

Main Idea: In John 5:24-30 we learn from Christ Himself both who He is and why He came to earth. He says He was sent by His Father to accomplish a mission that involves five objectives.

- I. Jesus tells us who He is: *the sent one* (24, 30).
 - A. This speaks of His submission.
 - B. This speaks of His authority.
- II. Jesus tells us why He came (24-30).
 - A. He was sent on a rescue mission (24).
 1. Through Him we have eternal life.
 2. Through Him we escape condemnation.
 3. Through Him we transfer from the realm of the dead to the realm of the living.
 - B. He was sent to give life to those who are dead (25-26).
 - C. He was sent so He could become the judge (27).
 - D. He was sent to empty graves (28-29).
 1. Some people will rise to live forever.
 2. Everyone else will rise to be eternally condemned.
 - E. He was sent so He could render judgment (30).
 1. His judgment is based on what He hears.
 2. His judgment is just.
 3. His judgment is based on the will of His Father.

Take Inventory: Some questions to ponder...

1. Have you affirmed the truth about Jesus?
2. Have you received what Jesus came to give?
3. Have you been sharing Jesus with others?

After the last Super Bowl almost thirty-nine million American viewers tuned in to watch a new television program. According to CBS it was the largest audience ever for a new series following the Super Bowl and the most watched premiere episode of any reality series. The show? It's called *Undercover Boss*.

I'm not a big reality show viewer, but the title and ads intrigued me, so I went to CBS's website to see what they have to say about this show. Here's what I found: Each week, UNDERCOVER BOSS follows a different executive as they leave the comfort of their corner office for an undercover mission to examine the inner workings of their companies. While working alongside their employees, they see the effects that their decisions have on others, where the problems lie within their organizations and get an up-close look at both the good and the bad while discovering the unsung heroes who make their companies run.¹

And that's what Todd Ricketts, the owner of the Chicago Cubs, did. So did Bryan Bedford, President and CEO of Frontier Airlines. As did Mike White, CEO of DirectTV. And Steve Phelps, the Chief Marketing Officer of NASCAR. These executives changed their appearance, took on an alias, and spent a week undercover in their own company. They got a ground floor look at the people who work for them and the problems they face.

There's something compelling about that story-line, the boss going incognito for the good of those he leads. A few months ago I read John Stott's biography. He did something similar. When he became pastor of one of the most reputable churches in London, All Souls Church, and chaplain to the queen and her family, one of the first things he did was to dress down and become a homeless man for a time, living under

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¹ http://www.cbs.com/primetime/undercover_boss/about/

bridges, and so on. He knew he would be a better pastor if he knew the challenges that people in the real world face.

Sometimes I get up out of my chair before a counseling session, and take a seat in the counselee's chair on the other side of my desk. It's helpful to spend a few moments thinking and praying about how I would feel if I were facing the challenges of the person I'm about to hear.

All that leads to this question. Is that why Christ came to earth? Was the purpose of His Christmas mission to get information? Think about it. The Creator of the universe entered the world as a creature, a human being to be specific. But why? What was His purpose in coming and becoming, if I can say it reverently, an *undercover boss*?

Some would say, "He came so He could understand us." And that's true, for Hebrews 2 says that since the Son of God took on flesh, He is able to understand how we feel when we face temptations and challenges (2:18).

But speaking frankly, that's not the primary reason God came to earth. There was a higher agenda on the Creator's mind when He became a baby in Bethlehem. And sadly, that's something that millions of people don't know, and I'm talking about millions who will be celebrating Christmas this week.

That's why last week we began a series I'm calling, "*The Truth about the X-Mas Child.*" The X sort of sums it up. While X originally stood for Christ (the first letter of the Greek word *Christos*), today it symbolizes the fact that Christ has become the unknown factor (as X in algebra represents an unknown quantity) in the holiday that's supposed to be all about Him.

Who is this X-Mas Child? Jesus Himself answered that question for us in the passage we investigated last time, John 5:16-23. In John 5 Jesus is under attack. He just healed a man who'd been disabled for thirty-eight years, but He did it on the Sabbath, and that infuriated the Jewish leaders. In His defense Jesus revealed to them seven things about His identity. Keep in mind He's explaining why He has the right to heal a man on the Sabbath. Here are seven reasons, if you will. He is equal with the Father (16-18), submissive to the Father (19a), imitates the Father (19b), loved by the Father (20), raises the dead just like the Father does (21), has received all judgment from the Father (22), and deserves honor just like the Father (23).

