

Jesus Responds to False Accusations with Good News

Mo'ne Davis is the African-American female pitching star from the 2014 Little League World Series. Though her team did not win the championship, she set several records, such as, being the first girl to win a game in the World Series. Unfortunately, a college player posted a very unkind and demeaning tweet about her on the Internet. He was immediately kicked off his school's baseball team. Mo'ne demonstrated her remarkable maturity by writing to the college president, asking that he be reinstated. She wrote:

"Everyone makes mistakes... It hurt on my part, but he hurt even more. If it was me, I would want to take that back. I know how hard he's worked. Why not give him a second chance?" ¹

So, how do you respond when you're falsely accused? In John chapter 5, we see Jesus heal a man who doesn't even express any faith in Him. He just heals him and walks away! Then, because Jesus did this on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders accused Him of breaking the Law. The rest of the chapter is Jesus' response to their false accusations. Why does John spend a whole chapter on this one incident? What does he want us to see and learn? Let's see for ourselves. First, we need to see that...

I. This Healing Reveals a Deeper Disease.

The Jews doing the accusing are probably Pharisees, though it doesn't specifically say that. But it was the Pharisees who had taken the Jewish law, which for the most part consisted of broad, general principles designed to give guidance to a healthy and wholesome life, and turned it into a matrix of thousands of rules and regulations that squeezed the life out of everyone.

For example, consider the law about working on the Sabbath. The law of Moses simply said that a man or his animals were not to work on the Sabbath but instead were to use that day for rest and worship (Deut. 5:12-15). But the Pharisees took that and created 39 different definitions of the just the word "work." The rabbis in Jesus' day said a man was sinning if he carried a needle in his robe because it was an instrument of work. They argued as to whether you could wear an artificial leg or artificial teeth on the Sabbath since they weren't really part of your body but "a burden" you were carrying.

So, when they saw the man Jesus healed, who had been an invalid for 38 years, carrying his mat, they said, "*It's the Sabbath: the law forbids you to carry your mat.*" (v. 10) This is a lie. The Law of God did not say this. Their man-made interpretation of the Law said this.

This is an example of the spiritual disease known as "legalism." The book of Galatians in the New Testament is basically a warning against the poison of legalism. In

Charles Swindoll's book, *The Grace Awakening*, he defines legalism as:
...an attitude, a mentality based on pride. It is an obsessive conformity to an artificial standard for the purpose of exalting oneself. A legalist assumes the place of authority and pushes it to unwarranted extremes.

Swindoll also quotes Daniel Taylor who writes:

The great weapon of authoritarianism, secular or religious, is legalism: the manufacturing and manipulation of rules for the purpose of illegitimate control. Perhaps the most damaging of all the perversions of God's will and Christ's work, legalism clings to law at the expense of grace, to the letter in place of the spirit. ²

Some of you have been the victims of a legalistic parent or boss or even a church. Isn't it interesting that God's basic "rule book" sums up the entire law with ten rules. Ten! And these cover all of life! The Pharisees expanded this into 613 permanent regulations. So, when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, the Pharisees couldn't see the blessing. All they could see was a violation of one of their man-made regulations. When they confronted Him about this, I love His response. Jesus said:

... "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."
(v.17)

What did Jesus mean? Jesus, who we must remember, CREATED the world with His Father, intended the Sabbath for man's benefit, not his limitation. It was for rest and worship. God the Father spoke through the prophet Micah to define worship. He said:
(Micah 6:6-8)

With what shall I come before the LORD...? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?

...He has showed you, O man, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you? (meaning: in worship)

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

So the Sabbath is not meant to be a day of total non-activity, but a day of doing the Lord's work of compassion or mercy. This is why Jesus did multiple miracles on the Sabbath and ate and fellowshiped and taught on the Sabbath. Treating it like any other work day is violating the Sabbath, NOT keeping it holy. But God the Father is healing and feeding and rescuing and caring for people every Sabbath. If you're joining Him in THAT work, you're worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth.

When Jesus healed this invalid, He was dealing with two diseases: the man's disease that caused his paralysis and the Pharisee's spiritual disease of legalism. Apparently, only one disease was healed that day because it says of the Pharisees:

For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him... (v. 18)

So, next we must see...

II How Jesus Responded to Their False Accusations

Technically, the Pharisees had two accusations against Jesus. One was that He broke the Sabbath's "no work" rule and the second was that He was equating Himself with God. Of course, actually, He was guilty of the second. He WAS equating Himself with God. We see this (and the Pharisees saw this) in the intimate way that Jesus spoke of God the Father. It was acceptable to refer to Jehovah as "OUR Father." But Jesus continually called Him, "MY Father," which to the Pharisees was blasphemy.

Now, if someone falsely accused you of committing a capital offense, how would you respond? (And that is what the Pharisees were doing. They didn't want to kill Him just because they hated Him. They truly believed He had committed a capital offense.) If it were you or I, we'd probably hire a lawyer and say, "See you in court." Jesus could have said, "If you think I've broken the law, arrest me and I'll see you in court." But He didn't do that. Why not?

Most people think that Jesus despised the Pharisees and yes, He did have some harsh words for them late in His ministry. But we must also see that, even when He knew they were out to get Him, He did not always fight fire with fire. Let's see how He responded here, in the second half of John chapter 5.

