

Who Does He Think He Is? John 5:19-30

Call: Ps 27:1, 4 (NIV)

Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

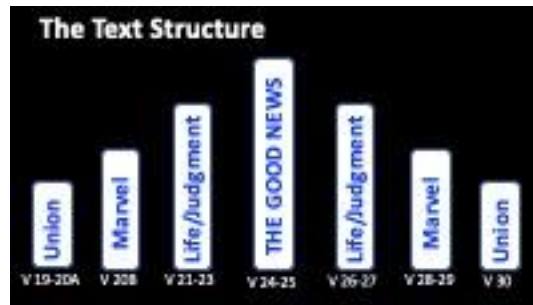
I. Introduction

Before this pandemic, a pastor sat down with four young adults at a restaurant. He asked each one of them what their view of God is. Each one said something different. One said, "My God is a God that meets me in mystical experiences. Another said, "Well I don't think you can really prove there is a God." Another said, "When I was a little girl I remember seeing this sentence that said that all paths lead to God. So, that shaped my whole idea of God since then. I've believed that my entire life. It doesn't matter what God you believe in because they are all the same." The last one said, "I don't know if I have a view of God, but I do hate those people who think they have the only right way of understanding God." One of the four then asked the pastor what he believed. He said, "I believe in Jesus, and I believe he's the only right way to understand God."

There is much confusion and uncertainty about God in our culture today. The text we will explore this morning clears up much of that confusion.

We are in chapter 5 of John. Last week we studied the miraculous healing of a lame man by the pool of Bethesda. Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath which made the authorities angry, but it was Jesus' justification for his actions that made the Jewish authorities really angry. What is his justification? In verse 17, Jesus said, "*My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working*" (John 5:17). Verse 18 then becomes the key verse for the rest of the chapter. Verse 18 says this, "*This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God*" (John 5:18). I've given both verses in the Worship Guide for your reference.

The Jewish authorities want to kill Jesus because he is making himself equal with God. So, Jesus now explains himself by giving his first substantial teaching in the Gospel. Most people miss this teaching because they focus on Jesus' bread of life sermon in chapter 6, or Jesus' I AM sayings. But, today's text is an extraordinary text for understanding who Jesus is. As someone has said, "You can't make this stuff up" (Reeves, 54). This discourse, which will take us two weeks to cover, is one of the deepest, most breath-taking, texts in all of Scripture.



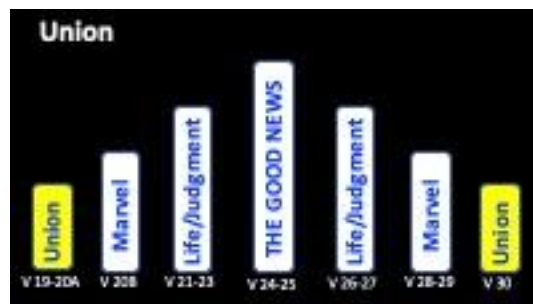
And, for this text, it might be good to keep the worship guide in front of you as it is a difficult text. Also, this diagram will govern our studies this morning. You can see how we move through the outside verses, listening to Jesus touch on his union with the Father, his “marvelous” works and his authority over life and judgment. And, because of these things, we get the culmination of this text which is the Good News of verses 24 and 25.

II. Union (19-20a, 30)

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.

...

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. (ESV)



A. The Dependent Union

Jesus begins this important text with “truly, truly,” meaning pay attention. Don't miss what he is about to say next, which is one of the most eye-opening and stunning declarations to ever be uttered in history. Jesus is going to give an exposition of the living God. In one short sermon, he is going to deconstruct the prevalent understanding of God in the first century, while constructing the true understanding of the living God.

Jesus begins by saying he can do nothing by himself. Indeed, the key here is not equality with God as if Jesus is another separate deity that is equal with God. What Jesus is going to emphasize is dependent unity with God. He and the Father are separate persons but act in perfect harmony and cooperation. We often hear of two minds thinking alike or even more, two hearts beating as one. Maybe that’s a human way of thinking of what Jesus is saying here.

