

Motives For Murder

John 5:19-47

Introduction

I want to begin with a personal testimony of how I grew to appreciate my wife more than I ever have before.

Her birthday was last Friday. I decided to surprise her with an airplane ticket to her home in Atlanta, where she and the baby could spend a week of rest and relaxation with her mother. Sure, I would have three kids to watch, but they would be in school all day. I would come to the office and catch up on a myriad of details and go home early to be there when they got home. I can do that! Besides, I was not going to be preaching on Sunday because we were going to Virginia for a long overdue Christmas celebration with all of my family. What a perfect plan!

Marsha flew out on Friday. On Sunday night, my daughter came into the office and said, "Daddy, my back itches. Will you scratch it?"

She pulled up her shirt and her back was covered with chicken pox or, as she called it, "chicken pops".

I took a good look at my other two children and, sure enough, one of the twins had "chicken pops" too.

So, I was home all day with two sick children and it happened to be the coldest week in ten years. That meant my two sick kids wanted to do nothing more than lay around in their warm pajamas and argue with each other.

Is it bad yet? It would help me if you would just say, "Awwwwww!"

The worst part was cooking for them. I was desperate for ideas. I had cooked all the tuna helper

and I had run out of macaroni and cheese. Now I know some of you called to help, but I can do this. The climax was Thursday night – the night before Marsha returned. For supper I looked in the refrigerator and nothing spoke to me. Then, I spied a carton of eggs. So, I scrambled about ten eggs and even threw some cheese in the skillet. I put the eggs on paper plates – by now I was sick of dishes – and one of my sons said, "What's this?"

I said, "It's a special egg soufflé dish with seasoning and cheese."

My daughter said, "Is this it?"

I said, "No, I have brown and serve rolls coming."

One of my sons would not eat them. My daughter gagged on them. My other son ate all of his. He is my favorite child now!

When I picked up my wife from the airport, I gave her a long hug. I told her to never, ever let anybody tell her that being a homemaker is anything less than the most important occupation on planet earth. Being the pastor of a large church is a "piece of cake," but keeping house with sick children, cooking meals, doing homework, laundry, and dishes is an impossibility.

So Friday, I came to my office for a long day of study. I normally have my sermons finished by Friday afternoon, but the only thing I was able to finish was my research. I told my wife that I needed inspiration. I got to the office and, under the door, someone had slipped a brown envelope. It was addressed from "a member of your flock". I thought, "Oh no, anonymous mail. That's not the inspiration I was thinking off."

Then, I noticed that it was addressed to, “Pastor Sweet Pea Davey”. After mentioning in an earlier sermon that I did not care for peas and then receiving a can, I thought, “Oh no, not another can of peas.”

I opened the large envelope and a note was inside that read, “God bless you and your family.” And inside, after mentioning in a subsequent sermon that I did like candy bars and fifty dollar bills, there was a king sized chocolate candy bar and a fifty dollar bill!

Now, my wife is back home, I have a candy bar to snack on, and a fifty dollar bill. The past week has almost been forgotten!

The moral of this story is, every husband ought to do that once in his lifetime.

We pick up our exposition of John’s gospel at chapter 5. The man whom Jesus healed has just left the temple and the official persecution of Jesus is finally brought out into the open. What is their verdict? Jesus must die. Why? Turn to verse 18.

For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

The purpose statement of John, as he wrote this gospel, was to declare and reveal the deity of Jesus Christ. So, he selected seven miracles and seven discourses that reveal, through Jesus’ words and works, that He was undeniably God the Son.

Did the nation of Jews get it – did they miss the point? Absolutely not. In fact every cultist today must stumble over John’s gospel – every Jehovah’s Witness, every Mormon. The nation of Jews understood the implications clearly. Look back at verse 18b.

[He] was calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God.

There is no doubt, Jesus was making himself perfectly clear!

The nation, as prosecutor, claimed that Jesus was making himself equal with God, a claim that was punishable by death.

