**FROM DEATH TO LIFE**

John 5:16-30

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.”

As some of you know, there was a wedding yesterday between Augustine and Hannah Park. I know both Aug and Hannah pretty well. Aug is like one of my big brothers, and we share a lot of interests and humor. He’s a guy that always makes me smile. And Hannah is a couple months older then me, so we grew up together, used to ride the school bus together. Hannah is one of the most trusting and genuine girls I know—and that makes her so refreshing. So, as you could imagine, when I got the invitation to go to their wedding ceremony and reception, I giggled to myself a little. Just the thought of their wedding brought me joy.

Weddings are like that; they are these times of joy. Being at a friend’s wedding, you sort of leave all of your problems and issues at the door and feel just alive.

Weddings are great, but the problem with weddings is that they begin and end. Weddings aren’t forever. The time we live in-between weddings isn’t always a time of life and joy. There are hardships, struggles, and sometimes there’s this sense of being unsatisfied with life, even lifelessness.

Today, we get an invitation—Jesus invites us to a kind of life that is a like a wedding celebration that doesn’t end (i.e. Mt22:1-14; 25:1-13; Jn2:1-12; 3:29; Rev19:1-10). Jesus’ invites us to come from death to life. This morning, let’s think about this invitation of Jesus and what it means to have eternal life in him.

**First, Who does this guy Jesus think he is?**

Before we get into Jesus’ invitation in this passage, let’s go back to what had just happened. Jesus had just healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, and did it with just his words (Jn5:1-15). This was an amazing miracle. But the Jewish leaders were very upset, because this man was carrying his mat on the Sabbath, the day when nobody was allowed to do any work. It’s sort of strange that the first reaction these Jewish leaders had to a paralyzed man walking was to criticize him for carrying his mat. When the man eventually told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who healed him, the Jewish leaders then began to criticize Jesus. They basically thought, “Who does this guy Jesus think he is? He’s breaking the Jewish Sabbath law and telling someone to carry their mat.” So in verse 16, it says that they began to persecute Jesus.

How does Jesus respond? He says in verse 17, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” Jesus is basically saying here that although there’s a Sabbath day, God never stops working. If God took one day off every week, things would start falling apart and it might get pretty scary. Jesus told them that since God his Father is always working, so he too is working.

Telling someone to pick up his or her mat on the Sabbath was nothing compared to what Jesus had just said to these Jewish leaders. If you look at verse 18, it says that because Jesus said this the Jewish leaders, they tried to kill him, because Jesus was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

So, who is this guy Jesus? I mean from what we’ve seen so far in John’s Gospel, he definitely is something else. He calls his first disciples by just calling them to him, and these ordinary men leave what their doing, their families even, to go and follow Jesus (Jn1:35-51). We’ve seen Jesus talk with all kinds of people, to a Jewish leader Nicodemus (3:1-21), to a socially labeled loose Samaritan woman (4:1-26), then a royal official (4:43-54), then to a man paralyzed for 38 years. And Jesus has these conversations with them that change each of their lives in some way. What’s more, Jesus performs these miracles, like changing water into wine (2:1-12), healing the official’s son, raising a paralyzed man to his feet with just his words. Who is this guy, Jesus?

Jesus talks about who he is in verses 19-23. Let’s look at these verses together. We see that again Jesus calls himself “the Son” and he calls God “the Father.”

When I was a boy, I used to want to do everything my father did. I used to follow him around, copy what he did. I tried to style my hair like my dad’s. I shaved for the first time when I was 8 because I saw my dad doing it and cut myself in several places. I even sat in my dad’s office when he would write his messages, and wrote my own messages on a notepad.

There’s something very sincere and pure in how Jesus describes who he is as the Son of God. In verse 19, Jesus says he only wants to please his Father—he’ll only move, act, if he knows it’s what his Father is doing. And in verse 20, it says God the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. This relationship Jesus has with God, it’s so intimate. God the Father and Jesus the Son are so close. Can anyone be close to God like that, to where they love him so much that they only want to do what God does? And can anyone know God’s love in a way that God shows them *everything* he’s doing? Who is this guy Jesus?

