

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
IHOP BIBLE STUDY  
August 2003

Topic: The Gospel of John 5:16 - 5:47 Jesus' testimony to himself

NOTE: In the Gospel of John chart, this section is originally named "The plot to kill Jesus." The section does concern this issue. However, it is because of Jesus' testimony and demonstrations concerning himself that he gets into trouble with the Jewish leaders. Please make note of this change in your chart.

I. Read through the assigned reading at one time.

SOME OBSERVATIONS: Reading this assignment can either be a spooky experience or a deeply reassuring experience.

Using a "Head trip analysis" it is a spooky experience because of the supernatural implications: God is a heavenly Father (vs. 17); raising the dead (vs. 25); authority to judge (vs. 27); those in "their graves will hear his voice and come out" (vs. 28); being saved (vs. 35); the heavenly Father sent his son (vs. 37). Note the italicized words are implied. These are not the words used by the writer of this Gospel.

As your Spiritual Guide, I can affirm that all of these implications are true for all the wrong reasons. What makes these implications spooky is their supernatural assumptions. Jesus, and his Jewish culture, never understood the nature of God as being spooky. For them (and for us), God is the meaning of life. It is to this end that God's nature is understood as The Meaningfulness. Meaning-filled-ness is something we all can experience.

When God is identified as an experience and not an idea, then we have turned from "Head trip analysis" to "Gut trip analysis."

II. vs. 17-God as a heavenly Father. Translate the word "heavenly" as the Big Picture. The word "Father" tells us more about how Jesus related to The Big Picture than it does about the nature of The Big Picture. Jesus is not the physical Son of The Big Picture. Jesus understood his spiritual relationship to The Meaningfulness of life SO INTIMATELY that he related himself to this experience in the most meaningful relationship a Jew could have, and this was the way a Jew related himself to his physical father.

Remember that Jewish society for 4,000 years was a patriarchal society.

Meaning was passed from one generation to another generation through the father to the son! Had Jewish society been matriarchal, Jesus would have called his relationship to The Big Picture of Meaningfulness "Mother!"

It is accepted that we live in selfish times. Few people believe that thinking of The Meaningfulness as Father is inappropriate. Not only is it inappropriate, it is mean spirited and dead wrong theologically.

It is dead wrong because God can not be identified - it breaks the first two commandments. This is why the Jewish leaders were upset.

It is mean spirited because the current images of FATHERHOOD are poor, and many people can not transfer their experience of fatherhood from their human father to a heavenly father. I see this all of the time in counseling women prisoners in the Saline County Jail. It is helpful, and an act of charity, to break the habit of using human genders (Father and/or Mother) to identify God. It is helpful to use the terms The Perfect At-One-Ment, The Guarantor, and/or The Meaningfulness. This gets us by the social issues, it honors our sisters of faith, and it is accurate theologically.

III. Vs. 25 - Raising the dead. Who are the dead and how does Jesus give them life? Our basic problem is that NO ONE can avoid being one of the dead ones. To be human is to be a dead one. So, how does Jesus give them life? Remember that John always implies that Jesus is THE CHRIST the Logos: the "Good News." When you see John use the name of Jesus it is necessary to add Jesus The Logos. The GOOD NEWS is that ABUNDANT LIFE THAT IS ALREADY OURS.

It is only necessary to claim it! Not to claim it means we are one of the dead ones; the spiritually asleep; those who are unable to make the choice; the spiritually asleep.

IV. This is what it means to be saved (vs. 35). Can you follow the argument to demonstrate the "gut trip analysis" of being saved? Saved from what? Save to what?

V. With this in mind, read the assignment again to note the deep reassurance and hope this interpretation provides. Talk about it with each other. Let me know what YOUR EXPERIENCE IS.

VI. From what you know about the Jewish leaders, why would Jesus' approach be so radical that they would want to kill him?

VII. From what you know about your contemporary friends and family, why is "gut trip analysis" as offense?