

Jesus healed the invalid at the pool of Bethesda and told him to take his mat with him. The religious police saw the man carrying the mat and told him he was breaking the law. He defended himself by telling them that the man who cured him told him to take up his mat. Instead of being awestruck at the instantaneous healing of someone that had been an invalid for 38 years, they were anxious to catch the man who told him to break the Sabbath rest by carrying his mat. It's hard to believe someone could be so dogmatic about their rules, but they were.

To help us understand how that was possible, we have to understand Jewish history. When the Jews were carried away into captivity, the prophets told them it was because they had not kept their part of the covenant with God. Part of that covenant was keeping the Sabbath weekly and the once every 7-year Sabbath rest for the fields. (Leviticus 25:4) The Chronicles told them the length of their exile was equivalent to the number of years they ignored the Sabbath rest for the fields. (Jeremiah 17:27; 2Chronicles 36:21) God gave the land that rest by removing them. During the exile and return to the land, movements sprang up that were aimed at seeing the Jewish people never compromise again so they would not have to endure another exile. That is how the Pharisees became so legalistic. It was motivated by fear of judgment. (Zechariah 7:11-12)

They had a good desire in trying to be faithful to God, but went so overboard in trying to enforce their rules to protect the laws that they ended up breaking the spirit of the laws. (Mark 7:13) So when they saw the man carrying the mat, their mindset wasn't about the wonderful fact that God was miraculously present (an objective of real Sabbath keeping) but instead on keeping the people obedient to the rules so that God would not have to judge them harshly. (Nehemiah 13:17-18) To have someone telling others to break their rules that they designed to protect the Sabbath was even a greater threat to holding off the wrath of God. That is what was behind this insane legalism.

Jesus responded to the legalists' accusations by making some very radical claims about Himself. He declared that He could give life to anyone at will. He claimed to be the Judge of mankind. He said He is Son of Man, a reference from Daniel's prophecy about the One to whom sovereign power and authority would be given, the One whom all will worship. That was so radical that they considered it blasphemy. How can a human claim those things that belong to God alone?

In our passage today, Jesus proceeds to defend His claims. ³¹ "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. ³² There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. Anyone can make any claim. When someone says something about them self, it often isn't a valid statement. One rabbi even wrote that a person's personal testimony in court should not be considered. We can overrate ourselves out of pride. We can understate our gifts and ability through false humility. We get a much more accurate estimation if we ask others who observe us regularly, especially someone that is a spiritually mature person.

Commented [notes1]: 4 But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Lev 25:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 27 But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses." Jer 17:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 21 The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah. 2 Chron 36:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 11 "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry. Zech 7:11-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." Mark 7:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 17 I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing--desecrating the Sabbath day? 18 Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath." Neh 13:17-18 (NIV)

³³ "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. Those that were attacking Jesus had sent a delegation to John the Baptist to ask about his teaching. (John 1:19) John told them of the One to come whose sandals he wasn't worthy to tie. (John 1:27)

Then Jesus said something that is very revealing about His attitude toward these religious leaders. First, He told them it didn't matter what men say. He just cared about what His Father thought. But the whole reason He brought up John the Baptist was to try to get them to hear and be saved.

When many read the gospels, they come away with the impression that Jesus didn't like the Pharisees and Sadducees. If that is the case, why did He spend so much time talking with them? Why did He accept dinner invitations with them? (Luke 7:36) Remember, God loves the world, and that means ALL the people in it. Jesus was harsh, but He was harsh in order to break through all the indoctrination they had grown up with. It would end up resulting in His death, but He kept on telling them the truth. That is love not animosity! Love is willing to risk relationship and acceptance in order to see someone's eternal soul saved from wrath.

Actually, Jesus and the religious leaders are trying to accomplish the same thing. The religious leaders were just misguided in how to go about it. While they are rebuking Him for breaking their rules in order to save Israel from wrath, Jesus is telling them some hard sayings to try to keep them from wrath. They couldn't both be right. So Jesus said, "Why didn't you listen to the prophet John?"

To convict a fellow Jew of the more serious crimes, one had to have two witnesses that agreed. (Deuteronomy 17:6) The Law of Moses required two witnesses to keep one person from incriminating someone they were at odds with. Remember an example of this at the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas. (Mark 14:59) They tried to get two witnesses to agree. Jesus said He had John as a witness, but He also had His actions as a witness. ³⁵ John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. ³⁶ "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

The original language has the definite article before "lamp". John was the lamp. Jesus was referring to something specific, perhaps the Messianic prediction in Psalm 132:17. ¹⁷ "Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one. As Jesus is the Son of David, David is prophetic Messianic term. (Hosea 3:5) Anointed one is "the Christ" in Greek. Jesus very well may have had this passage in mind.

