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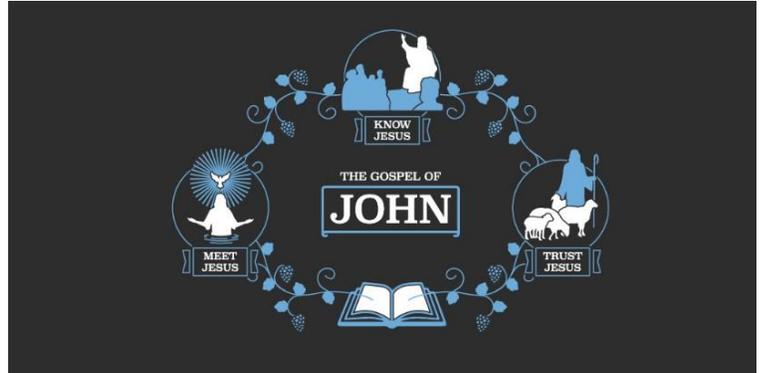
You Don't Know Who You're Messing With

The Gospel of John

Matthew 11:11; John 5:19–47

Tim Badal | November 7, 2021

The older I get, the more I start comparing my generation to the next generation living life now. What I mean by that is I look back to my high school days and say to my children, "That's not the high school I was a part of. Things are different." One of the things I ask is, "Are there fights in the high school?" I'm in a family of boys, so my question may be different than you who have girls.



Now, I grew up in the '90s and if you were in my peer group, there were a lot of fist fights in high school. There doesn't seem to be that anymore; maybe it's all happening on social media. I remember there usually wasn't a week that went by without a couple guys getting together and hashing things out, dealing with it by throwing some punches.

Now, listen. I'm not advocating violence. I don't want any of our high school students to get in trouble. I don't want the principal or police calling and saying, "Yeah, Junior heard your sermon yesterday and learned there aren't enough fist fights, so he started one." I'm not advocating that. I'm just saying it's just different these days.

I remember when I was a junior in high school, there was a senior in my P.E. class who was the biggest guy in our school. He even made me look small. He was pestering and harassing one of the smallest freshmen in the P.E. class. We were doing floor hockey, which already has a lot of pushing and shoving. Something had transpired in class that moved its way into the locker room. As we entered the locker room, the big kid shoved the little freshman into the lockers, saying, "You'd better watch it." What the little guy did next was crazy. He put up his fists, then he uttered words I will never forget and caused everybody to break out laughing. He said, "You don't know who you're messing with."

I thought, "What are you doing? Yeah, we know. You're little. He's big. Little kid, you don't know who you're messing with." Then in that moment—maybe because his abilities were being questioned—the bigger, badder senior lunged forward and went to punch the puny little freshman. In fact, I can't think of a time when that senior had not gotten his way. What transpired next would have come right out of your favorite Chuck Norris or Bruce Lee movie. Punches were thrown. Bruises were given. Pride was lost. And at the end of all of it, the freshman stood over the senior and the onlookers had whiplash. What in the world just happened? Little did we know that that freshman had been training his whole life in karate classes, so the big guy had been licked. The senior didn't know who he was messing with.

You're probably thinking, "Why in the world would you bring that up, Badal?" In our text today, we are going to see a group of men who think they are bad, that they are tough. This group of men are coming after Jesus. They're coming *en masse*. We're told that a group of them were part of hassling Jesus throughout the Gospel of John. In John 5, as we learned last week, Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Even though it was a wonderful thing, even though Jesus should have been given a parade for it, the hassle from the Jewish establishment was growing larger and more hostile as the days went on. We're told the reason for this was that Jesus had broken the man-made rules surrounding the Sabbath and had said He was the Son of God, equal to God Himself. Now, that's a problem. If that is true, then Jesus' words would have bearing, not only on the people of Israel, but on the religious establishment. That would reduce the sham of what the Pharisees were doing down to nothing. Their following would be gone. Their prestige and ability to bilk the people out of their money would be gone. Because of that, gone would be the days

of dialoguing and debating with Jesus. Right before our passage today, we read that the Pharisees were conspiring all the more about how they could kill Him.

I don't want us to miss this hostility. We can tend to pass right by it. This meant that every time Jesus was in public, the men around Him were wondering if that would be the day when they could assassinate Him. Could this be the day they could pull out a knife and kill Him or the day they could stone Him? Jesus might have been wondering what these men would do to Him.

Now, we know Jesus didn't wonder like we would. He had confidence that He would die only when He Himself laid down His life. So instead of being afraid, we read in our text today that He spoke to them.

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel."

