

Marvel: What Did Jesus Do?

Passing From Death to Life

John 5:18-29

Mark Vroegop

“This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 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. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment’” (John 5:18–29, ESV).

From 1941-1944 and during World War II, the Oxford professor C.S. Lewis recorded a series of broadcasts on BBC radio. These short talks were designed to make an apologetic for Christianity. A director at BBC Radio had read Lewis’s book *The Problem of Pain*, and he invited him to address the people of Great Britain on the basics of Christianity.

You can probably imagine why. The world was falling apart. World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars. And just a few years later, the entire globe was affected by horrors of national conflicts.

Lewis attempted to make the case of the central truths of the Christian faith. Eventually, these radio addresses became the best-selling book *Mere Christianity*. The book is considered one of the most influential evangelical books in the twentieth century.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis wrestles with what people believe about Jesus. He identifies a central tenet of Christianity which relates to one’s opinion of Jesus. Here’s what Lewis famously said:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹

Some people have summarized Lewis's argument by saying that Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord.

That's a decision that every person must come to. No one has the right to not decide who he is. Not deciding or ignoring his claims do not give you an excuse. In the same way that being disagreeing with or being unaware of the speed limit does not exonerate you if you break the law, who Jesus is must be reckoned with.

The apostle John wrote his gospel for that very reason. He said as much:

"...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Through the words and actions of Jesus, John wants you to marvel at what Jesus does and who he is. Last week, Brad helped us to see how hope is connected to person and work of Jesus. In John 5:1-7, we learned about Jesus's power to heal a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years. This story is unique because it introduces direct conflict with the Pharisees since Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath.

Our journey through John last week ended with this statement by Jesus: "My Father is working until now, and I am working." By saying this, Jesus is opening the door for a major issue—one that will eventually get him killed. Is he a liar, a lunatic, or Lord?

Verse 18 tells us about the nature of the conflict very clearly:

"This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

When he says, "My Father" versus "our Father," he's treading on thin ice since he's making himself equal with God. He's not only breaking the Sabbath. Jesus is making a claim that is central to Christianity and the essential reason he was killed. It is not only the main thought for our text today, but a thought that every one of us must decide if we believe or not: **Jesus is the Son of God who gives life.**

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6979-i-am-trying-here-to-prevent-anyone-saying-the-really>

Let's explore this text today to see: (a) who Jesus is, and b) what he does. This will help us know what it means for us to pass from death to life because of him.

Who Jesus Is

We've already read the setup in verse 18. Jesus's connection with the Father is related to his equality with God as the Son of God. John is making the case that Jesus is more than a prophet and more than a healer. He is God in the flesh.

John aims to make that case not just with what Jesus does, but with what he says. Verses 19-23 are very important because they are the first clear statement from Jesus regarding who he is. J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), an Anglican bishop in Liverpool said this about our text:

*Nowhere else in the Gospels do we find our Lord making such a formal, systematic, orderly, regular statement of His own unity with the Father, His divine commission and authority, and the proofs of His Messiahship, as we find in this discourse.*²

What does Jesus say about himself as it relates to his divinity? Four things.

1. Equal with the Father

In verse 19, Jesus begins his dialogue with the words "Truly, Truly." We'll see this in two other places in our text and in John's gospel. He uses this introductory statement in order to emphasize the weight of what is about to be said.

Jesus then makes two claims that are connected to being equal with the Father in his essence. First, he says that the Son can only do what he sees the Father doing. Jesus is saying that he has a unique relationship, role, and access to the Father. They don't see what the Father is doing, but Jesus sees his actions and activity. Jesus is the link between heaven and earth. He is the intermediary between God and mankind. He has a unique relationship with the Father as the Son. He is of the same essence as the Father. He is God in the flesh.

As a result, there's a second statement here. It focuses on what the Son does. Jesus says, "*whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise*" (v. 19). Jesus is the same essence as the Father, and he does the same works as the Father. The actions of the Son are designed to communicate that he is God. They validate who he is.

Jesus doesn't just imitate the deity of God the Father. He sees and does the same works as the Father because he is equal in essence and in identity. Jesus is God.

² Leon Morris, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 276.

Remember John 1? *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). We find the same concept communicated here. Jesus is equal with God in essence.

2. Loved by The Father

The second truth about Jesus is the manner in which the Father loves him. Verse 20 connects the previous statement about seeing the works of the Father to the loving relationship between the Father and the Son. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit operate together in unity in diversity, and the basis of their relationship is the love they have for one another.

Love is the center of Christianity. Love for God and neighbor is the heart of the gospel. Remember John 3:16—*“For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son...”* Love is what motivated the sacrifice of Jesus. It is why God redeems us from our sins. And it is the main expression of what it means to know Jesus. To know Jesus is to know the love of God and to love others.

When Jesus talks about “greater works than these,” he’s referring to the work of redemption that he’s going to accomplish. This work is a greater work than anything the people have seen.

If you are a Christian, this might be a good place to stop and ask yourself how that “love thing” went this week. Consider how love was demonstrated in your life this week in what you said, what you did, what you gave up, or what you wrote. To what extent did you make the love of Christ more apparent this week?

