

One of the Deepest Things in the Bible

John 5:16-23

“These verses begin one of the most deep and solemn passages in the four gospels,” writes the great 19th century British minister, J. C. Ryle. He continues: “[These verses] 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.”

He writes, “There are few chapters in the Bible, perhaps, where we feel our own shallowness of understanding so thoroughly, and discover so completely the insufficiency of all human language to express “the deep things of God.” Men are often saying they want explanations of the mysteries of the Christian faith, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the person of Christ, and the like...God gives him his desire in this chapter, and lifts up the veil a little. But behold, we are dazzled by the very light we wanted, and find we have not eyes to take it in.”

Finally, he says, “One thing is certain. Nowhere else in the Gospels do we find our Lord 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 discourse. To me it seems one of the deepest things in the Bible.”

Isn't that a great introduction? One of the deepest things in the Bible. And all of this comes because Jesus healed a man who had been infirmed for 38 years! Jesus declared to that man, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” And he did. But he faced opposition, because Jesus performed that healing on the sabbath day.

v.16

But that wasn't the real reason for the persecution, and I know that because of what follows in the text. I know that it wasn't the real reason for the persecution, because of what Jesus says in response, words that would provoke the Jews to even greater opposition.

v.17

So the real issue is defined in,

v.18

I. JESUS WAS PERSECUTED FOR CLAIMING TO BE GOD.

Jesus understood that the sabbath issue was a smokescreen. The Jews saw the healing, they saw that great display of power. And they were afraid of their own standing among the people. Rather than recognize the omnipotent and gracious hand of God, they chose to harden their hearts and protect their own selfish interests. So they raised the sabbath issue. And remember my comment from last week. There was nothing in the law of God which forbid Jesus from performing this miracle nor which forbid this man from taking up his bed and walking away. Their opposition to Jesus was completely self-serving.

Jesus would later rebuke these same people, pointing out the utter foolishness of their objections by asking,

John 7:23 “If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? 24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

In another context, Jesus answers the sabbath question

directly by his declaration in,

Mark 2:28 “Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”

But here Jesus provokes them to fully reveal their own sinfulness by his astounding response,
v.17

With a well understood claim to be God, Jesus declares that,

A. He always works in connection with God the father.

So this healing was not just a work of Jesus, but a work of God the father. What Jesus has done, God the father is doing. The two are joined together, in their work.

In one sense, Jesus is saying this. God the Father is always at work. Even on the Sabbath. And while he rested from his work of creation, declaring it to be finished, and while he refreshed himself in the enjoyment of what he created, still he continues his work of providence. He continues to govern all the affairs of this world and he continues to demonstrate his mercy and lovingkindness in the gracious provisions necessary to sustain life. So Jesus was perfectly justified in the sight of the law by performing this act of healing.

But there is more in Jesus’ response to the Jews. He is not merely citing the example of God the father, but he is claiming something quite astounding, something which the Jews would consider blasphemous.

B. Jesus claims equality with the father.

Notice again,
v.17

Jesus speaks of “my father.” That was not the way Jews usually referred to God. Usually they spoke of “our father, but wouldn’t dare to speak with such familiarity as to say, “My father.” Jesus had no such hesitancy, and speaks of God in the closest relationship to himself. The expression “my father” implies a claim which the Jews did not miss. Because of his close relationship with the Father Jesus works in the same way. The Jews understood. Jesus called God “his own father,” and this meant that he was making himself equal with God.

Jesus is not teaching that God is the Father of all, but that God was his father in a special sense. He was claiming that he partook of the same nature as his father, which involved equality.

And the Jews understood that, and charged him with blasphemy!
v.18

Indeed, the Jews realized that the alleged sabbath breaking was no isolated rootless phenomenon, but that it proceeded from Jesus’ view of his person and was consistent with it. And to them, that was blasphemous! So they sought to kill him.

Jesus seems to accept that charge as a correct statement of the case, and proceeds to explain himself further. And here is where we begin to plumb the depths of the mystery of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Let’s dig very carefully, but very deeply.

II. JESUS DEFINES HIS RELATIONSHIP TO GOD THE FATHER.

We are delving into the very doctrine of the trinity. Jesus was accused of “making himself equal with God,” and uses the opportunity to declare that he is, indeed, equal with God. As Calvin writes, “Christ, so far from clearing himself of the Jews’

accusation, misrepresentation though it was, maintained more openly that it was true.”

v.19-20

He speaks of two things there, two ways in which his relationship with the father can be defined by the word “equality.” First, equality when it comes to his works. For his works are the same as the works of God. Indeed, Jesus’ power to do works is directly connected to his status as a son. Specifically,

A. Jesus’ power as a Son proves his equality with the Father.

The Jews said, “You are claiming to be God.” And Jesus says, “I am doing what my father does. And whatever my father does, I do.”

