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John 5:19-30

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LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

My wife and I spent a couple of quiet days at Lake Tahoe last week. One morning while we were walking to the lake to exercise our dog we noticed a disheveled man, clothed in rags, sitting under a tree. The man was missing a leg. In the evening we walked down to the lake and again we noticed the man sitting in the same place. As we were preparing to leave, my wife in her unpredictable and impulsive manner walked over to the man and asked him if he was all right. Did he need water or food? She asked. She made it clear that she was not complaining about his presence nor was she accusing him of being a vagrant. The man smiled pleasantly. He said he was fine, and thanked her for asking. Later, my wife remarked that his eyes “looked so soft and kind.”

When my wife was speaking to this man, I was thinking, “What is she doing now? Why is she bothering to engage in a conversation with this bum?” We were on a Sabbath, a time to rest and cease from labor. Liz was breaking my Sabbath, but at the same time she was working with the Father, listening to the Spirit, willing to offer a cup of water in the name of Jesus. I was both irritated and amazed. I noticed the man, but Liz looked into his eyes.

As I reflected on this encounter I thought about Jesus and the paralytic, the story we have been studying in John 5. One day Jesus went to a pool in Jerusalem where there were many sick and disabled people. He noticed a disabled man, and he looked into his eyes. The man had been sitting by the pool for 38 years, hoping to be healed miraculously, but he had no one to help him. We don’t know what caused the man’s condition. Neither my wife nor I had any idea of how the man in Tahoe had lost his leg. Jesus just asked the paralytic if he wanted to be well. Then he told him to rise, take up his bed, and walk. The man was willing, and he was healed.

On one level this story illustrates that God sees us and cares about us. We might be paralyzed by fear, guilt, shame or sin. Perhaps we are disabled either physically, emotionally or spiritually. God is not put off by our condition or our sickness. He moves towards us. He invites us to be healed and to walk in newness of life, without demanding a long explanation or a list of requirements. He reaches out to one-legged men sitting by Lake Tahoe. He says, “Rise, take up your bed, and walk.”

On another level the story challenges the thinking of the religious establishment who find their confidence in keeping the rules but missing the heart of God. The healing took place on a Sabbath, and that is what Jesus intended. He deliberately

provoked the anger of the Jews so that he could explain to them that their view of God was inaccurate and they were missing the big picture. The story jolts Pharisees like me.

The religious authorities saw the man carrying his bed and this upset them. They weren’t excited about the healing; they were angry that he was working on the Sabbath. At first the man did not even know who Jesus was, but later, when he saw him at the temple, he pointed him out to the Jewish authorities. So we read in chapter 5, verse 16:

For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” 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 5:16-18 NASB)

Open hostility to Jesus begins at this point. The Sabbath was an important doctrinal issue. Jesus told the Jews, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” The issue was whether God breaks his own Sabbath law, since obviously he was still running the universe, granting and taking life. The consensus was that the Father does not break Sabbath, because he does not carry anything outside of his domain, which is the entire universe. By claiming that he works also, Jesus declares that the universe is also his domain. Jesus is the true Sabbath rest; the Jews were missing the point.

The Jews not only accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, they say that by calling God his Father he is making himself equal with God. Jesus does not directly claim to be equal with God, but this is how the Jews interpret his word to them. Moreover, they charge that Jesus’ claim is self-made. The rest of chapter 5 is taken up with Jesus’ response. In our text today, he raises the equality issue in verses 19-30 by describing his relationship with the Father. Next week, in verses 31-47, he takes up the self-made claim charge.

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is* something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and *the Father* will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even

the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” (5:19-23)

Here Jesus describes his relationship with the Father and clearly establishes his identity. In verse 19, Jesus answers his critics like he did in verse 17. The word carries legal overtones and is stronger than merely “he said.” It’s interesting to note that no word from the opposition is recorded.

Describing his relationship with the Father, Jesus begins by saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you.” He then incorporates four “for” phrases that highlight four aspects of his identity and relationship to the Father. First, the very nature of this relationship is based on unity.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.* (5:19b)

Jesus does not live a self-sufficient existence. He does nothing in his own strength. He is dependent on the Father and is completely subordinate to his will. He could act independently and do something outside his Father’s will, but he chose not to. He is completely obedient. The Father and the Son act in precisely the same way – like Father, like Son. If God gives life on the Sabbath, then Jesus does too. If God judges on the Sabbath, then the Son does the same.

By his obedience to his Father the Son is acting in such a way that he is revealing the Father. As John said in his prologue to this gospel, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*” (1:18). The Son exegetes or narrates the Father. Any ideas about God must be tested by the actions of the Son.

