

Jesus, our Judge; and the Resurrection of the Dead (John 5:18-30)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Jesus Makes Himself Equal with God

- a. Review from the previous lesson. We learned from **John 5:1-17** that:
 - i. A man who had been paralyzed for 38 years wants to be brought down to the water at the pool of Bethesda for healing.
 - ii. Instead of assisting him to the water, Jesus simply calls him to rise, take up his bed and walk. The man is healed. Word gets out, and the Jews are upset about this miracle.
 - iii. The Jews want to kill Jesus, because they accuse Him of “working” on the Sabbath. Working on the Sabbath was punishable by death according to the Law of Moses (**Exodus 31:13-17**)
 - iv. Jesus replies to the charge by saying, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” (**John 5:17, NKJV**)
 1. Rather than saying that healing someone should not be considered work (it is *not* like a carpenter building a house, a mason building a wall, or a farmer plowing a field), Jesus answers in effect, “YES, I have been working on the Sabbath!”
- b. Read **John 5:16-23**
 - i. Let us consider the points Jesus makes here, regarding God. All put him on the same plane as God. These things he claims could only be true if Jesus is the Son of God, and *divine himself*:
 1. He refers to Himself as “the Son”, and God “the Father”. In the mind of his opponents, he is therefore “making himself equal with God”.
 2. He says that the Father shows Him everything He does, and that He (the Son) in turn does exactly what His Father does.
 3. Jesus says that they will be shown *even greater works* than the one done recently (healing a man paralyzed for 38 years). He says that the Father can raise the dead and give them life; therefore, the Son can (and will) do likewise.

4. Jesus says that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son.
 - a. At the household of Cornelius, Peter said, “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.” (**Acts 10:42**, NKJV)
 - b. Paul preached to the Greeks at the Areopagus in Athens, “He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” (**Acts 17:31**, NKJV)
 - c. In **Romans**, Paul warns of the Day of Judgment to come, “when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.” (**Romans 2:16**, NKJV)
 - d. Paul charged Timothy, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! ...” (**2 Timothy 4:1-2**, NKJV)
5. Since all judgment has been given to the Son, all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Furthermore, *anyone who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father!*
 - a. Since all men are called to worship and obey the Father, then this means that *they should worship and obey the Son, as well!*
 - b. This is yet one more passage that confirms the divinity of Jesus Christ, from His own words.
 - c. Muslims are trained to challenge Christians with the question, “Where does Jesus say, ‘I am God, worship Me’?”
 - i. This is a trick question, demanding that Jesus use *specific words*. One could just as easily turn the question around and ask the Muslim challenger, “So where does Jesus say, ‘I am *not* God; *don’t worship Me*’?”
 - ii. However, perhaps an even better answer is to turn to this passage in **John 5:22-23**. If Jesus tells us that the Son must be honored just as the Father is, and the Father is to be worshipped, then

he is clearly saying that He must be worshiped as well!

1. When Satan tempts Jesus with all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will worship Satan, Jesus replies, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (**Luke 4:8**, NKJV, where Jesus is citing **Deuteronomy**)
2. Note that in **Matthew 28:17** we see the disciples worshiping Jesus after the resurrection.
3. In contrast, when John bows down to an angel in **Revelation 22:8-9**, the angel admonishes John not to do that. John is told instead, "Worship God".
4. Note that the Greek word for worship in all three New Testament passages cited above is the same: προσκυνεω (proskuneo).

ii. Further thoughts on how we should see Jesus

1. Jesus has just revealed several important *similarities* between Himself and the Father, showing himself to be equal to His Father in his nature. Earlier in our study of John, we discussed that both God and Jesus are uncreated and eternal. Here, Jesus explains several other ways the Son is like the Father:
 - a. Both are working at all times without violating the Sabbath commandment of Moses.
 - b. The Son does whatever His Father does.
 - c. The Son also raises the dead and gives them life.
 - d. The Son is to be honored just as the Father is honored. In fact, anyone not honoring the Son does not honor the Father!
2. However, while the Father and Son share the same divine nature, they are different persons. Jesus also points out one *difference* in terms of their roles: the Father has committed all judgment into the hands of the Son.

- a. Many Christians like to see Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Suffering Servant who sacrificed himself voluntarily to save us from our sins.
- b. However, they do *not* particularly like to see Him as the Great Judge, whom all will stand before on the Last Day.
- c. Jesus presented himself as the Great Judge seated on the throne of judgment in **Matthew 25**, in the story of the Sheep and the Goats.
 - i. Jesus begins the story: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'. (**Matthew 25:31-34**, NKJV)
 - ii. However to the goats, the ones He had placed on His left He says, "'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'"
 - iii. "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'" (**Matthew 25:41-46**, NKJV)
 - iv. Note that *both groups* being judged, the sheep (representing who are rewarded with heaven) and the goats (those who are cast into everlasting fire) are *believers in Jesus*. *The ones in*

the second group, the goats, even refer to Him as "Lord", and are clearly surprised at their fate on the Last Day!

