

Sam Storms  
Bridgeway Church  
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### Sermon Summary #16

#### The Inescapable Imperative of Honoring Jesus as God John 5:18-29

Even though the Jehovah's Witnesses have stopped ringing my doorbell, they will on occasion leave at my front door a copy of their magazine published by *The Watchtower Society*. It is very easy for undiscerning or uninformed people to think that the Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian group who confess Jesus as Lord. After all, the magazine several times will refer to the knowledge of Jehovah and everlasting life "through Jesus Christ."

What the magazine does not say but what Jehovah's Witnesses do believe is that before coming to earth Jesus Christ was actually Michael, the archangel. Thus, Jesus is not eternal. He is himself a creature who at one time did not exist. He was made or created or called into existence by God. Therefore, Jesus never was nor ever will be equal in deity and glory with God the Father. Jesus may be understood as "a god," but never as "the God".

Like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims also deny the truth of the Trinity, that the one eternal God exists in three equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Muslims also deny the incarnation. What we saw in John 1:14 that the eternal Word or Second Person of the Trinity "became flesh" is abhorrent to all Muslims. But in similar fashion to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims also do their best to speak highly of Jesus. He is given a prominent place in the Qur'an. He is called the Messiah, the virgin born Son of Mary, Messenger, Prophet, and Servant. He is revered by Muslims much in the same way as are Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad. But Jesus is not himself God.

As all of you know, the death of Jesus on the cross as a substitute for sinful men and women, followed by his bodily resurrection from the grave, is the very heart and soul of Christianity. There is no gospel, no good news, apart from the sinless life, atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus. But Muslims deny that Jesus died on the cross. And since he never died physically, he never rose from the dead. Someone disguised as Jesus suffered crucifixion, while Jesus was taken up into heaven by God.

Have you seen the billboard just north of us on Broadway Extension? On the right side of the sign, in huge letters, is the word ISLAM. On the left side, under the title One Family, are the names of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. No! We are not one family with those who deny that Jesus is God. Abraham and Moses are two of the great saints of the old covenant, but they lived in anticipation of the coming of Jesus. Their words and deeds and prophetic utterances pointed forward to the coming Son of God, the one true Messiah, Jesus. To suggest that Jesus is merely one of a long line of revered prophets that includes Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad, is blasphemous. Worse still, it is damning. To believe this lie is to consign your soul to eternal death.

I could go on and on citing the beliefs of numerous cults and non-Christian religions, but the point is made: there is widespread confusion today about who Jesus is. Even among average professing Christians in many churches here in OKC, people struggle to understand who Jesus is. Ironically, though, there was very little confusion in Jesus' own day among his contemporaries. In fact, they understood all too well who Jesus claimed to be, and they tried to kill him for it! There was no doubt in their minds about what Jesus said concerning himself.

Nowhere is this more clearly seen than right here in John 5. As we saw last week in John 5:1-17, Jesus has just healed a man who had been incapacitated for 38 years. There was no doubt about the reality of what happened. No one pretends to be paralyzed for 38 years, only then to make it appear he had been healed by jumping up and walking around with his bed tucked underneath his arm.

As we saw last week, this healing miracle had no impact on the minds and hearts of the religious leaders other than to harden them all the more in their opposition to Jesus. They couldn't care less that the life-long misery of this man has come to an end. They were devoid of joy over the fact that a life-long paralytic is now walking and running. Their

commitment is to the religious status quo. What shocked them most wasn't that a former paralytic is now walking and carrying his bed under his arm. What shocked and outraged them was that he dared to do so on the Sabbath!

But I do have to give the religious leaders credit for one thing. They may not have appreciated the fact that this man is now healed, but they had no problem in grasping what Jesus said about himself. Unlike those today who have built their cult or sect or denomination on the bedrock of a blatant denial that Jesus is God, these men understood from the get-go what Jesus claimed for himself.