Jesus goes on to say in verse 20b, “’Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.’” The two “greater works” that Jesus goes on to mention are described in verses 21-30.

The first of these two “greater works” of Jesus is the ability 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.’” Look also at verses 25-26, “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.’”

Who has life within themselves? Who can give life to something that’s dead? Who can raise the dead to life? I mean this scene in verse 26 is like something out of a zombie movie—all the dead will hear Jesus voice and rise to be alive. Can your voice raise the dead to life? Try it sometime—go to a cemetery and command everyone to come to life. Jesus has that power to give life.

The second of these two “greater works” is Jesus’ ability to **judge.** Look at verse 22. “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.” Look also at verse 27, “And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.” He goes on to talk about a time to come in verses 28-30: “’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.’”

Who can rightly judge another person? I remember I was called to jury duty for a murder trial in college, and all the evidence pointed to this guy—he purchased to gun, he was seen at the scene of the crime, the shell that hit the victim was from the gun he bought, he had a history of violence, there was due cause; I mean, it was pretty obvious this guy was the murderer. But it took us three days until finally we couldn’t come to a consensus, because some of the people there just felt uncomfortable sentencing this man to life in prison if they weren’t sure he did it. Even trying to understand what’s going on in another person, their motives, their sins—who knows the depths of another person? Who even can understand or rightly judge themselves? Jesus has the ability to rightly judge.

These two things, the ability to give **life**, the ability to **judge** someone. These are things only God can do. No human being can give life. Nobody can see what’s in another person. But Jesus can.

Let’s ask the question again—Who is this guy Jesus? Let’s look at verse 23. “’[T]hat 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.’” Here, Jesus says that honoring him is the same as honoring the Father. He says that its for that very reason God shows his greater works of life and judgment, so that “all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father’” (23a).

It’s clear here that Jesus is God. Jesus can give life. He can see into the depths of our hearts and minds and know what’s there. Jesus, the Son of God, God as a man is worthy of the same honor that God the Father deserves.

Jesus as God himself—the one who can judge and give life—God with us, who was living and breathing and eating food; it’s truly amazing. And as we’ve been studying John’s Gospel, we’ve seen that this is what this Gospel is all about—Jesus is God.

But let’s hold on for a second and ask this question—Why? Why did God come to earth as Jesus?

**Second, The Invitation**

Whenever we get invited to something, it’s pretty exciting. We get an event invite on Facebook, an invitation in the mail, an Evite, and it makes us feel pretty cool. Especially if it’s an invitation from a friend, or someone we like, we definitely will read it and take it seriously. Imagine getting an invitation from God himself, of holding that invitation in your hands. How exciting! Here, God gives each of us an invitation.

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.’” This is God’s invitation. Let’s look at it together.

Look at 24. Jesus begins with, “Whoever.” When someone is planning a wedding or a party, they usually invite their close friends. But here, Jesus is inviting “Whoever.” Anybody can come. As mentioned, we’ve seen already in John’s Gospel that Jesus goes to all kinds of people and talks to them. Jesus invitation isn’t exclusive—you don’t have to be spiritual or religious, you don’t have to be wealthy or poor, you don’t have to be super smart or dumb, you don’t have to understand God or Christian life or have it all together. You, as you are, you’re invited.

Look at verse 24 again. When you get a wedding invitation, there’s usually a little map that has the street names and directions to the place. In Jesus’ invitation, he gives us directions to what he’s inviting us to. The first direction he gives is, “Whoever hears my word.” The Greek expression here literally means, “Whoever has ears on their head” or “Whoever is not deaf.” Jesus is saying here that whoever listens to his words are invited.

