

## SERMON NOTES

Sunday, April 13

Synaxis Gospel  
John 5:19-30

### THE OFFER OF ETERNAL LIFE

#### INTRODUCTION

During the forty-day period after His Resurrection until His Ascension our Lord was finally able to teach the disciples the deep theological lessons concerning Himself in the Old Testament as well as the new teaching they needed to understand about His Person as revealed in His Incarnation. As we approach Pentecost, our Synaxis readings continue our focus on these teachings of our Lord.

The Gospel of John records those teachings. Moreover, the Holy Spirit brought again to John's memory those events of our Lord's ministry in which those teachings were first presented. One of those occasions is the subject of our reading for today.

Jesus had just healed a man crippled for thirty-eight years. The man was barely able to drag himself to the edge of the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem where they said that the first person in would be cured by an angel when it moved the water. The man had despaired of ever being able to get into the pool first. But Jesus healing him, told him to get up and take his pallet and go. This occurred on a Sabbath when one is not allowed to carry anything according to the religious leaders. Angry and ready to kill Jesus for this, the religious leaders confronted Him.

When Jesus defended His action—that He had done these things on the Sabbath day—by replying, “**My** Father is working continually, *even I* am working,”<sup>1</sup> the Jews grew even angrier. They interpreted His words to mean that He was claiming equality with God.<sup>2</sup> For it had been a debate among the rabbis how it could be that God, Who must continually maintain the universe, is said to rest on the Sabbath. They had resolved the problem in different ways, “but on one point they were all agreed: God was active all the time, on sabbath [sic] days as much as on ordinary days.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus was identifying Himself with this activity. Moreover they were furious when Jesus reckoned God as *His own particular Father*, because this claimed to be equal, or to be the same as God. This flew in the face of “Hear O Israel, the LORD your God is One LORD.” It is at this point that we pick up the conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> In John 5:17, the little *καγω* is used for emphasis and can mean ‘also I’, ‘likewise I’, or ‘even I’.

<sup>2</sup> John 5:18

<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983) pp. 126-127.

## SYNTAXIS READING

John 5:19-30

*Therefore, Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing: for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.*

*For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing: and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.*

*For as the Father raises the dead, and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.*

*For the Father does not judge anyone, but has committed all judgment to the Son, so that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that does not honor the Son does not honor the Father Who sent Him.*

*Truly, truly I say to you, He that hears My word, and believes Him Who sent me, has eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation; but has passed from death into life.*

*Truly, truly, I say unto you, an hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and those who hear shall live.*

*For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and He has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man.*

*Do not marvel at this: for an hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and will come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.*

*I can do nothing on My own initiative: as I hear, I judge. And My judgment is just because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father Who has sent me.*

## NOTES

Therefore, Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing: for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

Jesus used the term 'the Son' to show His peculiar relationship to God as His 'Father', that was different from the rest of the Jews who also called God their Father.

Our Gospel writer, John, has already pointed out that John the Baptist had identified Jesus as "the Son of God."<sup>4</sup> 'The Son of God' was a title for God's anointed king. All the Davidic kings of Israel had been given that title at their coronation as Psalm 2 was recited. The Davidic line had not occupied the throne for hundreds of years. But the Jewish prophets had long expected the reestablishment of the throne under the Davidic line by One, Who according to Micah and Daniel, would also be divine (God Himself).<sup>5</sup>

John has also used the term 'the Son' for the One sent from the Father in heaven.<sup>6</sup>

John has already established the identity of Jesus as the 'Word' Who is God and Who became incarnate. He is the Creator of all things. So of course, it was He Who created the Sabbath and it was He Who rested on it and it is He Who continues to work and maintain His creation (thus Jesus defense for working on the Sabbath). But the reality that John in the Prologue of his Gospel has explained as God and the Word, Jesus is now explaining as the Father and Himself. The terms are uniquely tied together. In Genesis God said and it was done. In John 1, the Word does. Here Jesus explains the reality as the Father shows (initiates) and the Son does. The Father's action and the Son's action are really inseparable. But Jesus is now explaining this from the point of view of His incarnation, as the Word become flesh, sent from heaven, Who is the Son of God, the Divine King of Israel. (Bottom line: the LORD that is acknowledged in "Hear, O Israel . . .", they are literally seeing, robed in human flesh, in Jesus Christ.)

