

Unfolding Jesus: The Great Self-Revelatory Statements in John

Part Two: Jesus, the Son of the Father

John 4.43-5.47

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This is the second Sunday in a new sermon series called Unfolding Jesus, in which we are looking at Jesus's own sayings in John's gospel about who he is and why he came. We began that journey last fall, looking at chapters 1 through 3, and we picked up again last Sunday where we left off.

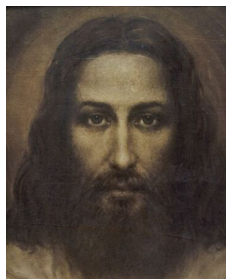
As you may know, John's gospel – his biography of Jesus – begins with an amazing prologue of just eighteen lines that are filled with an astounding set of claims about the nature and origin of Jesus. If you've never read them before, do.

Then, beginning in verse 19 of chapter 1, John shifts to an earthly perspective. He brings us down from heaven to this earthly plane and allows us as his readers to follow along behind Jesus as he walks this world. We get to watch and listen in as Jesus unfolds the **mystery** of who he really is, revealing his true identity through a series of remarkable statements and actions over the course of three years.

All of us have some starting view of who Jesus is. Who he was. What he was like. Why he came. Where he came from.

Maybe we got it from our parents. Or our surrounding culture. Or our church. Or things we've read.

How do you view Jesus? What do you believe about who he was and where he came from and what he was up to?



We want this series to be an opportunity to open up that understanding, sort of like this, to take our starting view of Jesus

and to add to it and broaden it and deepen it as we let Jesus himself unfold for us a clearer and clearer understanding of all the dimensions of who he really is.



* * *



What do you do when you encounter a mystery? You bring in a detective to help you put the clues together and solve the mystery. And who better than . . . Sherlock Holmes, right?

Sherlock was a master at finding clues and making sense of them.

So as we come to this morning's passage, which is the last portion of chapter four and all of chapter five, we'll don our Sherlock hats and see what we can make of

what we find here.

Watson: I've forgotten. What comes after K in the alphabet, Holmes?

Holmes: It's elementary, my dear Watson.

Before we go on . . . just one thought about solving mysteries.

A typical mystery we might read, like a Sherlock adventure or a Poirot case or a Miles Bredon conundrum, is really just a puzzle. It's a problem we solve. There are pieces missing like in a jigsaw puzzle, and the goal is to find them all and put them all in place before the author does.

But when it comes to Jesus, we really are considering a mystery rather than a puzzle. The goal isn't to solve the problem of Jesus, to find a tidy explanation of the question of who he was and then turn and pick up another puzzle. The goal is to grow in our awe and wonder and our worship as we grow in our understanding.

The more we know of Jesus, the more we realize there is still to learn. And that's the sign of a true mystery.

So we'll walk through this passage and look for the clues, seeing if they can help us solve some of its puzzles of interpretation. But ultimately, let's let them take us deeper and deeper into the mystery of Jesus himself, this one-of-a-kind human being, with his one-of-a-kind relationship with his heavenly father . . . and what that can mean for our relationship with them both.

I've been reading a fascinating book about prayer by a Swiss theologian named Hans Urs von Balthasar. He says,

"Contemplation [by which he means a life of humble and prayerful intimacy with God] starts at the point where . . . the mystery begins to reveal itself in all its vast proportions . . . in an astonishment which reaches to the very roots of our being. . . a trembling awe . . . at the thought of God's nature [made known in Christ]" (158-159).

“In the gospel[s], anyone who encounters Christ is impelled either to worship him or to pick up stones with which to stone him. Evidently, the gospel[s] do not foresee any other kind of response.” (159-160)

So let's open up these verses and prepare to be astonished. I'm going to just walk you through them from beginning to end. We'll be like Sherlock, noticing a few clues along the way and then pulling some of the pieces together at the end.

John 4.43

At the end of the two days, Jesus went on to Galilee.

Went on from where? A good detective always takes a look around at the setting.

Well, if we flip back to the earlier part of John 4, in verse 3, we see that he has come to Galilee by way of Samaria. And if we look back a bit further, we discover that Jesus is returning specifically from Jerusalem, where we find him in chapters 2 and 3.