Back in v. 17, Jesus responded to their protest that he should not have healed this man on the Sabbath, and that this man should not have been found carrying his bed under arm on the Sabbath. We read there: "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working'" (John 5:17). Let me tease out, if I may, what I think Jesus is saying:

"Moses tells us in Genesis that when 'my Father' finished the work of creation, he rested on the seventh day. But that doesn't mean he has ceased from his constant, moment-by-moment work of providentially sustaining and preserving and governing the world and all that happens within it. His works of love and kindness and mercy in making gracious provision for those in need continue every day of the week, even on the Sabbath. Therefore, it is only fitting that I, too, should do works of love on the Sabbath, just like the one you all have witnessed here today. Why should I have waited until after the Sabbath to heal this man? I do not break the Law of Moses by healing on the Sabbath any more than my Father does by causing the rain to fall on the Sabbath or the sun to shine or by graciously giving you air to breathe and food to eat."

If you and I struggle to comprehend what Jesus is saying when he refers to God as "my Father," the Jewish leaders in the first century understood him perfectly. The way he spoke of God as his Father in such a unique, personal, and exclusive way, as well as the claim that if God worked on the Sabbath so could he, all pointed to one conclusion:

***"This Jesus of Nazareth is claiming to be equal with God! He is claiming to be God!"***

Look again at v. 18. "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."

What I love about this sequence of events is that ***Jesus does nothing to correct any misunderstanding on their part.*** He doesn't interrupt and clarify by saying, "Oh, no, fellows. You greatly misunderstand me. I would never claim to be equal in deity, power, and glory with Yahweh. I'm only a man, just like all of you."

Not only does Jesus let stand their conclusion about what he is saying concerning himself, he proceeds to unpack it and defend it. He does so by making ***seven astounding claims.*** Let me mention them all up front, and then we'll back up and take each one in turn.

(1) I, the Son of God the Father, always do what my Father is doing. We act in perfect harmony. Our deeds are synchronized.

(2) I, the Son of God the Father, am loved by my Father, so much so that he always shows me what he is doing so that I will never act out of step with his will.

(3) I, the Son of God the Father, have the authority to raise the dead and give them life just like my Father does.

(4) I, the Son of God the Father, have been given the right and authority and power to be the one who executes all judgment.

(5) I, the Son of God the Father, am to be honored and worshipped and praised in the same way and to the same degree as the Father is honored and worshipped and praised.

(6) I, the Son of God the Father, am the one who was sent by the Father. If you believe what the Father says about me and what I have come to do, you receive eternal life and will never face eternal judgment.

(7) I, the Son of God the Father, am the one who will speak the gospel, and those who hear and respond will live eternally. Not only do I give life now to those who respond to my voice, but the day will eventually come when my voice will bring forth all people from their graves, some to life and others to judgment.

*Seven Astounding Claims!*

**(1) I, the Son of God the Father, always do what my Father is doing (v. 19).** We act in perfect harmony. Our deeds are synchronized. I understand the essence of what Jesus is saying here, but I confess to some degree of confusion as to how this actually works.

How does Jesus “see” what the Father is doing? Is this simply another way of saying that he “knows” what the Father is doing? And does the Father first “do” something in heaven and the Son then repeats it on earth. Or is the idea that the Father has a plan for all he does, and the Holy Spirit communicates this to Jesus so that he will act in lock step with the Father’s deeds?

It’s all a bit mysterious, and takes us inside the Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. But all three are equally God. They always act in concert with one another. None of the three do anything apart from the other two. It is a mystery of all mysteries, and I don’t profess to understand it fully. No one does. At least you shouldn’t believe anyone who claims they do.

What’s important is that Jesus evidently makes this statement in v. 19 to explain why he healed only the one man earlier in the chapter. His answer is that the Father intended only to heal one man.

And it is undoubtedly yet another reason why the religious leaders wanted to kill him. To make such a claim, namely, to say that for God the Father to act is for *you* to act sounds as if you share some essential connection or union with God. It sounds like you are claiming to be equal with God. Yes, that is precisely what Jesus is claiming.

