

John 5:24 “I 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. 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.

Dear Friends, Called By Our Savior,

It was a victory for the joy killers.

For thirty-eight years he had been paralyzed. If he wanted to move, others had to move him. If he wanted to eat, others had to cook for him. He depended on other people for everything. He had become a determined, yet bitter man. Every morning he hoped for the cure.

Then in an instant, he went from paralyzed to walking. He was sure no rain could dampen that day, no cold could chill it. It was the day he was healed. (Did I tell you it had been 38 years? 13,870 mornings of wishing for the impossible?) And it happened! He picked up his bedroll and walked home.

Then came the joy killers. “We don’t care if you were paralyzed for 38 years or 138 years. What do you think you are doing carrying your bedroll on the Sabbath day?” They sneered. “And, anyway, who healed you? You should know better than to get healed on the Sabbath.”

No joy over his victory -- just people angry that he isn’t still a paralytic lying on a mat. Can you hear his heart breaking? Bullying the former paralytic into submission, the interrogators eventually find out how he had been healed. It was a certain Jesus from the village of Nazareth – how dare he! “We will cut him down to size!”

Welcome to John chapter 5.

LIMITED TIME OFFER: SECOND CHANCES

I. What Is the Offer?

Our reading begins with Jesus confronting the confronters. “Yes, this paralyzed man walks because of me—no medicine, no rehab. But I tell you the truth, you will see even greater things.” But what could be greater than this? What can be more amazing than a man paralyzed for 38 years, now walking?

This is what was more amazing: ***“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.”*** The dead living? What is Jesus talking about? Well, today we are in the Last Judgment Sunday of the church year. So it sounds like maybe Jesus is talking about the Last Judgment, right?

Listen again. Listen carefully. ***“A time is coming and has now come...”*** Jesus said this in something like 30AD. It is not talking about the end of the world and the final judgment because by Jesus’ own words, this was happening already in Jesus’ day. What is he talking about? Listen closely, ***“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.”*** In Jesus’ day the voice of the Son of God was going out into the world. Some were hearing and living.

Now the word “some” is the crucial word. Jesus said that some heard, which means some did not.

He is not talking about the resurrection at the end of the world, but a spiritual resurrection that was ongoing in Jesus' day and ours. Let us call this "the first resurrection."

That is more amazing than the paralyzed walking. Or is it? Is it true that people coming to faith in Jesus is more amazing than a man walking after four decades of paralysis?

That is one of the problems with the first resurrection. It doesn't look amazing. Miracles get people to stand up and notice; sermons make people yawn. Who has ever heard of a man paralyzed for 40 years walking. Who of you has ever tasted wine made from water? Who has ever known a man born blind to see? Who has ever seen a dead man, dead and in the grave dead – not just resuscitated after 4½ minutes dead. These are amazing things. But Jesus Christ, who did all these things, says that coming to faith is even more amazing. It is amazing because as Jesus says here, we were born dead in our sins and transgressions.

When a sign says, "Free ice cream!" you don't stand there on the sidewalk on a 90 degree, 90% humidity day and admire the sign. You go in and get the ice cream! The sign by itself is useless.

When Jesus performed miracles, he called them "signs." Signs always point to something greater. Miracles of healing, feeding, etc. were just billboards. But the real deal is only found in Jesus. And so Jesus spoke the truth when he said that people believing God's Word was more amazing. The signs, miracles, were done to point to the truly powerful.

Jesus was pointing out that even if he personally came to you, touched you and healed your arthritis, relieved your allergies, cured your cancer, that would be only a small and temporary help. But what the voice of the Son of God offers, sins forgiven and life forever, is much greater. This is second chance Jesus gives.

Now we should be clear what we mean by "second chance." A second chance at salvation does *not* mean what it means when you fail a test and a teacher gives you a re-take of the test. If that is the kind of "second chance" God gives us, then I have bad news – you will fail! Me too! I am so prone to sin that I can't live a perfect life no matter how hard I try. It's like walking across Niagara Falls on a tight-rope. I may dearly want to make it across, but I will assuredly fall on the first or second step. But if I have a second chance, I might make it three steps. But even if I am on one of those invincibility modes you sometimes get in video games and I try one million times, I am never going to have what it takes to walk the quarter mile on a tightrope across Niagara Falls.

