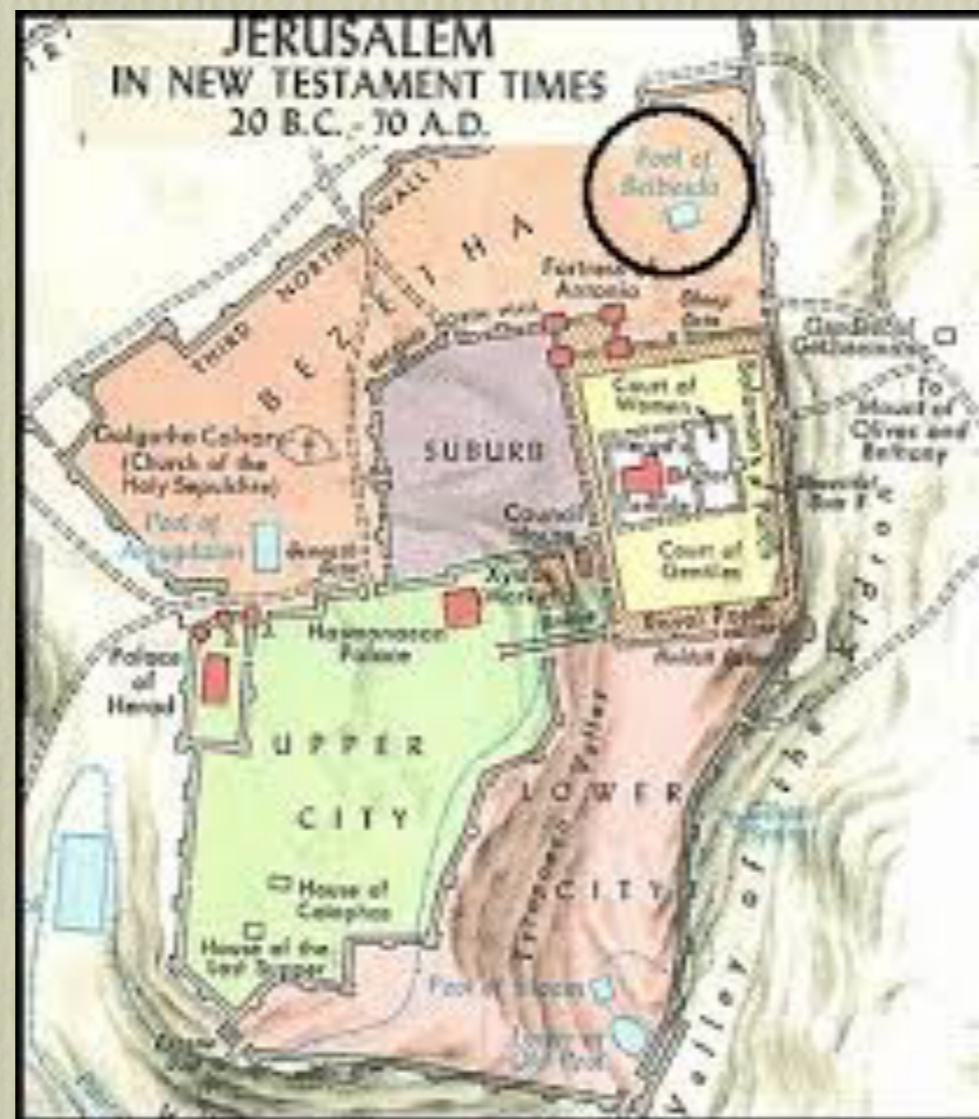


o8. ACT III : THE SON OF GOD GIVES HIMSELF FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

John 5:1 - 6:71

Scene 1 : At the pool of Beth-zatha, Jesus gives life
to a 'dead' man on the Sabbath (5:1-15)



The long discourses placed by John on Jesus' lips, for example in the scenes with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, are perhaps best understood as John's own reflections, built up from authentic sayings of Jesus but presenting John's attempt to give expression to the insights which he gained into the mind and heart of Jesus. In this and the following scenes similar reflections abound. John is working on two levels. He is drawing on memories of the hostility which Jesus received from the religious authorities. He is also drawing on the debates between Jesus' followers and the successors of the same authorities.

