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John 5:19-24

GIVE JESUS THE HONOR HE DESERVES

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Did you listen to that Old Testament reading this morning? It's not necessarily one that would put most people in a good mood. There are a lot of people who want to come to church and feel good about themselves. That text isn't going to do it for them. Just in case you weren't paying attention, let me read it again. "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays."

Yes, there are those people who say that churches and all their sermons must be happy and upbeat. We have come to the last Sundays of the Church Year. The sermons will be happy and upbeat for Christians. For those who reject Jesus, they will be something else. Judgment Day is surely coming. Most people really don't go about their business every day, thinking that the day is coming soon when we must all give an account to God for our lives. We are busy working and shopping and going to football games and watching television and eating and sleeping and everything else. We really can't be bothered by such talk. But Judgment Day is a reality. Our Lord tells us both in the Old and the New Testaments that Judgment Day is coming. Most people will be caught napping. Most people will be unprepared. But that day is coming. It is surely coming! Every day that goes by brings us one day closer to that final day. We will all appear before the Judge. Who is that Judge? It is none other than Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. It is the same Jesus who came to earth as a servant. It is the same Jesus who allowed his enemies to bind him and blindfold him and beat him and revile him. It is the same Jesus who allowed those enemies to nail him to a cross and kill him. He did that to bring salvation to the world. But he will come again. This time he will not come to save, but rather to judge. We had better be ready! GIVE JESUS THE HONOR HE DESERVES!

The apostle John takes us back to the early days of our Lord's ministry. Jesus attended a festival in Jerusalem. All Jewish males were required to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for worship at the major festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Since our Lord was put under the law in our place, he would go to fulfill that law. But he would not merely fulfill the outward requirements. He would fulfill the law with perfect obedience. He understood the significance of these festivals. They pointed to him.

Jesus had healed a man who had been a paralytic for 38 years. One would say that this was a tremendous miracle. It was instantaneous. The man did not have to learn how to walk again and be able to do so after months of practice and physical therapy. Jesus simply said, "Pick up your mat and walk!" and the man did.

But there was a catch. You see, Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath Day. This was no accident. Jesus didn't look back and see that he made a mistake, not realizing what day it was. This healing on the Sabbath was deliberate and would bring him into direct confrontation with his enemies already at the beginning of his ministry. These were men who believed that the only way that you could get right with God was by keeping the law. Yet they had so twisted and turned the Law that they didn't even understand its purpose. They did not understand that love was the fulfillment of the Law and that they did not love. They only observed the Law outwardly and they wanted to punish and lawbreakers with nothing less than death.

Jesus wanted this confrontation with his self-righteous enemies. This scenario would play itself out over and over again until Jesus would voluntarily offer up his life for the sin of the world on Calvary's cross. He would testify to who he was. He was no mere man. He was the very Son of God. Some people say that Jesus never claimed to be God. In John's Gospel, Jesus makes that claim over and over again. His enemies understood very clearly that Jesus was making that claim and they wanted him dead. Jesus doesn't merely call God "our Father." He calls him "my Father." His enemies knew exactly what he was saying.

And so did Jesus! He didn't merely use words that were easy to understand. He used words that were impossible to misunderstand. He wanted the people to know exactly what he was claiming for himself. They understood what he was claiming, and they would vehemently oppose him time and time again. They would accuse him of being possessed by a demon. They would try to stone him to death. They would pronounce him guilty of blasphemy and they would demand his crucifixion because he claimed to be the very Son of God.

Just to make sure that they understood him, Jesus would reassert his claim in even stronger terms, and he would warn them sharply against rejecting him. If they did reject him, they would be making a mistake, a big mistake, a mistake that would have eternal consequences. He said, "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."