What do we know about the significance of Jerusalem? Well, among other things, it was the spiritual capital of the region. It was where the Jewish faith was headquartered and all the highest religious leaders lived and served.

And Samaria? What do we know about Samaria? It was looked down on by earnest Jews as a land of compromised, mixed-race heretics who had completely disqualified themselves from a place in the kingdom of God.

And what about Galilee? Kind of a backwater place, home to unsophisticated fishermen and carpenters, with its own thick country accent. It was also a region known for its spiritual laxness because of the influence of several nearby pagan cities and the influence of the not-very-Jewish Herod Antipas, who ruled there.

John 4.44-46

⁴⁴ He himself had said that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. ⁴⁵ Yet the Galileans welcomed him, for they had been in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration and had seen everything he did there. ⁴⁶ As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine.

Before we go on, just notice that comment that John inserts, the one where Jesus says, “A prophet is not honored in his own hometown.” Doesn't that kind of come in from left field? Especially because the story we're reading is talking about the warm welcome Jesus receives in Galilee?

John 4.46

There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick.

We don't know exactly what this man's role was. It has been translated royal officer, nobleman, king's official. What we do know is he was connected to the court of King Herod Antipas, the ruler over first century Galilee. This is the man who divorced his own wife so he could marry his brother's wife, and who beheaded John the Baptist when he called that arrangement into question. His court was not exactly known for its faithfulness to biblical morals or beliefs. It's safe to say that this man, while influential, would not have been held in high regard.

John 6.46-54

⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die.

⁴⁸ Jesus asked, "Will you [the word "you" is in the plural] Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?" ⁴⁹ The official pleaded, "Lord, please come now before my little boy dies." ⁵⁰ Then Jesus told him, "Go back home. Your son will live!" And the man believed what Jesus said and started home.

⁵¹ While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. ⁵² He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, "Yesterday afternoon at one o'clock his fever suddenly disappeared!" ⁵³ Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." And he and his entire household believed in Jesus.

⁵⁴ This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea.

Words that are repeated are often clues to the significance of a story. Did you happen to notice any repeated themes in these verses? The word "live" and the word "believe" are each repeated three times. I think that might prove worth our noticing.

Before we go on, let's pause on that last line. John steps in here as the biographer and makes a comment that should stop us in our tracks.

6.54

This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea.

Second? If you flip back a page or two, you'll find mention of the first sign in chapter 2, verse 11, at the end of the story about Jesus turning water into wine. It says, "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him."

If you were here when we covered that passage in the fall, you might remember that that miracle ends up being nothing less than an announcement that God's long-promised king has finally arrived in the person of Jesus. He has come to usher in the long-hoped-for kingdom of God.

As we talked about last fall, a “sign” is not just any ordinary miracle, as if any miracle is ordinary. A sign is a miracle that points to something else. It has a second and deeper meaning. As the first sign shows us, it reveals something about Jesus and what it means to put our faith in him.

So what is this miracle a sign of? What is its deeper meaning? Let’s see if we can find the clues as we go along that will help us answer that. I think we’ll find that’s pretty central to the meaning of this whole chapter.

John 5.1

Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days.

Oh, that’s interesting. Here we are back in Jerusalem again, back to the headquarters of the Jewish faith. The place where you would *expect* a warm welcome for the Messiah.

John 5.2-15

² Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches [a pool that was believed by some to have healing powers].

³ Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. ⁵ One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?” ⁷ “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.”

⁸ Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” ⁹ Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!

But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, ¹⁰ so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!” ¹¹ But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” ¹² “Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded. ¹³ The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. ¹⁴ But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.”

¹⁵ Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

So up to this point Jesus has had key encounters with three very different people – but all three of whom have one thing in common:

- a Samaritan woman, who Rob taught us about last week, a woman of sketchy morals and sketchy religious credentials with no societal standing – but who, interestingly enough, ends up believing in Jesus.
- a Galilean royal official, an elite and presumably wealthy man who serves in the exceedingly unpopular Herodian courts, who has no obvious Jewish faith and who may

be, or may as well be, a pagan – but who, interestingly enough, ends up believing in Jesus, together with his whole family

- and this superstitious paraplegic from the Jewish capital city, a poor abandoned outcast who occupies the bottom of the pile in society – but who, interestingly enough, ends up being healed by Jesus and invited by Jesus to turn his life around, and who then begins to tell others what he has done for him

And then we have a fourth encounter: this time, finally, with the Jewish establishment – with the Jewish religious leaders. How will they respond?

