

The Day is Coming!

I. When Jesus will judge all people

II. When Jesus will give life to those who hear his voice

¹⁹Jesus 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. ²⁰For 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. ²¹For 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. ²²Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³that 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. 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. ²⁵Very 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. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and 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. ³⁰By 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.

Tell me, if you were to die tonight, do you know for sure where you would go? That's a question I posed to some students at FVL this week. Each year I have the opportunity to take some of the seniors through a law and gospel presentation sometimes referred to as God's Great Exchange. It's a simple way of sharing the basic truths of the Christian faith with someone who doesn't really know what the Bible says. And that whole evangelism presentation begins with a question that is designed to kind of cut to the chase, to uncover where that other person is in his or her spiritual life, to reveal where they think they stand with God. And so we ask that other person, "If you die tonight, do you know for sure where you are going?" In other words, do you think you're going up or down? And how confident are you in that destination?

You realize, a lot of people haven't given much thought to questions like those. In many cases, it makes them feel uncomfortable, uneasy, even afraid. They don't like to think about what's going to happen to them when they die. And because of that, more and more people are simply denying that anything will happen to them after they die. They deny that there is any kind of life after death. Actually, this is not a new idea. 2000 years ago the Greek Epicureans held to the belief that there was nothing after death. When the Apostle Paul preached to the Greeks in Athens about the resurrection of the body, the crowds sneered at him.

In more recent times you have people like John Lennon singing what? "*Imagine there's no Heaven, it's easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky.*" Or you think about the world-renowned physicist, Stephen Hawking who said, and I quote, "*Heaven is a fairy story for people who are afraid of the dark.*" These are ideas that are continuing to permeate our society. In a recent survey of Americans, it was revealed that only 72% of Americans believe in heaven

(defined as a place where people who have lived good lives are eternally rewarded). And less than 60% of Americans believe in a place called hell. You realize what that means? It means that there are a whole lot of people, millions of people, including some that you and I know and love, who deny that one day they will be held accountable by God. There will be no final Day of Reckoning. There will be no standing before God on his throne. No Last Judgment.

But, you see, that's why we are here today, on this second last week of the church year, the day the Christian church has historically used to focus on what God has to say about the Last Judgment. We're here to not only let God set the record straight about what is coming in the future, but also to allow us to reflect on how that event impacts our hearts and lives today. Our theme for today is simply this:

The Day is Coming!

I. The day when Jesus will judge all people

II. The day when Jesus will give life to those who hear his voice

Here in our text, Jesus gives his listeners, then and now, a little glimpse of what is to come. He puts it this way in John 5:28, *“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice (namely, the voice of the Son of God) and come out”* In other words, Jesus is saying that the day is coming when Jesus is going to call out of the grave the bodies of everyone who ever lived, whether they are a believer or an unbeliever, whether their bodies were embalmed or cremated, whether they were carefully lowered into the ground or blown apart by a nuclear bomb or drowned at the bottom of the sea. All these bodies which at the moment of death were separated from their souls (because that's what death is – the separation of soul and body. Remember, Jesus said, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* And then he breathed his last. His soul left his body and he died.) Well, on the Last Day, all those soulless bodies will be reconstituted. God, in effect will reform them, just like he did with Adam's body from the dust of the earth. And God will then put their souls back into those bodies. Don't worry, God won't mix any bodies up. You'll get your body. I'll get my body. Julius Caesar will get his body. When the voice of God calls, they'll all be raised from the dead.

In fact, isn't that exactly what the Lord revealed to the prophet Daniel some 500 years before Jesus was born? God told Daniel, *“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”* (Daniel 12:2) With those words, God is revealing why he will raise all the dead, namely, so that they can be publicly judged. Isn't that right? The Bible says that when a person dies, his soul is immediately judged. That soul immediately goes to heaven or to hell. Remember what Jesus said to the thief on the cross? *“Today, you will be with me in Paradise.”* In other words, your soul will be immediately with me in heaven. But you might call that a private judgment. When a person dies, nobody else except God himself, knows for sure whether that person went to heaven or hell. But on the Last Day, when souls and bodies are reunited, there will be a public judgment for all mankind to see.