For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing: and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.

Elsewhere the Father calls Jesus His beloved Son.<sup>7</sup> The adjective there is akin to the verb αγαπεω, 'to love.' Here a different verb is used, φιλεω, which, while it can mean 'to love', can also mean 'to kiss'. The kiss was a form of greeting between intimate friends. It demonstrated acceptance and trust. If this latter is the meaning here, it would indicate the intimate trust that exists in this situation. The Father trusts the Son. This trust is demonstrated by the Father entrusting everything to the Son. Thus, this nuance seems to fit the context.

The Father "shows" (this could also mean to 'explain by telling') what He Himself does.

The greater works that Jesus will be given to do and which will cause them to marvel are listed below.

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<sup>4</sup> John 1:34

<sup>5</sup> Daniel 7:13-14 and Micah 5:2; compare with John 1:49.

<sup>6</sup> John 3:35-36

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 3:17; 17:5; 1 Peter 1:17

For as the Father raises the dead, and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

In the Old Testament Scriptures, it is only God Who gives life.<sup>8</sup> In Ezekiel 37, a vision is given to the prophet of God bringing to life the dry bones of the Israelites. Possibly this is the foundation for the Jewish Synagogue prayer that apparently goes back to New Testament days:

“Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever; thou quickenest the dead; thou art mighty to save. Thou sustainest the living with loving-kindness, thou quickenest the dead in great mercy, thou supportest the fallen, healest the sick, loosest those who are bound, and keepest faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like thee, O Lord of mighty acts? Who is comparable to thee, O King, who bringest to death and quickenest again, and causest salvation to spring forth? Yea, thou art faithful to quicken the dead. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who quickenest the dead!”<sup>9</sup>

The power not just to resuscitate, but also to give spiritual life to the dead, which belongs only to the Father,<sup>10</sup> is the Son's. He will give life to all those He wishes to give life. But in hearing this statement we must remember that the Son's wish is based on the Father's.

For the Father does not judge anyone, but has committed all judgment to the Son, so that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that does not honor the Son does not honor the Father Who sent Him.

In the Old Testament Scriptures although men were assigned as judges they were to act for God, the ultimate Judge of all, and were to judge according to His precepts.

Deut. 16:18 Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall **judge** the people with just judgment.

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<sup>8</sup> While life after death, quickening, is not often dealt with in the Old Testament, that God is the Giver of life and sustainer of life is recognized. See for example Genesis 1-2; Psalm 36:9 and 133:3. But see also from the New Testament: Rom. 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who **quickeneth** the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Bruce, p. 129, from S. Singer, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book* (London, 1939) pp. 44 f.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm. 71:20 Thou, who hast showed us many and sore troubles, Wilt **quicken** us again, And wilt bring us up again from the depths of the earth.

Psalm. 80:18 So shall we not go back from thee: **Quicken** thou us, and we will call upon thy name.

Psalm. 85:6 Wilt thou not **quicken** us again, That thy people may rejoice in thee?

Psalm. 119:25 My soul cleaveth unto the dust: **Quicken** thou me according to thy word.

Psalm. 119:37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, And **quicken** me in thy ways.

Psalm. 119:40 Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: **Quicken** me in thy righteousness.

Psalm. 119:88 **Quicken** me after thy lovingkindness; So shall I observe the testimony of thy mouth.

Psalm. 119:107 I am afflicted very much: **Quicken** me, O Jehovah, according unto thy word.

Psalm. 119:149 Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: **Quicken** me, O Jehovah, according to thine ordinances.

Psalm. 119:154 Plead thou my cause, and redeem me: **Quicken** me according to thy word.

Psalm. 119:156 Great are thy tender mercies, O Jehovah: **Quicken** me according to thine ordinances.

Psalm. 119:159 Consider how I love thy precepts: **Quicken** me, O Jehovah, according to thy lovingkindness.

Psalm. 143:11 **Quicken** me, O Jehovah, for thy name's sake: In thy righteousness bring my soul out of trouble.

In the New Testament see: 1Timothy. 6:13 I give thee charge in the sight of God, who **quickeneth** all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;

Typical of the many verses that teach that God is the Judge is:

Isaiah. 33:22 For the LORD is our **judge**, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us.

That He will judge all mankind is:

Joel 3:12 Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to **judge** all the heathen round about.

That He will judge His people:

Ezekiel. 18:30 Therefore I will **judge** you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

But now this ultimate judgment is assigned to the Son, the incarnate God who is the King. **He** will sit to judge the world. The reason is so that He will receive the same honor as the invisible God the Father Who has sent the Son.

Those who believe that they can honor the Father without honoring the Son are badly mistaken.

Truly, truly I say to you, He that hears My word, and believes Him Who sent me, has eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation; but has passed from death into life.

The central teaching of our reading is focused on the eternal life that is available to mankind. Jesus affirms and underscores this teaching with His double “truly.” There are two requirements for the reception of eternal life:

- 1) **One must “hear” Christ’s word.** What does this mean? The term hear, especially in Aramaic which Jesus spoke, means to obey what is ‘heard.’ It is not simply registering that Christ has uttered a command. It must be obeyed. The basic command is to trustingly believe that the Father has sent Him for the purpose of providing salvation from sins by His work on the Cross. This kind of trust involves repentance and commitment to God. This is not a work, it is an inward realization of one’s lost condition and deep thankfulness for the grace that God has so abundantly and lovingly offered. It is a grateful acceptance of that offer.
- 2) **One must believe the Father.** We are all given the chance to be another Adam or Eve. They had the choice to believe God, to trust in His goodness and love for them OR to believe that He is not good and interested in their best, to believe that He is out to keep them from achieving their full potential. Adam and Eve chose the latter. They did not exercise faith in God and His goodness, but believed the lie of Satan. This cost them the Garden of Eden and threw the world of mankind into sin.<sup>11</sup> But now each of us has the chance to make that same decision. Those who choose to believe God, to have faith in His goodness and provision for us are restored to the fellowship with Him that Adam and Eve lost when they disobeyed and died spiritually. We will not be

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<sup>11</sup> They did repent and were forgiven which a study of the symbolism of Genesis 3 shows, but the damage to the world was done.

condemned at the judgment. In fact even now we have left the state of spiritual death and have eternal life.

**Truly, truly, I say unto you, an hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and those who hear shall live.**

There is a general resurrection of the physically dead coming. However there is a resurrection of the spiritually dead going on right now. Just as the physically dead will hear the Son of God's call and will be raised from the dead, those who are physically alive but who are dead in their sins ('dead' = separated from God), who hear the call of the Son of God now are being given spiritual life. They are being reunited to the fellowship of God.

**For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself;**

In Colossians 2, St. Paul writes that there is a "mystery about God and the Father and Jesus Christ." Theologians have broken their heads trying to understand how these concepts all fit together. Perhaps we should just simply accept what we are told in the Scripture. "In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." This statement accords with what John has told us already in the Prologue of his Gospel, "in Him was Life." This is being restated here with different terms (the 'Father' and the 'Son'). Life is in the Father; Life is in the Son. Everything the Father has, has as well the incarnation of God Who is the Son.

Thus, for all who will come to Him (accept Him and His work, or as John 1:12 reads: "receive Him"), Christ has the authority to bestow eternal life.

**and He has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man.**

'The Son of Man' is the title Jesus used most often of Himself. It was almost always in John used in the context of His passion (seven times out of ten). It was because He paid the price of mankind's sin with His own death on the Cross that it was right and proper that He should be the One Who executes judgment, either to pronounce a person righteous or to condemn a man as evil. The Son of Man will know who belongs to Him, who has accepted Him and His work.

It is marvelous to know that the One Who is our Judge is the One Who loves us so much He died for us.

**Do not marvel at this: for an hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and will come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.**

There will be a future resurrection of all the dead. Just as He called forth His friend, Lazarus, from the grave, someday, everyone who has ever died will be called forth by our Lord. At that time, He will sit in final judgment. Some will live eternally with Him; others will be damned.

The question is: what is meant by "done good" and "done evil"? Above, Jesus said, "Those who hear (obey) My word and believe Him Who sent Me has eternal life and will not come into condemnation." This is then 'doing good'. It is therefore evil to reject His word and not believe in the Father. Those who do this evil will be condemned.

I can do nothing on My own initiative: as I hear, I judge. And My judgment is just; because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father Who has sent me.

Here, we understand the trustworthiness of the Son to the Father. He does only as directed (or "shown"). All initiative comes from the Father. The Son acts on the Father's initiative. Even in His authority to judge, He only does so as He "hears." He looks to the Father's will even in this. God is just; therefore the Son's judgment is just.

## APPLICATION

"This Sunday, the third Sunday after Easter, is called Red Sunday (Karmir Kiraki). The origin of the name, Red Sunday, has been lost, but it is most probably related to nature. Like Green Sunday, it is a popular designation related to spring, since it is at this time of the year that the fields are adorned with red tulips amidst the green grass."<sup>12</sup> However, in the Armenian flag, red symbolizes the blood shed by Armenian soldiers. For Armenians then, red symbolizes sacrificial death and also new life.

Our reading from the Gospel today discusses new life, the new life that God offers us. But this new life can only be ours because God in His incarnate form, Jesus Christ, died a sacrificial death for us. That this should be called Karmir Kiraki is then very appropriate.

The Jews of Jesus' day did not understand Who Jesus was. Although their prophets had prophesied that the Divine King would someday come in the form of God's Servant to die for their sins, they did not recognize that in Jesus Christ the prophecies were fulfilled. Even the disciples did not realize this until after the Resurrection. However our Gospel writer, John, finally understood all that Jesus had done and taught during the three years of His ministry before the Crucifixion. In his Gospel John lays it out for us so that we too may know and believe and have eternal life.

In the first chapter, John told us exactly who Jesus Christ is. He is God. He is God the Creator of all things. Because He is God, life is in Him. We know and the Jews of Jesus' day knew that there is only One God. Things got tricky for us when the One God decided to become a human being. Human beings must worship and obey God. How do we then explain the relationship of the visible incarnate (in human flesh) God, Jesus Christ, to the invisible God in Heaven? There is still only One God. John uses the terms 'God' and 'Father' and 'the Word,' and 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man' to show how this One God functions. When the idea of initiation and sending is meant, John uses the terms 'God' and 'Father.' When the idea is doing what the One God wishes and initiates, John uses the terms 'Word' and 'Son of God' or 'Son of Man'. 'Son of God' also is a title for the promised Divine King. 'Son of Man' also is the title Jesus most often used for Himself because it not only refers to His Divine Kingship, it also refers to the fact that as a man, the incarnate God gave Himself sacrificially to die on the Cross for our sins. If this is still

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted from: Eastern Prelacy: Crossroads E-Newsletter - 04/29/2004

too difficult to wrap our minds around, all we need to remember is that everything that is God, was and is in Jesus Christ.

In our reading for today, Jesus is explaining to the Jews that He is the Doer and the Father is the Initiator of all God's actions. Therefore when Jesus healed the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day, it should not be thought of as breaking the Sabbath because God works on the Sabbath as well as on other days. (This of course offended the Jews because they realized that Jesus was claiming to be God.)

Jesus went on to say that the other prerogatives of God, raising the dead, giving life, and judgment are also Jesus' prerogatives. He will be the One Who calls forth the dead for the final judgment. He will be the One Who sits in judgment on all mankind. But He is also the One Who offers eternal life to all Who believe His words and trustingly believe in God's lovingkindness. This great lovingkindness has caused God to send His incarnation, Jesus Christ, to take our place on the Cross and to die for our sins. The Jews of Jesus' day, and we today, can have eternal life, freely, without cost, if we simply accept what Jesus said, sincerely repent of our sins and turn back to God in commitment to Him. If we do this, when the great final resurrection occurs and we stand before the judgment seat of God, we will look up to see our wonderful Savior. Moreover, as we live our lives today, we are assured that already we have eternal life. We have this on the sure and true word of the Son of God.