**(2) I, the Son of God the Father, am loved by my Father, so much so that he always shows me what he is doing so that I will never act out of step with his will (v. 20).**

Here we see the underlying motivation of the Father in making sure that the Son always knows what the will of the Father is. The Father *loves* the Son! It is from this place of deep and intense love and affection that the lines of communication, so to speak, are always open. I don’t know precisely how the Father “shows” Jesus all he is doing and will do. Perhaps again it is through the Holy Spirit that the Father shows all these things to the Son. Perhaps Jesus is referring to the purpose of God that was formulated in eternity past. Remember that in John 1:1 we were told that “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.” Being “with” God in such a deep personal relationship undoubtedly entailed a joint effort on their part in crafting the plans God had for what Jesus would accomplish.

There is a point of application here to you and to me. If we ever hope to hear the voice of God and to speak and act and minister in accordance with his will, we need to cultivate a deep relationship of intimacy and love, such that our hearts are completely devoted to him and all we desire is his will.

**(3) I, the Son of God the Father, have the authority to raise the dead and to give them life just like my Father does (v. 21).**

What makes this claim by Jesus so astounding and instructive is that in the OT raising the dead is always described as the prerogative of God alone. If now Jesus gives life to the dead, it isn’t merely because God has delegated that authority to him. It is because he too is God, no less divine in every respect than are the Father and the Spirit. As one commentator has put it, “Dead bodies and dead souls are both alike under his dominion. He has the keys of death and hell. In him is life. He is the life” (JCR, 281).

**(4) I, the Son of God the Father, have been given the right and authority and power to be the one who executes all judgment (v. 22).**

It is to the Lord Jesus Christ that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. Jesus will be the one who passes judgment on each person's faith or lack thereof. He will be the one who assesses the works of all mankind. It is what people make of Jesus and how they respond to him that will determine their eternal destiny. Paul affirmed this in his speech on Mars Hill where he said that God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness *by a man* [Jesus Christ!] whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

***(5) I, the Son of God the Father, am to be honored and worshipped and praised in the same way and to the same degree as the Father is honored and worshipped and praised (v. 23).***

This may well be the most important and decisive claim that Jesus made. The reason the Father has entrusted the final judgment to the Son, to Jesus Christ, is so that everyone will know it is absolutely essential to "honor" the Son "just as they honor the Father." In fact, look at the second half of v. 23 – "***Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.***"

Consider how this speaks directly to the question of whether people of other religions worship the same God as do Christians. That question is easily answered: Do they honor Jesus Christ. Do they acknowledge who he is? Do they believe and affirm that he is the Word who became flesh and made a sacrifice for the sins of men and women? Do they know and celebrate Jesus as the true Messiah? Do they honor and praise him for being equal with God the Father in deity, glory, and majesty? If they don't, then they don't honor the Father either. Clearly, if you don't honor the Father you don't worship him, you don't know him, you have no relationship with him.

So let me speak to the question that so many in our day are asking: ***Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?*** No! Definitely and decisively, No! Muslims do not honor the Son. They deny about Jesus everything he himself claimed to be. They reject his being the Son of God. They reject his atoning sacrificial death on the cross. They repudiate any notion of his bodily resurrection. And any suggestion that only through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ can someone be saved is abhorrent to them.

"In other words, if you want to know if someone in another religion, or no religion, honors God (has a true worshipful relationship with God), the test that you use to know this is: *Do they honor Jesus for who he really is—as the divine Son of God, the Messiah, the crucified and risen Savior of the world, the Lord of the universe and Judge of all human beings?* If they don't, then they don't honor God" (John Piper).

John the Apostle wrote much the same thing in his first epistle: "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:22-23).

