

June 5, 2011

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

The Testimony of Jesus

John 5:18 – 29

In this section of Scripture, in fact from verse 19 all the way through verse 47, we have the personal testimony of Jesus as to who He is – and His testimony is that He is God. As we have said before, one of the goals of John's gospel was to present Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Everything hinges on this, because if Jesus Christ is not God, then the Bible is a lie, and we all might as well go home. But John the gospel writer testifies to this; he has others say it – like Nathanael – '*You are the Son of God*'; Jesus demonstrates His deity through miracles and having divine insight into peoples hearts and minds, like the Samaritan woman and others. Again and again Jesus is presented as God come in the flesh and now we have His own words testify to this fact. Of course this is not the only time in this gospel where we see Jesus making direct testimony to His deity, but this is one of the first lengthy discourses on that subject.

Now I would like to warn you up front that the message this morning is not about you. Not that it doesn't have anything to do with you – the implications for you are huge – but the message this morning is all about Christ. In fact, we will be dealing with basic Christological questions that have everything to do with your faith. Most people will talk with you about God – most people have some idea, some concept of God that they are comfortable with. It may be God as the Master Clockmaker who designs and builds the universe, sets it in motion and then goes out for an extended lunch, leaving us to deal with it the best we can. They are Deists. Or you may have those who see God as everything – He is the ocean and the mountains, He's in everything and is everything – the birds are God and the bees are God and you are God. These are the Pantheists. Some believe that God is a Life-force – an impersonal, amoral energy that animates all living things. As long as something is alive, it has life force circulating through it and surrounding it; when it dies, the life force departs. These are what we call New Agers. And then there are the gods of Hinduism, and Buddhism and Islam and the many gods of other polytheistic religions, and finally you have the god of atheism – which is worship and adoration of no god.

And most people will talk to you about God – at least their idea of God. But when you ratchet it up a notch to talk about Jesus, that's where the conversation gets sticky. While most people are comfortable talking about God as God; they are usually uncomfortable talking about Jesus as God. That is why we cannot talk about God with someone without bringing up Jesus, the Son of God. If we just talk about God, we run the risk of leaving people with the idea that we all basically believe the same thing, and we leave them no better off than when we started. **The crucial issue is who is Jesus?** And whenever you press people with the revelation that Jesus is God, you draw a line in the sand. **You must believe that He is the Son of God or remain under divine judgement.**

And so in chapter five here we have Jesus doing the exact same thing with the Jews of His day. As we have learned, the chapter begins with the healing of the lame man by the pool of Bethesda. And we understand that this was not just a random act of kindness by the Lord, but a purposeful, intentional miracle that did two things – **it highlighted the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel** – impotent, lame, unable to walk; and **provoked a confrontation with the religious people of that day**. The nation of Israel thought that they were morally, ethically, religiously superior to all the other people of their day – but Jesus made it plain that they were sinful, sick, needy, and hopelessly entangled in a religious hypocrisy that was impotent to save them. One of the reasons we know this confrontation was purposeful was that Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath. And He didn't just choose someone randomly – He went to one guy at the pool out of a multitude of people who was laying on his mat or bed. And when Jesus healed him – He told him to pick up his bed and walk. That was very important because as we saw earlier, one of the Sabbath laws was that you couldn't do that. That was working.

And Jesus knew that the Jews would accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath. But this only gave Him the opportunity to expand on the issue. We read in verse 16: *For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.* John 5:16 The Jews were mad because He blatantly broke their law; but then Jesus ratchets things up a notch: *But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."* John 5:17 In effect He said that the Father's work was His work which made them equal to each other - what they heard was 'I am God'. And that made them mad enough to kill Him.

For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. John 5:18 They had been content to simply persecute the man – now they wanted to kill Him. The word John uses here can either be translated 'to murder' – an illegal action; or 'to kill' – within legal sanctions. I think these guys were supposing they were acting within the law, but I believe they had murder in their hearts. After all, the law Jesus was supposedly breaking was a man-made stipulation – not the law given by God. God did not say, 'Thou shalt not carry thy bed on the Sabbath' – He said, 'Six days shall you work and on the seventh rest'. The Sabbath was meant to be a God-honoring time where you put aside the pursuit of daily living to devote yourself to worship. It was all about focusing on God and not a time for you to worry about earning your daily bread. And what could be more God-honoring than receiving divine healing on the Sabbath? But of course the Jews didn't see it like that.

