

Recognising who Jesus is

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[0 : 0 0] Gracious Father, we do thank you for your word and we do ask for your help this morning to concentrate and to understand the profound truths that are in it. And we ask it so that we might rightly recognise who Jesus is and so honour him with the honour he deserves.

We ask these things in his name. Amen. Well, John Dixon tells a true story about three boys quite some years ago in their late teens in the US who hopped on a local bus.

They're in fairly spirited mood and they noticed a man sitting by himself at the back of the bus, dressed quite casually in tracksuit pants and a beanie and the like.

And so they thought they'll see how far they can push him. At first, they just made a few light jokes about him, but the stranger did not respond. And so they turned up the heat and started insulting him directly.

The stranger still did not respond. The boys continued this for some time, trying to provoke the man. After all, there was three of them and only one of him. The bus was nearing the man's stop, so the man then stood up and the boys realised that he was much, much bigger than they anticipated.

[1 : 1 9] The man looked down at the boys, reached into his pocket, pulled out a business card and handed it to one of them and then got off the bus. They huddled around to see what the card said and on it, on the next slide, Joe Louis, professional boxer.

Now, for those who don't know their boxing history like myself, he would go on to become the heavyweight champion of the world 11 times running.

And the point is, the boys did not recognise who this man really was. Otherwise, they would not have tried to pick a fight with him. Instead, they would have honoured or respected him with the respect he deserved.

And as we continue our series in John's Gospel today, the question is, do we recognise Jesus for who he truly is? And so honour him as he deserves. As I said last week, we're looking through chapters 5 to 10 from now till Easter.

And the question or the theme of these chapters is Jesus's identity, who he is, and his work, what he does. But today, Jesus ups the ante and claims to be none other than God, the Son.

[2 : 2 9] Point 1, verse 16. So because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.

Now, for those who weren't here last week, you need to understand that Jesus has just healed a lame man and told the man to pick up his mat and walk home. But he did it on which day?

The Sabbath day. That's right. Now, God's law, Sabbath law, was resting from your weekday work. So this hardly qualified as breaking God's law.

But the Jews had made up extra laws. And that's what Jesus and this man broke. And it seems it's not the first time that Jesus has done that to their Sabbath laws.

Do you notice in verse 16, the word, these things, those two words, it's plural. Isn't it? And so it seems as soon as the man dobbed on Jesus back in verse 15, the Jews knew that Jesus was up to his old tricks again.

[3 : 3 1] Or more accurately, up to his old miracles again on the Sabbath. So because Jesus was breaking their man-made Sabbath laws, they started persecuting him. But as I said last week, Jesus was deliberately doing these miracles on the Sabbath to show his identity as the son of God and to show his work as one who brings God's rest.

That's what the Sabbath day pointed to, God's rest, which was life in all his wholeness. And that's why John has included this miracle in his book. And do you remember John's purpose statement on the next slide?

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and by believing, have life in his name. And notice there on that slide that the titles Christ and son of God are parallel. That is, they actually mean the same thing originally. They both mean king. In the Old Testament, God said every king from David's family line would be known as a Christ and a son of God. Because the king was to continue God's work. Just like a son might continue his father's work. And so earlier in John's gospel, on the next slide, Nathaniel meets Jesus and he says, Rabbi, you are the son of God.

[4 : 50] You are the king of Israel. Again, do you see how they used in parallel? Son of God meant king of Israel. And yet we know, as John the gospel writer knows, that Jesus is literally the son of God.

He is God the son. Which makes him the perfect king to continue God's work in the world, doesn't he? I mean, after all, he is God. And that's what Jesus now wants the Jews to recognize.

So instead of saying, your laws are wrong, we read in verse 17. In his defense, Jesus said to them, my father is always at his work to this very day and I am working too.

Now, the Jews accepted that God worked on the Sabbath. They knew God only rested from creating the world on the seventh day, not from sustaining the world.

The Bible tells us that the sun doesn't rise automatically each morning. God causes it to rise. God is the one who sustains our laws of physics and gravity and atmosphere and even our bodies.

[6 : 00] That breath that you just took is because God sustains our lungs and enables us to take it. We owe God much more than we realize, don't we?

But here, by claiming to work on the Sabbath and by calling God his father, Jesus is basically saying he is God too. And that the Jews could not accept.

Verse 18. For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

You've heard of the expression, out of the frying pan into the fire? That seems to be what's happening here. You see, if our father is human, then it means we're also human.

