

Hows God Works

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Turn back with me to John chapter 5 in our morning services at the moment. We're working our way through John's Gospel and we've come to this section from verse 19 to 29 that we're going to look at today, but I'll just read verses 19 and 20 again as we start.

So Jesus said to them, that was the Jews who were opposing him. Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise, for the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these, he will show him so that you may marvel.

In this part of John's Gospel, Jesus is responding to accusations that have been made against him by the Jews. And we read about that in the first part of chapter 5 where Jesus had healed a man who had been ill for 38 years and the Jews had accused him of breaking the Sabbath law because he'd told the man to pick up his mat on the Sabbath day.

And Jesus responded by saying, well, my Father is working, so I'm working. And in doing that, he was speaking of God as his Father. That enraged the Jews even more and they took great offence at the fact that Jesus called God his Father because by doing so, Jesus was making himself equal with God.

[1 : 2 5] And as we read, that prompted the Jews to start not just opposing Jesus, but actually to think about how they might kill him. And we mentioned, we looked at the first part of this chapter last week and we mentioned the fact that from chapter 5 onwards in John's Gospel, you've got more and more opposition against Jesus arising.

And you've got long sections of dialogue in chapters 5 through to 10 that records Jesus' words as he interacted with the people who were opposing him. So today we're going to look at the little bit between 19 and 29 because in these verses, Jesus does something remarkable.

Jesus tells us about how God works. That's our title and it's a fascinating thing for us to think about. And it's always amazing to discover how something works.

As many of you will know, before I became a minister, I was an engineer. And when I grew up, I never really thought about becoming an engineer. It wasn't really kind of something that I expected to do as I was going through school or studying, even when I left school.

But one of the things that really, I think, sparked my interest in becoming an engineer was an example of what I've just described when you discover how something works.

[2 : 4 5] As you know, my wife's parents own a filling station over and back. And there was one day where somebody had come along and they'd filled their car with fuel. They had gone in to pay for the fuel.

They'd gone back into the car and they'd driven off and they had forgotten to take the nozzle out of the car. And so they drove away with the fuel nozzle stuck in the car and it pulled the pump over.

And that, you would be surprised to know that that actually happened fairly regularly. And so to prepare for that eventuality, they always had a spare pump in the shed behind the shop.

And so because this had happened, they'd managed to cut off the supply to that broken pump. They kept everything else going for the rest of the day. And that night, I was asked, will you come and help?

Because we just need many hands on deck to get the broken pump taken away and the spare one put in place. So I went along and helped. Well, I say helped. I don't think I was much help at all. But it was amazing to see how it worked.

[3 : 48] And for the first time in my life, I'd kind of seen the insides of something. And I was looking and seeing how it was all connected and put together, how it worked. And it just instantly sparked a fascination with that, that actually eventually became a career in engineering prior to becoming a minister.

It's amazing to discover how something works, whether that's an engine, petrol pump, even learning about parts of your body, even watching a loom. I could watch a loom all day where you see everything just working and fitting together.

Our question today is, how does God work? And that's got to be the most important, how does it work? And one of the reasons it's so important is because it's a question that people very often get wrong.

Some people think that God works like a businessman. So you kind of have to barter with him. You need to pay him what he'll demand. And you hope that by doing that, you get what you want.

And I don't just mean in terms of money. I mean anything where you think, you know, if I can earn God's favor, if I can get on the right side of him by paying him whatever they expect.

[5 : 04] Some people think of God like that. Other people think of God like a scary head teacher. You hope that you're in the good books, but you always feel like you're only one step away from them being absolutely furious.

Some people think that God is like a doting granny. Just whatever you do, he thinks you're amazing. Some people think that God works like Santa. That he gives you nice stuff, but he's kind of a long, long way removed from actual real life.

Some people think that God works like an emergency service. He's there to call on in a crisis. And some people think that God works like HMRC. Cold, detached, distant, always there, but you only deal with them because you have to, not because you particularly want to.

Now, I'm sure there's loads and loads of other illustrations that you can think of. They're all very real. Lots of people think that that's how God works. They're very real.

