

The Gospel of John

Week 11

The Trial of Jesus, part 2 (5.19-47)

1. Introduction and Review

- All information, study notes and related material can be found on the internet at <http://www.rtrc.net/biblestudy/john/john.htm>
- Course Syllabus
- Weekly Outlines (notebook)
- Discussion Forum: <http://www.rtrc.net/forum/> [go to the forum marked "Bible Studies"]
- Audio files are available on the web site

2. Outline for the next two weeks

- The Crime (5.1-15)
 - Background (1-5)
 - The Encounter (6-9)
 - Interrogation and Identification (10-15)
- The Decision to Prosecute (5.16-18)
 - First Basis: Jesus violates the Sabbath
 - Second Basis: Jesus is making divine claims
- Jesus goes to trial (5.19-47)
 - Jesus describes His "criminal" work
 - Jesus brings witnesses to His defense
 - Jesus prosecutes His opponents
 - Jesus identifies their crimes
 - Jesus challenges their ability to appeal

3. Brief Review of Part One, (5.1-18)

4. Introduction: Jesus Goes to Trial

- Verses 19-47 for the 3rd discourse in the 4th gospel (the other two being in chapters 3 and 4). This section is the defense of Jesus over against the charges that were publicly brought by the Jewish leaders:
 - Breaking the Sabbath
 - Blasphemy

- This defense has three basic elements:
 - Jesus describes His work as sheltered under the same divine prerogatives as when God “works” on the Sabbath.
 - Since Jesus is on trial he brings forward witnesses who can verify this divine authority in Him.
 - Jesus turns the tables on His opponents and moves from defense to prosecution, describing the root problem of His opponents.

5. Jesus and God (5.19-30)

- It should be noted up front that this section is thoroughly rabbinic in nature. First, it assumes an understanding of the Sabbath and its laws. Second, its form of reasoning is somewhat foreign to our own thinking in Western Culture, (arguing from the lesser to the greater).
- The central motif in this section (discourse) is the relation of a father to a son as it would be viewed in this culture through the trade or skill the son was learning. If one looks to Jesus’ own upbringing this would be very easy to see. He learned from his father in the skills of carpentry and later imitated him just as He does so by imitating His heavenly Father. His imitation of the Father is never independent or self-initiated but always dependant deriving its purpose from the Fathers will.
- In this model the relationship is not reciprocal. Notice: The Father initiates, sends, commands, commissions and grants. The Son responds, obeys, performs the Fathers will and receives authority. He does not simply gain inspiration from the Father but imitates Him completely and successfully. This is clear from the three clauses in this passage:
 - For the Father loves the Son (5.20)
 - For just as the Father raises (5.21)
 - For not even the Father judges anyone (5.22)
- The most important affirmation is that the Father loves the Son (note: this is the only place where John uses the Greek term *phileo* for the Fathers love of the Son). The Greek tense used here indicates an ongoing, continuous affection. This is the same idea found in John 1.18.
- This love spills into two tasks entrusted to the Son:
 - Jesus is sovereign over life (5.21)
 - Jesus is sovereign over judgment (5.22)

- Consider that the listeners would have no issue with the idea that God alone has power over life and can raise people from the dead. (Consider Deuteronomy 32.39 and 1 Samuel 2.6)
- The giving of life has also to do with judgment (5.22). In the theology of the 4th gospel judgment is not an event left for the end of time. The gift of life and the idea of judgment happens now – in this world. Implications:
 - Jesus is now present in this world as the exact representation of the Father (Hebrews 1.1-3)
 - He becomes the One whom light and life are mediated
- All this beings said this makes Jesus the premier agent in the world, (5.24b). In antiquity being an agent referred to a role in which authority and power were delegated to do a task. This is the imagery Jesus has in mind in 5.23
- Verse 24 – the repetition of “truly, truly” indicates a natural break in Jesus answer. Therefore we can conclude the following about His defense: God loves Jesus and has delegated to Him ultimate divine authority. Thus, to hear the words of Jesus is to believe God. God’s words and Jesus words are one in the same, (Consider John 1.1).
- In verses 24-30 we see that Jesus is expanding His divine claim from the previous section. His authority over the Sabbath leads to authority over eternal life. If it is true that His identity as God’s Son permits Him to assume authority over the Sabbath then He can assume divine authority elsewhere.
- Those tasks listed in 5.24-30 are clearly tasks listed as works of God in the Old Testament:
 - Life as a gift from God – Genesis 2.7; Psalm 16.11
 - Judgment is a work of God – Genesis 18.25; Judges 11.27

6. Witnesses for Jesus’ Case (5.31-40)

- This section is vital to the case Jesus is making. In the previous section we can see that Jesus makes a number of claims about Himself all rooted in His equality with the Father. Yet, under Old Testament Law claims alone were not sufficient. The lone testimony of Christ needed validation and Christ knew it. (Deuteronomy 17.6; 19.15)

- Verse 31 has an interesting phrase that supports the above mentioned comment: “If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true” (ESV). The Rabbinic teachings (Ketuboth 2.9) clearly taught that “none may be believed when he testifies of himself” The words used here and translated as “true” actually means “admissible as legal evidence.
- All this being said does not mean that His words are not true since they were most definitely true. It also is not safe to say that witnesses must be brought to the table (consider John 8.14). What it is saying is that He realizes that if He testifies to Himself only His testimony will be viewed as not true. Again, if we look at the context of 8.13ff we see this most clearly. (Same Greek term used in both passages: *alēthes*)
- As a result of the weakness of the listeners Jesus lists/identifies five witnesses whose words and deeds support His claims:
 - God – though not explicitly stated we can infer from 17-1.6 as well as from verse 37 that this is the case.
 - John the Baptist – 5.33-35 – He preceded Jesus, identified Him, worked with Him and directed his own followers to become Jesus’ disciples.
 - Jesus’ own works – 5.36 – not simply miracles but signs that point to Him as the Christ, the very Messiah they were waiting for, (Consider John 20.30-31)
 - The Scriptures – 5.39-40 – though it was true that those who brought these charges against Jesus were zealous of the Scriptures He points out that they miss the central message of the Scriptures. (Consider for further study Luke 24)
 - Moses – 5.46-47 – Consider Deuteronomy 18.15

7. Jesus Prosecutes His Opponents (5.41-47)

- The turning of the tables on His accusers reaches its climax here in this section. This concept was not unusual in Jewish courts. Unlike today, defendants did not simply prove their innocence and thus end the trial. Jewish trials were interested in getting to the truth of the matter. Accusers who made false claims in court could find themselves in grave danger.
- The point: these people bear some responsibility. If they cannot see the Father’s work, understand a sign when they see it, if they rejected John the Baptist and closed their hearts to the Scriptures something must be very wrong with them. These people are spiritually ill. They love religion but they do not love God.

- Moses here is not only presented as a witness as discussed earlier but also as a judge. Moses was everyone's hero in Jewish culture. Yet the very words of Moses haunt the people. It is a dangerous thing to possess the Bible and to know the Scriptures but not know God.

8. Application

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