

John 5:18-29 “Like Father, Like Son”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I am really grateful for your prayers. I'm excited to share God's Word in India. I'm excited to share God's Word with you right now.

Great, great passage this week. We read last week of Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath day, which causes controversy that leads to Jesus saying, my Father is working, so I also am working.

And the Jewish leaders are upset because they hear Jesus equating himself with God. He's going to explain some more about his identity now in response to their murderous threats.

Before we read it, I hope that we can all acknowledge how hard these concepts are to wrap our minds around. I don't want to pretend that's not true.

[1 : 11] I still remember when I was a kid and someone at church asked me, who died on the cross? And I said, God did.

And I remember that person saying, actually it was Jesus. And that was really confusing to me. Kids, I don't know if you've had an experience like that.

It was hard for me to understand. It felt like Jesus was God and was not God at the same time. That's hard.

Kids, many of you picked up this coloring sheet this morning. Some of you have this. Wave at me if you've got a coloring sheet that looks like this with the triangle on it. Yep, I see you. Maybe some adults want one.

There's extras in the back if you want. Yep, you too can have a coloring sheet. It has this triangle to show you one way of remembering that God the Father is God.

[2 : 14] Jesus the Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. All one God, which is maybe hard.

If that seems hard to you kids, know that that's hard for us adults to understand too. But also know this. This morning, we're going to focus on this bottom corner of the triangle, the Son.

Jesus the Son being God himself. That's what we're going to focus on. And as hard a concept as that is, that is one of the holiest concepts.

One of the most amazing things. One of the most helpful things that you could possibly learn. Because it means that when you know Jesus, you actually know the one true God and what he is like.

When you learn more about Jesus, you learn more about that God. When you know how much Jesus loves you, then you know how much the God who created the whole universe loves you.

[3 : 22] Because Jesus is God. And that is incredible. And really helpful and really hopeful. Jesus gives us a window into realities that are beyond this world.

Beyond our full comprehension. Because nothing and no one else is exactly like them. Even the triangle. Let's listen to John 5.

Beginning at verse 18. 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. So 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. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

[4 : 23] And greater works than these he will 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 is passed from death to life.

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. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

And he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out.

[5 : 26] Those who have done good to the resurrection of life. And those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. This is God's word. Let's ask for his help.

Father, indeed, these are things too marvelous for us to comprehend, for me adequately to explain. So, Holy Spirit, would you help us?

Would you speak to our hearts in ways that we can understand that we may not just learn more about Jesus, that we may know more deeply, more rightly, more passionately the God who made us and who loves us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. One of the first things to notice here in this passage is how Jesus does not respond to those who are wanting to kill him.

Think how you might respond. They wanted to kill him because he said he was equal with God. And that seems to me like the easiest and safest way forward would have been to say, no way.

[6 : 43] Listen. You are misunderstanding me. Of course there is only one God. We're all good Jews here. Everyone knows that.

I'm not the one. Not in the way you're thinking about it. But Jesus doesn't say any of that, does he? He does clarify some things that we'll come back to in a minute.

Distinctions between father and son. But in these verses he is affirming in no uncertain terms that he is God. John has told us already that the word was with God and the word was God at the same time.

And now here is Jesus, the word made flesh, equating himself as the son with God the father, his father. He first says it generally in everything.

Whatever the father does, that the son does likewise. The same things, the same way, whatever.

