

# Who is Jesus?

## Messages from the Gospel of John

### Message 7

#### *The Son of God*

John 5:16-30

#### ***Introduction***

What are you willing to die for? What is important enough to you that you would give up your life for it? For some people America and the freedom we have here are worth dying for, and this number has increased since we were attacked on 9/11. Most fathers and mothers are willing to die for their children, and occasionally a hero will die for others. This is why our whole country paid our deepest respect to the firemen who died in the collapse of the World Trade Center. These heroes went into danger's path and rescued others, but they never came out themselves.

Would you give your life for an idea, a belief? The founders of America put their lives in danger and some died because they believed in liberty. The reformers exposed themselves to great danger and many died, especially in France, because they believed the gospel. Would you die for the gospel? Would you be willing to endure persecution for the gospel? Would you be willing to lose your job for the gospel? Perhaps you would. I certainly hope that if we find ourselves facing persecution for our belief in Jesus, we would trust Him to carry us through without compromise.

But how about theology? How much difficulty would you take merely for some theological beliefs? Athanasius was a fourth century bishop who took an uncompromising stand for a theological position. He was so determined not to waver, he was exiled five times for refusing to compromise. He spent a total of 17 years in exile for his beliefs. Was Athanasius just another crazy early Christian zealot? No, for the belief which sent Athanasius into exile was something he judged to be vital to the Christian faith. He was convinced that compromise on this point would cause the death of the church, and make salvation impossible for everyone. The point which so captivated Athanasius is the subject of our scripture tonight: the deity of Jesus.

#### ***What Jesus Would Die For***

Our passage opens with Jesus in danger of His life. The Jews were in hot pursuit and they had murderous intentions. It seems like Jesus was always in trouble with the Jewish leaders. What was it this time that got Him into so much trouble? Had He denounced them again? No, He had healed a sick man, and had the temerity to do it on the Sabbath! Now, many people take pleasure in these stories, because they see Jesus as a sort of religious Robin Hood. He was the poor, uneducated, but compassionate rabbi going up against the rich, powerful Jewish establishment – and winning! But this is to miss the whole point. Jesus Himself never took pleasure in confronting the Jews. In fact, He often intentionally avoided them. This was not a power struggle between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, it was a conflict over God's word – for God never prohibited helping people on the Sabbath. That was a law made up by those Jewish leaders. Jesus was always faithful to God's word and compassionate toward needy people. So in a sense this *was* a power struggle – between faithfulness to God and loyalty to corrupt leaders. Jesus was so firm in His faithfulness to God, He absolutely infuriated the Jews – to the point that they began to plot to kill Him.

Are you willing to die serving others? Jesus could have thought, "This one man isn't worth it. It is the Sabbath, and if I heal this man, I will have the Jews all over me. If I pass by Him, I will have the freedom to preach and heal many others. This one man isn't worth my whole career." Do you think this way? Do you think, "I had better not volunteer to work at a soup kitchen for the poor, or go on the mission trip to Belize. It may jeopardize my academic standing and make me look foolish to my friends. If I am going to graduate and have a strong Christian witness, I need to be diligent while I am here." Well, it's true

you must be diligent in your work at Lehigh. But are you willing to risk *anything* to serve others?

So here is Jesus, His life in grave danger. Does He retreat into hiding? No! He steps up and answers the objections of the Jewish leaders. And does Jesus soothe their anger? No! He has the opposite effect. By claiming God as His Father, He implies that He is divine, and this infuriates the Jews all the more. So here is the second thing Jesus would die for – His claim to be God.

Now maybe you are concerned about the needs of others, and maybe you could see yourself sticking out your neck to help someone in need. But how far would you go in defending Jesus' claim to deity? Jesus risked His life for this claim. Would you give your life for the belief that Jesus is God? Would you defend this truth before your professors and your classmates? Or would you say, "I dare not take a stand for Christ in this class. If my grade suffers, I may not get into the school or job God is calling me to. Why should I sacrifice a lifetime of influence for this present situation?"

Folks, if you are unwilling to stand for Christ now, what makes you think you will ever do so? Jesus was so committed to helping the sick and poor, He served them at risk to His life. Jesus was so committed to the truth about His identity, He was willing to die for it. For 2,000 years men and women have followed Jesus' example. Next week we remember the Reformation. Martin Luther had a price on his head because he would not deny the truth of scripture. John Calvin trained hundreds of Frenchmen in Geneva, who returned to France and preached the gospel. Most of them were killed doing so. In our day, Mother Theresa was a great example of selfless ministry to the poor. All these were doing nothing very extraordinary. They were just following Christ wherever He led them. This is what He expects of you, too. Will you go? Will you follow Christ wherever He leads you – even if it is dangerous?

### ***Jesus is the Son of God***

Let's examine Jesus' identity a little more deeply. The point which provoked the Jews in this instance was Jesus' statement in verse 17, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Jesus was speaking in reference to the healing of the sick man, recorded in the first part of this chapter. The Jews recognized, accurately, that in saying this, Jesus was claiming God as His Father. Now in one sense God is the Father of us all in that all people ultimately owe their lives to God. But that is not the issue here. Jesus was claiming more than a general creation by God. He was claiming divinity. This is the reason, and the only reason, that the Jews were so upset with Him. In the following verses Jesus goes on to provide further details about His divine nature. In verse 19 Jesus says that He does what the Father does, and He does it in the same way as the Father. In verse 20 Jesus says that the Father shows Him all He does. A mere man could not begin to comprehend an infinite God. Only an infinite God could comprehend an infinite God. In verse 21 Jesus claims the ability to raise the dead. More generally, He is able to give life to anyone He wishes. Only God is the source of life. In verse 22 Jesus claims the authority to judge everything, and in verse 23 He claims the right to be honored by everyone on earth. Certainly universal judgment and honor are possible only for a deity.

What a catalog of qualities! Divine action, divine knowledge, divine power, power to grant life and to judge – divine, universal honor – no one can doubt that Jesus is laying claim to absolute deity. He continues in verse 24 that everyone who hears His word and believes in the Father has everlasting life. The implication is that those who do not hear and believe remain in death. The only way to escape the death sentence is to hear and believe Jesus. All those who refuse to hear and believe Jesus will remain dead. These are the ones spoken of in chapter 3, verse 18, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." That condemnation results in the ultimate death sentence, as stated in verse 36, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him." Everyone enters this world with a death sentence hanging over him. Everyone rebels

against God and is therefore under God's judgment. Unless something happens, each person will die forever. But those who hear and believe Jesus will escape death. They will live forever. This is because Jesus is more than a good man or a great prophet. Jesus is God Himself.

How can this be? How can Jesus, who walked on the earth as a man, simultaneously be God? This is the mystery of the incarnation, which we celebrate at Christmastime each year. No one can explain how this is. If we could, we would be God ourselves! But as the church has studied God's word over the years a few things have become clearer. First, Jesus was not a man who became God. This is an ancient heresy which is still propagated by the Mormons. In John 8:58 Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" Jesus exists eternally. Of course this must be true. How else could He truly be God? Indeed, Jesus was God who became man. The word the scripture uses for Jesus' origin is *μονογενης*. The older translations render this as "only begotten". Some newer translations render it "one and only". This term points to an eternal, divine origin for Jesus, even before He became man. Jesus comes from the Father, but in a sense He is eternally coming from the Father. Do not ask me how. I am not God.

The second point we can make about Jesus' divine nature is that He is not partly man and partly God. Jesus is fully man and fully God. Again, there is no way to explain this, but it is the testimony of scripture. Both of these points are succinctly expressed in the Athanasian Creed which is accepted by the church everywhere in the world as truly stating the nature of Jesus.

Who, although he is God and man, yet he is not two but one Christ.  
One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God.

Eight centuries after Athanasius, a monk in England wrote one of the most important documents in history. Athanasius accurately identified the deity of Christ as absolutely vital to the Christian faith, but he did not explain fully *why* it was necessary that Jesus be fully God and fully man. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century St. Anselm wrote *Cur deus homo, Why God Became Man* to provide this explanation. Anselm argued that the sin of man could be paid for only by a man. But only an infinite being could pay for the sins of *all* men. Only if Jesus were both God and man could He atone for the sins of the human race.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century C. S. Lewis pointed out that Jesus cannot be a good man if He is not God. Jesus claimed divinity. If He is not God, then He is a liar or a lunatic. The one thing He cannot be is a good man or a great prophet. Good men do not seduce billions of people with a lie about their nature. Great prophets do not promise people an eternal life they cannot deliver. Jesus is either a vicious liar, an monstrous madman – or God.