They're also very wrong because that's not how God works at all. So how does God work?

[6 : 10] Well, Jesus explains how he works in this passage. And to help us understand, we're going to ask three very simple questions. How does God work? What's God doing and what do we need to do?

And just to explain, we'll spend most of our time in the first two questions. The last one is really just our conclusion. So question number one, how does God work?

In verses 19 to 20, Jesus begins to explain how it's possible for him to speak of God as his father and therefore to speak in a way that effectively makes himself equal with God.

Now, to the Jews, Jesus doing that, calling God his father, speaking in Father, Son like that. To the Jews, that was shocking and there's a sense in which they were right to be shocked because for someone to speak in that kind of way is startling.

And you'll have maybe be aware that theologians have often said that when Jesus makes statements like this, it really forces us into a decision whereby he's either a liar or he's a lunatic or he is actually the Lord.

[7 : 22] Now, I think the Jews tended to go for the liar or lunatic option and therefore when Jesus spoke of God as his father, when he spoke in a way that made himself equal with God, they saw that as a threat towards God as though Jesus was this kind of madman trying to compete with God and put himself up to that kind of level.

Jesus responds by explaining that there's no competition and he is not forcing himself up to God's level in that way at all.

The truth is, he is always at that level. He has always been at that level because the Father and the Son have always worked together.

Now, that's the first key thing that we're learning about how God works. When we talk about how God operates, now I know that that's not the best word but I don't have a better one.

That working, that operation of God is a beautiful system of harmony, cooperation and partnership between God the Father and God the Son.

[8 : 32] Even at a very basic level, if you imagine in your mind God doing stuff, you mustn't think of God sort of like looking over the world and waving a magic wand or pointing a powerful finger that just makes stuff happen as though he's kind of on his own just as this great conductor or magician or whatever making things happen.

When you think of God accomplishing things, planning things, doing things, you should be thinking of Father and Son side by side, arm in arm, hand in hand, conferring, talking, running, implementing, working together in beautiful harmony.

And when you think in those terms, it's teaching us some really, really important lessons that I want to just try and identify a wee bit. It's teaching us that God works on the basis of shared work.

All the words and actions that Jesus does is shared work with the work that the Father is doing. Indeed, it's the same with God the Holy Spirit. It's all the same work.

It's all God's work. So Jesus is working is God's work. He's doing God's doings. He's speaking God's speech.

[9 : 57] And that's why any view of Jesus that just says, you know, he was a good teacher or he was a good model example. Something like that is just, it's totally inadequate.

And it's totally out of step with what scripture is presenting to us. Jesus has come as the great revealer of God. So that means that as you look at how Jesus works, you're seeing how God works.

Alongside that, you've got what we could call shared dependence. I should really apologize for my writing, especially for those who've not been here before writing and spelling our weaknesses in my life, but that's supposed to say dependence.

And now we have to be careful of that word because we can never ever talk about God being dependent on anything outside of God. So we must never ever think that God is dependent on something else that's not God.

God is completely independent and does not rely on anything else and especially does not rely on us. So we must never talk about God being dependent on anything outside of God.

[11 : 08] But I think we can and should talk about an inner dependence within God. So within the father-son relationship that Jesus is revealing to us here, there's an unbreakable dependence.

That's why Jesus can say, I can't do anything on my own. I'm not barging up to God by myself and putting myself against Him. I do nothing of my own accord.

I do what I see the Father doing. What the Father does, the Son does. And that interdependence is actually present in the very terms, Father and Son.

When we talk about Father and Son, two key words running all the way through the New Testament in relation to God the Father and to Jesus. In those two terms, express an interdependence because a Father can't be a Father without a Son and a Son can't be Son without a Father.

That means that when you look at God there is an amazing cannot do withoutness about the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit.

[12 : 20] So there's just that amazing connection there. And all of that is also teaching us that this shared work, this shared dependence, and in God we also see what I'm calling shared genius.

All of God's works are works of genius. You only have to look at a starry night or an open flower to see that that's true. But that genius is not isolated solitary ability.