3. The Bible speaks of *two comings of Christ*. The first time He came in humiliation to save men. However, the second time He will come in glory to judge all men. The early Christian writers said this was one of the main reasons that the Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah: *they only saw the prophecies regarding the second, glorious coming*.
 - a. Justin Martyr, a Christian writer from Samaria, c. 160 AD explains to Trypho, a Jew, that the Jews were expecting a glorious Messiah; yet they missed the prophecies that pointed to *two different* appearances of the Christ.
 - i. "O unreasoning men! Understanding not what has been proved by all these passages, that two advents of Christ have been announced: the one, in which He is set forth as suffering, inglorious, dishonored, and crucified; but the other, in which He shall come from heaven with glory." (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*. In Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p. 253.)
 - b. Irenaeus, a bishop of the church in Lyon, in modern-day France, writing about the year 180 AD said:
 - i. "(The Jews) do not recognize the advent of Christ, which He accomplished for the salvation of men, nor are willing to understand that all the prophets announced His *two advents*: **the one**, indeed, in which He became a man subject to stripes, and knowing what it is to bear infirmity, and sat upon the foal of an ass, and was a stone rejected by the builders, and was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and by the stretching forth of His hands destroyed Amalek (*a reference to Exodus 17:8-13 story, which several early Christian writers saw as foreshadowing the cross of Christ, by which we would obtain the victory - CP*); while He gathered from the ends of the earth into His Father's fold the children who were scattered abroad, and remembered His own dead ones who had formerly fallen asleep,

and came down to them that He might deliver them:"

- ii. "but **the second** in which He will come on the clouds, bringing on the day which burns as a furnace, and smiting the earth with the word of His mouth, and slaying the impious with the breath of His lips, and having a fan in His hands, and cleansing His floor, and gathering the wheat indeed into His barn, but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Source: Irenaeus, Against Heresies. In Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p. 506).
4. The challenge for us: to see Jesus Christ clearly, embracing *both* His First Coming (as the suffering servant, who died for us), and His Second Coming (as the Great Judge whom we must all stand before). Seeing Christ as the Great Judge who is coming again should be a powerful motivation to change our lives in several areas. Since He can return at any time, our awareness should be heightened!
 5. What is the significance of seeing Jesus as *both* our Savior and our future Judge? There are several areas of our lives that should be impacted:
 - a. First, to stop sinning, and to clean up our own spiritual lives; to repent, and live lives pleasing to God.
 - i. "Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." (**2 Corinthians 5:9-11**, NKJV)
 - b. Second, as Paul points out in the passage just read from **2 Corinthians**, to share our faith with the lost world around us. As Paul stated, "Knowing *the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*"
 - c. Third, to be slow to judge others, especially in matters of opinion; and to not look down on others.
 - i. Paul reminds us, "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. But why do you

judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” (**Romans 14:9-10**, NKJV)

- ii. Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 5** that the church is to expel an immoral brother, and in **1 Corinthians 6** Paul insists that there must be *someone* within the church who is able to judge a dispute between brothers. So, we know that Christians are called to make judgments in clear cases of sin, as well as where it is necessary to resolve conflicts. However, in the above passage, Paul also states that we should not be looking down on our brothers, as we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ!

- d. Fourth, as Jesus pointed out in the Sermon on the Mount, we need to be urgent about reconciling with our brothers (including spouses, parents, children and fellow-Christians). We are approaching the judge.
 - i. “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.” (**Matthew 5:21-26**, NKJV)
 - ii. Note that Jesus, who is addressing the crowd in the Sermon on the Mount, is also the judge in this passage. I would assume that the “officer” likely

represents the angels, with the “prison” corresponding to hell, the lake of fire.

II. Jesus Will Call the Dead Out of Their Graves

- a. Read **John 5:24-30**
- b. What Jesus is saying here.
 - i. “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man; and those who hear will live.” (**John 5:25**)
 - ii. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (**John 5:28-29**, NKJV)
- c. Significance of this passage to me, in my own spiritual journey, has been immense.
 - i. I was raised Catholic as a child; and later in life was part of a large Church of Christ.
 - ii. At funerals, I would hear things like, “So-and-so is in heaven with Jesus right now.” I also heard similar sentiments expressed from the pulpit, and I did not question this. I held to the same popular understanding as many Christians today, namely that:
 1. When we die, our soul goes straight to judgment, then immediately to heaven or hell.
 2. Our bodies deteriorate and are left behind in the grave.
 3. Saving the souls of men is the objective; the bodies will not survive.
 - iii. Sometime in the mid 1990’s, I wanted to know what the church was like in the beginning. While I had been told that my church was “just like the first century church,” I had doubts about that regarding some things I was seeing, and I had questions.
 1. After reading David Bercot’s book, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*, I discovered that there was a treasure trove of writings from the early church out there, much of which could be found in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, which included many of the church writings we have before the year 325 AD. I took the challenge presented by Bercot in his *Real Heretics* book, and started reading some of these early Christian writings on my own.

