

Sermon Outline

“LIFE IN HIS NAME”:
THE PURSUIT OF WHOLENESS AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

GREATER WORKS (JOHN 5:21-24)

I. Introduction

- A. Against the accusation that he was artificially exalting himself to God’s level, the Lord Jesus responds: “the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing...” (v 19).
- B. Jesus makes clear to his opponents that he has no agenda of his own except to do the Father’s will.
- C. The Jewish leaders are mistaken when they think that Jesus is forcibly assuming rights and privileges that belong only God, they are greatly mistaken.
- D. Yet the fact that Jesus *can* do what the Father is doing tells us that there is much more to Jesus than meets the eye.
 - 1. On the one hand, Jesus is subordinate to the Father.
 - 2. On the other hand, Jesus can do what the Father is doing (v 19)!
- E. Jesus is able to know what the Father is doing because “the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing” (v 20).
- F. Jesus informs his opponents that if they thought that healing on the Sabbath was a big thing, they haven’t seen anything yet. One day, the Father is going to show “greater works” for his Son to do. When that day comes, the whole world is going to be astonished.
- G. *What exactly are these greater things that Jesus’ Abba will show him?* The answer is in verses 21-24.

II. The Greater Work of Resurrection (Jn 5:21)

- A. First great work: “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will” (v 21).
- B. Notice the similarity between verse 21 and the two verses we had encountered earlier.
 - John 5:17: “But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working.’”
 - John 5:19: “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.’”
- C. The Son follows the lead of the Father, that the Son is the perfect mirror image of the Father on earth. *As the Father acts, so also the Son.*
 - 1. That is Jesus’ life meaning/mission.

2. That is the principle to help us interpret all the things that Jesus will do in his public ministry.
- D. Verse 21 points us to an event on a much greater level. Jesus talks about the miracle of all miracles, the Sabbath healing of all Sabbath healings, the resurrection to come.
- E. The Jews of Jesus' day believed (correctly) that one day, God is going to intrude into history and put an end to all suffering and death. God is going to raise the dead and cause them never to die again.

III. Resurrection in the Old Testament

- A. Resurrection derives from the Torah itself.
- Ezekiel 37:1-6: "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, 'Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.'"
 - Isaiah 25:7-8: "And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken."
- B. The LORD God is the One who raises the dead.
- Deuteronomy 32:39: "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.
 - 1 Samuel 2:6: "The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up."
 - 2 Kings 5:7: "And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me.'"

- C. Based on those earlier words of God, Israel believed that a day is coming when God is going to literally raise his people from their graves.

IV. The Son Gives Life to Whom He Wishes (Jn 5:21)

- A. When Rabbi Jesus says “the Son gives life,” he’s saying that the Son—who is himself—will act in the place of the LORD God on the day of resurrection. —Better yet: The Son will play the part of the LORD God on the day of resurrection.
- B. The Son will preside over the resurrection event that was foretold by Isaiah and Ezekiel, and hinted at in Deuteronomy and 1 Samuel.
- C. Not only will the Son preside over the resurrection. He bestows resurrection “to whom he will,” on whomever *he* wishes. That is absolute sovereignty.
- D. According to the Scriptures, no one resurrects anyone except the LORD God himself, blessed be He. No one has the right to take life and give it back except the LORD God of Israel. Resurrection is something only God has the ability to do.
- E. Thus, if Jesus claims to be able to do what the Father does, if he claims that he “gives life to whom he will,” what is he really saying about himself? Who is Jesus?

V. The Greater Work of Final Judgment (Jn 5:22)

- A. While the first great work was the work of *resurrection*, the second great work is *judgment*: “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son...” (v 22).
- B. Based on the Scriptures, Israel believed in a coming Day of Judgment, a day when God himself will deal with evil and injustice once for all.
- C. Rabbi Jesus teaches that just as he presides over the resurrection, he will preside over the Day of Judgment as well.
- D. Jesus’ language is very strong: “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son...”
 1. This is not to say that the Father has no interest in the work of judgment.
 2. Rather, the Father has chosen to exercise judgment through the Son. The Son will act in the place of the LORD on the Day of Judgment.
- E. Calvin explains that judgment implies sovereignty and absolute dominion: —“He now expresses more clearly the general truth that the Father governs the world in the person of the Son and exercises His dominion by His hand. The Evangelist takes the word ‘judgment’ for dominion and power, according to the Hebrew idiom. We can now grasp the tenor of this: the Kingdom was delivered to the Son by the Father, that He might govern heaven and earth according to His will” (*The Gospel According to St. John 1-10*, 127).

