

## 11. Jesus the Life-Giver

John 5:16-30

The Gospel According to John

In our last study, we looked at the healing of the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15). We saw that Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath, knowing that the Jewish religious leaders interpreted the Law as saying that healing a person on the Sabbath was considered to be work. Jesus had told the invalid man to pick up his bed mat and walk (John 5:8), which was another act the Jewish leaders considered work (John 5:10). The man did not know Who it was that had healed him, so when Jesus later found him and gave him some words of counsel, the man went and reported to the Jewish leadership that it was Jesus who had healed him (John 5:15). At that point, persecution broke out against the Lord, probably while He was still in the temple courts after talking to the man.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him (John 5:16).

### The Clash of Kingdoms

The Jewish leaders confronted Jesus about healing on the Sabbath. The only person considered to be legal to work on the Sabbath was God. He could not take a day off because the universe still needed His sustaining power. These men did not intimidate Jesus. In reply, Jesus claimed equality with God to work on the Sabbath. Christ faced them down and said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (v. 17). These words enraged them because of two reasons: 1) He was calling God His Father in an exclusive sense. Jesus didn't say "Our Father," but "My Father." 2) To say that Christ was working in tandem with His Father was the same as saying that He was God, Whom He is! He was telling them the truth in a wonderfully courageous way. The Lord knew that to speak these words was to invite persecution and anger, but His heart was to talk about the truth and trust the Father with the outcome. He did not shy away from stating His mission, i.e., to do the Father's will completely. In this passage, we see a clash of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. It is a truth that those who are born-again of the Spirit and walk in tandem with the Spirit of Jesus will be persecuted just as Jesus was:

Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you (John 15:20).

There is often a clash of kingdoms when the Spirit of God is moving. Do not be surprised at this. Satan, the enemy of the kingdom of God, will not take it lying down when his kingdom is plundered, and he is losing people who are seeing Jesus and learning of His power to save and deliver. Often, there is a reaction, i.e., the spirit of this world will respond by using people we would never suspect of being tools of the evil one. Even Peter, the disciple of Jesus, without realizing it, became a mouthpiece of Satan when he tried to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross (Matthew 16:22-23). Remember, though, that people are never our enemy (Ephesians 6:12), only the spirit that uses them to retaliate against the work of the Spirit of God (Ephesians 2:2).

Question 1) Have you ever had friends, family, or others try to talk you out of your faith? Have you had opposition to your faith? Share briefly with one another what happened.

Amid the persecution against Him, Jesus replied with five claims of equality with God:

### 1) Christ is Equal with God in His Person (vs. 17-18).

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." <sup>18</sup>For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:17-18).

Some people say that Jesus never said that He was and is God. I don't know where they get that notion because just in this passage of Scripture alone, the Lord states very clearly His divinity. Just as His Father never stopped working on the Sabbath, so it was the same with the Lord Jesus. The religious Jews certainly understood Him to be saying that He is equal with God (v. 18). For that reason, they responded by now trying even harder to kill Christ (v. 18).

### 2) Christ is Equal with God in His Works (vs. 19-20).

<sup>19</sup>Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, 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. <sup>20</sup>For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these (John 5:17-20).

Jesus stated that He could do only what He sees His Father doing. We should not see this as a statement that Jesus is weaker or inferior to the Father, for that would be heresy, but the Lord is stating the truth that everything He does is in cooperation with the Father and out of their Oneness. There is only One God, and Jesus is 100% God in human flesh. In one place, Christ said to the disciple Philip: "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9).

As Christians, we also should always have that thought uppermost in our minds in every situation we face, "Lord, what do you want to do through me in this situation? What do you want me to say to this person?" Sometimes, we might fall flat on our faces because we have said or done something that we thought the Lord was saying, yet saw no visible result. Even though we do not see results, we must trust that God is at work and be obedient to the leading of the Spirit. I remember sharing Christ many years ago with a couple of young girls. After sharing how they could be saved, I never followed up with them because there didn't seem to be a good level of interest. Later, I found out that they were so hungry for God that they took the initiative to come back to me and to ask me if I would share more with them. I led them both to Christ. How blind I was to the work of the Spirit of God! The more we learn to be sensitive to His voice and leading, the more we will see Him work through us.

