

## I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

### John 5:15-29

Today, we continue looking at the Apostles' Creed and we're focussing on the second sentence "I believe in Jesus Christ, his [that's God's] only Son, Our Lord." This sentence deals with our belief in Jesus Christ, that He is the Son of God, and that He is our Lord.

So Christ is our Lord, he is God, but what exactly is His nature? Let's look at that in the context of our gospel reading today.

The Background to our gospel reading is that Jesus had miraculously healed a man who had been an invalid for most of his life when he found him by the pool at Bethesda – the third miracle of Jesus recorded in John's gospel. But, this healing took place on the Sabbath and furthermore Jesus told the man he had healed to pick up his mat and walk. Now carrying a mat was contrary to the detailed rules covering work on the Sabbath which the Pharisees had established. The Israelites had been commanded to set the Sabbath aside as a day of rest, but the Pharisees had added 39 detailed laws qualifying, complicating and changing the original simple principle of Sabbath rest. Many of these had little to do with the original principle of the Sabbath – for example the Pharisees had introduced a rule forbidding looking into a mirror on the Sabbath – that one would certainly have caused my wife to sin every Sabbath.

So, here, for the first time in 38 years the invalid was walking. There was probably a spring in his step, but then he heard a voice saying "Hey what are you doing carrying that bed – don't you know that's illegal on the Sabbath, You're breaking the Law". That was the spirit of legalism at its worst. It's not in keeping laws that we are saved, but in our acceptance of God's grace – his amazing grace.

That really brings us to the start of our reading today, so please open your Bibles at page [\*\*] so that you can follow it along with me as we

study it together. We see that the Pharisees persecuted Jesus as well as the invalid. Look at verses 15 and 16:

“The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.” (John 5:15-16 NIV)

The invalid seems to have been an ungrateful individual – doesn't he – because he lost no opportunity in betraying Jesus to the authorities when he discovered who healed him, even though he must have known that this would lead to problems for Jesus. As we can clearly see here, miracles don't make believers – the invalid accepted Jesus' healing but didn't seem to accept him as Lord and master. Inevitably the Pharisees took action against Jesus, although we aren't told exactly what form their “persecution” took. As we shall see in a moment Jesus responded powerfully to the Pharisees and his words also powerfully challenge us all today.

Let's move on to verse 17:

“Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”” (John 5:17 NIV)

There are no words or specific question that Jesus is answering here – he was actually answering their persecution of him. In Mark's gospel Jesus defends his attitude to the Sabbath by saying:

“So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”” (Mark 2:28 NIV).

That doesn't mean WE are entitled to disregard that Sabbath ordinance and do as we wish on that day, it's merely stating that Jesus is Lord – even over the divinely instituted Sabbath – because he is Lord and has been given authority over everything.

This verse also emphasises the unceasing activity of God. Although God entered the Sabbath rest on the seventh day to rest from his work of creation (and arguably still remains within that rest) he continues to work to maintain and sustain our universe – and he does so unceasingly. If he didn't I believe the universe would literally fall apart. God works and yet remains in his Sabbath rest. Unless he works continually no one could survive – and because of his close relationship with the Father Jesus works in the same way. The

Sabbath cannot interfere with the work of such a one. This has implications for our own observance of the Sabbath. We observe it as regards secular work, but that does not imply idleness. God's compassion for his people must be reflected in our own Christian service. Also we should not so much *observe* the Sabbath as *celebrate* it. The Pharisees *observed* the Sabbath but Christians should rejoice each Sabbath in the overflowing grace of God and joyfully praise and worship our loving Father.

Let's move on to verse 18:

“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 5:18 NIV)

Jesus wasn't saying that God was the Father of all – which the Jews would have accepted – but saying that God was *his* Father in a special sense. The Jews were incensed by this statement, because they saw Jesus calling God his Father as Jesus claiming equality with God. Not only was he guilty of breaking the Sabbath, but guilty of blasphemy. The blasphemy of claiming equality with God.

But we see why this was not blasphemy – look at verse 19:

“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.” (John 5:19 NIV)

Here and in the succeeding verses we find possibly the clearest scriptural statement of Jesus' unity with the Father and his divine commission and authority and the proof of his Messiahship. These were, of course, the claims which eventually led to his crucifixion at the insistence of the Jewish authorities, but they are also the claims which testify to his ability to bring us the new birth and the water of life. Jesus acts entirely subject to the authority of the Father and yet teaches and acts with the full authority of God. What we see here is not any bare monotheistic authority of Jesus, but a rich Trinitarianism rooted in the mutual love of the Father and the Son.

