

John 5:16-30

The claims of the Son of God

Introduction

After Jesus had healed the man by the pool of Bethesda, who had been ill for 38 years, one might have expected universal acclaim and thanksgiving. But orthodox Jews with their mass of burdensome oral traditions about the Sabbath were alarmed. They were full of black looks. How could they be pleased? Here was a man carrying a burden on the Sabbath. They did not allow anyone to have as much as a needle in their robe on the Sabbath, or have artificial teeth, or wooden leg, or broach on the robe. They did not allow anyone to lift a chair, and they agonised over whether it was right to pick up and carry a baby. No wonder they did not take kindly to a man carrying his bed after he had quite wrongly been healed on the Sabbath day. This was to add insult to injury.

So they laid this charge against Jesus that He was a Sabbath-breaker – in fact a habitual Sabbath-breaker (ελυεν). This led to another of the bitter controversies that Jesus had with religious legalistic enemies among the Jews. In the course of the controversy, Jesus makes some extraordinary claims about who He was and what He was able to do – both now and in the future.

Let Him speak for Himself. Listen carefully as He explains what He can do for you now and what He will do for you when He empties the graves and raises the dead. Jesus in talking here, not just inspired apostles explaining the teaching of Christ. Jesus could not be more direct as He speaks to us. The issue is between Him and us directly.

Jesus' claims about Himself

Jesus makes claims found on the lips of no other teachers, pointing us to the uniqueness of the Christian message. We do not dare put Christianity as just another religious option and another world religion. Never put Jesus Christ on a level with Buddha or Mohammed or Confucius. He puts forward most extraordinary claims about Himself.

In one of the most important statements about the person of Jesus Christ to be found in this Gospel, or indeed the whole New Testament, He puts Himself on a level with God the Father. He tells His enemies that God in a very special way is His Father. At once His enemies accuse Him of making Himself equal with God, and of course they are right. Jesus does the same things as God. God is working still, and Jesus is doing the same. God has finished the work of creation, but is still at work governing the world and supplying needs. He still causes the sun to rise and the grass to grow on the Sabbath. Jesus also works, hence His healing of the invalid. The Father raises the dead, and Jesus says He raises dead. The Father exercises judgment over man, and so does Jesus. He is absolutely one with God in every way. Then He points out that since they honour and glorify God, they ought to honour and glorify Him. There is no jealousy in the Father; He is delighted when we honour the Son.

Jesus deliberately puts Himself on level with God. God is almighty, powerful and perfect. Jesus says He is also. The Father is eternal, and so is the Son. The Father is God, and so is the Son. Here we are in the presence of a great mystery, far too great for feeble minds to take in. The mystery of the Godhead – three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The mystery of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ – two aspects or sides to His person: The man, Christ Jesus, who was hungry, thirsty, suffered and died; and at the same time equal with God, same power as God, honoured with God, shared His mystery and wonder. Salvation depends on this truth. If He was not man, He could not have represented us on the Cross. If He were not God, He would not have been able to offer Himself as a sacrifice to save the vast multitude which no man can number.

*“He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all.”*

This passage emphasises His deity, that Jesus Christ is a member of the Godhead, the second person of the Trinity. We are to honour Him. And with our lips and our hearts and lives we crown Him Lord of all.

Jesus' claims about what He can do for us in the present

Whoever hears my words and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, 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 (John 5:24,25). How often people think that eternal life is something they get when they die. We get it in fullness then, but it is a present possession now. From the spiritual point of view, we were dead. But it is possible to be alive. God becomes real, His Word becomes real, Christian fellowship is real, worship is real, life has point and meaning and purpose because it is linked up to God. Till we know Christ, we only exist.

We see it all around – people wandering without sense of direction or goal. Although occupied – love making, war making, peace making, and career making – yet dissatisfied, bored and unhappy. No ultimate values to give integration to life, confined to this life with no link to the eternal world, no recognition of God's controlling hand. Statistics show an alarming jump in suicides, especially among young people, in recent years, and Samaritans report a growing number of contacts made by people who are calling out for help. A former chief government medical officer described suicide as “the tip of a huge iceberg of despair and misery in young people”. People swallow the devil's lies wholesale. “Throw off your Victorian ideas, express yourself, indulge self to the full – drugs, promiscuity, indulgence, marry fame, please yourself – this is all you need, you have arrived, you'll be made.” But the truth is the huge iceberg of despair and misery.

How often people say when they felt the liberating touch of Christ on their soul, “only then did I begin to live”. He gives us life through His voice. So often hearing a voice made all the difference – consider Samuel in the Temple, Isaiah in the Temple, Saul on the road to Damascus, Lazarus in the grave, the disciples at their workplace – hearing His call and turning to answer. Have you turned to Christ's voice? “Follow me”, “Come to me”. Are you listening? Are you tuned in? Sometimes He speaks with a still small voice; sometimes it is a trumpet call, masterful and impassioned. But

whatever its tones, it tells of life made new, and it comes with power. It speaks of forgiveness and purpose. He promises that when anyone hears, i.e. with trust, obedience and response, he will live. The dead, merely existing, come alive.

Jesus' claims about what He will do in the future

A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 6:28.29). What solemn and serious words. No mere man's words. The Son of God, who is one with God, One to be honoured with the Father – He is the speaker. How seriously we need to face what He says.

There is going to be a resurrection. The dead will go in one of two directions – either to live, to enjoy fullness of eternal life, or to condemnation, banished from the presence of God forever. This life is not the end. Death is only the end of this life. There will be another one of eternal dimensions. Which direction will you go in? There are only two. No third destination, no annihilation, no alternative. Do not just hope for the best. Jesus says we can know with certainty, and He describes precisely who is going where.

“Those who have done good” – how important to interpret that phrase in the light of the teaching of the Gospel of John, not as the man in the street would choose to interpret it. “Done good” means the things God requires of us, that we have put our trust in His Son, abide in His Son and obey His Son. That brings eternal life. And doing evil is just the reverse – rejecting His Son, not believing His Son, turning back on His Son.

So everyone can know exactly where he or she will be when Jesus opens the graves. Christ is the touchstone. Must take these things seriously.

A man was once standing by the rail of a big Cunard liner crossing the ocean, tossing something up and down. Someone asked what it was he was playing with, a marble? No, it was a diamond. The man had put all his savings into the diamond, it was his investment, it represented his entire fortune, and he was taking it to the States to get a better price for it. Asked if he wasn't taking a great risk, tossing it up and down so close to the edge of the rail, he replied he had been doing it safely for the last half hour. And with that he threw it up, but was distracted, failed to catch it, and it fell into the ocean to be lost forever. You say, that's a ridiculous story, couldn't possibly be true, no one would be mad enough to do a thing like that. But it is true. The person in the story is right here. That person is you. That sea is the ocean of eternity. That diamond is your soul. Are you not playing around with it? Are you not taking a great risk? You say, it will be fine, I've been doing it for the last 40 years, no risk. Do not play the fool. Take action and take it now. Be sure of Christ now. Put your soul into safe hands or else you might lose it forever.