

Main Idea: In John 5:16-23 we learn from Jesus Himself seven things concerning His identity.

- I. Jesus is equal with the Father (16-18).
 - A. The Father is working.
 - B. The Son is working.
 - C. The Father and the Son are equal.
- II. Jesus is submissive to the Father (19a).
- III. Jesus imitates the Father (19b).
- IV. Jesus is loved by the Father (20).
 - A. This love is transparent.
 - B. This love produces an effect on us.
- V. Jesus raises the dead, just like the Father does (21).
- VI. Jesus has received all judgment from the Father (22).
- VII. Jesus deserves honor, just like the Father (23).
 - A. The Father prizes His Son.
 - B. The way you treat the Son reveals what you really think about God.

Response: In light of what Jesus said about Himself, ask yourself the following.

1. Do you know the real Jesus?
2. Do you know Jesus for real?
3. Do you really want others to know Him?

Back in 1865 William Dix asked an important question...

What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping, whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping? As we approach Christmas, we need to think about the question Dix raised in that popular hymn. What child is this?

The reality is, many don't know. In fact, many who bought gifts this week to prepare for that child's birthday don't know who He is. Quite frankly, He's become the *X-mas child*.

The X at one time stood for *Christ*, X being the first Greek letter in the title that designates the identity of that special child, *Christos*. But, of course, hardly anyone knows that now. Today X is just a quick way to sign cards, *Merry X-mas*, or invite customers into your shop, for your *X-mas* sales.

In algebra, X is a symbol that's used to refer to an unknown quantity: $x + y = z$. And that's precisely what this child has become, an *unknown*.

So the question is quite relevant. What child is this? Who is the X-mas Child? There are a lot of places in the Bible we could turn to answer that question, perhaps none better than the passage before us in our current Sunday morning series in the gospel of John.

The apostle John, as we've mentioned repeatedly, wrote this eyewitness account of Jesus' life to prove that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and to urge us to believe in Him and have eternal life through Him (20:31). But how do we know Jesus is the Christ, and what qualifies Him to give us eternal life? John answers those questions for us on every page of his gospel account, and nowhere more vividly than in John 5.

This morning we're going to launch a three or four week series in John 5 entitled, *"The Truth You Need to Know about the X-Mas Child."* To prepare for this study I need to put it into context. There are two sections in John 5. First, there's a story (that's verses 1-15). Then there's a sermon by Jesus about the story (that's verses 16-47). To

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

put it another way, the first fifteen verses of John 5 are narrative. They tell the story of the disabled man Jesus healed at Bethseda. But the rest of John 5 is didactic. It's "red letter." That's because Jesus is teaching in response to the miracle He just performed.

Why would He need to teach about His miracle? It's because of the stir that miracle created. Notice verse 16, "So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath [i.e. the things in verses 1-15, healing a disabled man and then telling that man to carry his mat, both of which the Jews considered violations of the Law], the Jews persecuted him."

So the miracle Jesus did created a controversy, a teachable moment, and Jesus didn't waste it. In His defense, He took the occasion to reveal the truth about Himself. Quite frankly, some of the claims that Jesus makes in this red letter section are mind-boggling. This is top-shelf truth, which is why as we come to this text, we need to slow our pace and ponder these statements very carefully.¹

Let me give you some examples of what I mean by mind-boggling. In verse 17 Jesus says, "My Father is always at work to this very day." That's astounding. He says His Father is presently working. Who is His Father, and where is He working, and what is He doing, and what is the outcome of His work?

Look at verse 19 and you'll see another statement that should cause our jaws to drop. "The Son can do nothing by himself." What? Nothing? The Son who has inherent power such that He could create the universe, according to 1:1-3, can't do a thing on His own? Why not, and how then does He do His work?

Here's another question-prompter, also in verse 19, "He [the Son] can do only what He sees His Father doing." So Jesus says He's not innovative. He is an imitator. His actions always correspond to the actions He observes His Father doing. Okay, what actions of the Father is He talking about? What did the Son see His Father do that He now imitates, and when did He see those actions?

He says in verse 20, "For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does." Okay, when did that happen, and how does the Father show His Son all He does? Is Jesus talking about a pre-incarnation experience or something that happened on earth?