Three Ways In Which Jesus Is Equal With God

Now, the interesting thing is that Jesus goes on, seemingly uninvited, to give a speech or discourse that agrees with the prosecution!

“Yes,” Jesus declares, “I am equal with God.”

And, He presents three ways in which He is equal with God.

Jesus claims equality in power

1. First, Jesus claims equality in power.

He starts back in verse 17.

But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”

Skip to verse 19.

Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.”

What does this really mean? Does it mean that Jesus is inferior to the Father or that He can only imitate what He sees the Father doing? Some have imagined that Jesus is saying, “I have less power than the Father.”

The point is, Jesus is not stating His inferiority to the Father; He is declaring His unity with the Father. He is saying, “It is impossible for the Son to act apart from the Father.”

We talk about Jesus giving up the independent use of His divine attributes while He was on earth. That is well and good. However, it might lead to the erroneous belief that Jesus, prior to and after coming to earth, acts independently of the Father and the Spirit. That will never happen. There is perfect unity between the three persons of the Godhead. They never act without a unanimous vote.

The truth is, the Father will never do anything without the Son, nor will the Son act without the Spirit, nor will the Spirit act without the Father and Son. In other words, whatever the Spirit does, He does with the agreement and fellowship of the Son and the Father; whatever the Son does, He does with the total agreement and fellowship of the Spirit and the Father, and so on.

The analogy is certainly weak, but you might consider the activity of a corporate board that is made up of three men. Suppose one man is chosen to be the spokesman. He speaks on behalf of the board. That does not mean that the other two men do not know

how to talk – that they never got into the “Hooked On Phonics” program. No, it just means that one man has been selected to play the role of spokesman. That is the role of Jesus – He is the Word, the spokesman, of the triune God.

Then, let us say another man on this three man board writes all the material for the press. He is the man who helps the outside world understand the decisions of the board. That does not mean the other two men cannot write, it just means that his role is to inspire understanding by the things he writes. That is the role of the Holy Spirit – He inspired men to write the Scriptures so that we can understand what the corporate board of divinity has in mind.

Imagine, as well, one of the men being the chairman of the board. The decisions of the board are cast in terms of the will of the chairman. That is the role of the Father.

Now, we tend to talk of the first person of the Godhead – the Father, the second person – Jesus, and the third person – the Spirit. That can help theologians as they articulate the functions of the Godhead. The problem is, we interpret that, in our American minds, to mean that we have three people, equally divine, running a race. The Father comes in first place, the Son is in second place in importance, and the Spirit, bless His heart, comes in last.

The truth is, Scripture does not make that distinction anywhere. It is not three people running a race; it is a corporate board acting within their own divinely predetermined functions. They are coequal and co-eternal. They are:

- God, who is the Father,
- God, who is the Son, and
- God, who is the Spirit.

Continue to verse 20.

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

And what are these marvelous works? Well, to start, go back to the beginning, go back to Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

This is the creation of life and order out of nothing! Colossians, chapter 1, verse 17, informs us

that it was Christ who was the primary agent in creation and that, even to this day,

. . . in Him all things hold together.

You have probably read that the Hubble space telescope has been repaired. With its new wide field camera, it can see twelve billion light-years away. What are we looking for?

Newsweek summed up the quest,

Radiation from so far away, and hence so long ago, should carry messages about the universe's childhood and shed light on how the cosmos began and grew.

Like an adopted child who, with great intensity, hunts for his biological parent, so humanity, with even greater intensity, is still searching for its true parent. Humanity has an inborn desire to know, “Out of whose womb did we come? Who gave birth to the universe? Where did we come from?”

More and more, the discovery of the universe is pointing to a designer.

Tony Rothman, a theoretical physicist, wrote,

When confronted with the order and beauty of the universe and the strange coincidences of nature, it's very tempting to take the leap of faith from science into religion. I am sure many physicists want to. I only wish they would admit it.

One such writer comes close to admitting it. Astronomer George Greenstein, in his book, *The Symbiotic Universe*, wrote,

As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some supernatural agency must be involved. Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to, we have stumbled upon scientific proof of the existence of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit?

