**John 5:24-29** November 7, 2021

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Last Judgment, ET2

*John 5:24 [Jesus said,] “24I tell you the truth, 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. 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. 26For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son 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 good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Beautiful weather, isn’t it. Maybe a bit cold for some, but the sunny skies and autumn colors make up for it. We will enjoy it while we have it, however, we know colder air is coming. How nice to live in the age of central heating!

Speaking of which, did you pay your electric bill this month? Why? Because you want to stay warm in winter? Okay. But why not just turn up the thermostat and stiff the electric company? Don’t pay the bill. They got lots of money. You don’t. Why pay your electric bill? You *could* say the reason you pay is that they need money to pay their employees and keep the power plants operating. Or you could say, “It’s just the right thing to do.” But when it comes right down to it, the reason you pay your electric bill is probably because if you don’t, they will cut off your electricity. That would be bad in November; it would be much worse in January.

Why do you pay your taxes? Maybe you feel that you are being a good citizen by paying taxes, etc. but finally, if there were absolutely zero penalty for not paying taxes, how many would? Again, the reason you pay your taxes is probably the consequences if you don’t. You don’t want to pay penalties, have your income garnished, or do time.

Why do students do their homework? A few love to learn, but most just don’t want to fail. Why do soldiers do PT? Why do workers clock in every morning? Why drive sort of close to the speed limit? For a great many, maybe most of our behaviors, a huge motivator is thinking about the bad things that would happen if we didn’t! It’s about the consequences.

Is that how it is for Christians? Do we come to church on Sunday fearing the consequences if we didn’t? Or what could possibly motivate some of you to give 5%, 10%, or more of your income to support the Gospel work here in Radcliff? Why do you do all the other things you do for your Savior and fellow Christians? Is it, too, a calculated fear of consequences?

**Why Christians Do What They Do**

**I. It’s because of Jesus’ Second Call**

**II. It’s because of Jesus’ First Call**

**I.** As the sermon outline suggests, we are going to start, not at the beginning, but at the end.

In John chapter 5 Jesus states why people ought to believe him, trust him, worship him. Here he speaks to people who were persecuting him, even trying to kill him (16-18). You need to remember that. Jesus’ primary audience was, in one way, not a bunch people like you and I. He was speaking to his enemies. By God’s grace, we are not! Thank you, God!

Yet there are reasons for us to take Jesus’ most words seriously. In the final verses, 28 and 29, Jesus said, ***“A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son of God’s] voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”***

***“A time is coming…”*** When is it? Jesus is describing a future and final day of the earth’s existence as we know it. There will be a great judgment on that day. People will be judged for the lives they have lived on this earth.

This completely reshapes what we human beings do with our lives. Without judgment on what we do in life, it would be easy to adopt a survival of the fittest attitude. In fact, it would be the most rational way to approach life. But Jesus emphasizes a fact that this Sunday’s Scriptures repeatedly pushed home: everything you do in this world will be judged on the final day of judgment. Jesus reveals a couple other details that make this day more fearsome: For one, when judgment day comes, we will be reconstituted. It won’t just be our souls summoned before the judge, but even our bodies. Add to that, no one will escape judgment.

On that second point, some people have imagined that they can frustrate God’s plan to judge. They have their bodies cremated and ashes scattered to the winds saying, “Now I’d like to see God put that back together!” How singularly unimaginative! They really don’t get what it means that God is almighty. God will have no difficulty reassembling those fools!

Upon rising from the dead, there will be exactly two predetermined and unalterable destinations: a resurrection to life and a resurrection to condemnation. Both are forever. There is no third choice. There is no second chance. People have long imagined these things. Even otherwise stalwart Christian thinkers and leaders have suggested such things when it comes to the Last Judgment. Search God’s Word and you will hear no whisper of these options. At the end of this life, it’s over. The die will be cast; there will be no chance to change where you ended your last move. There will be no point to “praying for my soul” as some silly people say. It will be too late to change the destination address.

In light of that, doing the right thing must be like paying your electric bill, right? Do it if for no other reason than fear of the consequences.

Now I must make this clear! This is not the way Jesus would prefer to appeal to us. But Jesus knows how we are, and so he has to warn even believers about sin’s consequences.

At another time Jesus told a parable, not to his enemies, but to his followers. Jesus explained why they should forgive. The number one reason is because God is merciful. He used the illustration of a servant who had amassed such a huge debt to his king that he could never repay it. The king mercifully forgave all of it. That’s why we should do what is right.