And notice verse 21, "For just as the Father raises the dead...even so the Son gives life." So the Father raises people from the dead, says Jesus, and the Son raises people too. Are these groups distinct? What people did the Father raise, and when? And when did the Son see those actions of His Father, before He came into the world, or after?

Questions, questions, questions. There is so much here, so much wonderful truth about the identity of our God and His beloved Son, the One who came to save the world. Sometimes you study the Bible like you're looking through a telescope, to get the big picture. At other times you need a microscope to see the glorious details, and that's the case in John 5. Jesus' sermon makes four points, and those points will provide the structure for our series...

This week: *The Identity of the X-Mas Child* (16-23)

Next week: *The Mission of the X-Mas Child* (24-30)

The following week: *Witnesses to the X-Mas Child* (31-40)

The final week: *The Right Response to the X-Mas Child* (41-47)

So let's begin. Who is this child who became a man and ultimately died and rose again? In John 5:16-23 we learn from Jesus Himself seven things concerning His identity.

¹ Typically you can study narrative passages at a quicker pace than didactic passages, especially this one.

I. Jesus is equal with the Father (16-18).

Verse 16 begins, “So.” *So* takes us back to what just happened. According to verse 15, the man Jesus just healed went and told the Jews who it was who healed him and told him to carry his mat. *Jesus*, he told them. *He’s the one*.

The result? “So, because Jesus was doing [notice the continuous action] these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him [lit. ‘were persecuting him,’ the tense indicates ongoing action].” They started hunting Jesus down. That’s what the term means. They put a target on His back and started firing shots at Him. They won’t quit until they’ve nailed Him to a tree.²

In response, verse 17 says, “Jesus said to them.” He knows they’re talking about Him, and He knows they’re questioning His actions. So He speaks to His critics. Here’s what He said, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

My Father, He begins. He speaks of God in the dearest of terms. *My Father*. The Jews didn’t usually talk about God that way. Oh, they referred to Him as “*our Father*,” as in Isaiah 64:8, “O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter.” But Jesus talks of God as if He knew Him in the most personal way.

As we read John’s gospel we learn much about this intimate relationship between the person of God the Father and the person of God the Son. For starters, we’re told in John 1:14 that the Son is the one “who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:18 declares, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

When we come to John 2:16, we see Jesus throwing the money-changers out of the temple and shouting, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

In John 3:35 we hear John announce, “The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.”

In John 4:23 Jesus tells the woman at the well, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

And perhaps no passage reveals the intimate bond between the Father and the Son more clearly than John 17. In John 17 we read the prayer Jesus prayed the night before His crucifixion. He begins in verse 1, “**Father**, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” He bears His soul in verses 4-5, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, **Father**, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” He tells His Father about His concern for His followers in verse 11, “**Holy Father**, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.” He tells Him what He wants for His followers in verse 24, “**Father**, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.” And He concludes His prayer, again with the dearest of terms, in verses 25-26, “**Righteous Father**, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

² The KJV and NKJV add to verse 16 that they “sought to kill him.”

What a remarkable relationship! There is none else like this Father-Son bond. Jesus speaks openly and unashamedly about it in John 5. Remember why. The Jews are attacking Him because they said He was working on the Sabbath. But in defense, He points out something quite significant, something about His Father.

A. The Father is working. “My Father is always at work,” says Jesus.

You say, “But wait. He rested on the seventh day, didn’t He?” Genesis 2:2 says, “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”

Yes, He rested, but what does “rest” mean in Genesis 2? It doesn’t mean inactivity, any more than “work” means that God engaged in an activity that made Him weary. An omnipotent God doesn’t get weary when He works (like we do) because the work He does doesn’t diminish His endless supply of strength (Isa. 40:28). So God didn’t need to rest because He was tired. Why then did He rest? According to Exodus 20:9-11, He did so to set an example for us as human beings. The Lord wants His image-bearers to break the seven day cycle and rest from their labors one day out of seven.

But does “rest” mean total inactivity? No. The Father rested from His creation work, but He never ceases His work of sustaining and caring for His creation. Every Sabbath day we enjoy the benefits of My Father’s work, says Jesus. We wake up because He sustained us through the night. Our hearts are beating because He kept them going. We feel the sun warming our skin because He kept it in place.

He’s always at His work, says Jesus, right up *to this very day*, He emphasizes. And that includes the Sabbath. But the Father isn’t alone in His work. Jesus makes it clear that, secondly...