John 5.16-18

¹⁶ So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules.

¹⁷ But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” ¹⁸ So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

Before we go on, I wonder if we have enough information now to answer what sort of sign the healing of the official’s son was. What was the deeper reality that that miracle revealed about Jesus and belief in him?

The passage began, you remember, with a comment about a prophet being rejected in his home town.

Then it told a tale of three outsiders to the religious establishment who were treated by Jesus like insiders. All three were desperate people who found what they longed for in Jesus.

And then it told the tale of a group of insiders who treated *Jesus* like an outsider, religious leader who thought they had no need of him at all, and who refused to find in Jesus anything but a problem to be dealt with.

I wonder if this second sign might say something like this:

Jesus is prepared to receive all who are prepared to receive him.

But not all who *should* be prepared to receive him do.

It’s not about *your* spiritual credentials. That gives you no special footing before God. It’s about his credentials: who he is, where his authority comes from.

So . . . what *are* his spiritual credentials? Who *is* this guy – who speaks a word and restores wayward women, forgiving their sin, folding them into his love? Who speaks a word and heals dying boys and brings them back to life? Who speaks a word and heals hopeless men who have been paralyzed for almost forty years? Who is this guy?

Jesus tells us exactly who he is.

5.17

But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.”

And the religious leaders – who rightly understand Jesus to be claiming a unique relationship of equality with God – will have none of it.

Just in case they aren’t clear about what he is claiming, Jesus spells it out.

In the next twelve verses see if you can put your finger on three ways that Jesus claims that he is in fact equal to God.

John 5.19-30

¹⁹ So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. ²¹ For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants.

²² In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge, ²³ so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him.

²⁴ “I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life. ²⁵ “And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it’s here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live. ²⁶ The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son.

²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Don’t be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God’s Son, ²⁹ and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment. ³⁰ I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will.

Did you hear the three claims Jesus makes to being equal to God?

First, he claims he is nothing less than the Son of God. In our culture, with all of our emphasis on generational differences, to say you are someone’s son or daughter is to point out you are your own separate person. Think of Dr Rick’s mantra in the Progressive Life Insurance commercials: “We are not our parents.”

But in ancient culture, what was true of the father was true of the son – especially the firstborn son. You were viewed essentially interchangeably. Your Father’s power was yours. Your father’s resources were yours. Your father’s reputation was yours. Your name was your father’s. Your word was your father’s. Your deeds were your father’s.

So first, Jesus says he is God’s son, and he is doing his father’s work. Jesus is God speaking, God moving, God acting in this world. If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen God. He makes himself equal to God.

Did you catch his second claim? He claims that he will judge humanity at the end of the age.

There is only one person in the ancient biblical world and in the Jewish scriptures who was understood to have the power and authority to judge humanity at the end of the age. God himself. Genesis 18.25, Psalm 75.7, Isaiah 33.22. Now Jesus claims to do the same. This claim would have been like Jesus screaming at the top of his lungs that he was God.

And the third claim? Did you catch it? Jesus claims that he himself has life-giving power, and that through him the Father brings human beings from death to life – both now and at the end of the age.

But every Bible believing Jewish person in the ancient world knew that only God is the source of life. He spoke, and when he spoke he gave life to his creation. He will speak again, and when he does, he will give eternal life to his people. Genesis 2.7, Job 33.4, Daniel 12.2. Now Jesus claims – in stark terms – to do the same.

Pause there for a moment. Think of the picture of Jesus you started with. Do these claims fit with your understanding of who he is and what he does? As you hear Jesus say these things, do you find your knees giving way, and your heart being moved to bow and worship before him?

How does your view of Jesus need to be widened and deepened based on what he says about himself?

* * *

It’s reasonable that a person hearing Jesus’s claims would ask: how do we know? How we can be sure? Anybody could claim to be God. There are probably many people in mental health facilities who are making that claim right now. How do we know that there is any truth in those claims?

