

The Authority of Jesus

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Date: 19 July 2026

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[0:00] Well, a question we often hear is, with so many religions in the world, how can Christianity say that there is only one way to God? That's a question we often hear, isn't it?

And for many people, their biggest problem with Christianity is its exclusivity. It's popular to think that every religion simply leads you to God.

And so Christianity is just one path amongst so many other paths that will eventually get you to him. Because if all religions have millions of followers and offer much wisdom and encourage you to live a good life and promise lasting happiness and teach so much stuff that is just so similar, then how can Christianity claim to be the only true faith?

Well, Christianity does claim to be the only way to God. And there's a reason for that. And the reason is Jesus himself. You would have noted that from our Bible reading.

Jesus claimed to be equal with God. And that's something that no other religious founder or leader has ever claimed. And so that gives Jesus an authority above and beyond everybody else.

[1:17] Now, some might say, well, Jesus never claimed to be God, did he? But when we look at what Jesus does and when we listen to what Jesus says and when we take account of the testimony about Jesus, it's clear that Jesus is God.

Which means all the guessing games about God and what he is like are over in Jesus. Jesus alone is the one that we must look to and that we must listen to if we are to get to God.

Now, I'm conscious that this may annoy and upset people, but it always has. You'll have seen that from our Bible reading. The Jews wanted to kill Jesus because of what he said and what he did.

And so what started as this argument about the man being healed on the Sabbath turned into a question about the identity of Jesus, which Jesus then went on to prove.

And so Jesus left his hearers, both then but also now, with a choice to make. And the choice is, will we accept the authority of Jesus, believe and have eternal life, or will we reject Jesus and be judged?

[2:39] It's a stark choice. And so just listen to how, from this passage, how Jesus is equal with God. It's confirmed through his works, through his words, and testified by his witnesses.

And so our three points this afternoon on the authority of Jesus. The authority of Jesus is seen through Jesus' works. It's heard in Jesus' words, and it's testified by Jesus' witnesses.

So first of all, the authority of Jesus is seen through Jesus' works. Now, we get this in the story of the man being healed at the pool. This is a sign that points to the identity of Jesus.

And so as we read it, we're meant to see what Jesus does to prove that he is God. But this then kicks off an argument with the Jewish leaders.

And so the context says Jesus is in Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals, and there's a pool called Bethesda. And this pool had become a gathering place for the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed.

[3:47] And Jesus meets this man who'd been paralyzed for 38 years. So we read in verse 6 and verse 7. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, do you want to get well?

Sir, the invalid replied, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. So there was this belief at the time that this pool had some kind of power to heal people.

And a tradition that if you just got in first as the water stirred, then you had the best chance of getting healed. And this man seemed to think that he wasn't getting healed because there was nobody there to get him into the pool quick enough.

Well, who knows how or even if this actually worked. But that's not the point. The point is, this man is completely hopeless.

He's not been able to walk for 38 years. His condition is incurable. And he's trying in vain to be healed. And it's just not going to happen.

[5:02] Which all underscores for us the power of Jesus to perform this amazing miracle. Verse 8 says, Then Jesus said to him, Get up, pick up your mat and walk.

At once the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked. So Jesus says the word and he is instantly healed. He's able to walk again. Or even walk for the very first time in his entire life.

I've seen a fair number of footballers who've been out with leg injuries in my time. Where depending on the injury and the seriousness of the injury, it just takes time for them to get back on their feet, running again, even kicking a ball.

So they may need an operation or they may need a period of physio. But the point here is that this is an instant healing by Jesus.

And so can you imagine this man walking about for the first time in 38 years, instantly healed. No need for a period of recovery.

[6:12] Now there's no mention here of the man's faith. The focus is on the power and the authority of Jesus to heal him. And nobody can do this. Unless they have divine power and authority like Jesus.

But it's not simply the healing that shouts this out to us. Because John reveals a significant detail in verse 9. Where he says the day on which this took place was a Sabbath. So why does it matter that it took place on a Sabbath?

Well a Sabbath was the day of rest for God's people. And the scriptures had forbidden doing any kind of work on the Sabbath. In fact, to ensure the Sabbath had kept, the Jews had gone much further than God's law.