So that's the identity of the Christ, the *X-Mas child*, by His own claim. He is not God the Father, for they are distinct persons, but He is equal in essence with the Father, and indeed, He is God Himself.

But that raises the question, why did He come? Why is that baby in that manger? In John 5:24-30 we learn from Christ Himself both who He is and why He came to earth. He says He was sent by His Father, and He was sent to accomplish a mission, a mission that, as we'll see momentarily, involved five objectives.

I. Jesus tells us who He is: *the sent one* (24, 30).

As we finished last week's study, we heard Jesus use an important word to identify Himself, a word He repeats at both the beginning and the end of this week's text. Notice verse 23, "That all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who **sent** him."

Now notice the first and last verses of this week's text and you'll see the same word again. Verse 24—"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who **sent** me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." And verse 30—"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 is Jesus? He refers to Himself as *the sent one*. That's interesting. Who is Jesus? He is the Son of God. He is the Son of Man. He is Good Shepherd. He is the Vine. He's all that, but here He points out something very significant about Himself. He is the One that the Father *sent*.

The word "sent" appears over fifty times in John's gospel, and the majority of those refer to the fact that Father sent the Son. Back in 3:34 John says, "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God." In 4:34 Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Here in John 5 Jesus points that that the Father sent Him six times (in verses 23, 24, 30, 36, 37, & 38).

Don't miss the significance of that word coming from Jesus' lips. It speaks of two things.

A. This speaks of His submission. Why did the Son of God come to earth? He wasn't acting on His own. He says He was *sent*.

Did you ever send your kids to do something, like clean their room? If they baulked, it was probably because they thought their agenda was more important than yours. But if they went when you sent them, their obedience expressed their submission to you.

The fact that the Son came to earth highlights His submission. In addition...

B. This speaks of His authority. Boys and girls, has your dad ever sent you to give some instructions to your brother or sister? "Billy, dad sent me to tell you it's time to stop playing and get ready for bed!" Suppose Billy didn't listen to you. He'd be in trouble, wouldn't he? Why? Because the fact that your father sent you gave you some authority, didn't it? Not yours, but your father's.

Likewise, that fact that the Son was sent by the Father meant that the Son possessed the authority of the Father in all that He did and said. That was Jesus' point in verse 23, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him."

So who is Christ? Of the many ways we could answer that question, here's the way Jesus answers it in John. He is the submissive, authoritative Son. He is *the sent one*.

That raises the question, "Okay, why was He sent?" Jesus tells us why...

II. Jesus tells us why He came (24-30).

He says He came to fulfill five objectives. Actually, the first objective is the summary of which the other four are contributing components.

A. He was sent on a rescue mission (24). "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

When we break that verse apart, we see one mission, two qualifications, and three benefits. First, Jesus speaks of a mission, His mission—"who sent me." The Father sent Me. He sent Me to finish His work (John 4:34). What work? The work of rescuing sinners by dying in their place on the cross (John 17:4). That's the mission. Jesus came to rescue sinners.

What sinners benefit from His rescue work? Those who meet two qualifications. "Whoever *hears my word* and *believes Him who sent me*."

That's interesting. Usually the Bible emphasizes that to be rescued (or "saved") a person must believe *in Christ*. But here Christ says a person must believe *Him*, referring to the Father. He says that if you hear His word (referring to Christ's word) and believe Him (referring to the Father), then you will be saved and have eternal life.

Why does He say you must believe *the Father*? It's because believing in the Father and believing in the Son go hand in hand. They are inseparable. That's Jesus' point in His defense in John 5. He's being attacked for healing a man on the Sabbath. His

response is to say He's only doing what His Father is doing. Their works are one and the same. As Leon Morris explains, "All those who believe the Father, who really believe the Father, accept Christ. It is not possible to believe what the Father says and to turn away from the Son."²

So there's one mission—the mission the Father sent the Son to accomplish. There are two qualifications—hear the Son's word and believe the Father's assessment of His Son. And if we do? Then we're entitled to three amazing benefits.

1. *Through Him we have eternal life.* Jesus says that whoever hears and believes "has eternal life." Don't miss that eternal life is a present possession of those who have heard and believed. Eternal life isn't something they will receive when they die? Jesus says they *have* it. They have it the moment they hear and believe.

"But they can lose it," some say. Then what they had wasn't eternal life, was it? If they had it and then lost it, then whatever they had didn't last forever. And if whatever they had didn't last forever, then whatever they had can't be called *eternal* life.

