

From Death to Life  
John 5:24-29  
November 1, 2015, All Saints Day

*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

Jesus had many discussions with the Jewish leadership; the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Teachers of the Law. Today's Gospel reading comes from the middle of one of those discussions.

Jesus had, once again, said something that offended the Jewish leaders. In fact, they were so offended they were looking for ways to kill Jesus. In the verses leading up to today's reading, the Holy Spirit inspired John to write: *The Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God* (Jn 5:18 ESV). The law of Moses stated both of these crimes carried the death penalty.

As Jesus defended himself, he revealed he truly was the Son of God and equal to God, the Father. He also gave all Christians the wonderfully comforting words in today's reading. Jesus said: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life* (Jn 5:24 ESV).

These words are especially comforting to us on this day when we remember our loved ones who have preceded us in death. We not only hear that we who believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ will not suffer the judgment we deserve for our sins, but we also know that our loved ones who died in the faith have suffered no judgment.

Death is a frightening thing. Death, more than any other event in our lives, points the bony finger of judgment at us and says, "You are a damned sinner. You have sinned against the laws of God and you deserve the eternal punishment of hell. If you were not a sinner, you would not die."

Death is the curse man brought upon himself with his sin. God said as much when he told Adam not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God said: *You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die* (Ge 2:16-17 ESV).

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: *For the wages of sin is death* (Ro 6:23 ESV). Death is

frightening because it reminds us of the curse of sin on this world and everyone in this world. Death is most terrifying to those who die without faith in Christ. Those who do not believe in the person and work of Jesus find death to be the door to the judgment of God against their sins.

The judgment of God is different from the judgments rendered by our human courts. We have long trials and procedures to determine the truth of a matter. An earthly court can't know the truth until it has heard both sides present their evidence. Even then, it may be difficult to determine the real truth.

On the other hand, God already knows the truth. He knows that all have sinned and fall short of the standard of perfection required for salvation. Those who pass through death without Christ go directly to the sentencing phase of the trial. They are guilty of their sins and are sentenced to eternal punishment in hell. There are no appeals; no last minute pardons. God's court is the Supreme Court.

The wonderful news in this text is that those who believe will bypass God's judgment. They will not appear in God's Supreme Court. Listen once again to Jesus' words: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life* (Jn 5:24 ESV).

For those who believe, the door of death does not lead to eternal judgment, but eternal life – eternal joy and pleasure as we spend eternity in the presence of the Triune God. The only thing death can do to the Christian is escort him or her from this valley of sorrow into the eternal presence of our loving God.

In fact, according to Jesus, that change has already taken place. Jesus said those who hear and believe have passed from death to life; have passed, past tense. It's a done deal. Christians don't wait for the "sweet by and by" to be with God. God has already made us alive in Christ because we have heard and believed. Christians are already in God's presence and our earthly death merely lifts the veil that now clouds our vision of him.

How did we come by such a marvelous blessing? God sent his son into this world to do the work that rescued us from the curse of sin. Although Jesus was equal to the Father, he came to live among sinful people. He took on human form and humbled himself to live with us under the law. However, unlike us, he kept the law without sinning.

Nevertheless, even though he was without sin he became sin – not his sin, but our sin. St Paul tells us: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Co 5:21 ESV). Then Jesus took our sin to the cross where he collected the eternal wages of our sin in his suffering and death. Collecting the wages of our sin means he withstood the full punishment of our sin.

By this resurrection from the dead, he opened the door to eternal life for us and for all who believe in him. Those who believe in Christ do not come into judgment, but have already passed from death to life.

You might ask, or someone might ask you, “How does someone go about acquiring this wonderful gift of eternal life. One more time, verse 24 of our reading: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

Jesus said “my word.” We need to know exactly what word he was speaking about. After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples: *These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled* (Lk 24:44 ESV). Here Jesus explained that the entire Bible is his Word. When Jesus said, *whoever hears my word*, he was saying whoever studies and believes the entire Bible.

When we hear Christ’s word, that is, when we study the Bible, the Holy Spirit works through the word to establish and strengthen our faith. Romans 10:17 says: *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* It is Christ’s word the Holy Spirit uses to create faith in God the Father, the one who sent Jesus.

When Jesus said, *whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life*, he was describing the life of the Christian. We hear Christ’s words. By those words, the Holy spirit creates faith in us. Then, through that faith, we receive forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation. What a great comfort this is for those who hear and believe. What a great comfort this is for us who have heard and seen a confession of faith from a loved one who now lives with the Lord.

Today’s Gospel reading gives us the assurance these comforts are real and true. Jesus said: *For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself* (Jn 5:26 ESV). Jesus guaranteed this when he returned to life after dying on the cross. His resurrection proves he has the same power of life the Father has. The comfort we receive in our reading is true and reliable.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we all have loved ones who have gone through the door of death. What a comfort for us to hear our Savior say: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life* (Jn 5:24 ESV).

These words are what enable us to not grieve as the world grieves. As Paul told the Thessalonian Christians: *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope* (1 Th 4:13 ESV).

Our grief is one of temporary separation. We grieve over the parting, but we rejoice knowing our loved one is home. We grieve over their absence from our lives, but we

know that faith in Jesus Christ will one day bring us back together. We grieve, but our grief is not hopeless.

Jesus Christ transformed death from a doorway to eternal suffering into a doorway to eternal joy. He paid the debt of our sin when he suffered and died on the cross. He removed the eternal punishment from us. By his resurrection from the dead, he opened the way to eternal life for us and for all who believe in him. We have truly passed from death to life.