

“Like Father, Like Son”

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Continuing a series on the Gospel of John

John 5.16-30

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Who does Jesus think he is?

He has just healed a guy, who'd been paralyzed for almost four decades. Jesus told him: “Get up. Pick up your mat. Walk.”

[This painting is of that scene.¹ It's not the easiest to see, but I'm showing it because, as far as we know, it is the earliest depiction of Jesus. It was found when archaeologists uncovered the ruins of a house church in eastern Syria. It dates from about A.D. 235. ISIS now controls the city; I don't know what's become of the painting.]²

Let's hear what happens next in this story of Jesus.

[Please read John 5:16-30]

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Jesus broke the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a good thing. God gives it to us. It's a day of freedom from the grind of work. For one day we rest in the abundance God gives us every day. The Sabbath is for remembering who we are and to Whom we belong.

Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. He told him to carry away his mat on the Sabbath.

Jesus could have waited, just one day. A few hours even, until the sun went down. The man wasn't going anywhere. He wasn't getting any worse. He'd been that way for years full of days? If he was dying or in danger, then yes, heal him. No one would question that. But he wasn't.

Jesus healed him, when he did not have to. And he told him to carry his mat away, which was unnecessary.³

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dura-Europos_church#/media/File:Dura-europos-paralytic.jpg

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dura-Europos_church

³ Dale Bruner asks, rightly I believe,

Why did Jesus seem so singlemindedly to do so many of his healings on the Sabbath? The Jewish people were and are as humane as others, and if a sickness was life-threatening they allowed and still allow medical intervention on the Sabbath. They simply and sensibly asked only that if a sickness or a problem was not life-threatening, please, in order to honor God and his day of rest, postpone work on the sickness or problem for just a few hours. This seems thoughtful. Why does Jesus appear to flaunt this thoughtfulness? Frederick Dale Bruner, The Gospel of John, A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) , 299.

Pressed for a reason, Jesus gives this and sets off an explosion. *“My Father is still working, and I am working to.”*

Not even “our Father.” No, “*my* Father,” Jesus says.⁴ Like there is something special about him and God!

Who is this Jesus?

II

Great question. If I’m going to follow someone, I should know whom I am following.

Suppose I’m a stranger in a wild place. You come along and offer to guide me. What do I want to know? You know where you are going. You know how to get there. You are qualified as a guide. You have the skills and experience to survive in this place. I also need to know you care about me. Are you going to jerk me around? Are you crazy?

Friends, life is strange. The world is bewildering. If we are going to follow someone, we’d better know who.

Jesus? Hmm. You’ve seen what some of his followers are like? See how they act? Not good! Also, Jesus lived a long time ago, in a far different place? How can we trust him today?

Even back then, people were wondering. If Jesus doesn’t even know enough to keep the Sabbath, or doesn’t care enough . . . he’s dangerous. People were drawing to him. So the leaders were out to stop him.

III

How does Jesus answer them? And us?

Jesus does two things. Second, he gives what we might call “personal references.” We will look at those next week. First, he explains where he learned to act as he is acting, to do what he is doing, to have the priorities he is showing. Where he learned . . . or more correctly, from whom he learned.

Basically he says, “Like Father, like Son.”

His dad Joseph practiced carpentry.⁵ Growing up in Nazareth, Jesus learned this trade by working with his dad, side-by-side. That’s the traditional way of passing on from one generation to the next. The child is shaped by imitating the parent. It’s an apprenticeship approach to learning. Jesus apprenticed with Joseph, and became a carpenter like his

⁴ *“In all four Gospels, without exception, Jesus constantly speaks of God as ‘my Father.’”* Bruner, 310.

⁵ The Greek word used is *tektōn*. That’s a blanket term for a skilled worker. Ancient tradition says Joseph’s skill was carpentry.

dad.⁶

Jesus uses this apprenticeship idea to explain what he is doing. He is the Son of God who has learned from God the Father. God works on the Sabbath; otherwise, everything would fall apart. His Father is working, so Jesus the Son is working too.

IV

Then, Jesus says even more.

Only God, the Creator of all, can give life.⁷ Jesus knows that. Listen, then, to what he says about himself.⁸

*. . . just the Father raises the dead and gives life,
so too does the Son give life to whomever he wishes.* (v. 21)

*Just as the Father has life in himself,
in the same way he has given the Son
the privilege of having life in himself.* (v. 26)

Jesus is saying God's creator-authority belongs to him.

