

INTRODUCTION

It's been a tough few months for pop star Ariana Grande when it comes to tattoos. When she and SNL cast member, Pete Davidson, were engaged last year, she had the word "Pete" tattooed on her ring finger. After they split up she had it covered with a black heart. A little over a week ago Ariana posted a picture on Instagram of a new tattoo on her hand that she thought said, "Seven Rings" in Japanese. That's the name of her latest hit single. Instead, everybody who could actually read Japanese posted that the tattoo really said, "Barbeque grill." Okay, so just last week, she went back in and had another character added to "fix" it. But, alas, now her hand tattoo says, "Barbeque finger." Stand by: If you follow her on Instagram, I predict that Ariana, who is vegan, will fix it, even it takes her whole hand to do it.

At least her tat is in Japanese. Someone who didn't use spell check before they had their tattoo done meant for it to say, "Regret Nothing." But the word "nothing" is misspelled. The letter "t" is missing so it says, "Regret Nohing." So I wonder, did they regret getting that one?

There's another strategy to correct a bad tattoo. There is a lady in Sweden who had the names of her two children intertwined on a tattoo on her arm. The tattoo artist misspelled her son, Kevin's name. It read Kelvin, instead of Kevin. So instead of having the tattoo redone, she just had the name of her son legally changed from Kevin to Kelvin.

So, how do I make a transition from this to the Bible? Well according to Isaiah 49:16, the Creator of the Universe loves you so much that He has tattooed your name on the palm of His hand. God says, "See I have engraved you in the palm of my hand."

The title of this message is, "Who is Equal to God?" In this passage we are going to see that Jesus is God. Even His enemies understood this. They wanted to kill Him because He made Himself equal to God.

John 5:16-23 NIV. 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.

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. 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. 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.

This is the follow-up from the miracle we studied last week. Jesus appeared at the Pool of Bethesda and healed a man who was lame. He told him to pick up his bed and walk. The religious mafia police tried to arrest the guy for carrying his mat on the Sabbath Day. He told them he was just doing what Jesus had told him to do. So the religious police don't prosecute the healed man, instead they start to persecute Jesus. This is the beginning record of their opposition to Jesus—and it will last until they finally succeed in nailing Him to a cross.

The Jewish leaders had taken a simple commandment, Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy, and they had added hundreds of minute rules through the oral law and the Talmud. What God had intended as a Sabbath blessing they had turned into a Sabbath burden. Their man-made rules covered 39 categories of things that were (and still are) forbidden on the Sabbath. To give you an idea here are the first ten categories of forbidden things: Carrying, burning, extinguishing, finishing, writing, erasing, cooking, washing, sewing, tearing. You get the idea; I'm not making this up. Because tearing is prohibited religious Jews can't tear toilet paper from Friday night until Saturday night so they have pre-torn sheets of toilet paper.

During His ministry, Jesus intentionally challenged these religious rules. He even said they had replaced the Word of God with the traditions of man. In addition to this man, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. He delivered a man from demons and the Sabbath. And He defended His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath Day. In Luke 6 Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." And then He said, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Now you can understand WHY these people wanted to kill Jesus.

It says in John 5:18 that they wanted to kill Jesus not only because He broke the Sabbath, but that He made Himself equal to God. He said, "MY FATHER is always working..." Maybe you missed that, but they considered it blasphemy for someone to say, "God is MY Father." It was okay to say, "Our Father" but not, "My father." And Jesus shocked them at other times because He called God, "Abba." This would have been like Jesus calling God, "My dad." Or "My papa."

There is a good reason Jesus claimed to be equal with God. He IS God. The night before Jesus was crucified, Philip said, "Lord, just show us the Father and that's enough for us." Jesus said, "Philip, you've been with me three years and you still don't get it? When you see me, you see the Father. I'm in the Father and the Father is in me." (John 14:8-10)

Throughout the rest of the New Testament we are confronted with the truth that Jesus is God. When Thomas saw the risen Christ, he said, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28 CSB) When Titus was writing about the second coming he wrote, "While we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13 CEB) Paul wrote in Colossians that Jesus is "The image of the invisible God." And that "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him." (Colossians 1:15 NIV) And that the "Entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ." (Colossians 2:9 CSB)

Jesus not only made the radical claim to be Lord over the Sabbath and that He was equal to God. But He also made a radical claim that reveals the secret of a surrendered life. In verse 19 He said, "Very truly I tell you ..." That's a formula Jesus often used when He was about to say something super profound. If you grew up reading the King James version like I did, it says, "Verily, verily I say unto you." In the original language it is actually, "Amen, amen I say to you." Jesus used that formula thirty-nine times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Everything Jesus said was profound. But whenever He said, "Amen, amen" or "Very truly I tell you" you should pay close attention, because what follows is not just profound—it is *super* profound.

