

2. The Father and the Son

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[0 : 0 0] Our gracious God, we thank you that at the very heart of the universe is one great loving rule, which has been entrusted to your son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray that whatever our circumstances in life today, whatever our concerns, the things that have been bothering us up to this point, you would please help us in these few minutes we have together to fix our eyes upon him and to learn more about him.

Hear us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. I'd be very grateful if you turn to John's Gospel and to chapter 5.

You'll find that on page 890 in the Church Bibles. And before we read part of this great chapter, a few words of introduction, just to set the scene, we're in John chapter 5 over these next four Wednesday lunchtimes.

Last week we looked at the extraordinary miracle that kicks off all the discussion in this chapter. It's a miracle done on the quiet, but it's so dramatic that it can't be hidden.

[1 : 1 5] It's a miracle done on the Sabbath, and so it leads to huge conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities, because keeping the Sabbath is so important to them.

And in this miracle, and in the discussion that follows, Jesus' response to these people is extraordinary. When criticized for Sabbath breaking, he doesn't say, I wasn't really working on the Sabbath.

He says, yes, I was working. And that's because the Father is working on the Sabbath. Now I'll pick up the reading from verse 16.

This is 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.

[2 : 2 3] So Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing on 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.

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. Sabbath keeping.

[3 : 35] Keeping the Sabbath was a very prominent Old Testament command. Just as God had rested after creation, so the people of Israel had to put down their work one day a week, a weekly reminder of their dependence on God, and a weekly reminder that this world and its everyday business is not all there is.

Sabbath keeping mattered enormously to these people. Once they had been a great and free nation, but now they were small and weak and occupied by a foreign power, and failure to keep the Sabbath was widely recognized as one of the reasons for their current difficulties.

They hadn't obeyed. Things had gone badly. And consequently, they took Sabbath keeping enormously seriously. And even though in the Old Testament, Sabbath rest was all to do with not doing the work that you do every day to earn a living, these people had extended Sabbath rest to include a whole stack of other things.

Like, for example, in this case, not carrying around your sleeping mat on the Sabbath. That's the issue that sparks off this debate. Jesus, very provocatively, does not keep their extra rules.

They're provoked. They want to get rid of him. But his words of explanation are even more provoking than his actions. Verse 17, there it is. My father is working, and I am working.

[5 : 19] An extraordinary thing to say. He could have said, no, carrying your mat on the Sabbath is not Sabbath breaking. This guy's done nothing wrong.

Read your Bible properly. Instead, he takes a completely different angle. Not, this isn't work, but, I am working. And worse still, the reason I am working is that the Father in Heaven is working today, on the Sabbath.

God the Father and I have something profound in common, says Jesus. He works on the Sabbath, and so do I. It's an amazing way to answer the criticism.

Amazing. It's not even a tiny bit defensive, and his hearers are rightly, highly provoked. Verse 18. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Now, we need to pause just a second, and ask ourselves, why was that such a problem to them? In our own age, we have people all the time claiming profound knowledge of the divine.

[6 : 37] What is such a big deal about that? Why does it matter? What's the problem with claiming equality with God? Well, it's twofold, I think. First, potentially, it's a very arrogant-sounding claim, is it not?

In our own age, as in any age, equality means more than just being equal. If I'm equal to you, you can't rule over me. You can disagree, but I don't have to pay attention.

I have the same rights to decide as you have. I need not be bound by you if I'm equal to you. In other words, for us human beings, the word equality is strongly associated with the idea of freedom.

If I'm equal to you, I can be independent of you. Is that what Jesus is saying? I work on the Sabbath? That's because I'm equal with God.

God has no hold over me. I'm able to go against his rules. Is that what he's saying? That would indeed be very arrogant. The second thing is that this is an unsettling claim.

[7 : 46] Let me ask you a very personal question. Have you ever felt desperately at the mercy of competing demands on your life? Demands at work, from family members, husband, wife, children, parents, demands from society, be this, be that, don't be the other.

Perhaps even demands from your church, do this, do that, don't do the other. Have you ever felt, and I know you have, because I have, I cannot possibly do all this.

I cannot satisfy everyone. I feel like a constant disappointment and failure to people. Do you not feel that? Well, let me say, if you recognize that, let me tell you, that is the modern secular equivalent of what is theologically called polytheism.

Having multiple powers making demands on you. Powers that, because they don't talk to one another, make conflicting demands on your life. You can't possibly satisfy them all.

Now, let me say, it's a terrible thing to be a polytheist. Because you have to deal with all the powers all the time. You never quite know if you've kept them all happy, or if in a moment of inattention, you've let one slip with catastrophic results.