Only God, the Lord of all, can judge us.⁹ Again, listen then to what Jesus says:

*The Father does not judge anyone,
but he has handed over all judgment to the Son . . .* (v. 22)

*[The Father] gives the Son authority to judge,
because the Son is the Human One [or "Son of Man"].*¹⁰ (v. 27)

Why judgement? God is making things right. For God to birth the new creation, the evil that

⁶ Matthew 13:55 identifies Jesus as "the carpenter's son." The parallel passage in Mark 6:3, upon which Matthew likely based his account, says that Jesus was a carpenter. The fact that Joseph is not mentioned in the Gospel accounts, except during Jesus' childhood, strongly suggests he died during Jesus' youth.

⁷ "Only God 'raises the dead and makes alive.' All monotheistic faith holds firmly to this conviction." Bruner, 313.

⁸ Any doubt that Jesus is talking about himself when he speaks of "the Son" is dispelled in v. 30 when he switches to the first person "I."

⁹ "Two realities were confessed with feeling in Jewish monotheistic faith: (a) That only God gives life at the beginning and (b) that only God gives judgement at the end." Bruner, 314.

¹⁰ "In Jewish faith, the Son of Man was expected to come for judgement. Jesus occupies this office, we now learn again. Jesus is not only the creative Son of God/Word of God at the beginning of all human life (1:3; 5:24-25; cf. Col 1:16-17), but he is also the critical Son of man at the end of everyone's life, as we are now learning (vv. 27-29)." Bruner, 317.

has made a mess of the old creation needs to be pointed to and dealt with.¹¹ Only God is fit to do this with wisdom, power and grace. Now, Jesus is saying God's judge-authority belongs to him.

Then, Jesus wraps together "giving life" and "judging."

*Don't be surprised by this,
because the time is coming when
all who are in their graves will hear [the Son's] voice.
Those who did good things will come out into the resurrection of life,
and those who did evil things into the resurrection of judgment. (v. 28-29)*

Our beginnings and our endings are in God's hands. Which means, our beginnings and endings are in Jesus's hands!

V

Saying he can judge, when only God can judge. Saying he can give life, when only God can give life. Is Jesus so arrogant?

Or, is it true?

An apprentice-child learns to do what the parent does. There is a unity, an equality between the two. However, the child is also dependent on the parent, and subordinate to the parent.

So Jesus says:

*The Son cannot do anything on his own.
He can only do what he sees the Father doing.
Whatever the Father does, the Son is doing too, and the same way. (v. 19)*

And he finishes with this:

*I can't do anything by my own authority.
I judge based on what I hear, and my judgment is fair,
because I don't seek my own will
but the will of the one who sent me. (v. 30)¹²*

¹¹ "God has longed to put the world to rights; now, with is apprentice son on the job, he is doing so at last. But bringing new creation to birth can only be done if the evil that has corrupted the old creation is named, shamed and dealt with. That's what judgement is all about." N. T. Wright, John for Everyone, Part 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 64.

¹² "Subordination is written all over this verse, and Jesus wants it to be the summarizing memory of his defense. Jesus is equal to the Father in no other way than by his being totally subject to him." Bruner, 319.

Jesus is subordinate to the Father, and depends on the Father.¹³

Jesus does the same as the Father. But in no way does that separate him from his Father. He is not competing with his Father. He is not setting up his own shop apart from his Father. The best a son could do for a father was be grateful to him, follow his example, and bring honour to him. Everything Jesus has comes from his Father. Everything he does is led by his Father. Everything he accomplishes is to celebrate his Father.

VI

So, can we trust ourselves to Jesus? Can we trust his wisdom, that he knows what he is doing? Can we trust his heart, that he is full of love for us and all creation?

The “Father-Son” language he uses might not work for you. The parent-teaching-child apprentice relationship is not so common now, but I think we can still get it.

Jesus acts as God acts. He does what only God can do. Jesus is God the Son, acting in harmony with God the Father. He is God in action. He speaks, and he is God speaking. He loves, and he is God loving. Jesus is the Son, doing only and exactly what the Father is doing. The Son dies; he is God, giving Godself for the world. The Son rises from the dead; he is God beginning the new creation.

When you encounter Jesus, you are meeting your Maker. When you encounter Jesus, you are appearing before your Judge.

Because I see him in action, and know his passion, and am in awe of his power, and in awe of his love, I know I can trust him. I can trust God.

Amen.

¹³ “[This is] an equality that is only maintained by subordination. Jesus, in this entire subordination, is claiming this kind—and only this subordinate kind—of equality with God.” Bruner, 312.