He’s speaking of miracles, isn’t he? The father has supernatural, miraculous power. So do I, says Jesus. The authority with which Jesus teaches and acts is nothing less than the authority of God.

Now Jesus points out that the son himself, in his humanity, can do nothing. Jesus, in his humanity, doesn’t have power to perform miracles. Rather, that power is derived from his full identity as the son of God. And with that full identity as the son of God, he does the works of God.

v.19

Whatever the Father does, the son does! Now, if you don’t believe in Jesus, then that is blasphemous, for Jesus is clearly, claiming to be God. And here is where true Christianity departs from many of it’s false imposters. From the historical heresies of groups like the Arians, who denied the full deity of Jesus Christ, believing him to be numbered among the created things.

And it applies to groups today that would deny the full deity of Jesus Christ, all the while attempting to be included in the broad definition of Christian. Groups like the Mormons. And the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Their doctrine fails at this point, for they do not believe that Jesus Christ does whatever the father does, that he works in equality with the father based upon his status as the eternal son of God.

And even the Jesus of the liberal Christian church, the historical Jesus as they so often refer to him, is not the Jesus who declares his own identity in these verses. “Whatever he sees the Father do, he does.” “Whatever the father does, the son also does in like manner.”

The great church Father Augustine says, “Our Lord does not say, whatsoever the Father does the Son does other things like them, but the very same things...If the son does the same things, and in like manner, then let the Jew be silenced, the Christian believe, and the heretic be convinced: the Son is equal with the father.”

Likewise,
v.20

That is supernatural power, as clearly defined as it could be. Jesus does the works of God, because he is God.

In an age in which theological precision is so maligned and neglected, I have to ask the question, “So what?” What difference does all this theology make? To answer that question simply and directly, it makes all the difference in the world, for it makes the difference between life and death. For what is the gospel? What is the invitation of the gospel?

Act 16:31 “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be

saved, you and your household.”

And,

Rom. 10:9 “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

You must believe in the name of the Lord Jesus, and confess with your mouth his identity. This identity which he is revealing here. If you don’t believe these things, if you don’t believe that Jesus is equal with the father, if you don’t believe that Jesus is God, then you cannot lay claim to eternal salvation, but will instead be the recipient of eternal justice and damnation.

To be saved, you must believe the testimony.

1 John 5:11 “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Why am I belaboring this point? Because I want you to know Jesus. And I call you to love him! This isn’t mere doctrine. This isn’t religious philosophy. This is life, for life is found in the son! The son who claims equality with the father.

And these works that he does, these works ought to convince you that he is fully God, equal with his father. And in convincing you of that, Jesus speaks to you the gospel of salvation, the gospel of the gift of eternal life. The gospels are full of the works of God, written so that you might believe in him and have everlasting life. So we read at the end of this book of John, in,

John 20:30 “Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” That’s why I am emphasizing these things so much!

But there is something else you need to know about Jesus’ power. Something else revealed for us in,
v.20

Why does the Father show the son all things that he himself does? Why does the father enable the son to do all the works that the father does? Why? Because the Father loves the son!

B. Jesus’ power is derived from his status as the beloved of the Father.

The verb for love is in the present tense, giving the idea of a continuous love, a continual habitual love. A love that is the very definition of the father and the son.

Yet, as J. C. Ryle so well points out, “The ‘love’ is not the love of an earthly parent to a beloved child. The ‘showing’ is not the showing of a teacher to an ignorant scholar. The ‘love’ is meant to show us that unspeakable unity of heart and affection which eternally existed and exists between the Father and the Son. The ‘showing’ means that entire confidence and cooperation which there was between the Father and the Son, as to all the works which the Son should do when He came into the world to fill the office of Mediator and to save sinners.”

And so we read this great declaration of God the Father,

speaking about Jesus his son,

Mat.3:17 “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

From,

Isaiah 42:1 “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”

And,

Psalm 2:7 “The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’”

And so we read about this Jesus and his relationship to God the father in,

John 1:18 “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

The only begotten son. Perhaps, better translated, the one and only son. The unique son, the only one who shares in his father’s deity. The only one of whom it can be said, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Indeed, this is one of the deepest things in the Bible, and why should we try to plumb these depths? Quite simply, so that you can know God, as he reveals himself. God the father. God the son. And God the holy spirit.

This must never become merely an academic exercise, but one of the depths of our heart and soul. This must be a study in search of a savior, so that by knowing him, you might love him. Love him with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind.

