

Like Father Like Son

by Steve Zeisler

I want to begin by reading one of the most famous passages from the writings of C. S. Lewis, from his apologetic work "Mere Christianity:"

(many) people 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 a 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.

Most of us would reject the sentiment that Jesus was a great moral teacher only, but I suspect nevertheless, that we are more subject to what Lewis calls "patronizing nonsense" than we are aware. We often hold the teaching of Jesus at a distance; we deradicalize it, we do not receive with the forcefulness he intended the absolutely remarkable claim of his position as God incarnate.

In this series of messages on the discourses of Christ, we will be looking at John 5 today where I think we will see a passage that exactly fits the sentiments I just quoted from C. S. Lewis. No one could have said the things Jesus said in these verses unless he was a lunatic, the most vicious deceiver who ever lived, or else Lord and God. John 5:16-18:

And 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 cause 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.

We can see right away the direction Jesus takes. He is not content to be persecuted merely because he broke the Sabbath. There are much better reasons to hate him than that. He claimed to be equal with God.

He goes on to make that statement even more forcefully in John 5:19 and following:

Jesus therefore 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 greater works than these will He show Him, that you may 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 any one, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 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 shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. For Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 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

shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds, to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

There are three "Truly, truly," "Amen, amen" statements in these verses. Each of them introduces a new subject and each of these subjects builds on the previous one. In John 5:19 we have the first "Verily, verily." I want you to pay particular attention to this: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father is doing and these things the Son does in like manner." Now that is a staggering claim. From the dawn of history, the question "What is God up to?" has been a universal one. All of us long to know the answer to it. Where is God's hand in our affairs? What are his purposes? Why is this world such an abominable mixture of chaos and destruction; beauty and growth; terrible cruelty and loving winsome kindness? Where is God at work in this crazy quilt? What is he doing? What are his purposes? They are lost to us because we cannot see God at work; we cannot observe his purposes.

But here in these verses Jesus claims to be able to do just that. And this claim becomes all the more remarkable because he goes on to say, "I am living out the things I see. If you want to know what God is doing if you want to be able to see the purposes and the hand of God watch me." What the Son sees the Father do he does himself." He doesn't ask you to spend \$500 to come to his weekend seminar to let you in on what God is up to. He doesn't raise an army to go out and smash the infidels. All he says is, "Examine what you see in me and you will learn what God is like"—a remarkable thing.

Jesus highlights two prerogatives belonging only to God which he claims for himself also; two arenas in particular where we see God's activity displayed in him. The first is in John 5:21: "just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes." Only God can give life. Yet Jesus says "the Son gives life to whom he wishes." The second concerns judgment John 5:22: "For not even the Father judges anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son."

Now think about what the world offers so that you might experience life. We all recognize that our lives are not what they ought to be. We are dying. Whether we will admit it or not we are bound and decaying and unhappy. But the world still says there are ways that you can find life itself. A casino in Nevada beckons us to "Come to Life." But that life is elusive, short lived, and subject to all kinds of fads. The very thing you long for today may be passé and useless tomorrow. The world is competitive. The more you have the less someone else can have. People pollute their own bodies, pouring things, injecting things into themselves in an effort to find life. People abort their own children so that they might pursue life. They trample on the weak, they take advantage of the defenseless, they rob them of their resources so that they themselves may more effectively pursue life. They corrupt their own character, they sell their own souls for "life." Yet Jesus made this remarkable claim, "I am the one who dispenses life to whom I choose."

One way I find myself subject to the siren song of the world that it can offer life concerns how I view time off from work. Every year I find myself looking forward to my vacation. Working for a church and studying the Bible for a living has somehow created in me the very strange mindset that when I am on vacation I will stop studying and praying and all those things. But when I finally get to the beach, I find myself less and less happy; less and less fulfilled. I am deliberately further from the Lord, and less alive than I was at some of the most harried times of the year. Jesus is the one who gives life. I am a fool to stiff-arm him or go off in any other direction to look for it.

The second thing Jesus highlights about himself is that he is the judge; he is the one who says what things will or will not last. Have you ever considered how much your accomplishments are worth? What success have you made of the number of years and the resources God has given you? There is a really frightening event recorded in the book of Daniel. An Emperor named Belshazzar is at a party, and a mysterious hand appears out of nowhere and begins writing on a wall. The heart of the message is, "Belshazzar, you have been weighed on a scale and found wanting. Your life doesn't measure up." What would happen if our lives were weighed in a balance? Do you know how to find out? Do you know what standard to apply? Do you know what the "balance" is? It is the judgment of Christ. What does Jesus say about me? What does he say I am worth? Which of my

accomplishments meet with his approval? Nothing else matters, because Jesus is the judge.