- [7 : 53] All of it. Human sons may be a chip off the old block, we say. They may remind us of their father's mannerisms or skills or occupation sometimes.
- But they certainly have to grow into that. Jesus perfectly reflects the image of God and reveals the very nature, the very person of God.
- As the church has affirmed in the Nicene Creed for nearly 1700 years, Jesus is the only begotten son of God before all worlds. The world's very God of very God.
- Not made of the same substance as the father. There is nothing God does that is beyond the power and the reach of Jesus.
- And as if to drive that point home, Jesus then gives two examples here of things that most clearly belong to God.
- [9 : 02] Everyone listening would have known that. The beginning of things and the end of things. The giving of life and the final judgment. Jesus says, I do them both.
- Giving life. Verse 21. Jesus has already healed people. We've seen it. But greater works are coming, he says, including raising people from the dead.
- Just wait. We're going to get to read it in John. For as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whom he will.
- He is himself able to make the dead live. To give life. Verse 26 says, because like the father, the son actually has life in himself.
- No one else, no one else is the Lord and giver of life but God. But then at the other end, Jesus will also be the judge of all.
- [10 : 08] The father has given judgment to him. Verse 22. And the authority to execute final, eternal judgment.
- For sure, a divine prerogative. Why? Because he is the son of man. Yes, the one who has himself lived, been tempted, and obeyed the father.
- But more particularly, the son of man is the one in the book of Daniel who comes on the clouds of heaven. When the books are opened for divine judgment, here's a divine figure who reigns with the ancient of days.
- Jesus is doubling down, not backing down on claims of equality with God. Giving life.
- Judging the world. And then verse 23. Right at the heart of this argument, the coup de grace, if you will.
- [11 : 13] Jesus does all these things the father does with the goal that all may honor the son just as they honor the father.
- Honor. Wow. Honor. Honor. What we might call worship of someone as worthy of the reverence due to the king, the creator, the judge, is due to the son.
- In fact, without honoring the son, you can't honor the father because he sent the son. You understand, I think, that this makes Christianity distinctive from all other monotheistic religions, doesn't it?
- Judaism, Islam, and others would teach that the best way to honor God is to honor him exclusively. At the heart of Christianity is the teaching that the way to honor God is to honor the one he sends.
- That's how equal, how united, how inseparable are the father and the son. No other person like that. Honoring one honors the other.
- [12 : 36] They can share honor without either losing honor because, as Jesus later says, they are one. See, Jesus doesn't want you to think that he's just talking himself up as great and powerful as God, that here they are alongside one another.

Perhaps he is running. He's in the running for speaker of heaven. He's a rival candidate for greatest God. Maybe that's how some would take this. So right as he claims equality, he highlights their relationship, father and son, and the role that he plays.

So that we will know Jesus is not a rival to God. First notice that all of these things he's doing are possible because the father loves the son.

Verse 20. A peak, just stop and reflect on that for a minute. Peek into the eternal Godhead wherein perfect love has always existed.

From whom perfect love has continued to flow. Wow. That love between the father and son is the fount of so much comfort and assurance and wonder for us.

[14 : 04] But then notice repeatedly how Jesus is not competing with God, but rather submitting to the father. Verse 19.

Verse 19. The son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing. Jesus, being equal with God, has from eternity past agreed to submit his will wholeheartedly to the will of his father.

In love, they hatch the wonderful plan of redemption so that the father, notice even just in this passage, sends the son.

He gives him authority for judging. He shows the son what he does so that even when the most excruciating thought of being separated from his father means that drops of blood are pouring as sweat from Jesus, from the flesh of the incarnate son.

He says what? Not my will, but yours be done. Do you hear that? Do you hear in his words? Do you hear Jesus in full equality with his father saying, I do the will of my father.

[15 : 28] I've come to accomplish his work. This is how our relationship works, father and son. The British author and theologian of the last century, C.S. Lewis, popularized an argument that while it has some limitations, I'll explain in a minute, is still really powerful when you consider claims like the ones we read in this passage.

It's referred to as the trilemma. Trilemma, not a dilemma, two things, but a trilemma, three options or possibilities. It's referring to when Jesus makes these claims of deity that we're just reading.

You may read those and just say, well, that's just what he says about himself. Anybody can say anything, right? Lewis says if he's saying things like that, he is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord.

Three options and that's all. First, he's wrong and he knows it. Liar. Second, he's wrong but he just doesn't realize it.

He's a lunatic. Or third, he's right. And he really is the Lord, the Lord of all. Lewis uses this trilemma to address the notion that I hear often these days that Jesus is a good moral teacher and that is all.

[17 : 09] No more, no less. Not actually divine, but as a man I spoke with recently told me, quote, someone whose teachings and example shaped Western society for the better.

That's all. Here's what Lewis said about that in his book, Mere Christianity. You must make your choice. Either this man Jesus was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and kill him as a demon. Or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. In other words, no matter how many good things you may say, if you falsely claim to be God, if you tell people to give their lives for things that you say, for a false hope, if you mislead millions, you're not a good teacher or person for that matter.

