



The Book of Signs - Week 3 - Authority of the Messiah

Week 3, Day 1 – Jesus’ Authority Part 1

John 5:17-29

¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” ¹⁸ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ²¹ Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. ²² The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; ²⁷ and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Understanding the Passage:

You’ll remember from last week’s reading that the Jewish leaders were incensed that Jesus performed a healing on the Sabbath. In the first few verses of the reading above, you’ll see that Jesus equates himself with God, which further incenses the Jews.

There is a very specific set of vocabulary utilized over and over — Father (*pater*), Son (*huios*), judge/judgement (*krino/krisis*) and nouns and verbs from the root word for life (*zao*). The repetition in language and phrasing is intentional and communicates emphasis in the point being made through the tool of Chiasm. This tool helps readers to not only hear the point clearly, but to also commit it to memory easily. A well-known example of this would be President John F. Kennedy

saying, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what can you do for your country.” Another biblical example you may remember (likely because of this specialized sentence structure) is in Matthew 23:12; “For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Likewise, Jesus says (paraphrase), “the Son can only do what the Father is doing and what the Father is doing is what the Son is doing.” In other words, what you see me doing is the work of my Father. This is a statement that rings loud and clear to the hearers and continues to ring clearly to us — Jesus is Lord. All authority has been given to him. Jesus is in charge of judgement, justice, and salvation now. But Jesus’ authority is not only for justice – he also has the authority to give life and eternal salvation. To the Jewish leaders’ ears, these claims are not only absurd, but blasphemous.

It helps us to understand the position of the religious leaders if we imagine that we are sitting in church and someone walks in and begins to claim that he is the son of God and that his ministry is the only ministry of God. However, Christ’s coming is not sudden or out of left field. His coming and ministry were foretold. The outrage is a refusal of the religious leaders to refer to the prophecies and scriptures of their own tradition.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. If Jesus came to you in such a surprising way, what would your initial response be? Would your response change over time?
2. What does it mean that Jesus is Lord? How does this passage support that statement?
3. How is Jesus the Lord of your life?
4. What areas of your life, if any, haven’t been brought under the Lordship of Christ? How might you shift that in this moment?

Week 3, Day 2 – Jesus’ Authority Part 2

John 5:30-46

³⁰ “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³¹ “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. ³³ You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But I have a testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

³⁹ “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. ⁴¹ I do not accept glory from human beings. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

Understanding the Passage:

This is the second part of Christ's discourse with the religious leaders. The main topic of this section is the relationship with the Son and the Father. The religious leaders have challenged Christ basically asking him, "Now, just who do you think you are?!" Christ answers this question by naming the relationship between him and God – it's not simply a friendship; it is kinship, and with this type of relationship comes authority. It can be compared to an adult child who has become the executor of their parent's estate. The notion here is, "This is my dad's estate and I'm making the decisions here. I've consulted with him about how this is all going to go down and now I'm here to see it through." Jesus has been given the authority of God to make earth his domain – the judgement is Christ's to have.

The word judgement can be off-putting to our modern ears. However, in a biblical sense this word is not far from justice. Christ is setting all things right and doing so with a love that no one has ever known in its fullness. Christ has thus far claimed that judgement has been given into his hands; he offers life for those who hear him and that there will be an end time when resurrection happens for all. Some will resurrect into eternal life and others to "condemnation."

Verse 39 is particularly convicting for those of us who can look clearly at our past and see that even when trying to follow the Scriptures to a "T" that we've fallen short or had it all wrong. Thank God for the coming of Christ whose grace extends to us even in our misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and missteps. Verses 39 and 40 are gentle reminders that scripture is not the thing that will bring salvation. Jesus tells them, "don't look at your book when you have me standing before you! The Scripture, the laws, your religion will not save you. I will."

This passage is a wonderful opportunity to tune our hearts to the key of Jesus, to just slightly trim our sails toward our true north, or perhaps to do an about-face altogether and walk toward our Savior.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What does it mean to you to be a sibling with Christ, to be a child of the most high God? How does this inform the way you feel about yourself, others and the world?
2. What does it mean to seek the will of God?
3. What if Christ made you the executor of his estate? What implications does that have for the way we live? Some categories to think through might be: other humans/family members of God, the property of God/the Earth, utilization of resources, etc.

