

Equal with God

HN/SS 12/09/04 am

Reading: John 5:1-30, Philippians 2

Study: John 5:8-9

Psalms: 23, 110:1-4, 103:8-13, 103:17-19

Youth – Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus (Luke 19). Jesus looked up and said to him *Come down quickly for today I must stay at your house*. Imagine having Jesus come to stay at your house. Well Jesus says if anyone loves me he will keep my word; and my Father will love him and we will come and make our home with him (John 14:23). So Jesus will come and make his home with us – he will come into our hearts when we believe in him and he will live with us forever.

Jesus healed a man who had been a cripple for 38 years – on the Sabbath day. The Jews, the religious leaders accused him of breaking the Sabbath. They started to persecute him and even wanted to kill Jesus. They were very zealous men – zealous for the Sabbath, zealous for the Law of Moses. They thought they were pleasing God, that they were honouring God. They would not tolerate this fellow coming along and breaking the Sabbath. Who did he think he was?

What was Jesus to do? Should he go along with them and not rock the boat as we say? Should he oblige them by obeying the Sabbath laws – no more healing on the Sabbath! After all these were very devout, very religious men – always well dressed and praying on the street corners and always studying the Scriptures. It would not be wise to offend these religious leaders.

Or should Jesus have sought to correct their interpretation of the law. They had added so much extra detail to the law as we know. He could have gently said to them look the Sabbath law does not actually mean that- this is what it means. Many today wish he had done this. If only Jesus had clearly stated what was and what was not allowed on the Sabbath then we would not have all these differences about the Sabbath today – so they think.

Well how did Jesus answer this charge of breaking the Sabbath? *My Father has been working until now and I have been working* he said to his accusers. My Father said Jesus. *My Father has been working* and I am doing the same. Jesus directs their attention to God, the one who gave the law through Moses. In his defence, he claimed the authority of God.

The Jews took great offence at him calling God 'my Father'. We call God 'our Father in heaven' – that the Jews did not mind. But Jesus was claiming a relationship beyond this, a special relationship. As he said to Mary after his resurrection *I am ascending to my Father and your Father* (John 20:17). They now charged him not only with breaking the Sabbath but also with blasphemy, of making himself equal with God.

And how did Jesus answer this new charge. 'Our Lord seems to have accepted this charge as a correct statement of the case, and to have proceeded to argue that he had a right to say what he had said and that he really was equal with God' (Ryle).

In Philippians 2, we read of Jesus that *He thought it not robbery to be equal with God*. In other words, he was equal with God but was willing to step down into the realm of humanity.

Far from being blasphemy, this is the wonderful truth that Jesus wanted them to understand. This of

course is the wonderful truth that he wants us to understand. He does not want us to be arguing about Sabbath regulations. He wants us to believe that he is Lord of the Sabbath because he is Lord of All. *He who comes from above is above all* (John 3:31).

He was their *in the beginning with God. All things were made through him* (John 13). He is equal with the Father in power and glory. How tragic that these Jews were blind to this wonderful truth. How tragic that still today religious people can be blind to this truth.

The charge stands as far as Jesus is concerned. In fact, in the following verses he takes the Jews and us also, into the awesome mystery of the Godhead, the mystery of the Trinity. He tells us truths almost beyond our power to comprehend about the relationship between the Father and the Son. 'To me it seems one of the deepest things in the Bible' said Ryle.

Were the Jews listening or were they still fuming about the Sabbath? Are you ready to listen to the amazing things, which Jesus reveals about God the Father and God the Son? Oh, that we might listen attentively and that our hearts were focused more on Jesus Christ our Lord.

Most assuredly I say to you said Jesus – or literally amen, amen. Such words of introduction signal something important is about to be said. He who has ears to hear let him hear! 'You say I am making myself equal with God – well listen carefully and I will explain to you how and why this is true'.

Unity of purpose

The Son he said *can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do*. Is the Son limited in some way? Can he not do things he wants unless the Father allows him? Some people would like to understand his words this way. They want to see Jesus as inferior to the Father – but that is not what Jesus is saying.

Unitarians do not believe that Jesus is equal with the Father. This accusation is one that continues to be made against orthodox Christian doctrine still today. Not only Jews and some Christians but Muslims also stumble over this fundamental truth.

Jesus was saying here that he does not **desire** to do anything other than what the Father does. Such is the unity of the Father and the Son – one will and one purpose.

The Son is so intimate, so united with the Father that they are both involved together in every work they do. They do the same things; they work *in like manner*. Together they worked in creation. Together they make their home in the heart of the believer (see John 14:23).

This is the first point Jesus makes in explaining the relationship between himself and his Father. Complete unity of purpose and action. *I and the Father are one* said Jesus in another place (John 10:30). Yes, he is equal with God.

Note that this is one of the principal truths taught in this gospel. The name 'Father' occurs many more times in this gospel than in the others. In this passage alone, Jesus calls God his Father no less than eight times.

Unity in Love

The Father loves the Son. I wonder what the Jews thought about these words. Love – what is he talking about? It would have been a foreign concept in their religion. They were on about the law, and there was not much love shown in their efforts to keep the law.

The law was given to reveal sin, not love. How do we know love – Jesus Christ laid down his life for us (I John 3:16). God so loved the world that he gave the law? Is that what we read? No – *God so loved the world that he gave his son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

In our text, Jesus reveals the source of this great love that he brought into the world. It is the love that the Father has for the Son. It is the love that characterises all relationships within the Godhead.

In love there is openness to one another – *the Father shows him (the Son) all things that he himself does.* There are no secrets; there is no fear, no deception, and no competition within the Godhead – just love.

It is difficult to describe such wonders within the constraints of human language. Our understanding, limited as it is to human love, is way too small for us to grasp the wonder of this love of the Father for the Son. We are overcome with awe and reverence as we look into these wonders.

Yet Jesus is here revealing such things to us. In grace, he is revealing just who he is. 'The same in substance, equal in power and glory' (Shorter Catechism 6).

Jesus had healed a man crippled for 38 years. That man told the Jews he had been wonderfully healed – not that they were much interested in this miraculous sign. But this was a mighty work, a miracle nevertheless.

Now Jesus tells them that they shall see greater things than this. The Father through the Son will do marvellous things, things that neither these Jews nor anyone else will be able to ignore. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

What are these *greater works* he speaks of? What are these works that will make them marvel? We learn in the following verses – verses which continue to reveal Jesus as equal with God. But we will have to leave it till next time to examine these things.

We have been taken up a bit like the apostle John in the apocalypse (Revelation) to see marvellous things today. We have been given a glimpse within the Godhead – of the complete unity and wonderful love that mark the relationship between Father and Son.

Let us believe with all our heart, and let us keep before us this great truth of the Trinity. Jesus is equal with God. We do not worship angels or any other creature but we delight to worship the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with reverence and with awe.

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