But eternal life is something that can't be lost, or it couldn't be called eternal life. The Bible doesn't say that everyone who claims to have eternal life has it. But the Bible clearly says over and over that everyone who receives eternal life has it forever (see John 10:27-29; 1 John 5:11-13; Rom. 8:28-39).

But there's a second benefit that belongs to those of us who hear and believe.

2. *Through Him we escape condemnation.* "And will not be condemned," says Jesus. Literally, he "does not come into judgment." If you come into judgment and stand before the Judge, and if you are guilty, you will be condemned by the Judge. But that won't happen to those who hear and believe.

Jesus had more to say about this in his conversation with Nicodemus back in John 3:18. "Whoever believes in him [the Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Condemnation isn't just a future thing any more than eternal life is just a future thing. Those who have not believed *stand condemned*. It is a present tense condition with future implications.³

My unsaved friend, when you hear the gospel invitation and say *no* to Christ, you are condemning yourself. I read a little poem that express this tragic point...

*Still, as of old,
Man by himself is priced.
For thirty pieces Judas sold
Himself, not Christ.*⁴

Who did Judas condemn to death for thirty pieces of silver? Christ? Yes, but he also condemned himself. And so does every person who refuses to hear and believe.

But on the other hand, if we do hear His words and believe, we escape the condemnation we certainly deserve. What's more...

3. *Through Him we transfer from the realm of the dead to the realm of the living.* Jesus says, "He has crossed over from death to life." Literally, "from out of *the* death into *the* life" (there's a definite article in front of death and life). The verb means "to move from one location to another." So Jesus is saying that once a person hears and

² Leon Morris, p. 316.

³ To borrow a phrase from Leon Morris, p. 316.

⁴ Morris, p. 316.

believes, they move from one realm to another, from the realm they've been living in, *the realm of the dead*, to a new realm, *the realm of the living*.

In other words, a resurrection occurs. That's what resurrection is, moving from a state of being dead to a state of being alive.

Jesus actually mentions four different resurrections in this passage.⁵ One, there's the resurrection of Jesus Himself, for Jesus says in verse 26 that He has "life in Himself." Two, there is the future physical resurrection of believers (28-29a). Three, there is the future physical resurrection of non-believers (29b). And here in verse 24 we see a fourth resurrection, a spiritual resurrection. It's what happens when people hear Jesus and believe. They are transferred from their current state in the realm of the dead into the realm of the living.

You say, "I don't understand. What do you mean by the *realm of the dead*?" Here's what I mean. The Bible teaches that we all without exception enter the world *spiritually dead*. We have inherited a sin nature from our parents, who got it from theirs, all the way back to the first man, our representative, Adam. "If you eat the tree, you will die," the Lord told Adam. He ate, didn't he? What happened? Did he fall over dead? Not immediately. But he did die in that moment. He died spiritually.

That's how we enter the world, not neutral, but spiritually dead and unable to experience the kind of life that God intends. And then as we grow up, our sin nature manifests itself with sin choices. We read our resume in Ephesians 2:1 which says, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins."

What is spiritual death? Let me share a helpful description with you. It comes from a nineteenth century Scottish commentator named John Eadie. Here's what's true of spiritual death. "It...implies insensibility. The dead, which are as insusceptible as their kindred clay, can be neither wooed nor won back to existence. The beauties of holiness do not attract man in his spiritual insensibility, nor do the miseries of hell deter him. God's love, Christ's sufferings, earnest conjurations by all that is tender and by all that is terrible, do not affect him....It implies inability. The corpse cannot raise itself from the tomb and come back to the scenes and society of the living world....Inability characterizes fallen man."⁶

So people who are spiritually dead are totally numb to the things of God. They have no interest in responding to God, nor are they able to do so. In the realm of the spirit, they are *dead* (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Which is what makes Jesus' words so hope-giving. He says that if a person will simply hear and believe, then that person will instantly transfer from the realm of the dead to the realm of the living.

I was eleven when the transfer occurred. I was dead in my sins. The guilt was real, and so was the dread. But when I heard what Jesus did, how He came to rescue sinners like me, the Spirit of God took that powerful word, granted me faith to believe it, and a change of residence occurred. By the grace of God, I crossed over from death to life.

How about you? Have you changed residences? Do you want to? Then put your trust in Jesus. It's why He came. He was sent on a rescue mission.