3. Gives Life by His Will

The third aspect of his divinity is his sovereign power to give life. Once again, he connects this back to the power of the Father in verse 21. In the same way that the Father has the power to raise the dead, Jesus says that he has the same authority. Jesus has the power to decide when dead people come to life. It’s quite a claim, but it happened in John 11 when Jesus raised Lazarus from dead.

In the same way that God created life in the first chapter of Genesis by speaking, so the Son of God has the power to say, “Lazarus, come forth,” and dead people come to life. But it also has meaning beyond just physical life. This power relates to Jesus ability to give new spiritual life to those who trust and believe in him.

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36).

4. Possesses the Authority of Judgment

In verse 22, we find the last qualifier of Jesus’s divinity. The verse tells us that the Father has given the Son the authority of judgment. This is important because the Old Testament talked about God as the one who is the judge of the Earth. Since he is the creator, it is his prerogative to decide what is right and what is wrong. Jesus is the judge because the dividing line of judgment depends on what you’ve done with him.

The Father loves the Son and sent him. Jesus is the means of salvation. But he's also the person before whom all the world must stand. We'll have to give an account of what we've done with Jesus. Did you think him to be a liar, a lunatic, or Lord? Jesus is not only the Savior of the world, but as such the Father has given him the honor as his only son. Here's how the apostle Paul talks about this in Philippians 2:

"And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:8–11).

On that day, every human being will know who he is. But the question will be whether or not you know him. He'll know you—every part of you. The question will be whether or not you will be covered by his grace or whether you'll be under his judgment.

Because of who Jesus is, you want to believe in him now. That's John's point. And that's the call of the gospel today. Jesus is the Son of God. He is God.

What Jesus Does

The second message John intends to send here relates to the works of Jesus or what he does. This is also connected to his divinity but from a different angle. Verses 24-29 highlight some of the effects of believing in Jesus or what he does as the Son of God.

In verse 24, we find the second "Truly, Truly" statement. What follows is another important statement from Jesus. After saying a few things that should make us tremble, we read the good news—Whoever hears and believes in God's word has eternal life.

Read the next words slowly: "He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life."

Because of who Jesus is and what he has done, he has power and authority to deliver people from eternal judgment and to move them from death to life. That's both something that happens in the future after we die, but it's also something that happens right now.

When you become a Christian, God's grace is applied to your life such that you not only have hope in the future (after you die), but you also have hope right now. Jesus has the power to change your eternal destiny, but he also has the power to change your life right now. He has the power to move people from death to life right now.

Jesus moves people from death to life because of who he is.

That's what Jesus emphasizes again in verse 25. He says "Truly, Truly" for a third time. This is another vitally important statement that we need to listen to. He says that there is an hour coming and part of it is being fulfilled even now. God has a plan for the future, but that plan is being worked out right now.

The text says that dead people hear the voice of the Son of God and in hearing they live. Here is how this works. In the same way that Lazarus was called out of the tomb by the words of Jesus, his words as expressed in the Bible have the power to make people alive. That's why the book of Hebrews calls the Word "living and active." It's what the disciples described when they unknowingly met with Jesus after he was raised from the dead—"were not our hearts burning within us" (Luke 24:32)? It's what happened in the early church when Peter was preaching a sermon and the people were "cut to the heart" and asked how they could be saved (Acts 2:37).

It's when you hear the Word of Christ and you believe that it's true! In that moment, something has happened to you by the power of Jesus. You've been raised to new life.

If you are a Christian, do you remember what that was like? Do you remember when your heart burned with belief, faith, and trust? Do you remember how close and personal Jesus was to you? Would you describe your love and affection for him like that now? Do you stand in awe of him? Do you worship him? Do you thank him for all that he's done for you?

Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Son of Man—a term with Old Testament roots connected to a future conquering king.

And then this text ends with a look to the future. In verse 28, Jesus anticipates that there would be some who would scoff at the idea of him possessing this kind of power. So, he tells them not to marvel at this because there is another day coming—a day of resurrection.

There is a future day when the resurrection of all the dead will take place. And there will be two groups of people on that day—those who are resurrected to eternal life and those who are resurrected to judgment.

Now, you will notice that verse 29 distinguishes between those who have "done good" and those who have "done evil." This doesn't mean that these people are saved by what they've done. Rather, their actions serve to verify the kind of people that they really are.

While works do not save you—only Jesus saves you—the transformation in you must be effective. In other words, you cannot live in a way that doesn't fit with a relationship with Jesus and be assured that you are the "real deal." Passing from death to life because of who Jesus is, not only happens in the future; it happens now.

It is Jesus's voice and his return that usher in this resurrection moment. Those who've trusted in him are led into eternal life in fellowship with him. And for those who persist in their resistance to Jesus, they face the eternal consequence so their rebellion.

Oh Christian, rejoice that you've been spared from the penalty that your sin deserves. Thank God that you are forgiven. But never forget that the only reason you are free is because Jesus bought that freedom for you. Everything about your life revolves around who he is and what he did. Christ is your life!

To those of you still searching, who have not yet trusted in Christ and turned from your sins, why not trust in Jesus today? Does your heart burn with what I'm telling you? Why not receive Jesus? Why not make this the day when you pass from death to life?

You see, you must decide who Jesus is. You cannot remain on the fence all your life. What you believe about Jesus matter both now and in your future.

He's either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord.

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