The implication here was that **the Sabbath was made for man, not God**. Now it is true that the Bible says that God created everything in six days and then He rested: *Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.* Genesis 2:3 But the Bible does not say that God stopped all His work. He didn't rest on the seventh day because He was so worn out after six days of creating stuff that He just sat down to veg out. God never gets tired – there is no capacity in God for weariness. And nowhere does the Bible say that God takes one day off in six. The only reason He rested on that day, was to set the divine example for the Sabbath rest of man, one day a week. **And even at that**, God rested only from creation, but He didn't rest from His upholding all things. If He had, everything would have fallen apart the next day. He continued to uphold all things by the word of His power. He didn't rest from His love, or His justice, or His governmental dealings with man, or His providential work – the sun still rises, the tides still ebb and flow, the wind blows, the rain falls, the grass grows, the animals are fed and reproduce. **The Sabbath was never intended for God.** It is for us. And there yet remains, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, a Sabbath rest for us to enter eternally.

So what these guys heard is Jesus saying, **'I am God'**. And that really disturbed them. But it also must have made them feel pretty good too. It is one thing to persecute someone for carrying his bed on the Sabbath – but execution is more credible somehow when someone commits blasphemy. And when we get to chapter 10 we find that this is exactly the case when Jesus again confronts these religious Jews with the fact that He is God, John records that: *The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."* John 10:31-33

Jesus Christ is the dividing line in the universe. You cannot dismiss Him as merely a good moral teacher, or an enlightened prophet – you cannot put Him on the same level as Mohammed or Buddha or Confucious or any other great teacher or prophet. The religious Jews of His day didn't do that – they knew exactly what He was talking about. And you either have to accept Christ as God or reject Him as Anti-Christ. There is no middle ground. Jesus Himself will not allow it. Good teachers don't claim to be God. Only blasphemers and God claim to be God. And if Jesus Christ is God, then everyone will one day come face to face with their estimation of who He is.

And so Jesus begins to speak to the issue. This whole discourse is an answer to the Jews who wanted to kill Him. And essentially He begins by telling them, in verses 19 – 24, that in addition to the claim of being equal in **person** with God, He is also equal in **works**, in **sovereignty**, in **judgement** and in **honor**. And Craig did a masterful job of covering this a couple of weeks ago, so we won't labor those points today. But there are a couple of implications in this passage we need to look at. In verse 23 Jesus says: *He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.* John 5:23 In other words, if you want to know whether someone truly honors God, that is, they have a real relationship with God, the test is this: **Do they honor Jesus for who He really is – the Son of God, the crucified and risen Savior of the world – the sovereign Lord of the universe, Supreme Judge of the living and the dead – the only way to the Father?** If they don't – they do not honor nor even know God. **To honor Jesus is to honor God.** And to dishonor Jesus by relegating Him to a good man, even the best man, is to dishonor God and prove that you do not know God.

The second implication comes in verse 24: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."* John 5:24 When we hear and embrace the message of the gospel – two things happen simultaneously: We not only **inherit** eternal life – **we have eternal life**; and we not only **will not be judged** at the end of all things – **we have already passed through judgement** and are safe on the other side. When we are united to Christ by faith, His death becomes our death, His curse on the cross our curse on the cross, His resurrection our resurrection. We have **already** passed from death into life. Is there a future passing from death to life? Absolutely. But Jesus made it clear that His coming into the world meant that the Kingdom of heaven was already here.

The Bible makes it clear that there is an **already now – not yet** aspect to the kingdom. That is, there is a sense in which the kingdom of God has already come in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises; but the absolute fulfillment of the kingdom is still future. We enjoy as it were the first fruits of the kingdom, but the full harvest is yet to come. That is why Jesus tells Martha in chapter 11 of John when she says that she knows that her brother will live in the resurrection, *'I am the resurrection and the life! He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies'* John 11:25 And His raising Lazarus from the dead was testimony to the fact that we have eternal life now when we believe on Him. In fact Jesus says much the same thing in verse 25 of our text this morning: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."* John 5:25

That is, there **will be** a day in which all who are dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and will live – and that day **is also** now. I used to think that John was referring to those who were spiritually dead in this verse, until I realized that Jesus refers back to this statement in verses 28 and 29 – so He must be talking about the same thing: *"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."* John 5:28 – 29 In verse 25, Jesus gives us the already – not yet tension of the kingdom - *an hour is coming and now is*. The hour of resurrection is future – all who have ever died will be resurrected. All the billions of people that have ever lived on this earth and died, will one day find themselves standing before the throne of God. Some will experience a resurrection to life – others will find that they have been resurrected so they can stand trial.