***(6) I, the Son of God the Father, am the one who was sent by the Father. If you believe what the Father says about me and what I have come to do, you receive eternal life and will never face eternal judgment (v. 24).***

Here in the sixth of our Lord's claims he makes much the same point. If you want to experience eternal life and escape the judgment that will otherwise come on all people, you must not only "hear" my words but believe that what I'm telling you about God is true. Everything Jesus said while on the earth was simply what the Father told him or showed him to say. To reject Jesus, therefore, is to reject God the Father.

***Is this unloving and arrogant?*** The world today would insist it is. To claim that it is only in and through Jesus that people can escape eternal judgment and be reconciled with God strikes many as devoid of love. If you're going to love someone, so they say, you must affirm the legitimacy and truth of what they believe is the pathway to eternal life. It is unkind and harmful for you to tell them that apart from faith in Jesus Christ they will suffer eternal damnation. It is hate speech to say that if you don't honor Jesus you don't honor God. To say such things to non-Christians will hurt their feelings and make them feel "unsafe". It will make them feel badly.

***Actually, telling them that the only way to honor and know God is through honoring and trusting in Jesus whom he sent is the most loving and kind-hearted thing you could ever say!*** If in fact Jesus is only one among many ways to God, then it *is* unloving and unkind. If in fact Jesus was wrong in what he said in v. 23b, then it is unloving and

unkind. But if what Jesus said about himself is true, and if honoring and trusting and following him is the only way to honor God and to be reconciled to him, telling this to people is the most loving thing you could ever do for them.

***Let me tell you what hate speech truly is. It is speech that leads people to believe something that will result in their eternal damnation. There is no greater expression of hatred for someone, no greater expression of disdain and lack of concern for them, than to tell them to believe something that puts their soul in jeopardy of eternal judgment. Regardless of how it makes them feel, you can't love someone by lying to them.***

If you want to know what it is to love another human being, look again at v. 24. There Jesus says that if you want someone to receive “eternal life” and to escape “judgment” and to pass “from death to life,” urge them to believe me, to honor me, to trust me, to say Yes to all that I tell you about the nature of God and the reality of heaven and hell.

Let me say it again with as much conviction and energy as I can. If you believe Jesus is who he claimed to be, if you trust him and honor him as the one whose sinless life, and substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection are your only hope for forgiveness, two things will have already happened.

First, you not only ***will*** have eternal life, you ***already*** have it. This is clearly affirmed in v. 24a.

Second, you not only ***will*** not come into judgment, you have ***already*** passed through judgment and are safe on the other side. This is clearly affirmed in v. 24b. Jesus has become that judgment for you. When the Holy Spirit unites you to Jesus Christ by faith, his death becomes your death, and his crucifixion your crucifixion. The curse of judgment against sin that you deserve will have come upon him. Look again at v. 24. It is simply too glorious to gloss over or merely read once: you have already passed out of death and into life! This is beyond glorious. Rejoice in it! Let this truth fill you with courageous faith and bold witness and passionate worship!

This leads directly into the seventh and final claim Jesus makes, and it isn't something the world wants to hear. The world has by and large embraced the doctrine of universalism. According to universalism, everyone gets saved in the end. Everyone who dies goes to the same place somewhere up in the sky. All roads lead to heaven. All religious faiths are of equal validity. Any suggestion that there will be a final judgment that leads either to eternal life in heaven or eternal damnation in hell, based entirely on how one responds to Jesus, is angrily dismissed as hateful and arrogant, and who knows what else. But we can't ignore what Jesus has already said, and what he will now say in vv. 25-29.

***(7) I, the Son of God the Father, am the one who will speak the gospel, and those who hear and respond will live eternally. Not only do I give life now to those who respond to my voice, but the day will eventually come when my voice will bring forth all people from their graves, some to life and others to judgment.***

Jesus mentions two types of resurrection in these verses. One occurs now, in the present day, and the other will occur at the end of the age when Christ returns. One is spiritual in nature, while the other is physical in nature.

