

November 17, 2024

John 5:25-29

Are you going to let him get away with that? If anyone here has had the privilege of being the oldest child in the family, you know what it's like to say that. Parents are sometimes a little tougher on the oldest and then mellow out as the other children grow up. With four younger siblings in the house, I constantly was asking this in my mind, "Really, Mom?" "You're letting her get those kinds of grades. You're letting him go hang out with his friends when he hasn't done his chores? You're letting them eat that? That's not fair! I never got to do that!" Maybe, maybe not. But this question isn't simply the cry of oldest children. Everyone says it! "Really, ref? You're going to let him get away with that? If we were on offense that'd be a holding call." "Really, officer? The guy in front of me was going way faster than me!" "Really God? You're going to let those soldiers get away with that? You're going to let that sleazy politician get away with that? You're going to let her talk like that? You're going to let that church, that pastor speak about you like that? You're going to let that abusive husband, that neglecting parent, that drug dealer, that cheater, that liar get away with that?" If you've ever looked and thought, "Really, they get away with this? That's not fair," then Jesus has a message for you today: **"Expect Judgment." 1. Remember his grace. 2. Trust his justice."**

1. Remember His Grace. In John chapter 5, Jesus had just healed a lame man on the Sabbath day, and when the man took up his mat and began to walk home, the Pharisees stopped him and said, "you can't do that, because you are carrying something, and that's technically work- you can't do that on the Sabbath!" And the man told them that Jesus did it, and they start debating with Jesus and Jesus doesn't apologize- in fact, quite the opposite. He openly claims to be the Son of God, and therefore equal to God, and goes as far as to claim that those who hear his voice and believe what he teaches will be saved from eternal death. That's a big claim! And Jesus takes a step further and says what we see here- a time is coming, and in fact is now here- where the dead will hear his voice and come to life. But wait- the time is here? What's he talking about? He's talking about what Revelation 20 calls the "first resurrection." The Bible teaches that all people are inherently sinful and lost and spiritually *dead*. The human being by nature has no desire for God's ways, only rebels, only runs away from God and none of us has in ourselves the ability to believe or trust in God- we are all spiritual dead from birth, and therefore unable to save ourselves or make ourselves good enough to be with God, or to even want to be. But Jesus says, "I can change that with the sound of my voice. My truth. My preaching. My message." That is what brings a spiritual dead sinner into someone who trusts and believes in God and is therefore alive. Those who believe in Jesus, believe what he says, they are alive and saved and holy and perfect before God. Going to heaven, being able to stand in front of God completely perfect and holy, is not gained by living the right way, but hearing and believing what Jesus says.

Jesus then says, just like the God the Father and God the Son, Jesus, are both eternal and have life in themselves- I don't- my life came from my parents and their life from their parents, Jesus has life in himself. He is eternal along with God the Father- he had no beginning- he existed before time existed. In the same way, he has authority to judge the world and decide who gets punished with what- for he's a Son of Man. That's an interesting phrase, "a son of man," which is a Jewish way of saying, "a human being." Jesus is the true God of the universe and he became a human being. Why does he say that? Because we were all dead in our sin, hopelessly damned and destined for Hell, and God decided that he wanted you, even while you did nothing to deserve anything from him. So Jesus, true God, came and became a human being to be the perfect human being that you and I could never be, and then to face the wrath of Hell and God's perfect justice for all of our sins, so that we could be forgiven. Christ died so that we could be made alive, and it's through that message of Christ killed in your place so you can free from Hell- that's what brings us alive. Jesus' death earns life for us, and his voice brings us to that life. You must understand that or else you will always be angry at God- constantly asking him, "are you going to let them get away with that." We need to be humbled. Do you want a fair God? When you demand that God be just and give everyone what they deserve and not let anyone get away with anything- think about what you're asking for. You can look at the murderer with disgust, but we've murdered people when we hate and despise them in our hearts. You can look at unfaithful spouses and think, "how could they," but if we've looked at someone with lust or have been disrespectful or argumentative or petty with our spouse, we're guilty too. Sure, some people have stolen millions of dollars, but if we've stolen time from our employer by not working hard, in God's eyes we've broken that commandment too. God isn't fair with us. He should have punished us, but he punished Jesus instead. Thank God that he's not fair with us. Thank God he doesn't give us what we deserve. But does that mean God doesn't care about the atrocities and abuses and horrible things that happen in the world?