We must listen for that gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12) of the Spirit that becomes clearer the longer we walk with Him and are obedient to His prompting. Remember that the whisper of the Spirit never contradicts the Word of God. It always seems like something that Jesus would say, and it will agree with the Scriptures. The Lord said that this relationship between the Father and Son operates out of love for one another, “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does” (v. 20). When a person is genuinely in love with Christ, the gifts of the Spirit will flow in him and through him to touch lives. The Lord was saying that He was equal to the Father and that all He did flow out of the Father's prompting. □

Question 2) Why did Jesus deliberately face down His accusers and speak such inflaming words when He knew that this would provoke their anger? Wouldn't it have been wiser to say nothing?

### 3) Christ is Equal with God in Giving Life (v. 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 (John 5:21).

There is only one source of Life, and that is God Himself. Because they didn't believe in Christ, I imagine the Jewish leadership was shocked at this statement. He again was claiming that He is equal with God in the ability to give life. All of humanity stands weak in front of the death of a loved one's leaving this earth, but the Lord Jesus was and is the Creator that brought forth all life. He was in the beginning:

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind (John 1:1-4).

To prove His ability to give life to the dead, we have several examples of Jesus' bringing people back from the dead, i.e., another prophetic sign the Messiah would fulfill. The prophet Isaiah had written:

Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead (Isaiah 26:19).

### 4) Christ is Equal with God in His Judgment (v. 22).

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).

If you were to ask anyone who will be the final judge, most would reply that God is the ultimate judge of men for what they have done in this life, but Christ states that He is the One who will be the judge of all men. The Father has delegated all judgment to the Son. The Lord Jesus is perfectly righteous, while at the same time, He knows everything about us, and He has experienced being human from a lowly place. He can judge because He has walked in our shoes

as a man, yet still very God of very God. We would be quick to say that it does not mean that the Father ceases to be the final judge, for we see God as being on the white throne at the final judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). What the Scriptures teach is that Christ is equal with God and seated on the throne with the Father: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1).

### 5) Christ is Equal with God in His Honor (v. 23).

<sup>23</sup>that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. <sup>24</sup>“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (John 5:23-24).

Jesus claimed equality in honor with the Father, saying that, if we do not honor the Son, we do not honor the Father. Those Jews in the presence of Christ that claimed to love God, were actually opposing Him and were on the side of God’s enemy (John 8:44).

Those standing around Christ and listening to His statements of equality with God had three options to believe about Christ, and so do we. The three options are as follow: 1) He was a good teacher, but self-deceived and delusional. 2) He was a deliberate liar. 3) He is as He said, i.e., God in the flesh, come to earth.

1) The first option is that He was deceived, delusional, and insane on the level of someone who thinks he is a poached egg. It reminds me of the story of the British prime minister, Maggie Thatcher. In her capacity of serving the government, she went to visit a mental hospital to check on the level of health care that the residents were receiving. She introduced herself to one of the patients as the prime minister. Thinking she was a new patient, the man replied, “I understand. Most people when they first arrive here believe they are the prime minister.” People who are mentally ill often suffer from a delusion. We would not refer to someone who suffers from delusion as being a good teacher! The common belief that Christ was just a good teacher is out of the question. If He was deceived and deluded, then He was not a good teacher. □

2) The second option is that He was a liar and knew it. In which case, He was an evil man and working for Satan to deliberately deceive people. If that was true, what about His many miracles given as signs. How was He able to heal all manner of sicknesses, raise the dead, cast out demons, and create bread out of thin air. If God was not with Him, how could He do all this, along with His power over nature, e.g., controlling the wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:39)?