The Jews accuse Jesus of claiming equality with God. Is Jesus equal with God? Well, he is not equal in the sense of another or competing god. Equality implies independence and therefore would run counter to a monotheistic view of God. To be equal means not to be dependent, and both Jews and Christians would have a question with that. The problem is that the Jews were seeking glory in other people’s approval and that is what causes independence, pride and self-exaltation. Jesus describes his relationship with the Father as one of unity, not equality. The Son’s actions are completely unified with the Father’s. The relationship is not reciprocal. In other words, it would not be right to say that the Father does what he sees the Son doing. Here, Jesus gives the classic defense of monotheism.

When my wife and I first met we took photographs of one another at the same spot in Yosemite Valley. But we forgot to wind the film between shots. The result was a double exposure; our images were superimposed on each other almost perfectly. The Father and Son are superimposed on one another perfectly. There is complete union. When you see the work of the Son you see the work of the Father.

Marriage is designed to manifest this kind of unity. As some couples grow older they become more and more like each other. At times my wife says she is becoming just like me. Couples know each other so well they know exactly what each other will say or do, even though they maintain distinct personalities.

We can see the same principle at work in parenting. I have heard my children say that they are like me in some regard. Children watch their parents and instinctively begin to do as they do. No matter how much we don’t want to be like our parents, we often behave just like them because that is what we saw when we grew up. This is what Jesus is saying – like father, like son.

Unity marks the nature of the Son’s relationship with the Father.

Secondly, Jesus speaks of the basis of his relationship with his Father.

“For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and *the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.*” (5:20)

How can the Son do everything the Father does? It is because the Father loves the Son and gives all things to him. John says the same thing in 3:35, using the word *agapao*, the *agape* kind of love. Here he uses the word *phileo*, the word that speaks of friendship. Both words mean the same thing in this context.

How different this word is from the statement of the serpent in the garden. The serpent told Eve that God did not love her, and so spread distrust. He also told Eve that she could be equal with God and therefore independent and autonomous. This is the opposite of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Because of the Father’s love, Jesus will even do “greater works than these.” This is perhaps a reference to vv. 21-22. There Jesus says he will give life to the dead (as was literally the case with Lazarus), and pronounce final judgment. Jesus will do these things so that people will marvel. So people will not rely on their own wisdom, but make a step toward faith.

This disclosure of the nature and character of God depends not on God’s love for us but on the Father’s love for the Son and on the Son’s love for the Father. The cross was the outflow of the reciprocal love of the Father for the Son. They love one another and the result of that love is our salvation.

God’s love for his Son gives us the true picture of fatherhood. God gives everything to his Son. And he also gives us everything. As James says, God gives us every good thing and every perfect gift from above. This is hard for many of us to understand because we do not have a healthy view of fatherhood. This picture of God and Jesus tells us that there is a need for fatherhood at the core of humanity.

I love stories that reflect passion between a father and his son or daughter. Movies like *The Patriot*, *The Legends of the*

Fall, and *Field of Dreams* are among my favorites. There is something about a father and son going to war and battling together, or even playing catch together. I loved playing basketball with my son. When I watched my older daughter play water polo or my younger daughter sing on stage, I experienced more than mere joy and delight. If one of my children is hurt or threatened I come running with both barrels blazing. This father/son and father/daughter love is at the core of our being because of the love between the Father and the Son. This love between God and Jesus is the foundation of everything. It is so magnificent that the Father even allowed the Son to die on the cross to save us. That kind of love is hard to imagine.

The third aspect of the Father/Son relationship highlights the work they do.

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.” (5:21)

What is it that the Son sees the Father doing and does himself? He raises the dead and gives life. Raising the dead and giving life probably mean the same thing. Jesus is the source and giver of life, just like his Father. The reason we can have life through the Son is because the Father has life in himself and he gave this to his Son.

The O.T. writers presupposed that the raising of the dead was a prerogative belonging only to God. One rabbi asserted that God held three keys in his hand and did not entrust them to a representative: the key of rain, the key of the womb, the key of the resurrection of the dead. Elijah was sometimes regarded as an exception, but Jesus goes way beyond him: the Son gives life to whom he wishes.

Verses 24-26 expand on this life that Jesus gives.

“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. 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. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself...” (5:24-26)

Obviously, what Jesus says here is very important, because twice he uses the formula, “Truly, truly, I say to you.” What is the life that Jesus gives? Certainly this can refer to a last-day hope – life in the future. However, it can also refer to a present-day life. The hour is coming and now is when anyone who hears and believes will have the life that is in the Father and the Son. The future irrupts into the present. The raising of Lazarus, the healing of the lame man in chapter 5 and the healing of the official’s son in chapter 4 all picture the truth that Jesus gives life – both now and forever. “In Him is life,” says John. Jesus raises the dead. Many of us know what it feels like to be dead and to have been raised. Some of you feel dead in your heart and soul this morning. You are longing for life. Jesus wants to give that life to you. That is the work of the Son.

