

The life-giving voice of the Son

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as I say, a warm welcome to the Tron lunchtime service. I hope you find the next few minutes refreshing and helpful and encouraging. In a moment, I'll pray and then we'll read our passage of the Bible and then I'll preach from that. But let's start with a prayer.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we come to you in our weakness and our sin, knowing that we've failed to live up to your standards this morning.

So we ask that just as you have promised us, through the promises you've given through Jesus Christ, your own son, you will forgive us and restore us so that we can live for you.

And help us, Father, this afternoon, each of us to live for you, wherever we serve you. If we work to do our jobs wholeheartedly and well in a way that brings you praise.

And if we're retired or unemployed, to spend that time too in love and service for others. And in thankful enjoyment of what you give.

[1 : 1 4] Help us now as we listen and help us as we go out to walk with the help of the Holy Spirit in close fellowship with Jesus. Changed evermore to be like him.

Imperfect but pressing forward. And joyful because of all your kindness to us. Prepare our hearts to know you better. So that we may praise you forever.

Amen. Amen. Well, we're continuing in our series on John's gospel. And we're going to look at John chapter 5 now.

If you've got the church Bibles, that's page 890. John chapter 5. And we'll start reading at verse 16. Page 890.

Amen. So page 890.

[2 : 2 1] So page 890. John chapter 5, starting at verse 16. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus. Because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

But Jesus answered them. My father is working until now. And I am working. 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. So Jesus said to them. So Jesus said to them.

And 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.

For the father loves the son. And shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him. So that you may marvel.

[3 : 1 9] For as the father raises the dead and gives them life. So also the son gives life to whom he will. The father judges no one. But has given all judgment to the son.

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. 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.

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. For as the father has life in himself.

So he has granted the son also. To have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment. Because he is the son of man. Do not marvel at this.

[4 : 2 3] For an hour is coming. When all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. And come out. Those who have done good. To the resurrection of life. And those who have done evil.

To the resurrection of judgment. And to plunge in fairly straight into some heavy stuff. How do you feel today about your approaching death?

Now, it's not a question we often ask in our culture. But it is one that we will all face sooner or later. And people around us have such strange mixtures of feelings about it.

And I think of a very close friend. Who all through his twenties would wake up in a cold sweat in the night. Thinking of that coming death. But then I think again.

When I was helping in a hospital chaplaincy. Visiting a cardiac ward. Full of middle-aged men who had had heart attacks. Who would never mention. How close they had come to death.

[5 : 29] And they were just desperate to cover over that episode in their lives. And get back to working the long hours. And raking in the money. In exactly the way, of course, that had brought them to their heart attack in the first place.

Fear on the one hand. And complete denial on the other. Now, death is not a pleasant topic. Even if you are a Christian. Even if you don't take our culture's view of it.

It hurts just as much. And we grieve just as much when our loved ones die. And yet, it is different.

And if you've had the privilege of being at Christian deathbeds.

As I have. Or going to Christian funerals. You know just how different it can be. Grief, yes. But often smiles and grief at the same time.

And pain at death, yes. But pain in hope. Pain with a future. And all of that comes from a simple confidence in who Jesus is.

[6 : 39] Confidence in what he says in this passage. You know, if you were here last week, you'll have seen Jesus perform a truly extraordinary miracle. Instantly healing a man who had been sick and disabled for 38 years.

A symbol, in other words, of his power to give life with his voice. But because he'd done it on the Sabbath, the religious authorities were furious with him. And you can see that in verse 16.

They were persecuting him because of it. And unlike many similar occasions where people were angry with what Jesus did on the Sabbath, he doesn't argue with them about their dodgy interpretations of the law.

He hits the nuclear button. He says, my father is working until now, verse 17. And I am working. To us, that might sound fairly innocuous.

All Christians can call God father. But verse 18 tells us that if we read it like that, we haven't quite got what he's saying. Because their reaction in verse 18 is to seek all the more to kill him.

