

John 5

3/8/2005 9:37 PM

Overview

So far in John, while the people of Jerusalem have not received the Lord, neither have they decisively rejected him. By ch. 19, when they call for his crucifixion, they have become his enemies. This chapter marks the turning point from indecision to opposition. After a transition that brings the Lord back to Jerusalem (v.1), there are four movements:

1. Jesus and the lame man: healing
2. The Jews and the lame man: accusation (breaking the sabbath)
3. Jesus and the lame man: challenge to sin no more
4. The Jews and Jesus: accusation

The story is thus the inciting incident stimulating the opposition of the Jews against the Lord. Here for the first time they “sought ... to slay him” (vv. 16, 18), because he violated their sabbath rules and claimed God as his Father, “making himself equal with God” (18).

In the synoptics, the healing of a lame man plays a comparable role (Matt 9:2-7; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). There also the Lord claims divine prerogatives (forgiving the man’s sins). Though that miracle takes place in Capernaum, there were Jewish authorities from Jerusalem present (Luke 5:17), drawn perhaps by the Lord’s previous healing of a leper who was commanded to show himself to the priests (Luke 5:14).

Both here and in the synoptics, this is not the first healing, but it is the first one to stimulate Jewish opposition.

Significantly, the opposition to the early believers after the resurrection is also sparked by the healing of a lame man (Acts 3). Perhaps this particular kind of healing is emphasized because Isaiah prophesied that it would mark the advent of the Messianic age (35:6). The Lord is presenting his messianic credentials, and the temple hierarchy refuses to recognize them.

Thus the Jewish rulers are being forced to choose between their own entrenched authority and perquisites, and the arrival of the Messianic age which it ought to have been their duty to promote.

Frame

1 a feast ... Jesus went up.—The timing both marks the Lord’s piety and sets us up for the conflict.

- Piety: he is obedience to the OT commands that every Jew should present himself before the Lord three times in the year, for Passover, Pentecost, and Booths (Exod 23:14-17). We do not know the identity of the feast.
- Conflict: The important thing seems to be that the feasts were marked by an exceptional number of “sabbaths,” periods when people were not to work, so the Lord’s “offense” of healing a man would draw special attention to him. At the start of ch. 4 he left Jerusalem to avoid premature precipitation of conflict. Now he acts in a way to invite it deliberately.

2-9, Jesus Heals the Lame Man

2 Sheep market.—Better, “sheep gate” (Neh 3:1); sheep for sacrifice were sold in the temple at this time (Gill; cf. ch. 2), but they were brought into the city through a gate on the NE corner.

Bethesda.—That is, “house of mercy,” named perhaps for the mercy that God showed there to infirm folk.

Five porches.—four surrounding it, and one across the middle, providing shelter for the “great multitude” whom John describes there.

Compare the Lord’s healing of this man with the usual healings experienced there.

Feature	3-4, Previous Healings	5-9, This Healing
Similarities		
Recipients	Only one is healed, out of a multitude of sick people.	
Timing	The opportunity cannot be predicted. The person to be healed must be waiting there.	
Differences		
Agent	Angel	A man, our kinsman
Evidence	Non-verbal (moving of the water)	Verbal, propositional
Initiative	The sick person has to recognize the moving water, and get into it.	The Lord picks out this particular sick person.
Criterion	Merit: first one in (a mockery, for those who were blind and could not see the moving of the water, or those who were lame and could not move at all)	Grace: acceptance of the Lord’s invitation, “Wilt thou?”
Outcome	“made whole”(4)	“made whole”+ obedience (9)
Criterion	Merit: first one in (a mockery, for those who were blind and could not see the moving of the water, or those who were lame and could not move at all)	Grace: acceptance of the Lord’s invitation, “Wilt thou?”

The difference between the previous mode and what happens here reflects Heb 1:1,2.

Take up thy bed and walk ... [he] took up his bed and walked.—The man responds in simple faith, which is marked by obedience, in marked contrast with the Jews in the sequel. The contrast of 1:11-12 is acted out before our eyes, more clearly than in any episode so far in the book.

9 on the same day was the sabbath.—This little note turns out to be critical for the rest of the chapter. It contains an ambiguity.

- The sabbath is most commonly the seventh day of the week, appointed for rest from our weekly employment.
- But Heb 3:11-4:9 interprets the rest of Psa 95:11 as the messianic age. By performing this distinctive miracle, the Lord is announcing that the greater Sabbath has come.

This point may be the reason that the Lord so frequently heals on the Sabbath:

- the blind man in ch. 9,
- the man with the withered hand in Matt 12:10-12 (Mark 3, Luke 6)
- the man with an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21-26)
- the woman with an infirmity in Luke 13:10ff
- the man with dropsy, Luke 14:2-4

In fact, he is fulfilling the type, but the action invariably leads to opposition.

10-13, The Jews and the Lame Man

the Jews.—This phrase occurs 63 times in John, more than in any other book and more than a quarter of all its occurrences (216) in the Bible. These are “his own people” who would not receive him (1:11).

