

Exegesis

Vs. 31-33 – The Jews' response to the Lord's claim that he and God were "one" was violence. John says they "took up stones again to stone him." The term "again" likely refers back to 8:58, where the Jews were going to first stone Jesus for his claim that he was the "I AM" who existed before Abraham (cf. 5:18). And as had been noted above (*see notes for 8:58*), the presence of stones in or around Solomon's Colonnade seems to indicate that while the Temple proper was completed, the grounds were likely still under construction.¹ Doubtless, these Jews thought themselves fervent defenders of Jewish orthodoxy. In reality, they were more like the Israelites of old who likewise murmured against Moses and plotted to stone him on two separate occasions (cf. Ex. 17:4; Num. 14:10).²

In all of the gospels, Jesus never once lost control (cf. 10:18). Even when faced with an angry mob intent on lynching him, the Lord remained calm, stood his ground, and spoke confidently. Thus, rather than slip out as he had done before (cf. 8:59), he starts to reason with them. He says, "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" As we noted before (vs. 25), Jesus almost always referred to his works as proof of his messiahship, and, here, he utilizes them to prove his innocence. And as the plural "works" implies, these data points were both "good"³ and "many." The Jews would have to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that Jesus was indeed worthy of capital punishment, a task not easily done for one who has no misdeeds to his name and has never once misspoken.

The Jews seem to realize the futility of trying to condemn Jesus based on his works, so they deflect by saying, "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makes thyself God." Ironically, the Jews sought to discredit Jesus' works using Jesus' words, whereas John did the reverse.⁴ The multiplicity of the Lord's miracles established the truthfulness of his claims (cf. 9:32-33).

There is some debate as to how one could be charged with blasphemy. According to the *Mishnah*, an extra-biblical Jewish document that interpreted and applied the O.T., a person could be guilty of blasphemy for simply pronouncing the Tetragrammaton—i.e., YHWH or Yahweh.⁵ But considering that Jesus never actually used God's name and that there is no

¹ Contra Morris (1995), p. 466, who claims that there would be no stones in this area even though he had written earlier (p. 420) that there would've been due to the implied construction.

² Keener (2003), 1:826.

³ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 175, the Greek phrase **καλὰ ἔργα** (*kala erga*) here translated as "good works" is the exact phrase found in Mark 14:6 where it described the act of anointing Jesus by the woman in Bethany (cf. Lu. 8:15; 1 Tim. 4:6).

⁴ Keener (2003), 1:827.

⁵ Köstenberger (2004), p. 314.

evidence that the religious leaders during the first century held such a narrow and extreme interpretation, we can rule this explanation out.⁶ The Jews sought to kill Jesus more likely because his claim seemed to transgress the Law at two points. First, Judaism was monotheistic (cf. Deut. 6:4). Even though Jesus claimed "oneness" rather than co-headship with God, his words appeared to promote polytheism, a sin strictly forbidden by the second commandment (cf. Ex. 20:3-5).⁷ Second, Jesus was a man with flesh and blood that they could see and touch; and, according to Ex. 33:20, man could not see the face of God and live. So, if Jesus was indeed God, how was it that they all still lived? Thus, they supposed that Jesus was degrading the image of God and therefore deserved punishment.

The irony of the situation is striking since Jesus did not make himself God but is the "Word made flesh" (cf. 1:14).⁸ Jesus has always been and will always be with God and was/is God himself. The change occurred when God made himself a man and tabernacled among us. The accusation of blasphemy only stands if God could not become a man or Jesus was a liar. God can do anything. So it can't be that. And the many works that Jesus did and will soon do (cf. 11:43-44) show that he is as incapable of lying as God is capable of doing whatever he wants. "As the Son, there has indeed been a change in his status, but one that is almost the reverse of what the Jews think: he has obediently and humbly accepted the incarnation. The Word became flesh, the Son became a man."⁹ This was a possibility that the religious leaders simply refused to accept.

Vs. 34-36 – Quoting from Psalm 82:6,¹⁰ Jesus' response is to engage with the Jew's own interpretation of the Law. He says, "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"

The phrase "your law" does not cast doubt on the passage that Jesus quotes from. After all, he also affirmed that the "scripture cannot be broken." Instead, the Lord is appealing to something his audience already holds as authoritative and then applies it to the present situation. This form of argumentation called "*a fortiori*" was common in rabbinic circles.¹¹ A fortiori argues

⁶ Carson (1991), p. 396, explains that there are clear indications that right before the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD, "competing and fervent religious opinions in Palestine...[mocked] the streamlined, restrained and largely univocal vision preserved in the Mishnah."

⁷ Kruse (2017), p. 279.

⁸ Keener (2003), 1:827.

⁹ Carson (1991), p. 396.

¹⁰ Psalms 82:6-8: "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations."

