

John 5:25–30

Introduction

Last week we saw an amazing thing: It's only in the revealing of the Son that we truly see—even if we can never understand or comprehend—the oneness of the one and only God. Jesus said:

- John 5:19–20a — “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from himself, 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.”

Here there's a perfect identity of *activity* (what the Father is doing *is* what the Son is doing), there's a perfect identity of *will* (what the Son wills *is* what the Father wills), and what these two realities both assume is a perfect identity of *nature* (the Son partakes of everything that the Father is so that the Son is equal with God). And where are all of these things revealed to us? In the infinite perfections of the Son's *subordination to* and *dependence upon* the Father. This is the beautiful mystery. It's only in the Son's subordination to and dependence upon the Father that we can understand truly Jesus' equality with God and the true oneness of God. Jesus continues:

- John 5:20–21 — “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him [greater works than ones such as the healing of the lame man will the Father show the Son], 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.**”

If the Father raises the dead and gives them life, it's the Son who reveals this work that the Father does by *doing* Himself what the Father does and what the Father has shown to Him – by giving life *to whom He will*. This is why it's so important that we see the oneness of God as it's revealed in the Son's perfect submission to the Father. So that we might honor the Father *by* honoring the Son. So that we might believe the Father *by* hearing and believing the Son. And so that in honoring and believing the Son we can know, with the 100% certainty and assurance of faith, that we have eternal life. After referring to Himself in the 3rd person as “the Son” for the last five verses (19-23), Jesus comes back to the 1st person in verse 24:

- John 5:24 — “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.”

Here, in the person of Jesus, is the Son. So Jesus goes on to say in verse twenty-five:

I. John 5:25 — “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.”

Do you remember what “the hour” is in John? In chapter two, Jesus said to His mother, “My hour has *not yet* come” (2:4). In chapters seven and eight, John twice refers to the fact that “his hour had *not yet* come” (7:30; 8:20). But beginning in chapter twelve, we hear Jesus saying, “the hour *has come*” (12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1). “The hour” is that promised “eschatological” moment when all the history of redemption finally reaches its goal in Jesus Christ – when the

Son brings all the history of redemption to its fulfillment. And isn't that exactly what we see here? "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" (cf. Jn. 4:21, 23).

The "hour" was still to come because it was still awaiting Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension. But all the emphasis here is on the *nearness* of that hour ("and is now here"). All the emphasis here is on the fact that that hour is already present in the person of the Son who is about to do that "greater work" that the Father is about to show Him. The "hour" when the dead would hear the voice of the Son of God and those hearing would live arrived two thousand years ago. Doesn't that sound like the language of "resurrection"? Doesn't this make us think of literal bodies being raised up out of their graves? How can Jesus say that the resurrection has already arrived? How can He say that He's already doing this work that the Father does of "raising the dead" and "giving them life"? Our problem here is that it's very easy for us to try and answer this question by thinking of two "separate" resurrections – a "spiritual" one and a "physical" and "material" one. But that's very misleading. The resurrection *of the body* for the believer is more than just a resuscitating of the material body (cf. Elijah and Elisha). It's more than just the reuniting of body and soul. The resurrection of the body is a resurrection unto a certain kind of life – life lived in the fullness of the Holy Spirit; "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17; cf. 1 Cor. 15:44). This could lead us to think that the resurrection of the body is the guarantee of life in the Holy Spirit – as though that Spirit-filled life belonged entirely to some future day. But it's actually the other way around. Instead of the resurrection of the body being the guarantee of that life in the Holy Spirit, it's that life in the Holy Spirit that we already have today that is the guarantee that we'll one day experience the consummate fullness of the life that we already have *in and through the resurrection of our bodies*.

- 2 Corinthians 1:21–22 — It is God who... has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.
- 2 Corinthians 5:4–5 — For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.
- Ephesians 1:13–14 — In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
- Romans 8:11 — If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Do you see how when we speak of the resurrection, we can never finally separate between the physical and the spiritual? These two adjectives ("physical" and "spiritual") are really only describing two inseparable aspects of a *single* resurrection.* It's for this reason that we can truly

* This principle of a single resurrection is not contradicted by the "first" and (the assumed) "second" resurrections in Revelation 20:4-6. The "first resurrection" in Revelation *may* be referring to something different than what is referred to in John 5:25. Even if it is referring to the same thing, the *fundamental unity* of these two resurrections is emphasized in the reality that the second death has no power only over the one who shares in the first resurrection.

say that *the* resurrection has already begun for us and is already at work in us. Listen again to the words of Jesus:

- John 5:24–25 — “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.”

What is this “hearing” of the voice of the Son of God? It’s not a mystical “hearing” of some “still, small voice.” It’s not a physical “hearing” of an audible voice. It’s the “hearing” that receives the word of Christ, the Son of God, as that word comes to us in the Gospel, and it’s the “hearing that then embraces that word in faith. We are those who have heard the voice of the Son of God and who hear His voice even today. And having heard His voice, we *live* already. The resurrection, for us, has already begun. It’s already at work in us. We’ve been raised up from death to life. We’ve been raised up from our total insensitivity and even our hostility to the things of God (1 Cor. 2:6-14; Rom. 8:7; Col. 1:21) to that true life that’s lived in the power of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of the risen Christ dwelling in us (cf. Rom. 8:9). This is the very thing that was prophesied in Ezekiel thirty-seven:

- Ezekiel 37:1–14 — The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

What we see in these verses is the awesome power of that work that God the Father has shown the Son and that the Son is doing now – opening our graves, raising us from our graves, putting His Spirit within us, and causing us to live. Jesus says that it’s this hour prophesied in Ezekiel

that “is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will *live*.” And then Jesus explains:

II. John 5:26 — “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”

These words plunge us right back into that mystery that we were meditating on last week. To say that the Father has life “in Himself” is to say that the Father is the uncreated, self-existent God. So what does it mean to say that the Father has “*granted* the Son also to have life *in Himself*”? At one level, we can’t possibly know. But we can still confess these things: The Son shares with the Father in all the fullness of deity as the uncreated and self-existent God (He has life in Himself). The Son has life in Himself *because* the Father has from all eternity granted the Son to have life in Himself (cf. Jn. 1:4). Therefore, it’s in the Son’s perfect subordination to and dependence upon the Father that we see the equality of the Son with the Father and the true oneness of God. The Son does the works that He sees the Father doing (raising the dead and giving them life) because He Himself partakes fully in the Godhead of the Father (because the Father has granted the Son from all eternity to have life in Himself). And now *the Son* is *incarnate* in Jesus Christ. God with us. So Jesus goes on to say in verse 27:

III. John 5:27 — “And he [the Father] has given him [the Son] authority to execute judgment, **because he is the Son of Man.**”

The point here isn’t the weakness and frailty of human flesh. The point is the power and authority that *God* has given to “*man*” (cf. Mat. 9:8) in the incarnation of the Son. Jesus is the “one like a son of man” that Daniel saw in the night visions:

- Daniel 7:13–14 (cf. Mat. 28:18) — 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.

So it’s Jesus who has been given authority to execute judgment *because* He is **the Son of Man** – because He is **the Son of God incarnate**.

What’s the point of telling us these things? The point is to assure us of the truthfulness of Jesus’ words: “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.”

We are those who’ve heard the voice of the Son of God, and having heard His voice, we live already. We love, today, the things we hated before. We know a peace and a joy today that we never knew before. We bear fruit in righteousness today that we couldn’t possibly bear before. The resurrection, for us, has already begun. It’s already at work in us.

So what does this mean for the reality of physical death? It means that for those in whom the resurrection is already at work death itself has lost *all* of its fearful and threatening character. Death is no longer the harbinger of eternal condemnation. Now death is just a part of our passage to that consummate—to that *glorified* and *perfected*—life in the Spirit that will be ours one day at the resurrection of our bodies. Death remains death, but the whole character and nature of that death is transformed for us because the resurrection is already at work in us – because we’ve already heard the voice of the Son of God and so we already live. We’ve already passed from death to life, and so one commentator can rightly say that in some sense death “is no longer ahead of [the Christian] but [already] behind him or her” (Ridderbos).

➤ 1 Corinthians 15:55 — “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

But even as we rejoice at these things, the Jews were filled with unbelief. There’s a kind of “marveling” that can lead to faith (“greater works than these will [the Father] show [the Son], *so that you may marvel*”; 5:20), but there’s also another kind of “marveling” that’s dubious and incredulous and uncomprehending (Mat. 13:53-58). So Jesus said to the Jews:

IV. John 5:28a — “Cease marveling at this...”

Stop marveling that the Father has given the Son this authority to give life to the dead and to execute judgment. *Why?*

V. John 5:28–29 — “...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.”

In verse 25 Jesus says, “an hour is coming, *and is now here*.” Now He says only, “an hour is coming.” Can you see what the hour that is *now here* has to do with the hour that is *coming*? One day the Son will bring to completion the work He’s already begun – the work of raising the dead and giving them life. Calvin paraphrases Jesus’ words like this: “What I now tell you that I have commenced, I will one day finish before your eyes” – even before the eyes of the unbelieving world. The resurrection of our bodies will one day usher in the consummate fullness of that resurrection life that we already have today because the resurrection body will be a body no longer used as an instrument for sin, but only for righteousness.

On the one hand, there’s a perfect continuity between the “life” we have now and the “life” we’ll have then. On the other hand, our experience in that day of the life we have now will so far surpass anything we’ve ever known that it will be as though it were something wholly and completely new. In the words of the one seated on the throne: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5). In that day, we’ll feel as if we never had the faintest idea of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” so rich will our experience of these things be. And yet according to Paul, it’s exactly this “life” in the Holy Spirit that truly is the “life” we have today – all of us who have heard the voice of the Son of God. Therefore, in the words of Paul:

- Romans 6:13 — Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God **as those who *have been brought from death to life***, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

And therefore, in the words of Peter:

- 1 Peter 1:13b — Set your hope fully on the grace that ***will be*** brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

If there's a resurrection of life for those who heard the voice of the Son of God in this life, what will there be for those who remained deaf to the voice of the Son of God? If there's a resurrection of life for those who "live" already, what will there be for those who remained all their lives in the state of death? Life gives birth to life (cf. 2 Cor. 2:16b). Death gives birth to death (cf. 2 Cor. 2:16a). If there's a resurrection of life for those who live, then there will also be a resurrection of judgment for those who are dead. Therefore, cease marveling at these things. Stop being full of incredulous unbelief and believe. Will I be the evildoer who refuses to come to the light lest his works should be exposed (cf. 3:19-20) or will I be the doer of good who comes to the light so that it might be clearly seen that my works have been carried out in God (cf. 3:21)?

And now Jesus returns *again* to that theme of the Son's equality with the Father *revealed* in His subordination to and dependence upon the Father. And after referring to Himself in the 3rd person as "the Son" for the last five verses (25-29), He also comes back again to the 1st person:

VI. John 5:30 — "*I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*"

Here, in the person of Jesus, is the Son—who does all that He sees the Father doing; who raises the dead and gives them life. So let us always be coming *to Him*; always rejoicing to hear His voice.