

## **He is Marvelously Worthy (John 5:19-30)**

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How-to sermons are no less popular than how-to books. We like practical things. We like someone to tell us exactly what we need to do to make our life and world all we want it to be. Give me some action steps for growing my marriage, for improving my parenting, for strengthening my friendships. Don't give me a bunch of religious talk. Tell me what to do.

Friends, the Word of God is exceedingly practical. You will not find a single part of Scripture that fails to make a claim on our life in some way. But the application doesn't begin with what we're supposed to do on the outside, as right and necessary as that is. The application begins with who we are on the inside, with the orientation of our heart, the object of our affections, with what fills us with awe and delight.

There's a reason Jesus identifies the first and greatest commandment as this. Matt 22:37, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." If our hearts are filled with love for God, fueled by a deep sense of awe at who he is and what he's done, the right behaviors in various areas of life will follow. That's where all genuine growth in the Christian life starts and what makes the middle of Jn 5 such a precious gift. For here Jesus, the Son of God, gives us a glimpse of the majesty of his person and work in the context of the eternal order and operations of the Triune God.

Speaking of this passage, J.C. Ryle observes, "These verses begin one of the most deep and solemn passages in the four Gospels. They show us the Lord Jesus asserting his own divine nature, his unity with God the Father, and the high dignity of his office. Nowhere does our Lord dwell so fully on these subjects as in the chapter before us. And nowhere, we must confess, do we find out so thoroughly the weakness of man's understanding. There is much, we must all feel, that is far beyond our comprehension in our Lord's account of himself..."

And yet, there's nothing better, friends. Nothing is more needful. Nothing is more practical. Nothing is more satisfying, perspective-altering, or life-changing than having your soul transfixed by the unsearchable greatness of Jesus. John Owen is right. "Let us get it fixed in our minds that this glory of Christ in his divine-human person is the best, the most noble and beneficial truth that we can think about or set our hearts on."

As always, context is crucial. Jesus has just finished making the Jews hopping mad. How so? By healing a lame man on the Sabbath and defending his actions in v. 17 by

claiming to do the very work of God himself. In their eyes, he was guilty of blasphemy. There are not multiple gods. There is One True God, Yahweh. You're clearly a man, Jesus. How dare you denigrate the Holy One, our Father, by identifying yourself with him! But Jesus doesn't back down. He defends himself by explaining the exact nature of his relationship to God the Father in vv. 18-30.

The essence of Jesus' retort is this: I'm not *making* myself equal with God in the sense that I'm grasping for a divine identity or authority I don't already have. Nor am I setting myself up as some sort of independent, divine individual. I'm including myself within the singular divine essence, the one divine identity, not because I'm God the Father, but because I'm his Son. You think by claiming equality with Father I'm blaspheming God. I'm stealing the honor that is due him alone. But I'm not. I'm the eternally begotten Son in whom the glory of the Father is most fully revealed.

The theological territory covered in these verses is enormous, but I believe the Lord has a singular intended effect in view. There's something of which we must be convinced, not because it's implausible but because it's true: **Jesus is marvelously worthy of honor as the Son of God the Father.** Why? Jesus himself gives us three reasons, each of which begin with, "Truly, truly, I say to you..."

### **1) THE SON DOES THE FATHER'S WORK** (vv. 19-23)

V. 19, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." Only God can do the works of God. So the fact that Jesus does "what he sees the Father doing" tells us he isn't just a man. He's God in human flesh. He's a distinct person from God the Father who possesses the same divine essence and nature as the Father.

And yet the order of their relationship is not reciprocal. The Father doesn't do whatever he sees the Son doing. The Son does whatever he sees the Father doing. In fact, he can do nothing "of his own accord" or "on his own initiative." The Son always acts in obedient submission to the Father's divine will and purpose. It's not what makes Jesus the Son. It is how he relates to the Father as the eternally begotten Son. They don't defer to one another. There's a clear line of authority from the Father to the Son.

Köstenberger and Swain put it this way. "The Father commands; the Son obeys. But the Son does not obey because he is inferior to the Father or 'under compulsion' to do so. He obeys the Father because the Father's will is his will and because obedience to the Father is the truest personal expression of his filial unity with the Father. In this sense,

the Son is equal in authority to the Father as the Son of the Father, whose will is always to obey the Father's will."

So how does that work out in practice? How do we know that Jesus, as the Son of God, isn't doing his own work, but rather the work of the Father? Jesus gives us four reasons, starting with the second half of v. 19, each of which begin with the word "for."