Week 3, Day 3- SIGN- Feeding the 5,000

John 6:1-15

¹ After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them

to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

¹⁵ When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Understanding the Passage:

Jesus has performed many healings and the word has spread. A large crowd gathers and follows him (envison the scene in the film *Forest Gump* in which he jogs across the nation and people begin to join his running group).

Even as Jesus is trying to withdraw, he stops to tend to the needs of the crowd. They are hungry. Hungry for what? John does not indicate that they are physically hungry, though Jesus is aware there is a physical need. The passage says that they are following him because of "the signs he's been doing for the sick." Could you imagine sitting on your internist's table and then he or she walks in with a charcuterie board? There seems to be a disconnect... or is there?

Jesus knows what they are seeking and he meets their need, but in a surprising way. He knows they are hungry — for salvation, for the Messiah. And he takes something very ordinary from an ordinary child and produces the extraordinary – feeding the entire crowd and ending up with an abundance of leftovers. It's in the meeting of their physical need that their spiritual needs are met as well.

Note verse 15. He withdraws because he doesn't wish to be made king just yet. It seems difficult for them to receive Christ's gift on his terms without immediately trying to box him into manmade categories. Jesus' gift of grace will not be controlled by the crowd's desire for glory, so he hides. Recall yesterday's passage communicating his utter dependence on God. Christ's ultimate Messianic work must be done in the Father's time.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Imagine yourself somewhere in this scene. What do you see Christ doing? What are the disciples doing? What are the people doing?
2. For what do you hunger in this season of life?
3. Are there other places in Scripture you can recall Jesus feeding people? Does he ever turn anyone away hungry?
4. Has Jesus fed you in the past? How might Jesus be offering to satisfy your hunger even now?

Week 3, Day 4 – Jesus Walks on Water

John 6:16-21

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, ¹⁷ got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. ¹⁸ The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. ¹⁹ When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." ²¹ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Understanding the Passage:

Jesus has just done a very public sign by feeding the 5,000 and now he does a private sign with just the disciples. These two stories held side-by-side illustrate two things to us. One story is about Christ's grace (satisfying hunger in abundance) and Christ's glory (walking on water).

This story is told succinctly in John but is also included in the Gospels of Matthew (14:22-32) and Mark (6:45-51). John's telling of this story differs from the others in that it is completely told from the perspective of the disciples. John writes that the disciples had a strong reaction to the manifestation of the divine. Their reaction teaches us that the glory of Christ is one that is so different from any existing mental framework that it is fear inducing. You can almost hear them talking to each other, "what exactly am I lookin' at here?!" Christ's glory defies the laws of nature and when experienced directly, one walks away differently.

Jesus' response to the terror of the disciples is written in such a way that even hidden within the threads of this short story is a hint of the great I AM. The NRSV and NIV translate the statement simply to "It is I", however the Greek *ego eimi* should be translated as an absolute: "I AM." John communicates that Jesus is speaking as God speaks in Exodus 3.

Christ's authority extends beyond government, manmade systems or even the healing of bodies. Jesus now exhibits that he is the authority over the natural world too. Storms do not overtake him. Waves do not crash over him. He does not sink as any prophet or rabbi would do; he walks on the water. The Disciples did not know of the 'storm' that is brewing — the plot to kill Jesus — but Jesus does. In the telling of this story, John communicates that there is no storm that will overtake the Messiah. No manmade storm of plotting evil, no storm of sin in the hearts of mankind, no natural disaster — none of it is more powerful than God incarnate.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What storms in your life seem terrifyingly big? Take a moment to welcome Christ into that place of life afresh.
2. There are times we are caught in storms and no way to get out. Imagine yourself in the boat. What does it feel like to having Jesus walking toward you? Do you need Jesus to walk toward you today?
3. Reflect on Christ's response to the disciple's terror. What is Christ's response?

Week 3, Day 5

John 8:39-59

³⁹ They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹ You are indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. ⁴⁴ You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the

truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God."