But the hour of resurrection is also present. Jesus raised at least three people that we know of back to life when He was here, and we read of at least one person in the book of Acts that was resurrected. And when Jesus died on the cross, Matthew tells us that *'...the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.'* Matthew 27:51-53 So it is evident that the reality of the kingdom is now – but it is not yet fully realized. **Everyone is not raised now – but everyone will be later.**

One day, Jesus will raise all the dead – believers and unbelievers alike – from China and India and Denmark and Sweden – from Tunisia and Turkey and Iraq and Iran and Afghanistan – from every continent and every place men have lived and died. He will raise Julius Caesar and Ghengis Khan and Henry VIII; He will raise Aristotle the philosopher and Isaiah the prophet; He will raise Martin Luther and John Calvin and all the Popes; He will raise every king and every commoner; every tyrant and every humanitarian – He will resurrect them all – and they will stand before Him, with you – for life or for judgement. No one will simply wink out of existence – no one can hope for annihilation – all will be raised as Daniel 12:2 tells us: *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.* Daniel 12:2 And as Paul told Felix: *'...there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.'* Acts 24:15

And John says that this resurrection will distinguish between those who have done the good deeds with those who have committed the evil deeds – the former will be raised to eternal life, the latter will be raised to judgement. And we should not suppose that John is somehow saying that we are justified by our good works, or that we somehow earn heaven by our working for it. It is actually the reverse – if you have been justified by faith, **that faith will produce good works**, and those good works are the evidence, the confirmation at the judgement that you were justified by faith alone, and that God was on your side by grace alone, and that your connection to Christ was the reason you had any good works at all. What John is saying is, on that day, what you have built your life on, what you have trusted in, what you believed in, will be manifested by the record of what you have done. And on the basis of that you will either be raised to life or to judgement.

John's support, his argument for how the Son can command the dead so that they live, is verse 26: *"For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;* John 5:26 Notice the construction here: **As the Father has life in Himself – He has granted that the Son has life in Himself.** It is not as though the Father is the spring and the Son is a stream that flows from that stream – He doesn't say that the 'Father is the source and the Son is a channel of that source.' He says that just as life is inherent in the Father, He has granted from all eternity that life inherent in the Son. So when we think of Jesus raising the dead by His death-defeating voice, John wants us to know that He does this by the power of the divine life that He has in Himself absolutely – the same way the Father has life in Himself absolutely. That is, Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life – He doesn't merely channel life – He is Life. No wonder the Jews were upset – this was clearly understood to be only an attribute of God Himself and here is Jesus claiming to have it too.

And then Jesus gives us the reason that He has authority to judge: *and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.* John 5:27 Here the emphasis is on His humanity, not His divinity. As the Son of God He raises the dead with His mighty divine, voice – His voice, His word, conveys life-giving power to raise the dead. But in judgement He is the Son of Man. And we have to ask ourselves 'Why is He the Son of God in relation to resurrection – but the Son of Man when it comes to judgement?' I believe it is because **you need the power of a divine life to make dead men live – but to judge those same men requires someone who knows what it is like to be human.** Otherwise there might be room to say that God is an unjust judge – judging on the basis of divinity which is out of our reach. But God doesn't do that – He became a man, subjected Himself to human living, experienced all the limitations and fragility of humanness, and suffered and died as a man. So no one can say, 'God, you don't know what its like to be a human so you cannot judge me.'

It is eminently right and proper that God sees fit to judge human beings by One who knows what it is like to be human, living and suffering and dying as a man. It is altogether right that the One who has the power to sentence men to heaven or to hell would be one of us – that the Judge of all men would be able to look into every eye and say, 'I too am a man – I too suffered, I too was tempted and tried' The judging Son of God on the last day, must first be the suffering Son of Man.

It is crucial for us to affirm what the Bible teaches, the truth to which Jesus Himself testified; namely that **He is fully divine and fully human – He is God and He is Man.** And both affirmations give strength to our faith, depth to our worship and joy to our souls. Because Jesus is God, He is all-powerful and He cannot be defeated. His purposes will be accomplished. Because He is God, He is the only adequate Savior. Because He is God, those who believe in Him are safe and can never perish; we are eternally secure. Because He is God, we can have confidence that He will empower us for whatever task He gives us to do. And because He is God, all people, both the living and the dead, will be accountable to Him when He returns to judge the world.

Because Jesus is man, He has experienced the same things that we do. Because He is man, He can identify with us more intimately. Because He is man, He can come to our aid as our sympathetic High Priest when we reach the limits of our human weaknesses. Because He is man, we can relate to Him--He is not far off and uninvolved. Because He is man, we cannot complain that God does not know what we are going through. He experienced it first-hand and there's a Man in heaven interceding for us.

Our gracious God and heavenly Father,

Your main plan and the end of Your will is to make Christ Your Son, glorious and beloved, on earth and in heaven where He is now seated at Your right hand and where one day we will see Him there and behold that glory and love and glorify Him forever. We thank You for the foretaste of that glory and love here now in this world and ask that You would help us to receive Him, love Him, bless Him with our heart and mouth and lives – to live as He lived, looking to heaven to walk here on earth. May we be those who treasure the Son, who love and honor and give Him glory for all our mercies come through Christ who has designed, purchased, promised and given them to us. Let us delight ourselves in God through Jesus Christ and live to spread His joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the precious life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.