**First, the Father and the Son accomplish the same mission.** Look back at v. 19. "For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise." Jesus does not mean his actions as the Son are indistinguishable from the actions of the Father. The Father did not come into the world; he sent his Son. Nor did the Father die on the cross; his Son did.

At the same time, there is an essential unity to their activity such that whenever the Father is active, the Son is active. Wherever the Father is working, the Son is working. They're engaged in the same mission, both in creation and redemption. To borrow a human analogy, it's a family business.

**Second, the Father and the Son share the same knowledge.** Because the Father loves the Son, what does he do to express his pleasure? V. 20, he "shows him all that he himself is doing." Jesus is able to do the Father's work because the Father reveals absolutely everything he is doing to the Son.

Why is that an expression of love? Because the works of the Father display the perfection of his character and therein lies the greatest joy in the universe, not only for us, but also for God himself. Nothing satisfies the Son more than beholding the manifold glory of the Father. It's a glimpse of intra-trinitarian delight, the pleasure of God in God.

And when the Father shows the Son all that he is doing and the Son freely and joyfully participates in all the Father is doing, what sort of opportunity are we afforded? The opportunity to "marvel" at the character and ways of God displayed through the person and work of the Son. V. 20, "And greater works than these will he show him," culminating in Jesus' redeeming work on the cross, "so that you may marvel."

The ultimate reason the Father discloses his work to the Son and the Son accomplishes the work of his Father is so that we, as finite creatures, might stand in awe of the greatness of God. It's the reason God created us. It's the reason God redeems us.

And the wellspring of it all is the Father's love for the Son. Remember that. What guarantees the Son's faithfulness to accomplish the Father's marvelous work in your life

isn't your love for God. It's God's love for himself. It's the Father's delight in the Son, and his faithfulness to disclose to the Son all that the Father is doing in your life so he might participate in all the Father is doing in your life.

**Third, the Father and the Son exercise the same power.** In v. 21, Jesus asserts a prerogative for himself that the Old Testament exclusively reserves for God – power to impart the gift of life. 1 Sam 2:6, "The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up." In the same way the Father "raises the dead and gives them life," so too does the Son.

It's a power Jesus exercised physically and spiritually when he walked the earth. It's a power he continues to exercise today whenever he takes hearts like ours that are cold and dead to God and gives us new life through the gift of faith and repentance. And it's a power he will exercise in a physical sense once again on the day he returns. The life-giving power that God the Father has, God the Son has as well.

**Finally, the Father and the Son receive the same honor.** In v. 22, Jesus tells us the Father has also entrusted him with responsibility for judging the universe, another power the Old Testament reserves for God himself. We'll look more closely at the Son's judgment in a few minutes. For now, focus on the Father's goal. Why has the Father entrusted responsibility for judgment to the Son? V. 23, so "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."

"You guys say you're angry with me because you're jealous for the glory of the Father. But listen. If you really care about God's glory and not your own, you will honor me because the Father's eternal plan, his unrelenting ambition, is for me to receive the same worship, the same honor, the same praise and adoration that he deserves."

Brothers and sisters, no one is more committed to honoring the Son than the Father. So much so that if you want to honor the Father, you must honor the Son. What do people say in the name of encouraging religious diversity? We all worship the same God. We just do it in different ways.

V.23 tells us that's impossible. There is only one way to honor the Father. You must honor and trust and obey his only begotten Son – not as a good teacher or a mighty prophet, but as God himself for that he who he is. God has not permitted us to worship him in whatever way we desire. Good intentions are not enough. You cannot honor the Father unless you honor the Son whom he sent.

How do we know the Son does the Father's work? Because they accomplish the same mission, share the same knowledge, possess the same power, and receive the same honor. That's the first reason the Son is worthy of honor. He does the Father's work.

## **2) THE SON SPEAKS THE FATHER'S WORD** (v. 24)

The fact that the Son does the Father's work, including the ability to give life "to whom he will" is not, in and of itself, good news for sinners like us. For it leaves unanswered critical questions: (A) To whom will he give it? (B) And how can you receive it if you have repeatedly failed to give the Son the honor he is due?"

Read v. 24 carefully with me. "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." Praise God the Father doesn't just have a plan of salvation. He has communicated to us through the person of his Son exactly what we must do in order to be saved.

Jesus lays out two requirements, though grammatically they are inseparable, two sides of the same coin. We must hear Jesus' words and we must believe the Father who sent him. We might expect v. 24 to say, "whoever hears my words and believes me." Must we believe Jesus' words in order to find life? Absolutely. But he makes an even more profound point here. When the Son is speaking, the Father is speaking, so much so that to hear and believe Jesus' words is to hear and believe the Father who sent him. So what does Jesus say? What must we believe?