It is not lawful.—It is interesting to trace the development of the prohibition.

- Exod 20:10, “in it thou shalt not do any work.” 31:12-17. “work” is *ml'akah* “trade, craft,” not (*abodah* “servile labor.” What is forbidden is not abstract work, but plying one’s trade.
- Jer 17:21-27 forbade the Jews to “bear a burden” on the Sabbath and “bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem.” The practice is illustrated in Neh 13:15-16, when merchants tried to set up shop on the Sabbath. Clearly, what is being forbidden is engagement in commerce on the day set aside for rest.
- Gill on v.10 gives Jewish extensions, to carrying anything, and includes a particularly interesting prohibition that “he that rolls up a bed of the brasiers or tinkers (i.e. on the sabbath day) is bound to a sin offering.” These were itinerant tradesmen, and folding up their portable beds would be part of their work. But the prohibition went even further, to carrying anything in or out, from one place to another.

See Peter’s comment in Acts 15:10 that the Jewish interpretation of the mosaic law was a “yoke ... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.” In their zeal for obedience, the Jews had turned the “holy, and just, and good” law of God into an intolerable burden. This is a temptation to which we are all vulnerable, and for which we must always be vigilant.

Perhaps the saddest aspect of their legalism is that it prevents them from attending to other aspects of God’s revelation. The promise of the Messiah who would usher in the greatest sabbath of all, the Messianic age (Isa 35). Like much religious error, their failing is not in taking Scripture too far, but in emphasizing one teaching to the point that they ignore another. Compare the Lord’s rebuke of the Pharisees in Luke 11:42, “But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Here the Lord does a miracle that announces the arrival of the Messianic age, the ultimate sabbath, and the Jews completely miss it because they are preoccupied with the weekly sabbath. They focus on the type and ignore its fulfillment.

11 He that made me whole ... said unto me, Take up thy bed ...—The man’s defense is the perfect foil to their legalism. They are all tied up in details of what the law does and does not permit. He is very practical: the authority of someone who could heal him surpasses that of those

who can only talk. They can see only the carrying of the bed on the sabbath. He takes them to a deeper level, the fact that he has been healed.

Compare the response of the blind man later in 9:25: “Whether he be a sinner *or no*, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”

12 What man is that?—The Jews cannot tolerate such a direct challenge to their authority. They need to find this renegade and deal with him. Gill’s note is insightful:

“they take no notice of the cure, being unwilling to give any glory to Christ, ... but they laid hold on that, which they thought might be improved to his reproach and scandal.”

They have already judged the Lord. Even a miracle directly fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah cannot open their eyes.

13 Jesus had conveyed himself away.—As in 4:1-2, he allows the situation to ripen. He, not the Jews, will control the point at which the conflict comes to a head (John 10:18). The reason appears to be that he has further work to do with the lame man before the debate with the Jews is fully joined.

14, Jesus and the Lame Man

In particular, if the Lord had stayed around to engage the Jews, the interchange with the lame man in v.14 could not have taken place. Here the Lord seeks to raise his attention from the physical miracle to a more spiritual lesson.

On v.11, we observed that there were at least two levels to the man’s experience:

- The legal level, being commanded to carry a bed on the sabbath, which is where the Jews focused their and attention.
- The physical level, being healed of his disease, which is where the man properly focused.

In this verse the Lord takes the man to an even deeper level, the spiritual level. Like every son of Adam, this man is a sinner. While it would be a mistake to attribute his lameness to a specific sin in his past (cf. 9:3), we should also remember that sickness in general is a manifestation of the fallen nature of the creation (Rom 8:22). So the Lord challenges him to use his new freedom to serve God, rather than sin. The argument is exactly that of Rom 6:12-23, right down to the last verse, which is echoed in the Lord’s final words to this man, “lest a worse thing come unto thee.”

Given this spiritual dimension, it is worthwhile to compare this healing with that of the blind man in ch. 9, and to draw parallels between both of them and our spiritual healing.

	Ch. 5, Lame man at Bethesda	Ch. 9, Blind man near temple	Our Salvation
Long-standing illness	5 which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.	1 blind from <i>his</i> birth.	Long persistence of sin
Actively chosen by the Lord (does not come to the Lord for help)	6 When Jesus saw him lie	1 as <i>Jesus</i> passed by, he saw a man	We do not seek the Lord in our sinful state
Lord asks for his interest	6 Wilt thou be made whole?	<<lacking>>	“whosoever will”

John 5

Healing by a command	8 Rise, take up thy bed, and walk	7 Go, wash in the pool of Siloam	True faith involves obedience
Timing: on the sabbath	9 on the same day was the sabbath	14 it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes	Salvation is the true sabbath
Healed person confronted by the Jews	10-13	12-34	We should expect opposition from the unbelievers
Man's response: healing trumps legalism	11 He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.	25 Whether he be a sinner <i>or no</i> , I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.	Basis of our defense: personal experience, not abstract reasoning
Jews' response to the man	<<lacking>>	34 They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.	Further expectation of opposition
Jesus seeks the man out	14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple	35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him,	The Lord continues to encourage us in such opposition
Jesus challenges him on the spiritual level	Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.	35 Dost thou believe on the Son of God?	Warning against "easy believism"
Man's response: faith	<<lacking>>	38 And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.	Our ongoing response to the Lord
Man's response: tells the Jews	15 The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.	<<lacking>>	Importance of a continuing witness.

