

# John's Gospel - Like Father, Like Son

by John Vissers

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*Jesus' claim to be the Son of God and His unity with the Father are the core of His controversy and the foundation of His divine prerogatives.*

**Duration:** 39:48

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 5:16-30

**Topics:** "Gospel Of John"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jesus healing a paralyzed man. Despite the miracle, some people criticized Jesus. The preacher connects this story to the Apostle Paul's description of Jesus in Colossians chapter 1, emphasizing that Jesus shares in the work of God the Father as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. The preacher also mentions the concept of 'like Father like Son,' highlighting how Jesus imitates and reflects the Father. The sermon concludes with Jesus speaking about the future resurrection and judgment, emphasizing the thread of God's redemptive purposes throughout history.

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## Transcript

It's good to welcome you, and tonight we're continuing in our study of the Gospel of John, and tonight we come to a very interesting passage in the fifth chapter of John's Gospel, and we're going to read at verse 16 through to the end of verse 30. A rather lengthy passage, but nevertheless one which records Jesus' words, His response, His words to the religious leaders. And so we're in John chapter 5 at verse 16.

So let us hear the Word of God. So because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted Him. Jesus said to them, My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working.

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 Father, making Himself equal with God. 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. 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. 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. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He is crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming, it 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. 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. Amen, and may God bless to us these words from Holy Scripture this evening.

Let's bow in prayer, shall we? Lord, we thank You tonight for Your word. We thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ who is revealed to us, the living word revealed in the written word. We pray this evening that as we look to Him, that by Your Spirit we indeed might have greater insight and greater understanding.

We pray that You would help us to understand this passage, to apply it in our hearts and in our lives. That we might be more faithful in our lives of discipleship, in our lives of following You day by day, even in the week to come. For we ask it in Christ's name.

Amen. I want to begin this evening by suggesting that the passage before us tonight is really a rather controversial passage. And Jesus is presented to us in this passage in a rather controversial way.

And in many ways that should not surprise us. Jesus was a very controversial figure. He was controversial in the first century, during His own life and ministry, and in the years that immediately followed that.

He's been controversial throughout the last 2,000 years of the history of the Church, and indeed He's even controversial in our world today. And so in a very real sense, we should not be surprised by that. And in fact, there's nothing really unusual about that, because controversy has often surrounded many great and important people throughout history.

But the controversy that surrounds Jesus, and the controversy as it's unfolded for us in the pages of the New Testament, is really rather unique and really rather unusual. Because normally people are controversial because of what they say. They say certain things and that makes them controversial, and certainly Jesus said certain things which made Him controversial.

Or it's because of what they do or what they write, and certainly Jesus did some things that made Him controversial. But usually it's the ideas of people that make them controversial in our world. If we think, for example, of the 20th century, some of the most controversial figures are those who have shaped our thinking, and it's been their ideas which have been controversial.

For example, think of someone like Charles Darwin, who introduced controversial ideas about the origins of life and about evolutionary theory. Or the ideas of Karl Marx, who introduced radical ideas and controversial ideas about economics and politics and the way we should organize social life. Or think

about Freud and his controversial understanding of the human psyche.

What made these men controversial were their ideas. And when we come to Jesus, of course, what we discover is that it's not just His ideas which make Him controversial. It's not just His actions which make Him controversial.

But in fact, He's controversial because of who He claimed to be. He claimed to be the Son of God. In other words, what makes Jesus a really controversial figure in the end, when all is said and done, is not simply what He said, not simply what He taught, not simply what He did.

All of the things which make others controversial. But in the end, what makes Jesus a really controversial figure is who He is, in and of Himself, His identity. And our passage tonight in John's Gospel is one of the places in the New Testament where this controversy reaches a fever pitch.

Now, Jesus finds Himself in the midst of a controversy. And it's a controversy that He finds Himself in soon after He healed the man at the pool in Jerusalem in the passage that we looked at last week in the first 15 verses of John chapter 5. He healed this man by the sheep gate, the pool, and the sheep gate as he was waiting there, hoping that he might in fact be healed. And we looked at that passage last week, and Jesus told him to pick up his mat and to walk, which he did.

And we should expect, we might expect, that this would be an occasion of great joy. That this would be an occasion of great thanksgiving. But what we discover is that some people met this miracle with criticism.

Now, why? They met it with criticism, and it was controversial because Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath. And the man who'd been healed was walking through the streets carrying his bed. And some of the Jewish leaders noticed this, and they stopped him, and they reminded him that he was breaking the law by carrying his bed on the Sabbath.

And if you look earlier in John chapter 5, again in the passage we read last week, you'll see that the man who'd been healed defended himself by saying that he was simply following the orders of Jesus. One gets the sense in terms of how this man presents himself. We saw this last week when he kind of responds to Jesus and says, there's no one here to help me.

And now he says to the religious leaders, yes, I'm doing this, but it's really not my responsibility. The one who healed me told me to do this. And in fact, later he tells them that it was Jesus.

And so Jesus is in trouble. Jesus is in the midst of controversy. Jesus is confronted by the religious leaders because he had performed this miracle on the Sabbath.

And the feeling is intense. And you need to notice the language which is used here. The Jewish leaders persecuted him.

They began to seek to eliminate him. And it's in this context, in the midst of this controversy, in the midst of the intensity of this conversation with the religious leaders, that Jesus begins to tell them about his special relationship to God the Father. He says God the Father doesn't stop working.

So in fact, he doesn't either. And his claim is rather astonishing, because in fact he defends his Sabbath healing by appealing to his identity, and to his unity, and to his intimacy, and to his equality with God the Father. And as we read in the opening verses of our text this evening, of our passage this evening, this

was really too much for the Jewish leaders.

Because not only was he now breaking the Sabbath restrictions, but he was even calling God his Father. And it says in verse 18, making himself equal with God. You see, the point that John is making here is that the Jewish leaders recognized that Jesus was making a unique claim for himself.

It was one thing for a Jewish teacher to refer to God as our Father. But here Jesus was claiming a special relationship, an exclusive and personal relationship with God. He said, my Father.

And he did not speak of himself as a son or a child of God, but he spoke of himself as the Son of God. As the Son of Man, that great messianic title from the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. He's claiming here a special and a unique relationship to the Father, which the religious leaders didn't have.

And we need to be very clear, as John records this episode for us, that's what made the religious leaders angry. That's what made them want to eliminate Jesus. And in the verses then that follow, in verses 19 through to verse 30, we have Jesus unfolding.

Jesus elaborating this incredible, this extraordinary claim. And let's just look at the way this claim is unfolded as Jesus speaks to the religious leaders. The first thing that Jesus claims here in verse 19 is he claims that his actions are divine actions.

Verse 19, I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does. Now what Jesus is saying here is that he shares in a full and complete way in the work of the Father.

His work is the Father's work, and the Father's work is his work. He shares in a full and in a complete way in the Father's work. We might think of it this way, Jesus is in effect saying that his deeds are a perfect reproduction in miniature of the cosmic activity of God.

That's why Jesus healed the man at the pool on the Sabbath day, which was contrary to Jewish law, since God the Father did not stop making people better on the Sabbath, then Jesus couldn't either. But notice that he doesn't stop there. He doesn't stop simply where you think he might stop in his conversation with the religious leaders.

That is, he's justifying this action which he's taken in terms of healing this man on the Sabbath. But he extends the point, he says, whatever the Father does, the Son does also. And what he's saying is that he doesn't imitate the Father in this act alone.

He's not like the Father simply because he sees that the Sabbath was made for human beings and not human beings for the Sabbath. But he is saying that whatever the Father does, he also does. He's extending the point, he's making the point in a very clear and pointed way.

And in a very real sense, it's this very idea, which is picked up later by the Apostle Paul in Colossians chapter 1, in that magnificent Christological passage, starting in verse 15, where there's that description not only of the identity of Jesus, but the work of Jesus. And the work which Jesus is described with there, in the words of the Apostle Paul, is the work of God the Father. It's the work of Jesus as well.

He is the creator. He is the sustainer. He is Lord over all things.