This was a massive claim Jesus was making. We're going to see today exactly why they wanted Jesus to die. Yes, He had healed on the Sabbath, which was a no-no according to their man-made rules and regulations. more than that, the reason they wanted to kill Him was that He was calling God His Father and making Himself equal with God. Jesus was standing before a group of men who wanted Him dead and was about to throw shade on whatever they would present.

Here's what's awesome about that. We live in a society that likes a "meek and mousy" Jesus, the Smiley Jesus. But He was essentially telling them, "I am in charge, so either you obey Me or else." He did this by making these claims, then He went on to confirm the truth of His words, which will lead us to one of two conclusions. That's our outline for today.

The claim: Jesus is to be exalted above all!

The first claim is found in verse 18: "I am equal with God." The Pharisees hated Him for this. If the world today knew that's what Jesus said about Himself, I can assure you they would also hate Him. But most of the world thinks Jesus was just a nice, wonderful Teacher Who talked about being kind to one another and loving one another. These passages of Scripture never make it onto the talk shows in our world. They don't know about this intolerant, exclusive Jesus. He is clearly saying, "I am in control." In other words, Jesus is saying, "I am above all else. I am to be exalted above all."

The Pharisees responded, "No way. If You're going to be exalted above all, that means we're no longer in control. We no longer have a say." The Pharisees were saying, "Instead of us changing, let's kill Him. Let's get Him out of our lives."

Our world is saying, "If You're in charge, Jesus, then I can't do what I want to do. Then I can't spend my money like I want to. Then I can't spend my time like I want to. Then I can't put my priorities above Yours. If what You're saying is true, that you alone are to be exalted above all, that means I have to change." Many today, maybe even some in this place this morning, are saying, "I'll just get Him out of my life. I'll do everything in my power to live as if He doesn't exist." That might work for you right now, but as Jesus will say, "The problem is going to catch up to you at one point or another."

So Jesus has laid down this claim the Pharisees don't like; He' laid down this claim that the world doesn't like: "I am the One. I am God. I am equal to our Father in heaven, and because of that, I'm in charge. Because of that, I reign supreme. Because of that, My words matter."

Here's the problem. Jesus was saying these things about Himself. He was boasting about these things. Maybe you noticed in verse 31 that He said, "*If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true.*" He's essentially telling them, "I know My context. I know My audience." What's His context and who is in His audience? Jewish people. This was a culture that we don't entirely understand. In that world, a person could not speak about himself and it be considered true unless there were other witnesses that would speak on his behalf.

Our legal system also does this. Let's say I'm charged with a crime. I declare myself to be innocent because I wasn't there when the crime took place. The court would say, "You can say whatever you want about that time and place, but who are your witnesses who can confirm your alibi?" By itself, my testimony would not be valid until I have witnesses who will speak on my behalf.

The Jewish legal system was built on the premise that unless a person had two or three witnesses, their claim was not considered valid. In Deuteronomy 19:15 we read, "*Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.*" We see this also in Matthew 18:16 regarding personal conflicts. When a difference with one's brother cannot be resolved, Jesus said,

"If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses." In 1 Timothy 5:19 we read, *"Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses."* In 2 Corinthians 13:1, the apostle Paul says this about disagreements in the church: *"Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."*

The confirmation: truths that put an end to all debate!

Jesus was aware that the claim He was making would not be valid if He were the only one who made it. So after saying, "I am to be exalted above all," He went on to confirm this. How? He needed two or three witnesses. The confirmations here are truths that would put an end to all debate. Jesus was saying, "Let Me explain why this is true."

In verses 19-24, Jesus says, "All you see in Me, all that I'm doing, is part of the family business. The things I'm doing that you hate about Me— are because I'm doing what God has called me to do." In all honesty, you're hating the God you say you work for. This was the battle between Jesus and the religious establishment. Both were claiming to speak and act on behalf of God.

Jesus was saying, "Pharisees, you may pat yourselves on the back, you may take glory for being the spokesmen for God, but you don't even abide in the Word of God. You are anti-God because you are anti-Me. All I'm doing is what the Father in heaven has told me to do." In essence, He was telling them, "I'm right; you're wrong."

Verses 19, 24 and 25 begin with the phrase, *"Truly, truly I say to you..."* Other translations use the word "verily." He was saying, "I'm speaking truthfully to you, so you need to listen. These are important things I'm saying. I'm going to prove that what I say about Myself is true." He then described the three witnesses that confirm what He's claiming.

