

“Was He Out of His Mind?”
Pastor John Bronson

January 22, 2012

John 5:18-29

Order of worship for January 22, 2012

Prelude

Pre-service Song (8:55 am)
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment:

Call to Worship: Isaiah 45:15-19 and Prayer

Hymn of Praise: “Blessed Be Your Name” Overhead

Offering and Offertory

Special Music: JoySong

Message: “Was He Out of His Mind?” (John 5:18-29)
By Pastor Bronson

Songs of Worship: (recommended)

“All Heaven Declares”	Overhead
“All People That on Earth Do Dwell”	Song # 101
“Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above”	Song # 97
“Thou Art Worthy”	Song # 100

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evenings in the Word
Psalms of Ascent: 122
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

“The Prayer Closet”

January 22, 2012

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

Richard and Kerry Nakamura: For the family to be an example to believers and unbelievers. For a strong marriage and for wisdom in parenting. For open doors to the Gospel through the on-going efforts of Japanese believers to those who experienced last March’s tsunami. For safety and strength for Richard as he travels to churches on the West Coast. For wisdom in knowing when to return to Japan.

President Obama: by the Spirit’s power and grace he will learn the wisdom of humility, the power of honesty, and the inner strength of righteousness; the Lord will protect him and his family from all evil

Children’s Ministries: teachers and students will make a quick recovery from the Christmas holidays; the children will be prompted to invite their friends and friends’ families to church; AWANA will have a great rest of the year with committed leaders and enthusiastic kids

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Captain Dave Samson,

Sheriff (husband of Tammy): safety for he and those he commands while on duty

Young Adult of the Week: Gabrielle Sanford at Butte College (daughter of Bob & Lisa): driving to Roseville for classes, please pray that her car holds up and for travel mercies

As we are working our way through the Gospel [According to] John it is good to remember at the very outset that there are always two purposes that we should look for as we read any portion of this Gospel. These are the two purposes: John who writes the Gospel wants us to know, understand and to believe that Jesus is the Messiah sent from the Father to be our Savior. Jesus wants us to know the Father. So whenever we take any portion of the Gospel of John, we should always be looking for both of those pieces of information: what am I learning about Jesus as the Messiah, and what is Jesus telling me about God the Father. That is the intention that governs and controls what both of these men have done and said.

The title for today you might find a little disturbing, but probably not too much. The title is, “Was He out of His Mind?” That is a question regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. We will address one of the fundamental misunderstandings and misrepresentations [of Jesus]. How many of you have heard this: “I don’t think I can believe in the miracles and things, but Jesus was a great moral teacher.” Did you ever hear that? If Jesus was not in fact God, He was insane. You’ve got to know that. You cannot read what is written either about Jesus or what He claims regarding Himself and avoid that conclusion: He either is what He says He is, or He belongs in one of those hospitals where they don’t let them on the street.

Our text, as has been true for a couple of weeks, is John 5:18-29. Join me as I read this portion again of the Word of God.

“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath [That is when He would perform these miracles, and then He would in some cases tell the person to get up, to walk, to carry things around, but you weren’t supposed to get up and walk and carry things around on the Sabbath, so it offended the Jews], but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. 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. 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. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

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

Last week we ended with Jesus’ remarkable claim to be equal to God the Father and being able to raise the dead and give them life. You will see that in the 21st verse: *“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.”* In responding to Jesus’s claim that He could give life to whomever He wished, no one needed to explain something very fundamental to the Jews. They were sufficiently logical to know that just as the uncreated cannot create themselves, so also the dead cannot give themselves life. So when we are confronted with that, we are confronted with something that we

cannot comprehend or understand. Our own scientists are having a hard time accepting that, hoping they can figure out a way for the universe to have created itself, hoping to avoid the necessary implications that there is a God.