B. The Son is working. “And I, too, am working.” Notice that Jesus doesn’t deny that He just worked on the Sabbath. What He did for that disabled man He now calls *work*. That’s interesting. As Leon Morris observes, “What passes with us as miracle is to Christ no more than a ‘work.’”³

In his commentary, Warren Wiersbe cites British writer, George MacDonald, who said that this verse gives us tremendous insight into the Lord’s miracles. Wiersbe states, “Jesus did *instantly* what the Father is always doing slowly. For example, in nature...the Father is slowly turning water into wine; but Jesus did it instantly. Through the powers in nature, the Father is healing broken bodies; but Jesus healed them immediately. Nature is repeatedly multiplying bread, from sowing to harvest; but Jesus multiplied it instantly in His own hands.”⁴

You want me to defend my Sabbath-day actions? Here’s my defense. My Father is always working, even on the Sabbath day, and so am I.

Put two and two together and what do you conclude from Jesus’ statements? This...

C. The Father and the Son are equal. Verse 18—“For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

Now the Jews have another incentive to kill Jesus. What is it? They said He was claiming to be equal with God.

That reminds me of a conversation I had in my front yard one day with a Jehovah’s Witness. The man, of course, didn’t believe Jesus was God. I mentioned to him that the

³ Leon Morris, p. 314. In verse 20 He speaks of His future miracles as “greater works.”

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 305.

Jews certainly believed that Jesus claimed to be God. “But the Jews misunderstood Him,” the man told me. “Jesus didn’t really claim to be God. That was just the wrong conclusion the Jews made.”

No way. If that was the case, then explain Jesus’ response to the Jews in John 5. How did Jesus handle the Jews’ conclusion that He was claiming to be equal with God? Did He say, “Hold on, fellows. You’ve misunderstood me.”? Not at all. To the contrary, He embraced their conclusion and proceeded to give them even more reasons why they should embrace it (and likewise more reasons why they should want to kill Him if they continued in their unbelief).

Who is the X-mas child? Jesus makes it clear, first of all, that He is the One who is equal with God the Father.

II. Jesus is submissive to the Father (19a).

Take a look at the first part of verse 19, “Jesus gave them this answer.” That’s curious. An answer to what? They didn’t ask a question. No, but He’s answering their actions. They’re furious with Him because He just violated their Sabbath restrictions and then called God His Father. Consequently, they are trying to kill Him, having concluded that He’s a fraud.

Are they right? Is He a dangerous fraud that needs to be eliminated from the world? That’s the unspoken question that He now proceeds to answer.

I could be wrong, but I would suggest that nowhere else in the four gospels will you hear Jesus open the door into the privacy of His personal life any more clearly than in the verses we’re about to consider. As Leon Morris concludes, “Nowhere else in the Gospels do we find our Lord making such a formal, systematic, orderly, regular statement of His own unity with the Father, His divine commission and authority, and the proofs of His Messiah-ship, as we find in this discourse.”⁵

He speaks in verse 19, “I tell you the truth [KJV, ‘Verily, verily’].” He often used that phrase (and it appears 25 times in John) to preface something that sounds unbelievable yet is bedrock truth.

“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself.” That’s intriguing. Jesus, the One who later will say that “all authority has been given to me in heaven and earth” (Matt. 28:18) here says that He “can do nothing by Himself.” He uses a double negative, literally, “The Son is not able to do nothing by Himself.”

What’s that tell us about Christ? He never works on His own. He can’t. In verse 30 He says, “By myself I can do nothing.” It’s not a matter of lacking the ability. It simply would be a violation of His nature to act independently of His Father. He is always submissive to His Father and it could never be otherwise.

That’s why He stayed behind in the temple as a twelve year old, and when questioned by His earthly parents, responded, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house (Luke 2:49)?”

It’s also when, when He’s in the garden, sweating drops of blood as He dreads the hell that’s coming on the cross, He cries, “Father...not my will, but Yours be done (Luke 22:42).”

⁵ Leon Morris (quoting Ryle), p. 311.

Who is the X-Mas child? Keep this in mind, my friends, as you prepare for December 25. Jesus Himself makes it clear that He is equal with God the Father and is always in submission to Him. Thirdly...