Consider the spiritual resurrection that he describes in vv. 25-27. It may bother you to hear this, but I suspect there are some ***dead people*** here at Bridgeway today. You may be sitting next to one. You may be the father or mother of one. You may be married to one. You may ***be*** the one! There's no need to call the funeral home and arrange for a casket and flowers and a gravesite. Jesus is talking about spiritual death.

He is telling us that people who lack faith in him, people who have rejected him, people who do not “honor” him as God the Son in human flesh, are not really living at all. They may smile and eat and speak and go through the motions we associate with life, but they are spiritually dead. It is truly a “living death” (see Eph. 2:1-3).

Some of the nicest people you know are dead. Some of the wealthiest and most intelligent people you know are dead. Some of the most athletic, physically coordinated, and popular people you know are dead. They blink their eyes, their hearts beat in their chests, they get up and go to work every day, and they are dead!

How might they live? Only by hearing and believing and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ as the one sent by the Father to pay for sin's penalty on the cross. It isn't enough to attend church or watch sermons on-line. You must “hear the voice of the Son of God” (v. 25) and believe him. To “hear” his voice is more than listening to the sound of what Jesus said or what I say about Jesus. To “hear” is to believe and receive and to trust and to embrace and to honor him.

The voice of Jesus Christ is speaking here today. That isn't because I'm special. It isn't my voice. To the degree that you hear what Christ said, as found in John's gospel and elsewhere in Scripture, to the degree that you say Yes to what he claims about himself and entrust yourself to his life, death, and resurrection, you are hearing Jesus speak. So, will you believe him, trust him, love him, follow him, honor him? If you will, you will live!

Right now, every day, spiritually dead people are awakened by the Spirit of God to "hear" Jesus. When they do, they come to life. They come alive spiritually.

But there is also another resurrection that has not yet happened. It is physical in nature. In this resurrection it isn't just some or a few who "hear" the voice of Christ. All do. Everyone hears. And when they hear him, they will be raised physically, with bodies suitable to the eternal destiny to which they are assigned.

Some will be raised to enter into the fullness of eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. Others will be raised to enter into judgment, after which they will be consigned to eternal death in hell. The apostle Paul said the same thing when he stood before the Roman ruler Felix: "There will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15).

The point here in vv. 25-29 is that Jesus raises all the dead. All the men and women who have ever lived will be raised. Some will receive a glorified body that makes possible their life on the new earth in the presence of God. Others will receive a body that makes possible their continued existence in hell, separated from God. Jesus will raise everyone from the dead: Americans and Russians and Greeks and Germans. He will raise Michelangelo from the dead, and Beethoven and John Lennon. He will raise Adolph Hitler and Pol Pot and Ronald Reagan. He will raise Billy Graham and Judas Iscariot and Princess Diana and Michael Jackson. And if you die before he returns, he will raise you too.

But wait! Does v. 29 mean that the "resurrection to life" is the reward for our good deeds? No. We are not justified or saved or forgiven of our sins because of any "good deeds/works" we have done. It simply means that if you are truly justified, saved, and forgiven, your faith *will* produce good deeds. The God who saved us by his grace is by that same power of grace working in us what is pleasing in his sight (Phil. 2:12-13; Heb. 13:20-21). In this way your obedience, your good deeds become the evidence or the confirmation of your salvation. On the day of judgment, they will verify or bear witness to the reality of your saving faith.

### *Conclusion*

I entitled this message, *The Inescapable Imperative of Honoring Jesus as God*. It is an "inescapable" imperative because there is no way to weasel out of taking a stand on who Jesus claimed to be. Either you will do that in this life, or when you stand before him on the day of judgment. But then it will be too late. That is why it is "imperative" that you embrace and honor Jesus as God.

C. S. Lewis was certainly correct when he said that Jesus himself does not give us a multiplicity of options. Most of you have heard this, but here it is again:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God" (*Mere Christianity*, Book II, chp. 3).