

I have authority to judge

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Preacher: David Calderwood

[0 : 00] Okay, so as Australians, our minds have been conditioned. That's no surprise, I guess, but we've been conditioned to take on board and give acceptance to ideas that are actually opposite or exclusive of one another.

So Australians, who often believe there's no control of any god of any sort in their lives, will often talk about karma, which is a Hindu belief that the gods repay you according to what you deserve. Those two things seem to be exclusive opposites. Likewise, many Australians believe in both reincarnation and resurrection.

Opposites. Our political leaders, you'll often hear them say that they don't believe in God. And yet, when there's a crisis, you'll also hear them saying, well, our prayers go out to so-and-so and so-and-so.

It assumes that there's a God out there who cares, who will come to people and help them in time of trouble. And yet, on another level, they say, well, they don't believe in God. We see the same problem in churches.

[1 : 23] On the one hand, people say, yes, of course, I believe and trust in Jesus. We might even say, I believe and trust in the Lord Jesus. And yet, what they actually believe, or their lifestyle, might be totally at odds with what they say they believe.

It might be totally in opposition to Jesus' commands, Jesus' teaching, and Jesus' example. And so the problem we have, you see, is that oftentimes professed belief is not the same as actual belief. And when push comes to shove, it's the actual belief that drives us, that governs our life's actions, not the professed belief. And the strange thing is that we can have both, and the two can be quite opposite.

And that's how we've been conditioned to live as Australians. And that's exactly the problem we wrestle with, we have to wrestle with, when we jump back into John's biography of the life of Jesus. On the one hand, none of us come to these verses in neutral. I suspect that everyone here this morning have opinions and beliefs about Jesus, who he is, and how we should respond to him.

[2 : 45] But our professed beliefs may not be right. Our actual beliefs may be quite different to that which we profess, and oftentimes are for us as Christians.

So if we're going to actually respond to Jesus properly, then our beliefs, our opinions, our views, need to be shaped by his words, his opinions, his views.

And my friends, that includes, as we'll see this morning, being shaped by teachings that are actually uncomfortable personally. And in fact, unfashionable in our modern day society.

But we'll see more of that in a little while. But with that in mind, let's remind ourselves of the structure and context of these verses. So verse 18 is a bridge. So the bridge links the healing miracle of Jesus, where he healed that guy who had been a cripple for 38 years, and he heals him. Just like that. Just gone. Bang. Complete restoration of health. It's not even a restoration. It's complete giving of health and physical fitness. And then the passage we're doing this morning is Jesus teaching about the significance of that particular sign or miracle.

[4 : 07] And the key thing in that verse 18 is this. That the Jewish religious leaders had already by that stage decided that the only way to respond to Jesus was to kill him.

The healing did nothing but increase their outrage and increase their determination to kill him as soon as ever possible.

How does that happen? Well, the key issue seems to be, as we read verse 18, the key issue was that Jesus disregarded the Sabbath rules.

Now remember, these Sabbath rules were rules that were actually made up by the Jewish religious leaders. But they had been teaching that these rules were actually, you had to obey them.

They were essential. You had to obey them if you were to be acceptable to God. If you were to be saved. If you were to get into the kingdom of God. If you were to get into heaven. And all those terms are the same thing. You have to keep these rules.

[5 : 14] That's what makes you acceptable to God. That's what enabled you to say, I've honored God. And so when it comes to the rules of the Sabbath, the Jews would have thought like this.

Well, only God has exemption from these rules because only God made Sabbath. So when Jesus gets disregarded these rules, he was not only rejecting their authority as Pharisees and Jewish religious leaders, but he was rejecting their understanding of what honored the Lord.

What made a person acceptable to him. And most offensive of all to these Jewish religious leaders, they could hear Jesus saying, I am God. Added to that, if you look back at verse 14, Jesus had dared to take upon himself the responsibility of determining the place of sin in another person's life. That was outrageous to the Pharisees. Only God could do that. And verse 17, Jesus identified himself very personally with God in his work of healing.

My father's working, so am I. My father is healing, so do I. And as the Jewish religious leaders heard this and saw this in front of their very eyes, the fury raised up within them.

[6 : 43] And there's only one possible outcome. And that was Jesus had to go. Exposing sin specifically in a person's heart.