There is no other source for the kind of life that Jesus gives. Careers and accomplishments won’t give us this life. Marriage won’t give us this life. Children won’t give us this life. There is no other place to go for life. If we do not hear and believe, we remain in death, spiritual death and eternal death. We remain exactly like we were born – spiritually dead and separated from the life of God. But, if we hear and believe we pass from death to life immediately. Every day we have to be reminded that we do not have life in ourselves. Life is found only in Jesus.

Lastly, Jesus gives a further explanation of his role.

“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” (5:22-23)

Both Father and Son give life; however, all judgment has been given to the Son. Jesus did not come to judge the world but to save the world. However, in the end some will be condemned because they did not come to Jesus. Jesus is the judge and final arbiter of our destiny.

The reason for entrusting the Son with all judgment is so that all might honor the Son. If we do not honor Jesus, then we do not honor God. The glorification of the Son is what glorifies the Father.

Verses 27-30 expand on the theme of Jesus being given the authority to judge.

“and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man. 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. I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” (5:27-30)

The focus of these verses is now future, to an hour that is coming, compared to the hour that is coming and now is. On the last day there will be a resurrection of life and a resurrection of judgment. Doing good and evil does not refer to works but rather points back to what Jesus just said. Those who hear and believe will be resurrected to life. Those who reject Jesus will face judgment. Even those who have already received life will be resurrected to life – a ratification of what has already taken place. Jesus will judge properly because he is completely subordinate to the Father, a reiteration of vv. 19-20.

Here again Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, a term that appears thirteen times in this gospel. This is a reference to the apocalyptic Son of Man in Daniel 7, who is brought on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, being vindicated after a period of suffering and given kingly power. Many first century Jews understood this term to be a reference to the Messiah.

What an incredible statement by Jesus as to his identity, his character and his relationship with his Father, based upon the love between the two that results in total unity. The Father initiates, sends, commands, commissions and grants; the Son responds, obeys, performs his Father's will, and receives authority. Jesus is God, but he is not independent of God. In one sense the Son is the Father's agent, but he is much more than that. Jesus is a faithful Son who is apprenticed to his Father in his craft. Either Jesus was a lunatic and a liar or he is the Lord of the universe. There are no other choices. Either we believe and have life or we reject his claim and live in death. Either we discard his claim as a sham or we bow down and worship him with all the honor due to God alone.

In this text we see clearly that Jesus' identity is based solely on what the Father says and what the Father does. Jesus did not derive his identity from someone else or from what he wanted to be. His identity came straight from the Father.

The amazing thing is that we too have the same identity. While there is one Son, we are all sons and daughters in Jesus. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of God we become unified with Father and Son. We submit our lives to the will of the Father and do what he does. We too reveal God to the world through the works that he gives to us. Because of the love between Father and Son we too live in that love. We understand true fatherhood and we live in that relationship for which we long. While we are not the source of life, we offer life to those around us. Everywhere we go we are an aroma of life to life. And we are also an aroma from death to death. The fragrance of Christ that comes from us is a reminder to people that there is a heaven and a hell. The same identity that the Father gives to Jesus he also gives to us. We too are sons and daughters.

This means is that we do not live for ourselves. There is no greater purpose to life than doing the works of the Father as his children. Nothing else will fulfill us. No matter what our circumstances or station in life, the thing that brings meaning and purpose is our willingness to submit in dependence on the Father, as the Son lived, doing nothing on our own initiative, seeking the will of the Father and manifesting the glory of the Son to the world around us.

Many of you have known Dave and Terri Burns over the years. Terri went home to be with the Lord a few weeks ago after a three and a half-year battle with cancer. John Fischer wrote the following about Terri's memorial service, and how she lived purposefully, doing the work of the Father:

Most of the comments at this service coming from those who were closest to her were all about how she served right down to the end. To the last drop of her earthly life, she was living for others.

This remarkable woman had what she called her Thirty Second Rule. She would take all of thirty seconds to tell you about how she was doing; the rest was all about you. Her wardrobe consisted of T-shirts and overalls, partly because she liked being informal, but partly because her posture was always cross-legged on the couch or the floor, fully engaged in you. Apparently it was no different when she was dying. No long litany of pain and heartache. It was still all about you. People said they came to serve her and got served instead. People came to pray for her and got prayed for as well. It was a beautiful legacy of a life filled with service to find her no different in her death. As her husband said in his tribute, "She taught us how to live and she taught us how to die."

If this woman could serve through her dying, think what the rest of us could do with our living. I think she would like knowing she inspired you and me to think about serving those around us today – maybe even apply the Thirty Second Rule.¹

This is who we are as sons and daughters of the living God. We live in obedience to him because of his wonderful love for us, offering a life that will raise people from the dead.

1. John Fischer, PurposeDrivenLife.com. September 8, 2004.