And so if Jesus is saying God is his father, then he's saying that he is a God too. But the Jews rightly believe there's only one God. So for Jesus to claim to be God too, like a second God, well, that was so offensive, they wanted to kill him.

[7 : 12] Now, I realize this is hard for us to understand because we've had 2,000 years to get used to the idea that Jesus is literally the son of God. Even non-Christians know this.

And so for us, we don't feel the shock that the Jews felt. In fact, often more people these days are shocked at the recent news, like on the next slide from New Idea. You know, the divorce of Princess Mary.

Shock news. Don't worry, it's actually not true. I just checked. Which means the magazine New Idea should really be called No Idea. But the point is, while the Jews felt the shock of this statement, we often miss it altogether, don't we?

We can take it for granted. But if we remember who Jesus is, then doesn't it help us to see afresh how extraordinary his death for us was? That God would come down to earth only to be rejected, spat on and crucified for us.

Isn't that extraordinary? Is that not a God worth following? But Jesus is not just... Sorry, Jesus now goes on to explain that he is not another God, a second God in competition with the true God.

[8 : 29] Rather, he is one with the Father. For he only does the Father's work. So point to verse 19. Jesus gave them this answer. Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself.

He can do only what he sees his Father doing. Because whatever the Father does, the Son also does. And here is the first of three truly statements, or verily, verily in the King James.

And Jesus begins this first one by saying, he only does what the Father does. Kids often copy their parents, don't they?

For better or worse. I caught Tim saying to a car that cut us off last week, oh, come on. He got it from his mother. No, no.

Like Father, like Son. And it's like that with God only always good. Jesus only does what he sees his Father doing, which means they act as one.

[9 : 34] That's the point. Perhaps to visualize this, on the next slide, it's kind of like those canoe races in the Olympics. The person behind looks at the person in front. So they do exactly the same thing.

And when they do, notice, it's like they are united as one, doing it together as one unit. Or a bit closer on the next slide, maybe it's Father-Son kind of thing. That's probably more closer to what's happening here.

Jesus says the same thing in verse 30. Come down to verse 30 at the end of this section of the three truly statements. He says the same thing, verse 30. He says, by myself, I can do nothing. Same thing as verse 19. I judge only as I hear from the Father. And my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself, but him who sent me.

You see, Jesus submits to his Father, seeks to please only his Father, and does only what his Father says for him to do and say.

[10:36] Which means they are united in their work, because they're actually united as one God. And so later on in John's Gospel, on the next slide, Jesus will say, I and the Father are one.

And anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. You see, Jesus is saying to the Jews, he is not another rival God. He is united to the one true God as the Son.

In other words, we're talking about the Trinity. At three persons, one God. Bad maths, good theology. But it means if we look at Jesus, we see God.

If we listen to Jesus, we hear God. And if we see the work of Jesus, we see the work of God. And it's that work that Jesus now goes on to tell them about.

Do you see verse 20? He says, For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these miracles, so that you will be amazed.

[11:40] For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. For the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.

Here the Father shows the Son all he does, so that all Jesus says and does is actually God's work, including healing the lame man.

But there are two greater works or jobs that the Father shows the Son. Do you see them? The job of giving life and the job of judging people.

In the Old Testament, it was only God alone who raised the dead and gave them life. And it was only God alone who would one day judge all people. But now the Father has entrusted this work to his Son.

Jesus is now the judge before whom all people will one day answer. We may say he's gone to meet his maker, but Jesus says he's come to meet me.

[12:48] And as the judge, Jesus determines then who he gives life to and whom he doesn't. And this life, as we'll see, is both spiritual and physical life.

But for now, do you see how the Father has made the Son central to all his work? And especially the work of giving life and judging all. In fact, in each of these truly statements, Jesus talks about these two jobs of giving life and judging all.

But in each one, he adds something else. He adds either why he's given this job or how we receive life or when we receive life.

And in his first truly statement, it's the why. Why has God made Jesus so central? Why has God given him this work to do? Well, verse 23, so 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. You see, the Father gave the Son this work, not because he's lazy or the Father needs a break, but because, verse 20, the Father loves the Son.

[14:06] And verse 23 wants the Son to be honored by all. Either honored willingly now as our life giver or saviour, or honored unwillingly later as our judge where every knee will bow.

But all this means we cannot honor God without honoring Jesus, doesn't it? Which means the focus for every Christian should be on Christ. We come to Christ to bring glory to God.

The focus of every church should be on Christ. It's why our mission statement is about going, gathering, and growing in Christ. For God has made Jesus the center of his work, that all may honor him.