Jesus backed His claim up with His miraculous deeds. You could put all the miracles of the prophets together and they wouldn't come close to sheer number of miracles Jesus performed. Not many people can say you should believe what they say because of the way they live. No one but Jesus can ask for belief in them because of miraculous deeds. We generally don't invite scrutiny. But Jesus said in essence, "My life testifies that I am heaven sent and that my claims are true."

Commented [notes7]: 19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. John 1:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 27 He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." John 1:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. Luke 7:36 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 6 On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. Deut 17:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree. Mark 14:59 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days. Hosea 3:5 (NIV)

Think about that. If God became a man, would He live any differently than the life of Jesus? He showed His power over creation and compassion on the sick. (Mark 4:41; Matthew 8:16) He boldly declared who He was and His mission to save us (Matthew 20:28), but He didn't shrink from warning of final justice to those who clung to evil. (Matthew 8:12) What throws us is that His life ends on the cross. It's hard for us to imagine any god loving us enough to endure that, but that is because we tend to think of what we would put up with if we had all power. What I'm saying is that His life was greater in humility, love and purpose than we would imagine.

There may be one more tradition behind Jesus' use of two witnesses. In that time, there were the common rabbi, and then there were those who memorized the entire Law, prophets, and psalms. If you were able to do that and two others who were recognized as that top level of rabbi confirmed that you had done so and were worthy, you would then attain to that top level of rabbi. The common rabbi quoted others who had come before. They dared not interpret the Law themselves. This highest level of rabbi could interpret the law and be quoted by others. There were only a few in Jesus' day. Jesus may have been saying He was of that level and more. He could tell others how to interpret the Sabbath Law. He knew the Scriptures and His two witnesses were John the Baptist and His miraculous works. He was claiming authority equal to, and greater than, those that the religious leaders based their opinions on.

³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸ nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You have the prophet John, the miracles Jesus performed, and God, Himself, testifies of Jesus. He is witness number three, and He is the ultimate witness. That should be proof positive for any sincere seeker of the truth. The religious leaders didn't hear His voice at the baptism, nor do they hear His voice in their heart. Do we? If we are in tune with God we will hear Him say, "This is my beloved Son whom I love. In Him, I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 3:17; Luke 9:35) But they didn't hear God's voice and His word did not dwell in them, because they did not believe Jesus.

Think, for a moment, about that phrase, "nor does his word dwell in you..." They had memorized huge portions of Scripture, more than any of us, and yet Jesus said God's word did not dwell in them. (Psalm 119:11) There must be a difference between memorizing Scripture and having the Word live in us. The only way I can interpret this is by John the Beloved's declaration that the Word was made flesh in Jesus. (John 1:14) In other words, the Word of God is the Son of the Trinity, one with the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit of God does not reside in them, there may be a million words memorized in their head, but the Word of God is not at home in them. The letter is dangerous without the Spirit. (2Corinthians 3:6) When the Spirit is at home in you, you hear God's voice and believe the one He sent. Jesus' manner of speaking is unique. His statement wasn't a supposition or a suggestion; it was a declaration of fact. "You don't hear God and His word isn't living in you!"

Sometimes we meet people that are genuinely seeking the truth. The Holy Spirit has been at work in their life, but He does not yet live in them. They almost seem to be a child of God, but they don't receive Jesus as the Son of God and Lord of all. His

Commented [notes13]: 41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Mark 4:41 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 16 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. Matt 8:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matt 20:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matt 8:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matt 3:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." Luke 9:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalms 119:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:6 (NIV)

word does not dwell in them. They have not yet heard His voice. How intolerant of Jesus to say such a thing? No, how audacious of man to question Son of Man's declarations of truth. If you think your opinion is better than His declaration, let me ask you if you can point to your life as a reason to believe you? Jesus can point to His life and we are still in awe of how He lived even to this day.

³⁹ You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life. The religious leaders had fallen into a trap that we can easily fall into as well. They worshipped the Scriptures. (note) They thought by knowledge of the details they could please God as if God was the great rule maker in the sky that doles out His love and mercy on those who perform exactly as He has prescribed. They missed the simple declaration of the Psalmist, "There is none that does good, no not one!" (Psalm 14:3)

Jesus is saying something here that the disciples took as a new paradigm. Correct interpretation of the Scriptures (the Old Testament) is to see Jesus throughout those writings. The church today does not emphasize this point enough. "These are the Scriptures that testify about me..." Jesus said. The first thing Jesus did after the resurrection was to explain the Old Testament to the two on the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24:27) Then when He showed up in the room that the disciples were hiding in, He explained it to them as well. (Luke 24:44-45) Throughout the book of Acts the disciples and Paul preached Jesus from the Scriptures. That was their main message. (Acts 3:18) That is why I wrote that book, *Jesus Concealed in the Old Testament*. The sovereign God of history painted picture after picture for us of His Son. That is witness number four!

