

Prayer

Good morning, everyone, my name is Andrew and I'm a member of the (10am) congregation here at St George's. Thank you to Victor for asking and encouraging me to preach today.

Let's pray. Lord, open our hearts this morning so that we may be encouraged, and through the things taught and revealed in the Holy Scriptures, that we may attain hope and everlasting life. Amen.

Introduction

Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath. Those that are familiar with the gospels will know that that usually leads to trouble for Jesus. And that's exactly what happens. Jesus told the man to 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.' And he did! But when the Jewish leaders saw this, all they could see was the previously lame man (and Jesus for that matter) "doing work" which, in their eyes, broke the 4th commandment to rest on the Sabbath. So they start persecuting Jesus. But rather than taking his more conventional approach of reinterpreting what the Sabbath was meant to be, Jesus makes this a teaching moment about God, authority, justice, and the Scriptures. The healing was the third 'sign' in John's Gospel and as Jeanne explained a couple of weeks ago, John has recorded these signs because they reveal Jesus's glory and encourage us to have faith in him. Here, Jesus explains why he can heal this man to the Jewish leaders, and in doing so he invites them and us to see his glory. He addresses three things in particular that I want to draw out: his status as equal with God the Father; his authority to give life and judge; and how Scripture testifies to all of this.

Sabbath controversy

It's a strange thing in our culture to get in trouble for working. I remember a few months ago – we have a lot of BBQs and cake and things at my workplace – and during one of these BBQs I was quietly working at my desk when my boss's boss's boss came in and said 'oi, get

out to the BBQ'. And I thought 'hmm, never got in trouble for working before, kinda strange'. But the Sabbath rest was a big part of first century Jewish culture (and something we should give thought to as Christians as well).

So when the Jewish leaders found out that it was Jesus who healed the man on the Sabbath, they started to go after him. And Jesus defended himself by saying, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working' (v17). The Jewish leaders were already not happy with Jesus, but this was enough to make them think Jesus needed to die. 'God is working, so I too am working, even on the Sabbath'. So what's the problem here? It doesn't sound so bad to us. Why would this make anyone want to kill Jesus?

Well, with this comment the text tells us Jesus is making himself equal with God. For starters, Jesus calls God 'my Father', not just 'Father', making it a uniquely personal relationship. But more than this, Jesus says the conditions that allow God to work on the Sabbath also allow him to work on the Sabbath. Over time the Jewish laws regarding the Sabbath became increasingly strict but Jewish thinkers were agreed that God did indeed work on the Sabbath. He had to. So on this point, they agreed with Jesus. God upholds the cosmos, he cares for the flowers of the field and the birds of the sky (Matthew 6:25-34). If God rested from his work on the Sabbath – on any day – all of creation would grind to a halt and the universe would cease to exist. But Jesus says he works on the Sabbath for the same reason – 'my Father is working so I too am working'! Which means if the work of the Father is needed to sustain the cosmos, then so is the work of Jesus the Son.

The Father's work is creation – creating and sustaining the world. And Jesus says that is also his work! In healing the lame man, Jesus performs an act of creation, just like his Father does. When it is the creator God acting in the world a miraculous healing doesn't seem like such an impossible thing.

But no wonder the Jewish leaders were upset! Jesus was placing himself on God's level, making him equal with God. But someone might ask, doesn't this mean Jesus was breaking the first commandment, where God says 'you shall have no other gods before me'? Well, no,

as Jesus goes on to explain, his work in fact reveals something new about who God is, about his being and about how he acts in the world. Jesus bridges the Old Testament distinction between human and holy, between finite and infinite. He has closed the gap between the one holy God and broken, imperfect humanity. In one person stands both God and man. In Jesus, God has revealed himself to us as he really is in his own being. This is what the Jewish leaders can't understand.

Authority of the Son

So, after his initial headline comment – ‘my Father is working, and I too am working’ – Jesus launches into a speech that explains more of his relationship with God and more about his authority. This speech is, I think, the main point of this chapter and the reason John included the story of the healing as well, as a precursor – this is what John wants us to hear, and it is what Jesus wants us to hear.

Verse 19: ‘Jesus gave them [the Jewish leaders] this answer: “Very truly I tell you, 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”’. The Son can do nothing by himself, or nothing by his own initiative. He is not independent from the Father – Jesus is not a rival to the God of Israel, he *is* the God of Israel. But he is also submissive to the Father – he can only do what he sees his Father doing and whatever the Father does the Son also does. Here we have unity in action between the Father and the Son. What the Father does the Son does, and what the Son does the Father does. This means as we read and hear about what Jesus has done for us and amongst us, it is God himself that is acting. The actions of Jesus are the actions of God. This is one of the reasons why we confess each week in the creed that Jesus is of one being with the Father. Through Jesus we glimpse into the inner life of God, into the being of God as he is in himself.

This is really the source of the power of the gospel. If Jesus is not God and it is not God that is acting through Jesus then the gospel loses its saving power. Because Jesus's actions carry the weight of divine authority, and only because Jesus's actions carry the weight of divine

authority, we can really trust that his work is effective. And this is exactly what Jesus is telling us here – it is the unity he has with the Father, in being and action, that makes him able to complete his work, and makes his work effective.