And so any church or version of Christianity that does not have Jesus at the center is actually a dud and does not honor the Father. I mean, even the name Christian, whose name is in it?

Christ. A friend of mine used to be in a grunge band that wrote Christian songs for teenagers. They even produced a few CD albums. And we used to run scripture seminars at local high schools back

in the day when the government allowed it.

[15 : 21] After they played a set of songs, each with a brief explanation about what the song was about, we then break into discussion groups with the kids. And I'd help lead one of these discussion groups.

And I often asked the children what they thought of the music. And I remember, or the band, and I remember one teenage boy said this. He said, the music is all right, but they just keep talking about Jesus.

Yes. Rightly so. For the Father has given the work of life, giving life and judging people to the Son, so that all may honor the Son.

Which means Jesus must be central to our church and our lives. For we cannot honor the Father without honoring the Son. But how does this Son give us life?

And what sort of life is it? Well, he tells us in the next truly statement, verse 24. He says, Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.

[16 : 30] Here's the second truly statement. And here Jesus again speaks about life and judgment. But this time he tells us how we receive it, doesn't he? It's by hearing his word and believing the one who sent him.

Of course, to hear Jesus' word is to hear the Father's word, as we've already seen. To believe in him is to believe in the Father and vice versa. To honor one is to honor the other.

And so the way we receive eternal life is to hear the word about Christ and believe. And when we do, we have spiritual eternal life now.

Did you notice that? Jesus says, the one who hears and believes has, present tense, eternal life.

He says, the one who hears and believes has passed from death to life already.

You see, the moment we believe in Jesus, we actually begin our eternal life spiritually. Where we are forgiven and given a place in God's family forever.

[17 : 36] Perhaps I can represent it visually on the next slide. So on the right hand side, the moment we believe in Jesus, it's the blue line. We begin our eternal life, which continues even when we die in this world.

What's more, in verse 24, we're told that we will not be judged. The moment we believe in Jesus, we are acquitted from judgment.

And that gives us great assurance, does it not? I've never been taken to court before, but I can imagine it would be scary, particularly if your eternal life or destiny was up for grabs.

But imagine going to court when you already knew for certain the judge would acquit you of all your crimes, all your sins. Wouldn't that be great assurance?

Imagine going to court knowing the judge would declare you free to go because someone else has paid for your sins. You wouldn't mind going to court then, would you? But what Jesus seems to particularly emphasize here is how we receive this eternal life and freedom from judgment, this assurance.

[18 : 46] It's by hearing the word and believing. So if we want people to believe, then what do they need to hear? The word of Christ.

And dare I say, this is our primary job as a church, to share the word about Jesus so that people might hear, believe and receive. That's why on the front of your bulletins down the bottom, the way we gather and grow in Christ is by prayerfully promoting and proclaiming, notice, God's word in love.

For according to Jesus himself, this is how people receive life eternal and freedom from judgment. It's no good being in a welcoming church if we never share the word of Christ. It's no good doing social justice if they never hear the word of Christ and miss out on life eternal.

It's no good caring for the environment if they don't hear the message of Jesus and so aren't saved. I know many people say churches should be primarily on about providing meals for the needy or driving the sick to doctors or helping the unemployed get jobs and so on, you know, providing for physical needs.

I even had one guy say to me that churches should also run a dating service because he was having trouble finding a wife. Now, don't mishear me. They are all good things that we should do.

[20 : 08] Well, maybe not the dating service. I'm not sure. But we should do what we can to love and care for people's physical needs. That's part of honoring Christ. But our primary work is to

share the word so that they can not just have physical life, but eternal life.

I mean, even Jesus did not come primarily to care for people's physical needs. I mean, if he did, he would have healed everyone at the pool of Bethesda last week, wouldn't he?

But he didn't, did he? He healed one man, a lame man, with his word on the Sabbath to show that he primarily came to bring life eternal, God's rest to those who believe his word.

And so that's our work. But when does this life happen? Well, we've already seen spiritual eternal life happens the moment we believe. But Jesus now unpacks the when, including the physical eternal life.

So verse 25. Very truly, I tell you. A time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and those who hear will live.

[21 : 22] For as the father has life in himself, so he's granted the son also to have life in himself and give it. I notice our third truly statement has the words time in it.

And he says this time that is coming has actually already now come. Do you notice that? When the dead will hear the voice of Jesus, the word of Christ and live.

And so here we have a picture of spiritual eternal life. When the spiritually dead hear the gospel, believe it and live. But then Jesus goes on to talk about physical eternal life on judgment day.

Verse 27. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the son of man. Do not be amazed at this. For a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.

