

“Father and Son”

John 5:19-47

March 20, 2022

Read John 5:19-47

This is the Word of the LORD.

This morning we have one of the more powerful self-revelation speeches Jesus gives in the gospel of John. There is some high theology in this – and I am going to ask you to hang with me as we go through it – but there also are some very practical ramifications to be taken from what Jesus says.

There are several sections in this address. The first, Jesus revealed that he was the Son of God and how his coming was consistent with God’s plan all along. The second, Jesus talked about how the religious authorities *should* recognize him because the witnesses testify to his coming. Third, he talked to them about the judgment coming to the religious authorities for failing to recognize him.

1. The Son Does What The Father Does

The initiation of the conflict was Jesus’ healing the man on the Sabbath that we covered last week. Jesus started it, no question. He was intentionally picking this battle. He knew it was the Sabbath, knew how the religious leaders would react, and then he went and “healed” the man.

Why is it important to know that Jesus started it? It is important because it shows that Jesus’ mission included the cross – and he knew it. He was not naively doing random acts of kindness and forgot what day it was. Jesus was not a tragic figure. He was not someone who was “just in the wrong place at the wrong time.” He was not an unsuspecting victim. Jesus went out of his way to reveal who he was and was uncompromising about fulfilling what he was sent to do.

Last week, we talked about the significance of the Sabbath. This week, we need to look at the next step. Jesus’ response to the religious authorities’ complaint about working on the Sabbath was, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.”

In short, the Jews believed that God rested on the Sabbath day. The problem was, they needed to account for the reality of births and deaths on the Sabbath – both the power of life and death were attributed to “acts of God.” In other words, though God rested, God also worked on the Sabbath. That said, *only* God was permitted to work on the Sabbath. Thus, when Jesus said, “My Father is still working, and I also am working,” he was equating himself with God. In more modern language, Jesus was saying, “God is still working on Sabbath, and because I am the Son of God, I work on Sundays too.”

That was a remarkable statement.

Jesus’ self-revelation – that is, the ways in which he made clear who he was, what he was doing, and how it was going to play out – were the very statements that the religious authorities would use to develop the case against him within the Jerusalem community. Then they would translate

these statements to develop the case against him before Pilate and the Romans. Talking about his being the Son of God and having the authority to do things only God is permitted to do led to their presenting Jesus to Pilate as a criminal for claiming to be “King of the Jews.” Technically, Jesus was charged with sedition; that is, inciting a revolution against Caesar in Rome. Remember what Pilate posted over Jesus’ head on the cross, “King of the Jews.” The sign was designed to mock him; the tragedy was that it was accurate.

For all those people who say, “Why didn’t Jesus just say who he was;” he did. He told them. They did not have eyes to see – or, more accurately, ears to hear. They were either too distracted by their own expectations or too hard-hearted to be willing to believe. Simply put, they did not really expect God to show up. They certainly did not expect that God would show up like *this*; that is, like this guy.

Jesus’ self-revelation led to the discussion of the Son doing only what the Father has shown him to do, does only what the Father wants done. Sons followed what fathers did; even Jesus did. Joseph was a carpenter; thus, Jesus was a carpenter. Here, Jesus said, “My Father is still working” that is, on a Sabbath, “thus, I am still working, too.”

What does the heavenly Father do that the Son did? Jesus identified two things: he gives life and he judges. Those were responsibilities that God handled; Jesus was saying that he had the right and authority to exercise them – meaning that he was equal to God.

He gives life and judges. That is a pretty good summary the cross.

It also was a pretty good reference point in discerning between believers and non-believers. Jesus did not mince words here – he was giving life to those whom he chose. This was the point of the story with the royal official’s son; it was the point of the story with the man he told to “Stand up, take your mat, and walk.”

What is the difference between life and judgment? It is the difference between the healed man and the Jews. The man rejoiced while obeying Jesus’ command to stand up, take his mat and walk. The Jews were angry and condemned the man’s joy, “We’ve never done it that way.” The man was willing for God to act like God; the Jews wanted to judge how God could act.

Jesus then dropped in this little nugget: “**Do not be astonished at this** [*that the Son gives life to whomever he wishes and has all judgment*]; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

The case-in-point illustration will be seen in chapter 11 when Jesus called four-day-dead Lazarus out of the grave. Jesus had that authority to give life and judge. Then Jesus declared that **all** will come out of the grave to be judged: those who heard his voice and believed God sent him will be judged to the resurrection of life; those who have done evil – not believed – to the resurrection of condemnation.