Jesus is saying, "You've got these four undeniable witnesses that all agree and yet you refuse to come to me to have life!" Now we are getting down to why people really reject Jesus. It's not for lack of proof. The prophet John said Jesus is the One. His miracles proved it. God speaks to our hearts and tells us. The Old Testament is full of prophecies and pictures of Jesus. What more could you ask for? The problem is we refuse to come to Him because we know that to do so means to acknowledge that He is Lord and we aren't. Yet, if we don't, we will never receive life. Yes, your heart is beating and you are still breathing, but life is knowing God and Jesus. (John 17:3) Without that, as alive as you think you are, you're still dead.

⁴¹ "I do not accept praise from men, ⁴² but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. When the love of God is in our hearts, we don't really care what men say about us. We want to please the Father. As long as He is pleased, we are satisfied. This desire for the praise of man is what has led to the downfall of so many. (Galatians 1:10) I value your encouraging words of appreciation, but I always have to take them to the Lord and acknowledge that if anything good came from me, it is all because of Him. If the praise is valid and not flattery, it deserves to be laid at the feet of Jesus. Without Him, everyone of us would be in the sandals of these religious leaders, refusing to come to Him to have life. (John 15:5)

Commented [notes22]: If a man has gained for himself words of the Law he has gained for himself life in the world to come. Hillel (m.'Abot 2:7)

Commented [notes23]: All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. Psalms 14:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Luke 24:44-45 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Acts 3:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. John 17:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. Gal 1:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (NIV)

What a shocking statement this was, and yet what conviction it must have carried. They knew they loved the praise of men. (John 12:43) That's why their religious life was a big show. (Matthew 6:5) They believed they loved God too, but Jesus was saying if one is true the other isn't. If you love praise from men, the love of God can't be in you.

⁴³ *I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him.* After Jesus ascension, a number of men came on the scene and claimed to be the Messiah. They wanted to oust Rome, and they did obtain backing from the religious leaders. Jesus' prediction of their acceptance of false Messiahs and the destruction of the Temple came to pass. (Matthew 24:5) If you need even more proof, there it is.

⁴⁴ *How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?* It just isn't possible. If you are seeking the praise of men, you will never make an effort to receive the praise that comes from God, and therefore you will never believe. It is only when we turn from the things the world lauds that we can truly seek what pleases God, and then we can truly believe in Jesus. (Matthew 6:24) This is a key challenge for everyone that comes to Christ, but especially for those who are in the public eye. Whose praise are you seeking?

⁴⁵ *But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set.* ⁴⁶ *If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.* ⁴⁷ *But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"* They invested their lives in studying the books of Moses. Jesus is repeating His point that the Scriptures are all about Him. If they refused to see that, Moses will one day stand and accuse them. On that day they aren't going to tell Moses that isn't what he meant or that what he wrote wasn't inspired revelation of the Son of God.

The Jews of that day believed Moses was in heaven interceding for them. Jesus flipped that idea around and said he is in heaven accusing them. If they don't believe Moses, whom they continually studied, they will never believe the words of Jesus.

These religious leaders had invested their lives in boasting about what they do. (1John 2:16) Along comes this carpenter rabbi from a little rural town and tells them everything is about Him, but that they are incapable of receiving it. He laid out the proof for them and for us that we might come to Him for life. The book of Acts tells us that after the resurrection many of them did believe. (Acts 6:7) His words got through to their hearts and they were able to leave their worldly ambitions behind and follow. Many more continued to refuse to believe. (Hebrews 12:25) That is the point of this passage. We have enough proof. Jesus laid it out for any honest seeker. Will you cling to the world and refuse to believe or will you let go of your own ambitions and come to Jesus for life, real life, eternal life? Are you seeking the praise that comes from God alone?

Commented [notes30]: 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.
John 12:43 (NIV)

Commented [notes31]: 5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.
Matt 6:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes32]: 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.
Matt 24:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes33]: 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.
Matt 6:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes34]: 16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.
1 John 2:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes35]: 7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.
Acts 6:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes36]: 25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?
Heb 12:25 (NIV)