And they devised 39 categories. Yes, 39 categories of what could be considered work. And if you did any of them, then you would be breaking the Sabbath.

But the problem is that these were 39 man-made rules. And yet they had become more important, it seems, to the Jews than the God who gave them the Sabbath in the first place.

[7:26] And so this man has just been healed. And the Sabbath police are out in force. Spying on everybody. Maybe with their list of 39 rules.

Just to see if anybody was doing the stuff on this list. And could be accused of breaking the Sabbath. And they pounce on this man for carrying his mat.

But here's the thing. The man wasn't actually breaking the Sabbath by doing this. Maybe if the man was carrying a bunch of mats. And he was going down to the market.

And he was going to sell all his mats and make some money. Then, well, yeah, he could be breaking the Sabbath by working. But he wasn't doing this. He just picked his mat up because he'd been healed.

In fact, did you notice later Jesus finds him at the temple in verse 14. Perhaps he's there praising God for being healed. Which is where the Jewish leaders should have been.

[8:25] Because here's a man who's able to walk after 38 years. It's interesting. Nobody thought to mention this fact to the man.

They're not caring about the fact his legs now work. All they care about is being nitpicky. Judging him for breaking their rules. And so they had lost the plot.

They'd lost the point of their religion. And so this man then shifts the blame onto Jesus in verse 11 and 12. The man had no idea who Jesus was.

But then Jesus found the man, verse 14, at the temple. And now the man had been healed. Jesus is saying he must turn from his sin because something worse. Something worse may happen.

But something worse is the judgment to come. And yet the man seems more concerned about what the religious leaders think about him than what Jesus thinks.

[9:23] Verse 15. And so the religious leaders are scandalized because Jesus had been healing on the Sabbath. And so they accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath too. But Jesus never broke the Sabbath either.

Look at verse 17. In his defense, Jesus said to them, My father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working. For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him.

Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. And this really gets to the heart of the matter.

The Sabbath raised the issue. Jesus was calling God his own father. And God the Father, we read, is always working.

So he's always working on the Sabbath. Well, why is he working on the Sabbath? Because he upholds the whole creation, the universe. Otherwise, if he didn't work in this way, everything would just disintegrate.

[10:26] And Jesus says he's also working. In this case, he's working by restoring the broken creation, by healing this man and making him walk again. So God the Father, God the Son are working.

But this was like a red rag to a bull for the Jews. And they're thinking, who does he think he is? Why is he behaving in this way? He's behaving like he is God.

Which, of course, he is God. Jesus is equal with God. And so we see this through Jesus' works.

Secondly, we hear it through Jesus' words in verse 19 to 30.

So the authority of Jesus is heard as he claims equality with God the Father. And it's a huge claim to make that he is equal with God.

And it needs some explanation. And that's why Jesus doesn't get sucked into a debate about what you can and can't do in the Sabbath. Instead, he speaks about his identity. He explains who he is and why he came to this earth.

[11:35] And it's a work with complete unity of purpose between God the Father and God the Son. So Jesus explains his relationship with the Father there in verse 19.

Jesus gave them this answer. Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself. He can only do what he sees his Father doing.

Because whatever the Father does, the Son also does. When Jesus says the Son can do nothing by himself, it doesn't mean Jesus can't do anything.

But it means that he doesn't work on his own initiative. He does the work the Father gives him to do. The Son is equal with the Father. But he can do only what he sees his Father doing.

So Jesus has a distinct role or mission, if you like. And in this relationship between God the Father and God the Son, Jesus is in a relationship of obedience and submission to God the Father.

[12:43] One commentator says, So Jesus always works in line with his Father.

And never independently of him. He must do what his Father does. Now there's so much to unpack here that we can't do justice to everything that Jesus says.

But let's just think, what is the work that the Father gives the Son to do? It's there in verse 20 to 23. Let me read those verses.

For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son. That all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

[14:02] So the greater works that the Father gives the Son to do, what are they? Well, firstly, there's two. Firstly, there's the work of giving eternal life, which is described here, verse 21, as raising the dead and giving them life.