2. The first things I read were two very interesting early Christian apologies by Mark Felix and Justin Martyr contained in Ante-Nicene Fathers volume 1, that had been translated into modern English and presented in a book called *We Don't Just Speak Great Things, We Live Them*.
3. I was fascinated to learn about what the early Church was like from first-hand accounts. I learned a lot regarding what they believed about Jesus, the Bible, the divinity of Christ, Old Testament prophecies, holy living, perseverance, salvation, how someone becomes a Christian, etc. I was encouraged to find that many of the things I had come to believe were in fact what they believed.
4. And then I ran into something that both Justin Martyr and Mark Felix spoke about, in explaining the faith to unbelievers, which surprised me. They spoke about the bodies of the dead people rising up out of their graves on the last day. That seemed strange to me, and even a bit creepy. Imagine being in a graveyard and all of a sudden dead people all start coming out of their graves!
5. First I read *Octavius*, by Mark Felix (written c. 200 AD). In that story Octavius, a Christian, is engaged in a debate with Caecilius, a pagan, near Rome. There, Octavius compared what the Christians believed with what the pagan philosophers taught.
 - a. He explained, "As you can see, the philosophers said many of the same things we are saying. But this isn't to say that we are copying them. Instead, they imitated the shadow of truth by taking from the divine announcements of the prophets. For example, two of the greatest thinkers, Plato and Pythagoras, taught *a corrupted version of our doctrine of the resurrection of the dead*. According to them, however, the physical body is forever dissolved, and the soul alone lives forever." (Source: Mark Felix, *Octavius*, in *We Don't Just Speak Great Things, We Live Them*, p.58)
 - b. If Octavius was right, what I believed was the same as what *the pagan Greek philosophers* taught, not what the early Christians believed!
 - c. The early Christians believed not only that the soul continues to live on after death, but that the physical body will be resurrected on the Last Day. The two will

be reunited and will face judgment together, by the Son. While this may seem strange to us, they reasoned that God created man from nothing and has no problem putting our bodies back together. Also, God resurrected Jesus' physical body, providing the pattern for what will happen to our own bodies!

6. Then I read Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (c. 160 AD). Justin was a converted philosopher, originally from Samaria. In his letter, Justin reasoned with the government leaders in Rome:
 - a. "Listen to your philosophers – men like Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates. Take note of the poet Homer, who wrote that Ulysses inquired of the souls of the dead."
 - b. "Since you respect the views of such people, show the same respect for our beliefs. We certainly hold a firmer belief in God than they did. For we expect to obtain our own bodies back again, even though we may die and be buried. (**John 5:28-29**) Though this may sound impossible to you, we are convinced that nothing is impossible with God. (**Luke 1:37**)" (Source: Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, in *We Don't Just Speak Great Things, We Live Them*, p. 87)
 - c. There was a reference here to **John 5:28-29**. I went back and read it. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (**John 5:28-29**, NKJV)
 - i. My conclusion, after considering what Jesus actually said, was that Justin Martyr, Mark Felix and all the other early Christian writers were right, and I had been wrong the whole time! Jesus clearly said, "All those who are in their graves...will come forth!" The only thing in the grave is the bodies of dead people. Therefore, according to Jesus, the bodies of the dead *will be raised up* on the Last Day, as strange as that may have seemed to me at the time.
7. Then I started to reconsider other passages of Scripture.
 - a. From the Sermon on the Mount: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it

is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” (**Matthew 5:29-30**, NKJV)

- b. **1 Corinthians 15** – Essentially the entire chapter is about the resurrection of the body!
 - c. Many passages in Scripture also clearly state that there will be a single Day of Judgment in the future when all men and women, from all ages, will appear at the same time. Therefore, we are not each judged independently on the day that we die. Consider some examples of this teaching:
 - i. **Matthew 12:40-42**, where Jesus speaks of the men of Nineveh, the Queen of Sheba and the people of His own generation all rising up and *being judged at the same time*.
 - ii. **Matthew 25:31-46**, where Jesus speaks about the judgment of all people in the story of the sheep and the goats.
 - iii. **John 11:23-24**, where Martha, the sister of Lazarus and a disciple of Jesus, speaks to Jesus about what will happen on the last day.
 - d. I saw in a new light all the passages about “the resurrection of the dead”, where I had assumed it was talking about the soul (not the body). No wonder the intellectual pagans in Athens scoffed at Paul. “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’” (**Acts 17:32**, NKJV)
8. Other early Christian writers such as Tertullian continued to combat the same heresy that Paul had addressed in Corinth. Some believer in the early church, who were clearly heretics, accepted the immortality of the soul but denied the resurrection of the body.
 9. A belief in the resurrection of the body is included in the *Apostles Creed*, a foundational statement of faith in the early church.

10. Also, it states that this teaching was considered among the elementary, most basic teachings of the Christian faith, in the beginning.
 - a. “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.” **(Hebrews 6:1-3, NKJV)**
 - b. This involves two of the six elementary, foundational teachings of the Christian faith. And I (and most in my church) somehow had missed it?
- iv. This was very humbling. Naturally I began to wonder, *what else* have I been missing? Are there any other important aspects of the Christian faith that have I misunderstood?
- v. That started me on a journey that I am still on: to rediscover the original faith, the faith “once for all delivered to the saints.” **(Jude 3)**