What this means is if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. There is no God in heaven who is unlike Jesus. So, as someone has said, “Let’s get rid of any horrid ideas that behind Jesus, the friend of sinners, there is some sinister being without compassion or mercy” (Reeves, 15).

B. The Trinity

And, of course, this brings in the doctrine of the trinity, although Jesus doesn’t bring in the Spirit here. We know that the Spirit has permeated everything in this Gospel up until this point, and will continue to do so. But, here, Jesus does bring in the plurality of the Godhead, the trinity. And, at this point, people fade out because any trinity talk is heard as “a riddle wrapped up inside a puzzle buried in an enigma” (Johnson, 38).

“It’s like the story of a worship pastor who on a Sunday morning led his congregation in the reading of the Athanasian Creed. This creed uses phrases like “we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the Substance.” And, phrases like, “the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, the Holy Spirit uncreated.” And, phrases like, “The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.” And, after the worship pastor read that last line, he was heard to mutter under his breath, “the whole thing’s incomprehensible!” “ (Johnson, 38).

Yes, trinity talk is hard work, but it is so worth it. Why? Because trinity talk is God talk. As we are hearing in our text today, these are God’s thoughts about himself. These aren’t human thoughts about God. Jesus as God is telling us who he is. It’s extraordinary!

And, his statements here are not meant to blur the distinctions between the Father, Son and Spirit. The trinity *is* made up of three distinct persons, but their actions, wills and purposes are in complete agreement (Klink, 285).

C. The Love

Jesus was and is in perfect union with the Father, in dependent unity with Him, a relationship defined by perfect love. Verse 20: “*For the Father loves the Son.*” In chapter 14, we get the complementary truth that the Son loves the Father (14:31). Love is what defines this relationship. At the center of our universe is a relationship of love. It is deeply, deeply personal.

The Trinity is engulfed and pervaded by love. Augustine, the great theologian of the 4th century said it this way, “The Father is the lover. The Son is the beloved. And, the Spirit is the bond of love between them.” It’s not a perfect analogy, but he’s trying to get at the central truth that the trinity is defined by love. And, *because* it is all about love, it means God has to be a plurality of persons. For, if God was a single entity, a monad, he couldn’t be love because there would be nobody to love.

D. The Invitation

And, what are the implications for us? We are invited into this love relationship as adopted sons and daughters, through the Holy Spirit. It is within this relationship that “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Later in John, the night before the cross, when Jesus speaks of the vine and branches, he says, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (5). He goes on. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love” (9). Remain in my love. Stay here in my love. The intimate relationship between Jesus and his Father is now duplicated between us and the Son. We are invited to abide in this love relationship. And, of course, this is what we are to reflect to the world. This is how the world will know us, by our love.

So, that is union. We now move to the next section called Marvel, verses 20b and 28-29.

III. Marvel (20b, 28-29)

20b And greater works than these will he show him, so that you [all] may marvel.

...

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 has just healed a lame man who was lame for 38 years, but he says, “You ain’t seen nothing yet!” “Just you wait, just you wait” as they sing in Hamilton. There are greater works coming, God’s works, done by Jesus, so that the Jewish leaders will be amazed, as they should have been with the healing of the lame man.

Indeed there are more wonders coming, culminating in a dead man coming out of the tomb after being dead for 4 days. But, even beyond that, Jesus points toward the final resurrection and judgment, topics which we will take up in our next section: Life and judgment, verses 21-23 and 26-27.

IV. Life and Judgment (21-23, 26-27)

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.

...

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.

A. The Keys

Jesus now turns to life and judgment, and his authority over them. We talked about the keys last week with this slide. Let me give a brief summary for those who may have missed it. Jesus had healed the lame man on the Sabbath which caused the Jewish authorities to wrestle with not only man working on the Sabbath but also God working on the Sabbath. If God works on the Sabbath, what kind of work does he do? Most Jewish leaders held that God is always

working, sustaining the world moment by moment. And, from man's perspective, this work was visible in three ways, as one Rabbi said: "God has kept in his hands three keys which he entrusts to no one else:

1. The key of rain.
2. The key of birth.
3. And, the key of the resurrection of the dead" (Brown, 217).

And, it was clear to everyone that he used these three keys on the Sabbath, because on the Sabbath it may rain, a birth may happen and someone may die.