Healing or restoring life. Working on the Sabbath. These were things that only God could do. Only God should do. And for somebody like Jesus to take this sort of responsibility on himself was just vile blasphemy.

Deserving of death. So how does Jesus respond in the face of this dire threat to his life?

Well, he doesn't run if that's what you're expecting. He actually ramps up the confrontation. He really takes it up to these guys and says to them effectively as we move into these verses, Yeah, actually, you know, you guys have got this one right at least.

Yes, you are hearing me correctly saying I am God. I'm equal with God. But let me tell you, the concept of me being equal with God is far more outrageous than you guys can even begin to imagine.

[7 : 54] Let me tell you a bit more about what it means to be equal with God. He takes the battle up to them. And he uses formal rabbinic language in this truly, truly.

That's exactly what a rabbi would use if he was teaching his disciples. Jesus is having a lend to these guys. Let's see what you're going to do with this, says Jesus.

And he proceeds to make three huge statements about equality. Each of which pushes them to see that Jesus' understanding of equality with God is far more outrageous than they could imagine.

Statement one. You cannot honour the Father if you reject me. Now that doesn't sound all that hard for us because we're used to it.

But for these Jews, that would have just done their head in straight away. Jesus spells out in verses 19 through to 23 the detail of his relationship to his Father.

[9 : 03] But it's all leading to the conclusion of verse 23. And that is, the conclusion is, the relationship's important, but it's the conclusion that's the most important because the conclusion is that to honour the Father is to honour Jesus as God.

That's the connection Jesus wants these guys to see. So let's see how Jesus breaks that down in these verses. Verse 19. The one that James opened up for us already.

There's a total unity of will, purpose, and action. A total harmony between the Father and the Son.

And it says there in verse 19 that Jesus never acts independently of his Father. Now it's really important we notice the language there. It's not that he just does not act independently as if he had a choice.

It's not just that he imitates the Father. No, it says he cannot act independently of the Father because he's got the exact same nature.

[10 : 07] Which means he's got the exact same desires. He does the exact same things for the exact same reasons. But that equality is not without difference or distinction.

So the Father and Son remain distinct personalities. It's clear they've got different roles. Especially seen in the issue of God's salvation purposes.

The Son is happily obedient to and always dependent upon the Father. Yet that happens without competitiveness or resentment in the roles.

Now immediately I need to stop and say, Well look, we're going to have trouble with that concept of equality. Because that's not equality as we understand it in our world. So when we talk about different roles.

So if we're talking about a workplace or even in a marriage. When we talk about different roles, our minds immediately start to go to, Ah, that means somebody's inferior and somebody's superior. Or that means that somebody's open to exploitation by somebody else.

[11 : 20] So for us in our world, when we think of equality, we're thinking of a concept that removes distinctions and removes roles. So that there's a perfectly reciprocal relationship.

Even to the fact that if we're going to be equal as husbands and wives, we have to wear the same clothes. Have the same hairstyles. That's our concept of equality. But that's not what Jesus is talking about here. He's talking about a unity, a harmony, that's much deeper.

That's based in a oneness of values. A oneness of mind. A oneness of purpose. Not competitive. How does it work?

Well, verse 20, it works because of love. This unity is nurtured, we're told in verse 20 there, through a constant, generous, giving love in which the Father reveals everything he has in mind in the salvation plan to Jesus.

And in turn, Jesus is driven by love for the Father. So everything he does and says and teaches in response to that is perfectly synced. He makes real the things that his Father has said and is doing.

[12 : 35] So it's an equality that we have trouble getting our minds around. And Jesus says, look, you've already seen these great things that we're doing together, Father and Son.

It's already been evident in my ministry of grace and mercy, says Jesus. But you know what? Far greater things are yet to come. There's more to be heard, more to be seen, more to be experienced. As I and the Father work together in the achieving of his salvation purposes. And verse 21 and 22. The key point is in terms of Jesus giving life.

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will, to whomever he chooses.

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son. Jesus has been given by the Father the primary role in achieving his salvation purposes.

[13 : 50] And again, this would have just blown the heads of these Jewish religious leaders. Because they understood that the Father was the source of all life. It was his jurisdiction only to give life.

Now Jesus is saying, no, the Father's actually handed that on to me. It's now become my role. Yes, the Father is a source of life. But in his salvation purposes, in real time, he has committed the responsibilities of bestowing life and judgment to me, his Son.