3) The third option is that He really is Who He said He is, i.e., God of very God becoming a man to win our redemption as a man. There are no other options; we must believe one of them. Even the foremost teacher in the country at that time, Nicodemus, said of Christ; “We know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2). I trust that you have concluded that He is who He says He is. □

In verse 24, the Lord Jesus quite clearly states the qualifications for receiving an impartation of life from God. It is hearing God's Word and responding with the belief that acts following what he believes. An individual that responds to the Gospel *has* eternal life. It is not something that happens when a person passes from this world, but something that begins in the present time. Believers do not need to fear the judgment, for their sin has already been judged at the cross of Christ. Upon believing, one has crossed over from a condition of death to that of new life (v. 24). □

There is something quite powerful about the Word of God that we often underestimate. It has been attacked over the centuries and often been shut to the common man, but when the Word of God is spoken or read and mixed with faith, something happens inside a man or woman. The writer of the book of Hebrews put it this way: “**For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart**” (Hebrews 4:12). The message about Christ is *living and active* when spoken under the inspiration of the Spirit. When a person believes that Word and places trust in the saving work of Christ, the Spirit of God regenerates the spirit, and that person is born-again just as Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3. He crosses over some invisible barrier between life and death (v. 24). Paul the Apostle wrote about it in this way:

**He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).**

If you are a believer, then you are no longer under the dominion or domain of Satan's kingdom of darkness. You have been transferred to God's kingdom. Jesus said that the believer *has* eternal life, i.e., present tense. It is something that happens internally upon hearing. You may not understand it all, but God has made receiving eternal life so easy that a child can receive the gift of life. Eternal life is not pie in the sky when you die; it is cake on your plate while you wait! Can you believe this? Can you place your trust in Christ and be willing to turn your life over to Him? If so, you will be born-again of the Spirit and begin to experience the life of God at work within you.

At the point of decision, some people go through a battle in their mind. The enemy of your soul may whisper to you not to give your life to Christ. All kinds of thoughts and excuses might arise in your mind prompted by the enemy of your soul. Resist him! Is there a good reason for you not to place your trust in Christ? Remember what we said at the beginning of this study: the enemy will challenge any movement of the Spirit of God to touch someone's life. Be aware of the battles in your mind to try to dissuade you from entirely giving yourself to serve God.

### **The Resurrection of the Just and Unjust**

The Lord Jesus now talks of a time when the dead will hear and live, i.e., a time that not only had come at the moment He was speaking (v. 25) but also at a time that is coming (v. 28):

**<sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup>And he has given him**

authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup>"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice <sup>29</sup>and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. <sup>30</sup>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. (John 5:17-30).

Question 4) Why does Jesus mention two separate times? What is the time that has now come (v. 25), and what will happen at the time that is coming? (v. 28).

In verse twenty-five, the dead that Christ mentioned is those around Him who were not yet experiencing the life of God. They were in a dead condition without Christ. The future time He says in verse 28 is that of the resurrection when all who are in the grave will come forth. Let's first take a look at what Jesus meant by "the dead" mentioned in verse 25. He is talking about those who are spiritually dead. □

### The Dead Being Made Alive in the Present Age

When I was a child in a British primary school (ages 7-11), I was an atheist, unchurched, and knew nothing about the Christian faith. I remember walking the four or five hundred yards to school. On the way, I used to pass a Salvation Army chapel. Written on a poster on the side of the building were the words, "Are you really alive?" There was no explanation to the statement, and it seemed so ridiculous to me as a child. I had to be alive to read it! What was the point of the statement? To me, it showed how ridiculous Christians could be. When I later became a Christian and began reading the Scriptures, I finally realized that, without an experience of receiving new life from the Lord, we are in a condition of being separated from God and spiritually dead in our sins. Writing to the Church at Ephesus, Paul the Apostle stated that, when I was following the ways of this world and living for myself, I was dead:

<sup>1</sup>As for you, **you were dead in your transgressions and sins**, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live **when you followed the ways of this world** and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Now, I understood the message of the Salvation Army! In a few verses later, the passage states that God has made us alive; whereas, before, our spirit, i.e., that part of our inner makeup that can connect with God, was dead. Paul further writes:

"because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **made us alive** with Christ even when **we were dead** in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved... <sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God**— <sup>9</sup>**not by works**, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:5, 8-9).