- F. If the Father has given the Son the right to preside over final judgment and resurrection, it would mean the Son has absolute sovereignty over all of human existence.
- G. If the Jewish leaders had thought that Jesus' Sabbath healings were difficult to swallow, wait till they see him enthroned between the seraphim on the Day of Judgment! (Isa 6:1; Jn 12:41)
- H. Summary:
 1. Because the Father loves the Son, the Father shows the Son all that he is doing (v 20).
 2. Because the Father loves the Son, the Father is going to show the Son more astounding things to do.
 3. The Father is going to let the Son preside over the Day of Judgment and the resurrection. He will give to his Son absolute lordship over all creation, over all living beings.

VI. That All May Honor the Son (Jn 5:23)

- A. Why will God grant Jesus such honor? What is his ultimate aim?—"that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father" (v 23).
—God wants people to venerate Jesus. God wants people to worship the rabbi Jesus of Nazareth.
- B. The veneration of the Son is so closely connected to the worship of the Father that Jesus can say, "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."
- C. Israel cannot worship God properly if they do not believe in the Son and listen to what he has to say.

VII. Jesus, the *Shaliach* of God

- A. Jesus' actions could be understood in terms of the Jewish concept of a *shaliach*.
 1. A *shaliach* is an emissary who acts on behalf of the one who sends him.
 2. The *shaliach* would be so closely associated with his sender that he could actually be regarded as the sender himself.
 3. To receive someone's *shaliach* was to receive the person who sent him.
 - Matthew 10:40: "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."
- B. The apostles are the *shaliachim* (plural) of Jesus, his envoys and emissaries.
- C. If we didn't know anything else, we could say that Jesus was simply claiming to be the *shaliach* of God, God's emissary. He would be on the level of a prophet.
- D. But there again, is that all he is saying?
 1. Can even God's emissary claim equal honor with God himself?
 2. Can God's emissary judge the world and give life to whomever he wishes? Doesn't the Scripture say that God does not give his glory to another or his praise to idols? (Isa 42:8)

3. While Jesus doesn't outrightly claim to be God, he will leave it to his own *shaliachim* (i.e. apostles) to interpret the meaning of his life for a later audience.
 - Colossians 1:15: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

VIII. The *Shaliach* Who Is the LORD

The Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth bears upon his person the sacred name of the LORD God of Israel. Yet he does so in a highly unusual way. Unlike the prophets of old, Jesus doesn't merely represent God. In some mysterious, yet-to-be-explained way, he *shares* in God's unique work, and therefore in God's exclusive identity, God's holy name. One day, Jesus will do only what God has the right to do, judge souls and raise the dead. Moreover, God gives Jesus those rights precisely that he might be honored as God himself is honored. Those who will not honor Jesus will not honor God. All this points toward one conclusion—that Jesus of Nazareth is the LORD God himself; distinct from the Father, yet mysteriously inseparable from him, mysteriously one with him. Let us worship the Lord Jesus. Let us entrust our lives to his care and devote ourselves to him. The Abba of Jesus commands it.

Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today's sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything that you disagree with or found difficult to accept?
3. Jn 5:19: "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing...." How does this statement weave humility and majesty together?
4. "As the Father acts, so also the Son." How does this principle help us interpret Jesus' works?
5. What do we see in the Old Testament concerning resurrection? According to the Old Testament Scripture, who will raise the dead? How does this impact the way we read Jesus' words?
6. What is the second great work the Father has entrusted to the Son? (v 22)
7. What is implied about the scope of the Son's authority in the work of final judgment?
8. How does the Jewish idea of the *shaliach* inform our understanding of Jesus' words? But why is the idea of *shaliach* inadequate to explain Jesus?
9. Jesus shares in God's work and identity. How should we respond to Jesus?