Something already demonstrated in this miracle you've just witnessed, but couldn't actually witness. Because you're so tied up about rule-breaking. So ultimately, Jesus is saying here, it will be seen and demonstrated that he is the Messiah that Isaiah spoke about.

Both in his role as God's Savior, in the future looking forward with death and resurrection as the basis for acceptance with God and new life.

But also, as we're told in here, in his role as God's King. Now what does a King do? Well, a King rules. What is it to rule? Well, a King rules by passing judgments. That's acceptable.

[15 : 06] That's not acceptable. I want you to do this. I don't want you to do that. If you do that, when I don't want you to do it, there will be consequences. That's judging. So Jesus is God's Savior and God's King.

And the two, we'll see a little bit more towards the end. Those two things, just inseparable. Jesus says, The Father has given me free reign.

That's the bit to whomever I will. The Father has given me free reign in matters of achieving God's salvation purposes in this world. Wow.

Wow. Now why would God do that? Verse 23. So that Jesus is honored in precisely the same way as the Father has been honored.

Now, the implications of that one verse are simply enormous.

[16 : 11] Especially for these Jewish religious leaders. Because the rejection of Jesus by these guys, Jesus is really saying, is a very, very serious matter indeed.

Jesus is saying to these guys, now look, you have a really strong commitment to honoring God. I can see that.

Your idea of expressing that commitment of honoring God is through rule keeping. Religious activities. You think these things honor the Lord, but I'm telling you now, says Jesus, that when they're put against me and you reject me in favor of these things, what you're actually doing is dishonoring God.

Yes, you can do all the good religious things you want to, but if you reject me, then you are not honoring God and you will not have God's favor. Ever. Ever. In healing on Sabbath, he was breaking their rules, but acting in total accord with God's character and God's purposes. But they couldn't see it because they were absolutely convinced that they had it right. It didn't occur to them that they were ignorant. It didn't occur to them that they needed to change.

[17 : 40] No, it had to be Jesus that changed or face the consequences. Jesus challenges them here.

And he challenges us too in the exact same way to acknowledge him, sorry, he challenges to honor him, to honor the Father by acknowledging who Jesus is.

That he is who he says he is by submitting to him, by submitting to his teaching. His teaching especially on how a person is made acceptable to God.

And look at the outcome that Jesus wants for his opponents. Remember, this is a highly confrontational situation. But rather than rage and rejection that we have in verse 20, you see Jesus' heart for these people.

Jesus wants them to see himself for who he really is. And he wants them, verse 23, he wants them to marvel. Don't respond to me in rage and rejection, says Jesus.

[18 : 46] If you can just step back and look at me for who I am, for what I'm saying, for what I'm offering to you, you'll marvel at me, you'll welcome me. There's nothing to be frightened of in me, says Jesus. There's much to be loved.

If only you can see it. If only you can accept it. And marveling, verse 23, will result in honoring. If we're to marvel at the Lord, as I've already suggested earlier in my introduction, if we're to marvel at God and honor him, then we must allow our minds and attitudes and understanding to be molded by Jesus.

And this includes, again I say, when we get to it, his uncomfortable and unfashionable teaching, which is what Jesus moves on to spell out next. So statement two about equality.

My desire is to move people from death to eternal life. And that eternal life, says Jesus, is available only on me. Verse 24. Truly, truly, there's that rabbinic formal statement again.

[19 : 55] Listen up, you guys. I say to you, whoever, 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. Now, that's a wonderful promise in its own right.

So we've got to put a couple of things here together to appreciate the promise. The Father and Son are totally united in the reality that there will be a day of judgment, a day of accounting for our sin and how we treated the Lord.

That comes out in those previous verses, verses 22. So the concept of judgment or that day of accounting is put on the table. Now, here's the beauty of the promise. No sooner has Jesus and the Father put this big thing, this day of accounting on the table than verse 24.

He immediately offers as a way to escape that judgment. How good is that? He says, yes, there will be a day of judgment and it's going to be a fearsome day.

[21 : 07] Now, let me tell you what you need to do to escape God's judgment and be safe. It's amazing the generosity with which he continues to respond to these Jewish religious leaders and to us down the track.

So Jesus promises that anybody, that word doesn't need explanation, includes everybody here, anybody, anybody who hears his word, that is, the word being the whole message of Jesus, that salvation and acceptance with God and new life is not earned by doing religious things and keeping rules, but is received as a gift through simple belief and trust in Jesus.

