

## THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL IDENTITY" (John 5:19-47)

10.11.20

### INTRODUCTION

Have y'all seen these two guys? (pics of Trump and Biden) Silly question, right? We all have - a whole lot, actually. In a matter of a very few weeks, we will go to the polls to vote for whichever one has impressed us most with their answer to our most basic question: Who are you? The one who we feel best about, the one who best reflects our values, the one who best represents a future that we can feel good about, the one who has done the best job in helping us see his identity, is the one that is probably going to have earned our vote. So it's very appropriate that the text we are looking at today is completely Jesus' words (no one else is speaking), sharing His identity with the enemies who were already beginning to gather around Him: the religious leaders, made up of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the teachers of the law.

Jesus had already shown Himself to be somebody who they could not outsmart with their arguments, nor intimidate with their position, nor overcome with their prejudices, nor overwhelm with their power. Jesus of Nazareth was not like anybody they had previously encountered. Even John the Baptist, now imprisoned instead of preaching, had not been so bothersome. The huge difference? While John had, like this "Radical Rabbi," preached with powerful words, he had not shown any of the accompanying miracles that this Nazarene had - amazing works that, simply because of the sheer volume of witnesses, could not be so easily dismissed.

Ah, those works, those so-called "miracles." I can almost see those religious leaders shaking their heads as they replayed all they had heard, and some of them had even seen - those amazing moments, where healings far beyond anything they could even imagine, had been occurring, creating increasing crowds filled with excitement and energy as they followed this guy. In fact, up until now, those had been the Nazarene's major calling card, the thing He was most widely known for: the blind now seeing, the lame now walking, even lepers instantly cleansed from their disease. Certainly, He had done some teaching - for some reason, the "ignorant masses" who were constantly following Him seemed equally charged up by His words. But those miracles - those were head-scratchers. Where is that power coming from? How do we deal with such a man as this?

But now, maybe now, He had finally gone too far - seeming to equate Himself with God, calling God His "Father!" How could any mere mortal do that? OK, guy; you better have a really good answer for this. John had already told us that they were "persecuting" Him - a Greek judicial term suggesting an ongoing, long-term process during which they would be working to build a case against Him. So, they waited for His response - and now we'll go into the answer Jesus gave them. But first, **let's go to the throne of the Lord in prayer.**

OK, before we begin, let's not forget the context for this moment which, in this case, means picking up from where we left off a couple of weeks ago when we looked at Jesus' healing the invalid at the pool of Bethesda. Now initially the religious leaders went after Christ because He

had healed on the Sabbath - remember that medical work was disallowed on that holy day except when specifically rendered to save a life - but then He seemed to add to His troubles by, in explaining Himself for breaking the Sabbath, to quote from John: ***[H]e was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God - John 5:18b.*** Wow, talk about a hornet's nest! Their opposition to Jesus had quickly ramped up to the point that, as John says: ***[T]hey tried all the more to kill Him - John 5:18a.*** So even while Jesus knows the depths of their anger, even to the point of murderous intentions, He graciously gives out explanation as to what's behind these words and actions they find so objectionable - and that's where we pick things up this morning.

Now this is a very long, detailed section so I am going to focus on the highlights of how Jesus is presenting Himself in the face of the growing opposition heading towards His ministry as He informs His accusers - and us - as to exactly who this is who is saying and doing all these things. Jesus is going to be making three main points as He talks with them.

## **TEXT**

His first point: Jesus can call God His Father because He is doing the work of the Father; in fact, He is continuing the Father's work: ***"Very truly I tell you (in other words, this is binding 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. 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" - Jesus Christ, John 5:19-20.***

He begins by calling out a cultural image that virtually anybody in that audience would have understood - a son following in his father's footsteps, taking up his father's occupation. That would have started with the child following everywhere his dad went, trailing after him to make sure he watched everything he did. As he grew older, more responsibility would have been given him until he could do his father's work on his own. Jesus Himself had lived that example, learning from Joseph the skills of carpentry and woodworking, along with working with other materials as well.

The point? Everything He is doing is the same things He had seen His Father do. The Father had validated Jesus as His Son by showing Him His work as His Father. And He promised that even more of these works are on the way, to the point that anybody watching will be "amazed."

Wow! Instead of clamming up or going into some kind of denial, Jesus fearlessly endorsed their accusations. "Yes; God is My Father! Yes; I am His Son!" But yet, notice the humility He is expressing - even the divinity He is claiming is being revealed as being at the direction of His Father. In other words, He is not in business for Himself, but strictly in the business of, by His words and works, revealing and bringing glory to His Father.