III. Jesus imitates the Father (19b).

Notice the second part of verse 19, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he *can do only what he sees his Father doing*, because *whatever the Father does the Son also does.*”

Some of you will remember Phil Donahue, a well known talk show host several years back. In his best-selling autobiography, *Donahue*, the outspoken celebrity explains why he left the faith. He writes, “If God the Father is so all-loving, why didn’t he come down and go to Calvary? Then Jesus could have said ‘This is my Father in whom I am well pleased.’ ... How could an all-knowing, all-loving God allow his Son to be murdered on a cross in order that he might redeem my sins?”⁶

But Donahue isn’t telling the whole story, is he? The fact is, the Father did share with His Son in the work of redemption. Listen to Jesus again in verse 19, “Whatever the Father does the Son also does.” So the Son’s work is a reflection of the Father’s work. The Father and the Son, thus, share together in their work. Did the Son experience pain? Yes, but so did the Father. Did the Son make a sacrifice? Yes, beyond comprehension, but so did the Father. Did the Son demonstrate His love for us? Yes, there is no greater love, but the Father demonstrated the same love.

Kent Hughes explains, “Those who were with Christ saw the Father. They saw the Father’s smile. They heard the Father’s teaching. They observed the Father’s tender touch and trembled before his wrath. If we want to see what the Father does, all we have to do is look at Christ.”⁷

I can’t explain this fully, but I affirm it. Jesus says that what the Father does the Son does, and what the Son does is what the Father does. In verse 20 Jesus elaborates and says that the Father “shows him all he does” and that He will “show him even greater things than these.”

That’s why I am using the word *imitate*, though it’s deficient. Jesus says that the Son can do only what He sees His Father do. He watches His Father and does what His Father does. But He’s not a mindless robot, for in verse 21 He says the Son gives life “to whom He is pleased to give it.”

So Jesus gave life to a man’s dead limbs on the Sabbath. Why did He do that? Because He has seen His Father doing the same. Like Father, like Son.

The Father and the Son are devoted to the same work. What work is that? At the end of His earthly visit, Jesus prayed this to His Father in John 17:4, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” What work is Jesus talking about? It’s the work of reversing the curse, of redeeming and rescuing sinners, and it’s a work that is fully shared by both God the Father and God the Son (and God the Holy Spirit, too, although that goes beyond today’s focus; see John 16:5-15).

What’s true of the Christ? Jesus says He is equal with the Father, submissive to the Father, and always imitating the Father in the work they share. Fourth...

⁶ Phil Donahue, quote taken from Kent Hughes, p. 163.

⁷ Kent Hughes, p. 163.

IV. Jesus is loved by the Father (20).

Verse 20, “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.”

It’s worth noting that Jesus doesn’t use *agapao* here (as He does in John 17, for instance; see 17:23, 24, 26). Here He uses *phileo*. *Phileo* speaks of family affection, in this case, the tender love of a Father for His precious Son. It’s the only time in the New Testament we see this word in reference to the Father’s love for His Son, and here it’s in the present tense indicating this love is continual and unending.

Jesus here emphasizes two things about His Father’s love. First...

A. This love is transparent. Notice the verbs. The Father *loves*, so the Father *shows*. What does the Father do to demonstrate His love for His Son? He’s totally transparent with His Son. He shows Him all that He does. Literally, all that He *is doing*.

Again, Jesus is talking about the work of redemption. In eternity past the Father designed a plan to reconcile sinners to Himself. We read about that in Ephesians 1 and Romans 8. But here we learn that the Father doesn’t just plan. He works, too. And He doesn’t just work, but shows His Son what He’s doing and involves His precious Son in that work.

And the Son reciprocates His Father’s love. See Him as He prepares to leave heaven, for when the Son became a man He entrusted Himself totally to the will and loving care of His Father. *I will do whatever You ask Me to do, Father*. And He did. See Him as He becomes a helpless baby in Mary’s womb. See Him as He is born in that obscure stable. See His submission as He grows, and ultimately goes to the cross.

Donahue says the Father is cruel. That’s not what the Son says. He trusts His Father, and He trusts Him fully because He knows His Father loves Him.

And notice something else about this love. Jesus says...

B. This love produces an effect on us. “To your amazement,” He says in verse 20, “He will show him even greater things.” Jesus actually uses a purpose clause here to explain the intended effect of His Father’s transparent love. Here’s how the ESV translates, “Greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.”