15-47, The Jews and Jesus

This section is a detailed chiasm (see table next page), which will enable us to resolve an interpretive question in v.15.

The dominant theme throughout this section is the relation of Jesus as the Son to God as the Father. The title "son" occurs ten times in this chapter, more than in any other chapter of John, and eight times it is used absolutely, more than in any other chapter in the NT. (John uses the absolute title 15x in the gospel and 7x in the epistles; the rest of the NT uses it only 16 times.)

15-18, Witnesses to the Son

This section is an alternation, between statements emphasizing the Lord's authority (by the healed man or the Lord) and the Jews' resolve to kill Jesus.

15-18, 31-47, The Witnesses and Human Opposition	
	31 If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. 32 There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. 33 Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. 34 But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. 35 He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.
15 The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.	
16 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him , because he had done these things on the sabbath day.	36 But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do , bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.
17 But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.	37 And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. 38 And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. 39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. 40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. 41 I receive not honour from men. 42 But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. 43 I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. 44 How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. 46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. 47 But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?
18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him , because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.	
19-30, Divine Authorization and the Ultimate Judgment	
19 ... Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself , but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth , these also doeth the Son likewise.	30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.
20 For the Father loveth the Son , and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel.	28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good , unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil , unto the resurrection of damnation.
21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth <i>them</i> ; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.	26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;
22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son :	27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.
23 That all <i>men</i> should honour the Son , even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.	
24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.	25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.

15 The man departed, and told the Jews.—There is disagreement among commentators as to his motives.

- Calvin and Hendriksen think that he wants to ensure that Jesus gets the honor appropriate to his healing. Calvin: “Nothing was farther from his intention than to make Christ an object of their hatred, and nothing was farther from his expectation than that they would rage so furiously against Christ. His intention, therefore, was pious; for he wished to render to his Physician the honor which was justly due to him.”

- Constable, Borchert, and Morris think that he is trying to pass the blame off to Jesus and get himself off the hook. They note the tone of v.10, and Morris observes that violating the Sabbath was a capital offense. Borchert: “It is doubtful that the man in this story really understood the significance of Jesus. ... the blaming, self-centered, self-preservation pattern of his former life continued after the healing as he turned from the Healer to investigators (the Jews) and reported Jesus to these authority figures.” Constable: “Clearly the ungrateful man wanted to save his own skin by implicating Jesus.”
- Westcott, Alford, and Dods are ambivalent.

I think we must agree with the first, for three reasons.

- Note the shift between the Jews’ question in v.12 and the man’s response here.
 1. They asked, “What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?”
 2. He told them “that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.”

If he were trying to attach blame to Jesus, he would have said that it was Jesus who told him to take up his bed. He really is trying to shift their focus from the Sabbath violation to the miraculous healing.

- Within 15-18, the man’s words are set in parallel to the Lord’s claim in v.17. Structurally, he and the Lord stand side by side in challenging the Jews.
- Most importantly, his words represent the witness of the miraculous works that the Lord mentions in the concluding panel of the chapter, at v.36. This correspondence is even stronger when we realize that the Lord’s own comment in v.17 corresponds to another of these witnesses, in 37-47.

16 therefore ... the Jews ... sought to slay him.—Here is the strongest statement yet of opposition to the Lord. The Lord had accused them of desiring to “destroy this temple” (2:19), but that was figurative and oblique. Now their deadly opposition is explicit.

because he had done these things on the sabbath day.—The verb tense suggests continual, ongoing action. They perhaps had heard of other healings that he had done outside of Jerusalem on the Sabbath (Matt 12, Mark 1, Luke 13). He might get away with this in the rural areas, but here in the holy city, they would not tolerate it. Morris notes (but without citing a source) that the death penalty was possible for Sabbath violation.

17 Jesus answered them.—His defense is notably distinct from that which he gives in the synoptics for his Sabbath healings.

- In the synoptics, the defense is, “These are works of mercy, and anyone can do mercy on the Sabbath.” Compare Luke 13:15-16; 14:2-5. Note “you” in both of these texts: “you work on the sabbath, and so may I.” The distinction turns on the nature of the work. Healing is a work of mercy, and because works of mercy may be done on the sabbath, the Lord may heal.
- Here, his defense is, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” The Jews recognized that God’s providential activity never ceased, even on the Sabbath. Cf. *Psa 75:3*. Philo, a Jewish author in the first century, observed that in the LXX, *Gen 2:1*, “God ... rested on

the seventh day from all his work which he had made,” can be translated, “God ... caused [others] to rest ...,” and concluded that God’s own work did not cease. “For God never ceases from making something or other; but, as it is the property of fire to burn, and of snow to chill, so also it is the property of God to be creating. And much more so, in proportion as he himself is to all other beings the author of their working. Therefore the expression, “he caused to rest,” is very appropriately employed here, not “he rested.” For he makes things to rest which appear to be producing others, ... but he himself never ceases from creating” (Allegorical Interpretation I 5-6). Here, the distinction turns not on the nature of the work, but on the person of the one doing the work. God works on the sabbath, and because Jesus is the Son of God, he may work on the sabbath.