Who do you say that Jesus is? If He is God, you must worship Him. If He is not God, you must hate Him. There is no middle ground. You cannot say He is a good man or a prophet without denying the evidence. Then you become a liar yourself. But if He is God, He commands your allegiance. And if He is God, He is able to save you from death. This is good news! This is the gospel! The death sentence that was over us all when we entered the world is lifted for all those who believe in Jesus. Jesus does not merely make your life better. Jesus gives life to those who live in death. Everyone who is marching relentlessly toward hell can find refuge in this great God who became man to save us. But you must believe. Only those who believe receive life. And when Jesus says believe, He means hearing His word and obeying His voice. Jesus does not lie. Jesus tells the truth. If you believe in Jesus, you trust Him. You trust Him to save you at the end, but you also trust Him now. You trust Jesus when He calls you to serve the poor and when He calls you to confess Him before men. You may die serving Jesus, but if you trust Him, you will live forever.

### ***The Son of God Obeys the Father***

In the remainder of the passage Jesus draws out the implications of His divine Sonship. First, in

verses 19-20 He declares that the Son obeys the Father. This might not have been so remarkable were it not for the fact that Jesus is God, too. It makes sense to us that children should obey their parents. After all, their parents are much older and wiser than they, especially when children are very young. Parents are needed to protect children and teach them how to survive in life. And we should expect Jesus to obey the fifth commandment, to honor one's parents. But Jesus is, and always has been, fully God. Jesus is just as much God as His Father is. Something seems incongruous about Jesus obeying His Father. And this is just the reason that Jesus makes this point so clearly. He doesn't want us to have any doubts that He is fully obedient to His Father.

As we read through this passage, one thing that stands out is the love between the Father and the Son. The Son is not obedient to the Father because He is forced to, but because He loves His Father and wants to please Him. Similarly, the Father does not coerce obedience from the Son. Rather, He honors the Son in return. This passage is very significant for the insight it gives us to the relationships in the trinity, but also for the pattern it reveals for all relationships. Simply put, the Father and Son are here revealing the pattern for all hierarchical relationships. The superior is to love and honor the inferior, and the inferior is to do likewise. As St. Augustine observed, love is what binds the trinity together. Similarly, love is what makes human relationships work.

In addition, this passage teaches us the beauty and value of hierarchy. Sinful human beings tend to chaff at any authority, be it father or mother, husband or employer, pastor or magistrate. In this sinful world authority figures often abuse their power, but that does not mean authority is a bad thing. Human authority is both good and necessary. It is good because God has established it, and it is necessary because we are made in God's image. God's nature is hierarchical, and since man is made in God's image, man is a hierarchical creature. So it is good and necessary that parents rule their children, husbands lead their wives, and pastors and elders govern the church. It is foolish and wrong to seek a society in which there are no authority structures. But as believers, we should work to see that authority is used righteously. Jesus shows us by His relationship with His Father how hierarchy should work. As each party seeks to love and honor the other, the relationship reflects the love and honor between the Father and the Son.

Jesus said, "What [the Son] sees the Father do...the Son also does in like manner." Can you say that? Can you say, "Whatever I see God do, I do it also?" In other words, are you a true son or daughter of God? Can we tell by your behavior that you have been born from above? Jesus is totally obedient to His Father, and we should follow His example.

### ***The Son of God Gives Life***

Jesus concludes this passage by teaching about judgment. Earlier Jesus taught that He has the authority to judge. Now Jesus warns us that He definitely will judge.

For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, <sup>27</sup> and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice <sup>29</sup> and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. John 5:26-29

An hour is coming. You may deny it, you may fear it, you may seek to avoid it, but no one will escape it. You will be judged by this Jesus – God who became man and died to save you. You will go to hell, a place of eternal punishment, if you refuse to hear the voice of Jesus. All your works will come into judgment, and although you may have done many virtuous things, refusing to believe in Jesus is so despicable, that alone is enough to cancel out all the good things you may have done. But if you hear His words and believe in Him, He will give you eternal life – even though you may have lived a very wicked life

so far.

The final question to you tonight is this, Where will you stand in judgment? Have you believed in Jesus? Have you received life? Or are you still under God's death sentence? Do not postpone this question until some other time. Now is the time to trust the One who was God and became man and died to give you life. Do not despise the love of Jesus. Ask Him now to forgive you of your sins and grant you the life He promises.

C. David Green  
Lehigh University  
October 25, 2005