Isn't that the event that Jesus describes in Matthew 25? *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him.”* (Matthew 25:31) In this case, it's not only all the people whom Jesus raised from their graves. It's also all the people who are still living at the moment of Jesus' return. All mankind, both those who are dead and those who never died, will be publicly judged. Jesus says that *“he will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”* (Matthew 25:32-33) Then Judge Jesus will hand down a verdict. To those on his right he will say, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the*

creation of the world. In other words, “Heaven is yours to enjoy for both soul and body.” And to those on his left, Jesus will say, “*Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*” (Matthew 25:41) In other words, “To hell with you.”

Now, the real question is, I mean, the truly critical question is, how did Jesus decide who's going to heaven and who's going to hell? If you're familiar with the account of the sheep and the goats, you remember that Jesus pointed to all the good things that people going to heaven did. They fed him, clothed him, came to visit him in prison—all the same things that the people going to hell didn't do. All of which has led a lot of people to conclude, “There you have it. God says, ‘If you're good, you go to heaven. If you're bad, you go to hell.’” Heaven is the reward for godly behavior and hell is the punishment for sinful behavior. In fact, they might even point to a couple other Bible passages that appear to say the same thing. For example, 2nd Corinthians 5 verse 10 says “*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.*” In fact, doesn't Jesus himself make a similar statement here in our text? “*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.*” (John 5:29)

Now you realize, at first glance, all those passages are perfectly logical. It makes great sense. It's what we all feel. Good people should be rewarded and evil people should be punished. We all have a desire to see justice carried out. We all want people to get what they deserve, whether good or bad. But what if the people who are bad, the people who have done evil in their lives—what if those people are you and me? The Bible says, *There is no one who does good, not even one* (Romans 3:12). And the Bible tells us what the penalty for such bad behavior is. *The wages of sin is death.* (Romans 6:23) That means that the only thing that sinners like you and me have earned from a just and holy judge is eternal separation from God. Because of our selfish desires and our godless actions, God has every right on the Last Day to call us out of the grave to be condemned. You might say that, by nature, we're all headed for a resurrection to condemnation!

Unless, of course, Jesus performs a little different kind of resurrection first. A resurrection that occurs not on the Day when Jesus will judge all people. But rather, II. On the Day that Jesus will give life to those who hear his voice.

Here in our text Jesus talks about that day when he says, “*Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.*” (John 5:25) What day is Jesus referring to there? Well, notice that Jesus says it is a time that is coming, and yet it has already come. In other words, it's not one date in the future. It's something that has been going on for some time. And exactly what is it that has been going on for some time? Jesus said that the dead are hearing the voice of the Son of Man and they are living. Now one could take that to mean that when Jesus spoke to dead people like Lazarus or Jairus' daughter, they came back to life. That's certainly true.

But the fact is, with these words, Jesus is referring to much more than raising up people who were physically dead. He's talking about raising people who are spiritually dead. People who are dead in their sins. People who by nature are doomed to eternal condemnation. He's talking about people just like you and me. And yet, even though we were all once condemned to die, even though we were all, in effect, spiritual corpses, what promise did Jesus make to us? Right here in our text. John 5 verse 24, Jesus says, “*Very truly I tell you, (literally, amen and amen) 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.*”

Think about that a minute. Whoever hears my words. In other words, whoever listens to what Jesus has to say about who he is and what he's done to rescue us from our sins. Whoever trusts that the Father is the one who sent Jesus to cover us with his righteousness and make us right in God's eyes. Whoever believes that our standing with God is dependent not on what we do for God, but what he has done for us, in Christ. That person, Jesus says, already "has eternal life". Notice, the present tense there. For believers in Christ, eternal life is not merely something way off in the future. It's something you already in are enjoying right now. You are no longer dead in your sins. You are now alive in Christ. You live as a precious as a child of God right now. You are no longer dead to God. You are alive! How did Jesus put it? "*You have crossed over from Death to life.*"

So what does all this mean for your life and mine today? It means three things. First, it means that now that Jesus has made you alive through his word, he's giving you the ability to do things that are pleasing to him. Remember what Jesus said? "*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.*" (John 15:5) On Judgment Day, Jesus is going to point to that good fruit as evidence of the new life that he gave you.

Second, it means that Judgment Day is not something you need to fear or downplay or deny all together. Judgment Day will mark the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus made to you in John 6:40, namely, "*Everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.*" And finally it means that you have an answer for the question, "So, if you die tonight, do you know for sure where you are going?" Your answer can be the same as my answer. And that's, "Yes, by the grace of God alone, through faith in Jesus alone, as God has promised in Scripture alone, my last day on earth will be my first day of forever with God in heaven. And that, dear believers, will be the greatest day of my life—and yours too! Amen.