

**"The Authority of the Son"
(John 5:16-30)
Pastor Peter Yi
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So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. ¹⁷ In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." 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.

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. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. ²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ 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.

²⁴ "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. 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. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

²⁸ "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

Last week we looked at an interesting story of Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath day, who was an invalid for 38 years. If you remember Jesus had told the man to get up, pick up his mat and walk, which the man did. The Jewish leaders saw the man doing what was prohibited according to their laws. They start to question the man and instead of taking responsibility for his actions he says that the only reason he's carrying his mat is because Jesus told him to. From this we notice that the healed man displayed no faith or gratitude toward Jesus. He doesn't excitedly share with the Jewish leaders what had happened to him. He just wants to avoid getting into trouble. The response of the religious leaders is also stunning. Instead of being amazed that the man had been healed, instead of inquiring about who the healer was, they are so boxed into their rules, that all they can see is that one of their thirty-nine man-made rules about the Sabbath had been violated, so there has to be an investigation. They have to get to the bottom of it.

Verse 16 tells us, “Because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath.” What things? Healing and helping. In another Sabbath incidence recorded in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand. And the religious leaders can only see red. They are so blind to the One doing the healing and also blind to the one that was healed, that all they could think about was that the Sabbath law was supposedly being violated, to which Jesus replies very logically,

¹¹ “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” (**Matthew 12:11–12**)

Isn’t this common sense? If we had our way, would we tell our public servants and hospital staff to close down on Sundays?” Of course not. Even our society calls them essential services.

Is it possible to be this blind? Apparently it is. From this point onward the Jewish leaders determine to persecute him. They wanted to entrap him, discredit him, arrest him, and eventually kill him.

Work

Jesus responds to them saying, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” This offended them so much that the persecution escalated to wanting to kill him. And John, the gospel writer, tells us the reason. He says, “not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

What’s the big deal? To find the answer we have to go back to Genesis. God created the heavens and the earth in six days and on the Sabbath he rested. Here’s the account,

“Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” (**Genesis 2:3**)

The question that arises from this is whether or not God ever rests? Sure he rested and ceased his activity of creating, because it was complete. But does God ever actually rest? And everyone agrees that the answer is no. God doesn’t really rest. Think about it. Does he ever cease from his role as sustainer of the universe? Does he ever step down from his throne and take a break from ruling? Does God for one day a week stop the work of listening to and answering our prayers? And the consensus is that he does not. God and only God is always at work. Yes, God ceased from his creative work on the seventh day, but he continued in all of his other duties. I hope that makes sense. We can all agree on that. Then what was the problem? The problem was in two things.

First, he dared to call God his Father and second he claimed to always be at work like God.

‘Father’ was a title for God that was very uncommon in Jewish religion. There were many other titles, but Father was not a common one. And if Father was used, it was spoken corporately. They would have said, “our Father”, but to say ‘my Father’ was never said. When Jesus spoke of God in this way, the Jews said, “making himself equal with God.” We’ll get to why they came that conclusion in just a minute.

Secondly, Jesus said, “my Father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working.” Just as God, because he is God, though it says he rested on the seventh day, we know that he’s always working, doing the work that God does...and Jesus says, I too am doing that kind of work. Just as God is in a class by himself as the only one who is allowed to not keep the Sabbath, I too am in that class, I too am not bound by Sabbath laws.

So, what is Jesus doing here? Other places he does go into a proper understanding of Sabbath. Remember when he says, “Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”? He tells them that their understanding and priorities are all out of whack; their understanding of the purpose of the Sabbath are incorrect. Here however, Jesus is bypassing Sabbath purpose and going up even higher to the nature of God. He’s saying, “we all know that God is beyond the Sabbath. God doesn’t need a Sabbath. God doesn’t actually rest. The psalmist says,

³ He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; ⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” (**Psalm 121:3–4**)

And I, too, don’t rest. I, too, am like my Father. I had the privilege of taking a class on this gospel with Professor Don Carson when I was in seminary and he gives this example. *If Mr. Stradivarius, the famous violin maker makes great violins, it’s a skill he learned from his father, which his father learned from his father and so on down the line. And when Mr. Stradivarius has a son, guess what his son will do for a living? He will be making Stradivarius violins in the way his father was taught by his father who was taught by his grandfather and so on. So, when junior gets older he can say. My father is working and I too am working. Every violin that comes out of that shop will be a Stradivarius.*

So, when Jesus says, Only the Father can technically break the Sabbath and work and he happens to be MY Father, so I too am always at work. This is the only way we can understand the violent response of the Jewish leaders.

Jesus continues the exchange in verse 19:

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. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.

Now, this is where the Stradivarius example breaks down. Stradivarius junior can be off in the corner of the shop goofing off and doing his own thing, building birdhouses instead of violins, but when it comes to the Son of God, he can only do what he sees the Father doing. Even though Jesus does only what the Father does, making himself God, he submits himself to the Father’s will. In other words, Jesus though equal with the Father, lives in submission to the Father. The Father doesn’t submit to the Son. Scripture never teaches that. It’s the other way around. Here’s Don Carson again, “The Father initiates, sends, commands, commissions, grants; the Son responds, obeys, performs his Father’s will, receives authority.” What we have here in John, and we will see it again and again, is the beginning of the doctrine of the Trinity. We saw it in the first chapter. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and you have here the fleshing out, no pun intended, of the doctrine of Christ, what’s called Christology. Jesus is a co-equal with God the Father, yet he submits to the father.