One commenter noted:

The criterion for judgment leading either to life or condemnation in the age to come is doing 'good' or doing 'evil' in this age. Care must be taken not to import ideas about doing good and evil from elsewhere in the NT. In this Gospel doing good means believing in the one God sent into the world, while the ultimate evil is to reject this one, and refuse to believe in him.¹

Friends, let me stop here for a moment. Take that in. What is the practical application? If we take Jesus at his word, we cannot come to any conclusion other than Peter's testimony in Acts 4: there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. There are not many roads that lead to God. **It does matter what and whom you believe;** it does matter who is Lord of your life. Jesus said, "those who believe in me have life; those who do not face condemnation." It is that clear.

2. Testimonies

The next thing Jesus said to the religious authorities was that they should have recognized him. "Yeah," we think as readers, "how could they not know? How could they miss this?" However. However, if Jesus walked into the sanctuary today and said, "I'm back," without a big flashy entrance, would we recognize him? We put in psychiatric wards people who say, "I am Jesus Christ." In so many ways we are not looking for Jesus to show up; would we recognize him if he did? What would he need to say or do to convince us?

Here, Jesus gave three separate examples of why the Jews should have known who he was. First, and least authoritative but perhaps the most persuasive for the religious authorities, was **the testimony of John the Baptist**. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is He!" Boy, that had to irk Jesus' opponents. It was widely believed that John was a prophet, it was widely accepted that he was a man of God; yet these same opponents had rejected John.

Second, Jesus pointed out that the religious authorities could simply use their own eyes and **see what works Jesus was doing**. The very things he was doing, the conversations he was having – these were a testimony that Jesus was who he said he was. The authorities knew – and Jesus knew they knew – that only God was capable of doing the things that Jesus was doing.

Third, Jesus referred them back to **Scripture**. Scripture, he said, testified to who he was. His coming was foretold in Scripture. Scripture is more than just a rule book. If you read the Bible simply to tell you how to live your life, you miss the point. You have to read the Bible to draw – and be drawn – closer to the author. What does that mean?

We are excited about baseball season beginning again. Yet, imagine if we had never seen the game played and all we had was the rule book for baseball. We would read about the dimensions of the field. We would read about how rosters are established. We would read about what constitutes an "inning." We would read all these things and have no idea of the beauty and artistry of seeing the players play. How do you explain by the rule book the wonder of Shohei Otani pitching and hitting?

¹ Colin G. Kruse, Tyndale Commentary, [Vol 4: Jn, p. 156]

How could you enjoy the artistry and frustration of a Fernando Tatis? How could you appreciate the joy of an Anthony Rizzo or Freddie Freeman?

Jesus' opponents were not looking for the one whom Scripture foretold. They wanted to regulate the height of the grass and the kind of chalk used for the baselines and batters' boxes. Keeping the field pristine was more important than watching for the ones for whom the field was prepared.

John's testimony. Jesus' works. Scripture. Powerful witnesses; even so, the Jews did not recognize him.

For those of you who are praying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come," why is that your prayer? How did you come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior? What testimony spoke to you? What did God use to convict your heart? Was it a thought, an answer to prayer, or something someone said? Whatever it was, praise God for calling you as his own.

What are the testimonies that give you encouragement?

Each month, the session (the elders charged with shepherding the mission and ministry of this congregation) begins our time together by reviewing what we have seen God do in the last 30 days. Where and how has God touched lives? What has God done beyond what we planned or anticipated? How can we see God moving in our midst – and, through us, out into the congregation and beyond? Things range from the mundane to the magnificent, from the ordinary to the ordained, and from the simple to the spectacular. We have celebrated baptisms. We have celebrated healing. We have celebrated miracles and missions. We have celebrated graduations and retirements. We have celebrated gifts – and God's goodness providing resources at just the right time. There is never nothing. My hope – my prayer – is that some of these things are filtering out of the session meeting and into all of your ears so that you too can be encouraged by knowing God is alive and well and active in our midst.

The point of the exercise was that when we have eyes to see, it is overwhelming to consider everything that God is doing in our midst – creating life where once there was death or hopelessness. It is easy to think conceptually, "Yes, I know God is working;" it is another thing altogether when we engage in remembering real events in real time with real people. When we realize that the Holy Spirit is moving and touching and transforming in our own lives and in the lives of people we know – well, we sit up a little straighter, our eyes are a little brighter, our direction is a little clearer, we experience hope and joy.