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." ⁵² The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' ⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?" ⁵⁴ Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, 'He is our God,' ⁵⁵ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. ⁵⁶ Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷ Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." ⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Understanding the Passage:

The issues between Jesus and his opponents continues from the previous verses. The central point of contention is the claim of his opponent to be the children of Abraham. Jesus calls them out. He explicitly states that their murderous intentions against him are all the proof he needs to not only disprove their claims, but in the same breath attribute them to the devil. Strong words indeed.

These claims by the religious leaders that they are the natural descendants of Abraham will not fly with Jesus. To be "children," implies a personal relationship with Abraham and assumes the children will act in accordance with the character of their parent or ancestor. Sadly, they are doing nothing of the sort. Through their actions, they unknowingly reject their kinship with Abraham. In Genesis 26:5 God said, "Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." Those who act as Abraham did in this situation would keep Christ's charge, his statutes, and laws. They would humble themselves and sit at Christ's feet to learn that change in their behavior in hearts is needed. Ultimately this would be a liberative move, but they are willingly bound to the Law and thus are blinded to the Messiah right in front of them.

To make matters worse they lob a racially loaded accusation at him — revealing their own prejudice, but also using the worst words they can find — a Samaritan AND having a demon. Anyone who questioned or went against these theological gate-keepers had to be terrible. Judeans contrast themselves to Samaritans who severely interpret the Jewish Law and even dare to worship on the wrong mountain, Mt. Gerizim. One can imagine the Judeans sneering down their noses at Samaritans and now throw this "insult" at Christ. Jesus does not give that accusation any attention at all (because it's not even an insult to someone who loves all people including, gasp, Samaritans) and directly addresses this demon comment. This comment opens up a whole can of worms for his accusers. Jesus says, "I do not have a demon" and then moves into naming exactly who he is and what he is about. This progression of identifying statements feature central arguments that are at the core of this Gospel eventually taking it back to chapter 1, verse 1 — before creation even was I AM. The accusers have reached their limit with such a claim and resolve to put him to death right then and there. They pick up stones and Jesus flees.

Note that this entire conversation is an "us and them" type of conversation. The religious leaders have a strong desire to "other" Jesus and undermine him so that he loses the authority and notoriety he is gaining. Obviously this cannot be done, but they stand across from him with their

metaphorical fists clenched, instead of with him. An “us and them” mindset reflects that someone is not in a good place. Christ is the very epitome of invitation, welcome, and breaking down barriers that dehumanize and “other” valuable children of God. But the leaders have dug their heels in and are rooted in religious superiority, which provides them counterfeit safety, security, and power.

It’s counterfeit because they are a part of a larger system designed to subjugate them so that they then subjugate the Jewish people and keep them “in line” or at least out of the way. The pressure and power of the Roman Empire would never afford them actual safety, security or power, but this illusion is all they have. And as long as they play the game like they’re told they should be fine. However, Christ is messing all of that up and so he must be done away with or it all comes crashing down around them. One must always remember in interpreting the Gospels that the Jewish leaders are not to be villainized to the extreme. This is a source of hatred and anti-Semitism throughout history and at an increasing rate even today. The system in which they operated created this situation. They played merely one part in the plot to do away with the authority of Christ.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Ask God to reveal places that you are bound to laws, situations, relationships, behavior patterns, etc. Reflect on the invitation to be bound to Christ in a deeper way,
2. Are there systems in my life that require me to “play my part” while evils happen around me? How might you begin to learn and impact those systems?
3. Make a list of all the things Christ identifies himself as in this passage. As you continue to study the book of John see if these identifiers keep coming up.

Video Questions:

1. What does it mean that Jesus is the Messiah?
2. What is Christ’s relationship to the Father?
3. Why is this upsetting to the religious leaders of the time?
4. What does it mean that Christ has been given the authority to judge?
5. What are the various names of God/ Jesus in this week’s reading?
6. What does it mean to be the Son of God?
7. Where does Christ’s authority show up in your life?
8. What does it mean when God and Jesus use the words of “I am?”
9. Why does John place the feeding of the 5,000 next to Jesus walking on water?
10. What is the difference between the miracle and sign? Why does John use the word sign?

Prayer requests and other notes.