Let me stop for just a second and give an application. In Ephesians 5:22 Paul writes these words, that to some are sweet gospel in your ears, but to many, are words we wish were deleted. "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord." Now, I don't want to get too much into it today. We'll speak more about it next month and it'll be addressed at the woman's retreat in June, but let me say this. That command, and it is a command, cannot be understood, let alone obeyed, apart from a Biblical Christology. Unless both the man and woman understand the submission of the Son to the Father, and that that submission does not reduce the Son in any way, that it does not make him lesser or inferior to the Father, I don't think women will ever embrace that command and of course, men need to understand that as well. Only when we understand that to be the Son means to submit, will women love this command, because it means that in my submitting to my husband, I am emulating my Savior, I am becoming more like Christ. As well, men won't be able to fulfill their duty to sacrificially love their wives apart from a robust understanding and application of Christology to their own lives.

Love

Let's move on. Jesus then gives the reason for why he can only do what the Father does. Because the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Now we don't tend to think a lot about the love between God the Father and God the Son. We think more about God's love for us in sending his Son and in Christ's love for us in going to the cross, but it would do us well to think a bit more deeply about the love within the godhead. We can say that it is a perfect love. We can say that it is an eternal love. Jesus speaks of it as a love they had even before the creation of the world (John 17:24).

Do you remember at Jesus' baptism when God spoke from heaven and said, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (**Matthew 3:17**) and then again at the mount of transfiguration God spoke from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

The Father's love to the Son is demonstrated in revealing all that the Father does. And the Son's love is demonstrated in perfectly obeying the will of the Father. For certain the reason Jesus went to the cross and the reason God sent his Son is because he loves us. But another reason, perhaps even a greater reason is this. God revealed his plan to save sinners to the Son because he loves the Son. And the Son loves the Father in obeying the Father and going to the cross. Jesus died on the cross not only because he loved us, but also because he loved God.

Life

There's more. In verse 21 Jesus says, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." Everyone knows that only God can give life. Only God holds the prerogative to give, take away and give again, and take away again, life. No human, no doctor, no demon, holds that power. It belongs to God alone. It's part of what makes him God. And Jesus too possesses that authority, that power. And since he alone possesses it, he alone has the right to give it to whomever he pleases. He is no man's debtor. He is obligated to no one. All of physical life is a gift of the giver of life. And all eternal life is a gift of the giver of eternal life. Even in this gospel alone, life means much more than physical air-breathing, heart-beating life. Yes Jesus can raise a dead corpse like Lazarus back to life, but he can do much more than that. He is "the resurrection and the life."

He is "the way, the truth and the life" He's the means by which we go to heaven. He's the means by which we go to the Father.

Judge

So far, this is what we have. Jesus stands above the Sabbath as the one who never rests, who always works. Jesus is the one who alone does whatever the Father does. Jesus is the one who alone is in a special love relationship with the Father. Jesus alone receives the perfect will of God and perfectly obeys his Father's will. Jesus has power of life and death, just as God has power over life and death. And now, just as God is the judge of all, that judgment has been delegated to the Son. This doesn't mean the Son will judge apart from the knowledge of the Father or independent of him. No the Son only does what the Father does, but the very specific act of being judge of the world is the duty of the Son.

Here's what John writes in the book of Revelation about the judgment of the Son.

¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶ They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (**Revelation 6:15–16**)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (**Revelation 20:11–15 NIV11-GK**)

Honor

And the reason that judgment has been entrusted to Jesus is revealed in verse 23...That all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. In fact, whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Jesus is making clear two things. In and through his office as judge, in his acts of judgment, he will receive honor that to this point, everyone thought belonged solely to the Father. Jesus is saying that he too will receive that honor. Secondly Jesus is saying that one cannot honor one and claim that they are not honoring the other, and in particular if you do not honor the Son, you are not honoring the Father.

For the Christian worshiper, of course we can honor specifically the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit. We make that distinction in our worship, but we never say, I honor you, but I don't honor you. We are Trinitarian. We say, "Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, three in one."

Up to this point, statement after statement Jesus is telling us something remarkable about himself. I think we can be a bit sympathetic with the Jewish leaders. They were strict monotheists. It would have been unthinkable for them to think in terms of a trinity.

Response

As Jesus concludes his teaching about himself, he asks for a response.

Hear my word and

Believe the one who sent me

And you will have eternal life

Which means you will not be judged.

You will cross over from death to life

For the non-Christian, there will be a judgment.

For the maybe-Christian, examine yourself, test yourself

For the Christian, believe better. I know we believe, but we can believe better.

This is why Jesus came -- to reveal himself to us, in order that we might believe in him.

Let's pray.