, it happened again.

They were there, the Pharisees, the experts in the law, and Jesus asked them. This is Luke 14, verse 3. Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?

Of course, they didn't want to say anything because they knew that Jesus would embarrass them if they did because he knew what was lawful even better than they did.

verse 5 of that same account. Jesus answers the question with a question. He says, if one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?

The implied answer in both of these cases is the same. Jesus knew what keeping the Sabbath holy meant, what kind of work was permitted and what kind was forbidden.

[19 : 13] His point was essentially this. It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. It is lawful to save a life on the Sabbath.

It is lawful to do the work of healing on the Sabbath. In fact, it might be that he's even saying something a little more than that.

To leave this man here with his hand like this when I have the power to heal him, to set him free, would be evil.

It's either good or evil. Which one is lawful? The good. Jesus knows better than anyone else what is lawful on the Sabbath, what it means to keep that day holy, what God intended.

And so when we bring all of these things together, I think the clear answer is that Jesus did not break the Sabbath law. He may have broken the laws that were imposed by men and added later on to kind of spell out or fill out what constituted breaking the Sabbath law, but he did not break the law which God had given.

[20 : 42] But what surprises me most is that Jesus says absolutely none of that in this moment. Why are you working on the Sabbath?

He doesn't say any of that. Maybe he did and it's just not recorded and this is the one thing that was recorded. It's possible. After all, this thing does stand out.

Why are you working on the Sabbath? Who gave you the authority to be doing this? Jesus' answer is this. My father is always at his work to this very day and I too am working.

what an answer to give. What does it mean? First of all, we notice that Jesus does not deny that he's been working.

Yes, I am working, he says. I have been healing people. I have been teaching. I have been casting out demons on the Sabbath.

[21 : 58] I have been working. So has God, my father. He's not guilty of working on the Sabbath and he works on the Sabbath as implied, stated, and neither am I guilty for working on the Sabbath.

like, what kind of an answer is this? This is surprising. Literally, my father is working until now or right up to this moment, we might say.

And so am I. It's the Sabbath day. This is the day that he has done this healing and he says, my father, God, my father, he's working today.

So am I. You have to know that this really got the religious leaders worked up and we're going to see that in a moment.

But what does Jesus mean by this? Well, there's some religious background that we should probably understand here. I guess the rabbis of Jesus' day had been having this whole discussion, theological discussion.

[23 : 27] Does God keep the Sabbath? It's kind of a ridiculous discussion in one sense. Is he guilty of breaking the Sabbath? Well, some would say he carries things on the Sabbath because he's carrying the universe.

He's sustaining the world. He's working. He's accomplishing his sovereign purposes. He doesn't take a day off from that stuff. If he did, the universe would be in trouble.

He works on the Sabbath, they said. And so, how can he not be guilty for that? For breaking his own law? The way that they were reasoning it out was they were saying things, and this is kind of ridiculous, but saying things like, well, maybe he's not guilty of carrying something from one place to another because he's everywhere at once.

And so, if he's everywhere, then he can't really carry something from one place to another. He's already there. So, he kind of gets off the hook that way. You can kind of see the legalistic, ridiculous mentality of their reasoning.

But the rabbis were right about two things. First, they were right that God doesn't take a day off from his work. I mean, he took a day off from the work of creating the universe.

[24 : 50] On the seventh day, he rested. But since then, God continues to work every day, sustaining the universe, holding everything together, sovereignly directing it according to his plan and purposes.

That's something he does every day, constantly. They were also right that God is not guilty for working, even on the Sabbath day, for doing that kind of work.

But the reason he's not guilty is because the law doesn't apply to him. As Jesus said in another gospel, the Sabbath was made for man.

That law, that requirement does not apply to God. And Jesus, I think, is leveraging that truth.

He's bringing that truth to bear on this conversation. My father, God, is always at his work.

[25 : 54] He's always working. And he's not guilty for it. But then the rest of his argument is, neither am I.

I too am working. And implied, I'm not guilty either. Well, how does that work? There's an implied statement in there.

And there's various interpretations of this, but this is my understanding of it. They're bringing their accusation, you've been working on the Sabbath, Jesus is giving his defense.

He's saying, God is not guilty of working on the Sabbath. Sabbath. I'm not guilty of working on the Sabbath, and I have been working on the Sabbath.

And I think the implied statement is because the work I am doing is his work. The works that I am doing, they are his works.

[26 : 59] works. And so the Sabbath law doesn't apply to his work as it applies to just ordinary works of men.

That's my take on it, my understanding of it. You see this clearly with the miracles that Jesus did. Only God can heal a person in the ways that Jesus has been doing.

So yes, in a very real sense, the works that he is doing are the very works of God. An analogy that might help us to kind of think of this could be that of a son who's apprenticing under his father.

You can imagine a father owning a bit of a carpentry business, taking orders for, you know, crafting fine furniture at the workshop or something like that.

And in a very real sense, if the son is his son is his apprentice, when his son is working on the table, he is doing his father's work.

[28 : 07] It's for his father's business. It's what his father is up to. It's his father's company. And the father could look at the customers and say, yep, I'm working on that table right now.

And even in that moment, it's true, even though it might be the son that's the one who's actually in the shop doing a part of that work. That'd be maybe one way to think of it.

Another way that might be helpful is to think of it in terms of the prophets. We know that the prophets were specially chosen by God to speak the words of God to people.