But by declaring that He is continuing His Father's work, Christ is challenging His critics in two ways:

- 1) He is challenging them to return to the Scriptures to review everything they know about God - what He says, how He works, how He responds, how He testifies about Himself - and then apply those Scriptures to Him.

2) He is challenging them to, essentially, "Watch Me. Listen to what I say; watch what I do. Do the things I say and do match the Father? If the things I say and do do not match the Father, then I am not His Son."

Christ goes on, expanding on doing His father's work: ***"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. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted 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"*** - ***Jesus Christ, John 5:19-23***. Having now shown that He is only doing His Father's will, He now claims to have the Father's power as well - including the awesome power of raising the dead. What's interesting is that, at this point, as far as we know, Jesus had not yet done such a thing. For sure, those "amazing" works were on the way - Lazarus, the son of the widow of Nain - but nobody at this point had witnessed anything like that. Besides, the power of restoring life was reserved for God alone - a power that this Nazarene is now claiming for Himself as well, not in opposition to God but rather in harmony with God. This was hardly the argument to win over your opponents.

But then Jesus takes His claim of equality with God even further: He claims God's authority to judge, going so far as to say that God has given Him that authority. Those Jewish leaders would have understood that only Jehovah was the judge of all the earth; Jesus claiming that authority likewise claimed equality with God.

And then His final equalizer with God: "To honor God, you must honor Me!" It's actually a very logical conclusion: If Jesus is doing God's will, if He is showing God's power, if He is judging in God's authority, then the Son, to whom God has given all this power and authority, must be honored as equal with God. John underscored this very point in his first letter: ***Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist - denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also - I John 2:22-23***. In other words, as pastor and author Warren Wiersbe has noted: *"Apart from Jesus Christ, we cannot know the Father, worship the Father, or serve the Father."*

Christ's second point: He can call God His Father because, even as God has life in Himself, so Jesus as His Son also has life in Himself, and can grant that life to whoever He chooses: ***Very truly I tell you (another binding truth), 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. 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. 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 judge because He is the Son of Man"*** - ***Jesus Christ, John 5:24-27***. What Jesus is saying here is that whoever hears the word He is speaking and "believes" - meaning that belief in His words is reflected by obedience to His words - will have eternal life. And, as God's Son, believing in His words is the equivalent of believing in God's words. As a result, a person living this way will pass from death - spiritual death, an eternity of separation

from God - to spiritual life, an eternity in the presence of God. And Jesus as God's Son has the same life within Himself as His Father - they were not created but have always been - He has the power to grant His eternal life to all who believe in Him.

The idea of "spiritual death" is important to understand when considering any of Christ's statements about spiritual life. Before salvation, all of us are spiritually dead. What does that mean? Well, if somebody is dead, they are insensitive to life. For instance, if I was to take this hammer and smash my thumb with it, because I am alive, I'd feel it - a lot, and loud! But if I were to do the same thing to the thumb of a dead person, because they are dead, that person would not feel it. In a spiritual sense, to be dead means that we are unfeeling or insensitive to the things of God. There is no desire to be a part of God, no ability to ever get to God, and no spiritual senses to respond to God. What changes that state of spiritual being? John said it in his first letter: ***God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son – I John 5:11b***. Jesus, the Son that God so lovingly, graciously gave to us, is the only means of changing our circumstances from death to life.

So, the Father has given the Son three tasks: (1) to give eternal life, (2) to raise the dead - either to everlasting joy or to the sorrow of everlasting punishment, and(3) to judge all men. But did you notice the very intentional way that Christ phrases these words? Listen again: ***"[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. 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 judge because He is the Son of Man" - Jesus Christ, John 5:25-27***. Notice that, when Jesus is shown as the giver of life, He refers to Himself as the "Son of God." But when He refers to Himself as the judge of all mankind, He refers to Himself as the "Son of Man."

So, what does that mean? It means that those who have recognized Him, surrendered to Him, loved Him, served Him and obeyed Him as the Son of God will be granted eternal life with Him in heaven because He has given them His eternal life. Those who deny this recognition will face Him as the Son of Man - a man who, while fully human, fulfilled God's law in every respect. It is that perfect Son of Man who will judge all who have not surrendered to what Jesus offered on the cross: Redemption through forgiveness of sins. As John 3 closes: ***Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them - John 3:36***. That's why Paul's words in Romans 8 are such a celebration for all Christians, and will be such an eternally punishing regret for all who reject Him: ***[T]here is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death - Paul, Romans 8:1-2***. In other words, because of Christ's work on the cross, God's wrath is gone!