But there was are people who can make it across the Niagara Falls on a tightrope – and one person actually did this carrying another person on his back.

That is the "second chance" that Jesus offers. He says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." He says, "I am the gate." John the Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." You see, Jesus does give second chances to everlasting life. But these second chances are always rooted in despairing of ourselves, and putting ourselves in God's hands. That second chance is there for every person—to climb on the back of the world's best tightrope walker and make it to the other side, and let him, Jesus, do all the work.

The wonderful thing is that as Jesus says, "***the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear live.***" People are changed by Jesus. The Hell-bound are re-routed to heaven. People who have lived lives of iniquity hear Jesus, and he gives them life. And just as amazing is that middle class people with solid family life and enough legitimate income to live comfortable also hear Jesus' voice. That people hard-pressed should believe in their Savior is, in a way, understandable. But that people who have what they need, and haven't fallen into public disgrace better than most, should believe in their Savior, this is an even greater mystery – because they probably don't *feel* like they need a Savior.

II. For How Long Is the Offer Valid?

This offer of a second chance is open to every single person, but it will not be forever. If you get a coupon for 35% off all purchases at JC Penney, those coupons always have an expiration date clearly marked. But God's second chance is different. You don't know the expiration date.

So, here you have this coupon for eternal life. It's better than free ice cream. Better than being full use of all your limbs after being a paralytic for 40 years. It's a bigger blessing than being resuscitated after a heart. It's better than all those things put together. And we're not talking about a lottery ticket here where one out of 50,000,000 tickets will win. It is an iron-clad guarantee from God that every single person who listens to the voice of our Savior will have forgiveness now, assurance in this life, and true life forever.

Are you going to hit the snooze button? ...“Dear Father in Heaven, Save me, but not yet”? We misinterpret God's patience with us as a reason to not hurry or worry. But that coupon will expire, and it might be today. It might be in the next nine minutes. Get serious.

III. What Happens When You Miss the Limited Time Offer?

“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—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

The chance for a second chance ends with the end of this life. Nothing anywhere in God's word agrees with the popular idea that somehow, somewhere, there will be a second chance beyond the grave. Of course, the human race, which loves to procrastinate, would say that! But God never hints at it. And it is a good thing. Because if there were a second chance after the grave, if there were a place to reform in the next life, do you know what every single one of us would be tempted to do? Another tap of the snooze button, another time. Too much work now...

But here is the biggest difference between the first resurrection and the second: the second will be unavoidable. In this life, Jesus forces no one to believe. In this life Jesus calls but lets people, if they so choose, go their own way. But Jesus' warning is, ***“A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.”*** There will be no choice. There will be terror. Those who had once mocked Jesus and told him to come back another time, they will call on the mountains, *“Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb [of God]. For the great day of their wrath has come.”* (Rev 6:16-17). That will be the day of final judgment.

Christians, rejoice that you have put your faith in Jesus. For you, that last day will hold no terror of fear. But also remember those words, ***“those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*** This is not declaring that we are saved by works, but it describes the nature of saved people. People who have heard and listened to the voice of the Savior in this world will do what he says. He is saying that if you confess with your mouth, ***“Jesus is Lord”*** but don't act according to his teaching, then you should beware. You might not be who you think you are.

But when you have truly listened to your Savior's voice and taken part in the first resurrection trusting him for full salvation, then the second resurrection will hold no fear and no surprise for you.

Second chances? If you don't realize that Jesus is your only second chance, remember that the time is limited.

Second chances? If you know Jesus as your Savior, praise God that he has given you that second chance—not a chance to do better, but a chance to rely on someone else to do what you could not. For you, there will be no joy-killers, none who can accuse you in the Last Judgment. Amen.