

JESUS GIVES LIFE

John 5:17-47

Key Verse: 5:24

“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.”

In today's passage Jesus mainly reveals who he is. It is vitally important for everyone to know who Jesus is. Knowing Jesus means to have a personal relationship with him. This personal relationship with Jesus is unique. It is different from knowing anyone else. If we know Mayor Rahm Immanuel, we may be able to get a good job in Chicago. If we know Bill Gates, we may be able to obtain a grant or scholarship. But neither of these two powerful men can give us life. And neither has the power to decide our eternal destiny. But Jesus does. Jesus, the Son of God, has authority to give life and to judge. This is why it is essential to know Jesus and hear his word. Let's learn who Jesus is and hear his word.

First, the Father is always at work, and so is Jesus (17-18). In the last passage Jesus healed a man who had been invalid for 38 years. It happened on a Sabbath. The Jewish leaders took notice and began to persecute Jesus. They thought that Jesus broke the Sabbath law. Jesus did not shrink back in the time of persecution. Rather, Jesus defended himself and explained why he was working on the Sabbath. Jesus said, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working” (17). Genesis teaches us that God worked hard for six days to create the universe and all that is in it. Then, on the seventh day, God rested from all his work. It was not because God was tired. It was to commemorate his work (Gen 2:1-3). Since then, God has worked continually in order to sustain his creation. Even on the Sabbath the sun rises and sets and the rain falls in season. Babies are born. God continues to provide everything that is needed for mankind and the animals as well. If God did not work on the Sabbath, the whole creation would perish. Furthermore, God always carries out his redemptive work. Since the Fall, God has worked steadily to save mankind. God called his servants, such as

Abraham, Moses and David. God sent prophets and gave promises and spoke his words to mankind again and again, even though people were rebellious toward him. When we face rebellious people, we easily give up on them and say, "Okay, perish if you want to." But God never stops working to save man, regardless of the response. Finally, God sent his one and only Son to save mankind. After Jesus came into this world, he saw God working on the Sabbath, and Jesus too worked on the Sabbath. But the Jewish leaders did not understand the real meaning of the Sabbath. They only prohibited many activities on the Sabbath like religious police.

In addressing the Jewish leaders, Jesus referred to God as "My Father." We also call God "Father," but in a different sense. When Jesus called God "Father," he expressed a unique relationship with God. Both the Father and the Son are divine; they are both in very nature God. As for us, we are sinners. We cannot go to God directly, but only through Jesus. We are adopted into God's family through what Jesus has done for us. We need to be sanctified. We are not equal with God. But Jesus is the Son of God. The Jewish leaders understood Jesus' claim to divinity. So they tried to kill him. Their main issue was not really the Sabbath law, but that Jesus claimed to be God, which they considered blasphemy (18).

Despite the hatred of the Jews and the unfavorable environment, Jesus was not discouraged. Even though the person he healed seemed to turn on him, Jesus did not lose heart. Rather, Jesus continued to work because the Father was working. The Father was the standard for Jesus, not the environment or the presence of visible fruit. We can learn from Jesus here. When we work hard to raise disciples and then watch them leave one by one, we easily lose heart. Moreover, the moral and spiritual climate of our nation seems to be getting more anti-Christian. We may think, "Should I continue to work in this situation?" But God is always at his work. God still loves the world. God's heart's desire is to save people from eternal condemnation (2 Pet 3:9). Out of his great shepherd heart, God is always at his work, to this very day. So we too are working.

Second, Jesus is the Life-giver and the Judge (19-23). In this part Jesus explained that his work originated from the Father God, so that the Jewish

leaders might honor Jesus as the Son of God. The Jewish leaders had accused Jesus of claiming equality with God. But in verse 19 Jesus reveals his great humility. Jesus said, “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.” Jesus does not work apart from the Father. He is not a rival to the Father. Rather, he is in submission to the Father. His work arises out of his absolute obedience to the Father. Philippians 2:6-7a says of Jesus, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing....”