His aim is to present Jesus as the fulfilment of the Jewish Law given through Moses. God has replaced this gift of the Jewish Law with an even greater one: the gift of a sharing in the love which he shares with the Word – a love revealed in Jesus and offered to all who open their hearts to accept it. As John writes in the Prologue: ‘From his fullness we have all received’ (John 1:17).

In a special way a community gives expression to its faith in religious festivities. John places us first in the context of the Sabbath in order to present Jesus as the Son of God and therefore as the one who brings the Jewish Scriptures to their fulfilment. He then takes us to the festival of Passover in order to present Jesus as the Redeemer who nourishes us on our journey to God.

John 5:1-3

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids – blind, lame, and paralysed.

John 5:4

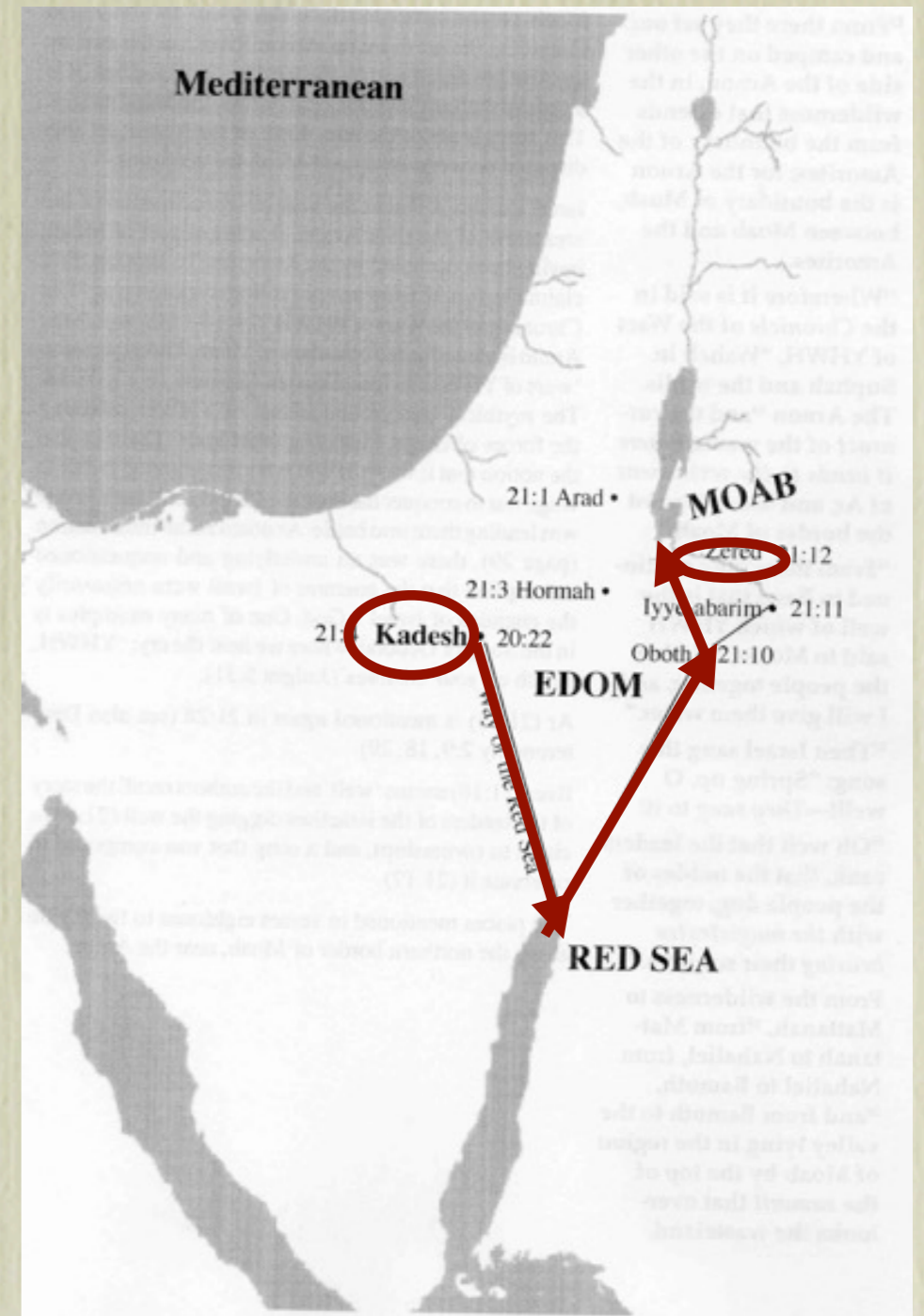
They were waiting for the stirring of the water, for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water. Whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had.