Wow. Which of those two alternatives would you rather go for? Whoever hears his word and believes, believes what? Well, it's not just a sort of loose mental ascent, but it's believes what Jesus is teaching, believes what he's showing and demonstrating that the Father and Son are working together to move people from death to life.

That is their desire, that is their purpose in salvation. That is the whole reason Jesus came into the world in his rescue mission to move spiritually dead people to life. marvelling and honouring is great, but the ultimate response to Jesus must be this sort of belief, faith and trust, that my acceptance with God is determined by Jesus, not by my performance of religious rights or rules. and that person then already has eternal life and will never, ever experience God's judgment.

[23 : 14] Now, we've got to look at the text again carefully here. Lots of people take it one way, lots of people take it another way. I think the way I want to take it is this, that the fact that a person hears and believes are not steps towards receiving eternal life, but evidence that you already have eternal life.

So, in other words, the reason we can actually hear and believe is because God's already done a work in our life.

It's a much stronger concept, I think. What a wonderful promise. And the receiving of eternal life guarantees we'll never face God's judgment.

Now, I want to say to you, it's a very simple promise. And then follow on immediately by saying, and you know, it's the simplicity of the promise that we often trip over.

We struggle to believe that Jesus can give us so much in terms of forgiveness from sin, acceptance with God, a new life and relationship with God.

[24 : 29] We struggle to believe that Jesus can give us all that at no cost. Like the Jewish religious leaders, we actually feel more comfortable and prefer to put our confidence for acceptance with God in a mixture of Jesus and our own goodness and our religious actions because that makes us feel better.

It sort of takes all the emphasis off Jesus delivering so much and it's a combined effort and that's what we prefer because that's how life operates here in our world.

But God says, no, that's not how it works in my economy. That, in fact, says the Lord, is to dishonor me and it's ultimately to disbelieve God, to say that Jesus himself can go a bit and then we have to do our own bit alongside, that actually ultimately dishonors God.

And yet, here we are, so many people believe they can ignore Jesus and simply have this sort of generalized view of God and say, well, okay, I believe in God and at the end of my life when I die and stand before him, yes, my goodness and my belief in God will be enough to get me over the line and I'll be in heaven.

And Jesus doesn't even figure. Or people think Jesus is a savior and this is more in churches.

People say Jesus is savior but I know people who believe that Jesus is savior but I actually don't believe he's God.

[26 : 13] Or people think that Jesus is a great teacher and as a great teacher then I can cherry pick those moral principles that he's shown and demonstrated so well and so capably because they endure across the generations but I don't need to think about Jesus as God and savior and judge.

And so we go back to the introduction again. These ideas we just take on board and we think we're safe but in actual fact the ideas we're taking on board are opposites.

They're exclusive of one another according to Jesus' teaching. See many who claim to be Christians have a professed belief in needing Jesus for salvation but then their actual belief drives them to continue building their acceptance before God on the base of their own goodness their own religious actions.

And I'd be very surprised if there's not more than a few here who are exactly in that position.

Professed belief yes I'm saved by Jesus. Actual belief I need to do things to be more acceptable to Jesus in fear of judgment ahead.

And that traps many Christians doesn't it? We say on the one hand that yes I do believe the gospel. I do believe I have forgiveness. I do believe I have eternal life. I do believe that Jesus saved me.

[27 : 48] Yet we live in fear of God's hand of judgment falling upon us and it debilitates us. Well what about that sin back then or what about these sins now or what about the sin I haven't yet committed?

And we sort of say on the one hand yes I believe that I've been saved I've been given new life and I'll never have to experience God's judgment but the actual belief makes us live in fear. sin. Since Jesus is God then he has power and authority to keep the promise he makes here in verse 24. Including delivering on eternal life and guaranteeing that we will never ever face the judgment of God in the future. Statement three.

Your response to Jesus now determines how your life story will end. So this is one of those stories you know with kids books and I'm getting reacquainted with that sort of stuff.

This is one of those stories where you can choose your ending. And verses 25 through to 29 will either be a fantastic comfort and promise or a dire warning.

[29 : 07] And so that's going to divide us here now this morning. So you're all out there well some of you are listening to me or still listening to me or maybe once were listening to me.