The order and beauty of the universe points to a creator. The Scriptures explain that the creator is Christ. To deny the witness of Christ, is to deny the witness of creation.

Notice verse 21.

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

The universe was created out of nothing, so another marvelous work of Christ is the power to resurrect; that is, to recreate life out of death. Even the rabbis taught that only God had the power to bring the dead to life. So:

- Creation is – life out of nothing.
- Resurrection is – life out of death.

These are the powers of Christ. He is indeed, equal to God.

Jesus claims equality in position

2. Secondly, Jesus not only claims equality in power, He claims equality in position.

Look at verse 22.

For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.

Skip to verses 27 through 29.

and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

The nation of Jews believed and taught that only God could judge a man for his sins.

Now, just what is this resurrection of judgment? We learn in Revelation, chapter 20, that there are two resurrections, which we do not have time to discuss both.

The two, mentioned by Jesus, are actually separated by a thousand years.

Focus with me on the second resurrection that is explained in Revelation, chapter 20, verse 11. It refers to all those who rejected the testimony of the Messiah and refused to receive Christ as Savior. It is known as the great white throne judgment. No believer will be there.

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

Continue to verses 12 through 14.

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were

opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

How do we know who is sitting on this great white throne? John, chapter 5, verses 22 and 27, tell us it will be the Son of God.

Go back to John, chapter 5, verse 27, and notice the basis for His right to sit on that throne.

and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.

I imagine there would be millions there who could say, “God, how can you judge me? You’re perfect and holy – you’ve never walked in my shoes; you’ve never had my struggles.”

Notice, however, who the judge is. It is the God-man. It is the One who was tempted in all points, who suffered the degradation of humanity, who felt the lure of power and fame, who can indeed, feel, a million times over, all that you have felt.

The One who came as a Messiah to save all those who place their faith in Him – is now judge to condemn forever all who have rejected the witness of creation and the witness of Christ.

Jesus claims equality in receiving praise

3. So, Jesus claimed equality with deity in power and position, and thirdly, He claims equality in receiving praise.

Look at verse 23.

in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

Four times, in this verse, the Greek verb “timao” appears, which means, “to esteem, to honor”.

No mortal man would ever dare suggest that he is worthy of the same honor as God the Father, unless he was equally God. And, since Christ is, it is

impossible to honor God the Father without honoring the Son.

John records for us, in chapter 20, that when Thomas fully realized the resurrected living Lord was indeed, standing before him, he fell to his knees and declared, in verse 28b,

. . . My Lord and my God!

Jesus should have shushed him or corrected him, but instead, He accepts Thomas' worship.

Jesus is equally deserving of praise.

Now, if you called my wife on the telephone and said, "Marsha, we're having a few couples over for dinner and we'd like you to come."

She would say, "Well, I'll talk to Stephen and we'll see if we can come."

But then, you respond with, "Oh, we don't want Stephen to come. After last Sunday's bad sermon, we don't like him anymore. We just want you to come."

Do you know what my wife would say? She would say, "No thanks. If he's not welcome, I'm not welcome. Besides, I've never heard him preach a bad sermon."

Okay, I'm stretching the truth.

Or, what if you got a call from a neighbor who said, "Hey, I've got tickets to the Superbowl for both of our families."

Imagine that – tickets to the Superbowl!

And then, they say, "I've got tickets for everyone in your family except your son. We really don't want him around. You want to go?"

You would say, "Not a chance."

Can you imagine the Father receiving praise from someone who ignores His Son? Not a chance!

To honor the Father is to honor the Son, for He is equally deserving of praise.

The song, "Majesty," that we sing, gives the Son that praise. Listen to the words.

Majesty, worship His majesty.

Unto Jesus be all glory, honor, and praise.

Majesty, kingdom authority flows from His throne unto His own. His anthem raise.

So exalt, lift up on high, the name of Jesus.

Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus the King.

Majesty, worship His majesty.

Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings.

Six Witnesses Jesus Calls

Now let me summarize the six witness Jesus calls to the witness stand to speak on His behalf.