Not at all. Jesus cannot be just a good person. He's either the son of God as he claims or he is a very bad person indeed.

[18 : 44] Right? There seem to be none of these middle of the road responses to Jesus in his day either, right? I mean, once people hear him clearly, some of them bow down before him in worship.

Others plot his death or pick up stones to kill him, but really nothing often in between. I think it's a good indication that if we find ourselves between seemingly extreme options like that, we are at least hearing Jesus' claims correctly.

Three options. Lewis concludes this way, now it seems to me obvious that he was neither a lunatic nor a fiend. And consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God.

Now the most common objection to this trilemma is one I addressed briefly a few weeks ago in talking about the historical reliability of the biblical accounts.

It's the idea that Jesus is not liar, not lunatic, and not lord, but rather a fourth option, rather he's legend, if you will. That what we read here about Jesus is not actually how Jesus understood himself.

[20 : 15] He did indeed do lots of good things and taught lots of good things, and then it's his followers, it's all their fault. They made up these bits, these small little snippets here and there where he claims to be God so that they could turn it into a bigger following and a more exciting thing to be a part of.

There are so many reasons to dispute this currently very popular line of thinking, including the historical nature of the gospel accounts, the eyewitness timing of the stories, and many more, but one I want us to consider this morning as we try to think about what Jesus was teaching about his deity, it's that Jesus so lived this idea of being equal with God that it is on nearly every page of every gospel account.

In our passage here in John 5, he states it directly. He's teaching about the nature of it, but in basically every chapter, he'll do or say something that indirectly indicates that he is, that he must be equal with God.

I'm just gonna name a few and not give text because most of these he does multiple or even dozens of times, but they're important. Jesus forgave sins, and who can forgive sins but God alone, the one alone against whom every sin is committed, and Jesus pronounces forgiveness himself.

Jesus taught on his own authority. Every good prophet said things like what? Thus says the Lord, or hear the word of the Lord.

[22 : 07] Jesus said over and over what? Truly, truly, I say to you. In fact, you have heard it was said, but I say to you.

And just as God's word will be fulfilled, so Jesus says heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Big claim. Similarly, Jesus performed miracles on his own authority. Again, as a rule, prophets and apostles give glory to God for miracles.

Jesus heals with his own word, at his own will, and receives the glory for himself. That is a no-no for prophets, isn't it? What happens when Moses receives glory for himself for a miracle?

When he tries to take the credit, he gets significant punishment. Jesus repeatedly takes credit with no divine lightning strikes. Nothing jumps in to correct him when he takes the credit for himself.

[23 : 11] Every time, one of these miracles that he's performing, it's as though Jesus is slapping, you know, hashtag, I am God. He doesn't have to say the words.

What he's doing is making that statement. Jesus applied Old Testament passages about Yahweh, the one true God, to himself. For example, when the children are praising Jesus in the temple after the triumphal entry, Jesus doesn't stop them.

In fact, he explains to the chief priests and the scribes that this is Psalm 8 happening right in front of them. Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies, you have ordained praise.

Psalm 8, a Psalm of praise, of course, to Yahweh himself. Oh Lord, our Lord. And Jesus says it's happening right now when they praise me.

Jesus connected eternity with relationship with him. Life eternal in him. In fact, he tells his followers to love him and keep his commands even if it costs them their lives, even to the point of death.

[24 : 23] You are not a very good teacher, I would say, unless you've got something for them after that death. Jesus received worship willingly.

Now certainly many saw and heard Jesus and they wanted to kill him for blasphemy. But some would throw themselves at his feet like the leper he healed who came back praising God.

When that happens, before other good men and angels even, they refused such worship. They repeatedly in the New Testament say, stand up, stop worshiping me, I'm just a man like you.

Jesus doesn't seem to have a problem with it. After all, he doesn't want to point our worship away from the one who's truly worthy of it. And he is God himself.

I could keep going on all of these ways, but Jesus' understanding of his equality with God is throughout his life and ministry. If you want to cut out the references, you will have very little of the gospels left in your Bible.