¹¹ Kruse (2017), p. 281.

that if something to a lesser extent is true, something to a greater extent is likewise true.¹² Thus, Jesus' line of reason is as follows: if beings could be called "gods" ¹³ who were not divine, "how much more can he [who is divine] whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world be so termed?"¹⁴

Arguing based solely on the use of the terms "gods" and "Son of God" that Jesus was blasphemous was a spurious and illogical accusation. The Father is the one who has "sanctified and sent [his Son] in the world." Jesus has only attested to the truth of his identity and about the one who sent him.¹⁵ The Jews wanted to argue semantics, but even they were a mark in Jesus' favor. For a more thorough discussion of the identities of those called "gods" in Psa. 82, see the 'Additional Notes' section.

Vs. 37-38 – Leaving off the interpretive implications of Psa. 82, Jesus moves back to something far more persuasive: his works. "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." All that Jesus has done has been done under his Father's direction and power. The amazing things happening right in front of the eyes of all Israel point to only one conclusion: the Father is in Jesus, and Jesus is in the Father. Jesus never expected the Jews to take his claims at face value, but he did expect his audience to view his claims in light of his works (cf. 14:10-11).

Vs. 39-42 – Saying "the Father is in me, and I in him" in vs. 38 was Jesus' way of repeating what he said in vs. 30: "I and my Father are one." And just as it had there, the reaction of the Jews to Jesus' claims was the same as John tells us, "Therefore they sought again to take him...." The Lord's appeal to Psa. 82 and his own works did nothing to mollify the Jews. They still wanted blood. If the Bible and miracles could not convince them, one begins to see the futility of trying to make unbelievers believe. As always, in John's account, belief is the pathway to more enlightenment as opposed to more evidence. Evidence has very little persuasive power when the one who is shown the evidence chooses not to believe it. Always, it is a believing that leads to more knowing.

John also tells us that, despite being surrounded (cf. vs. 24), the religious leaders could not capture Jesus. Much as he had before (cf. 7:30; 8:58), the Lord escaped "And went away again

¹² A modern example of a fortiori is Life Cereal's slogan, "If Mikey likes it, anyone would."

¹³ The Hebrew word translated as "gods" in Psa. 82:6 is *elohim*, which, more often than not, refers to God in the O.T. However, there are multiple occasions when the term is used to indicate judges (cf. Exo. 21:6; 22:8, 9; 1 Sam. 2:25.), false gods (cf. Ex. 18:11; Ex. 20:3; 32:1, 23; Deut. 10:17; Jdg. 2:17; 5:8; Psa. 136:2), and possibly even angels (cf. Psa. 82:1; 86:8; 138:1).

¹⁴ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 175.

¹⁵ Morris (1995), p. 469, "They [the Jews] thought he was making himself God. He [Jesus] held that he was not making himself anything. He was what he was, and it was the Father who in the first instance sent him in to the world, and in the second instance testified of him (5:37)."

beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode." The reference to "the place where John at first baptized" is a callback to 1:28, where John was baptizing people "in Bethabara beyond Jordan." Historically, this was under the jurisdiction of Philip and well-clear of the reach of those in Jerusalem.¹⁶

We're not told how long, exactly, Jesus "abode" in this area. But it was a fruitful trip as John explains that while Jesus was in Bethany, "many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true." It is curious that the thing that drove these people to accept Jesus was the same thing that the religious refused to accept: miracles. Again, John portrays his own people as being divided as to Jesus' identity (cf. 7:43; 9:16; 10:19).¹⁷ Though John the Baptist was a key figure in this area, he "did no miracle." In place of miracles, however, was his insistence that a mighty miracle worker would come after him. Thus, when Jesus showed up one day and started performing many good works which could only be described as miracles, the people were ready to accept the claims of those miracles. In a way, Jesus was the miracle that gave John's message meaning. And so, our narrator tells us that "many believed on him there." What a resounding note of commendation for the Baptist's ministry that those he first ministered to were also those who believed in Jesus the Messiah. And it is fitting that this is the last that John the Baptist will be mentioned in John's account.¹⁸ To have said that people came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior through a person's ministry is the highest praise possible for a ministry. May it be said of ours.

¹⁶ Carson (1991), p. 400.

¹⁷ Keener (2003), 1:830.

¹⁸ Köstenberger (2004), p. 318.

Additional Notes

10:19-21 - Interestingly, the choice presented before the Jews here and in other places is the same one given to every person first introduced to Jesus. Taking his cue from Jesus, C.S. Lewis presented to his readers in *Mere Christianity* the following argument:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."¹⁹

In actuality, Lewis wasn't the first to have articulated Jesus' claim in this way. Justin Taylor notes at least two others before him.²⁰ The first was John Duncan, a 19th-century missionary to the Jews in Hungary, who explained that Christ's claim to the divine station presents us with a "trilemma." "Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable."²¹ The second to articulate Christ's assertion was Watchman Nee, a Chinese church leader and Christian teacher who worked in China during the early 20th century. In his book, *Normal Christian Faith*, he wrote,

"How can Jesus of Nazareth claim to be God? Before going on, we have to pause for a moment to seriously consider the matter. It is not a light thing to claim to be God. A person who makes such a claim falls into one of three categories. He must belong to one of these three categories; he cannot belong to all three. First, if he claims to be God and yet in fact is not, he has to be a madman or a lunatic. Second, if he is neither God nor a lunatic, he has to be a liar, deceiving others by his lie. Third, if he is neither of these, he must be God. You can only choose one of the three possibilities. If you do not believe that he is God, you have to consider he is a madman. If you cannot take him for

¹⁹ Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity*, (HarperCollins, 1952), p. 52.

²⁰ Taylor, Justin. "Is C.S. Lewis's Liar-Lord-or-Lunatic Argument Unsound?" The Gospel Coalition, The Gospel Coalition, 29 Oct. 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/is-c-s-lewiss-liar-lord-or-lunatic-argument-unsound/>.

²¹ Duncan, John, *Colloquia Peripatetic*, (1873), p. 109. <https://archive.org/details/colloquiaperipat00dun/page/n7>

either of the two, you have to take him for a liar. There is no need for us to prove if Jesus of Nazareth is God or not. All we have to do is find out if He is a lunatic or a liar. If He is neither, He must be the Son of God. These are our three choices. There is no fourth."²²

10:34-37 – Jesus arguing semantics from Psa. 82 implied that the Jews had no grounds to stone him based solely on the fact that the Lord called himself one with God and the Son of God. Psa. 82 uses these same terms—i.e., "gods" and "children of the Most High"—to refer to individuals who were not divine. Thus, Jesus could hardly be stoned for something the Scriptures themselves did. But while Jesus' train of thought is easy to follow, the identities of those mentioned in Psa. 82 is not so easily discerned. Consequently, three subjects have been proposed to explain who the Psalmist was referencing.²³

The first group presumed to be the "gods" are Israel's judges. This interpretation relies on the subject matter being dealt with in the front half of the psalm, where individuals are being condemned who "judge unjustly" and fail to "defend the poor and fatherless." But, given that this same group is also called "children of the Most High," it is suggested that the "gods" could be angels or demons since a variant of this phrase ("sons of God") can be used to refer to spiritual beings (cf. Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Jude 1:6; 2 Pet. 2:4). However, a third proposal is similar to the first in that Psa. 82 referred to beings within the Jewish community; except, rather than explicitly referencing judges, "gods" referred to all of Israel more generally. Proponents of this view say that the phrase "whom the word of God came" referred to the giving of the Ten Commandments (cf. Ex. 32).

Of the three approaches, which is the correct one? John's context is the key. Given Jesus' use of the psalm in John 10, there seems to be a clear contrast between God and mankind and not between God and angelic beings.²⁴ This means that the second interpretation seems the least likely. As for the other two, one would be tempted to take the more general approach of option three, and, indeed, some interpreters do.²⁵ But option one seems the most appealing given how closely the two contexts parallel one another.²⁶ Much like the judges of Israel in Psa. 82, the religious leaders in John 10 were ruling over God's people unjustly. And, if you'll

²² Nee, Watchman, *The Normal Christian Faith*, (Anaheim, CA; Living Stream Ministry, 1994), p. 35.

²³ Köstenberger (2004), p. 315.

²⁴ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 176.

²⁵ Kruse (2017), p. 280; Carson (1991), p. 398-399, holds that this last suggestion seems best as most ancient interpreters thought of Psa. 82 in this way. Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 177, agrees, citing Ex. 4:21-22, where it says, "Israel is my first-born son...Let my son go that he may serve me." Köstenberger (2004), p. 315, while not denying that the judges are a valid option, opts for all of Israel.

²⁶ Morris (1995), p. 468; Keener (2003), 1:828-829.

remember, Jesus even personified the Pharisees as "thieves," "robbers," and "hirelings" who had abandoned their post (cf. vs. 1, 12). The main contrast in John 10 is unarguably between the Good Shepherd—i.e., Jesus—and the under-shepherds—i.e., Pharisees and Sadducees. Thus, just as the Psalmist condemned the rulers in his day, Jesus was condemning the leaders in his day. Psalm 82 even ends with the heartfelt appeal for God to act: "Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!" The Lord has acted. God, the supreme judge over all the earth, has arrived in the person of Jesus Christ.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 20

Text: **John 10:31-42**

Today we conclude John chapter 10. And in our passage, we'll see how the Lord will appeal to Psa. 82 and his own works to validate his claim that he and the Father are "one." But, sadly, nothing could mollify the Jews. They still wanted blood. If the Bible and miracles could not convince them, one begins to see the futility of trying to make unbelievers believe. As always, in John's account, belief is the pathway to more enlightenment as opposed to more evidence. This is not to say that evidence is unimportant, only that it is secondary to belief. Evidence has very little persuasive power when the one who is shown the evidence chooses not to believe it. Always, it is a believing that leads to more knowing.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: