



Every Christmas many of the same movies end up on TV. One of those movies is *Miracle on 34th Street*. There's an old version and a new one; the old one is better but they're both good. You probably know the story. A jolly old bearded man named Kris Kringle goes to work as a department store Santa, and it turns out he's the real Santa Claus, or at least he thinks he is. As Kris makes those claims, he starts to get persecuted by some very greedy and selfish people, and he's even put on trial to determine his own sanity. In that trial, witnesses are called and Kris tries to prove he's the real Santa by getting post office employees to deliver bags of "Santa" letters to him in the courtroom. The judge is so impressed he dismisses the case!

In a way, that story parallels what happened with Jesus. Early in John's Gospel Jesus made some astounding claims that brought him head to head with the Jewish religious leaders. In John 5 we see this clash for the first time. Jesus has just got done healing a man who was unable to walk for 38 years. He did this through the power of his word. He simply said, *"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk,"* and that's what the guy did. It was a miracle! But when the religious leaders saw the guy carrying his mat they got upset because it was the Sabbath and they had rules about what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath. Carrying your own mat was forbidden. So when they learned Jesus was the one who told him to do this, they confronted him. In a way, they put him on trial.

The Accusation: Jesus is Accused of Making Himself Equal with God

However, the accusation was much deeper than just breaking a little Sabbath rule; they accused him of the most serious form of blasphemy.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (verses 16–18).

It seems this wasn't the only time Jesus had broken their Sabbath rules, but this time Jesus said something new: *"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."* Jesus touches on something the Jews had debated about for years. Does God himself keep the Sabbath? Most Jewish rabbis agreed

that it was okay for God to at least do some work on the Sabbath. If God is the sustainer of his creation then his work must continue even on the Sabbath, otherwise everything would just fall apart! Aren't babies born on the Sabbath? How could a baby be born apart from the work of God? It's like being a parent of an infant. No matter what day it is, you still have to change the diapers; you still have to feed them. In a way, it's the same with God. So Jesus just affirms what they all knew—God is always at his work, even on the Sabbath.

But in that statement Jesus says two things that set them off. First, he calls God, *"My Father."* They didn't like that. That sounds just a little too chummy. Second, he seemed to be claiming he had the same right to work on the Sabbath that God did. They **really** didn't like that. It's okay for God to work on the Sabbath, but not you. If you think it's okay for you to do that, you're making yourself equal with God. In their book, that's a crime. You can see just how mad they are. John says, they *"tried all the more to kill him."*

Now Jesus will go on and, much like Kris Kringle, he'll defend his claim to be equal with God. But something to notice here is how upset these people are about that. People have always been upset about this, and they continue to be today. It's one thing to say Jesus is a great moral teacher or a great example of the kind of person we should all strive to be. Many religions will even go so far as to recognize Jesus as an important prophet who was sent from God. But to say he has some kind of exclusive and absolute claim to be God or even to be the only way to God is offensive. It's fine to make him one version of the truth, but to claim that he's The Truth against which all other truths must be weighed will rouse some serious opposition.

So starting in verse 19 and extending all the way through the end of the chapter Jesus responds to their anger. It's almost like he's on trial in a court of law. First in verses 19–30 he defends his own unique relationship to the Father, and then in verses 31–47 he calls forth several witnesses to support his claim.

The Defense: Jesus Defends His Unique Relationship to the Father

In defending his own unique relationship with the Father, he makes several startling claims. First, he claims a unity with God the Father in all his works. Look at verses 19–20.

Jesus gave them 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. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed."

Jesus isn't claiming equality with God in the sense of being a rival god. Rather, this is an equality based on a unity where the Son is so utterly submitted to the Father that the two are one in the works they do: *"The Son can only do what he sees the Father doing."*

By the way, you can't turn that around. The Father doesn't always do what the Son is doing because within the Godhead the Son subjects himself to the Father. It's like in a marriage; there can be equality, but in that equality there can also be submission. Jesus, the Lord of lords and King of kings, submitted to his Father in everything.

"The Son can only do what he sees the Father doing." That doesn't mean it was impossible for him to do something apart from the Father. He could have done that just like we can, but he couldn't in a moral sense. For example, I might tell our Foster City Campus Pastor, Neal Benson, "Neal, why don't you pad your expense account this week so we can take our wives out to a fancy dinner." I know Neal and he'd have a look of horror in his eyes and say, "I can't do that!" He could do that, of course, but he won't. That's the point of what Jesus says. He could but he won't because of who he is and the kind of relationship he has with the Father. In fact, he says the Father loves the Son so much he shows him all he does. That's what love does—it shares. It doesn't hide what it's doing; it moves a person to reveal and share what it's doing. That's why when there are secrets in a relationship something is very wrong. Love doesn't do that. It shares. It reveals.