What I want us to do is to take a moment and think about death. The dead cannot give themselves life. I suppose we believe that. Well, I imagine most everybody in the room except if you are 12 and under believes that. If you are 12 and under, you are used to playing video games, and in a video game my observation is that dead characters come to life all the time. You earn points and manage to resurrect yourself. Well, that is kind of silly, but it is a part of a larger picture about modernity that probably sinks more deeply into our consciousness than we are aware of. Modern technology and the wealth it produces have allowed us to sanitize death. Dying either takes place under highly controlled conditions far removed from everyday life, or it occurs as a form of entertainment. (Now, I want to make a comment. Anyone who has actually confronted death, particularly in war, knows that death is not a form of entertainment. Indeed it is the distance between the refusal to deal with death in its reality and the reality of death as experienced by many men who go to war that tends to make some of the transition from war scenes to everyday life so difficult for those who have been through them. We need to increase our sensitivity and perceptiveness as to what those men have gone through.)

What was death like in the days when Jesus spoke and acted? Perhaps the best way for us to understand the ever present reality of death was not just the fact that people died in their homes, or on the streets, but you need to remember that when the Romans crucified people, they placed the crosses upon which they hung along the major thoroughfares that led in and out of the cities. So that day by day if you were going in and out of the city you walked by the dead bodies that hung upon the trees.

When Jesus said, “As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he will,” those were words that would have spoken high volume into the ears of those who were listening. The Jews no doubt like most of us, when hearing Jesus say that He had the capacity to give life to whomever, would think primarily in terms of such a situation as would later on happen with Lazarus, that is, calling someone out of the tomb. But beloved, I am quite persuaded that that was not the primary issue on Jesus’ mind. Primarily on Jesus mind was the issue of spiritual life. Being consumerist Americans, the minute I say “spiritual life”, I suspect that many of us someplace inside of our hearts and minds go like this: “O well, that is a whole lot easier; after all, it’s just spiritual.” If that is our response, if that is our attitude, it might help us all to appreciate how lightly we take the realities of spiritual warfare and the consequences of sin. God’s grace has as its primary objective not the well-being of our physical bodies, but the eternal life of our souls. It is the life of the inner person that God is primarily concerned for in Jesus. Death primarily is a spiritual condition of opposition to and alienation from God who is the source of life. The majority of Americans are dead. What you and I can scarcely imagine is to say to ourselves, the condition of these dead souls is equivalent to those bodies hanging on those trees. We just don’t get that. And so we expect these dead ones to act reasonably, graciously, respond quickly, but they cannot. A fair analogy would be to imagine a plant uprooted from the soil. The roots have no access now to water; they have no access to nutrients. So they are starving. Rootless souls do not cease to be, they diminish eternally in an endless withering. You might ask the Lord to put an imprint of such a picture on your heart regarding those whom you know who do not know Christ, and ask that perhaps it would increase our urgency to have Jesus give them the gift of life, that they might escape so sad an eternity.

Well that sort of concludes the second of the responses that Jesus has to the hostility of the Jews towards Him because He broke their ceremonial laws, their rituals, and because He claimed equality with God. If you move on to verses 22-23 we have a third response. This brings the spiritual dimension of Jesus' ministry to the fore, because at this point He speaks about judgment. I suspect that the minute you and I hear the word “judgment” our ears perk up and also certain defenses within the heart arise. This is what we are told, “*The Father,*” Jesus says, “*judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.*” If we were to try to locate a center-point for the offensiveness of Jesus' words to His Jewish listeners, I think this would be it. What Jesus claims – this was my point earlier – is either true or monstrous. It is on account of claims like this that C.S. Lewis, among others, says that Jesus is either a divine being as He claimed to be, or He is mentally deranged. What He cannot be is a great teacher with an exemplary social and personal ethic. In simple fact, mad men are not good models.

When we read that statement, vv.22-23, generally I would imagine that our concern with Jesus' words tends to be with the issue of judgment. That is something to which we are highly sensitive. I am going to pursue the issue of judgment later on. You need to know that for the Jews the primary issue would have been honor, not judgment. They knew judgment; honor would have been the issue. They knew and were insistent that God alone was to be honored above all. To rightly honor God was to acknowledge His unique divinity: none but God was God. To claim equal honor was simply to say, “I am equally divine.” That was outrageous and blasphemous to the Jews. [That] Jesus was claiming such equality is the point of the first couple of verses [in this discourse from v.19]. He sees all that the Father does and He does all that the Father does. But notice that Jesus' claim is uncompromising. He says if you do not honor the Son, you do not honor the Father Who sent the Son. It is very important for us to fully grasp what this is saying to the Jews and to us. These words by Jesus render all those who see any kind of contradiction between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New as out of order and dangerously unwise. We are to honor the Father just as we are to honor the Son. We are to recognize that they are absolutely and totally in agreement with one another. There is no tension; there is no contradiction; there is nothing that separates or divides them. They are fully and completely united in all that they do. Consequently we cannot say to ourselves, “Well I'm going to worship gentle Jesus good and mild who is full of forgiveness, but that Old Testament God, not for me, thank-you.” That division [of thinking] has existed almost from the first century of the church. So who is this God whom we worship? To love and serve God, one must love and serve God's Son. The God Who sent the Son is the God who created the world: of course! He is also the God Who kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden. It gets better! He is the God Who sent the flood. Yes, He is the God of the ten plagues of Egypt. Rather than selecting the God Who said to the Israelites, “I want you to go in and commit genocide on the people of the land of Canaan,” – you do understand that? – He is the God Who determined the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem. Are you aware of what the siege of Jerusalem was like, where finally under the conditions of total starvation the parents ate their own children? Again, we simply do not understand the reality of sin and how horrid it is.

It is a sad tale that when God sent His people into exile away from the land of blessing and the place of blessing in recognition that they had totally violated and invalidated the covenant of His grace, when after 70 years He said, “Come back,” almost none did. They were comfortable. The Jewish settlement in Babylon remains large and prosperous right straight through the days of the Roman Empire. Comfort, ease, prosperity: Americans have developed a passion for fun, for amusement and entertainment. There is absolutely nothing the matter with having fun, pursuing amusement or entertainment. But Americans, I

fear, have lost the passion for truth, we have lost our passion for goodness; we have lost our passion for righteousness and we have lost our passion for justice. The moral character of our nation is rotting. We know it. As the moral character of the nation grows weaker, every moral issue grows heavier, because we cannot carry it with weakened arms. As the moral issues then seem so much heavier, we are ever more inclined to run away and hide inside of our amusements and entertainments because we feel inadequate to meet the moral challenge. This is the dying of a people. Jesus says, “You cannot love and serve the Son of God and turn a deaf ear to God’s call for people to love righteousness and truth.” Hear the words of two of the prophets [Amos 5:23-24]: *“Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”* We are going to have our Annual Meeting in a couple of weeks, maybe three. I hope you attend. Why do I say that? It is when we gather together to talk about the business of the work that we figure out whether or not we are just singing songs or whether or not we are serious about serving God. I make this analogy in my report which I shared with my wife. It is a brilliant analogy. People who just come to worship and don’t want to go to business meetings are rather like people who love to go and eat a lovely meal, but they hold the kitchen in contempt. “I don’t want to be in there and get my hands dirty and bump up against people and such. I like to eat nice food, drink the nice drink, walk out and say, “O it was a lovely time. After all, when people talk about business, sometimes they argue, and I am above arguing! Or I’m below arguing. I’m not into arguing. It really makes me mad when people argue! So I will avoid all arguing situations.”

(Micah 6:8) *“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”* That is not a song; that is a command.

Jesus goes on – remember we are having a revelation here. Jesus is saying, “Do you see My Father? Do you see His mind? Do you see His heart?” John is saying, “Do you see Jesus? He is the Son of the Father and He is your savior. Follow Him. This mutuality is being put home to us, brought home to us with even greater clarity in the twenty fourth-verse. I encourage you to look at that verse. This is what Jesus says: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”* Do you notice carefully what Jesus says here. It is a very interesting statement. It is not at all what I would expect and therefore it is not what you would expect either! He does not come into judgment, he says, whoever hears my word and believes. . . Him who sent me. Ah! Not, whoever believes Me” but whoever believes the One who sent Me. You cannot choose to believe one or the other. If you believe one, you must believe the other. Again, as profound as the core statement regarding life is, that the key to eternal life is faith in God, what would have especially troubled the Jews was Jesus’ blunt claim to exact equality with the Father. Faith in Jesus will secure eternal life, but eternal life is something only the Creator God can grant, just as it is only the singular God of righteousness and justice who can grant forgiveness of sins. Meditation on these words of Jesus presents us with a standard dilemma in all of John’s writing which we see here taken directly from Jesus’ own words. What He says is that to actually or truly hear Jesus’ words, you must already believe that God has sent Him. But of course the whole reason for God sending the Son was in order that we might believe in the Father, and that such a one [the one who believes] indeed has passed from death to life. It is as if you were standing or searching for a house in the woods and you have to find your way through an extremely dense fog. You know there is a bell mounted on the side of the house, so you keep listening for the bell as you wander in the fog. You hear the bell. Your heart leaps for joy. You turn in the direction of the bell, and as

you turn the fog drifts away and you find that you are already standing inside the house. “How did I get here?” That is the meaning of grace. God brought you there.

Verses 25 and 26, Jesus turns to the idea again of life. This is His fifth response: “*Truly, truly, I say to you and 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.*” He made the same kind of statement, as you might recall, in v. 21. However, Jesus adds to the general claim a particular: “...an hour is now here...” Obviously this injects a powerful sense of urgency into Jesus’ words. “Now”! “Now!” Equally or perhaps even more it brings the focus onto himself, a focus reinforced by the even more astounding claim: “...for as the Father has life in Himself so he has granted the Son also to have life in Himself.” That little phrase, “to have life in himself”, means to have self-generating life. It is in fact a claim to divinity. The Son is not alive; the Son is life. The Son cannot die, for He simply is alive. If the Jews did not act at once either by drawing away from Jesus or reaching for stones to strike Him down, it is probably because they couldn’t believe what they have just heard.

Jesus moves on at once and in the 27th verse He makes His sixth and last response. This is what He says, “*And he [the Father] has given him [the Son] authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.*” At first glance you might feel that this is a step down from where Jesus has been before. He is “just a” son of man, merely human, not divine. Those would be the kind of corollaries you might want to draw. But the Jews would have heard something very different. When the Jews heard Jesus say “The Son of Man,” they would instantly have remembered Daniel 7:13-18. Because the Son of Man is key to their anticipation of the unfolding of God’s plan for the well-being of Israel in the future. This is what we read in Daniel 7:13-18,

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. ‘These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’”

Oh! Son of Man: you should know that the Son of Man as was revealed through the prophet Daniel was Jesus’ most frequent self-designation. “I am the Son of Man.” And when He is saying that he is saying, “I am the fulfillment of Daniel chapter 7:13-18.” That is who I am. Consequently it is not just a claim to be someone; it is a claim to be in fact the one who fulfills the prophecies regarding the future of Israel. The hour is now here, he has said. Beyond that, He is letting it be known that He is the one who will occupy the throne of David and the kingdom of David. Beyond that, Jesus is saying that I am the One who returns humanity to God’s first and original purpose. What was that purpose? You will find it in Genesis 1:27-28. It is essential that we remember these things, because if we do not remember them, we do not act properly. The church of Jesus Christ in America has not acted properly at all; it has not gotten its priorities straightened out. What does it say in Genesis 1:27-28? This is what it says, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves*

on the earth.” Dominion: you and I are to exercise dominion over the creation. What does that mean? It does not mean we wantonly destroy! It means that we are stewards required by our God [to work] for the well-being of all creation. I was praying the other day. You can thank me for the storm! That may be a little inflated, yes. But you know, beloved, I asked God, and I said, “God, I understand that we have enough water in the reservoir that we can go for three years, but the animals that roam the hillsides need rain.” You see, as one of God’s creatures who understands God’s grace and knows that God intended that you and I would care for all creation, I am very anxious for the well-being of the forest. Are you? It is one of the marks of sin that we think only of ourselves, and that is an ugly way to stand in the presence of God.

It was not the expectation of the Jews that the Messiah for which they waited would be divine. But that is exactly what Jesus has here set before them. He has set before them as well that the Messiah who will establish anew the covenant people of God will in fact establish humanity again in the place of dominion over all creation. This Messiah, Jesus says, will also be the judge of all humanity. God through Jesus is pressing home to our understanding that you and I do not need to fear that we shall be judged by an alien and inhumane judge. We will look at this more closely in a couple of weeks. You can read about that in Hebrews 4-5.

Now we come to the end. In verses 28-29 you do not have a further response, but rather I believe a glimpse of the Jew’s response to Jesus’ comments. Notice what He says in verses 28-29, “*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*” When Jesus says there, “Do not marvel...” I suspect the Jews were standing there marveling, thinking to themselves, “This man is out of his mind; he needs to be stoned.” They surely were not pleased with what they had heard. What would not have excited wonder in them [however], but probably does in us, is His statement regarding judgment. Again, “...those who have done good to the resurrection of life; those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” How are we to understand this? Surely this is in direct contradiction to the most fundamental truth of grace, a truth actually stated by Jesus Himself in verse 24. Notice what He said in verse 24, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*” All of us say, “Ha, ha! No judgment for me!” Wrong. There is a saying which helps us to resolve this seeming contradiction. We are saved by faith alone. True? But we are not saved by a faith that is alone. Listen to James (1:22): “Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” “I’m saved. I don’t do anything, but after all, saved by faith alone.” In the next chapter, 2:17 and 26, [James says] “...*faith itself, if it does not have works, is dead...For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*” It is however the apostle Paul who very nearly quotes Jesus in 2 Corinthians 5:10. This is what he said: “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*”

It is helpful, you see, to recognize that there are two distinct judgments taught in Scripture. There is the judgment seat of Christ, to which all believers are called. There is the Great White throne judgment which is indicated to us Revelations 20:11-15. At that throne all humanity appears, and each one is judged based on whether or not they have placed their faith in Christ. The most pressing question that faces any person on the earth is where you will stand. Jesus is the Son of God. What He says the Father says. What has He said to you, and what have you said to Him?

Let us pray: our Father in heaven, thank you for Your word. It is almost impossible for us to take in the whole reality of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Help us. Help us to walk faithfully, being full of good deeds, knowing that it is as we rely upon You that we discover more and more about Who you are. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What have been your experiences with death? What are your thoughts about death? Do you see death as a given part of life? What do you understand spiritual death to be?
2. Do you see honor as an important value for healthy living? What are some healthy ways of expressing honor and when should they be used?
3. “Americans have developed a passion for fun, for amusement and entertainment, but we have lost our passion for truth, for goodness, for righteousness, for justice.” True or False? If true, how might this affect church life and worship?
4. In what sense is eternal life important to you today in your daily walk of faith? (See John 17:3)
5. In v. 25 Jesus says the hour is “now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” What exactly do you think Jesus means? Does this awaken a sense of urgency in you?
6. What is the significance of Jesus' title “Son of Man”?
7. According to Genesis 1:27-28 what was God's original purpose in creating man? Do you think it is important that we remember that purpose, and if so, what should we do about it?
8. Does it surprise you to learn/know that as Christians we still face a judgment at the end of the age? How does the judgment of the Christian differ from that of the lost?
9. At which judgment seat do you expect and are you prepared to stand, that of Jesus or that of the Great White Throne? How does one qualify for either of these?