In verse 20a Jesus explains that his relationship with the Father is characterized by love. Jesus’ submission was his response to the Father’s love. The Father did not hold anything back from Jesus. Out of the fullness of his love, he trusted Jesus completely and showed him all he did. Between the Father and the Son there was no secret, barrier or conflict. They were one in love. In his love, the Father would show the Son even greater works than he had done thus far (20b). What were these greater works? In verses 21-22 Jesus tells in two aspects how the Father empowers the Son. First of all, the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Giving life is something that God uniquely does out of his love. When we love others, we want to give them the best gifts, even a new car. But we cannot give life to them. Only God can give life. In contrast, the devil is a murderer (8:44). The devil takes away life whenever he can. But Jesus gives life and even raises the dead. Jesus does not crush weak people, but he makes them alive by any means. In the town of Nain there was a young man who was the only son of his widowed mother. He was everything to his mother. He ate a lot, studied hard, learned to play an instrument, and became a debating champion. But one day he suddenly died. He could do nothing; his corpse lay lifeless in the coffin. When Jesus saw this, his heart went out to the widow and he said to her, “Don’t cry.” Then he touched the bier and said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk (Lk 7:11-17). Jesus has power to give life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Secondly, the Son has authority to judge. Verse 22 says, “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son....” Jesus

is meek, gentle and full of grace. Jesus is our Friend. He accepts us as we are and we can hang around him and enjoy fellowship with him. At the same time, Jesus is the Judge. He has authority to judge all people on earth without exception. At the last day, everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor 5:10). To sum up, God gave Jesus authority to give life and to judge. Why? Verse 23 says, "...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." Jesus is God Incarnate. Jesus is worthy of the praise, honor, glory and worship of all mankind. It is vital for all people to know that Jesus is the Life-giver and the Judge.

Third, whoever hears my word and believes has eternal life (24-30). The fact that Jesus is the Life-giver and the Judge is not mere theory. It has profound implications for all people who will ever live. Let's read verse 24 together. "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." In this verse the word "hear" is *ak-oo'-o* in Greek and is equivalent to *shaw-mah* in Hebrew (Deut 6:4). The word "*shaw-mah*" when used in relation to God's word means obedience. Hearing God's word is not a light matter; it is a matter of life and death. We can consider two things here. First is the importance of what we decide to hear. Second is the result that follows hearing. We hear many voices every day. Some voices give us encouragement, comfort, hope and vision and make us alive. On the other hand, some voices seem to be sweet, but contain the poison of death within them. They discourage us and rob the vitality from our lives. They irritate us and upset us and lead us to waste our time and energy. Which voice we listen to is very important. We need to discern which voice is from God and which is from Satan and make a right choice in hearing.

When Adam and Eve heard Satan's whispering, it was very sweet and aroused sinful desires in their hearts. They were deceived and became rebellious toward God and disobeyed his word. As a result, they lost paradise and died. Their disobedience affected not only them, but all of their descendants. In contrast, Jesus, who is the second Adam, heard God's voice and defeated the devil's temptation with the words of God. Jesus said, "It is

written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Mt 4:4). Through his obedience to God’s word Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:9).

In verse 24 the word “whoever” means that Jesus invites anyone into eternal fellowship with him regardless of their human background. There is no other qualification but to hear his word and believe. Eternal life comes only through hearing and believing! It is amazing. Is it true? Yes. It is true. Jesus promises us so. Eternal life begins the moment we hear Jesus’ word and believe. We enter into eternal fellowship with Jesus, who is the source of life. Not only so, but we will not be judged. The Bible tells us that God’s judgment is inevitable and inescapable. Hebrews 9:27 says, “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment....” The result of this judgment is not a limited jail sentence. It is eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev 21:8), with no way out. But when we hear Jesus’ word and believe, we are exempt from this judgment.