In school, I used to copy down what my teachers said word for word, and I would try to memorize what my notes said, but when it came time to take tests, I didn’t really understand the material. So one of my teachers told me something that really impacted me—“There’s a big difference between hearing and listening.” Jesus seems to be saying this in his invitation, “Whoever is listening to my words.” To really listen requires us to think, to wrestle with what’s being communicated. In all of his conversations with people, Jesus didn’t preach at them and ask them to passively sit there taking notes, he wanted them to be engaged with what he was saying, to really think about it. To hear Jesus’ words doesn’t mean memorizing a bunch of Bible verses (although, that’s never a bad idea). Jesus invites us to listen to his words and think about what they’re saying to us.

And what’s more, Jesus’ words have this power of life. When Jesus was talking with the paralyzed man, he asked him if he wanted to get well, and the guy never even answered Jesus but responded by complaining. But Jesus spoke to him anyway and said, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” Jesus words shook this spiritually and physically paralyzed man from laying on the ground to his feet. Jesus’ words have life in them.

The second direction of Jesus’ invitation is, “Whoever… believes him who sent me.” It’s interesting that Jesus doesn’t say, “Whoever believes in me” or “Whoever believes in the Gospel,” but rather, “Whoever… believes him who sent me.” Jesus doesn’t even ask us to believe in him. He directs us in his invitation to first listen to his words and to also believe in God the Father.

So, we have our directions. Now what? What is it that we’re being invited to? Let’s read verse 24 together again, please. “’Whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.’”

Jesus’ invitation is that when we listen to him and believe in God who sent him, something happens to us—in that moment we gain eternal life, we’re no longer condemned but we cross over from death to life.

When Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman, he promised her life in what he called “living water.” He tells her that after drinking this living water, life in us becomes a spring of water welling up to eternity. This eternal life that Jesus invites us to isn’t something that begins someday when we die. This eternal life begins the moment we accept Jesus’ invitation to us.

Think about the joy of a wedding again, those couple of hours where you’re just happy with your friends—that happiness, that life is constant in Jesus. It’s a life that is forever. In this life we can have the kind of relationship with God that Jesus has, where we long to please him like we would our own Father. We can be in a relationship with God like Jesus has where God begins to show us how he’s working in the world. Jesus says later on in chapter 10, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn10:10b). This full life with God, we can have this no matter where we are, no matter what’s going on in our lives, no matter what we’ve done. We have it the moment we listen to what Jesus says and accept it as true and from God. Then, Jesus’ words keep us in this eternal life.

You may be thinking, “I had that life once, but things have turned dead again. I don’t feel alive.” Jesus’ words have life in them. They can bring us to life. They can bring us back to our senses. They can lead us to repent. Jesus’ words are like are life-line to this eternal life.

Jesus once told a story about accepting his invitation in Luke 15. A son once left his father’s household, took his inheritance, and did what he wanted. Jesus describes him as hanging out with his friends and spending his money on prostitutes and wild living. When money and friends ran out, he was left for dead and was starving while living among pigs. But in that horrible place, the son remembered the grace of his Father. This led him to turn back and head towards and home. Jesus describes that while the son was still a long way off, the father was waiting for his son. When he saw the figure of his son in the distance, the father ran to out him. His son must’ve been dirty and covered in filth and smelled o booze and women and pigs. But the father wrapped his arms around him and kissed his son. The son tried to apologize but the Father ignored him, told everyone from his house to come out and meet them where they were. The father wrapped a robe around his son, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And then the father said, “’Let’s celebrate and be glad. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’” (Lk15:24a).

In essence, what Jesus is inviting us to do, and what his words call us to do, is to turn away from ourselves and turn towards God. Let me say that again, what Jesus invites us to do is to turn away from ourselves, our sins and our self-condemnation, and turn to God. And when we do, in that very moment God runs to us, and even though we’re covered in the filth of our sins, he doesn’t condemn us but wraps his arms of grace around us. God wants to be our father again. He wants to have a life of joy with us, a life of celebration and gladness. God wants to be with us always. And when we allow that to happen, we have the complete joy of being with God our Father.

So we’ve heard the invitation—“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.” The directions Jesus gives us are to listen to his words and to believe in God. He promises us life eternal. How will you respond to Jesus’ invitation?