There’s the effect divine love produces, says Jesus to His critics. When you see the works My Father shows me, and when I do those greater works, you’re going to be amazed and marvel. And they did.

By the way, how about you? Have you ever marveled at Jesus? That’s not the ultimate response to Jesus, but it’s where you start. I’m convinced that Jesus is the most amazing person to ever walk on this planet, and if you’re not yet persuaded, I urge you to study His life. Look at the miracles He did, listen to the sermons He preached, follow Him to the cross and the empty tomb. I’m convinced you will marvel.

Who is He? He’s equal with God the Father. He is submissive to the Father. He imitates the Father. And He’s loved by the Father. Fourth...

V. Jesus raises the dead, just like the Father does (21).

Verse 21—“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.”

To put it bluntly, this was blasphemy to the ears of the Jewish leaders. What Jesus is here claiming is something they attributed to God alone. They said that Yahweh alone held three keys: one, the key to open the heavens and give rain (Deut. 28:12); two, the

key to open the womb and give conception (Gen. 30:22); and three, the key to open the grave and raise the dead (Ezek. 37:13).⁸

I can do that, too, says Jesus. Yes, the Father gives life to the dead, but so does the Son. The Son gives life to whomever He pleases, just like the Father. You want to know why I just gave a new body to a disabled man and why I did it on the Sabbath. Here's why. It's my right. I have the power to do whatever I choose to do, including give life, just like my Father does.

By the way, are you tired of your sin-wasted life, my friend? Then look to the only One who has authority to give new life to whomever He is pleased to give it. He can raise the dead, which is precisely what He will do for you, if you'll believe in Him. Listen to Romans 8:11, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."

But there's more. Not only is He equal with the Father, submissive to the Father, imitating the Father, loved by the Father, and able to raise the dead like the Father...

VI. Jesus has received all judgment from the Father (22).

Listen to Jesus in verse 22, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son."

A lot of dads are control freaks, as I must confess. They've got to have their hand in everything, or at least their say. But that's not true of God the Father. He has totally taken His hands off of something. He has entrusted to His Son the task of judgment.

All judgment. That certainly includes the final judgment, for John 3:36 declares, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." We read in Acts 17:31, "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." Paul talked about that judgment day in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

But it's not just the final judgment that's in His hands. John 5 says the Father has entrusted to His Son *all* judgment. *All judgment* includes every other occasion of judgment. It's all been entrusted to the Son.

Did any judgment take place in John 5? Remember the context. Jesus just made a controversial decision. He chose to heal a disabled man on the Sabbath. Why that particular man, and why on that particular day? There were dozens of other disabled people by the pool, but He chose to heal this particular man. And there were six other days in the week, but He chose to perform this miracle on this particular day, the Sabbath. Who gave Him the right to make these judgment calls?

My Father did, says Jesus. *My Father has entrusted all judgment to Me.*

Why would the Father do that? Jesus says that the Father committed all judgment to His Son with a purpose in mind. What's the purpose? Jesus tells us in verse 23, "...that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him."

⁸ Observation by Wiersbe, p. 306.

So how should we respond when the Son exercises His right as the God-appointed judge? We should *honor* Him.

How do we honor the Son? Here's one very important way. It's how we respond to the decisions He makes that affect our lives.

Remember the context. Jesus just made the decision to heal a man. That decision produced a series of responses, first from the healed man, then from the Jews, and later from John and the other disciples, and so on.

How did the healed man respond? Did he honor Jesus? We're not sure. We would assume he was thrilled to be healed, but you would expect him to be thrilled with the Healer. Yet there's no indication he was. To the contrary, he seems more interested in pleasing his Jewish peers than in pleasing Jesus. So much so that Jesus confronted him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you (14)."

Of course, we know how the Jewish leaders responded. They certainly didn't honor Jesus for the choice He made that day. They set out to kill Him.

So the question is, what's the right way to respond to Jesus and the judgments He makes that affect our lives? The answer brings us to Jesus' final point.

VII. Jesus deserves honor, just like the Father (23).

Ponder again what Jesus said in verse 23, "that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father." If you met a man on the street who said that to you, you'd take a step back and call the police. We lock up people who make such claims, who think the world exists for them.