Now, they didn't just speak on God's behalf, whatever came into their heads to say. No, they actually, God actually put his own words in their mouths such that when they opened their mouths and spoke, it was God who was speaking through them.

And I think Jesus is implying here with this, that it's the same when it comes to his works. when he does his works, when he does those miracles, when he drives out demons, it is actually God who is at work in that moment doing his works through him.

[29 : 33] And I think it, not in the same sense as we might say that any of us are doing God's works, but in a very special sense, in an exclusive sense, in a sense that it's only had by Jesus, by the prophets, by the apostles, as we'll see.

So this is what Jesus says in his defense. And the religious leaders, the Jewish leaders, they go wild when they hear this.

Verse 18, for this reason, because he said this, 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.

So this just caused them to go, well, in his words, all the more they tried to kill him.

They just wanted to get this guy. Why? Not only because he said this, it says, not only that, but he was breaking the Sabbath, at least in their view, or their Sabbath laws, he was breaking.

[30 : 52] But that wasn't the big thing. The big thing was that he was even calling God his own father. You can imagine what's going on in their minds, like, how dare he?

I mean, they're probably thinking back to Numbers 15, where the man was, the Lord told Moses to stone him to death for picking up sticks, for gathering sticks, deliberately just going out, defying the Sabbath law, doing work on the Sabbath day.

They're thinking, Jesus is just like that guy. He deserves to die. He's, he's, he's blaspheming. He's putting himself on the same level as God, calling God his own father.

I mean, they, they're not stupid. They picked up that Jesus wasn't just saying that, that God was kind of his father in the general sense, that he's the father of Israel, or the, that were his, all his children.

No, he was saying God is his own father. Like, you're James, son of Zebedee, I'm Jesus, son of God himself.

[32 : 04] That's like saying you're divine, putting yourself on the same level as him. How dare you? They wanted to kill him. And the tension continues to rise.

In, in the weeks ahead, we're going to see how Jesus, he's going to go on and say a whole bunch more here. And this next section is a gold mine.

So we're just going to slow it down and really try to draw out what we can from the words of Jesus. But what's here in these, in these few verses for us today?

Well, I think the first thing that we notice is that there's no commands given. I don't even think this passage is really so much about whether or not we should keep the Sabbath as Christian Gentiles.

I mean, this passage just isn't really about us. It's, it's really all about Jesus and what happened to him when he came into our world almost 2,000 years ago.

[33 : 07] But I don't think that means it's irrelevant to our lives today as Christians. Christians. I think John and through John God has put this in here for a very specific reason to cause us also to, to come in to ask this big question which is written all over this section, this question of who is Jesus?

This is what the religious leaders are wrestling with. who is Jesus? They're trying to come to their answer.

They've painted him, they've got him pegged and categorized and figured out as a guilty lawbreaker and a blasphemer who deserves to die.

But of course as we look more closely at the religious leaders we know that's not the complete story. we know that they see Jesus as a threat to their position, to their authority.

They don't like Jesus because he shines the spotlight on them and exposes the ugliness of their religiosity and the evil and selfishness and pride in their hearts.

[34 : 31] So there's something more going on here. that's who they think Jesus is and they're not stupid.

They know what Jesus is claiming. They know what his words mean when he says, my father, that he is putting himself essentially on the same level as God.

He's claiming to be the divine son of God. God, it's against the backdrop of this that we see this truth come out, this truth that John's been trying to show us right from the beginning of his gospel, that Jesus is the divine son of God.

That's one of the answers to this question of who is Jesus. This question was something of who is Jesus is something that the religious leaders stumbled over.

But as Jesus is about to say in the weeks ahead, it's one of the most important questions, not just for them to answer, but for all of us to answer, for all people to answer, for me to answer, for you to answer.

[35 : 51] And so I want to ask you today, what is your answer to this question? who is Jesus? Do you believe that he is the divine son of God?

Have you answered this question? Or are you putting off answering this question? Perhaps sitting on the fence, waiting for a later time to answer this question?

I want to encourage you not to put this off any longer, if that's you. This is one of the most crucial questions for all people.

Who is Jesus? If he is the son, the divine son of God, it has massive implications for our lives.

Our eternity is at stake. So I want to encourage you if you have not answered that question, to answer that question.

[37 : 00] Finally, if you do believe in Jesus, you are born again, as Jesus has said, you belong to him. I want to encourage you and remind you that this is the question that we must bring to our world and encourage them to answer with everything that we can.

Who is Jesus? We ought to bring this question to our unbelieving co-workers, neighbors, family, friends.

it's not just the most important question for you to answer, it's the most important question for them as well. Eternity hangs in the balance for them.

And it falls, it has been given to us by Christ to bring this question up with people, to point them as John is pointing us here, towards answering it and seeing the truth of who Jesus is.

And Jesus has already made it clear that we will not always be appreciated for doing this. In fact, later on to his disciples, not too long before he is crucified, we'll say this to them, John 15 verse 8, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

[38 : 40] If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.

That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

May fear not keep us from sharing and from speaking the good news of our master, Jesus, the son of God.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for your word. thank you that we get to be the fly on the wall and see a little bit of what happened and hear what Jesus said that day.

We love you, we love him, and we ask that you would teach us to live the way that you want us to, to follow him in a way that honors you and brings glory to his name and to yours.

[39 : 56] We ask this in Jesus' precious name, amen.