In addition, we cross over from death to life. The Message Bible translates this: “This person has taken a giant step from the world of the dead to the world of the living.” There are two worlds: the world of the dead and the world of the living. Those in the world of the dead may eat well, wear stylish clothes and live in a mansion. But they often suffer under the power of death; they are empty, meaningless, powerless and hopeless. They have no lasting peace or joy. They have no remedy for their inner hatred, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, sorrow, despair, vengeful spirit, and the like. Their smiles are often clown smiles. On the other hand, those in the world of the living experience peace, joy and true satisfaction even if they live in humble circumstances. They have hope and vision and can laugh from deep within their hearts. They can forgive one another, love one another, bear with one another, and serve one another instead of biting and devouring each other. To enjoy the world of the living, shall we pay an expensive entry fee? No. All we need to do is hear Jesus’ word and believe. Everyone can do this. Then all the elements of death and darkness working within us disappear and the light of life begins to shine. Vitor Belfort is a professional UFC fighter from Brazil. He has enjoyed great success in the combat cage, has married a beautiful Brazilian woman and has millions of

fans around the world. One day his sister was kidnapped, terribly abused and killed by a gang of men. At that moment, the power of death gripped him. He felt that everything was empty and meaningless. Feelings of hatred, vengeance and grief nearly made him crazy. He could not get out of it. He cried out to God. Then he heard the voice of Jesus tell him, "Your sister belongs to me." In that moment, all the darkness left his soul. Peace and joy filled him. He crossed over from death to life. Only Jesus' words can do this.

In verse 25 Jesus says, "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." The life-giving power that Jesus grants in this life is a foretaste of the resurrection power he pours out in the future. Jesus can give this life to those who hear him because he is the source of life (26). Jesus has authority to judge those who do not believe because he is the Son of Man (27). Jesus said the most amazing thing in verses 28-29: "...a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." At the last day, all people who have ever lived, both good and evil, will come out of their graves after hearing Jesus' voice. Each one will be either rewarded or punished according to what they have done. At that time everything will be laid bare. God has the record of everything we have done and said. There will be no defense, excuse or appeal, for God's judgment is righteous and just (30). Every mouth will be silenced. Fortunately, those who believe in Jesus will not be judged like this. Thank God!

Fourth, testimonies about Jesus (31-47). Jesus, out of his great compassion, wanted to help the Jewish leaders open their eyes and see that he is the Son of God. So he gave them clear evidences and spoke to them in a way they could understand. In the Law of Moses, two witnesses were required to establish the validity of a testimony (31-32). Jesus presented not only two, but four valid testimonies in verses 33-40. The first testimony was that of John the Baptist (33-35). John was a lamp that burned and gave light. They chose for a time to enjoy his light. This shows that they knew John came from God. John testified about Jesus. The second testimony was that of the works the Father gave Jesus to do (36). Jesus performed many miraculous signs which revealed God's power. This was a concrete witness that Jesus

was sent by the Father God. The third testimony was that of the Father himself (37-38). At both Jesus' baptism and transfiguration the Father himself spoke, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love" (Mk 1:11; 9:7). The fourth testimony was that of Scripture (39-40). The Bible has many authors, spanning many centuries, who wrote at different times and in different situations. But there is one common theme. That is the coming of the Messiah. Specific prophecies were made regarding his birth, his way of life, his suffering, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and much more. This revelation was given progressively. The Jews studied these Scriptures very diligently because they thought that in them they had eternal life. Jesus said, "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (39). The entire Old Testament looks forward to Jesus. The entire New Testament testifies about Jesus. Jesus is the focal point of the entire Bible. But the Jewish leaders refused to come to Jesus to have life (40).

Jesus diagnosed the problem of their unbelief and its causes in verses 41-47. They did not have the love of God in their hearts (41-42). They loved themselves and the world more than God. 1 John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them." Loving the world and the Father are mutually exclusive. Another reason for their unbelief was that they did not seek God's glory (43-44). They sought praise from one another and honored each other. Their hearts were so full of human honor that they had no room for God. Jesus did not accuse them (45). But the Law of Moses did. Jesus pointed out that they did not really believe what Moses wrote. Then how could they believe in Jesus? (46-47) They needed to humble themselves and listen to Jesus.

Jesus is the Life-giver and the Righteous Judge. Jesus has power and authority to give life and to judge. Whoever hears his word and believes has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life. Let's hear Jesus' voice so that we may experience true life in Jesus.