Very simply Jesus says that he and his heavenly Father are in perfect communication and communion with one another. Jesus is in perfect harmony with the Father's will. That is almost impossible for us to understand because our lives are so tainted by sin. We live for ourselves. We know what we want to do, and we know what we do not want to do. How many times when our earthly fathers wanted us to do something, did we rebel against them? We grumbled. We complained. Sometimes we did it to their face. Other times we mumbled under our breath and told others of our dissatisfaction. And we certainly feel the same way about our heavenly Father and his commandments. We don't want to keep a single one of them because they destroy our freedom and wreck our fun.

Jesus was called the second Adam. The first Adam rebelled against God. The first Adam questioned both God's love and his truthfulness. The first Adam brought sin and death into the world. Jesus would resist every temptation of Satan. He would obey his Father's will gladly and perfectly.

"For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." Jesus does not merely carry out a businesslike approach to doing his Father's will, merely "doing his job" so to speak. Jesus knew exactly what it would take to redeem fallen man. He knew that he would have to become the lowliest of servants. He knew that he would be hated. He knew that the cross was in full sight. He knew that because the Father showed him. Jesus did not see the Father as the enemy, forcing him to do something that he did not want to do. Jesus would do his Father's will because he was in complete harmony with it.

The healing on the Sabbath day was a great miracle. People were amazed, but Jesus tells us that we would see even greater things than this. In the Scriptures we see many miracles. God gave his prophets the power to perform certain miracles in his name. We think of Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, Elijah, and Elisha just to name a few. But Jesus would do "greater things than these." He would do things that only God could do. He is equal to the Father.

Jesus is going to make the point that people must recognize him for who he is. Merely being amazed by miracles isn't going to cut it. He will speak of these greater things. Very simply they are giving life to the spiritually dead, raising the bodily dead on the Last Day, and executing the final judgment on all people.

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." Jesus has the power to raise the physically dead and he has the power to raise the spiritually dead. He showed and used his power to raise the physically dead at least three times during his earthly ministry when he raised the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son, and Lazarus. He raised himself from the dead on Easter Sunday as he had promised. On the Last Day he will raise all the dead.

He also brings the spiritually dead to life. He brings people to faith through the Means of Grace. By nature, we are all spiritually dead in our sins, blind to spiritual truth and enemies of God. By nature, everything about Jesus is mere foolishness. We cannot come to faith on our own. Only God can bring the dead back to life. Only God can create the miracle of faith through the Word. Christ is the very Word made flesh. He brings us from death to life.

But there is more, much more. "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. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him." God is holy and God is just. He hates sin and his justice demands that sin be punished. In God's courtroom, the guilty must always be punished and the innocent must be set free.

Jesus was in full accord with the Father's will. He knew that sin must be removed and that we must acquire the righteousness that God demands. That is why he came into the world the first time. He would take our sin and he would supply us with the righteousness we needed by his perfect obedience to the Law. He is the one that the Father sent. He offers his atoning work to us free of charge. We receive it by faith.

But if we reject Christ, we lose all the benefits of his atoning work. We will have to stand before him on Judgment Day without the wedding garment he has provided. He gives us a very stern warning. We cannot be selective in our worship of the Trinity. If we honor the Father, we must honor the Son. If we do not honor the Son, we do not honor the Father who sent him.

Give the Son the honor he deserves. He is true God. Merely acknowledging him as a good man, a great prophet, a moral example and teacher are not going to do it. Jesus is different from other gods. Other religions may look at Jesus favorably, but they do not acknowledge him as the only saving God and they are wrong. Their mistake will lead to eternal judgment. That is certainly not politically correct in this day and age, but it is most certainly true. We know that the day is coming when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Believers will do it gladly and willingly. Unbelievers will do it reluctantly, but they will do it.

Judgment Day is very serious. Most people take it far too lightly. They don't see it coming any more than Jesus' enemies would see the destruction of Jerusalem coming in another forty years. Jesus came the first time to save the world. He will come the next time to judge the world. Don't be unprepared! Recognize your Lord and give him the honor he deserves! AMEN.