In these verses right here, Jesus is claiming the authority to use the keys, and, specifically, to use the key of birth, or life, and the key of judgment. Let's look at these two keys separately, with judgment first.

B. The Key of Judgment

All judgment has been given to the Son. Paul refers to this truth in his sermon at Athens in Acts 17. He says, "[God] commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). That man is Jesus, God's Son. The Father has given all judgment to the Son, verse 22.

Other religious figures warn people that they must give an account for their lives at some point in the future. Jesus claims he is the one to whom everyone must give that account. Although Jesus has not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world, judgment and salvation are two sides of the same coin. And Jesus, as judge, is the decision point.

Additionally, verse 27, Jesus is the Son of Man. As we talked about back in May, the Son of Man is the heavenly judge who the prophet Daniel sees in Daniel 7 (Daniel 7:13-14). He is the divine being who comes to judge all nations of history and to inaugurate the kingdom of God.

C. Why Judgment?

And, why has the Father given judgment to the Son? Verse 23. In order that *all* may honor the Son like they honor the Father. All people. That all people would worship and revere Jesus as they do the Father God. In other words, to not honor Jesus is to not honor the Father. It means if we get Jesus wrong, we get God wrong. Jesus is defining the living God for us right here. That is what's at stake in these verses.

And, now we move to the key of life.

D. The Key of Life

Jesus has the key to life because of two reasons:

1. Because the Father has given him that key in verse 21, meaning Jesus can give life to whom he will.

2. But even more verse 26. The Son has life in himself, just like the Father. From our perspective, all forms of life we know of are borrowed life, owing their existence to someone else. For you and me, life was handed to us. We are receiving it for a little while, but at some point, we will have to give it back. Not Jesus. His life is self-existent and self-sustaining.

That's why other teachers and religious leaders can claim to know the path to life, but Jesus claims to be life! And, He can claim to be life even beyond the grave as he did in verses 28 and 29. He will repeat this claim in verse 25. He can give life to an official's son on his deathbed, but also, *"An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out."* The dead will hear his voice? How? Because he has life, and he is life! It's like the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel (Ezek 37:7-8). The bones hear the voice of the Lord and come to life! Jesus, the Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us, is the sole source of life because he is life. Have you ever heard anyone speak this way?

Ok. We've now moved through the outside verses hearing how Jesus is in dependent union with the Father, and because of this, his marvel-filled works are the same as the Father's. And, how the Father has given Him authority over life and judgment. Now, we are ready to hear the Good News, verses 24-25 (as if all that other stuff wasn't good news).

V. The Good News (24-25)

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.

A. The Son = Jesus

Who is this Son that he keeps referring to throughout this passage? It is him who is now speaking, verse 24, *"whoever hears my Word."* Jesus moves to first person right here, making sure his audience knows beyond a shadow of a doubt who the Son really is. It is the one standing right in front of them. On the Sabbath, when people's minds are filled with thoughts of God as creator, as sustainer, as judge and as resurrecter, Jesus breaks the human laws, then claims he, himself, has God's authority to do so.

B. Death

And, those who hear and believe will have life eternal. I happened to be at two memorials yesterday. As you all know, we had a memorial for our beloved Bill Harmon yesterday. I also attended another one. Memorials remind us of our own mortality. We don't talk about death or the brevity of our lives anymore except at memorials. At this memorial I was at yesterday for a grandmother with lots of grandkids, when she knew the end was near, she said this, "I can't wait to see Jesus face to face, but I can't believe how brief life is." Life is but a breath and then it is gone (Ps 144:4).

I think it's interesting that churches used to be built right next to cemeteries. Why? Because it raised the question of our mortality every Sunday. Just by walking into church every Sunday, the question would arise, "How are you planning to deal with your mortality?" I guess churches not being next to cemeteries anymore points to a culture that deals with death by avoiding it. Jesus doesn't avoid it. Jesus answers it right here by saying he's the answer. The way to deal with death is to believe in him, the giver of life.