That brings us to the final section of the passage, the last seventeen verses of the chapter.

In these verse Jesus lays out five different reasons that we can be confident that what he is claiming is true. When he talks about testimony or testifying in these verses, he is talking about what we might think of as *credentials*. That's actually a perfect translation, because its root is the Latin word *credere*, which means to believe or trust. Jesus is saying there are five different credentials that he can point to that support the reliability of his claims and give us reason to believe he is who he claims.

See if you can find them as we read this last section. They're not too hard to find. Jesus sort of spells them out.

John 5.31-35

³¹ "If I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid. ³² But someone else is also testifying about me, and I assure you that everything he says about me is true. ³³ In fact, you sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist, and his testimony about me was true. ³⁴ Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved. ³⁵ John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were excited for a while about his message.

There's the first one – John the Baptist, the last in the great line of prophets.

Malachi 4.5 says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."

And then in Matthew 11:14 Jesus says, "And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come." John, who points to Jesus and says, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1.29).

John 5.36

³⁶ But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me.

Here are the second and third credentials:

His teaching

Mark 1.22 says, "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."

And his miracles

After Jesus cast out an evil spirit, Mark 1.27 says, "The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him!"

His forerunner. His teaching. His miracles. And . . .

John 5.37

³⁷ And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face, ³⁸ and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you.”

There's the fourth one: the Father's own miraculous testimony about his son.

At his baptism. Mark 1.11 tells us, “A voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.””

And again at his transfiguration. Luke 17.5 says, “A bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

And here is the last credential. Verses 39-40:

³⁹ “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

The last credential is the testimony of the Scriptures.

According to Walter Kaiser, there are at least six direct Messianic predictions in the Pentateuch alone, the five books of the Old Testament written by Moses (Genesis 3:15; Genesis 9:27; Genesis 12:2-3; Genesis 49:8-12, Numbers 24:15-19, and Deuteronomy 18:15-18). That's not to mention fifty nine other direct messianic prophecies that he identifies in the rest of the Jewish Scriptures related to every aspect of his life and ministry. “The Scriptures point to me!”

* * *

The Old Testament (Deuteronomy 19.15) requires the testimony of two or three witnesses to establish the truth of something. In these verse Jesus offers five convincing credentials, five convincing reasons to believe he is who he claims: John the Baptist identifying him as the Messiah, the unrivaled authority of his teaching, the unparalleled power demonstrated in his miracles, the supernatural testimony of God himself, and the witness of the Bible, filled from cover to cover with predictions about him,

But, apart from a few religious leaders like Nicodemus, who open their hearts to Jesus, these religious leaders will have none of it. A prophet has no honor in his own country.

Now Jesus comes back to the theme that has run from beginning to end through this chapter and a half. Belief. Receiving Jesus in faith. Three different times at the end of chapter four the belief of the royal official from Galilee is commended. Now, three different times at the end of chapter five, the lack of belief on the part of the religious leaders is confronted and condemned.

John 5.41-47

⁴¹ “Your approval means nothing to me, ⁴² because I know you don’t have God’s love within you. ⁴³ For I have come to you in my Father’s name, and you have rejected me. Yet if others come in their own name, you gladly welcome them. ⁴⁴ No wonder you can’t believe! For you gladly honor each other, but you don’t care about the honor that comes from the one who alone is God. ⁴⁵ “Yet it isn’t I who will accuse you before the Father. Moses will accuse you! Yes, Moses, in whom you put your hopes. ⁴⁶ If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you don’t believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

Do those words sound familiar? Jesus finishes his comments to the religious experts with words that sound remarkably like some from the opening prologue of John’s gospel.

John 1.10-13:

¹⁰ He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. ¹¹ He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. ¹² But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

John chapters four and five give us the second sign of faith. Have you understood it? Have you taken it to heart?

Jesus is prepared to receive all who are prepared to receive him.
But not all who *should* be prepared to receive him do.
It’s not about *your* spiritual credentials. That gives you no special footing before God. It’s about his credentials: who he is, where his authority comes from – and how we respond to him.

Have you recognized him? Are you prepared to receive him? To believe in him? To honor him – to fall on your knees and worship him?

What is God’s invitation to you this morning?

Will you pray with me?