The first witness – Jesus' own words

1. The first witness is Jesus' own words.

Look at verse 31, where Jesus said,

If I alone bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true.

Now, the Jewish *Mishnah* said, "A man is not worthy of belief when he is speaking about himself."

Demosthenes, the Greek statesman, said, "The laws do not allow a man to give evidence on his own behalf."

And so it was. Even the Mosaic law required two or three witnesses to establish a matter.

So Jesus gives His own testimony, knowing that He would need to give more. And He does, not two or even three more, Jesus calls to the witness stand five more to testify on His behalf.

The second witness – John the Baptist

2. The second witness is John the Baptist.

Look at verse 33.

You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.

Skip to verse 35.

He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, publicly declared, while pointing to Jesus, as recorded in John, chapter 1, verse 29b,

. . . Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

The rabbis taught that only God could forgive sin. John said, "There is the Forgiver of Sins."

And they rejected his testimony.

The third witness – the miracles of Jesus

3. The third witness to speak are the miracles of Jesus.

Go back to the prophet Isaiah and repeatedly he declares that, when the Messiah comes, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, and the lame will leap for joy.

And what had Jesus just done? He had walked up to a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years and, in John, chapter 5, verse 8, had said to him,

. . . Arise, take up your pallet, and walk.

It was an undeniable, irrefutable miracle! What a witness!

But what happened? The Jewish leaders got upset because Jesus performed the miracle of healing on the Sabbath. They completely overlooked the miracle, blinded instead, by the minutia of their regulations.

The “bottom line” was, they wanted to protect their traditions more than they wanted to discover the truth.

The fourth witness – God the Father

4. The fourth witness that Jesus calls to take the stand is God the Father.

Look at verses 37 and 38.

And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form [face]. And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent.

The Father gave direct witness to His Son at His baptism, in Mark, chapter 1, at the mount of the transfiguration, in Matthew, chapter 17, before His crucifixion, in Matthew, chapter 12, and in His resurrection, in Romans, chapter 1.

The fifth witness – the Scriptures

5. The fifth witness is the Scriptures.

Look at verses 39 and 40.

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.

The word “search,” in verse 39, could be translated “research”. The Jewish scribes and leaders studied the very letter of the Scriptures. Each line of

text was analyzed so that they knew how many consonants were in each line.

They knew the facts of Scripture, but refused its truth. They studied the pages of Scripture, but refused the Author.

The sixth witness - Moses

6. The sixth and final witness was, no doubt, a surprise to the Jewish leaders. The final witness to take the stand is none other than Moses.

Listen to the startling conclusion of Christ’s message in verses 45 through 47.

Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?

Imagine the courtroom scene. The nation who declared unswerving loyalty to Moses now finds out that they have, all along, ignored the truth of Moses’ writings – writings that pointed to the Savior.

Turn to Luke, chapter 24. In this chapter, the Lord begins to walk beside some disciples as they travel to the village of Emmaus. As they walked, Jesus began to explain the Scriptures. Start with verse 27.

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Skip to verse 32.

And they said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”

But the Jewish leaders that Jesus speaks to in John, chapter 5, are entrenched in their own love for their religion. They missed the Savior. They are so submerged in their facts of Scripture that they missed the Father’s message.

And, what does our Bible study do for us? Does our knowledge of the Bible give us a bigger head or a burning heart?

Well, the nation refused Christ because He claimed to be equal with God and He broke the Sabbath.

Why do people refuse Him today? Why do you?

Because life in Christ is:

- too demanding,
- too humiliating,
- too costly,
- too disappointing,
- too irrelevant, or
- “I’ll just save Him for a later time.”

If you refuse Him, you will one day stand before Him as your judge and it will be too late – forever too late. Is your pride in yourself worth an eternal hell? Are your passing ambitions worth an eternity apart from God?

If you come to Him now, you will find He is a lamb, slain for your sins; a Savior, available to save you, not just from an eternal hell, but from an empty life and for an eternal heaven.

Come to Jesus Christ – He is God!

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