Part of the argument here, though implicit, is that sick people get well on the Sabbath, and no one complains about this. A pious Jew must attribute spontaneous healings to God, therefore acknowledging that God works on the Sabbath. So the Lord is simply imitating the Father’s Sabbath healings.

18 making himself equal with God.—This analysis shows just how radical the Lord’s claim is. He is claiming the prerogatives of deity, specifically, to work on the Sabbath. No wonder the Jews hated him!

In preparation for comparison with the end of the chapter, note that the two parallel sections of 15-18 give us two witnesses to the Son: his healing (attested by the healed man) and the Father (whom the Lord claims as his authorization to heal on the Sabbath). Note also that the Jews reject both witnesses. We will see these same two witnesses, and the same response to them, in 37-47.

19-30, *The Work of the Son*

This section of the chiasm extends the theme of v.17, that Jesus is doing the Father’s work and so is entitled to the Father’s prerogatives. The correspondences are very close, yet there is a striking difference, which appears most clearly in vv.24-25. The first panel concerns the giving of life in salvation; the second, in resurrection. There are three levels:

1. 19 and 30 give the general principle, that the son does the Father’s work.
2. 20-23 and 26-28 focus in on the Father’s delegation of a specific work to the son, resurrection and judgment, with emphasis on the motives
3. 24 and 25 describes the Son’s work of resurrection, both spiritual and physical.

19 *The Son does the Father’s Work*

We are invited here to see a young child imitating his father. Perhaps the image has in mind the son in the father’s carpenter shop, carefully watching the father’s every movement, holding the tool just as he does, moving it in just the same way. In particular, he sees the Father heal on the Sabbath, and he does likewise.

This is a relatively unthreatening statement. It places all the initiative on the Son. But this will change in the next verse.

20-23, Delegation and Motives

In this paragraph, v.20 is a high-level generic statement, and 21-23 make it more specific. Both the generic statement and the specific version reveal something that the Father does, and his motive for doing it.

20, General Statement

20 The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him.—Now the initiative shifts. It is no longer just an adoring child imitating the Father, but the Father deliberately showing his actions to the Son in order to encourage this imitation.

All things.—The scope of action that the Father thus encourages the Son to imitate is breathtaking. It encompasses all of the Father's actions. There is nothing that the Father does that the Son is not authorized to imitate.

Greater works than these.—The healing of the lame man is one such work of the Father that the Son imitates. God, the creator of the human body, can heal it. Jesus has already claimed to heal, not of his own power, but in imitation of the Father. But now he claims that his imitation will go far broader.

That ye may marvel.—This is the motive for which the Father encourages the Son's actions: so that people may marvel. The Son is the Father's channel for revealing himself to his creation; see 1:18, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Cf. 2 Thes 2:10 for *qaumazw* as a description of appropriate worship.

21-23, Specific Statement

Now the Lord unfolds the "greater works" that the Father will show him, and in which he will imitate the Father. He focuses on two: resurrection and judgment. The conjunction of these two suggests that he has in mind Dan 12:2.

21 raiseth ... quickeneth.—All would agree that the Father can raise the dead. The clearest statements are Dan 12:2 and Ezekiel chapter 37, but see also Isa 26:19; Job 19:26; Hosea 13:14. Now the Son audaciously claims that he can give life to anyone he wants to, a claim that he will make good in ch. 11.

22 judgeth.—Dan 12:2 suggests this action of judgment in distinguishing between those who "awake ... to everlasting life" and those who "awake ... to shame and everlasting contempt." A Jew would naturally see God as "the judge of all the earth" (Gen 18:25, Psa 94:2). Remarkably, Jesus claims that the Father will not do this work directly, but has delegated it to him.

23 that all men should honor the Son.—This is the specification of the motive, described generically in 20 as "that ye may marvel." This marveling is not gratuitous titillation. Its purpose is to lead people to worship. Here our Lord claims the right to the same honor that the Father deserves, and even asserts that it is impossible to honor God without honoring him.

Compare our Lord's claim here with Dan 7:9-14. The Father is described, the judgment is prepared, and then the authority over all nations is given to the Son of Man. The Lord is claiming to be that Son of Man, a point that we will see more clearly in v.27.

24-25, *The Son Raises the Dead*

These two verses, each introduced with “verily, verily,” are the center of the chiasm. The Lord has claimed that the Father has given him authority to raise the dead, and these verses focus on that authority. However, their perspective differs subtly. The first focuses on the issue of *spiritual* resurrection, while the second deals with *physical* resurrection. This is reflected in the verb tenses, which are all present (with one exception, a perfect) in v.24, but mainly future in v.25. 24 describes what we experience in this life; 25 describes our entry into the life to come.

