

The Voice of the Son – *John 5:16-30*

Introduction – We come to a unique portion of this Gospel in which Jesus declares and defends His divinity and sonship. Because of the formal structure and legal charge of the argument, some wonder if this is an address before the assembled Sanhedrin. In it, our Lord makes clear His unity and submission to the Father, His divine commission and authority from the Father, and the proofs of His Messiahship. Consider the Words of the One Who is the Word of God, whose Voice brings life to the dead, and at whose Name every knee shall bow.

“My Father’s” Sabbath Work (vv16-18) – Chapter 5 began with the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda, which as it turns out was on the Sabbath (vv8-10). The paralytic’s mat was a sign of victory over suffering and death, a sabbath from sin’s curse and a sabbath into salvation’s rest. And yet, for this reason, the Jews (probably the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling court) harassed Jesus and even sought to kill Him. This may have not been the first time Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, many others are recorded in the other gospels. In this incident, Jesus simply turns up the heat. He sees the controversy as a teaching moment. Jesus answered that the Father (“My Father”) has always been working and so had He (v17). This might seem obscure to us, but it was clear to the Jewish authorities: Jesus was claiming that God was His Father and that He was equal with God (v18). Now they sought to kill Him all the more.

Rarely in the Old Testament is God called “Father” (Isaiah 63, 64), but rabbinic law taught that God was a father to the Jewish nation (much like we might call George Washington the “father of our nation”). Covenantally, God was “our Father.” But Jesus was claiming something else. Jesus said He was “My Father” and that just as the Father works on the Sabbath, so does the Son, “*upholding all things by the power of His word*” (Heb 1:3). The Father and the Son uphold all things at all times by the power of the Word. If God did not actively sustain us and hold all things together, we would cease to be.

Like Father, Like Son (vv19-23) – Jesus begins this address by taking a vow (“Amen, Amen,” or “Most Assuredly”) and will do so twice more (vv24-25). The Son does whatever the Father does because they are in perfect union. And while the Son is fully God, equal to the Father, He is eternally begotten of the Father and so “*can do nothing of Himself.*” Though coeternal and codivine, the Son is functionally subordinate to the Father. There is no personal inferiority to the Father; rather Jesus says, “*I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me*” (v30). The Word of God loves to be the Word which God desires and sends. Think of it this way: Jesus is not simply the One (or another one) bringing the message of God; Jesus is the Message of God.

The Son delights to do what the Father is doing (v19b, like sustaining, healing, saving on the Sabbath). And the Father loves the Son and so shows Him all that He does (v20a). Jesus then alludes to even greater things that He will do that the Father will show Him (v20b). These first two reasons display the unity of the Father and the Son. The next two reasons display the power and authority granted to the Son by the Father, namely, to give life (v21) and to judge (v22). Throughout the Old Testament, Yahweh alone had the power to give life (Deut 32:39, 1 Sam 2:6, Psalm 68:20) and was the final judge (Psalm 9:7-8, 98:9). Jesus is saying that the power of life and judgment has been conferred to Him by the Father. And the reason is so that “*all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father*” (v23). Equal honor is to be given to the Persons of the Trinity, and we are warned that specifically to give honor to the Father only and not to the Son as well is to not give honor at all to God (v23b). We are to render honor to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The First Resurrection (vv24-25) – This is the center of Jesus’ argument, and He solemnizes these statements again with His “Amen, amen.” In verse 21 He said, “*even so the Son gives life to whom He will.*” How does He do that? In verse 24 He says, “*he who hears My Word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life*” and in verse 25, “*the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.*” But this is not about the final resurrection. Again in verse 24, “*he who hears...has everlasting life*”, and verse 25, “*the hour is coming, and now is...*” One who hears the voice of Christ in the preaching of the gospel tastes resurrection life; he “*has passed from death to life*” (cf. Col 1:13). This is what Paul describes in Eph 2:1,4. This is what we experience as the Spirit works in us (Gal 2:20, 5:22-25). “*...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*” (Rom 10:17).

The Son’s Ability and Authority (vv26-27) – These verses explain how it is that the Son can bring forth resurrection life and declare divine judgment. It is because the Father has granted the Son to have life in Himself and has given Him authority to execute judgment. “*Life in Himself*” first of all means that the Son, just as the Father, is self-existent. The Jews already believed this about God and Jesus is declaring it of Himself as well. This is part of the Nicene Creed – “*...begotten, not made, being of one substance (Latin: existence) with the Father...*” There has always been an eternal “granting” of life by the Father to the Son, for we

have been told of the Word that was with God in the beginning that “*In Him was life*” (1:4, also 1 John 1:2). Theologians refer to this as the eternal generation of the Son.

The Second Resurrection (vv28-30) – You think that’s amazing, Jesus says, but “*do not marvel*” for that’s nothing. For there will be a final resurrection where all who are in the graves will hear His voice, each and every one. And all will be resurrected, each and every one. Everyone will stand before this judgment, but those who had heard His voice in the first resurrection “*shall not come into judgment*” (v24) because that will have already taken place on the Cross. All they will have to offer is what they have “*done good*” which of course they will now perfectly see as the good works that God had done through them (Eph 2:10, Phil 2:13). This will be the eternal version of “giving thanks to God for the good works He has done in me.” Another way to look at this is that your good works will be fully glorified in the resurrection in such a way as to magnify the glory of Jesus and His perfect work in you. You will share in that glory, you will delight in that glory, and that glory will be a communion-glory with the Son and with the Father. But to the rest, no matter how much they may have dismissed His voice in the past, they will hear His voice on that day in full (Rev 20:11-13) and the glory of His vindicating wrath over sin will be in full display (Rom 9:22).

Hear the Voice of Christ Today – Our society, our world, has displayed in these last couple of years, that they hear the voice of death and are afraid. We might think that we need to teach them not to fear death. Instead, maybe we need to teach them to fear death far more – for they are only afraid of the first death, a cessation of living here. That’s nothing. “*Do not marvel.*” We ought to fear the second death which swallows up the first death (Luke 12:5). Fear Him who has the power to cast into hell. That is the fear that our nation needs. But if God grants us hearing and we hear the Word of Christ, then we have nothing to fear. Only glory to behold. “*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*” 1 John 3:2-3.

Dave Hatcher – January 23, 2022

¹⁹Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

²⁰For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

²¹For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.

²²For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, ²³that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

²⁴“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

²⁵Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

²⁶For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, ²⁷and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

²⁸Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

³⁰I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.