The same honor that's due to God is due to ME? God wants everyone to honor me? From the lips of a mere man, that's insanity. But that's the point. These words aren't coming from the lips of a mere man.

I'm struck by two realities as I meditate on verse 23. One...

A. The Father prizes His Son. He entrusted all judgment to His Son (that's verse 22) so that everyone would honor His Son (that's verse 23). That says tons to us about the Father's estimation of His Son. He prizes Him above all else. That's why He's chosen a course that will result in everyone giving honor to His Son (see Phil. 2:9-11).

Here's the second reality, and it's staggering in its significance.

B. The way you treat the Son reveals what you really think about God. A lot of people talk about "God" in the generic. They say they are "okay with God." But according to Jesus, if a person isn't honoring the Son, then that person isn't honoring God the Father either.

Ask the average person on the street and you'll likely hear, "You don't have to believe in Jesus. Buddha will do. So will Muhammad. There are many ways to God." But Jesus wouldn't agree with that. He made it clear that if you're not honoring the Son, you're not honoring the Father who sent Him.

You say, "How do I honor the Son?" Here's how. *Believe* in Him. Believe that He is who He claimed to be. Believe that He accomplished what He came to earth to accomplish, namely, the work His Father gave Him, the work of dying in the place of sinners and conquering the grave to set them free from sin's penalty. And then believe that He indeed is worthy of your affection, trust, and obedience, and give it to Him.

The Bible calls that "being saved." That's how you begin to give the Son the honor due Him. You *get saved*.

But let me talk about another way, one that applies to you who have been saved. Back in 2003 Bob Sjogren & Gerald Robison wrote a book with an intriguing title. It's called *Cat and Dog Theology: Rethinking Our Relationship with Our Master*. The premise of the book is that you can look at cats and dogs and find an illustration of two ways to view God. Some Christians are like the cat, others like the dog. To the cat, the master exists for me. To the dog, I exist for the master. The cat is happy when its master makes much of it. The dog is happy when it has the privilege to make much of the master. The cat wants. The dog gives. The cat is loyal to itself. The dog is loyal to its master. Two very different approaches to life.

Which best describes you and how you are treating God's Son? It's easy to honor the Lord when He does things we like, but what about when He does things we don't like? The way we treat Jesus in those times is a revealer of what we really think about God.

How do you treat the Son when His judgments conflict with yours? Do you honor Him then? He gives you a good job. It's easy to honor Him then. What if He chooses to take your job, or your health, or something else? Do you by faith agree with the wisdom of His judgment and honor Him then?

Back to *Cat and Dog Theology*. I found the authors' observations about physical suffering and healing quite helpful. They write:

Just ask yourself the question, Is God capable of healing Joni Eareckson Tada? The answer is obviously yes. But God has been gaining far more glory by leaving her paralyzed since 1967. Her paralysis will be gone when she enters eternity, but more glory is being given to our Father by her current state. Is that fair? Well, let's go back to the basics of this book. Life isn't designed to revolve around us; hence the question, Is that fair to us? isn't a valid question. Life wasn't designed to be fair. Life was designed to be a series of opportunities to point to and reveal God's glory. And Joni's experience radiates our Father's glory tremendously! Therefore, when we look at ailments, we can ask God for healing, but we must also realize that if the ailment or infirmity will bring God more glory (either in the eyes of others or to prepare us for eternity with Him), God might choose to allow it to stay in our lives. It is the glory we need to focus on, not the ailment. The apostle Paul asked the Lord three times to take away an ailment. And how did the Lord respond? He said: "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God was basically saying, "Paul, I'll get more glory in you and through you, by you keeping this ailment in your life than if I take it away; I'm going to leave it."⁹

My friend, sometime the Lord uses His power to heal, as He did in John 5. But many times He uses His power to sustain through suffering rather than to heal. Regardless of the option He chooses, He has a purpose in mind, to bring honor to the Son to whom all honor is due.

Response: In light of what Jesus said about Himself, ask yourself the following.

1. *Do you know the real Jesus?* You've just heard from Him. Do you know Him?
2. *Do you know Jesus for real?* Many know about Jesus, but not really. Do you?
3. *Do you really want others to know Him?* Then tell Him now, and them this week.

⁹ Bob Sjogren & Gerald Robison, *Cat and Dog Theology*, p. 95.