Witness #1 – Various speakers

"Courtroom, I'm to be exalted above all else and to prove that fact, I call My first witness." Jesus' first witnesses were various speakers. "I can't just say these things about Myself—I need others to say the same things." Who's the first person He called? It was John the Baptist. Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees had liked John the Baptist and had liked what he was doing. We already know from John 3 that John the Baptist was in prison. Many scholars think he had even been put to death at this point, because Jesus implied that he was a lamp that no longer shone (John 5:35).

"John was your guy, Pharisees, and here's what he said about Me. I came to John on the side of the Jordan and when he saw Me, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.' He pointed to Me, saying, 'I am not worthy to untie His sandals.' John the Baptist also said to his disciples, 'I must decrease so that Jesus might increase.' He told a company of witnesses that I am the Son of God." So Jesus was pointing out to the Pharisees, "You were a big fan of John, who confirmed that what I'm saying now is true." That was His first speaker.

Then He brought in a second speaker as part of His first witness. This time He called an even more impressive witness: God the Father. The Pharisees probably thought, "What does He mean, God the Father? God the Father hasn't spoken for 400 years. He hasn't spoken audibly since our forefathers heard Him on Mount Sinai." Jesus said, "Wait a minute. You have heard Him speak." Where had God spoken? How had He given testimony? "Remember that day I was baptized?" Many Bible scholars believe the very men He was talking to were followers of John, because they liked what he was teaching. If that's true, then some of the men Jesus was now debating could have been present at His baptism.

"What happened when I came out of the water? You were there. You heard the voice from heaven that said, 'This is My Son in Whom I am well pleased.' You heard that voice. So when I say I'm the Son of God, I'm not the only one who's saying this. John the Baptist said it, then My Father in heaven said it. You heard it, but in your rebellion you're unwilling to accept what was said."

Witness #2 – Miraculous signs

If one witness wasn't good enough, Jesus then brought in His second witness: miraculous signs. In verse 36 He brought up His second proof: *"But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me."* He's saying, "I've done some things." What had He done? Remember that this story comes right after the healing of the paralyzed man. That guy was still in the room. He had turned Jesus in and now there was the discussion about how Jesus was the One Who was in trouble for healing on the Sabbath. We'll call him "Pete, the paralyzed guy." Jesus said, "Okay, proof number two is Pete."

We all know Pete was paralyzed for 38 years. "Pete, were you paralyzed for 38 years?" "Uh huh. Yep." "What happened when you saw Jesus?" "Well, He told me to get up, pick up my mat and walk." "What did you do?" "I walked." "What are you doing now?" "I'm walking." Jesus was like, "Ta da! You're not even disputing that, Pharisees. You don't care about that. What you're concerned about is that I healed him on the Sabbath. Is that right?" This guy was walking around, everyone knew he had been paralyzed for 38 years and now he's walking. "I did that," Jesus said, "and I did that because I am God. I did that because the Messiah was prophesied to come and heal the lame, making them walk again."

You see, John keeps telling us about these miraculous signs so that we might believe. But in their rebellion, the Pharisees—and our world today—say, "I don't buy it. If I can't see it, I won't believe it." But these individuals even saw it. Pete was standing right in front of them, walking around. They said, "We don't have an issue with that. We have an issue that You did it on the Sabbath."

So there were speakers who bore witness to the truth that Jesus was Who He said He was. There were also miraculous signs. Later John wrote in John 20:30-31, "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*"

Witness #3 – Numerous Scriptures

Now witness number three is numerous Scriptures. Jesus pivots, beginning in verse 39, to this: "*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people.*" Now fast forward to the end of this passage:

⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

Jesus says, "The final witnesses about Me are the Old Testament Scriptures that substantiate and verify My claim that I am to be exalted above all." Everything that has been written about the Messiah, every one of the prophecies, point people to Jesus. He says, "You Pharisees say you love the Bible, you say you find life in the Scriptures, yet the very words of Moses, whom you revere as a Hall of Famer, speak of Me. Yet you will not believe."

What He's saying is this. "It isn't just that you don't believe I am the Son of God and that I am to be exalted above all; you're not even a good Jew. You're not even a good follower of Judaism. You're not a lover of the Torah. If you truly were, you would have seen that the Scriptures speak of Me."

Various speakers, miraculous signs and numerous Scriptures. You see, when we believe this truth, that Jesus is to be exalted above all, by faith the Scriptures explode, showing us over and over again that this is true. In Luke 24 we see that after Jesus has been resurrected from the dead, He meets two men on the road to Emmaus. Here's what we read in verse 27: "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*"

The question for us now, in the midst of all these witnesses, is this: are we going to believe? We have two choices. Either we believe and obey, or we disbelieve and then do whatever we have to do to keep Jesus out of our lives. Some of you may be keeping Jesus at arm's length to the best of your ability. "Listen, Jesus isn't as great as you think He is, Tim. I've kept Him out of my life and I have no issues. Jesus knows I'm in charge and He stays away." Here's the problem. Jesus has made a certain claim and has given us confirmation of its truth. From this there is only one conclusion.