Those who have done what is good will rise to live. And those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself, I can do nothing. I judge only as I hear.

[22 : 29] My judgment is just. For I seek not to please myself, but the one who sent me. As we've seen, God has given Jesus all authority to judge.

We heard that from our first reading where the son of man was given all authority. But here in verse 28, do you notice the time is coming? There's no and now has come, is there?

Like verse 25. This event is all about the future. The judgment will happen in the future. And on that day, notice everyone, all people will hear the voice of Jesus and come out of their graves.

In other words, all will rise physically. They will come out of their graves. As something Jesus points to when he calls Lazarus out of his tomb.

You remember. He will raise us all, whether we've been buried or cremated, and give us a new body. But only the good, that is those who believe, verse 24, will come to literally a resurrection of life.

[23 : 37] Where we will enjoy the new creation with a perfect body and with our Savior forever. But those who do evil, that is those who do not believe, will come literally to a resurrection, which is physical, a resurrection of condemnation.

They will rise with an immortal body, but not to enjoy the new creation with God, but rather to suffer eternal condemnation apart from God.

That's what the Bible calls hell. Unless we think that's not fair or too harsh, Jesus reminds us in verse 30 that his judgment is just.

That's what the Bible calls us in verse 30 that his judgment is just. And so can you see how desperately people need to hear the word of Christ? That they might be saved from this? It's the most loving thing we can do for people.

Well, I've run out of time to look at the rest of the verses or unpack points three and four in your outline. So let me begin to wrap up. You have heard the word of Christ this morning.

[24 : 44] So firstly, let me ask you, do you then believe it? Have you put your trust in him for life? If you haven't, then please do, because it makes an eternity of difference.

And for us who have, then two things. First, do we honor the son in our lives? Whether it's by listening and doing his word, even if it's sometimes hard to accept.

Or even if it's a long passage. I mean, how many of us inwardly groaned when we saw how long it was today? Or do we honor the son by the way we treat and love one another?

Even those who have little. As Jesus said, whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me. We're still to love one another. That's honoring Christ.

Or do we honor Christ by not being ashamed of him? After all, the opposite of honor is shame. I remember being at university once and the topic of religion came up in our class, our tutorial class.

[25 : 53] But I just kept quiet about being a Christian. I cared more about what my peers would think of me than about owning Christ for myself.

And seconds after class finished, these words of Jesus popped into my head from Mark's gospel. He said, do you remember these? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this generation, the son of man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his father's glory with his holy angels. I immediately said sorry and praise God that he always forgives because of his amazing grace. You see, it is much easier to talk about God, isn't it, than Jesus? When you mention the name Jesus, the temperature often rises, doesn't it? But we mustn't be ashamed of him. Rather, we must honor him by being known to follow him. And second, for us who believe, do we do what we can to share his word? Whether it's by promoting his word through praying for others, by serving here at church so that people can hear the word, or by giving so that people can hear the word.

[27 : 03] There's a guy at our church who struggles with a form of autism and lives on his own and doesn't have much money. But he just found out yesterday, yesterday I think it was, that Yarra Water overcharged him by \$200.

And so he said, oh, I can give some money to the church this Sunday, Andrew. Now, he wasn't telling me to boast. He was just excited to be able to give so that the word of Christ might be proclaimed.

Isn't that great? Or we can actually share the word by proclaiming it, not just promoting it. I know many here who, when they see the doctor, often mention things like, oh, I have people praying for me.

Or I'm not worried, Jesus is with me. Or I'm content because I know where I'm going. Jesus has secured life for me. In fact, I think I've told you before about Florence from my old church, who used to share the message about Jesus with people in the bed next to her.

And she said to me, the best thing, Andrew, is they can't run away. Well, those three boys, those three teenagers who were having a go at Joe Louis, no doubt felt very foolish for not recognizing who he was.

[28 : 15] But Jesus is no boxing heavyweight champion of the world. He's much, much more, isn't he? He's the heavyweight champion of the universe. He is the king, the son, the life giver, the judge.

And so it really does matter that we recognize who he is and believe in him. Because if we don't, we'll feel more than foolish on that last day. And if we do, then we'll seek to honor him with our lives and share his word with others so that they might have the same eternal life that we have.

Let's pray. Our gracious father, we do thank you for your word, which tells us more about your son. Father, we thank you for who he is and what he's done for us.

That he gives us life by his death and resurrection, such that we fear no judgment on that last day. Father, help us to honor him in our lives and to share his word with others, whether by promoting it or proclaiming it.

We ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen.