

John 5:25-47: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 10 January 2020

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 5 verses 25 to 47. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, 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 also to have life in himself, and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. I can do nothing on my own, as I hear I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me. If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true.

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth, not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light, but the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me, and the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life, and tis they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people, but I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe when you receive glory from one another, and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father.

There is one who accuses you, Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? The second half of John chapter 5 continues the discourse that followed the healing of the infirm man at the sheep pool on the Sabbath. Jesus had just spoken about the relationship between the work of the Father and his work, and he develops his points further here, specifically in relation to the eschatological acts of giving life to the dead and judging all. Some of the statements that Jesus makes concerning himself in this passage are truly astonishing in their strength. In the verses that immediately preceded our passage, Jesus had declared that those who hurt him and believed had passed from death to life and would not enter into judgment. He elaborates that point here, making it in a more eschatological form. The greater weighted eschatological works of God, resurrection and judgment, are being and will be effected through the Son. Once again, Jesus speaks of an hour that is coming, a recurring motif in the Gospel of John. This coming hour will be one in which the dead are raised. Here the means of resurrection is hearing the voice of the Son of

God and living. We might think of the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 verse 43, brought forth from his grave as Jesus cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come out. The resurrection that Jesus describes at this point is one that is already occurring in his ministry. It is taking place as a new people are being formed through the hearing of his word, as he described in the preceding verse.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Such a faithful response to the word of Jesus might seem to be worthy of celebration, yet speaking of it in terms of resurrection might seem excessive.

[4 : 04] However, although it might not seem to be remarkable or dramatic, it is anticipatory of final resurrection. Elsewhere, in ways reminiscent of Ezekiel prophesying to the dry bones in Ezekiel chapter 37, we see that Jesus is forming a renewed Israel around himself in the course of his ministry.

How people responded to the voice of the Son of Man as he spoke in his earthly ministry would determine how they would stand in the final resurrection and judgment. In the work of the Spirit, through the words of Jesus, the event of resurrection is already mysteriously taking place. People are passing from death to life and eternal fates are being determined. The power of Jesus' voice to raise people to new life is a manifestation of the fact that the Son has life in himself. Elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus speaks of giving living water, or of the rivers of water of the Spirit flowing forth from him. In John chapter 3 verses 34 to 35, we were told by John the Baptist that the Father has given all things into the hands of the Son, and that he had the Spirit without measure. As the man of the Spirit, Jesus has life in himself and can give it to others. He does this through his words, which he later describes in chapter 6 verse 63 as words of Spirit and life. In addition to the power of life, the Father has given the Son the authority of judgment. It is through the Son, as the Son of Man, that the Father will judge the world.

Jesus is possibly here alluding to Daniel chapter 7, where the Son of Man, in a prophecy to be fulfilled in the years that followed, would be elevated to power by the Ancient of Days, receiving the kingdom formally controlled by the beasts. Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14, I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days, or was presented before him. And to him was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

The raising to eternal life that was occurring then, through the words of Jesus, the man of the Spirit, anticipated the later resurrection, another hour that was to come. That later hour, while distinct from the coming hour Jesus spoke of that was in the process of beginning in his ministry, is not only similar to, but also inseparably related to it. As Jesus would later illustrate to an extent in the raising of Lazarus, that later hour would involve the calling forth of the dead from their tombs to the general resurrection. People would be divided according to their works, those who had done good to the resurrection of life, and those who had done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Such a division in judgment according to works is a division of people according to their fruits, a very common theme in the New Testament. Of course, Jesus is not teaching that the works themselves are what have brought about people's passage from death to life. The movement from death to life is accomplished through the power of his words, giving life to the dead as they are received by faith. The works are the effects of the new life that he has given that will naturally follow this.

Good fruits help us to recognize the good trees, but it is the good tree that produces good fruit, rather than the good fruit that produces the good tree. The good fruit, rather, makes the good tree manifest and brings it to its fullest expression. The intimate and inseparable bond between the father and the son is seen in the fact that the son never acts independently. Whatever the son does, he does as an expression of the will of the father who sent him. Although he had spoken of the son in the third person, now Jesus speaks clearly of himself in the first person. Although it was already clear, now it is absolutely evident that he is the son of whom he is speaking. The son, to whom all judgment is delivered, now answers his accusers by presenting witnesses. If he were simply to make such claims of himself on the strength of his own witness, they would not stand legally, as to be established, matters require multiple witnesses. However, there are witnesses beyond Jesus himself that he can bring forth. First of all, there is John the Baptist. John bore witness to the truth, and the testimony that John the Baptist bears is a true one. Many of the people had recognized the authority of John as a prophet, and the witness of John to Jesus, especially in his baptism, is prominent in each of the Gospels.

[8 : 31] In the final week of Jesus' ministry, he deftly deploys the witness of John against opponents in Matthew chapter 21, verses 23 to 27. And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority? Jesus answered them, I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.

The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man? And they discussed it among themselves, saying, If we say from heaven, he will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say from man, we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, We do not know. And he said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. Jesus knew that his opponents could not easily dismiss John, and John had borne a clear and powerful witness to him. Beyond this, however, Jesus' very acts testified to his character, and to the fact that he was sent by God. We have already seen Jesus perform three signs in this gospel, besides the many miracles and great works that he was doing. The people had seen the infirm man that he had just healed. How would Jesus enjoy such power, and display such remarkable deeds of healing and restoration, were he not sent by God? Those works were evidence that he was doing the work of his father, and that his father was with him. Beyond even these, though, the father himself bore witness to the son. They had not seen God at any time, nor heard his voice, yet the father was being made known through the son, as chapter 1 verse 18 declared. Jesus' opponents studied the scriptures, believing that eternal life was to be found in them. In this belief, they were correct, but because Jesus himself is found in them. The scriptures themselves bear witness to him. The refusal of the religious authorities to come to Jesus was evidence that they were not receiving the scriptures' testimony, the testimony of the very words that they prided themselves in.

Tragically, in refusing the scriptures' testimony to Jesus, and not receiving his words, they were forfeiting the life that he offered. What matters is not human praise or glory. Jesus does not consider such glory or honour worthy of account. Indeed, he would go on to the greatest place of human shame, stripped, dishonoured, and hanging on the cross, ridiculed by all. What really matters is the glory and testimony offered by the father. On the other hand, his accusers were preoccupied with the glory that other people offered. They would not accept the son when he came in the name of the father, but they would readily accept a proud human being who came on his own authority. Their entire approach to honour and respect made them incapable of receiving God's gift and testimony. In a tragic twist, they would discover that the very figure in whom they placed their confidence and hope, Moses, would be the very person who accused them. Jesus himself would not need to accuse them, because Moses testified to Jesus. Jesus is likely alluding to Moses' statements concerning the prophet to come. This prophecy was already alluded to earlier in chapter 1 verse 21 in the conversation with John the Baptist, who had denied that he was that figure. Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 15 to 19. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers. It is to him you shall listen, just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die. [12:12] And the Lord said to me, They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. Jesus was the prophet like Moses. If they believed Moses, they would naturally believe Jesus. If they did not believe Moses, they would be unable to receive Jesus. Jesus' witness and Moses' witness go hand in hand. Their rejection of Moses and the prophet he foretold meant that the prophecy concerning those who rejected that prophet would be fulfilled in their case. A question to consider. Jesus claims that his accusers do not have the word of God abiding in them, in verse 38, nor do they have the love of God within them, in verse 42. What might these two claims imply for those who do receive Jesus?