So as Jesus continues, we get to look through Christ to see something of the inner life of God. In Verse 20 we read: ‘The Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.’ The love of Father for the Son is displayed in the sharing of all he does with the Son. The Son responds by doing what his Father has shown him. So as we watch the work of the Son, we not only see the work of the Father, but we see the love of the Father for the Son, embodied in Jesus and his actions and revealed to us by the Spirit. It is love within the inner life of God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that propels the work of Jesus. We also read in John 14:31 that Jesus’s work is primarily motivated by his love for the Father, ultimately on display during his death on the cross which he dies for us. This means the love of God toward us, as we see it on the cross, is an overflow of what already exists (and has always existed) within the life of God between the Father and the Son.

Jesus has a certain authority because of his relationship with the Father, and he starts to give us an idea of the range and extent of his authority as he continues his speech. Verse 21 – just like the Father, the Son is able to give life to whom he is pleased to give it. And verse 22 – all judgement is entrusted to the Son by the Father so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Here we get to the crux of the matter. Verse 23 – because of who Jesus is, the Son of God, anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father. To explain what this really means for us, Jesus makes reference to the Day of Judgement, often called the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament.

Flipping back in our Bibles to Daniel 12 verse 2, we read, ‘Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth [are dead] will awake [will come back to life]: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.’ (Sounds pretty similar to the words of Jesus we read earlier.) About this day of resurrection, the day of the Lord, the prophet Amos says, ‘Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be

darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light' (Amos 5:18-20a)? That's a bit scary. But the idea of judgement also comes with a sense of deliverance. This is central to the day of the Lord, and not just for humanity but for creation as well. Isaiah shows us an image of what creation will be like once God comes to set things right on the day of the Lord: 'The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord' (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Creation itself is groaning, Paul tells us in Romans 8, and is eagerly awaiting its renewal, and to be 'liberated from its bondage to decay' on the day of the Lord. In August 2021 my wife and I lost our first daughter 19 weeks into the pregnancy. It was a tense 2 weeks that led up to the moment we first saw Elsie and she fit in the palm of my hand. To see God's creation, and not just his creation, but the image of God in a person, my daughter, dead in my hands – how could there be justice for that? How could there be hope? And yet Jesus gives us hope. The day of the resurrection, of true perfect justice, and new life was the pillar, the light at the end of the tunnel, that kept me well enough to find a new normal. I saw that day the groaning and decay of creation.

But Jesus has life in himself. Jesus has the authority to judge. On the day of judgement God will set right his creation. Good works will be rewarded. Evil that has gone unchecked and unpunished will be dealt with. Justice will be delivered. I think this is something we all long for. We do our best within our societies to administer justice as best we can, but sometimes we can't do that or we simply don't have the authority or ability to do that. Jesus will be the one

that presides over the day of Judgement, the day of the Lord, the day of life, and he has the authority and ability to judge perfectly, as he hears from the Father.

But, I hear you ask, what can we do to prepare for this moment? Well Jesus tells us plainly in John 5:24, ‘whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.’ Jesus has the authority to give life, life in itself, to whomever he is pleased to give it. Jesus has been given all authority to judge. And Jesus tells us, the one with all the authority tells us, that if we believe his word and believe the one who sent him – God the Father – then we will cross from death to life. We will not be judged but will rise to live and be given life by the one that has authority to give it. We cross from death to life. We move from Amos’s picture of the day of the Lord where we rest our hand on the wall of our house and get bitten by a snake, to Isaiah’s picture of the new life where we can be the young child that puts their hand into a viper’s nest without being harmed [although I don’t recommend trying that just yet!].

Witness concerning Jesus

Well that’s some pretty heavy stuff and some big claims coming from the lips of Jesus. But Jesus tells us we don’t need to just take him at his word. There is testimony that backs him up. We can see this in two main ways. First, through Jesus’s works and the signs we’re talking about in this sermon series. Jesus says (verse 36) that the very works he is doing testify that the Father, the God of Israel, has sent him. And those that don’t accept Jesus, in the end don’t know God. Jesus’s work includes his ministry, his healings, the signs we’ve been talking about, and ultimately his death on the cross and his resurrection. What Jesus did on earth testifies that he is from heaven, that he is God.

The second source of testimony is the Scriptures, Jesus points to the Scriptures as testimony of his authority. This means the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament. The Jewish leaders rightly gave their Scriptures the authority of God. One Rabbi even taught that the more you studied the law (the Scriptures), the more you would gain life for yourself in the world to

come.¹ But in verse 39 Jesus says to them, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” Two things Jesus tells us here. First, it is ultimately in Jesus that the Scriptures are fulfilled and find their true meaning. He is the fulfilment of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (Lk 24:44). Jesus is the lens through which we should read the Old Testament. And Jesus tells us that reading the Bible is not an end in itself, rather we should read in order to encounter the one to whom the Bible points – Jesus. He’s the one who can give life, and through him we come to the Father.

Conclusion

Jesus has showed himself to be trustworthy through his actions and the testimony of Scripture. He can work on the Sabbath because he is one with the Father. He can heal, because he is doing God’s work of creation. He has life in himself, just as the Father does, and so he can give life to all who believe in him. As God he has authority to judge and he promises that all who believe in him will cross over from death to life. The question is, do you believe in him? Will you trust him as the one who gives life? Hear his word and believe the one that sent him and the day Jesus returns as judge will be a day of life, where you, with all God’s people, will not be judged but will enter into the joy and peace of new creation, where the wolf will lie down with the lamb and neither harm nor destroy.

Let’s pray. Father, thank you for the life you have given us and that we are able to cross from death to life through faith in Jesus. We trust that you will bring justice and come to restore the brokenness of this world. Lord we pray that you direct our hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance, in whose name we pray. Amen.

¹ D.A. Carson, *Gospel of John*, on v39.