

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 God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And 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 ²⁹ and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

No Surprise Ending!

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come.

Revelation 1:4b

I have three phrases for you to listen to, and I want you to see if you can figure out what all three of these phrases have in common. Alright, here goes: (1) “*Talitha koum!*” (2) “*Lazarus, come out!*” (3) “*Young man, I say to you, get up!*”? If you’re still not sure, perhaps it’ll help if I tell you that “*talitha koum*” means “*Little girl, I say to you, get up!*” These are the three times we know of that Jesus raised people from the dead simply by the power of his voice. He spoke to them, and even though they were dead, they heard him, and became alive, and got up--all by the power of his voice! Part of last week’s sermon lesson were these words, “**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**” (John 5:21). Today we take under consideration the five verses that follow last week’s lesson. As we do, we will see how the power of Jesus’ voice will come into play on the great Day of Judgment and also how it does so every day.



When Jesus spoke about the end of the world, he made things unmistakably clear. He made no bones about the fact that all people who have formerly died will somehow be raised to life on that day. He did not mince any of his words about some rising to live and others rising to be condemned to hell. And he made it abundantly clear that he would be the Judge right there at the center of it all. How did most people react when he said these things? They hated him for it. They tried all the harder to kill him because of it. Truth be told, they had no excuse not to take Jesus at his word. And they will have no reason to be surprised when that Day does come and everything he said comes true. Why not? They heard all about it.

“I tell you the truth, 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” (5:25). Yes, on Judgment Day, all those who have died will hear Jesus’ voice and they will come out of the graves either to eternal life or eternal torment. But did you notice that Jesus said a time is coming *and has now come*? Wait a minute: the dead already are hearing the voice of Jesus? How is that? Well, he could be talking about Lazarus, Jairus’ daughter, and the widow’s son, all whom he raised to life by the sound of his voice. But it seems more likely that Jesus is actually talking about people who are *spiritually* dead, who hear his voice and become alive spiritually. Doesn’t that happen every day when people who are born spiritually dead, like we all are, hear the gospel and *believe* it...or for the baby who hears the voice of Jesus as the baptismal water comes into contact with their head? So it seems to be that Jesus, is masterfully weaving together two resurrections: the one that will take place on Judgment Day--a physical, bodily resurrection, and the

resurrection that happens on a daily basis when spiritually dead people are made alive by Jesus' voice heard in the gospel.

But like those infuriated Jews who wanted to kill Jesus, many people will refuse to believe even when they hear the voice of God in his Word...and so they will stay dead. They will go on about their lives in denial and ignorance. They themselves are entirely to blame that they don't hear and believe and live. They have no excuse *not* to take Jesus at his word. And they will have no reason to be surprised when that Day comes and everything Jesus said comes true, and that he is who he said he was. On that Day the blame for their condemnation will fall squarely on their own spiritually dead shoulders. And it will be broadcasted for all to hear, what the difference is between the spiritually dead and the spiritually alive. **“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned”** (5:29).

So what difference between the spiritually dead and spiritually alive will be put on display that day? At first reading it seems that the do-gooders will be commended to heaven and the evil-doers condemned to hell. But how can this be? Isn't Christianity a religion based on faith and not works? Isn't it the only faith-based religion? How can Jesus say **“those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned”**? A closer look shows us that those two words which are translated “done,” are not the same words. The *doing* word used for the good things is just the standard, simple word for doing something, performing some act. But the word translated “those who have *done* evil” is a word which emphasizes doing something intentionally. It is an evil that is not just *done*, but *practiced*. To practice evil is to work at it, to relish and cherish it and have no desire to be rid of it. People that practice evil as Jesus describes it here may even be members of Christian congregations who during their lives came to church and heard the voice of Jesus in Word and Sacraments, but who embraced sin by living the way *they* wanted to live--that is without repentance. It doesn't matter how many good deeds these people appeared to do. Without the heart of repentance that comes from faith, all those good deeds are filthy rags to God. As the writer to the Hebrews says it, *“without faith it is impossible to please God”* (11:6). So we can see how those who practice evil with lives of impenitence, will rise to be condemned on the great Day of Judgment.

But that still doesn't fully resolve the issue. How can Jesus *commend* the other people on Judgment Day for their good deeds when we know that our good deeds can't earn us anything before God? We know that we can't make God love us any more than he does by the good things we do. We know that there is not a single good thing we do on any day that is not still tainted with sin. Sin infests the whole lot of it. Not a single one of my good deeds can stand up against the scrutiny of God's demand for perfection! And come to think of it, sometimes can get so puffed up by the subtle lull of spiritual arrogance that I actually convince myself that I'm pretty good. *“At least I'm one of the good ones who doesn't do such-and-such and what-have-you.”* We would never presume to say we were in any way a *better* person than someone else, but we certainly have thought it--and likely without even realizing it! Add that evil thought to all the others we'd be horrified to let anyone else in on, and you've got yourself sufficient proof that our little good deeds earn us nothing before God our Judge. We cannot perform a single good thing without sin being part and parcel.

But you know what: this fact makes God's perspective of our good works all the more wonderful. The truth is, God does see our good works as just that--good! Maybe you've heard it said about someone before that “she sees the world through rose-colored glasses,” meaning that that person is optimistic about everything, perhaps even to a fault. Could we say that God looks at us through rose-colored glasses? Maybe we could. But it's not that God is ignoring the sin that pollutes even our best works. It's not as if God is simply saying, *“that OK, don't worry about it.”* No, the rose-colored glasses through

which God looks are rose-colored because they are stained with the blood of Jesus. His blood was shed when it should've been ours. As our perfect High Priest, his blood given in death was able to substitute for all the guilt stockpiled by the world. As our second lesson says, **“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”** (Hebrews 10:11-12). So on Judgment Day, and for that matter everyday, God will look down to see the works you do for him and for others, and all he will see is good. Because the blood of his Son filters out the sin tinge around everything we do.

How can Jesus' blood do this? Our lesson speaks to that too. **“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man”** (5:26-27). As the Son of Man, Jesus was our perfect substitute, our perfect Savior, our perfect Judge. He was both God and man. He had *life* in himself and the *authority* to give it to us.

We need not be surprised at the things Jesus says about himself or about the Day of Judgment. We know what will happen on that day. We know what part he will play in it all. We know that all the dead will come out of their graves, believers and unbelievers, at the sound of his voice. Those who embraced a life of self-willed impenitence will be forcibly compelled to stand on Jesus' left to have their evil deeds exposed for all to see. And then, they will hear the voice of Jesus one last time, **“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”** (Matthew 25:41).

But we will stand with all the other believers on the Savior's right. That includes all those Christians we now call *the saints triumphant*--those who have left this earthly pilgrimage for the promised land of heaven. The almighty God who created their bodies will raise them up and restore them to be like new, to be like the glorified body of Jesus, fit for eternity. And then we too will hear the voice of Jesus as if we're hearing it for the very first time, as he says to us, **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”** (Matthew 25:34). There will be no shame for us who stand on the right, even though our deeds will be exposed for all to see. Because when God brings these deeds to light, we will hear his voice say, *“Well done, good and faithful servant!”* (Matthew 25:23).

What a wonderful day that will be! It will be no surprise ending for those who have heard the voice of Jesus and believed. Amen.



May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20-21