John 5:4 is a gloss, picking up popular expectations. Presumably an intermittent spring caused movement in the pool and popular imagination attributed the action to supernatural intervention which was thought to promise healing.

John 5:5

One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

‘The length of time we had traveled from Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the Wadi Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation of warriors had perished from the camp, as the Lord had sworn concerning them’ (Deuteronomy 2:14).



John 5:6-7

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.”

John wants us to hear Jesus' question and apply it to ourselves: ‘Do you want to be made well?’

The man thinks he has no one to help him. But he is wrong. He is not without a saviour. Jesus, ‘the Saviour of the world’(4:42) is with him.

John 5:8-9

Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

John 5:9

Now that day was a sabbath.

The Sabbath was the day which God blessed and made holy ‘because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation’ (Genesis 2:3). The people were expected to conform to this by not going about their normal life so as to assembled for prayer in the synagogues. It was a day consecrated to God, and its observance was symbolic of the commitment of the people to keep their part of the covenant.

‘You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. ... Whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people. ... Therefore the Israelites shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant’ (Exodus 31:13, 16).

John 5:10

So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.”

By the time of Jesus those who considered themselves responsible for policing faithful adherence to the Law had surrounded the Sabbath with hundreds of detailed regulations including the prohibition against moving things from one place to another (see Mishnah tract Shabbat 7:2). Hence their objection to the activity of the healed man.

John 5:11-15

He answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

We watch Jesus as he seeks the man out. He finds him in the temple, from which he was previously excluded because of his sickness (see Leviticus 21:18; 2Samuel 5:8). Jesus tells him that he has given him more than physical life and warns him to live accordingly. The something worse that could happen to him is the ‘death’ of which Jesus will shortly be speaking with his opponents, a death caused by sin.

Scene 2: Jesus, the Son of God (5:16-47)

John 5:16-18

The Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

In the eyes of ‘**the Jews**’, Jesus’ reply goes beyond disobeying the Law. In speaking of God as ‘**my Father**’, he is blaspheming, ‘**making himself equal to God**.’ The intimacy Jesus experienced in his relationship with God is central to Christianity. Christians, including the community of the Beloved Disciple, saw Jesus as the perfect human expression (the Incarnation) of God, revealing God as Love. However their experience was interpreted by outsiders, they vigorously opposed the misinterpretation that Christians thought of Jesus ‘**equal to God**’. The rest of this chapter makes this point vigorously.

Jesus is claiming to be one with God whom he calls ‘my Father’ because he knows God, and he knows, too, the perfect communion of love that he enjoys with God. He wants to share this communion with us. Far from claiming to be equal to God, Jesus knows he can do nothing apart from God on whom he utterly depends for who he is, and for everything he says or does.

John 5:19-20

Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves (φιλέω) the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

The Christian understanding of the nature of the relationship between Jesus and God is so important to John that we will pause here to meditate on the many statements he places on Jesus’ lips that take us to the heart of Jesus’ prayer-communion.