24, **Spiritual Resurrection**

There are five clauses in this verse. Grammatically, they fall into three sequential groups: two present participles, two present indicatives, and one perfect. The difference between the present tense and the perfect is crucial here. The present tense indicates an ongoing state of affairs. The perfect indicates an event that took place in the past, with present consequences. Thus the last clause in the sequence actually takes place first chronologically.

The perfect: “He ... is passed from death unto life.”—This is the only verb that isn’t in the present tense. It is in the perfect, which means that it describes a past event with present consequences.

We might naïvely think that the Lord is presenting hearing and believing as the condition for passing from death to life. The verb tenses work in just the other order. One who hears and believes has already passed from death unto life. Compare

- John 10:24, “ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep”
- John 8:23, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.”

The entire NT makes clear that the unsaved person cannot understand the gospel, apart from an initial and sovereign work of God.

- 1 Cor 2:14, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
- 2 Cor 4:4, “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

The whole point that the Lord is trying to make is that “the Son quickeneth whom he will” (v.21). v.24 is substantiating that by exhibiting to us people who have already experienced that quickening, who have already passed from death into life. They did not save themselves. They were objects of the Son’s saving power.

The present participles.—The first two clauses *describe* these people in terms of their present behavior. We can recognize someone who has passed from death into life by two characteristics.

- He hears the Lord’s word. He listens attentively, accepts the truth of what is said, and obeys it. Recall the parallel between John 1-2 and Genesis 1, and the centrality of God’s word in creation. Our words are caused by the world around us, but God’s word causes things to happen in his creation. When we are part of his new creation, the word of Christ causes things to happen in our lives. When you see a person who is yielded to the word of Christ, you recognize him as someone who has been the object of Christ’s life-giving authority.

- He believes on the Father. The point here is that he accepts the Lord's claim to come in the name of the Father. He accepts the Lord as the one sent by the Father, with the Father's authority. "Believeth on him who sent me" = "believes on him as the one who has sent me." Cf. 12:44.

These two marks distinguished the Lord's followers from those who rejected him: receptivity to his words, and recognition of his divine authority as the one sent by the Father. The disciples, and the woman at the well, and the nobleman of Capernaum, heard his words and recognized that the Father sent him. The Jews did not.

The present indicatives.—The other two clauses describe things that we cannot sense directly, but that we can assume are true of someone who hears Christ's words and recognizes his divine mission. The Lord has claimed authority to raise the dead (v.21) and to judge (v.22). He presents those who hear his words and accept his mission as evidence of this authority.

- "He ... hath everlasting life." Everlasting life is not something we receive when we die. We have it right now. I cannot see your everlasting life directly, but I can see your obedience to God's word and your trust in the Father, and from this I recognize in you one whom the Lord has made alive.
- "He ... shall not come into condemnation." Actually, the verb is in the present tense like all the others so far. "He does not enter into judgment." It reminds us that the court of heaven is already convened, and Satan, the accuser, is continuously accusing God's people, but the accusation is never admitted, because of what Christ has done and is doing for us.

In sum, v.24 is not telling us how to become saved, but what characterizes someone who is saved, both outwardly and inwardly. The point is not in what we can do to have eternal life, but how those to whom the Lord has sovereignly given life can be recognized, and the privileges they enjoy as a result of his gift.

25, Physical Resurrection

Now the verb tenses move from the past and present into the future. This leads us to understand that the resurrection in question here is the physical raising of the dead, anticipated in Dan 12:2, and described in more detail in Rev 20:12. Here the Lord tells us that he is the one who will summon the dead from their graves. For the most part, "the hour" for this great event "is coming," but a handful of resurrections during his earthly ministry demonstrate that it "now is."

- The most notable is Lazarus, whom the Lord summons back to live in 11:43.
- Consider also the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, Mark 5:41,
- And the son of the widow of Nain, Luke 7:14

In each case, he calls the dead, and they hear his voice. Other healings may be by the laying on of his hands, but these are all verbal.

26-29, Delegation and Motives

The Father has delegated two responsibilities to the son: resurrection and judgment. We have seen these already in 21-22 and 24. Now they reappear in 26-27, and again in 28-29. 26-27

focuses (like 21-22) on the delegation from the Father to the Son. 28-29 focus on the resulting execution. Between them is the injunction, “marvel not,” linking us back to the corresponding first delegation section in 20-23, where however the intent was that men might marvel.

In the first panel, 20 was a general statement, and 21-23 offered details about the Son’s authority to raise the dead and judge them. In the second panel, both members discuss both resurrection and judgment, first in terms of the father’s authorization of the son (26-27), then in terms of the actual execution (28-29).

26-27, Delegation

Here the Lord explains further his twin prerogatives to raise the dead and judge them, tracing the first to his deity and the second to his humanity.