It's shared between God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. And I don't know if I can fully explain what I mean by that, but I just want you to think about that. That just the marvels that we see in God's handiwork is a genius that's shared.

It's a display of the beautiful harmony of God's workings. So the shared work, shared dependence, shared genius, but all of that is grounded on one key thing.

It's grounded on shared love. Sorry, my L didn't work there. There we go. It's all grounded on shared love. That's what verse 20 is explaining to us.

[13 : 30] The Father loves the Son. All of that shared, harmonious work that happens is because of the love between God the Father and God the Son.

And so a key point for understanding how God works is to recognize the fact that the Father loves the Son and the Son reciprocates that love to the Father.

And I personally always find it very helpful to think of God the Holy Spirit as the great carrier of that love between Father and Son. So you have Father, Son and Spirit in this beautiful relationship.

You could think of it as like sunshine or a breeze or an aroma or a song of love shared between the persons of the Trinity. Some theologians have even described it as a dance of love between Father, Son and Spirit.

And I don't mind if you think in terms of dance or song or aroma, if you think like an engineer like me with cogs and wheels and harmony, if you think hand in hand, arm in arm, I don't mind what image you use, whatever the image.

[14 : 32] The key point is that it's all fueled by love. It's all fueled by love.

And I think this is crucial to recognize as we try to understand how Jesus responds to the Jews. They've accused him of making himself equal with God. They've kind of tried to almost make him out that he's a kind of threat towards God, that there's this conflict between what Jesus is trying to do and what God actually is.

So they've accused him of wrongly making himself equal with God, but he doesn't reply by saying, I am equal with God. He replies by saying, the Father loves me.

And that tells us something crucial. It tells us that Jesus doesn't ground his identity on his status. He grounds his identity on his Father's love.

That means that when the Jews opposed Jesus, they weren't just insulting Jesus, they were actually insulting God. And I think that makes perfect sense if we take an example. Imagine your child or your grandchild or niece or nephew, somebody very precious to you.

[15 : 38] You've given them lots of your time, you give them many gifts, you've poured a whole pile of energy into them. They're very, very dear to you. Imagine they went off to school and they were told by their friends, what do you think you're doing getting all that stuff from Granny?

What right do you have to spend so much time with them? What have you done to earn that kind of status? And you would reply to them by saying, what are you on about?

Like Granny loves me, and that explains it all. And we're seeing the same thing here in John 5. Jesus can do everything that he's doing because the Father loves him.

They're doing the same work. They're in perfect harmony. In other words, Jesus doesn't have to defend himself or justify himself to these opponents because the Father loves him.

And do you know the incredible truth of the gospel? Is that if you trust in Jesus, then you can do exactly the same thing.

[16 : 44] You don't need to defend yourself, explain yourself, or justify yourself to anyone who thinks that you've got no right to come near to God.

And in our context, Jesus faced opposition or accusation from other people. I would say in our context, your biggest accuser is probably going to be yourself, where you tend to think, like I've often thought that you're not where you should be, not good enough, and that you don't have that right to come close to God, to know God.

You just don't deserve it. When that happens, when you feel that kind of accusation, even if it comes from yourself, you can actually say what Jesus said, my Father loves me.

And when you say that, you are finally getting to the heart of how God works. So that means don't try and justify yourself by enriching the businessman God who we've got to somehow present adequate offerings to.

Don't try and keep scary head teacher God happy that if you get one mistake wrong, then they're going to go mental. And don't think that it's emergency service God who's only interested in you when there's a crisis.

[18 : 19] Otherwise, just don't bother them, that's not how God works. God works on the basis of love, incredible love for his son.

But through his son, God the Father is doing something incredible. And that takes us to our second question. What is God doing?

Now, again, that's a huge question, there's loads that we could say. I want to just focus on what verses 21 to 23 tell us about what God is doing. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will.

The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. Now, three very important words come up in these verses.

The word life, the word judgment and the word honour. And I want to just think about them a wee bit. God is bringing, He's giving life, He's bringing judgment, He's honouring the Son.

