

The Claims of Christ, Part 1 “Equality” - John 5:16-23 - Jn14

In the next 3 studies, the Gospel of John is going to focus on 3 major foundations of who Jesus Christ is:

- 1) His Equality with the Father;
- 2) His Authority in the Resurrection and Judgment; and
- 3) His Testimony in the four-fold witness.

However, we’re going to start these great claims of Christ by looking at the event that set the discourse of chapter 5 into motion – THE SABBATH. We ended last week with the paralytic walking and leaping and praising God, and carrying his cot, just as Jesus told him to. And then, he had the unfortunate opportunity to run into the leaders of the church, the Pharisees. In chapter 5, verse 10, as he was overwhelmed with the joy of Jesus Christ’s work in his life, the church leaders had a singular focus – “What are you doing carrying that cot??” It’s like the man who’s been healed of a lifetime of alcoholism running into church to worship Jesus, and all we can say to him is, “Hey, don’t you know you shouldn’t be smoking?”

John 5:16

“For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.”

I’d like to take some time to talk about both the Pharisees and the Sabbath. This “pharisaical spirit” actually started out as a genuine attempt to obey God’s law, but over time, man decided he needed to help God out – he needed to protect God’s law. So the church leadership added 39 sets of rules to protect God’s one law regarding the Sabbath, and somewhere in these 39 sets of rules, it clearly said you couldn’t carry your cot, even if you were healed from paralysis after 38 years.

The pharisaical spirit is the spirit of legalism, and the spirit of legalism destroys all joy in the church. Some people mistakenly think that list-keepers are godly, and list-givers are even godlier. The Pharisees were the best list-givers of all. For them, the gospel was “For God so loved the world that He gave a list, that whosoever might do the things on the list might have eternal life.”

Be very careful because the pharisaical spirit is alive and well in the Christian church today, and it is monumentally destructive to the Body of Christ. The pharisaical spirit wants rules they can keep. They want merit for what they do. At some level, they reject grace and are only fulfilled when they’ve done something for themselves – when they’ve earned something from God.

But the Sabbath has its origin, not in legalism, but in the completion of the work of God. When God created the earth in 6 days in Genesis chapter 1, in every one of the first 6 days, it says, “and the evening and the morning was that day.” But then, on the 7th day, there is no mention of an evening and a morning. It just says God ended and rested from His work.

The word “Sabbath” literally means simply *to cease*, but we somehow think that God rested for 24 hours after His work. That’s not at all what happened.

Look at John 5:17

“But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.””

The Sabbath rest that God entered on that 7th day, He is still in. God does NOT stop working every 7th day. God is always at work, including and especially on the Sabbath day, and it's a good thing because, if God ever stopped working for one second, we'd be in a terrible mess, wouldn't we? When God instituted the Sabbath rest for Israel, He did it for at least 3 reasons:

- 1) To remember the Sabbath rest that God had entered;
- 2) Because it is vitally important for man's relationship with God; and
- 3) To look forward, or foreshadow, the permanent Sabbath rest that God Himself would provide.

But what God meant for remembrance, refreshing, and foreshadowing, man simply turned into a burden and a duty. But here is the greatest thing and the last word about God's intention for the Sabbath.

Turn to Colossians 2:16-17 (NIV)

“¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”

Jesus Christ IS our Sabbath rest. God's work is complete in Christ, and our working toward God has been made complete “In Christ.”

Turn over to Hebrews 4:9-10

“⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;

¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”

Believers have entered into what the Sabbath was looking forward to. Jesus Christ IS our true and eternal Sabbath-Rest. And so, instead of “looking forward” to it, we celebrate our Sabbath-Rest on the Lord's day, which is the first day of the week, Sunday!! Look at how the Holy Spirit set aside Sunday as the celebration day for the New Testament church. I'm going to list 8 things that were begun by the Holy Spirit on the first day of the week, the Lord's day.

SUNDAY WAS:

- 1) The day of the resurrection;
- 2) The day of Christ's ascension;
- 3) The first day Jesus appeared to the disciples;
- 4) The day He first broke bread with the disciples after the resurrection;
- 5) The day Jesus commissioned His disciples to “go into all the world”
- 6) It was on a Sunday, 7 weeks after the resurrection, that the Holy Spirit descended on the New Testament church on the day of Pentecost.
- 7) The day Paul preached to believers meeting together in Acts chapter 20; and
- 8) In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul says “on the first day of the week lay something aside for the collection for the saints.”

And it's these 8 events that make up the foundation of what we come together to celebrate and/or do on the Lord's Day, Sunday. So we gather on the Lord's day, Sunday, to celebrate entering into the true Sabbath-Rest of Jesus Christ. It's not just a different way and a different day of observing the Sabbath. It's a celebration of entering into our Sabbath-Rest in Christ. Let me also make it clear we definitely do still need this time each week set aside to focus entirely on God, and to be refreshed. So there's some background on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.

Let's re-read John 5:17-18

“¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”

¹⁸ Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.”