You say, "It sounds too good to be true." Yes, it does. Perhaps that's why Jesus began verse 25 as He began verse 24, "I tell you the truth." I'm not lying, He says. This is the truth. And there's more! In verse 25 Jesus talks about a second objective. Again, in reality the next four objectives merely elaborate on the first. He says that...

⁵ Observation by Wiersbe, p. 306.

⁶ John Eadie, quote taken from John MacArthur, p. 197.

B. He was sent to give life to those who are dead (25-26). Verse 25—“I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God⁷ and those who hear will live.”

Notice Jesus says, “a time is coming *and has now come*.” So this particular resurrection is happening right now. Compare that to verse 28 where He says “a time is coming,” but does *not* say “and has now come.” That resurrection is yet to occur, for in verse 28 He’s talking about the coming physical resurrection when “all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out.”

That’s not what He’s talking about in verse 25. He’s not talking about the resurrection of dead bodies, not primarily at least. He’s talking about the resurrection of dead souls.

In John 4 He talked with a woman who was married five times and was presently living in adultery. She was dead in her sins. But on the day she heard His voice, she started living. And oh, how powerful is His voice! The dead “hear the voice of the Son of God,” and those who hear “will live.” Later Jesus said of them, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me (John 10:27).” He also said in John 18:37, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

That’s why He came, my friend. His Father sent Him to give life to those who are dead.

But you can’t give something you don’t have. How is it that the Son can give this life away? He tells us in verse 26, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.”

That’s interesting. In the Old Testament life comes from the Father. The Father breathes life into man (Gen. 2:7). He is the Giver of life (Job 10:12; 33:4). He is the fountain of life (Ps. 36:9). He shows men the path of life (Ps. 16:11). Moses concludes in Deuteronomy 30:20, “For the LORD is your life.”

So the Father has life in Himself. Every first century Jew knew and believed that. And that’s what makes Jesus’ claim so astounding. The Father, says Jesus, “has granted the Son to have life in himself.”

I have what the Father has. Life. I can give life to the dead. I just gave life to the dead limbs of a paralyzed man, and I can do that with the souls of men, too.

And that’s what He’s done that for us, beloved, if we have heard His voice and believed in Him. If you want to know more about this spiritual resurrection that Christ accomplished, check out Romans 6:4, “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” And Romans 6:11 says, “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

That’s our identity, brothers and sisters. Christ was sent to give life to those who are dead. We were dead, but now we are *alive to God*. But there’s more. Jesus says...

C. He was sent so He could become the judge (27). “And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”

What does Jesus have? Authority to judge. Why does He have that authority? Don’t overlook the word “because.” The relationship between the two statements in verse 27 hinges on that word. “He has given him authority to judge *because* he is the Son of Man.” Why did God the Father entrust His Son with the authority to judge? Jesus says

⁷ This is one of three places in John’s gospel that Jesus refers to Himself as “the Son of God” (see 10:36; 11:4; in 19:7 the Jews say that Jesus used this title).

it's because He is the Son of Man. The fact that He is the Son of Man is what qualifies Him to be judge.

So what does He mean by "Son of Man"?⁸ The title appears over eighty times in the four Gospels, and John uses it twelve times. It comes from Daniel 7:13-14 and in that text it's a messianic title. So when Jesus referred to Himself as the "Son of Man," He was claiming to be the Messiah, and not just that, but specifically claiming to have the Messiah's God-given authority to judge.

But there's something else here, even more basic. He is the Son of *man*. Ponder that. The Son of God became a *man*. That enables Him to accomplish many things, including this one, to judge. Because He is the Son of *man*, He is fully qualified to judge mankind.

Think of judgment day. And think of the excuses sinners might raise. "God, I know I didn't live for You like I should, but You can't blame me. You don't know how hard it is to live in this world, how strong the temptations are, how weak these frail bodies are." But the Son of Man does know. And as you look at His nail-scarred hands, you too will know that all the reasons you've ever given for not obeying God are groundless excuses.

Until this point in John 5 Jesus has piled shocking claim upon shocking claim. Here's yet another. He identifies a fourth objective for coming. He says...

D. He was sent to empty graves (28-29). "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 good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

Job asked the all-important question in Job 14:14, "If a man dies, will he live again?" Here Jesus gives the definitive answer to that question, and it's quite shocking. He says that every man—that's believer and non-believer alike—will be raised from the dead and live again.

Notice His words again, "All who are in their graves." Not *some*, but *all*. "All who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out." What's going to happen to the *all*? They will hear His voice and come out of their graves. Who will come out? *All* will. Every person who has ever lived and died on planet earth will be raised from the dead and live forever.