26, resurrection: hath life in himself.—The Lord asserts his authority to raise the dead by claiming the divine prerogative of having life in himself. This is a very loaded statement. It occurs only three times in the Bible, all in John (5:26x2, 6:53), but a similar statement appears in the creation story of Gen 1:30. Each of these concerns a different individual.

- 5:26a, the Father has life in himself. He does not derive it from any source, but is himself the source of life.
- 5:26b, he has granted to the Son the divine prerogative of being a source of life. This is different from granting the Son life. In that case, the Son would *not* have life in himself, but only derivatively from the Father. What he has given the Son is intrinsic life.
- Gen 1:30 describes every animal, including man (v.29), as having “the breath of life in itself.” The addition of “breath” is significant, and calls to mind Gen 2:7, in which man receives his life as a gift from God. So does every other creature. Our life is derived from God, but he and his son have intrinsic, self-generated life.

Thus far, the Lord’s claim is clear. Unlike the creatures (including man) of Gen 1:30, his life is intrinsic, and he is thus able to animate others. Claiming life in himself is a claim of divine prerogatives.

In this light, consider 6:53. This verse makes it clear that ordinary people do not have life in themselves. Strikingly, it also suggests that those who receive Christ do have such life, and (v.54) that this life consists in living forever. The believer derives life from Christ in a more intimate way than God did from Adam. We are united with him so intimately that his life becomes ours.

27, judgment: the Son of Man.—In claiming the authority to judge, the Lord traces it to his title as Son of Man. Throughout this chapter, the focus is on his place as Son of God, not Son of Man, so this reference draws our special attention. At least two points appear to be in view.

1. Unlike the other 45 occurrences of “the Son of Man” in the gospels, the title is anarthrous: not “the son of man,” but “son of man.” The phrase is thus more a description than a title. While the title (with the article) is found only in the NT, the description (as here) occurs 14x in the OT, always with the generic sense, “human.” Cf. Num 23:19, “God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent.” To be just, a judge must understand the weaknesses of those being judged. The Father has committed all judgment to one who knows what it is to live as a human.

2. The Lord seems to have one of these OT references particularly in mind: the Son of Man prophecy of Dan 7:13, where the Ancient of Days grants “dominion and glory and rule” to the promised Messiah. The point of the phrase here is not to compare the Messiah to any particular son of man, but rather to assert that he is human. By taking up this phrase here, the Lord is claiming to be this promised figure.

Thus the Lord can raise the dead because he shares the Father’s quality of having intrinsic life, and he can judge them because he is human.

28b-29, Execution

Note that all will be raised, not just the righteous. Both the righteous and the wicked receive resurrection bodies in which to experience the eternal consequences of their lives.

Any Pharisee would have agreed with this statement, as long as you understand “his” to be God. This is an unexceptional statement of the Jewish belief in resurrection and judgment, with one exception: the actor is Jesus, not the Father!

28a, Marvel Not

Why does the Lord tell them not to marvel, after claiming in v.20 that marvel is one of the Father’s motives for assigning all authority to him? The instruction appears to go back to exhortations like Eccl 5:8 that people are not to be dismayed at the prosperity of sinners in this life, because God will one day judge them. His hearers should marvel that the Father has assigned judgment to him, but they should not be surprised that judgment will come.

Implicit in this is the warning that if they reject him, their doom is sure, because he himself will sit in judgment on them.

30 The Son does the Father’s Work

There are three points of comparison with the corresponding paragraph in the first panel.

- The Lord can do nothing of himself. He is not autonomous, but the Father’s servant. Note the shift from the third person “the son” in v.19 to “I” here.
- In both cases, his actions are guided by the Father, but in different ways. In 19, he *imitates* what he *sees* the Father *do*; in 30, he *obeys* what he *hears* of the Father’s *will*. This is a progression. The first case may be attributed to the devotion of a son to his Father, but the second shows the delegation of the Father’s authority to the son. Thus the second is much stronger than the first.
- The Son’s action in 19 are “what things soever the Father doeth.” In 30, the focus is on judgment. He began with the relatively innocuous claim of the right to heal a man. He ends claiming to be the Father’s delegated judge over all the earth.

Recap of 19-30

We can trace a progress through these verses:

- 19, the Son is completely subject to what he sees the Father do.
- 20, the Father encourages this imitation in all things, so that men may marvel.

- 21-23, in particular, he commits the work of resurrection and judgment to the Son, so that men may honor him together with the Father.
- 24, those who do honor him and escape judgment show the effect of his resurrection power.
- 25, physically, the Son's voice will raise the dead physically as well as spiritually.
- 26-27, the Father has committed the work of resurrection and judgment to the Son.
- 28-29, he will exercise this authority at the final resurrection and last judgment.
- 30, in all that he does, he is subject to what he hears the Father say.

31-47, Witnesses to the Son

Now John returns to the theme of witness, repeating the two that were mentioned in 15-18, and adding a third.

31-32, Need for Witnesses

31 If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.—Surely the Lord does not mean that whatever he says about himself is false; compare 8:14, where he asserts the truth of his own testimony. To understand his words, we must recall his *audience* and the *claim* in question.