Then Jesus continues: ***"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice 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. 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" - Jesus Christ, John 5:28-30***.

This idea of being raised to judgment was not a new idea; the Pharisees and certain of the teachers of the law would have known of this concept from the OT prophet Daniel, who declared: *[E]veryone whose name is found written in the book - will be delivered.*

*Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt - Daniel 12:1b-2.* And the judgments that Jesus says He will be pronouncing will be absolutely just, righteous and perfect because He will be judging not to please Himself but His Father - "Him who sent Me."

And then the third reason why Jesus can call God His Father: He has witnesses who will testify that God is His Father: *"If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not true" - Jesus Christ, John 5:31.* One of the most "basic basics" of Hebrew law was that, if a person provided only a single witness to verify a claim, it would not be considered "truth." As Moses told the nation of Israel: *"One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" - Moses, Deuteronomy 19:15.* Embracing that standard, even exceeding it, Jesus shares four witnesses with His accusers:

- 1) John the Baptist: He had declared very openly exactly who it was that had come to him for baptism: *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ... I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One" - John the Baptist, John 1:29b, 34.* And as Jesus declares here: *"You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy His light" - Jesus Christ, John 5:33, 35.*
- 2) Jesus' works: As He told them: *"[T]he works that the Father has given Me to finish - the very works that I am doing - testify that the Father has sent Me" - Jesus Christ, John 5:36b.* In fact, He later went on to testify to the importance of His works: *"Do not believe me unless I do the works of My Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father" - Jesus Christ, John 10:37-38.*
- 3) God the Father: Jesus not only claimed God as His Father but as His witness when He said: *"[T]he Father who sent Me has Himself testified concerning Me. You have never heard His voice nor seen His form" - Jesus Christ, John 5:37.* Jesus' very baptism was accompanied by this affirmation from God Himself: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased - God speaking, Matthew 3:17.*
- 4) The Scriptures: Jesus told them very directly: *"[H]is word [does not] dwell in you, for you do not believe the one He sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life" - Jesus Christ, John 5:38-40.* Verses that the Pharisees and others would have known and studied pointed directly to Jesus as God's "anointed One," His Messiah - from God's first words of a promised Savior in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15) to His promises through Isaiah of a great Healer (Isaiah 35:5-6a), a tender Shepherd (Isaiah 40:11), and a suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:5-6).

## APPLICATION

You can almost hear, upon Christ ending His words, a conclusion of, "I rest my case. This is Me; now, what are you going to do about it?"

That's the question. Basically, we have three options: Either Jesus of Nazareth is a liar - you can't believe a word He says, Jesus of Nazareth is a lunatic - certifiable nut-job, or Jesus of Nazareth is exactly who He said He was - the Son of God!

Just seeing Him as a good guy, an influential philosopher, a great moral teacher - none of those options are available to us because they haven't been given to us. He never described Himself that way. And let's face it: If He's a liar, He's not a good guy, a credible philosopher or moral standard-bearer. If He's a loon, none of those options are even on the table.

But if Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God? That's the consideration, and the only consideration that's relevant. Think about that: The eternal destiny of every single human being who has ever lived is going to be determined by the answer to one solitary question regarding Jesus Christ: liar, lunatic or Son of God!

## CONCLUSION

The communion that we are going to commemorate in just a moment will be celebrating the incredible gift of amazing grace that God gave us through His Son that allows us to know Him for exactly who He is - the Son of God. Now everybody has been offered that gift, but it is the surrendering our lives to Him that signals the claiming of that gift. But before we celebrate, there is one more thing to consider.

And it's this: After finding life in Christ, there is living the life of Christ. And that presents a necessary question: Are we living like Jesus - this One to whom our lives have been surrendered - is the Son of God? Like His infinite power is always surrounding us, like His infinite love is always filling us, like His infinite wisdom is directing us, like His infinite *riches in glory* are providing for us? Christians have God in us, with us, around us, in the person of His Son and His Son's Holy Spirit. Do our lives reflect that? Would somebody watching our lives ever conclude: "Wow, they're living like they think they got God right beside them." Folks, that's exactly what we've got! Is that the life we show to the world?

As we move into communion, we need to consider not just our salvation through Christ but our lives in Christ. Let's begin that consideration now - let's pray!