[9 : 04] And it is a wonderful relief when a polytheist discovers that really, there is only one God. One rule, which rules everything. You don't have to pay attention to many.

Fundamentally, you just have to pay attention to one. Your life is not the random product of many conflicting powers, but of the one loving rule.

Things won't go wrong if you take your eye off one corner of life, because one loving ruler is involved in the whole thing. And if you're okay with him, fundamentally, at the most fundamental level, you are okay in life.

And that is a wonderfully liberating truth, and worth defending. And therefore, with good reason, these people hated the idea of God having an equal.

Not only has God said that he has no equal, but if he does have an equal, he's not really in control. And there isn't really one loving rule over everything. Jesus seems to be threatening that wonderful truth.

[10 : 12] That's what they're upset about. making God his own father, and making himself equal with God. And that is the issue that runs through all of the rest of the long speech in this chapter.

How is it that Jesus can say this kind of thing and not be threatening the loving rule of God? It's a question of profound importance.

How many rulers are there in the universe, really? One loving rule or multiple competing rules? Our lives are going to look very different depending on which of those is true.

Well, I'm going to look at this passage under two big headings. Both of them have magnificent and far-reaching implications. Point number one. Equality with God is not competition with God.

Look at verse 19. Jesus said to them, 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.

[11 : 24] For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel. Being equal to God, says Jesus, is not the same as being in competition with him.

And here we come to the language of Father and Son, which is very prominent in this chapter and very prominent in this Gospel and in the rest of the New Testament.

It's the great central reality of the Christian message and unique in all the world that there is indeed only one God, but that that one God is not merely one.

Here Jesus talks about Father and Son. Not an illustration, I think, but a reality. He's not saying the relationship between me and the Father is a bit like the relationship between a human Father and Son.

Rather, the Bible says a human Father-Son relationship is a pale reflection of the Father-Son relationship. It works top-down rather than bottom-up.

[12 : 34] We don't look at family to learn about God. We look at God to think rightly about family. Can I just add on that note, your family background may not be all it could have been.

Can I say that the fact that Father may not be a great word for you at gut level is because the human reality didn't match the divine reality not because the idea of Father is a bad idea.

And let me say, if you didn't have a great human father, it needn't mean that that has to dominate your view of God. Let Jesus' words about the Father and the Son dominate your ideas about God.

What specifically is Jesus saying here in verses 19 and 20? Well, simply that the Son does not threaten the Father's loving rule. The Son can do nothing of His own accord for whatever the Father does.

That the Son does likewise. He only does what He sees His Father doing. He does everything He sees His Father doing. The Son does not threaten the Father's loving rule.

[13 : 51] More than that, verse 20, the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything that He is doing. This is a Father who loves His Son.

He shows Him everything He does. He wants to hide nothing from Him. There's nothing He wants to keep secret from His Son because He loves Him. Now, that is a wonderful reality.

First, you see how it relates to the criticism that's coming Jesus' way? equality with God is not competition. The things the Son does fits exactly on top of the things the Father is doing.

There are no overlaps. This is not my work, says Jesus. It's the Father's work as well. He's doing it, so I'm doing it. He says it, so I say it. He heals on the Sabbath, so I do.

He instructs the healed man to carry his mat, so I do. That's the way the argument works. I only do what He shows me, and I do everything that He shows me without fail.

[15 : 03] There is no competition there. Second, let me just step back for a moment and be practical for us. Do you see how wonderfully reassuring it is that this is the way the relationship it is between Father and Son?

Let me ask you a question. How do you know about God? Well, the standard Christian answer to that is, God has very kindly made Himself known to us.

He didn't have to, but He did. The question is usually answered with reference to us. God has kindly spoken to us. We know about God because He has spoken to us, and of course that is true, but this adds a whole new dimension to that.

How do you know about God? Because the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He does. And the Son loves the Father and does everything the Father shows Him.

He does He does everything He does everything He does everything He does everything He does everything. He does everything. He does everything He does everything that He has shown.

[16 : 22] It's wonderfully reassuring. Is this a Father who is going to tell lies to His Son, hide things from His Son, deceive His Son as to the way things are?

Of course not! Many fathers do do that, but not this one. Is this a Son who is going to misrepresent His Father to the world?

Well, of course not! Of course many sons do that with their fathers, but not this one. Father and Son are not in competition. At the heart of the universe is this magnificent relationship that because of its other-centered love spills over into being known by the whole of the created order.

Equality does not mean competition in God. It means loving, united cooperation. Of course, this has implications for us too at the human level, doesn't it?