He shares in the fullness of divine activity and creation and redemption. He shares fully in the work of the Father. As most of you know, I have three children, including two sons.

And I'm constantly amazed at how my children imitate me. There's a well-known saying, of course, which I've used as the title of the message tonight, Like Father, Like Son. There's another well-known saying, that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

And when you have young children, it's often very humbling, and sometimes even embarrassing, because, in fact, you see how carefully they try to imitate what you do in every way. And often when you look at your children, you feel that you're looking in a mirror, and it makes you realize what a humbling and indeed what an awesome responsibility it is to raise children in the nurture and in the admonition of the Lord. But even when children imitate their parents, even when children, as it were, try to share in the fullness of the reality of who their parents are, when they reflect their parents' attitudes and their personalities, it is never perfect.

And often, and usually, that's a very good thing. But the reality of what Jesus is saying here is that his unity with the Father is such that it is unique and complete. He perfectly shares in the work of his Father.

He perfectly imitates the Father. And the Father is completely at work in the Son. Jesus says, I can do nothing in and of myself, but it's the Father at work in me.

I and the Father are one. It's an astonishing claim. It's an astonishing claim which Jesus makes here.

And then secondly, notice that Jesus, in verse 20, claims that his knowledge is divine knowledge. Verse 20, For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does. Yes, to your amazement, he will show him even greater things than these.

What Jesus is saying is something that he said already earlier in John's Gospel. He's saying that the Father has revealed to him, has shown him his will, his way, and his work. That the Son has been shown the work of the Father.

The Son has been shown the way of the Father. The Son has been shown the will of the Father. When we think of a prophet, if we think of the prophets in the Old Testament, for example, we usually think of those who have been given particular and unique insight into the will of God, into the word of God, into the way of God.

Those who can share and those who can speak the word of God. But even the prophets in the Old Testament at best enjoyed a partial and a hazy glimpse of God. It was better than most people, but it was not complete.

But what Jesus is claiming is even more than what the prophets shared. He's claiming that here he knows the Father completely. That his knowledge is unlimited, undistorted, born of a quite extraordinary intimacy.

And what he's saying to them is that the Jewish leaders don't know the half of it. Healing a man by the pool is really small potatoes. Transcending the Sabbath law is only the beginning.

The Father is going to show the Son even greater things than this. There's much more to come is really what Jesus is saying to them. And of course he's pointing to the reality of his life and his ministry and eventually the cross and the resurrection itself.

Now the image that's at work here in this passage is the kind of image I think that we can all relate to. It's the image of a faithful son who is apprenticed to his father in the same craft. Which is something that would have been quite common in the first century.

And it's something that's been quite common really ever since. The father trains the son in all the intricacies of the craft. And he lets the son in in all the knowledge that he has gained over the years.

But because the father is teaching the son, there is an even deeper intimacy here. A deeper relationship, a deeper unity than there would be as might exist normally between someone who is training an apprentice. It is one thing to train an apprentice.

It is quite another to teach the craft to your own son. And the relationship is one of love. The love of the father for the son and the love and respect of the son for the father.

It permeates that relationship in every way. And that's the kind of image which Jesus is using here. We might think, for example, of Jesus as a young man or even as a boy at work in his father Joseph's carpenter shop.

Where there he worked and perhaps even apprenticed under his human father Joseph. And what he's saying now is now he works under his father in heaven. He does all that his father does.

He knows all that his father knows. Why? Because the father has shared it with him. And the son does everything in obedience to the father, according to the will of the father, in dependence upon the father.

And what we are led into here is something which is very profound and something which is very deep. Because we are invited here, in the words of Jesus, to enter into the very Trinitarian life of God. This unique relationship between the father and the son.

The father reveals and the son imitates. And it is all rooted in the mutual love of the father and the son. And the work which Jesus has come to do is rooted in the reality of this relationship and this love.

And think for a moment what this means. Think about the profundity of what this means for our understanding of the gospel. Because the revelation of God in the son, the redemption of sinful humanity through the giving of the son, is rooted not only in God's love for us as human beings, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That is the love which he imparts in the son to the world, in the giving of the son. But it is also rooted, our redemption is rooted, in the eternal love of the father for the son. And the eternal love of the son for the father.

A love which moves the father to reveal his deeds to the son. A love which is overflowing and into which we are invited by the giving of the son on the cross of Calvary. You see, the reality of our redemption is rooted in the love of the father for the son and the son for the father.

As one of the commentators puts it, this is holy ground indeed. This is holy ground. And Jesus is describing his relationship with the father.

And then thirdly, notice that Jesus claims divine prerogatives to give life. In verse 21 and then in verses 24 to 26. Verse 21, 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.

And in verses 24 to 26, Jesus says that those who believe in his word have eternal life. They cross over from death to life. Now Jesus here is referring, in the first instance, to the resurrection from the dead.

The Pharisees believed, of course, that in the last days God would raise the dead and grant some everlasting life. And this was a sovereign act of God. This is something that God would do.

Only God could raise the dead. Only God decides who shall be given everlasting life. But here again, Jesus claims that he shares this with the father.

He says those who believe in his word, the words that he has received from the father, these words that have been revealed from heaven, those who believe these words, those who trust in these words will receive life. It is the voice of Jesus that matters. Those who hear his voice, the voice of the Son of God, those who hear it will live, Jesus says.

And then in verse 26 he spells this out very clearly. As the father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. Do you see here what Jesus is saying? As human beings, our lives are in the hands of God.

We move and live and have our being day in and day out, moment by moment, breath by breath, in dependence upon the living God. What Jesus is saying here is that the father has given him life. We are dependent creatures, we rely on God for every breath we take, but not Jesus, he is the source of life himself.

If you go back to Genesis chapter 1, Genesis chapter 2, it's his word which speaks creation into existence. It's his breath breathed into Adam which makes Adam a living being. He is the one who breathes new life into his people by his spirit.

And the father and the son live and move and have their beings in themselves. And we live, and we move, and we have our being through the Son, through the Son and in relation to the Father. And so Jesus has this divine prerogative that he is given life, and is given authority over life, and is the life giver himself.

And then notice, fourthly, that Jesus claims that he has authority to judge, and that this authority is a divine authority in verses 22 and in verses 27 to 30. Moreover, in verse 22 he says the father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the son, and in verse 27 he has given himself authority to judge because he is the son of man. What Jesus here is saying is that he has been given authority over the last judgment.

That authority has been given to him by the Father, on whose authority he acts. He has authority over life and death, over the forgiveness of sins, over the eternal destiny of men and women. Now, you need to understand, if you're not already astonished by these extraordinary claims, that here again we have a rather extraordinary claim made by Jesus.

These are claims that are made by someone who is either not in his right mind, or someone who really is the Son of God. And C.S. Lewis, in a number of places in mere Christianity, puts this in a very elegant and very eloquent manner. In one paragraph he puts it this way, he says, commenting on these and other words in the New Testament, this is so preposterous as to be comic.

We can all understand how a man forgives offenses against himself. You tread on my toe, C.S. Lewis says, and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct.

Yet this is what Jesus did. What C.S. Lewis is saying is, this is the kind of choice, when you read the Gospel of John carefully in passages such as this, this is the kind of choice that is laid before you. Jesus is either a liar, or a lunatic, or indeed he is Lord of all.

And here he's saying that he holds the scales of justice in his hands. He holds the future in his hands. He holds the eternal destiny of men and women in his hands.

Someone who says that is either a lunatic of incredible proportions, a self-deluded megalomaniac, or he is who he says he is, the Son of God, the messianic Son of Man who comes from heaven in the clouds of glory. This is the option that Jesus presented to the religious leaders. And it's the option that he presents to us.

And if that were all not enough, Jesus in verse 23 says that he claims he is worthy of the same honor and worship as the Father, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Notice that what Jesus is saying here is really the same honor and the same worship.

Jesus does not say he deserves the same kind of honor, or even an equivalent form of worship as the Father, as if he's setting himself up beside the Father, but he says he is worthy of the same worship as the Father, the same honor as the Father. And what he's really saying here is you cannot truly honor the Father without honoring the Son, because the Father and the Son are one. There is a unity here.

There is an intimacy. There is indeed an equality. If you dishonor the Son, you dishonor the Father who sent him.

And in a very real sense, these words help us, it seems to me, understand John chapter 4 a little bit better, where Jesus, in response to the woman at the well, says, those who worship the Father must worship him in spirit and in truth. And what does it mean to worship the Father in spirit and in truth, but to worship him through the Son who has revealed the way and the work and the will of the Father? And so we are invited here, in a very real sense, in a very true sense, into what is real, Biblical, Christian, Trinitarian worship, the worship of the Father and of the Son. And as we'll see later in John's Gospel, chapter 14 to 16, also of the Spirit who is sent by the Father and the Son.

The astonishing content of these words should not be lost on us. These are amazing words, and they come in a rather astonishing tone as well. On the one hand, in response to this controversy with the religious leaders, Jesus is bold, Jesus is strong, Jesus is confident as he speaks to them about who he is.

But there's also a sense of humility here. There's also a sense, a kind of tone of servanthood. These are not the words of a conceited, self-absorbed Messiah reveling in deity.

These are the words of one who seeks not to please himself, but to please his Father who sent him for the salvation of the world. The thread that runs through these words is the thread of God's redemptive purposes. It is the thread of salvation.

There's a lot of confusion and indeed a lot of controversy in our world today about the identity of Jesus. We see it in the world out there as we consider how people think about Jesus. We see it even in the Church, where Church leaders are not so sure anymore that they can describe Jesus as the Son of God.

But whether it's significant Church leaders or whether it's scholars like those who work in the Jesus Seminar, or whether it's others who question the deity of Jesus, the identity of Jesus, the unity of Jesus with the Father, the intimacy of Jesus with the Father, the equality of the Son with the Father, all of them in the end must be taken back to passages such as this passage this evening. What do you do with this kind of a passage? Where the claims are so clear, where the claims are so controversial, where the claims in many ways are so difficult to accept and even to understand, and yet in the midst of this conversation, Jesus makes it very clear that he and the Father are one. And lest we think that the controversy and the confusion is new, it's not new in our world and in our Church today.

It was there in the first century and it's been there throughout the history of the Church. Men and women have always struggled with these claims of Jesus Christ. In the fourth century, there was a bishop named Arius.

And Arius had difficulty understanding how passages like this could really mean that Jesus was fully the Son of God, equal with God the Father. And so he started teaching, well, you know, Jesus is like God. We can say that he's God, but we can't mean by that that he's really one with the Father and equal with God the Father.

And in response to that was written the Nicene Creed. And in response to that, Athanasius, the great Church leader of the fourth century, said, No, the Bible teaches very clearly that Jesus is not just like God, he's not just the best representative of God that we have in our world, but he is the eternal Son of the Father, fully of one and the same substance as the Father. And that's where we get the words of the Nicene Creed.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made. Words that we sing every Christmas. Being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, as we saw this morning.

He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the scriptures, and ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father, and he shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. In the fourth century, when confronted with the identity of Jesus, the Church voted for John chapter 5, verses 16 to 30. The question is for us this evening, when confronted with questions about the identity of Jesus, where are we going to cast our vote? Where are we going to take our stand? I invite you to consider these words, to study them and reflect on them carefully, because we've only scratched the surface this evening, but to decide for yourself the answer to the question that Jesus asked his disciples in Matthew 16, Who do you say that I am? Let us pray.

Lord, we bow before you tonight, and we confess that our feet are standing on holy ground, that these are holy mysteries, as we seek to understand with our finite minds the depths of your reality, of the relationship, of the love, of the unity, of the intimacy between the Father and the Son and the Son and the Father. And yet, O God, we give you thanks and praise this evening, that by your grace, that by your

redemptive purposes, that through the giving of your Son on the cross of Calvary, we are taken up into, share in the reality of this life and this love, this saving grace. We praise you tonight for your love, for your mercy, for your grace.

And help us, we pray, to understand more deeply, to love more fully with our hearts, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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