So does that mean everyone is heading for the same eternal destiny? By no means. Jesus mentions two different groups of people and two very different outcomes on the other side of the resurrection.

Notice what Jesus says about the first group. "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 (28-29)." Did you catch that? Jesus says that...

1. *Some people will rise to live forever.* What people? Those who have *done good*.

Does that mean they'll be raised because they've done good? Is Jesus here teaching salvation by works? No. Elsewhere Jesus makes it crystal clear that a person is saved by faith in Him alone, not by their works (see John 3:15, 16, & 18). Salvation is based on *His* work, not ours, which is why He later said, "I have finished the work (John 17:4)" and "It is finished (John 19:30)."

So our good works don't save us. His good work does that. What then do our works do? They're evidence. Our works are the evidence that we have put our trust in His work.

⁸ In the original there's no definite article. It's literally "because he is a Son of Man." But as William Hendriksen points out, "It is a well known fact that official titles have a tendency to lose the article." p. 203

My friend, if you're thinking, "Well, I know I'm going to heaven. This good works stuff is just optional." Think again. When you look at the passages in the Bible that talk about God's judgment, you see a lot of emphasis on works.

Psalm 62:12 "Surely you will reward each person **according to what he has done.**"

Isaiah 3:10-11 "Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for **what their hands have done.**"

Jeremiah 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, **according to what his deeds deserve.**"

Jeremiah 32:19 "Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and **as his deeds deserve.**"

Matthew 16:27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person **according to what he has done.**"

Revelation 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone **according to what he has done.**" [see also Gal. 6:7-8]

Please don't water this down. The Bible says that God, and specifically that's the Son of Man, will assess our works on Judgment Day. Why? To determine if we've done enough? To see if the good outweighs the bad? No. We're saved by faith, but the most revealing way to determine the quality of a person's faith is to examine his works.

If you really believe, it shows. Anybody can claim to believe in Christ (and about one billion people on the planet make that claim). But claiming something doesn't make it true. How can you tell if the claim is valid? You look at the works.

That's what the Lord will do on Judgment Day.

What about the second group? Some people will arise to live forever. What about the rest? They too will come out of their graves. To face what? Notice the end of verse 29, "And those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." There are two and only two categories of people. Some will rise to live forever.

2. *Everyone else will rise to be eternally condemned.* Picture the scene. Those who do not know Christ will hear Christ's voice, come out of their graves, appear before Him as He sits on His judgment throne, and in that moment they will hear their final sentencing. They will be condemned by the One with nail-scarred hands and cast into the lake of fire.

You say, "Won't the fire consume them?" No. Jesus says they're going to come out of their graves and "rise to be condemned." In other words, they're going to receive resurrection bodies too, a special body that fits them to experience the consequence of a condemnation that will never end.

My friend, I urge you to think about that as you open your presents this week. Why did the Christ-child come? Hear it from His own lips. He says He was sent on a rescue mission. He was sent to give life to those who are dead. He was sent so He could become the judge. He was sent to empty graves. Fifthly...

E. He was sent so He could render judgment (30). "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." We learn three things here about Jesus' judgment.

1. *His judgment is based on what He hears.* "I judge only as I hear," He says. That's true when He makes the judgment call to heal a man on the Sabbath, and when He tells that same man that unless He stops sinning, something worse will happen. He judges on the basis of what He hears from His Father.

2. *His judgment is just.* The Son always draws right and righteous conclusions. He said in John 8:16, “But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.”

3. *His judgment is based on the will of His Father.* That’s what directed His life on earth, and that’s what will direct His verdict on Judgment Day. “I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”

I don’t know if there’s a more terrifying scene in the Bible than Revelation 20:11-15: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Take Inventory: Some questions to ponder...

1. *Have you affirmed the truth about Jesus?* Who is He? He is *the Sent One*. Does your assessment of Jesus agree with the One who sent Him?

2. *Have you received what Jesus came to give?* The Father sent His Son to give those dead in their sins *life*, eternal life. Have you received that gift? Have you responded to the mission that the Christ came to fulfill?

If you have, know this. You have a mission too. Jesus told the disciples in John 20:21, “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” Who is He? The Sent One. Who are we? We too are *sent ones*. Sent to do what? To tell the world what He’s done.

3. *Have you been sharing Jesus with others?* How will they know unless they hear? And how will they hear unless we tell them?