[25 : 36] Very few pages uncut. And you'll have very little left of a good teacher or a good person. He and his claims to deity are not a legend.

And most agree, he doesn't seem like a liar or a lunatic. He's calling us to bow before him as Lord.

doing that really is as simple as trusting yourself to him. The one who is God himself who can truly, because of that, give you life.

Jesus says, verse 24, that as we hear his word and believe the one who sent him, we have eternal life. Deliverance from death and a new life with him.

by believing. If that sounds like what I say every week, good.

[26 : 42] Don't forget it. You have life by believing in him. Period. These things were written that you might not just become more moral and attract God's attention and affection because you're such a good person, but that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that you might have life in his name, that you might realize that God's attention and affection are already so much yours that Jesus came for you.

I want you to know him and know that life because you know him. And listen, when you do, when you believe him, when you experience that life, knowing him, trusting him, receiving his love is so good that your life absolutely will change.

When you start experiencing that new life, it makes you completely new. Let me say it this way in light of our conversation about who Jesus is this morning. Think of it this way.

If Jesus can't be just a good person, you can't be just a good person either. If Jesus can't just be a good person, you can't just be a good person either.

If Jesus must be God himself, if he is your king, you follow him. And if he does, what does he do?

[28 : 19] only what the father is doing, if he submits his will to the father, then believing God, then following Jesus means you give yourself up to all of it.

You say you found life in God, then everything changes. Submit to his will in everything, right? Jesus did too many people in buildings like this are content at being pretty good people.

Thinking life consists, this is where life is, it's in not doing anything that's too bad. It's in coming to church services with reasonable regularity and doing some good things for other people and that's life.

I'll go enjoy myself and do what I want. Jesus says in not so many words, that's not an option. That is not a reasonable option. Call him a liar, call him a lunatic, call him a legend and it's an option.

You can go on being a pretty good decently moral person. That's just fine. But if you call him Lord and God, you must submit to him in all of life, obeying every word, reordering every priority, right?

[29 : 44] That's who he is. You've passed from death to life, so now live like someone with a new life, who knows the true king, who has eternal security, who has hope today and purpose, who has joy that is worth sharing and a hope and eternity worth sacrificing for whatever it costs right now.

Live like that person, with reckless abandon, fully submitting everything you are and all that you have to Jesus and his kingdom and know that at the end of the day, your relationship with Jesus does not rest on how well you perform at submitting to him.

Believe in him and you get his perfect submission to the Father given to you as well. You get that for your security and for your life.

See, Jesus is not the first person in the Bible referred to as God's son. He is the true and only begotten son of God who stands where other sons have fallen and failed.

Adam was a son of God. He was supposed to reflect God's image perfectly, to trust and obey God in everything. He doubted God's goodness, obeyed the desires of his eyes.

[31 : 21] He failed. The kings of Israel were sometimes referred to as sons of God who were to lead God's people and following after God and pursuing his law.

They followed other gods. They led God's people astray. They failed. The people of Israel, the whole group of them are sometimes called God's son who were supposed to live in relationship with Yahweh and be a light to the nations.

They often cared more about themselves, wandered in darkness after other gods. They failed. So, God sent his only begotten son who perfectly reflects the image of the father, always trusts his plan even to death, obeys God's will in everything.

He's the true son. Jesus is the true son who always leads God's people toward the father and his good law that directs our paths. Jesus is the true son who shines as a light to the nation so that they run to him and find life in him.

So that when you and I fail to bow down, when we fail to measure up and we think that we will be hopelessly without life, we can trust again the true son and find life and actually be welcomed back to the father as sons and daughters by faith in the one and only divine son who loved us and gave himself for us.

[33 : 11] Let's pray. Jesus, we bow before you in worship as the one true and awesome God, the one worthy of all of our praise, not just when we come in a building and sing to you, but every moment of every day, with all of our lives, all we are and all we have.

Oh, help us. We've confessed we often don't treat you that way. We don't live as though that's true. Help us, Jesus, by your divine power, your spirit at work within us that we might really know life with you.

Experience it now that we might share it with those around us and look forward to celebrating it forever. We ask this in your name. Amen.

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