

Life in the Son

John 5:19-29

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ 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. 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.

²⁵ “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. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. – John 5:19-29, ESV

Introduction: Who is on Trial?

One of my all-time favorite novels is *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In the climactic trial scene, Atticus Finch skillfully turns the trial of Tom Robinson into a trial of the racist culture of 1930’s Alabama and of the Ewell family, who exploited that racist culture. While Tom Robinson is still found guilty, it is clear to the reader that he is innocent and that Atticus has demonstrated his innocence beyond a reasonable doubt. Instead, the town that condemns is clearly itself condemned by the skillful questioning and clear presentation of the truth by Atticus Finch.

One of the reasons why I love *To Kill a Mockingbird* is that Atticus Finch in that courtroom reminds me of Jesus. For 2,000 years, people have been seeking to put Jesus on trial, and in the fifth chapter of John’s Gospel, we see Jesus being pressed by the Jewish religious leaders. We see Him skillfully turn the tables on them and spin the questioning back on them to demonstrate His authority clearly. They thought they would put Him on trial and sentence Him to death for blasphemy, but instead they are the ones on trial, for rejecting Jesus.

Have we been guilty of putting Jesus on trial, testing Him to see if He meets our standards. Or have we come to Him as the Lord and Judge of all to hear His judgment and receive from Him the gift of eternal life?

A. The Work the Son Does, vv. 19-22

Jesus’ words in verse 19 come in response to the anger of the Jewish religious leaders, who were seeking to persecute Him, according to verse 16, and to put Him to death, according to verse 18. They were angry because Jesus had healed an invalid on the Sabbath day and then had defended His actions by saying, “My Father is working until now, and I myself am also working.” The Jewish leaders interpreted this statement as a claim of equality with God, and *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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For as the

Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son”

Jesus is here making a very tight argument, much like a skilled lawyer in a courtroom. His case is held together by four causal statements, indicated in the English by the word “For.” Here’s the flow of His argument:

Since the Jewish leaders are, in essence, putting Jesus on trial (pressing Him and seeking to put Him to death), Jesus offers testimony, beginning with a solemn assertion of truth:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

He begins with language of apprenticeship, perhaps language reflecting His human upbringing in Joseph’s carpenter’s shop. As the Son, Jesus watches His Father and imitates Him. He does not take the initiative Himself. God the Father is the fountainhead and source of all divine activity.

From this humble statement of full dependence on the Father, Jesus begins building His case:

“For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”

So Jesus is humbly stating His place as His Father’s apprentice, but notice that He is doing the same work as His Father: *“whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”* If the Jewish leaders were scandalized by His statement that *“My Father is working, and I also am working,”* this is even more clear and challenging, for Jesus does the works of God.

And how is the Son able to do this? It is . . .

“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.”

The Son is able to do all He does because of the great love that the Father has for the Son. As a loving Father, He shows His Son all that He does and invites the Son to do all of the work, too. In fact, the healing of the invalid was just the beginning. The Father will show the Son greater works to do.

At this point, we might ask, *“What kind of greater works will the Son do and what will enable Him to be able to do them?”* So Jesus answers our anticipated question with the third *“For”* . . .

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.”

In the Jewish view, as expressed later by Rabbi Johanan, God alone had power to raise the dead, to open the womb and send rain. The prophet Elijah was seen as an exceptional prophet because he was used by God to raise the dead and to withhold and send rain. But Elijah could not do so on his own authority. He could only do what God told him to do. Jesus claims here the power *“to give life to whom he will.”* This is different.

But it’s not just the power to give life. The power to give life actually rests on another power, and so Jesus concludes His four-step argument with the last *“For”* clause:

“For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son”

God is the great judge of all the earth. The Psalms resound with this theme:

The LORD judges the peoples – Psalm 7:8

Arise, O LORD! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before you! – Psalm 9:19

Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!

*Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.”*

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;

*let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it!*

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

*before the LORD, for he comes,
for he comes to judge the earth.*

He will judge the world in righteousness,

and the peoples in his faithfulness. – Psalm 98:10-13

Yet Jesus says “For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.” This means that the Son has been invested with the full authority of the Father.

So we see that Jesus is claiming to do all the work of the Father, and even to have life in Himself and the power to give life to whom He will, because He has been given all judgment from the Father. Jesus is here claiming the highest possible authority, much more authority than any mere human being could ever claim for Himself.

But Jesus is not done yet. Why has the Father given all judgment to the Son? Jesus says it is . . .

B. The Honor the Son is Due, vv. 23-24

“ . . . 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. 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.”

I. Honor to the Son: Hear and Believe

At this point, we have reached the conclusion of Jesus’ argument. He does the work of God because He’s been given the power of life and all judgment by the Father. The Father has given Him the power of life and all judgment, so “*that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.*”

How important is it to honor the Son? Well, if everything Jesus has said to this point is true, then “*Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.*”

Do you see how Jesus has skillfully turned the tables on the Jewish leadership? He took their accusation – “How dare you call God your Father and make yourself equal to God!” – and He skillfully turned it back on them, so that the conclusion now is, “How dare you not honor the Son? When you fail to honor the Son, you fail to honor the Father who sent Him!”

Jesus’ argument is bold, but it’s also logically tight and easy for the Jewish leaders to verify or falsify. How could they verify or falsify Jesus’ claims? Well, by His works! He either does the works of God or He does

not. If He does, then it is only because He has the power and authority to do so, which can only be because He is, in fact, the Son who is equal to the Father, and so they must honor the Son just as they claim to honor the Father.

Now, either Jesus is telling the truth, and He is equal with God and does the works of God, and so all who hear His word and believe pass from death to life, or else Jesus is lying and deceiving us or is deceived Himself.

This is the trilemma made famous by C.S. Lewis – either Jesus was a liar or He was a lunatic or He is the Lord. Lewis made this argument popular in *Mere Christianity*, but nearly 100 years earlier, Scottish preacher and missionary to the Jewish people, John Duncan, said:

Christ either [1] deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or [2] He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or [3] He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable.

The solution to this trilemma is simple: Talk is cheap, but Jesus did so much more than just talk. As Jesus Himself said again and again, if we cannot believe Him based on His words, we should believe based on His works. Neither a liar nor a lunatic can turn water into wine, heal a man who had been an invalid for 38 years, and he certainly could not raise up a man who had been dead for four days or rise from the dead Himself.

And so now we should ask: How can we honor the Son and what difference does it make if we honor Him or not?

Well, verse 24 answers these questions:

“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.”

2. Life from the Son:

We honor the Son when we hear His word and believe in God. So we hear Jesus speak – in our case, through His word – and we believe that He is the Son of God and that God sent Him. And what we receive when we honor the Son is eternal life. If this sounds familiar, it should: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

Eternal life is marked by two main features, freedom from judgment and from death:

a. Free from Judgment

If we are going to have eternal life, we must be freed from judgment first. Jesus has the power to give life because He has been given all judgment. Jesus’ words here are reflecting the biblical truth that death comes as a judgment for sin. Sin leads to death, which we earn as the wages of sin and which we reap as the work of the flesh. So, for us to pass from death to life, we must be delivered from the judgment we deserve for our sin. Jesus alone has the power to give life because Jesus alone has the power of judgment, the authority to release us from the guilt of our sin.

b. Free from Death

Once the Son delivers us from judgment, we pass from death to life, for death is judgment for sin. As Jesus continues His discourse, He explains how He grants eternal life and how He judges, first in this life and then in the resurrection to come . . .

C. Life in the Son, vv. 25-29

²⁵ *“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. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

Jesus speaks here of two times when the dead come to life, one that “is now here” and a second that is yet still coming:

I. Life Now, vv. 25-27

Jesus begins by solemnly proclaiming that a long-awaited hour is now here. (*“an hour is coming, and is now here”*) This hour is marked as a time when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and come to life. As a physical representation of this coming to life and as proof that He indeed has authority to bring about this resurrection, Jesus would later raise Lazarus from the dead. And how would He do so? By calling out to the dead man with His authoritative, powerful voice.

Jesus repeats again why it is that He is able to do this great work, to speak to the dead and bring them to life: *“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.”*

Jesus is repeating much of what He said already, but He does add something new: *“because He is the Son of Man.”* This is Jesus’ favorite way to refer to Himself. Jesus uses the phrase 29 times in Matthew’s Gospel, 14 times in Mark’s Gospel, 26 times in Luke’s Gospel and 13 times in John’s Gospel. That’s far more than any other title Jesus uses. This title is also a clear reference to Daniel 7, the only place in the Old Testament where this phrase is applied to the Messiah.