I believe the image Jesus has in his mind is him sitting in his father's carpenter shop as a boy. He's watching his father work. His father loved him and so he shared with his son all his knowledge and all his secrets about his trade. In those times that's what a boy did—he learned his trade from watching his father. We call it apprenticeship. In Jesus' day, it meant for father and son to be side by side, with the son watching every move the father made and learning to do it in exactly the same way. That's the image Jesus brings forth here. He's so one with his Father that he can only do what he sees his Father doing.

Often we hear people say, "The God of the Old Testament is harsh and demanding and angry, but the Jesus of the New Testament is different. He's gentle and loving and compassionate." I always know when people say that they probably haven't really read the Bible much at all, either the Old or the New Testament. It simply isn't true in what you read, but it isn't true based on what Jesus says right here either. The Father and the Son are one in all their works because the Son only does what he sees the Father doing. He can do nothing else.

This begs the question, what is the Father doing and what has he given the Son to do? At the end of verse 20 Jesus says the Father *"will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed."* What's he talking about? This leads to a second claim Jesus makes—the Father has given him the power to give life. Look at verse 21.

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.

When Jesus speaks of raising the dead, we have to ask: Does he mean the spiritually dead or the physically dead? If you look down in verses 24–26 he deals specifically with spiritual death.

"Very truly I tell you, 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. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come 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."

People who never think about their accountability to God are spiritually dead. People who never make any response to the things of God, who push away the witness of creation that there is a creator—those people are spiritually dead. They're unaware and unresponsive to anything beyond what appeals to the body and the soul. Jesus has the power to give life to such people. How does that happen? It's very simple. It happens when a person hears his word and believes that God sent him. That person has crossed from spiritual death to spiritual life. Notice Jesus says that person *"has eternal life."* He's not just talking about everlasting life, though that's part of it. It's true that we'll live forever, but this describes a quality of life as well. He's talking about the richness, the fullness, the beauty of life. Remember what Jesus said, *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly"* (John 10:10 NASB). It's a quality of life that's enriching; it can't be diminished by circumstances. We get to taste this quality of life now. It begins here, not in heaven after you die. The claim of Jesus is he alone has the power to give life.

Almost 40 years ago a young man about to graduate from high school was spiritually dead. He had no interest at all in God. He had no sense of accountability to God. He lived by his own rules; he lived for himself and in a way he lived by himself. That young man was me, but then something happened. I began to feel a need in my heart. I had a deep sense that my sins had alienated me from God and I was hungry to know how to fix that. I rummaged through my house looking for a Bible or anything I could read to guide me. I found nothing. This went on for months and I was too proud to tell a soul. Then one day I just gave in and cried out for help. I remembered the words from my childhood, words found right here in John's gospel, *"Behold, the lamb of God who*

takes away the sin of the world," and I believed it. I confessed my sin and believed his promise.

Things began to change immediately. I felt forgiven and free. I had a deep sense that I was loved and somehow knew that could never be taken away from me. In response, all I wanted to do for the rest of my life was serve him. I began to make choices to deal with behaviors that I instinctively knew weren't pleasing to him. That process, by the way, is still going on today. I finally got my hands on a Bible and I devoured the New Testament in a just a few months. I found a group of believers on my college campus and I began to hang out and learn from them. I experienced what Jesus describes here: I crossed over from death to life. That can happen to anyone. Your experience may look different from mine, but the Son gives life to whoever believes.

So Jesus has made two amazing claims. First, he's one with the Father in all that he does; he only does what he sees his Father doing. Second, he has the power to give life. And there's one more thing. The third claim is he has the authority to judge. Back up in verses 22–23 he said:

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.

Isn't that interesting? The Father judges no one. Again, we usually have this turned around. We think the Father is the judge and Jesus is the one who tries to talk him out of it! No! The Father has given all judgment into the hands of his Son because he wants all to honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Then he explains when and how this will happen in more detail.

And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (verses 27–30).

What an amazing claim! Jesus is talking about a future bodily resurrection. Just as Jesus came out of the grave, so will we. This will take place at the second coming of Christ. That's the blessed hope of believers. That's when we receive our new bodies and a new heaven and a new earth. That's when what John writes in Revelation will come true: *"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain..."* (Rev. 21:4).