The world uses two measures to decide whether somebody is worth something or not. One is the ability to make money and to preserve it by investments, etc. The second is fame; to be well known and widely appreciated, to be remembered by succeeding generations. Now Jesus said some very interesting words about those two things. One time he sat across from the temple treasury with his disciples and watched people donating money. After watching a woman putting in two small copper coins, he said she had given more than all the great sums the wealthy people put in. So his judgment has nothing to do with how much money you have. Rather, his standard is how wisely did you use what you had? To what extent were your resources available to God for his use?

Near the end of Jesus' life, another woman broke a vial of perfume and poured it on him. Jesus received her action as an anointing of him for burial, saying, "What this woman has done will be remembered forever. She will be honored for this." That monument to her will last forever, because Jesus' words will never pass away. More people have read the Bible than have read any other record of the people and events of the first century. In a sense, therefore, that woman (her name is not even given in the books of Matthew and Mark) is more famous than the most prominent women of her day because of her selfless act of love for Jesus.

Sometimes I imagine myself as the "Mother Theresa" of my age, who, after a lifetime of humble service to God, will receive the Nobel Prize. At the presentation ceremony I'll blush, cast my eyes down and say, "Oh, you really shouldn't." At other times I imagine myself writing a book that will be remembered forever. We are all susceptible to those two things—the desire to make money and the desire to be well known and widely appreciated, to leave a mark on our generation. But Jesus said that that woman who poured the perfume over him did something that will be remembered forever. And he is the judge; he is the one who decides what is of value and what is not, what will burn and what won't. In these matters he is displaying the things his Father is doing. In both the giving of life and the judging of human endeavor he is showing us what God is like.

Now Jesus did not do either of those things merely because they were interesting, or for conversations' sake. There is a purpose behind his display of the motives and the actions of his Father. First, that we may marvel at them that we should not grow bored and unconcerned about the things Christ has done John 5:20. There ought to be an excitement, a marveling about the great, magnificent things our Lord has done. They are not of little consequence. They are magnificent, and ought to strike us as such.

And marveling at the mighty works of Christ is only the beginning. This morning we sang, "Magnify the precious name of Jesus." Now that is an appropriate kind of response, but it is not enough. If that is all we do we have fallen short, because a further result of these things is that we should honor Jesus: "in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5:23). Jesus says, "the Father loves the Son" (John 5:20). Make no mistake, the Father loves his Son and he intends that his Son be honored. Marveling ought to lead to honoring; an awakening to the magnificence of Christ ought to lead to worship, to belief and obedience and to placing ourselves under him.

How do we honor Christ? What does this requirement to honor him mean? John 5:24: "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." That is, if we listen to the words of Jesus, if we examine his statements and discover that we hear and understand and love the Creator God himself standing behind his words, then we are honoring him. God himself speaks through Jesus. If we believe and embrace that, then we are honoring Jesus and we have "passed from death to life."

Life and death, those two conditions exist in the world. But Jesus goes on and draws it to a finer point, John 5:25 and following: "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live." This is not merely a general statement of fact that life and death are present. This is also important for you at the moment. An hour is coming when everything is going to end; when tombs will be opened. Some will receive life, some condemnation and death. This is not just interesting theology that is provocative to contemplate. There is a present point to it. That hour is for those of you who are listening to

me right now, says Jesus, "when the dead (those dead in their sins) shall hear the voice of the Son of God and live." The decisions which we are making right now matter. We should be amazed at the works of Christ, and that amazement should lead to a commitment to honor him now, not just some day in the future. These things are critically important now. Jesus is forcing his hearers to that point. He reminds them that he is the life-giver and the judge John 5:26: "For just as the Father has life in Himself; even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 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 shall hear His voice, and shall come forth." The final point of what he is saying is to awaken people to their need to pay attention, to their need to make a decision, to the need right now to honor him.

We too can listen to and make use of the things Jesus said. We can examine our lives right now. We can ask ourselves are we listening to his voice, letting him be judge, are we giving him the right to make determinations about what things are true and valuable and what things are not? Have we decided that we will live based on what he says is worthwhile, what he says is worth having, what he says is worth living for? Or are we going to allow some other individual or idea or corporation to determine that for us? What about finding vital, worthwhile experiences? Who gives them? Where do you seek them out? Where do we go to alleviate the dreariness, the boredom and drabness of our everyday experience? Do we go to Christ as the dispenser of life? Do we draw near to him? Do we listen to him? Do we obey him? Do we allow him to thrust us out and make use of us, to take on the challenges he gives us, to do battle with his enemies and laugh with his friends? Where do we seek life?

Jesus says he has the unique prerogative of God to dispense these things—life—to this world. That ought to amaze us. That ought to lead us to honor him right now. That ought to lead us to make decisions today about the issues directly confronting us, the concerns that his voice is speaking to us about this present moment. "Truly, truly I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live."

Thank you, Lord, for the aggressive nature of your word. Which seeks us out, pointing to our shortcomings, facing us with the areas in which we have need of you, and then offering us life.

Thank you that you have sought us out in these things; you haven't left us to ourselves. We express now our gratitude and love to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Steve Zeisler
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