

John 5:25-29

²⁵“Amen, Amen, I tell you: A time is coming and is here now when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who listen will live. ²⁶For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to execute judgment, 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 will come out. Those who have done good will rise to live, but those who have practiced evil will rise to be condemned.”

The Good, the Bad...

I.

It's the Sunday you have been waiting for. Did you know you had been waiting for it?

Every year on Trinity Sunday we read the Athanasian Creed together. Each year a brief explanation is given about some of the words near the end of that lengthy creed. The last part of this church year I have been preaching on the Gospel readings. This Gospel reading contains the verse I briefly explain each year before we recite the Athanasian Creed. You have been waiting for more.

Did you catch the verse as the Gospel was read today? Did you wonder yet again what it all means when I just read the verses as the sermon began? Do you wonder, even now?

[play music] The scenes of a spaghetti western come to mind. The music is ominous. Something is about to happen. Jesus speaks only about the good and the bad, so we will keep it to that and skip the last category from the movies.

Jesus speaks of Judgment Day. “A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and will come out. Those who have done good will rise to live, but those who have practiced evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29, EHV). Which are you? Are you the good...or the bad?

Those who have practiced evil seem to be pretty easy to pick out of a lineup.

As a pastor, I have been to jail. No, not for any personal violation of the law. I have been to jail to visit people behind bars. My most memorable was the time the deputy led me to a special cell and led in the prisoner who was in handcuffs and shackles and locked him to the desk in the room. “I’ll be right outside the door if you need me, pastor; just bang on the door.” And he left, locking the door behind him, leaving me with a man I had never met before that day, a man who was accused of trying to murder his parents in search of money to feed his drug habit. People like that would be the bad, wouldn’t they?

I’ve been to visit WELS people in prison, too. Some have been in minimum security prisons where they could walk around with relative freedom on the grounds and meet with me with few, if any, restrictions. I have visited those in high security prisons. The process for a visit is unsettling. At least, to *me* it is. They don’t want any visitor to bring contraband in to the prisoners. Leave your wallet and any and every electronic device in the car. Sit in the waiting room until they are ready to pass you through to the visiting room. Enter an intermediary room, take off your belt and pass through the metal detector; then sit down and take off your shoes and socks so they can make sure nothing is in there. Unlike family members or other visitors, pastors are allowed to bring in a Bible and a service book, as well as communion, but even that has to be set up and okayed by the prison chaplain and the

warden. Just writing about the process elevated my heart rate; so does speaking about it. I suppose one could label those incarcerated in prison after a fair trial the bad, right?

II.

Christians are often delusional. Many of you haven't *been* to a prison, let alone confined in one. Whether you have been on the inside of a jail cell or in a prison visiting room or not, it's easy for Christians to compare your morality with those incarcerated and conclude that you are doing all right.

After all, most people have never had to take a life in self defense or in an act of war or as a law enforcement officer, let alone committed a murder. Perhaps most of us have never robbed a bank or a party store or committed any kind of robbery or theft. A look at the police reports might make us feel pretty good about ourselves.

Perhaps once King David was delusional. He once might have thought he was in a pretty good position with God. God had selected him above all his brothers and elevated him to be king. All his illusions and his delusion was smashed when he had to be confronted by the prophet Nathan about his sins. After a bit of introspection and examination of his own life, David concluded in his Psalms: "Every single one has turned back. Altogether they have become rotten. There is no one who does good. There is not even one." (Psalm 53:3, EHV).

Don't be delusional. Don't look at your own life and compare your actions with those of David and conclude that he was a greater sinner than you. You see, "good" doesn't mean making comparisons between ourselves and Bible figures. It doesn't mean comparing yourself with those who have been locked up for their violations of the law. The people whom you might consider the dregs of society aren't to be your measuring stick. Cherry picking things that you do well and then taking a look at friends or family members or even those sitting next to you in the pew and finding that they don't measure up to that one issue isn't to be the point of comparison.

"Good" means flawless. "Good" means people who are completely holy—without sin.

So what does Jesus mean? "Those who have done good will rise to live, but those who have practiced evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:29, EHV). No one is flawless. No one is completely holy and without sin.

III.

Jesus says: "The Father has life in himself" (John 5:26, EHV). What does that mean? God created the world. No creature has "life in itself." Creatures had to *receive* life from the outside—they received life from God. When God gave life to all the creatures at creation, he established a pattern. From one generation creatures pass life on to the next, and on and on the pattern goes.

"Amen, Amen, I tell you: A time is coming and is here now when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who listen will live" (John 5:25, EHV). Jesus is not speaking about the dead yet in *this* verse. That would come when he speaks about the dead rising from their graves. Notice what he says: "those who listen will live." "The time is here, Jesus said, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God." Jesus is speaking of the spiritually dead.

We already established that *no* human being is "good" in the eyes of God. Each of us has done things that are reprehensible to God. Whether our sins rise to the level of incarceration in a human prison or not, every single sin—everything that violates God's moral law in any way—deserves eternity in hell as the righteous punishment.

"For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he has granted the Son to have life in

himself” (John 5:26, EHV). Jesus *does* have life in and of himself, unlike a created creature—he is God himself. Just as God the Father is the source of all life, as God himself, *Jesus* is the source of all life.

Jesus has life in himself; it is not an add-on as it is for created creatures. Jesus is the God-man. Though he is 100% human in every way, but was without sin, his life is not something that was added to him. As 100% God, Jesus has life in himself.

“And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:27, EHV). Jesus explains that as true God, having life in himself, he is given the authority to execute judgment on the world.

The last part of our text has the seemingly-problematic part. It explains how Jesus will judge: “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice²⁹ and will come out. Those who have done good will rise to live, but those who have practiced evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29, EHV).

Remember the voice of the Son of God from the first verse of our text? The dead would hear the voice of the Son of God and live. Now Jesus says that those in their graves will hear his voice...those who have done good will rise to live. It is the relationship with Jesus that is the determining factor.

Those who heard the voice of the Son of God and listened are believers. The very definition in the Bible of a good work is something done that is in accordance with God’s will and is done out of love for God. Jesus says later in John: “I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, EHV). If a person isn’t doing something because of his or her relationship with Jesus, it simply is nothing. It is not a good work. No matter what Christians do, when they do things that are not violating God’s moral law because they love Jesus, their works are good. They are those who are good.

Those who have practiced evil are those who have no faith in Jesus. No matter what they have done, even those things that seem very moral and upright, they have not done them out of a heart that is loving and thankful to God. Their works are not good in God’s eyes because they have no faith. They rise at Judgment Day to be condemned.

IV.

Today is Saints Triumphant Sunday. Several saints from Holy Trinity have gone to their triumphant reward over the past 12 months. We read their names to remember them earlier in the service. They now wait for that day Jesus promised. They will hear his voice on the last day and will rise from their graves. Jesus will call them those who have done good, because they had faith in him as their Savior. They will rise to live.

One day you, too, will sleep in the dust of the earth. We all will. But you have heard the voice of the Son of God now, and your spiritual condition has been changed from one who was dead in sin and unbelief to one who is alive because of the voice of Jesus. Remain faithful to your Savior. You, too, will one day hear his voice. Rise as a victorious saint on that day and enter eternal life with your Lord Jesus. Amen.