But it's not just believers who will be raised up. In verse 28 Jesus says this will happen to *"all who are in their graves."* He's going to empty the cemeteries of the world. Some will rise to

life and others will rise to be condemned. This is their final destiny. Notice it appears this judgment is based on works. Those who have *"done what is good"* shall experience the resurrection of life. What does that mean? Many people look at this and make up their own ideas about what it means to do good: be nice to your neighbor, don't cheat on your spouse, keep the Ten Commandments. Then maybe the good you've done will outweigh the evil and God will let you into heaven. That's not what Jesus means. This is just a few verses removed from what Jesus said about simply believing to receive the gift of eternal life. To *"do what is good"* means to believe and receive eternal life and then to do the works that flow out of that. When God's life is in you, that changes the way you live. Not perfectly and not overnight, but it will inevitably result in good works. Ephesians 2:20 says, *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works..."*

What then does have *"done what is evil"* mean? Obviously this is referring to those who have refused his offer of life, shut their ears to the offer of grace from God. Those are the ones who have all their life *"done what is evil"* even though there were times when it looked like they were doing good. They'll rise to condemnation. No one put it better than C. S. Lewis: "God is going to invade this earth in force. But what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream, and something else, something it never entered your head to conceive, comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us, and so terrible to others, that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we have really chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back, to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it." And Jesus wants us to know that he's the one who will judge.

This week has reminded us all how upside down this world is. Isn't it good to know that the day will come when everything will be made right? That deep sense of vulnerability we feel not just for us but for our children, the sense of randomness, and that sense of just how wrong it all is can at least be comforted to know that the Father has given all judgement to the Son and he will judge with righteousness and justice.

The Witnesses: Jesus Calls Several Witnesses Who Will Back His Claims

So Jesus has made some amazing claims. In chapter 1 John called Jesus the Word made flesh. Well, here we see what the Word says about the Word. I think Jesus knew he'd better come up

with some kind of validation. And so what he does in verses 30–47 is he calls forth several witnesses.

“There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true. You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light” (verses 32–35).

The first witness is John the Baptist. John's whole life was about pointing people to Jesus. Jesus says, “I don't need human testimony but I mention John for your sakes. Even you guys were impressed by John.” John is a precursor to all those who preach and teach the word of God and in doing so point people to Jesus. We have people who come to this church and they're drawn by the preaching of the word of God, and they're not even sure why. Something rings true for them and that's a witness to them of the truth of the message.

“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent” (verses 36–38).

The second witness was the miracles Jesus performed. The Gospel of John lists seven miracles, but at the end John says there were so many more that if you tried to write them all down the whole world couldn't contain the books (20:30; 21:25). There are also times today when God chooses to reveal himself through a miracle or sign that takes place in the name of Jesus. The greatest miracle, of course, is what I described earlier when a spiritually dead person is made alive in Christ, but there are times when God chooses to heal people physically as well. Sometimes people exploit this and there are many counterfeit miracles that take place, but there are times when God chooses to break through in this way.

“You study the Scriptures diligently 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” (verses 39–40).

The third witness is that of the Scriptures. Jesus, of course, was talking about the Old Testament scriptures because they didn't have the New Testament yet. He refers to the fact that these Jewish leaders prided themselves on knowing the law and the prophets inside and out, but he says they missed the whole point!

Eternal life isn't found in a book; it's found in a person. It's found in Christ. The Scripture from Genesis to Revelation bears witness to Christ; he's the main character throughout. At the end of the chapter he says that even Moses, who wrote a good part of the OT, and whose writing they depended on for their very salvation, would now become their accuser because Moses wrote of him.

So let me just sum this up by asking, will you believe and follow what the Word says about the Word? Jesus is the Word and the Word makes some amazing claims about the Word. Will you believe and follow that? Let's address this question to two different groups.

For believers or Christ followers: We started with a courtroom and a trial. Just like Jesus, in this world we're in that courtroom and we're on trial. Will we be willing to bear witness to what the Word says about the Word? The world doesn't like what the Word said about the Word. His claims are too absolute, exclusive and narrow. When we bear witness we'll often get the same response he got—they tried all the more to kill him. The way we bear witness is by what we say and how we live our life. We live our life on the same basis he did: ***“the Son can do nothing by himself, he can only do what he sees the Father doing.”*** That means I do nothing on my own. I only do what my Father does. When I live that way, there will be some who are attracted but there will be more who are repelled. That's what we see in this passage. It's a reminder that we must be willing to be mistreated as Jesus was. Jesus said, ***“A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also”*** (Jn. 15:20).

For not yet Christians: Will you believe what the Word says about the Word? Yes, he made some audacious claims. But wouldn't you agree that he backed them all up that way he lived his life? If you have trouble believing, maybe some of these other witnesses will help: John the Baptist or others preachers like him, the miracles which Jesus performed, the Scriptures which testify of him from beginning to end. But if that isn't enough, consider other witnesses. Consider my story which is the same story many in this room have had and many more ever since the day Jesus rose from the dead. Will you believe what the Word says about the Word? The stakes are high. We've been reminded of that this week, haven't we? The world is a fearful place but there's a place of safety for all of us.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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