I. Jesus knows and reveals God

John 1:18

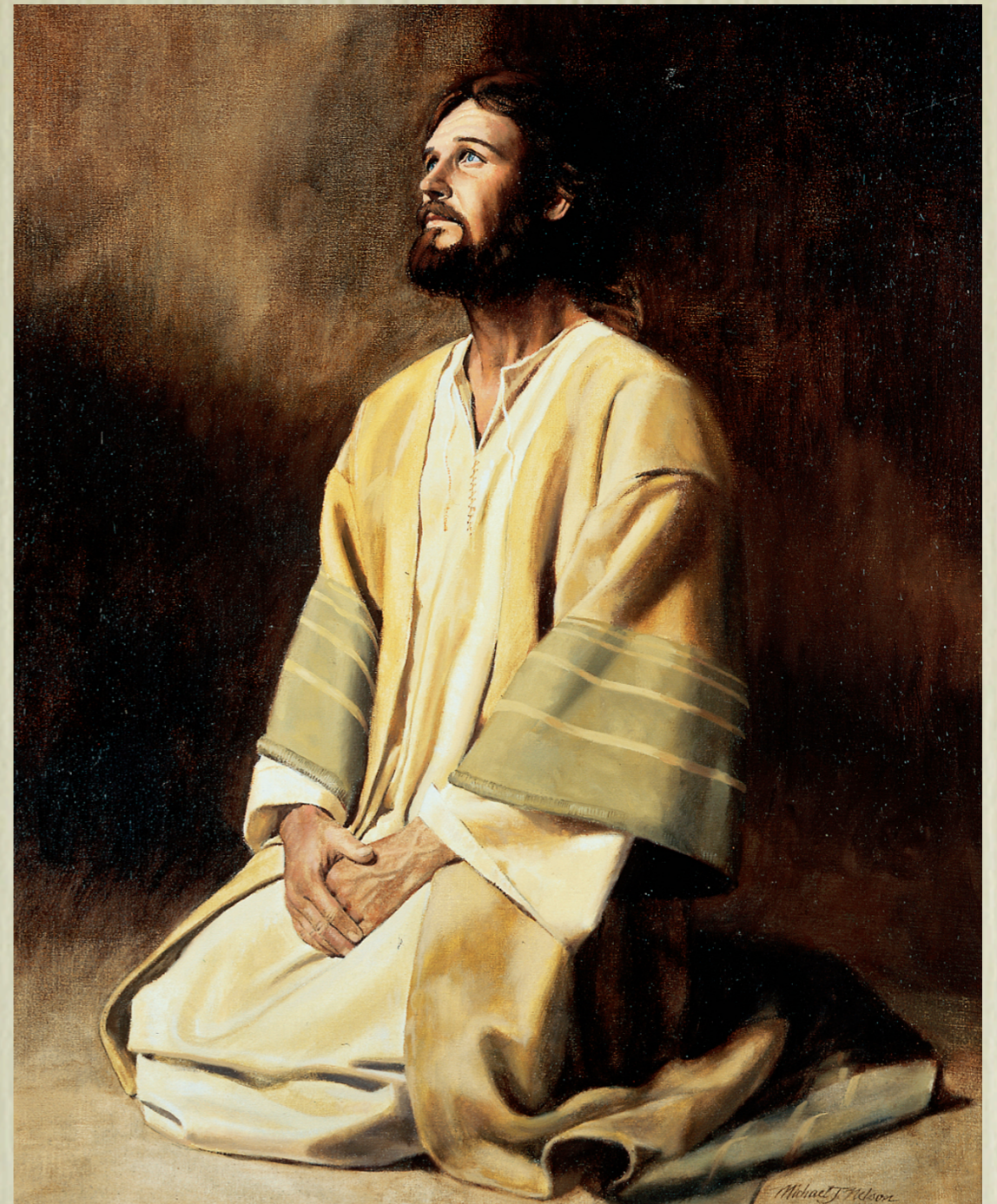
No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made God known.

John 10:15,17

The Father knows me and I know the Father ... The Father loves me.

John 3:16

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.



Jesus kneeling in prayer, Michael Jervis Nelson,
Used with permission.

John 3:31-32

The one who comes from heaven testifies to what he has seen and heard.

John 6:40

This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see **the Son** and believe in him may have eternal life (6:40).

John 6:46

The one who is from God has seen the Father.

John 6:57

The living Father has sent me and I live because of the Father.

John 7:29

I know him because I am from him and he sent me.

John 8:19

If you knew me you would know my Father also.