So I will make much of Jesus. I will proclaim Jesus to you, as a faithful minister of the gospel. But not the shallow, superficial Jesus that is so commonly presented in our day. Not the small and beggarly misrepresentation so common in the minds of many. Not any Jesus whom you can capture in a visual image, but rather the Jesus who reveals himself in the pages of Scripture. The Jesus who claims equality with God the Father, the Jesus who claims to be God himself, by doing all the works of the father. And actually, we are told, greater works!

We read that,

III. Jesus continues the works of God in greater measure.

Again,

v.20

I do hope that you marvel at these things. I do hope that you marvel at the revelation of the greatness of the power and glory of Jesus, to do even greater works.

Greater works than the healing of this man by the pool at Bethesda. And in a true sense, even greater works than those of God the father. And what are those greater works? The giving of life. Not life in the flesh. But a greater work. The giving of spiritual life.

A. Jesus the Son is the author of life.

The giver of eternal life.

v.21

The Father raises the dead and gives life to them. Now, the Jews could accept that. The father raises men from the dead, at the last judgment. That was an article of their faith, as well. It was a clear teaching of the Old Testament. Nothing in that for the Jews to marvel at. But here is what is truly marvelous. Here is

what is truly marvelous. The son also gives life!

And not just the resurrection unto life granted at the last judgment, but life now. A resurrection now. A raising men from the death of their sin unto life NOW.

Just as the Father takes dead bodies and raises them into new life, so the Son takes men who, though their bodies are alive, are yet in a state of death, and raises them into spiritual life.” That’s what is so amazing. So marvelous.

The son is the author of life, spiritual life. The son, who says of himself,

John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

The son, who says of himself,

John 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

And notice something else about this son who is the author of life. He gives that life with sovereign authority. He gives life “to whom he will.”

v.21

Not to everyone, for many will perish in their sins. But to whom he will. To whom he chooses. Actually, to those whom his father gives him. The elect. Those whom God has chosen and predestined in love, before the foundation of the world to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. His sheep.

Jesus says,

John 10:14 “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep,

and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

And,

John 10:25 “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”

Jesus the son gives life, eternal life, to whom he will. And we are included in that number, and have life, if we believe upon his name. And so we read of the doctrinal truth in,

Eph.2:1 “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

The son gives life. The son is the author of life. The son of God, the eternal son of God, whose name is Jesus. And it is this Jesus whom I am preaching to you today.

And what should you do? Kiss the son, as we read in Psalm 2!

Ps. 2:12 “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

Kiss the son, embrace the son, rest and receive in him alone for your salvation, for he is the author of life. But be warned, as Psalm 2 also warns, for “his wrath is kindled but a little.” His wrath may soon be kindled. In the NIV, “His wrath can flare up in a moment.”

You see, there is another greater work, another work of Jesus that is greater even than the works the father has revealed of himself, and it is the work of judgment. For,

B. Jesus the Son is the judge of the world.

Jesus will be the judge at the end of the age! Jesus the savior of those who trust in him will become Jesus the judge of those who remain dead in their sins.

v.22

We don't think about Jesus in that context, enough, not in our age. Not in this permissive society that doesn't want to speak about accountability to a judge in any sense whatsoever. But it is an inescapable reality.

Heb.9:27 “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

As we'll study next Sunday,
v.25-29

And in very specific terms,

John 9:39 Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.”

Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world.” For judgment.

God the father carries out his eternal judgment through Jesus the Son, “...in the day [which Paul declares in Rom. 2:16] when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

That day will come, and Jesus the Son will be the judge of the world. God the Father will show Jesus the son even greater works than he himself has done.

And Jesus shall be honored. Not in separation from the father, but in equality with the father. And so we see in verse 23 that,

C. Jesus the Son receives the honor of worship.

v.23

All should honor the son just as they honor the Father! So much for the religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses! So much for those who cling to Judaism today. So much for those who say they believe in God but don't believe in the deity and eternal existence of Jesus Christ.

“He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father

who sent him.”

Now let me ask, how much plainer can it be said?

If you don't honor Jesus, if you won't bend your knee and confess that Jesus is Lord, if you won't worship Jesus as the second person of the trinity, than you have no claim to know or love God! If you will not worship the son, you cannot, you cannot honor and worship the Father. For the Father sent him.

He who has the son has life. He who does not have the son of God does not have life.

All religions are not the same, are they? All religions among men are not equal, are they? All paths don't lead to the same place, do they?

No, indeed.

Prov. 14:12 “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Indeed, this is one of the deepest things in the Bible. So drink deeply. Drink deeply of Christ. Find your life in him. And worship him. Honor him. For in doing so, so honor and worship the Father who sent him.