But Jesus knew that even his people, even Christians to this day, still have a sinful nature, sometimes metaphorically called the Old Adam. That Old Adam would rather do what that forgiven servant did in Jesus’ parable. He took the king’s forgiveness and ran. In a fit of hypocritical greed he found another servant who owed him a few bucks and he dragged him to court and prison. The king found out and was furious. He summoned this merciless servant and decreed that his enormous debt was reinstated and he would spend the rest of his life in prison. That was Jesus talking to Peter!

Christians may be Christians, but we have that Old Adam always drawing us toward sin, always taking for granted God’s goodness. That sinful self likes to imagine that the little sins (whatever that means) really don’t matter. And the bigger sins are just oopses. That’s why you have Jesus, right? And the really big stuff, well, it’s not really our fault. That’s how our sinful natures think.

Like Jesus’ enemies, like the apostle Peter whom Jesus was looking in the eye when he told that parable, you too have a sinful nature that will take every chance it has to jump the rails. It needs to be beaten into submission with the threats of what will happen if it has its way. When you are tempted to drinking too much, to immorality, to selfish neglect of others, to neglect of God and his house, it is time to bring out the cudgel of the Last Judgment.

Jesus would rather not have to remind us of the Last Judgement. It isn’t his preferred approach. But because of the sin that inheres in us, Jesus had to and has to remind us of the punishment of hell. We Christians must be watchful, and wield Christ’s threats of the Last Judgment even against ourselves, so that even if we don’t want to do the right things out of love for God, at least out of fear of God we don’t do the wrong things.

**II.** But that’s not how God would prefer it. For sure, what parent wants children who are well-behaved only because of fear? There may be some out there like that, but they are disgraces.

That’s why Jesus did not first tell his listeners about Judgment Day. What he *first* spoke of is this in verse 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.”*** Now what is he talking about here? At first, it sounds like he is just talking about Judgment day again. But when you listen carefully, it doesn’t match up. He says ***“a time is coming and has now come…”*** Jesus is not looking with prophetic eyes into the future. He is describing what is happening in 30AD, ***“…is coming and has now come.”*** ***“The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.”*** He says that the dead will hear the Son of God, but implies that not all will really hear; many who hear won’t pay attention. This can’t be the last judgment because all will come to life. Verse 25 is the call to faith.

This initial call of the Savior was happening in Jesus’ day. It happens in our day every time that any Christian opens his or her mouth with the message of Jesus Christ. Some hear, some do not. But those who do, live.

Verse 24 describes it this way: ***“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.”*** Just like John 3:16, just like Ephesians 2:8-9, just like Acts 16:31, just like Romans 3:22, Jesus declares that we have eternal life through faith, and faith alone. Eternal life isn’t a prize for doing more good than bad. It isn’t about doing the best we can. It isn’t about hoping for the best. It isn’t about inviting Jesus into your life. It is simply about believing what Jesus says about himself. What he says is that he *“gave his life as a ransom;” “his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.”* That’s the reason we do what we do: Christ’s call that brought us to faith.

But what about that verse 29, ***“those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*** At first this might seem a recipe for working our way into heaven. But that is a misunderstanding. We don’t have time to treat it in full, but what Jesus said earlier in verses 24 and 25 prevents us from understanding it in that way. At the time of judgment, Jesus will look at the evidence. People who have believed will then act like people who believe. As Jesus said elsewhere, the good tree will bear good fruit. And those who practice evil and don’t live like Christians are not Christians. Simple as that.

But back to Jesus’ words of assurance. Ask people this question. Ask Christians this question, “If you were to die tonight, would you go to heaven?” Do you know how many Christians say, “I hope so;” or “I’m not sure?” When I hear that, I get concerned. I get concerned because they haven’t heard what Jesus just said. He said, ***“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has (not will!) crossed over from death to life.”*** With faith in Jesus, no longer do you look at the Last Judgment expecting a resurrection unto death. You already stand in the camp of life. No longer do you even stand in the camp of maybe. You are in the camp of certainty.

This is why Christians do what they do. Sure, there are times when sinful desires wrestle for control of our lives. At those times we must remember that Jesus will issue a call to final judgment. But when that Old Adam is beaten into submission, and the Holy Spirit is set free to work in us, it is Jesus’ first call that makes us do what we do. It is not fear of judgment, but joy over God’s forgiveness. That joy leads us to be patient, forgiving, generous, accepting, hard-working, concerned, prayerful, worshipful, joyful and much more. That’s why we do what we do!

Why do God’s people do what we do in our best of moments of loving people and worshiping God. We remember there will be a call to judgment. But even more we remember that we have been called to faith. Amen.