Now Jesus has really done it. He's broken the Sabbath AND made Himself equal to God, and it's at this point the Pharisees make a permanent commitment to make sure Jesus is killed. But starting in verse 19, Jesus begins a discourse vindicating Himself against the charges of the Pharisees and, in this discourse, He's going to give the Pharisees all the truth they need to repent and believe. Verse 19 starts these great claims of Christ where we'll see 3 great truths:

- 1) HIS EQUALITY with the Father;
- 2) HIS AUTHORITY in the resurrection and judgment; and
- 3) HIS TESTIMONY in a four-fold assurance.

Today we're going to look at Jesus' EQUALITY with God. To understand how radical Christ's claim of equality with God is, we've got to try to get a glimpse of a picture of God.

There was a prophet named Ezekiel who saw a vision of God, and He put it in a prophetic writing for us. Let's turn to Ezekiel chapter 1, but remember, God is truly indescribable and inexpressible to the human mind, so this is not a literal picture of God. This is Ezekiel trying to portray a small part of all that God is, and it is written in a type of symbolic manner so that our minds can try to get a grasp on God's character.

In Ezekiel 1:1b, Ezekiel says

“...the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.”

Then, in Ezekiel 1:4-28, he says

“⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

⁵ Also from within it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.

⁶ Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings.

⁷ Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze.

⁸ The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings.

⁹ Their wings touched one another. The creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.

¹¹ Thus were their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two wings of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies.

¹² And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

¹³ As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning.

¹⁴ And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

¹⁵ Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces.

¹⁶ The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workings was, as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

¹⁷ When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went.

¹⁸ As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them.

¹⁹ When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.

²⁰ Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

²¹ When those went, these went; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

²² The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads.

²³ And under the firmament their wings spread out straight, one toward another. Each one had two which covered one side, and each one had two which covered the other side of the body.

²⁴ When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings.

²⁵ A voice came from above the firmament that was over their heads; whenever they stood, they let down their wings.

²⁶ And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.

²⁷ Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around.

²⁸ Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.”

With this background, we understand why the Jews would not even speak the name of God, and why their reverence was so deep that every time a scribe had to write the name of God, he would

ceremoniously cleanse his hands and use a new writing instrument. And with that background, we understand why the Jewish leaders were so infuriated at Jesus for claiming to be equal to God. But Jesus says in John chapter 14, “He who has seen me, has seen the Father.”

How can He say that? Because Jesus and the Father are One, and if God would have come to earth fitting Ezekiel’s description, He couldn’t have hung on the cross to die for our sins. So instead, the indescribable, inexpressible God of the Universe condescended to become a man in the likeness of sinful flesh so that He could fully pay the penalty of our sin and offer us, in exchange, His own righteousness. But here’s the point. Though He condescended to become a man, He was still fully and completely equal to God. He was God, setting aside His glory to dwell among us, and to die for us. THAT is what these next verses speak of:

John 5:19

“Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”

Commentator David Thomas says, “Can there be a stronger assertion of Christ’s equality with the Father than this? I see not how, after language of this kind, a man can reject the divinity of Christ.” The NIV leaves the words “in like manner” off of verse 19:

John 5:19b (NIV)

“...whatever the Father does the Son also does.”

They move in perfect unison because They are One. Verse 20 continues this thought:

John 5:20

“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.”

The word “love” here is not the word “agape,” but instead, is the word “phileo.” In human terms, this word “phileo” means *a love between friends or brothers*. But here, it conveys a unison of hearts – two hearts of God, beating as One.

And so, in regard to the incredible vision Ezekiel put into words in the first chapter of his book, Jesus Christ is saying, “I am the equal of the Almighty God because I am the Almighty God. I am the incarnation of that vision.” Jesus can say “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” because Jesus Christ IS that almighty, indescribable vision of Ezekiel, tabernacled in human flesh. Now verse 21 goes on to describe some of the “greater works” that verse 20 says the Father and Son will work together:

John 5:21

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.”

The words “for as” (or “just as”) and “even so” are words of equality. Notice here in the last words of verse 21, the Son has His own will. But what He is teaching us is that His will and the Father’s will are ONE will. And it’s much more than mere agreement. It is absolute equality and perfect unity that we describe as “the Trinity,” and we see that even develop further in verse 22:

John 5:22

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son”

Yet another concrete proof of Christ’s equality with God. ALL judgment will be done by Jesus Christ. Every single person ever born in the image of God will one day stand before Jesus Christ to be judged – both believers and non-believers. The only difference is that, to the believer, Jesus Christ is both Savior and Judge, and that gives us assurance of our salvation.

In our next study, we’re going to look more at these judgments and resurrections – 2 judgments and 2 resurrections. But to finish for today, let’s look at verse 23:

John 5:23

“That all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

Again, clear words of total equality. The Son and the Father are to be honored the same because They ARE the same. Throughout the Bible, we’re taught that God alone is to be worshiped and that we are to honor no other god. Now we’re taught we must honor the Son just as we honor the Father, and the only way that can be true with the rest of scripture is if Jesus Christ is God, just as the Father is God. And that is exactly the truth of heaven, whether we understand it or not. And finally, this text makes it clear. If we don’t honor Jesus as fully God, then we are not honoring the Father who sent Him.