In these verses Jesus revealed how He lived His life in the flesh in relation to His Father. There are three important principles to understand how to live a life that is surrendered to God. As we explore these three principles, we'll examine what Jesus said, and what it means to each of us.

**1. Jesus said, "The Son can do nothing by himself."
Here's what it means to me: I can do nothing on my own.**

Jesus often spoke about himself in the third person. For instance, in Luke 19:10 CSB Jesus said, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost." He could have said, "I came to seek and to save the lost." And in John 5 Jesus could have said, "I can do nothing. I only do what I see my Father doing."

This is an amazing claim. Jesus was God in the flesh. He was the Creator of the heavens and the earth. But while He was living in human flesh, He made himself submissive to His Father. He refused to do anything in the strength of His human flesh. My friend Ron Dunn talked about this passage. He said when Jesus said He did NOTHING without His Father, He meant it. There was a time when Jesus did something as mundane as spitting in the dirt to make clay to put on the eyes of a blind man. Ron said that Jesus didn't even spit without being guided by His Father.

And Jesus repeated this truth in John 15. He said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me." (John 15:5 CSB)

Let's be honest. We CAN do things in our own strength. You can come to church in your own strength, you can read your Bible in your own strength. You can give money to God in your own strength. You can teach a Bible Study in your own power. But Jesus was saying in the final accounting, that which we do on our own counts as ZERO in Heaven's accounting system.

So, it is a conscious choice we must make to NOT serve God in our own strength. It's like this. If you gave me a .38 caliber pistol and said, "Shoot Lanny Bridges." I would say, "I CAN'T shoot Lanny!" That doesn't mean I'm not physically able to take the gun and pull the trigger. It means that I can't shoot him because he's my brother and I love him.

In the same way, if we are going to experience life, we must have the attitude that I can do nothing without the power of God working in me.

**2. Then Jesus said, "He can do only what he sees his Father doing."
Here's what it means to me: I can see what God is doing in the world.**

Many times Christians ask me, "How can I find God's will for my life?" That's a good question, but it's not the best question. The better question is, "What is God's will?" We sometimes think that finding God's will is like playing Divine hide 'n seek. We think God has hidden His will for us and we have to search for it. Instead we should be looking around to see what God is doing and then join Him.

For many years I totally misunderstood what Jesus was saying here. He said, "What I see my Father doing, that's what I do." I thought Jesus had some kind of supernatural edge that allowed Him to look into Heaven to see what God was doing. And I thought, "It's too bad I can't look into Heaven and see what God is doing." But then I came to see that Jesus wasn't talking about some kind of supernatural sight; He just looked around like we can to see where God is working.

In 1990, Henry Blackaby wrote a bible study called *Experiencing God*. In the early 1990s Henry came to speak at our church when we were still meeting over in the chapel. Hundreds of our members have gone through the study. Worldwide, the study has sold over five million copies in 47 languages. Henry always insisted that the study doesn't change your life, but it is *Experiencing the God of Heaven who changes your life*. There are several foundational truths in that study that teach us how to walk with God. The first is that God is pursuing a continuing love relationship with each one of us that is real and personal. Another of the foundational truths is based upon our passage today. God is always working around us, and He invites us to join Him in His work.

Here's how Henry Blackaby expressed it: "Right now, God is working all around you. People don't ask questions about spiritual matters unless God is at work in their lives. When you see someone seeking God or asking questions about Christianity, you are witnessing God at work." (*Experiencing God*)

God is at work all around you. He's working in your family, your neighborhood, your community, and your school and workplace.

We should pray, "Lord, open my eyes to SEE what You are doing, and then help me to have the courage to join You in what You are already doing."