Let's move on to verses 20 and 21:

“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. 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 5:20-21 NIV)

The revelation of the relationship between the Father and the Son is taken a step further – we see that the Father loves the Son with a permanent unceasing love, because the verb “loves” in verse 20 is in the present continuous tense. Jesus acts only in accordance with divine revelation and thus looks forward to even greater works, because he will be shown such greater works by the Father. The following verses show that these “greater things” are the Son’s activities in judging and giving life.

The fact that the Father raises the dead and gives life would have been accepted without question by Jesus’ Jewish hearers – this is the teaching of the OT (Deuteronomy 32:39; 1 Samuel 2:6; 2 Kings 5:7). What is new and marvellous is the assertion that Jesus gives life.

The thought now moves on to judgement – see verses 22 and 23:

“Moreover, the Father judges no-one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him.” (John 5:22-23 NIV)

Again this would have been new and surprising to the Jews who believed that the Father was the judge of all people. Jesus now tells them that the prerogative of judgement has been given to him so that we will honour him in the same way as we honour the Father. Those who don’t honour Jesus don’t honour the Father who sent him. This means more than just that the sender of a message is dishonoured if his messenger is dishonoured. The whole emphasis of this passage is on the unity of the Father and the Son – what is done to the Son is done to the Father also. So dishonouring Jesus is a very serious matter. When we dishonour Jesus we also dishonour the Father.

Let’s move on to look at verse 24:

“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 5:24 NIV)

Still the stress is on the unity of the Father and the Son. We are told that to gain God’s gracious forgiveness from judgement we must believe in the message of Jesus and believe the Father who sent him. This last statement is quite unusual as it’s much more usual to be told we must believe in Jesus rather than the Father – so the unity between the two is further emphasised. These words are both a simple statement of fact and also a challenge – a challenge and an invitation to hear Christ and take a step of faith in him. When we do that, it’s a decisive action – the believer receives life and death no longer has any hold over him.

We now come to the final verses of our reading – Jesus’ further words about judgement and eternal life – see verses 25:29:

“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. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. "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 good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:25-29 NIV)

At first sight, verse 25 seems to follow on from verse 24, but the fact that it starts off with a further “I tell you the truth ..” statement probably marks it off as a separate thought. This section is not just a repetition of the thoughts of the last few verses – the words of verses 28 and 29 are too strong for that. These verses are a clear statement that Jesus will be our judge on the Great Day of Judgement.

Going back to verse 25 the words “has now come” make it clear that Jesus is not talking there of the raising of the dead on the last day but of the present life giving ministry of the Son. They are a reference not only to the future resurrection, but also to the fact that Christ gives life now. Our eternal destiny is determined by our attitude to him. Those who are spiritually dead hear his voice and those who hear it

and accept its message in their hearts and minds will live. Notice that Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of God” here – one of only three times in the gospel of John that he does so.

Verse 27 tells us that Jesus will be our judge because he is “the Son of Man”. Probably Jesus has been appointed judge because he **is both** man **and** God and thus uniquely able to understand us and yet to judge justly.

Verses 28 and 29 emphasise both that Jesus will be responsible for calling the dead forth on the last day and also that here and now those who believe in Christ enter into eternal life whilst those who choose darkness receive condemnation. This amazing claim of Jesus prefigures the raising of Lazarus from the dead told in John chapter 11.

Let’s just take a few moments to summarise what we’ve learnt today. We’ve learnt that a dead legalistic interpretation of God’s laws is not what is required of us, but rather a living compassionate interpretation of these laws. We saw that Jesus is indeed our Lord and God’s Son. We saw that He is in a complete and permanent unity of love with the Father, that the Father has appointed Christ to call us forth and be our judge at the last day and that those who hear his words to us with an acceptive mind and heart will be saved from that judgement into eternal life. So now we see the overwhelming importance of this sentence of the Apostles’ Creed. Belief in Jesus as the Son of God and Our Lord is the saving faith that preserves us from God’s judgement.

And what about all of us here today. Will we accept in our hearts the second sentence of the Apostles’ Creed and choose to turn to Jesus and believe in him and the one who sent him or will we ignore his message and choose darkness and condemnation? Let’s accept him for who he says he is and receive the grace of God and freedom from condemnation in the judgement at that last day when Christ will come again. But if we do choose to accept him we need to face the question “What difference is this making in my life?” for we shall

nevertheless stand before the judgment seat at that last day when Christ calls us forth and we will need to show that we paid more than lip service to the principle which Christ stated *whatever the Father does the Son does also*. Let us go out and from now on live our lives in accordance with the principles laid down by the Father in His word to us – the Bible.

Let's just close with a few words of prayer – Father thank you for sending Christ your son and our Lord and thank you for the revelation of your word. Give us all a true saving faith in Christ and send us out now in the power of your Spirit and help us henceforth to live our lives in accordance with the principles you have laid down. Amen