Jesus came to give eternal life. And secondly, there's the work of executing judgment, which is described here in verse 22, as entrusting all judgment to the Son.

So these are the greater works the Father has given the Son to do, because they're divine works, works that only God can do, works that are accomplished by God the Son.

What are they? Jesus gives life. Jesus executes judgment. And that's why Jesus is to be honored in verse 23. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him, indicating that Jesus is the only way to God.

Only in Jesus can anyone receive eternal life and escape the judgment, which is to come. Verse 24, Very truly, I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.

[15:28] Jesus' words here in verse 24 are basically a summary, a great summary of the whole chapter, because they reiterate Jesus is the life giver and Jesus is the judge.

And so whoever responds to Jesus, hears his words, and believes has eternal life and won't be judged, because they've crossed over from death to life.

And this crossing over or this passing basically indicates that eternal life is not just a future hope after death, but it's also present reality for living life right now.

And so when we've got this life, we're told here we're no longer under condemnation, for our sin. And that's why it's so vital that we respond to Jesus.

Because not only does Jesus have authority to give us life, you, me, everybody else in this world, Jesus has life in himself. Verse 26, And Jesus also has authority to execute judgment.

[16:37] Verse 27, So only as the life giver and judge, only by believing in him can we have salvation right now and in the future.

And there's no other religion in this world that promises eternal life now and life when you die and giving you the assurance that it's yours at this very moment.

Only Jesus can do that. And the reason is because Jesus speaks with divine authority. And so only Jesus has the authority to raise you, raise me, and everybody else who's ever lived up from spiritual death and give them everlasting life.

But on the flip side of this, if we don't believe in Jesus but instead reject Jesus, then he will raise us up to be condemned.

That's what verse 28 and 29 are saying. So Jesus is saying his people will rise to live. And so just like that man at the pool, remember Jesus told him to get up just as he rose up to a new life, so we too will rise up to resurrection life when Jesus Christ returns as judge.

[18:02] And this life, the life of God and the soul of man as one classic Christian book puts it, this life only comes to us through Jesus.

Life to the full now and hope of everlasting life to come. Jesus is the one who gives us the opportunity to cross over from the human situation we're born into, spiritual death, to cross over from that into life.

And that's why Jesus' huge claim to equality with God just can't be dismissed. In fact, it's Jesus' claim to deity that eventually gets him killed by the Jewish authorities because the works that Jesus performed and the words that Jesus spoke prove he has been sent by God.

Nobody who encountered Jesus at the time ever thought Jesus was just an ordinary human being. They were aware by what he did and by what he said there was something different about this man. I think C.S. Lewis expresses this well in his book, Mere Christianity, when he says, I'm trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him.

[19:26] I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic on the level of a man who says he's a poached egg or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else a mad man or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. And so can you see how in what Jesus says and what he does he proves himself to be God.

God come to us. And so he forces us to make a decision on him and his claim to be equal with God. But there's one final line of evidence that proves the truth of Jesus' claim.

[20:41] The authority of Jesus is not just seen through Jesus' works, it's not just heard in Jesus' words, but it's testified to by Jesus' witnesses. And there are several key witnesses that testify to this.

But before we get to them, Jesus acknowledges his testimony about himself in verse 31 and 32. Let me read those. If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.

There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true. Jesus is not saying that his testimony is somehow false, but he's saying that there's more than one witness. So Jesus knew exactly what his opponents were thinking, because in the Jewish court of law, it was essential to have more than one witness.

And so Jesus calls upon his other witnesses to testify about who he is, that he is God. And so the magnitude of Jesus' claim means that we are not only to take his word for it, but we're to take the other witnesses and what they say too.

[21:53] And the main witness being God himself. He's the other witness in verse 32. God himself authenticates Jesus and points us to him, giving us the firm evidence to trust everything that Jesus says.

But Jesus continues to call witnesses to validate his claim to be the Son of God. And there are four witnesses here. The first is John the Baptist. There's the testimony of John the Baptist in verse 33 to 35.