[7 : 45] This is far worse in their eyes than anything he's done so far. Are they overreacting? Well, Jesus doesn't disagree with them.

He doesn't tell them they're wrong in what they're thinking. He just helps them to see better what he means. You see, God had commanded people to rest on the Sabbath long before.

That was a good law. But God himself, of course, could not rest on the Sabbath. Because his job, as it were, includes holding the universe in being and governing all things moment by moment with wisdom and love.

And if he stops doing that for a moment, then everything disappears like a soap bubble in a sharp wind. And Jesus is saying, you know how a father and a son work together in business?

You know, perhaps, how Jesus would have learned his trade in Nazareth as a carpenter with Joseph? Well, my father and I work together in that same intimate way in the family business.

[8 : 51] Upholding everything. We don't rest on Sunday. We make the sun rise and the rain fall and the fruit grow in the trees. And this is, just as they see it is, a claim to be absolutely equal with God.

But not, and this is where they went wrong, a claim to be another separate God, a rival. Not at all. He is claiming to be equal as the son is with the father.

The same kind of person, not worse, not weaker. But directed in an intimate, close relationship in his time on earth, as an adult son might in those days be directed by his father.

And we see here a picture of the life of the Trinity. The one God, the one being who is so great that he contains within himself three relationships, three persons who share all that they do and all that they are.

And all through this passage here, he weaves together his eternal equality with God and his human dependence on God at the same time. Now, as we look at the rest of the passages, it has a very clear structure and a clear argument.

[10 : 01] Jesus is telling us something. And we'll get back to the topic of life and death in a minute, because that is what he is talking about. You'll see three times he uses the strong words, underlining what he's saying.

Truly, truly, I say to you. Verse 19, verse 24, verse 25. The first one, in 19 to 23, Jesus tells us how he is one with the father.

And that is his key point that makes everything else flow from it. And he gives four sub points for that, each of them starting with the word for. Verses 19, 20, 21, 22.

But then the other two statements, truly, truly, I say to you, in verse 24 and 25, give us the vital consequences, the consequences for us of what he's saying.

In verse 24, we see that his voice gives eternal life today. And in verse 25, that his voice will raise all the dead to judgment on the last day.

[11:03] So firstly, 19 to 23, the son is one with the father. Truly, truly, I say to you, the son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing.

Now, for a moment, when they heard that, they'd have thought he was downplaying what he just said. Don't worry, I'm not making myself equal with the father. It makes him sound like he's saying he's lesser. But then he goes on to explain it in four ways that completely contradict that idea, each starting four.

Firstly, the end of verse 19. For whatever the father does, the son does likewise. And that is a pretty astonishing claim for a human being to make, isn't it?

He said he doesn't act without the father. But he's also saying the father doesn't act without him. He is claiming to take part in everything that God does.

Creating all things, upholding all things, governing everything from the rise and fall of nations to the death of a sparrow. And verse 20, this is based on the relationship of love.

[12:16] For the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing. Everything from the ants in their nests to the sun on planets that no human eye has ever seen.

And the miracles they're sharing, he says, are part of that. He says, I will show him greater works, you know, greater works than the miracle he has just done, so that you may marvel.

In other words, all that I'm saying, all that I'm doing here, it has an agenda. It's not just me talking about theoretical theology for the fun of it. As he'll say in, I forget the verse, verse around 36, something like that.

But I say these so that you may believe. In other words, so your eyes will be opened, so that you marvel, so that you see reality. He's still operating with the same compassion, the same desire for them to come to him to have life.

And then thirdly, verse 21, he says that just in the same way the father gives life, so does the son. Just as the father raises the dead and gives life, so does the son.

[13:26] And of course, the greatest miracle that he will do in his earthly life, perhaps, is the raising of Lazarus. Later in John's gospel, a man who's been dead and moldering four days, brought straight back to life by the power of his voice.