Part of the reason we have been pushing participation in the Great Cloud of Witnesses is so that we become a congregation that tells of the mighty acts of God. For those of you participating in the 1 Peter study, that language should sound familiar. One of the responsibilities of believers as the priesthood of all believers is to "proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." We are to tell of the things we see, the things we hear, and the things we experience. These are an encouragement to other believers. These testimonies strengthen the body.

So here is **the practical application and this is a good exercise** for everyone. It sounds kind of “Dr. Phil-ish,” but it would be worth doing: take a pad of paper and a pencil and for an hour, write down every experience you have where God has touched your life. What has happened to you? What has happened with people you know? What have you seen with your own eyes? What have you heard with your own ears? What have you discovered from other people?

After about five minutes, your mind will start to wander down the road with one example or another. Although that can be fun, stop yourself and keep thinking. Keep writing down a word or two as a description of the time. See how many you can get. Then, when the hour is over, go back through and spend some time meditating and reflecting upon the scope and extent of God’s goodness. These are your testimonies that you have to share.

3. Ultimately, Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for their lack of love for God.

Jesus knew their hearts. Lack of evidence was not the problem; it was a lack of love for God. Their righteousness was found in their own abilities and noting how they were better than other people.

The witnesses were there – if the Jews would have had eyes to see them. The witnesses are here, too – if God grants the eyes to see them. You cannot argue someone into faith. You can have the best arguments in the world, you can articulate the gospel with perfect clarity, you can speak passionately with complete integrity and still not convince someone who is unwilling to believe. That unwillingness to believe is an issue of pride – self-love – and reflects an unwillingness to love God.

Over the course of years, I have had a number of these conversations. Normally, I end up asking this one question, “What would it take to convince you to have faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? What does God need to do or what needs to happen in your life for you to be able to accept the truth of the cross?” There usually is no answer or “I do not know.”

The issue is not a cognitive one – it is not an issue of information. Just talking *about* God often reveals a great deal about peoples’ hearts. There is a tenderness or a hardness of heart that quickly becomes apparent.

R.C. Sproul tells the story of a well-known professional golfer was playing in a tournament with President Gerald Ford, Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. After the round was over, one of the other pros on the tour asked, “Hey, what was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham?” The pro said with disgust, “I don’t need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat!” With that he headed for the practice tee. His friend followed, and after the golfer had pounded out his fury on a bucket of golf balls, he asked, “Was Billy a little rough on you out there?” The pro sighed and said with embarrassment, “No, he didn’t even mention religion.” Astonishingly, Billy Graham had said nothing about God, Jesus, or religion, yet the pro stomped away after the game accusing Billy of trying to ram religion down his throat. A hard heart.

Alternatively, take the story of Helen Keller. The story is told that after Helen Keller’s teacher, Anne Sullivan, had given her the names of physical objects in sign language, Miss Sullivan attempted to explain God and tapped out the symbols for the name “God.” Much to Miss Sullivan’s surprise,

Helen spelled back, "Thank you for telling me God's name, Teacher, for he has touched me many times before." Helen Keller knew something of God's signature from nature, but it was wordless.² A tender heart.

Note how specific and personal Jesus was in his judgment. "*You*," he said to those who were complaining, seeking to kill him, "*You* search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet *you* refuse to come to me to have life."

How is your heart towards God? Are you waiting for God to prove himself to you this morning? Are you at the place where you recognize the futility of trying to be righteous on your own? Will you this morning – either for the first time, or for the first time today – come to Jesus to have life?

Conclusion

Jesus was uncompromising about his identity and his mission. As John said in the prologue, "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."

When you go out this morning, go in the confidence that Jesus is who he said he is – and that in him is life.

Amen.

Questions:

1. Why is it important to know that Jesus was not a victim?
2. Would we recognize Jesus if he showed up? What would he need to say or do to convince us?
3. Take a pad of paper and a pencil and for an hour, right down every experience you have where God has touched your life. What has happened to you? What has happened with people you know? What have you seen with your own eyes? What have you heard with your own ears? What have you discovered from other people?

² The Billy Graham and Helen Keller illustrations were found at sermonillustrations.com.