Whatever. But you see these verses are going to divide us because the verses are going to talk about God's judgment in relation to where we are now. and the way your story will end depends on whether you accept Jesus and believe in him or you reject him.

It's that simple. There isn't a third alternative. Verse 25 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 to life. A saviour Jesus has power and authority to give spiritually dead people new life and relationship with God.

That as my previous point was that's God's desire desire, that's the father's desire, that's the son's desire, that's what they're working on in harmony to move people who are spiritually dead to life.

[30 : 18] But this also means that Jesus is the judge because in giving people new life he makes a judgment about them, he stamps them never again to be considered for God's judgment.

no longer under judgment, Romans 8, no longer under condemnation. So the act of saving involves the act of judging. Now we don't actually see that so much now when we're actually talking about Jesus and responding.

But verse 28 and 29, that reality, which is sort of covered a little bit when we're just offering people the gospel, that reality will be seen at the end of the world, verse 28 and 29.

on the great and final day of judgment when Jesus will divide all people into two groups. And it's very clear what the two groups are. Those who have done good, those who have done evil.

Now, our natural tendency again is to immediately think of our performance. But that's not what these words mean here in the context. Good here in the context is those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 38] as the basis of acceptance before God. Evil are those who have believed in their own merits, in their own religious actions as the basis of acceptance before God.

God. And so, at that great day of judgment will be a very simple matter. Jesus will call all people from their graves across all the generations.

And here's the either or alternative. Either he will greet you warmly and welcome you into heaven and full enjoyment of the life that you now enjoy in him because you've believed in him.

Or he will greet you formally and coldly as a formidable judge and he'll say to you, go to hell. Because you dared to reject me. Now, this is the uncomfortable and unfashionable truth I mentioned earlier.

[32 : 53] Because you see, we don't like the idea of judgment in our world. When people are challenged about anything these days, what's the standard response?

Don't judge me. Don Carson says the most favorite verse in the Bible for Christians used to be John 3, 16. But now he says, Matthew 7, verse 1, don't judge me or you'll be judged.

Very sad, isn't it? We don't like judgment. We do it when we can to avoid the concept of judgment. We refuse to be accountable of our actions by allowing other people to make a judgment upon our actions.

It's a very uncomfortable truth. that that's exactly what Jesus says will happen. We play it down, we avoid it, but it's a key role in Jesus achieving God's salvation purpose.

It's not going to go away just because we don't like it. It's not going to go away just because it's unfashionable. a savior, Jesus is also king and a key role of ruling, as I've said before, is judging, discerning between this one and that one.

[34 : 25] But at the same time, it's also a wonderfully positive truth because it means that everyone here this morning has the opportunity to sort the future, your future, right now.

And isn't that what we long for? I'm hearing people all the time and it's in my own heart. We just wish that we could secure the future.

We plan for the future in terms of savings. We long for the future to be good. We long for the future to have security for us. People invest time and energy and money consulting those who claim to be able to predict the future, whether scientists or witches.

we're geared. We've got that deep longing within us to settle the future. And by the way, I wasn't saying scientists and witches were the same there. I see one scientist up the back having a bit of smile.

They're polar opposites. But rationale versus irrational. All right, I'll talk to you afterwards, Adam. And the other 27 scientists. I didn't.

[35 : 31] Yeah, okay. But you see, we're hardwired. for eternity. We get so often get trapped into seeking security for the future in our own effort.

And all the while, Jesus said, look, come to me, and this morning, your future can be sorted. So Jesus says to us this morning, yes, I am equal with God.

But he also says, I'm the man you cannot ignore. or maybe he'll give it a second go. I'm the man you can only ignore at your own peril.

Because at the end of the day, says Jesus, when you die, and that final judgment comes, my voice will be the first thing you will hear consciously after your death.

And that voice will either say to you, every one of us here this morning will either say to you, welcome home on the basis that you believed in me and trusted in me for acceptance before God, or will say, go to hell.

[36 : 40] Let me pray. Lord, these are big words, heavy words, and yet exciting words. Help us, Lord, to walk through them carefully, sensing the awe of them, but walk through them, Lord, with excitement and confidence, knowing that you want to move us from death to life.

You want us to be settled in respect to the future, and that both those things are achieved by belief and trust and living under the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to see that, Lord. Help us to respond, not just in marvel and honor, but to believe. Amen. Amen.