

John 5:25-29

Third Sunday of End Time: Saints Triumphant
November 14, 2021

Does God want us to go through life sour-faced and grim? I don't think so. He has lifted from us our biggest burden, that of sin. Its removal lightens all the other loads that we bear, plus he offers to help us carry them. He also provides Christian friends to support and assist. Take a look at books of the Bible like Psalms, Isaiah or St. Paul's letter to the Philippians and note how many times words like joy and rejoice appear. Christians are happy people.

Jesus was not a gloomy Gus when he was on this earth either. In fact, once he commented that some people rejected him because he partook of life's pleasures like eating and drinking. Of course, there are limitations on what is right and good and wholesome. Actually such restraints contribute to satisfaction and pleasure. With that understanding we encourage

ENJOY LIFE

- I. Life now through the Word
- II. Life forever in heaven

The life which the Savior provides is needed, as we start out dead. I'm speaking about being dead spiritually. The Bible says we were dead in transgressions and sins. All of us were born that way. We inherited the sinful condition from our parents and we pass it on our children. It shows in the sinful actions, sinful speech and sinful thoughts which fill our every day. That spiritual deadness left us with a predicament. We did not love God and could not. That plight does not matter to everybody. Some are so insensitive to right and wrong that they relish wallowing in evil. Even if we recognized the misery of our natural condition, we were powerless to do anything about it.

There is no joy in sin. Satan wants us to think there is. He portrays sin as being fun, as the experience of real freedom. But is just isn't so. Sin boomerangs. It comes back with consequences and they aren't pleasant. There can be penalties imposed by earthly authorities, whether they are in the government, the family or the school. We might get hurt. We harm relationships with others when we sin against them. We have a guilty conscience. Sin is slavery, for we can do nothing but sin. It brings misery in this life and finally, death eternally.

Life is not self-generated. It comes by God's power. If we think of physical life we recognize he implanted it in seeds, he gave the ability to animals to produce succeeding generations and he did the same for us humans. Spiritually Jesus brings life. "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." We hear his voice in his Word and come to life. Its gospel message tells us we have been forgiven for our many sins. Jesus paid for them all. He came to our world and won that forgiveness when he gave his life on the cross. The burden has been lifted from us. We have peace with God. We do not need to fear his punishment. The thoughts of judgment which predominate this End Time season do not fill us with terror. St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Rather we know we will hear his invitation to join him in heaven.

The life which Jesus spoke of comes by the power of God. It flows from the Father to the Son to us. They are one. These words of Jesus came in response to objections from his opponents about being true God and one with the Father. He shows his divine power in the call to faith which awakens hearts dead in sin and kindles faith in them. He grants spiritual life.

Knowing Jesus in faith, having spiritual life, is a blessing to us now on earth. It gives us a purpose for each day. We live to glorify God. We have stability for we are based on a firm foundation that is reliable and unshaken even amidst the turmoil and trouble that surrounds us in a sinful world. We have joy to illuminate even the darkest day. Our Savior is at our side and in our heart. We can enjoy life.

Where physical life exists it is evident. There is a pulse and breathing and movement. The same is true of spiritual life. It shows. In his letter to the Romans we hear, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." A living faith is demonstrated in actions. We live for God and not for ourselves. He takes over the number one place in our lives. When we face choices, we ask what his will is, not what do I like or what makes sense to me. We strive to follow his will and his ways as revealed in his Word. Our actions aim to glorify him and to serve our neighbor.

God calls you to that life. His call comes now, in your lifetime. That is our time of grace, when we can come to know our Savior. Don't delay. Hear his voice and believe in Jesus Christ. Have the peace and joy he brings. Enjoy life through the Word and live it to the fullest.

II.

Keep listening because another call is coming. It is the call to life forever in heaven. Jesus told of the resurrection that will occur on the Last Day for everyone. "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." That will happen no matter where our grave is or how we died. It is true whether our body was buried or cremated or blown to bits and never recovered. When the voice of Jesus sounds, we will return to life. This call, unlike the call to faith, cannot be rejected. No one will be absent.

Such a happening takes power—not just any power, but divine power. Only the Lord controls matters of life and death. Jesus possesses such power. He showed it by rising personally from death. He is true God.

This return to life is for eternity. Believers rise to live, he noted. We will have eternal life in heaven. And what a life it is! We will be in the presence of God. We will be surrounded by all our fellow believers. That's the uplifting truth that this Saints Triumphant Sunday reminds us of. Don't you look forward to it? There will be those heroes of faith that we have met in the Bible. We will see people we have learned of from history. There will be other believing family members that we will meet for a joyful reunion. And there will be a host of others from all over the world. Together we will really fulfill the purpose for which God made us as we will serve the Lord in holiness. All of this will happen in a place of beauty beyond compare. We will enjoy the absence of sin, sadness, pain and sickness.

Jesus said that the ones receiving eternal life are "those who have done good." Whoops, we may panic, that's not me. I know sins pop up daily in my life. As much as I detest it, they dog me all

the time I walk this earth. Our Savior was not changing his teaching on the way of obtaining salvation. The basis of his judgment was clear in words he spoke to Nicodemus just two chapters earlier. "Whoever believes in him 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." The determining factor is the presence or absence of faith. Believers are saved and receive the gift of heaven. Doing good is doing God's will, which Jesus also explained as looking to the Son and believing in him. Faith, however, is not a visible quality. While God reads the heart, we cannot. Faith does show itself as we noted earlier. Many fruits of faith are seen. There are acts of love for God and others. As the Bible says, "We love because he first loved us." We love God and we love the people who inhabit this planet with us. In describing the scene on Judgment Day Jesus pointed to deeds that reveal our faith, actions like feeding the hungry, visiting prisoners and welcoming strangers. "Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me," he explained. They're not all flashy deeds that make the headlines, but they do express the love and kindness that fills the Christian's heart in response to the love Jesus has for us.

With unbelievers it is just the opposite. They have done evil. Their sins all remain on their record because they reject Christ's forgiveness. Sins are not just heinous crimes like murder, acts of violence or abuse. They include also arrogance, sinful pride and boasting. There are impure desires that no one sees. And sin is not just what is labeled as bad. Some deeds may be admired. They can be great feats, even ones that are helpful to many people. They need to come from a heart that is right with the Lord. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Those unbelievers will also rise, but they will rise to be condemned. They come from death to return to death. They will be judged and found guilty. That verdict means spending eternity in hell where the suffering never ends. There is no hope, nothing to look forward to except more suffering. People will be filled with despair. Scripture speaks of gnashing of teeth because of the pain experienced.

That result comes not because Jesus did not love them. They are part of the world he died for. They will be in hell by their own fault. What a tragedy!

Obviously we know which scene we want to be part of, and that is the heavenly one. We want to enjoy the life Jesus won and prepared for us. He gives it to you by faith. So be and remain in faith. Feed your faith by listening to his voice. Exercise that faith as you put it into practice. Grow in faith. Then you will be ready for the Last Day. Seeing the alternative also moves us to share the powerful Word which calls to life. We want no one to be lost eternally. Proclaim God's message broadly and confidently.

The importance of the Word stands out in all of this. It is the source of our spiritual life, our strength for that life and the assurance that eternal life is ours. As the world continues its march to the end, keep in tune with the Word and enjoy life. Find fulfillment in serving God and others and anticipate your eternal victory in heaven, where you will be a saint triumphant.