Through that, the father and the son together show you who the son really is. He is the one who gives life to whoever he wills. And the reason he may do that, verse 22, for the father has given all judgment to the son.

This is his prerogative. In the sharing of their work, the father gives this role to the son. And the Bible, of course, is very clear. No one may judge but God alone.

Psalms 75, 7, just for one example. It is God who executes judgment. But it is God the son before whom we will all one day stand.

Why? Verse 23. Because the father wishes all to honor the son just as they honor him. In other words, you worship God.

[14:39] You must come to worship the son as well. You know, there are plenty of occasions in the Bible where human beings meet greater creatures. You know, they come face to face with angels.

And invariably, the response is to fall flat on your face at the splendor and majesty of these beings. And John himself in the book of Revelation is an example. And when they do, people often, they begin to worship.

And inevitably, the angel will stop them and say, You cannot worship me. I am a creature just like you. You know, perhaps a slightly better looking creature, but a creature.

Only God may receive worship. But here the son is to be honored just as the father is to be honored. So to bring that all together, the son who is living his life here on earth in total dependence, nonetheless, shares the work of the father because he is one with the father.

In these verses, he's teaching us in simple language about mysteries that angels cannot fully grasp. He's behaving like a parent explaining in simple terms to a child things that they won't really fully understand until they grow up.

[15:59] But again, Jesus doesn't teach us these things just for their own sake. He has a purpose here. And the two consequences are what Jesus lays out next. Verse 24.

The son's voice gives eternal life now. Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

Not in the future. Now. He offers us right now that full confidence and assurance of life. Because, as he goes on to say, he does not come into judgment but has passed.

Past tense. Has passed from death to life. Listen to him. Listen to his voice. Trust his father. And the son, the judge, declares himself satisfied with you right now.

And then you will not face judgment. Condemnation will not touch you, in other words, at the final judgment, the final day. You can face death with confidence.

[17:03] Still experiencing all those pains of the present world. But knowing where you're heading. Knowing where you're going. And everything that Jesus says in this passage is a call to listen to that.

A call to come and have life. Verse 34 again. I say these things so that you may be saved. He's calling them to listen to him. He's calling us to listen to him.

Because without him, we face that sentence of death. And after that, of judgment. But he offers us this way through. Perhaps you have listened to him.

Many of us in this room have. But perhaps you still, at times, feel worry and fear. You fear, I'm not good enough.

I've not quite lived up to my side of the bargain. I'm not a very good Christian. Well, Jesus is so clear here. However weak and struggling we are.

[18:05] If you have heard me. If you have trusted me. You have passed from death to life. There is no question about it. There is no surprise yet to come. And there is no condemnation yet to come.

If you are mine, you will live. But from that note of assurance, he then goes to a note of warning in verses 25 to 28.

The son's voice will raise all the dead to judgment. And that is what gives what he says real urgency. We need to listen to what he's saying.

Because he tells us that the son's voice will raise everyone to face that judgment. His voice has power to return life to all the long dead corpses of this world.

Because he is not like us. He is not something made or created. Verse 26. He has been granted by the father to have life in himself. Just as the father has life in himself.

[19:06] You know, he's not a mere channel. He's not taking the father's life and passing it on to us. He himself has been. He's uncreated. Unending. Immortal. Immortal.

And the father has given that to him. So he is life and he can give us life. And verse 27. God has made him his judge.

Made him the life giver. Because he has that divine power of life on the one hand. And on the other hand, verse 27. Because he is the son of man.

In other words, he's been a human being. He has tasted the same weakness that you and I have.

The same temptation. The same pain. And so there is no one in all the universe who is better suited to be the judge.

No one can come to him and complain that he judges those who go through things that he has never faced. He has tasted it all. He knows the struggles that we face.

[20:05] Because he was just like us. And yet because he is divine, he can also give us life when he judges for us. And so verse 28.

He will call all bodies out of the tombs. Everyone who has ever lived. In his next coming, that will happen. And in verse 25 he says, you know, you're already seeing four tests of that.