Do you notice the extraordinary idea here that both equality and submission are there in the Godhead? father and son have the same things, know the same things, yet it's the father that discloses and the son that does what he's shown.

[17 : 44] Again, that is profound because we tend to think that submission to authority is to do with being inferior. We hate it when somebody is to be obeyed, don't we?

especially if we don't think they're better than us. But this son gives us a model for submission. The value is not diminished by submission.

Now, we're all involved in multiple relationships where we're to submit to another, all of us, without fail. Jesus is the pattern for that.

It doesn't mean being inferior. Equality does not mean competition. in God. And it needn't for us. That's the first big thing.

Second big thing, and it flows out of verse 20. My second heading, you ain't seen nothing yet. That's what verse 20 says, isn't it?

[18 : 47] Greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. Healing of a paralyzed man, does that impress you?

Hold on to your hat then, says Jesus. Does that upset you? Well, prepare to be really upset, says Jesus. Jesus mentions two things about the son that come from the father that mean much bigger things are still to come.

first, the son gives life as he chooses. Look at verse 21. Four, as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whom he will.

The father gives life, well, so does the son. The father raises the dead, well, so will the son. The father is able to do precisely what he pleases in relation to life and death, because he's God.

And so is the son. He gives life to whom he will. Healing of a paralyzed man on the Sabbath? You ain't seen nothing yet, says Jesus.

[20 : 06] greater works than these will he show him. And that really will make your eyes pop out. Like the father, the son has absolute power over life and death.

He gives life as he chooses. Second, very striking thing, he judges all. Verse 22. The father judges no one, but as given all judgments to the son, that all may honor the son, just as they honor the father.

God the father is owner, ruler, judge. Of course, Jesus here is knew that only too well and believed it. But here's something they didn't believe, that he's entrusted the judgment of all things into the hands of the son he loves.

the one they are not now willing to honor. Can I say that Jesus, therefore, is the judging authority, the judging authority in the world and on the world.

And let me say that again is reassuring. The judge of the world is not in any way a distant, remote figure. the one who rules the world is not like the one who rules your company or your health service if you work for the health service.

[21 : 38] He's not a pen-pushing bureaucrat who knows nothing about how things really work or what life is really like in the organization. No. This is one who's been here and done it and in the end suffered the worst of the world's injustice and hostility.

humanity. He sees humanity from the inside. He's well qualified to judge human beings rightly. It matters how they related to him and therefore it matters how we relate to him.

Verse 23. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. No matter what these people thought they thought about God, Jesus says, if you're not honouring me, you're not honouring God at all.

All they're concerned for Sabbath breaking and Jesus, they won't accept, well, they're dishonouring God. Of course, the same is true in every age.

The measure of whether you honour God is whether or not you honour his Son. Our attitude towards Jesus is the precise measure of our attitude towards God.

[23 : 00] So together are the Father and the Son. If we've no time for Jesus, we've no time for God. If we won't listen to the words of Jesus, we're not listening to God, no matter what we think.

If we don't worship Jesus, we're not worshipping God. If we love Jesus, we love God. It's as simple as that. We know what we think of God by what we think about Jesus.

Well, our time is gone. Let me step back and summarize such big ideas in these few sentences. Let me summarize. Working on the Sabbath?

I certainly am, says Jesus. And that's because the Father is. Claiming equality with God? I certainly am, says Jesus.

does that claim threaten the supreme rule of God? No, says Jesus. Because he loves me, shows me everything he does.

[24 : 07] I only ever do what I see him doing. Because of that, says Jesus, you're going to see much bigger things. He has power over life and death.

Well, so do I. He is rightful ruler and judge. he's handed it all over to me. Where does the rubber hit the road for us today?

Here? Now? Well, I think the big point is this. Jesus is simply inescapable, unavoidable, unavoidable.

He gives life as he chooses. He judges all. He's inescapable, he's unavoidable.

Look what he says in verse 24. truly, truly, believe it, I say to you. Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

[25 : 09] He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Life or judgment, it will be one or the other, inescapably, for all of us.

Because he gives life as he chooses and he judges all. which will it be? Well, look at the invitation, the positive note. Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me won't end up in judgment, but has eternal life.

Inescapable, unavoidable. Let's pray together. listen again to the words of the one who does and says only what the father shows 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. God's love and love.

[26 : 43] We thank you, heavenly father, for the faithful words of your son. We thank you that because you love him, you show him everything that you are doing.

And because he loves you, he does everything and only, only what he sees you doing. Help us therefore to heed these words as they really are straight from the one at the heart of the universe.

Help us to hear them and to believe them. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.