John 10:14-15

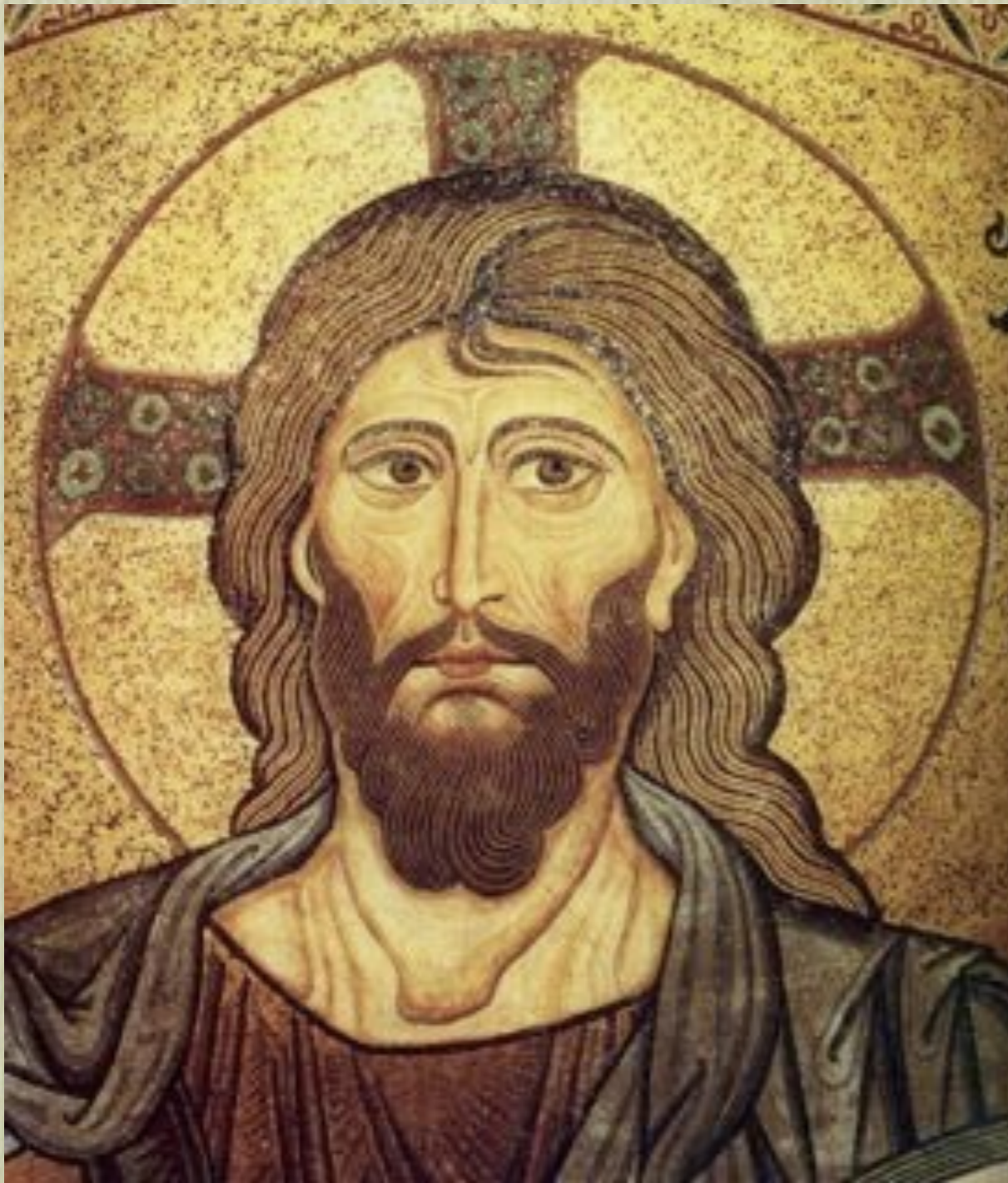
I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

John 10:30

The Father and I are one.

John 14:10-11

Do you not believe
that I am in the Father
and the Father is in me?
The words I say to you
I do not speak as from myself.
It is the Father living in me
who is doing this work.
You must believe me when I say
that I am in the Father
and the Father is in me;
believe me on the evidence of
what I am doing, if for no other
reason.



Christ Pantocrator mosaic in Byzantine style, from
Cefalù Cathedral in Sicily, Italy, c. 1130
Public Domain

2. Jesus does not speak his own words, but those of God .

John 3:34

He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

John 7:16-17

Jesus answered the Jews: “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own.

John 8:26, 28

I declare to the world what I have heard from God ... I speak these things as the Father instructed me.

John 8:38

I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence

John 8:40

You are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God.

John 8:55

I know him and I keep his word.

John 14:10

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?
The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself.

John 14:24

The word that you hear is not mine. It is from the Father who sent me.

John 17:8

The words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

3. Jesus does not carry out his own actions, but those of his Father

John 4:34

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.

John 5:17

My Father is still working, and I also am working.

John 5:19-20

The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.”

John 6:38

I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

John 5:30

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

John 5:36

The deeds that the Father has given me to complete, the very deeds that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.

John 8:28-29

Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realise that I AM, (ἐγώ εἰμι) and that I do nothing on my own.’ The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.

John 14:10

It is the Father living in me who is doing this work.

