

On the Way to the Cross – Like Father, Like Son

After the Lord Jesus was asked about fasting and prayer, and He had answered using the parable of the New Wine in Old Wine Skins, He was again confronted by the very people who were stuck in their self-righteous ways. *“For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’. Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:16-18).*

After another altercation Jesus decides to reveal Himself at length and gives one of the most detailed speeches recorded in the Gospels. This passage is our Lord’s response to the accusations made against Him. But only His words are recorded, as there is no verbal interaction between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. Note also, our text contains a three-fold use of the expression, *“Most assuredly, I say to you...” (verses 19, 24, 25)*. Surely this tells us that the words spoken here are vitally important, both to be heard and to be adhered to. *“Nowhere else in the Gospels do we find Jesus making such a formal, systematic, orderly, regular statement of His own unity with the Father, His divine commission and authority, and the proofs of His Messiahship, as we find in this passage” (Ryle)*. This is one of the great texts in the Gospel of John and probably in the entire New Testament. The truths set out here are the very foundation of the gospel and of our Christian faith. Let us listen intently, for they are words that the Lord Jesus indicates we should hear and pay close attention to.

Some background... Until now, the Lord has been keeping a relatively low profile. He has been very reluctant to draw too much attention to Himself too quickly. The events of chapters 3 and 4 are consistent with His desire not to attract undue attention to Himself, and particularly to His miracles. From all appearances, Jesus’ meeting with Nicodemus was a private interview, conducted at night. When His ministry became too prominent, He and His disciples retreated to Galilee, where His followers were not as enthusiastic. However, He did have a very successful ministry among the Samaritans (through the woman He met at the well), but this had little or no impact on the Jews, who looked upon the Samaritans with contempt.

The healing of the nobleman’s son, was accomplished in a way that left the curious crowds in the dark. It is the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda which draws most attention to Jesus. This miracle prompts the Jewish religious leaders to view Him as a notorious criminal, deserving the death penalty. The healed man is quickly intercepted by “the Jews,” who accuse him of violating the Sabbath by carrying his bed on this sacred day. The former paralytic justifies himself by laying the responsibility on the One who healed him. Once Jesus is identified as the culprit (as we have read earlier), the zealous Jews make it their business to wage an attack against Him.

But the Lord’s defence is simple: *“I am only carrying out My Father’s work.”* This is what really enrages the Jewish authorities. Jesus is not just a Sabbath-breaker; He is a blasphemer! He has boldly claimed to be God! For the Jews, there is no more serious offence than blasphemy. Now they are even more intent on putting Him to death. The words of this passage of scripture are the Lord’s response to this charge of blasphemy.

John 5:19-23... *“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all*

things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him."

Here Jesus sets out to give specific examples of His activities in relation to working with His Father. Let's begin with our Lord's claim: **"I can do nothing apart from what My Father is doing."** The Jews are greatly distressed by the way Jesus speaks and acts. In short, Jesus acts like God. Like the Father, Jesus works on the Sabbath. And to make matters worse, Jesus claims that God is His Father. One may not like what Jesus is saying, but it at least He is consistent. Jesus acts like God and talks as if He is God. In fact, to defend His God-like actions, Jesus claims to be God. Note, Jesus states that He cannot do the things He does apart from His being the Son of God. Later, the Jews will attempt to counter this statement by accusing Him of performing miracles by means of Satan's power. Jesus then challenges His opponents to explain why Satan could be the one empowering Him, since He attacks the powers of darkness and casts out demons (**Mark 3:22-26**).

Our Lord's defence is powerful. How can you deny the claims of One who says He is God and who also does the works of God? The thrust of the Jews' accusation against our Lord is this: *"How can you dare presume to act and speak as if you were God?"*

Jesus turns this accusation around by saying, *"How is it possible for the Son of God to act in any way that is independent of, or inconsistent with God the Father and what He is doing?"* The Jews are saying, *"How is it possible for you to speak and act as you do?"* Jesus is saying, *"If I am God, how is it possible for Me to do otherwise?"* It is impossible for Jesus to act in any way that is not like His Father. Jesus is one with the Father. Jesus is God! He must therefore act and speak like God. Jesus is, by nature, divine. He cannot act contrary to His nature. His words and His deeds are those of the Father. Like father, like son - and so it is with our Lord.

The second element of our Lord's defence is rooted in the Father's love for Him as His Son. Even if Jesus could act independently of the Father (which He cannot), why would He ever want to? The Father loves the Son. The Father withholds nothing from the Son. The Father and the Son share all things. The Father shows the Son everything He is doing so that the Son will do likewise. What Jesus is doing is exactly what He has seen the Father doing. Specifically, because He has seen the Father work on the Sabbath, the Son does likewise (**John 5:17**). As great as the things are that He has already done, the Father has even greater things to show the Son - so that when the Son does them men will be amazed (verse 20). Just what are these "greater deeds" yet to be shown the Son, and yet to be done by the Son? Jesus is just about to tell us:

Verses 21-23, ***"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever He wishes. Furthermore, the Father does not judge anyone, but has assigned all judgment to the Son, so that all people may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. The one who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him."***

Jesus has not yet raised the dead in John's Gospel, but in chapter 11, He will raise Lazarus. Our Lord points to the works He has already done to prove His identity as the Son of God. Now, He speaks of the greater

works He is yet to do, which will dramatically validate His claims even more. Before long, our Lord will “give life” by literally raising the dead.

Luke 5:24-30... *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, 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 to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”*

Here, our Lord is simply “stating the facts.” He is not seeking to save Himself. He is laying out His case so that His words and actions will be correctly understood (as a bold claim to His being the Son of God). Observe how Jesus intertwines His work with the works of God the Father. He is the Son of God. As the Son, He does what His loving Father shows Him. As the Father has life in Himself, and thus brings the dead to life, so the Son gives life. The judgment the Father once administered has now been given over to the Son. Those who honour the Son honour the Father, and those who dishonour the Son dishonour the Father who sent Him.

It is very clear from our text who Jesus claims to be. It is also very clear who the Jewish authorities believe Jesus claims to be. The two most important questions you will ever answer are these:

- (1) Is Jesus right about who He claims to be?
- (2) If He is right, what have you done about it?

There are no more important questions in life than these. What is your answer? Do the words of Jesus ring true? If they do, what have you done about it?

We have just heard... *“The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.”* But soon, we will here the Lord Himself say these words, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12).*