[19 : 28] So let's do these just one by one quickly. He's giving life. According to the Bible, the great problem facing humanity is death. And that's where we again see that the Bible is actually talking everybody's language.

Because we all know that, we all recognise that. Death is wrong. Death is an unwanted intrusion in creation. Death is an enemy.

And that's why sin is so awful because sin creates an unstoppable path to death. Jesus has come to address that problem. Jesus has come to give life to those who are dead in sin.

But that raises a key question. What is life? Jesus says He's come to give life. John's written this whole Gospel so that we can believe and have life.

What is life? Is it existence? As though, you know, the key thing is we would have to just make sure that we keep our hearts beating, that we keep our blood oxygenated, that we keep our organs functioning, that we are just maintaining existence.

[20 : 33] Is it experience that we go bungee jumping or whatever else and travelling the world, doing this, doing that and we get to experience wonderful things? Is that what life is?

Some people speak in both of these terms. It's all about survival. It's all about experiencing stuff. And these things are part of life, but they're not what lies at the heart of life. The Bible presents one key thing that lies at the heart of how life is to be understood.

In the Bible, life is all about relationship. Life is knowing God. This goes on to say that later in John's Gospel, this is life that you know the only through God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent.

Life is about knowing God. Now, that doesn't mean just in terms of head knowledge, knowing stuff about God. That's not what it means. It means knowing God in terms of a deep, committed, tender relationship.

And that makes so much sense when we think about it because when is it that we feel most alive? We feel most alive when we know the love of friends and family and community when we get to share things together as those who love one another.

[21 : 49] God has come to give life. Life means knowing God. That means that knowing God means being loved by God.

And all of that's telling us that the God who is Father loving his son and who is Son loving his father and who is Holy Spirit loving and being loved by both, that God is extending his love to you.

And that's the incredible truth that the Bible reveals. We said at the start, God depends on no one and nothing. He exists forever as God in this incredible relationship of love and yet his great work and plan is to extend that love to you.

He's come to give you life so that you can know his love. Now, we need to know, we need to make sure that we get that the right way round.

God's come to give you life so that you can know his love. You've got to make that, got to make sure that's the right way round. It's not that he loves you so much, therefore he's going to give you life that lasts forever.

[23 : 08] So that's kind of thinking that God's the ultimate Santa. So loves you so much, he's going to give you eternal life so forevermore you will just have loads and loads of nice stuff and nothing bad will happen. So he loves you so much, he'll give you eternal life and you can just go and be happy forever.

That sounds good but it's not completely right. But I think it's actually the other way round, he gives you life so that he can love you and love you and love you and love you and love you forever.

As part of that verse 21 to 23 tells us that he is bringing judgment. Now, there's a word that kind of sends a shiver down our spine.

We can easily be put off by that word, concept of judgment can seem cruel or harsh and certainly intimidating but that's the wrong conclusion to jump to when we see that word judgment.

And actually no one thinks that, no one actually thinks that. You think you know judgment, oh that sounds bad, you actually don't believe that because when your life is in danger judgment is a good thing.

[24 : 18] Judgment is the thing you desperately need. In fact judgment is the thing we absolutely demand. If you are being mugged then you need the police to grab the mugger.

If you're being exploited you need the courts to sentence them for their crimes. If you're being shot at or bombed or invaded you need an army to conquer the enemy.

All of that is judgment and all of that is what we desperately need. Please don't think when you see the word judgment, don't think of that in terms of all the bad examples that we have of judgment like gossip and judging others.

That's absolutely not what the Bible is referring to. It's speaking to that absolute justice that we all crave and need. And in terms of the Bible's emphasis judgment is removing everything that is threatening your relationship with God.

And so just think about that, Jesus, the judge of the living and the dead, by judging them, by doing that work of judgment he's removing everything that's going to threaten your relationship with God and that makes perfect sense.