First, Jesus gives the Pharisees evidence that He IS equal with God. In verse 19 He says that the source of His power to heal is the Father in heaven:

... "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."
(v. 19)

Then secondly, Jesus predicts that they will see Him do even greater things, like raise the dead, something only God can do:

... "Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. 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." (v. 20, 21)

And the final proof of His divinity is that God the Father has given Him power and authority to judge:

"For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."
(John 5:26, 27)

Now remember, this is early in Jesus' ministry. How will He demonstrate that He has this power and authority? Well, He not only healed people but He raised several people from the dead. Also, He did something that really torqued the Pharisees: He told people that their sins were forgiven. Remember that? In Matt. 9 Jesus forgave a paralyzed man his sin and the teachers of the law said, "*This fellow is blaspheming!*" And Jesus said:

"Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home. (Matt. 9:5-7)

So, the first way Jesus responds to these false accusations is not to lawyer up, but to provide evidence, both past and future, of who He really is.

Secondly, Jesus provides witnesses of who He is. Jesus says, in accordance with Jewish law:

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid." (John 5:31)

By Jewish law, He needed to provide at least two witnesses. He provided four. First, is John the Baptist. John, as we've seen in earlier chapters, was not bashful about this. He said:

"I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." (John 1:34)

His second witness is His miracles:

"I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me." (John 5:36)

His third witness is God the Father Himself! He says:

"And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me." (v. 37)

Three times people heard the voice of the Father confirming that Jesus was His Son (at His Baptism, at His Transfiguration and at His last entry into Jerusalem). But Jesus knew that these particular Pharisees didn't accept that because they didn't hear it with their own ears, so He said to them:

“...You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”
(John 5:37-40)

Let me pause here and ask, “Do you put your knowledge of Scripture as a higher priority than your relationship with Jesus?” We’re not saved by Scripture, we’re saved by Jesus and, as we spend time in His Word, we must guard against measuring our spiritual health by our knowledge of Scripture rather than by our obedience to Christ!

And the last witness that Jesus calls upon is Moses. The Pharisees considered Moses the greatest prophet and the Savior of the nation. As legalists, they held no human being in higher regard than Moses because the Law came from him. And this is who Jesus calls as His final witness:

“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” (John 5:45-47)

When did Moses write about Jesus? Continually! Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible in which are found the Law which the Pharisees held in highest regard. But in every book there are multiple references to Jesus! I don’t have time to even to begin to point them all out but let me show you two. In Ex. 12 we find the instructions for the Passover. For the angel of death to passover their family and not strike the oldest child dead, they had to do what? Smear the blood of an innocent lamb on the doorpost of their house. And John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said, “Look! There goes the Lamb of God!!!”

Then in Deuteronomy Moses says this to the people, *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.”* (Deut. 18:15)

This is what Jesus was talking about. It wasn’t just John the Baptist. It wasn’t just the miracles. It wasn’t just the audible voice of God the Father. It was also Moses who prophesied that Jesus was the One.

So, do you see how Jesus dealt with His accusers? He didn’t avoid them. And He didn’t attack them personally. He confronted them with compelling evidence of what was true. His goal, though not achieved with all His accusers, was to resolve the conflict. Is that your goal when you’re accused or condemned?

In Luke 17, Jesus is teaching His disciples about the dangers of sin, especially in relationships and he concludes by saying:

“So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” (Luke 17:3-4)

That’s actually a very mature request on their part. We need great faith when we’re being accused of something serious, don’t we?

In his excellent book, *How to Deal with Annoying People*, Christian counselor, Bob Phillips, lists five decisions we should prayerfully make BEFORE we confront someone. Here they are:

Determine in your mind to take the principled approach to resolve the conflict. Attempt to remain friends... This may not always be possible but it should be the goal.

Determine in your mind to not strike back and get revenge. Digging in and becoming inflexible will not solve anything. It only separates further.

Determine in your mind to be the change agent in the situation. Do not wait for the other person to make the first move. You make it. Avoiding the conflict only makes matters worse.

Determine in your mind to develop a thick skin. Do not take everything so personally. Relax. Ease up. A wise person said, "We would worry less about what others think of us if we realized how seldom they do."

Determine in your mind to allow the other person to save face. Do not go for the throat. Public humiliation is not necessary. Be mature. Be the bigger person.³

We've studied Jesus' words and His argument, but did you hear His tone? Jesus speaks the truth, He clearly describes where they are wrong, He doesn't avoid their accusations but He's not inflexible and in this conversation He's not trying to humiliate them publicly. In fact, He's offering them a way out. In verse 24, Jesus says:

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

In your most difficult relationship, is that your goal? Even if the one you are in conflict with refuses your offer to resolve the situation, if you are a Follower of Jesus, you should be the one who speaks Good News. Jesus said, that's the way to life.

Now, in each of our worship locations, your site pastor will come to lead in prayer...

¹ PreachingToday.com/News that Illustrates for Sunday, 4/20/2015

² Charles Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), p. 81

³ Bob Phillips & Kimberly Alyn, *How to Deal with Annoying People* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2003/2005), pp. 216-217