Let me illustrate this from the Old Testament. 3600 years ago, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and they cried out to God to be delivered from slavery. God was at work to deliver them, and He invited Moses to join Him in what He was already doing. The only reason we even know

about a character named Moses is because He joined God in delivering them. Had Moses said, "No way, Yahweh" God would have still delivered them, using someone else.

In the same way, God is at work here locally and around the world reconciling sinners to Himself. He is asking each one of us to join Him in what He is already doing.

Sometimes we make plans and then we say, "Please God, bless our plans." Instead, if we see what God is already doing, we don't have to ask Him to bless it, He's already blessing it!

The first principle is "I can do nothing on my own." The second principle is "I can see what God is doing in the world."

3. Jesus said, "He will show him even greater works than these." The third principle is: Jesus living in me can accomplish great things!

Let's get our pronouns correct. Jesus said, "He (that's the Father) will show him (Jesus) even greater things. We all know Jesus performed miracles and mighty acts. So how could God ever do greater works than Jesus was doing?"

When Jesus was walking on planet earth, He could only be in one place at a time. When He was turning water into wine in Cana, He couldn't be in Jerusalem healing the lame man at the pool.

Jesus told the disciples that after the cross and the resurrection, He was going to leave them and return to His Father. But He was going to send the Holy Spirit to live IN His disciples and the Holy Spirit was going to do might works through them.

Here's what He said the night before the cross. "Truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father...And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth...you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you." (John 14:12, 16-17 CSB)

That's a huge difference. He said, I've been WITH you, but the Holy Spirit will be IN you."

There is one God, but He expresses Himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In these passages where Jesus talks about the coming of the Holy Spirit, He freely interchanges the roles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He says, "I will ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit." Then He said, "I will send you the Holy Spirit." Then He said, "I won't leave you alone, I will come to you." He wasn't confused. The Holy Spirit living in me can accomplish great things. God didn't say, "Here's the Christian life, now live it." He said, "I will send my Holy Spirit to live in you to represent the personality of Jesus."

So many Christians are frustrated and feeble because they are trying so hard to imitate Jesus. You don't have to imitate Jesus, you just have to surrender to His Lordship and let Him live His life in and through you. This is the most practical, important truth that I have ever learned in my life.

I'm always looking for ways to help you understand how the Holy Spirit lives in you. I usually drink coffee in the morning, but a few weeks ago, I was in a restaurant for breakfast and I ordered a cup of hot tea. The server brought a cup of hot water with a tea bag on the saucer beside the cup. I unwrapped the tea bag and started dipping it into the hot water. In that moment, the power of that tea was infused into the water and it changed it. Within a few minutes, the plain, tasteless water was transformed into something totally different. It looked, smelled and tasted differently. Just having the tea bag beside the cup of water didn't change anything. It was only when it was in the water that it infused it. I was reminded that I am totally incapable of reproducing the life of Jesus in my personality. In order to live the Christian life, His life and power has to be infused into my personality. When you put a tea bag in hot water, you don't even call it water any more. You call it tea.

And when Jesus lives in you, you aren't just living a natural life anymore, you are living a supernatural life. That's the miracle of the Christian life. You see, the Christian life is not an experience, or set of principles. It is a Person and His name is Jesus. He was no ordinary man. Let me tell you about him.

CONCLUSION

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another small village and worked in a carpenter's shop until He was thirty. For three years, He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness. His only credentials were His character.

While He was still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends all ran away. One of them turned Him over to be arrested. Another one denied Him. He went through the mockery of a trial then they nailed to a cross between two thieves. While He was dying, the soldiers gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth—His coat. When He died, they laid him in a borrowed grave. After three days, God raised Him from the dead.

Twenty long centuries have come and gone, and today He stands as the central figure of the human race. All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever set sail, all the parliaments that have sat, and all the kings who have ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one solitary man. Jesus Christ, the man who was equal to God.

OUTLINE

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I can do nothing on my own.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me." *John 15:5 CSB*

2. *"He can do only what he sees his Father doing."*

I can see what God is doing in the world.

"Right now, God is working all around you. People don't ask questions about spiritual matters unless God is at work in their lives. When you see someone seeking God or asking questions about Christianity, you are witnessing God at work." (Henry Blakaby, *Experiencing God*)

3. *"He will show him even greater works than these."*

Jesus living in me can accomplish great things!

"Truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father...And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth...you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you." *John 14:12, 16-17 CSB*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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