[25 : 28] He wants to extend his love to you. So his judgment, his work of judgment is going to remove everything that gets in the way. Now that is simultaneously incredibly comforting and it's also terrifying because Jesus will judge and banish everything that is going to get in the way of his relationship with his people.

And for every person who's trusting in Jesus, even if you feel like your faith is weak and rubbish, that's such a comfort.

But for anyone who's thinking, I just not that interested in Jesus and I'm not going to bother with him, he's going to get in the way of my life, I don't want a relationship with him.

Where does that leave you? As judge, Jesus is going to be honored just as the Father is honored.

So it's really interesting to see this. In John 5, Jesus is being accused, opposed and dishonored by the crowds around him. But what's actually going to happen is that these people who are judging and dishonoring Jesus, ultimately he will be their judge and they will honor him.

[26 : 54] But I think that in the midst of all of this, John's giving us a clue as to how this honoring of Jesus is going to work. Everything that's been said in these verses 19 to 29 is in response to the fact that the Jews are starting to plot to kill Jesus.

They want to kill him. But what I want us to see is that that plot to kill Jesus is actually the very pathway that will lead to Jesus being honored.

Because in terms of God's plan of salvation, the pathway for Jesus to be honored as judge is a pathway that's going to take him through the cross.

It's a pathway that's going to take him to death. That's why in Revelation, when we read the descriptions of God, the Son being honored, the vision presented to us is of a lamb in the midst of the throne.

In other words, of one who's been sacrificed. When I looked and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, the voice of many angels numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

[28 : 11] I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that's in them saying to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.

This is so important in terms of seeing how God works. Jesus is only going to be honored and exalted once he has died to save you.

That means that he's going to be recognized after he's been rejected. He's going to be displayed after he's been despised.

He's going to be glorified after he's been vilified. He's going to be adored after he's been abandoned. He will be worshiped after he has been crushed.

That means that when Jesus will be honored as judge on the last day, it's because he has died on the cross so that you and I can be acquitted.

[29 : 16] And that's how God works. The God who forever exists in this beautiful bond of love between Father, Son and Spirit. He's extending that love to you.

But he's not saying, you know, you can have bits of this love if you try hard enough. If you do this, that and the next thing, then I might love you forever. He's saying, I will love you forever and I will do whatever it takes to make that possible.

The love of God has been poured out towards you even though that meant that the blood of Jesus had to be poured out instead of you.

God is not a businessman that you make deals with. He's not a headteacher that you have to impress. He's not a Santa that you can kind of joke around with. He's not a tax man that you have to comply with.

He is the Father who has never forgotten you. He's the Son who's laid down his life for you.

[30 : 24] He's the Holy Spirit who will bring you to life forever. So how does God work?

He works as a Father who forever loves his Son. What is God doing? He is handing over that Son so that he can love you forever as well.

It is all fueled by love. What do we need to do?

Well, the answer is so beautifully simple. Jesus said, 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. Two key things there, we've got to hear what he's saying.

[31 : 24] We've got to believe in him. And it's that simple. That doesn't mean that you have to understand everything that he says. I've been a Christian 25 years and I'm still learning new stuff every week because the Bible is so full of amazing stuff.

It doesn't mean you have to understand everything but it does mean you've got to listen to what he's saying that he's calling you to follow him. And it means that we've got to believe what he's saying which is just as simple as it sounds.

It's not like about having like super strong kind of bodybuilder belief where you know, yes, I never doubt anything. It's not that at all. It's just saying, Lord, yes, I know that I can't do this on my own and I trust you to save me.

It's so simple, so beautiful. The last thing to say though is this, in these verses at the end that I haven't really gone through 25 to 29, well, let me read them and I'll tell you why I'm reading them when I'm done.

Truly, truly I say to you an hour is coming and it's now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, those who hear will live for us the Father, as life in himself, so he's granted the Son also to have life in himself.

[32 : 40] And he's 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 and those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who've done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

These verses are telling us that everything that we've tried to say the day will come when nothing matters more than this.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your incredible love and we just bow before you as our God, our Saviour, our King.

Help us to hear your words. Help us all to believe in you. Amen. Amen.