Notice how this Life from God comes to us: it is given as a gift of grace. What does the word *grace* mean? Grace is a word that means *undeserved favor*. It means that there is nothing you can do to earn it; it is a gift of life given to you when you believe and trust in the work of Christ on the cross for you and as you. Jesus said in another place, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I **have come that they may have life**, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Jesus

came as the life-giver. You received life from your mother when you were born, but that inner part of you that connects with God, the spirit of a man, was born dead. Jesus said to Nicodemus that to receive this new life he had to be born-again:

<sup>3</sup>"I tell you the truth, **no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**" <sup>4</sup>"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>Flesh gives birth to flesh, but **the Spirit gives birth to spirit** (John 3:3-6).

Only flesh can give birth to flesh, but if a person wants eternal life, he must come to Christ and receive spiritual birth, i.e., the life of God imparted to him. This life cannot come to a person by going to church, having godly parents, being kind and doing good works, etc. You cannot become a Christian by living Christianly. This impartation can only come by coming to Jesus, the Life-giver:

Yet to all **who received him**, to those who **believed in his name**, he gave the right to **become children of God** (John 1:12).

### **The Dead Brought to Life in the Future (v. 28)**

The Lord then went on to talk about the time when the dead will be raised to life (v. 28). He said that not only will He give new life to those who repent and turn to Him, but also He will come again for those whose body is in the grave:

<sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with **a loud command**, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and **the dead in Christ will rise first** <sup>17</sup>After that, we **who are still alive and are left will be caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

When a believer dies, his spirit and soul, i.e., the part of him that is unseen, goes to be with the Lord while his body is buried. Paul the Apostle stated that, when we die, we are absent from the body but present with the Lord until His return (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). In his book *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem has something interesting to say on this topic:

Paul further explains in 1 Thessalonians that the souls of those who have died and gone to be with Christ will come back and be joined with their new bodies on that day. Christ will bring them with Him when He comes in glory: "for since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Paul affirms that not only will God bring with Christ those who have died; he also affirms that "the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The believers who have died with Christ are raised up to meet Christ, "We...shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This only makes sense if it is the souls of believers who have gone into Christ's

presence who return with him, and if it is their *bodies* that are raised from the dead to be joined together with their souls, and then to ascend with Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The Prophet Daniel also told of a time when the dead will awaken, some to everlasting life and others to shame and everlasting contempt. The bodies that will rise will shine with the light of the Messiah, reflecting His glory:

<sup>1</sup>At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—**everyone whose name is found written in the book**—will be delivered. <sup>2</sup>Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup>**Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens**, and those who lead many to righteousness, **like the stars for ever and ever**. <sup>4</sup>But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge (Daniel 12:1-4).

This new body we are given will radiate the life of God that we received when we gave our lives to Christ. At the moment, we cannot see the Spirit's work of transformation going on within us, but we know that, when He comes, our new body will be like Christ's body: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and **what we will be has not yet been made known**. But we know that when he appears, **we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Paul talks further about this life that is at work within us, i.e., the life that Christ has given us in this way:

<sup>42</sup>So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; <sup>43</sup>it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup>it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, **there is also a spiritual body**. <sup>45</sup>So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, **a life-giving spirit**. <sup>46</sup>The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and **as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven**. <sup>49</sup>And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, **so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven**. <sup>50</sup>I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup>Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but **we will all be changed**— <sup>52</sup>in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>**For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality**. <sup>54</sup>When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:42-54).

Question 4) What things stand out to you from the above words? If you could ask Jesus for anything based on what we have studied, what would you ask Him? (In closing, pray.)

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Printed by Zondervan Publishers, 1994, Page 829.



Prayer: Lord, will You transform me within. I give myself wholeheartedly to You. Today, I want to turn around and become all that You have called me to be. Come into my life and forgive my sin. I want to be born-again of Your Spirit. Amen!

Keith Thomas

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