John 17:4

I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.

John 12:44-46

Then Jesus cried aloud: “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.”

Back to John chapter five (repeating slides 11-12).

John 5:16-18

The Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

John 5:19-20

Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

John 5:20-21

The Father will show the Son greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the **Son gives life** to whomever he wishes.

John is writing in the context of the life which the risen and glorified Jesus, whom the Father has raised from the dead, is pouring into the world.

John 5:22-23

The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.

God gives life. Since the life that God is offering is the intimate life of love which he as Father enjoys with his Son, if we reject the Son we reject life. In this sense 'the Father has given all judgment to the Son' (see John 3:18).

We believe in Jesus to the extent that we 'abide in him' (1 John 2:28). We abide in him to the extent that we do not sin (1 John 3:4-6) and especially to the extent that we love one another (1 John 3:14). We cannot bypass the Son. To reject him is to reject the One who loves him (compare Luke 10:16; also John 15:23; 1 John 2:23).

John 5:24-25

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

Those who hear Jesus' word and believe in his Father whose mission he is carrying out are already experiencing a life that is not confined to this world but is a sharing in God's own divine life. Those who are dead, in the sense of existing in a state of separation from God the source of all life (compare Ephesians 2:1), are already hearing God's Word summoning them to life, like the lost boy in Jesus' parable, who 'was dead and has come to life' (Luke 15:32). As we listen to Jesus' majestic words, we recall John's earlier reflection: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (John 3:16).

John 5:26-30

For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the **Son of Man**. (1:51; 3:13-14 – Daniel 7:13). Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

The resurrection from the dead is very different from the Greek notion of the continuance beyond death of the soul. The whole human person in some way will be given fullness of life again by God. In this passage, Jesus is claiming to be the one who will give this life to all who believe in him and who recognise the gift of God.

Commenting on this passage, Augustine writes: ‘We see people who are so in love with this life which is bound by time and which must come to an end and they work in such a way for it that when fear of death is upon them they do all within their power to delay it. If we spend so much effort, so much care, and do so much in order to live a little longer, what ought we do when it is a matter of living forever? If we consider prudent those who do all they can to put death off and to obtain a few more days, how senseless are those who live in such a way that they forfeit the day that is eternal’ (De Verbo Domini, sermon 64).

Jesus calls everyone to do God's will because he is convinced of the delicate personal love that God has for all. The central importance of this teaching of Jesus is clear from the whole of the New Testament, and from the constant tradition of the Christian community. We are all called to an 'obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5). Jesus does what he sees his Father doing. We are called to do the same. But we can do so only if we see the Father, and for this we need the revelation given us by his Son.

John 5:31-35

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to **John**, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light (see 1:9).

God witnesses to Jesus firstly through John the Baptist who was ‘sent by God as a witness to testify to the light’ (1:6-7). Significant as it is, it might be argued that it is only ‘**human testimony**’. As such Jesus declares that he is not basing his case upon it (compare 1 John 5:9). At the same time, he reminds his opponents that for a while they were willing to rejoice in the light offered by this **burning and shining lamp**.

John 5:36

I have a testimony greater than John's. The **works** that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.

We are reminded of Jesus' reply to the disciples of the Baptist who wanted to know if he was the Messiah: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (Matthew 11:3-5).

John 5:37-38

And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.

Those who are accusing Jesus of blasphemy have ‘never heard God’s voice’. If they would only listen to Jesus, they could do so (see 1 John 5:9-10). Unlike Moses (Numbers 12:8), they have ‘never seen God’s form’. If they would only believe, they could see it in Jesus, for he is God’s Son. They ‘do not have God’s word abiding in them’. In this they are continuing the failure of their ancestors ‘who did not accept God’s Word’ (John 1:11). By refusing to believe the one God has sent, they are rejecting God’s testimony.

John 5:39-47

You search the **scriptures** because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?

Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is **Moses**, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

They are unwilling to listen to Jesus because of the demands his words make on their behaviour. They stand under the condemnation uttered earlier: ‘This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed’ (John 3:19-20).

They stand accused by the very Scriptures of which they claim to be the guardians and in which they place their hopes. As the following scenes will illustrate, their behaviour demonstrates that, for all their posturing, they do not believe the Scriptures, for the Scriptures are God’s gift and are meant to lead to communion with God – the very communion which Jesus is offering them.

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