The conclusion: Obey Jesus or else!

Jesus' conclusion is that we should obey Him or else! You might think, "Or else what? Like I just said, I don't believe. I've kept Jesus at arm's length. My neighbor doesn't believe either and he seems to be doing just fine. Obviously, Jesus isn't right, because there are many people who are living their lives completely in rebellion to His lordship. What Jesus said cannot be true."

Listen carefully. There are some Christians who are buying into this. That's why you're filled with dread and worry. Your heart is melted because you look at the world and think, "There is no God. If there is a God, this stuff wouldn't be happening. I thought Jesus is in charge. I thought Jesus is in control, but all hell is breaking loose. Now you're going to tell me from the pulpit that Jesus is in charge? Have you read the paper? Have you watched the news? I don't see that."

Notice why Jesus concludes: "Obey Me, or else." Verse 25 says, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, an 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.*" There is debate on what Jesus meant by this. One view is that

He was speaking about raising people from death to life. He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead which was a foreshadowing of that. The man who was dead would be brought back to life. We know from other Gospel stories that Jesus raised others from death to life, including Jairus' daughter. So He may have been referring to this physical resurrection. Other commentators say He was referencing spiritual resurrection, that through His words He was raising those who were blind, dead and held captive by the devil, causing them to be born again into newness of life.

Both interpretations are true, but there's also a third interpretation. Jesus Himself would die, then at the moment He was brought back to life, tombs were opened up and the dead rose to life. Now, I don't think it's that important to pick between these three options, since they're all true. The bottom line is that by His power, Jesus raised dead people—physically, spiritually, and even those who were already in the grave.

Then He continues in verse 26:

²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Listen to me, those of you who are keeping Jesus at arm's length, saying, "Jesus, You do not have control over me," this is a warning to the world: there is a day coming. He says, "An hour is coming, a moment is coming," when the conclusion of His claim will be made evident in every person's life. Jesus tells us, "There will be a day, a moment, coming in human history when, because I am the Son of God, I will execute judgment. I will call all tombs to open up." On that great and momentous day, everyone who is in a tomb—those who are dead in Christ and those who are dead in their sin—will rise. And on that great and glorious day, we will stand before the One Who claims in this passage that He is God.

On that day, we will walk up to His throne and stand before Him. Every knee, every person, will bow and give allegiance to Jesus as the one and only. On that day, either you will do what you have done through your eyes of faith, that is, "Praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit—three in one," because that's what you've been doing all your life. Or, for the first time in your life—when it is too late—you will bow the knee and will give glory to the truth that Jesus is to be exalted over all. Listen to me. Those men who were conspiring to kill Jesus will bow the knee to Him one day. Those evil men who crucified Him will one day bow the knee to Him. Nero and every Caesar who tried to stop the movement of God's people in the first, second, third and even fourth centuries—those Caesars who owned the known world—they too will bow the knee to Jesus. The great thinkers and Renaissance men and women who did marvelous things and thought they were an end unto themselves—they too will bow the knee. All scientists and innovators will bow the knee. The great religious leaders of the day, including Buddha, will bow the knee. Krishna is going to bow the knee. Muhammed is going to bow the knee to Jesus. Prime ministers and presidents are going to bow the knee to Jesus.

You and I, great and small will bow the knee to Jesus. Will that be the first time you do it? Or will it be the millionth time you've done it, because by faith in this life you said, "Jesus is to be exalted over all"? That begs the question this morning: do you believe this? Jesus has laid His claim: "I am to be exalted over all. I am to be your highest priority. I am to be your greatest aspiration. I am to be your most costly possession." Have you bowed the knee?

If you haven't, Jesus alone has the power, as He says in this passage, to execute judgment. In the book of Revelation, also written by the apostle John, he says, "Anyone's name that is not found written in the Lamb's book of life will be cast into the lake of fire." Jesus is serious about His claim—and you should be as well. Are you living in the light of the claims of Scripture or are you filled with dismay and dread? Do you allow the fears of this world to overtake you or do you stand resolute, bold and confident on the promises and truths of Scripture? Even though the world fights against us, you can stand and articulate even as Jesus did to a world that hates us, that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life; no one can get to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

Is that how you live your life? Is that how you go to work? Is that how you go to school? There's a day coming when you're going to hear this, but when you hear it from Jesus on the day of judgment, it will be too late. If you do, then tell others now, so they can enter into heaven, instead of being consigned to hell.