- He is facing a hostile *audience* who will surely remind him of the pervasive Jewish legal principle that a person cannot bear witness for himself in a court of law (see Gill, and compare Deut 19:15, requiring two or three witnesses to establish every word).
- The *claim* that is in question is the notion that the Father has delegated all authority to him. It would be absurd to ask people to accept such a delegation solely on one's own say-so. He needs some irrefutable testimony to the fact of this delegation. The situation is different in 8:14, where the issue is his origin, not his authority.

He is not denying the truthfulness of what he has just said, but rather acknowledging that in their view, his own witness is inadmissible.

32 There is another that beareth witness of me.—He acknowledges the need for another witness, and assures them that there is one who is currently bearing this witness (present tense verb). But he does not state it outright. Instead, he builds up to it step by step.

33-35, John

The first candidate for his witness is John.

33 Ye sent unto John.—He recalls their embassy to the Baptist in 1:19. John identified him as the promised redeemer.

He bare witness.—The perfect tense indicates that his witness was in the past, suggesting that by this time he has been at least imprisoned, if not put to death, by Herod. So he will not be the one who is currently bearing witness. This is one problem with his witness. The next verse points out another.

34 But I ... that ye.—Both “I” and “you” are emphatic. The Lord describes John’s function using a contrast between himself and the Jews.

I receive not testimony from man.—In spite of John’s popularity, and even the divine origin of his mission, the Lord will not rest on his testimony. After all, what good is a human testimony on the issue of whether Jesus was the son of God or not?

these things I say, that ye might be saved.—His reference to John does not increase his own credentials, but may be more palatable to his hearers than his own claims. How unlike this is to human politics, where everything is focused on the benefit of the campaigner. The Lord’s primary concern is not for his prestige, but for their well-being. In spite of their opposition, he takes no pleasure in the judgment that will fall upon them, and desires rather that they would believe, by any means possible.

This verse also puts the importance of our own witness into perspective. The Lord does not depend on our testimony for his own credentials, but our fellow-creatures are much more likely to receive testimony from one another than directly from God (in spite of their protestations that “If I only saw a miracle...”).

35 He was a ... light: and ye were willing—Whatever they might think of the witnesses he is about to present, they must agree that John’s witness was open and plain, and that they themselves were favorably disposed toward it. Many of them came to be baptized by him (Matt 3:7), hoping that he would be the Messiah, but he rebuffed them for their sin.

36, Not Man, but the Works

the works ... bear witness of me.—Next, he draws their attention to the miracles.

- These do not show his full authority, for the prophets also performed miracles.
- But they do attest (for him and the prophets alike) to the divine authority for his mission: “that the Father hath sent me.”
- And their witness is present and ongoing, as they have just seen in the healing of the lame man.

37-47, The Father through his Word

This section is an alternation highlighting a single central element, summarized in the table. The alternation has three pairs of corresponding elements.

37, 41, The Witness to the Son

He offers the (positive) resolution to the mystery witness from v.32, paired with a repeated rejection of any lesser witness.

37 the Father ... sent me.—The notion that the Father sent the son is distinctive to John. Only in the gospel (18x) and 1 John (4:14) do we read that the Father sent someone. The whole focus of this chiasm is that the Father has authorized and sent the son, and now he claims that his witness is the very one who has sent him.

Two different verbs are used for “send”: 20:21 suggests that the difference is minimal: “as the Father hath sent <apostellw> me, so send <pempw> I you.”

The Lord's Honor	
37 And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me.	41 I receive not honour from men.
The Jews' Failure	
	42 But I know you,
Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. 38 And ye have not his word abiding in you:	that ye have not the love of God in you.
for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.	43 I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not:
	if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. 44 How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?
The Lord's Honor	
39 Search the scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.	45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is <i>one</i> that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. 46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. 47 But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?
The Jews' Failure	
40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.	

- *Pempw* is the generic term, and appears in 5:23, 30, 37; 6:44; 8:16, 18, 29; 12:49; always as the aorist participle defining the Father as “the one who sent me.”
- *Apostellw* specializes the concept to include the notion of an official embassy. The Lord never describes the Father as “the one sending <apostellw> me.” The verb is always used when the sending itself is the focus of the statement, rather than a qualifier describing the Father. It is used in 5:36; 6:57; 8:42; 10:36; 17:21, 25; 20:21; 1 John 4:14.

the Father ... hath borne witness of me.—He names the witness, but the perfect tense is puzzling, since v.32 had promised one who bears witness (present tense). The Father’s witness in the past certainly included his testimony at the baptism, to which the Baptist refers in 1:33-34. But that witness was only accessible to those who were there at the moment. There is another past witness by the Father that is accessible to the Jews now.

41 I receive not honour from men.—The fact that he has the Father’s testimony, the highest possible, leads him to reject any lower form of testimony. With this verse, compare v.34. Not only does he reject men’s testimony, he refuses to accept the honor that comes with it. Testimony makes other people feel good about us; honor makes us feel good. His confidence on his Father’s endorsement is so great that he relies on neither of these. In particular, he is so self-assured in his Father’s commission that he can make utterances like vv. 40 and 42 without fear.