2. Trust his Justice. Perhaps it was only me, but did anyone's Lutheran sirens go off when they heard this statement from Jesus? That when he comes back and the dead rise, those who did good will live forever in Heaven and those who do evil will suffer forever in hell? Wait a minute! I thought we were saved by grace- not by doing good things because we've all done bad things! You're right, and that's what Jesus clearly teaches. Remember who Jesus is speaking to. He's speaking to Pharisees who, although they have all the proof anyone would need in front of their faces, refuse to believe in Jesus and are plotting to kill him- the God they claim to worship because he dares to tell them what they don't want to hear. And Jesus claims not to just have the voice of salvation that brings people to spiritual life, but that his voice is going to call everyone out of their graves on Judgement day, and he is going to be the Judge of all people. Jesus is saying, whether you like it or not, you are going to hear his voice. You will either hear and listen to his voice right now, or you're going to hear it when it's too late. But what does Jesus mean about those who do "good" and those who do "evil?" Let me ask you this- as a Christian, do you ever get frustrated by the lack of recognition for the good that you do for God? Husbands and wives, do you ever get frustrated that you put work into your marriage and you try to be a good

spouse, but it just doesn't work the way you thought- and you are trying to do the right thing because you love God and your spouse, and it just doesn't work? Do you ever feel frustrated that even though you try to share Jesus with that friend, that family member, that coworker- it just doesn't work and God doesn't seem to acknowledge it? Do you get frustrated that no one seems to see your genuine Christian love for your children or your community and you feel tired and unseen? You aren't doing these works to be seen, but it's frustrating when God doesn't seem to notice. My friends, he does. The "good" that Jesus is talking about are the good works that we do in faith, the good things, the acts of love we do not because we are trying to earn anything from God, but only because we love him. On the last day, God himself, who's forgotten everything bad you've ever done, is going to say, "well-done" and acknowledge all the good things you did for him. And the Pharisees and all their religious rituals and extra prayers they do just so people think they are righteous, in the end their works are going to be exposed for what they are- selfish, hypocritical, and evil. This is a warning to those who look really good on the outside but are inwardly selfish. God sees, and it will be exposed in the end- not because forgiveness wasn't available- in Christ it always was- but because they didn't want it- they wanted what they deserved.

But what about the really evil people that don't get punished? What about the fathers who abandon their families and marry other women and take their money and seem to get off scot free? What about the greasy, corrupt politicians who clearly don't have a concern about the people they serve, but about their money and fame and power? What about the parents that abuse their children, the spouses that abuse the ones they are supposed to love and defend? What about the pastors who preach false doctrine and lead their people to hell? What about the thieves who scam innocent people out of their hard-earned money and never get caught? What about the serial killers who never get found out? What about the bosses and coworkers who make bad, dishonest moves and get rewarded for it? What about the mass murderers and school shooters who take lives and then take their own so that they don't have to face justice? What about the monsters like Hitler and the Muslim terrorists who take their own lives so they don't have to look at the ones who they terrorized in the face? They won't escape. They won't get away with it. Justice is going to happen. And if they don't place their faith in the one who was punished for them, they will wake up on the last day and rot in hell forever. They will have to answer for the damage they've done and the hurt they've caused, and they will have to explain every word and action to God himself, and it won't be pretty. I know it's frustrating. I know it takes the wind out of your sails to see people get away with it- but they aren't getting away with it and their time is short, and justice will prevail.

Fyodor Dostoevsky was a Russian writer in the 19th century, and he wrestled with this notion- that a just God would allow evil people to get away with their crimes. In one of his books, he writes: *"I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage... that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it*

will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened."

That's what we believe. The justice, glory, and perfection that God is going to bring in his kingdom will not only heal your wounds- but make you say, "It was worth it." Therefore, let vengeance belong to the Lord. Let God worry about punishing others. Instead of asking, "are you going to let them get away with that," rejoice in the fact that God has let you get away from your punishment, and has invited you to side in glory even when you didn't deserve it. In the end, all will be made right, all will be as it should be, all will be just and perfect. Soon. Amen.