Jn 3:14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." To believe Jesus is to trust that he was lifted up for you. That he died your death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for your sins. And that because he died, now you can live, not because you deserve life from God or with God, but because Jesus earned it for you. Through faith and repentance, you can exchange your rags for his riches, your death for his life.

If you've done that, Christian, then know two things are you of you right now. First, you are no longer under judgment. Jesus doesn't say you won't in the future. He says you are not right now. "He does not [present tense], come into judgment." Not now, not tomorrow, not next week, nor any other day for the rest of your life, you are not condemned. Praise the Lord!

Second, you have passed "from death to life." A cataclysmic change has taken place. You're no longer living in the kingdom of darkness. You have been carried across the

border, rescued by King Jesus. You now live in the kingdom of God. You're still sojourning in a broken world, but you're doing it as a protected citizen of the kingdom of heaven, kept by God's grace, nourished by his Word, sustained through prayer, and upheld by his people. Through the presence and power of the Spirit, you have received the gift of eternal life. It's not something you're waiting to receive in the future on the day you die. It's something you have right now.

Right now you get to taste his comfort in your sorrows, his nearness in your isolation, his faithfulness in your wandering, his power in your weakness. Right now you get to experience God, enjoy God, and become more like God. Jesus isn't just good news on the final day. He is good news today. Through faith in his work – not in your good works (including your own faith) – you can know life as it was meant to be, not the mess we have made it to be.

Jesus is marvelously worthy of honor as the Son of God the Father because he speaks the Father's Word, first and foremost, the saving word of the gospel. The Son does the Father's work. The Son speaks the Father's word. Finally...

### **3) THE SON WIELDS THE FATHER'S AUTHORITY** (vv. 25-30)

V. 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." How does that happen? What enables Jesus to raise Lazarus from physical death in Jn 11? What enables Jesus to raise us from spiritual death today? What will enable him on the day he returns to raise the bodies of every man or woman who has ever lived back to life? Two things.

First, the Father has eternally granted the Son the self-existent life he himself enjoys. As human beings, we don't have a category for that kind of existence. All of us are contingent beings. We're dependent on God to give us life and sustain our life. Not so the Son of God. He has life "in himself," just like the Father. He always has and he always will. That's why he can raise the dead.

Second, the Father has given the Son authority to execute judgment because (v. 27) he is "the Son of Man." Here too we have to be really careful. The fact that the Father "has given" Jesus authority to judge the universe does not mean there was ever a time when he lacked such authority. The fact that the Father gives it and the Son receives it does not reflect an inequality of rank but rather a functional order of relationship.

It's a relationship the prophet Daniel glimpsed in Dan 7:13-14. "I saw in the night visions, and 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."

But don't marvel at my title, Jesus says. Marvel at what I will do on the last day. V. 28, for "an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out..." What can your voice accomplish, friend? Can you speak worlds into existence? Can you decree the end from the beginning? Can you still the raging sea? Can you awaken a dead heart? The Lord can and the Lord does. Ps 29:4, "The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty."

On the final day, Jesus will speak the same word he does to Lazarus in Jn 11, "Come out." And every human being who has ever lived will rise before him – not as ghosts, not as vapid spirits, but as living, breathing, human beings, rich and poor, black and white, summoned to the great assize.

You will stand before Jesus on that day to be judged on the basis of your works. If you have "done good," living an obedient life of repentance and faith toward God, you will experience a resurrection to life. If you have "done evil," trying to create life for yourself by keeping all the rules or breaking all the rules, you will experience a resurrection of judgment. No one fades into oblivion or eternal slumber. All will hear his voice. All will rise. And only those who choose to follow Jesus in this life will be saved.

## **CONCLUSION**

No matter what you choose to believe about Jesus right now, you cannot avoid dealing with him on the final day. He is the gravitational center of the universe. The One who created all things, upholds all things, and is returning to make all things new. **He is marvelously worthy of honor as the Son of God the Father.** For he does the Father's work, he speaks the Father's word, and he exercises the Father's authority.

How should we respond? Jesus has already told us. Marvel at him. Don't spend your days making much of yourself. Make much of Jesus. Meditate on the splendor of his person. Think long and hard about all the ways he is gloriously unlike you. Stand in awe of him, not the other people around you. Praise him for making a way for us to receive the gift of eternal life and be delivered from the coming judgment. Resolve to honor him by listening to his word, believing his word, and then doing what it says.



As creatures, we cannot begin to comprehend the full glory of our Creator. But what we glimpse in Jesus is more than enough to merit our praise, now and for ages to come.