So John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus, bore witness to Jesus. He made a big impression on people. Everybody agreed that John was special and listened to John and he gave light as a witness to shine the spotlight on Jesus who is the true light.

So there's the testimony of John the Baptist. Secondly, there's the testimony of Jesus' works. Verse 36. So the miracles of Jesus demonstrate his authority as God.

And we've seen this in the man at the pool. But all the works that Jesus performed throughout his ministry in the Gospels prove to us that Jesus is equal with God.

[23:08] I read a story this week about the 19th century French artist Paul Gustave Dory. If you were here for our series in Job, the image we used for Job was an impression of Job by Gustave Dory.

But the story is that he lost his passport when he was traveling around Europe. And so when he got to a border crossing he explained to the immigration official he didn't have a passport, he didn't have any identification with him, but he did say to the official that he was the painter Paul Gustave Dory.

He was famous at the time. And so the official was a bit skeptical, didn't really want to believe him and so asked him if he could prove it. And so he gave him a pencil, he gave him a piece of paper and he said to him, look at these people, can you just sketch those people for me?

And so Dory sketched them so quickly and so skillfully that he convinced the official that he was who he claimed to be. His work confirmed his word.

And so it's the same with Jesus. Everything that Jesus did proved that he is who he claimed to be. The son of God, the man at the pool and all through the gospels because nobody else in human history has performed the kind of supernatural miracles that Jesus has.

[24:35] And they're all signposts for us pointing to Jesus as God. And then third, there's the testimony of God the Father. There in verse 37 and 38, Jesus already said, God the Father bore witness to him.

So the Father sent the Son and testified about him. Which gives us a simple answer to the question, is Jesus the only way to God?

Because if God himself testifies about Jesus and tells us that Jesus is the only way to God, then we should look no further than Jesus.

And then fourthly, there's the testimony of the scriptures in verse 39 to 40. All of the Old Testament scriptures bear witness to Jesus. And at the time, the irony is that nobody studied the scriptures more than these Jews did.

And yet they missed the very one. Their scriptures were all about Jesus. Because the scriptures or the Bible for us is the testimony from God about his Son so that we would believe in him.

[25:54] Their whole purpose is to bring us into relationship with Jesus. And yet despite all of this testimony that Jesus gives to the Jews who are listening to him, pointing us to his true identity, in verse 40 Jesus has to say to the Jews, you refuse to come to me to have life.

He's lined up all these witnesses to drive home the point. The testimony about Jesus comes from every direction but they still don't accept him.

And their response in the closing verses shows us that they never actually listen to God. Verse 37, they don't have the love of God in their hearts. Verse 42, and they don't seek the glory that comes from God.

Verse 44, in other words, Jesus says to them, you don't know God. They didn't believe what Moses said and Moses wrote about Jesus because Jesus is the fulfillment of all of their scriptures.

And if they really believed what the scriptures said, then they would believe in Jesus. And so while these Jews may believe they're God's people, their rejection of Jesus proves they aren't.

[27 : 19] Which means there's no excuse for them and there are consequences for their failure to believe. And there are consequences for us too if we fail to believe in Jesus.

And so the issue, just as we bring this to an end, the issue is whether we will acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and accept His authority over our lives because God sent Him to us to give us eternal life so that through His death and resurrection on the cross our sins are forgiven and we're given new life by believing in Jesus.

But if we fail to believe then we miss out on this life and we must be judged for rejecting Jesus which is the worst possible life decision ever.

And so the authority of Jesus is seen through Jesus' works, heard in Jesus' words, testified by Jesus' witnesses and yet the people standing before Him who saw Him raise up the man at the pool and help Him walk again, they still failed to believe in Him.

And so we better not make the same mistake because it's not simply a matter of choosing to accept the authority of Jesus over our lives right now.

[28 : 51] It is because our future destiny, what happens at the final judgment, that's determined by our relationship with Jesus.

So don't listen to anyone else and what they say about how you get to God. Listen to the one who came from God to us through His works, through His words, and by His witnesses!

He is who He says He is. So let's listen to Jesus and believe in Him and enjoy eternal life now. Life that goes on forever.