37-38, 42-44, The Failures of the Jews

These sections take the form of a series of negative statements about the Jews. In both, their failure to recognize Jesus as the Father's envoy is a result and evidence of their more general hardness and blindness to the Father's revelation.

In 37-38, each negation puts the object first. The fourth gives the evidence ("for") for the first three.. Westcott: "The passage is a summary of the mode and conditions of revelation." Note the progression from perfect to present tense.

In the first three, they show themselves unworthy successors to the OT heroes of the faith

Ye have neither heard his voice at any time.—Unlike Moses, with whom "the Lord spake ... face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend" (Exod 33:11), they have not heard God's voice.

nor seen his shape.—Moses saw God's backside (Exod 33:23), and Jacob proclaimed, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen 32:30), but they have never experienced God in this way.

38 And ye have not his word abiding in you.—Many saints might be without experience of God's voice or vision, yet be able to say with the Psalmist, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa 119:11). But they don't even have this intimate relation with his written word.

The final clause, introduced by "for," gives the evidence (present tense) that they have no experience (in the past) in God's revelation.

for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.—The evidence that they have not experienced God's revelation is their lack of response to God's messenger. This might be John (1:6), but more likely the Lord is referring to himself. If they had truly been receptive to God's revelation, they would have had all the attestation they needed to recognize him.

In 42-44, he repeats this pattern of a failure in their relation with God that leads to their rejection of him, but then amplifies it on each end with a direct personal judgment.

Ye have not the love of God in you.—Their blindness to revelation is paralleled by their inexperience of the love of God. The expression is ambiguous: does it mean they have no love for God, or they have no experience of God's love for them? In the end, they come down to the same thing, but the parallel with their blindness to revelation in the first half of the structure suggests that "the love of God" is viewed here as another mode of revelation to which they are blind and of which they have no experience.

43 I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not.—This closely echoes 38b.

- "whom he hath sent" = "I am come in my Father's name," not on my own authority.
- "him ye believe not" = "ye receive me not," repeating the parallel between "believe" and "receive" from 1:12.

The additional personal judgment begins in 42, with "I know you."

I know you.—2:25, "he knew what was in man." Cf. Heb 4:13, "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

Then it continues at the end of 43 with a contrast between their lack of reception of him, and the reception they accord to false messiahs:

if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.—The history of the first two centuries is littered with the false messiahs after whom the Jews ran willingly. Morris cites others saying there were at least 64 such candidates. They would have accepted John as such if he had been willing. What set these false messiahs apart from Jesus was that they came in their own name, not in subjection to the Father.

44 How can ye believe.—Here is the real reason for their hardness of heart, their insensitivity to the word of God and the love of God: they seek honor from one another, not from God. Thus they are completely out of touch with him, who seeks honor from God alone and despises the honor that comes from man (v.41).

39, 45-47, The Evidence of Scripture

The previous section on their failure emphasizes their lack of experience of God's revelation. Now he makes this explicit. The form in which the Father bears witness is through the Scriptures he has given. In the first half, he speaks of them generically, while in the second, he focuses in on the law of Moses, the most sacred portion.

39 Search the scriptures.—This may be read as indicative rather than imperative. The Jews were famous for searching the scriptures. The Hebrew word “search”, *daraš*, leads to the notion of a *midrash*, an interpretation of scripture, which is studied in their rabbinical schools, the *betey midrash*.

in them ye think ye have eternal life.—They felt that by knowledge of the scriptures they could attain to eternal life. Hillel was reputed to have said (Abot 2:7), “Increasing Torah increases life; ... one who has acquired for himself Torah knowledge has acquired for himself life in the World to Come.”

they are they which testify of me.—In spite of their intimate knowledge of the words of Scripture, they still missed their real meaning, which was to point to Christ.

In the second half he takes them to the law, the foundation of the scriptures.

45 one that accuseth you.—This picks up the “testify” of v.39. The witness of the scriptures to Christ is at the same time an accusation against them.

Moses, in whom ye trust.—This is parallel to “ye search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life.” They were confident in their knowledge of the OT.

46 he wrote of me.—The Law is rich in Messianic prophecies. It teaches the Jews to anticipate

- the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent, Gen 3:15;
- the seed of Abraham who will bless all nations, Gen 22:18
- Shiloh, who will gather the nations, Gen 49:10
- The prophet like unto Moses, Deut 18:15

Had they been eagerly expecting the Messiah, they would have recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of these promises. But in fact, seeking only honor from one another and not from God, they were quite comfortable in their positions as the spiritual rulers of Israel, and didn't really want to be replaced by the true shepherd.

40, Their Ultimate Failure

The negative statements about the Jews reach their culmination here at the center.

40 ye will not come to me.—“Will” here is volitional, not future. “You refuse to come to me.”

that ye might have life.—Coming to him would give them life, but they don’t recognize that they are dead.