C. Belief

And, when you believe, Jesus says you immediately enter eternal life. The one who "believes," in him *has* eternal life, now, in the present – not "will have" in the future – now in the present.

Eternal life in John doesn't necessarily point to the longevity of life or the quantity of life, rather it points to a *quality* of life. It is the life of God which - just happens to never end. And, Jesus' great claim here is that *he* alone can give this life. What life? A radically rich life, not as in money, but rich, as in fullness and beauty and love and joy and peace and hope. A radically rich life that is radically deep, radically fulfilling, and radically abundant. It is also indestructible. It is not lost due to changes in history, or changes in the economy, or changes in government, or changes in health or even death. This is eternal life! And this is the life that Jesus gives now by belief in him. Believe in Jesus and you have right now "*passed out of death into life*" (24).

D. Belief vs. Works?

Today is the day of salvation. This is the good news, and it is so simple. It sounds too good to be true! You would think that such a rich life would require super spiritual conditions or super spiritual works. Nope. Simply by hearing these words of Jesus and believing in them, you move out of the realm of judgment and death, and into eternal life today. We move from the land of the dying to the land of the living and Jesus is the mover.

But, what about verses 28-29 which say that, on the last day, when the cemeteries will be emptied, Jesus will separate those who have "*done good*" from those who have "*done evil*?" Is more than belief required? Answer: No. In fact, in the next chapter, the people will ask Jesus what it means to do the work of God. Jesus answers like this, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent*" (John 6:29). But, it's also true that throughout scripture, belief and behavior go together. Faith and fruit go together. They cannot be separated. Jesus cares deeply about how we live our lives, after all Jesus calls us to love our neighbors and our enemies, but it's not earning salvation, it's fruit from our belief in him. It's effort, but not earning. And, that is good news.

VI. Conclusion

Well, that's our text for this morning. It is a deep and stunning passage to say the least. A summary of it might be this: The Father wants to give life. He desires for all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). That's why he sent his son Jesus into the world. And, Jesus is doing His work, even giving life and pronouncing judgment. The good news is that all who believe in him will find the life the father wants to give.

Isn't it true that no one ever spoke this way? C.S. Lewis captures it best in this famous quote: On the one side, [Jesus gives us] clear, definite moral teaching. On the other, [Jesus has] claims which, if not true, are those of a megalomaniac... There is no half-way house, and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him 'Are you the son of Bramah?' he would have said, 'My son, you are still in the veil of illusion.' If you had gone to Socrates and asked, 'Are you Zeus?' he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, 'Are you Allah?' he would ... have rent his clothes ... If you had asked Confucius, 'Are you Heaven?', I think he would have probably replied, 'Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.' ... The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question... The only person who can say these sorts of things is either God or a complete lunatic... We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects – Hatred – Terror or Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval" (Lewis, 158).

In this text that we've explored this morning, Jesus has definitely moved out of a "mere moral teacher." It is as Lewis says, "simply out of the question." In this text, we are forced to come face to face with the truth that there are only two paths in life. There are only two options in life. No more. There simply is no third, fourth or fifth options. There are two. And one person stands as the center point of the decision, Jesus. Jesus is standing at the fork in the road. And, the great crisis is - what are you going to do with him? This is the great decision we all must make. Is he Lord, or is he a lunatic?

- If we choose to not believe him and call him a lunatic, he plainly says here that the destination is judgment and death. To not believe in Jesus is to be destined for destruction.
- But, to believe that Jesus is Lord leads to abundant and eternal life, now and forever. This way leads to a radically rich life, not a pain-free life, but a radically rich life. And, this way is what we were made for because this way enters into the relationship of love at the center of the universe.

What will you do with Jesus, because that determines everything. As John Newton once wrote:
*What think you of Christ? is the test ,
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him;
Amen.*

Benediction

Now, receive this Trinitarian Benediction from the hand of Paul:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" ([2 Corinthians 13:14](#)).

Resources

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Johnson, Darrell, *Experiencing the Trinity*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)

Lewis, C.S., *God in the Dock*

Reeves, Michael, *Delighting in the Trinity*