An hour has come and is now, sorry, an hour is coming and is now here. Already people were being revived from spiritual death. Already a few like Lazarus experienced a restoration to this life.

But in the end, everyone will rise at the sound of his voice. Every man and every woman and every child and every grave and every tomb. In every country, every person whose body was lost or washed away or eaten by animals.

Every single one of them will stand before him again. Because his voice, the voice that spoke the world into being, has power to recreate us all again.

[21 : 13] And you and I on that day, if he hasn't come back first, will come out from the dust of our graves. And we will stand before him.

And we'll be judged. Verse 29. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life. And those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

And that is a real warning. Judgment day is coming. And it is urgent. It is important to listen. But we may think, surely these words of verse 29 contradict what he has just said.

He's saying that those who do good will live and those who do evil will be judged. Whereas a moment ago he'd said that anyone who hears his voice now will live.

This, of course, is not a contradiction. But it's a reflection of the Bible's consistent teaching all across every part of itself.

[22 : 18] When Jesus says that those who have done good will live and those who have done evil will be judged, he does not mean that you get into heaven by doing good things or by being a good person.

He does not mean in theological words that we're justified by our good works. If he did, he couldn't say those two things so close together. To quote Jesus' words later in John in chapter 15, whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

In other words, if you are linked to me, then good will come in your life. And then he says, apart from me, you can do nothing. Not, of course, that morality is impossible without God, or that there aren't many great and splendid things that people do without knowing him.

That's not at all what the Bible teaches. But it does teach that true, utterly unselfish, God-pleasing, God-trusting goodness, what we were made to be is impossible without knowing him.

And about without his help. And that is the sort of thing that counts on the last day. The sort of thing that, because of the way we are, because of our selfishness, we cannot do on our own.

[23 : 35] So what Jesus is saying is this. On the final day, our files will be opened to see if there is evidence of any of that kind of good.

Evidence that we really trusted him. Evidence we depended on him. Evidence that his work and his voice was at work in our lives. In other words, evidence to show whether we really listen to his voice or not.

Now, you may feel, as I think most of us fairly regularly feel, that so far your file shows at best a D-. But that's not the point.

Jesus has said that those who don't have life cannot even attempt the questions. Dead people cannot get a D- on a test.

No. If you trust him, if you hear the son's voice, then on the day he raises you again, your file will show to all the universe and to all the angels that weak and problematic and troubled and sinful as your life may be, there were signs and fruit in it of the true life of God at work, that you were alive in him.

[24 : 49] If, on the other hand, we do not trust him, then there is no hope on that day. There will be no last reprieve and there will be no last chance to change our minds. So Jesus is saying, come to him now while we can.

So, back to that. One day you will face your death and I will face mine. And if we're lucky enough, we will see it coming. And one day after that, after that, we will stand before Jesus himself with our decomposed body brought back to life to stand before him.

We can come to those moments in very different ways. We can come in fear. We can ignore the reality of it and deny it till the last moment, as so many do. Or, I think perhaps of my grandfather, who when he was close to death, he thought he was going to die one day, woke up the next day and wept.

He was so sad he wasn't with Jesus yet. Or, I think of the funeral of a young mother I went to about a decade ago now, left two young teenage girls, an utterly grief-stricken day.

She died of cancer. It was awful for her husband and for her children and for many of us who knew her. And yet, we were able to sing the songs at her funeral with joy.

[26 : 21] You know, we could smile with tears rolling down our faces. And so could they. Why?

Because she had shown us the way forward. She, you know, she wept, leaving her family behind.

But she could talk with joy of where she was going, of the confidence in Christ who had laid hold of her, whose voice had spoken into her life, and would one day speak and bring her into his kingdom forever.

Let's pray. Lord God, these are heavy truths, but you offer us life.

Life that we could not begin to grasp without you. Open our ears to listen. Give us this life that only you can give.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.