In Daniel 7, Daniel is seeing a series of terrifying beasts devour and destroy. These beasts represent the oppressive and tyrannical kingdoms of men, and then suddenly the scene of terrifying beastly domination is interrupted, and in verses 9-14, we read this:

*“As I looked,
thrones were placed,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat;
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames;
its wheels were burning fire.
¹⁰ A stream of fire issued*

and came out from before him;
 a thousand thousands served him,
 and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
 the court sat in judgment,
 and the books were opened.

¹¹ “I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

¹³ “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.

¹⁴ 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.

In this scene, God the Father is the ancient of days, the One whose rule precedes, overrules and judges the terrifying beasts of the kingdoms of men. Jesus identifies Himself with the Son of Man, and He says He is given authority to judge because He is the Son of Man, and thus He has been “*given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him.*”

One thing Jesus’ use of this title “Son of Man” means is that He has this authority, the power to judge and to give life, as a human being. This is part of His role as Messiah and as the mediator between God and man. This is what the Apostle Paul declares in 1 Timothy 2:5-6: “*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*”

So, if Jesus has this authority as the Son of Man, and if the hour “*is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live,*” what does Jesus mean by that? In what way do the dead hear the voice of Jesus now and live? Well, Lazarus was a physical demonstration, a living example, of this resurrection, which is an internal spiritual reality.

Ephesians 2 describes this resurrection when it says that we were dead in our sins and trespasses, but God made us alive together with Christ. Jesus already told us about this present resurrection when He said “*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.*”

When we were in Ephesians, we noticed how often Paul uses the phrase “in Him” or “in Christ” to describe every aspect of our salvation. We pass from spiritual death to eternal life in Christ, because He alone is the mediator and He alone has the power of life in Himself, for He alone is the Son of Man, enthroned over all. So, have you heard the word of Jesus and have you believed?

Then, Jesus goes from talking about this present resurrection unto life to a resurrection that is yet to come.

2. Resurrection Life Forever, vv. 28-29

Jesus says, “*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.*”

Ultimately, the power and authority of the voice of Jesus will be seen by the whole world when He comes again and at the sound of His majestic voice, the dead are raised forever. This resurrection will not be like the resurrection of Lazarus, who was only restored to his mortal life and who thus died again. When Jesus comes again, ALL who have died will rise again and will live forever.

We need to be careful that we’re not tripped up by the end of what Jesus says here: “*those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*” He is not teaching a salvation by good works. In the context of this teaching, those who have done good are clearly those who have heard the voice of Jesus and have believed. They are the ones who will not come into judgment. It is hearing the word and responding in faith that is the good Jesus intends and which leads to a good life, a life lived by faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we must ask: Have you heard His voice and have you believed? Three times in these verses, Jesus declares, “Truly, truly I say to you . . .”

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. – The Father and the Son are equal in their works.

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.

Jesus is Lord. He has verified and substantiated His testimony. Believe in Him, and you will not come into judgment but will pass from death to life.

For those of us who have come to believe in Jesus, we need to consider some truths that Jesus says here, too:

1. What does it mean to hear His voice and believe Him? Are we doing this? This is not just saying that we believe in Jesus or calling ourselves Christians. We must be listening to Jesus and believing Him. Hear the word and believe.
2. Do we believe that we have passed from death to life, and that we do not come into judgment? Do we believe that Jesus’ finished work and Jesus’ authoritative word are the only basis for this? Do we truly

trust that He alone has finished the work of salvation and that His authoritative word alone releases us from judgment and brings us into life? If we do, why do we wrestle with feelings of deep shame? It's one thing to come under conviction by the Holy Spirit and turn to Christ for forgiveness, but it's another to be plagued by deep shame and fear and doubt when the judge has already passed His sentence and declared us not guilty and given us eternal life. We must believe and rest on His authority and not on our performance!

So, whether you are here as an unbeliever, a nominal Christian or as a true believer, the message for us all is the same: Honor the Son by hearing His word and believing!