

John 5:28-29

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 April 2012

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] The resurrection is a big deal for Christians. We begin every single week remembering and celebrating that on the first day of the week, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, rose from the dead. He died on Good Friday, was dead, buried, placed in the grave, but on Resurrection Sunday, He rose again. He was raised by the Father. Bodily resurrection, raised to life. We celebrate that truth every first day of the week, but we know that last Sunday was particularly special in the Christian calendar, Easter Sunday. And across the world, Christians gloried and rejoiced in this great historical fact and foundational truth of our faith. Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed. He is alive today. For us as a family, it was a little strange to spend Easter in a Muslim country, where Easter Sunday is just another working day. As a family, we had gathered for worship on Friday morning, which is the day that is convenient for that purpose, the weekend there in Dubai and, of course, in other Muslim countries.

Now, I have to say that at the service on Friday, Easter Sunday service was announced for 5.30 in the morning, obviously before the start of the working day. I confess we didn't quite make it to that particular service. But the resurrection is, I repeat, a big deal for Christians. But is it just the resurrection of Jesus that occupies our attention? I'm sure when we speak of the resurrection, and if we simply mention the word resurrection among ourselves or to others, the immediate thought that comes to mind is, well, the resurrection of Jesus. We believe that Jesus rose again from the dead, that He was resurrected. And that's understandable that our thought immediately focuses on the resurrection of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But is that the only resurrection that occupies our attention? Today, I want to consider another resurrection, where Jesus is not the one who is raised, but the one who does the raising. Just before Easter, as a congregation, we concluded our study of the Apostles' Creed at the neighborhood fellowships. The Apostles' Creed provides a distilled essence of

Orthodox Christian theology, and includes towards the end of the Creed this affirmation, I believe in the resurrection of the dead. The Creed has already spoken of the resurrection of Jesus, but it goes on to make this claim, I believe in the resurrection of the dead. Who are the dead? Well, that would be you and me and every man, woman, and child who dies in this world. We will address this foundational Christian doctrine by considering words of Jesus directed to the disciples that are recorded for us in the fifth chapter of John's gospel, the passage that we read, and very particularly verses 28 and 29.

So, we'll read these two verses again, for these are the verses that we'll be concentrating our attention on this morning. John chapter 5, verses 28 and 29. Jesus is speaking. He's speaking to His disciples, and He says the following, 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.

In these two verses, there are three truths that I want to identify and consider. First of all, Jesus speaks of a time that is coming, a time that is coming. He speaks also of a voice that will be heard, a voice that will be heard. And finally, and perhaps most significantly, or certainly what will occupy more time for us this morning, a resurrection that will be experienced, a time that is coming, a voice that will be heard, and a resurrection that will be experienced. First of all then, a time that is coming. We read there in the verse, verse 28, Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming.

[5 : 3 4] What can we say about this time, this time of the resurrection of the dead? Well, first of all, we can say that it is certain. Jesus is very clear. The time is coming. There's no maybes, there's no perhaps. This is not some possible or unlikely future event. It's not even what we could describe as a likely future event. It is certain. It is certain. A time is coming when the dead will rise. Now, of course, we know that many would consider this a preposterous suggestion. Many who live in this

great city of Aberdeen would smile knowingly at that suggestion, and they would say, well, that sounds fine, but of course, that's just nonsense. But Jesus is very clear. This time is certain. The time is coming when the dead will rise. But we can say something further. We can say not only is the time certain, we can say that the time is fixed. The day has been set. The Greek word that is translated here in verse 28. Time is a word that we can recognize because it's very similar to an English word. It's the word *aura*, O-R-A. And it's the word from which we get our word *hour*. You can see clearly the linguistic connection there. And it's a word that can be used to refer to a time, but in the sense of a particular or specific time, even a specific time of day. And as a result, it's perhaps preferable to do, as many Bible versions do, to translate the word with the English word *hour*. And so we would read that verse as follows. Do not be amazed at this, for an hour is coming when all who in their graves will hear His voice. The hour is coming. And not just any random hour, but the hour.

The hour that has been fixed when the dead will rise. Now, when is that hour? Well, that we do not know. As Jesus Himself explained to His disciples in words that are recorded for us in Mark's Gospel in chapter 13. No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. The time that is coming, it is certain, it is fixed, but I want to say one further thing.

It is drawing near. The time, the hour is coming. There is a dynamic about this. This is nothing static.

It is coming. It is approaching. It is drawing near. Time is nothing if not predictable. It ticks relentlessly. You can smash the ticking clock, but you're only destroying the messenger, for time will continue to tick, tick, tick. And time is no respecter of persons, rich or poor, young or old, powerful or powerless. Time continues its serene march ever forward. And as time edges unremittingly forward, so the hour, the hour draws ever nearer. We live in the realm of time betwixt two days of resurrection. We look back to the resurrection of Jesus and celebrate His resurrection and all that it implies and all that it brings in its stead. But we also look forward to the approaching day of the resurrection of the dead. And that day is drawing near.

[9 : 49] Jesus speaks of a time that is coming, but He also speaks of a voice that will be heard. I want us to move on now to think about that second aspect of the words that we're thinking about, a voice that will be heard. Again, we read verse 28, Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice.

What can we say of this voice that will be heard? Well, first of all, we want to identify the voice. Whose voice is it? Jesus speaks of His voice. It would seem that He's speaking of another, but if we take into context what He has said before, when in verse 27 He speaks of the Father giving authority to the Son of Man, it's clear that He is referring to the Son of Man. And we know that the Son of Man is Jesus Himself. It was Jesus' favorite self-designation, the Son of Man. So this voice that will be heard is the voice of Jesus. The very voice that is speaking to the disciples concerning the voice that will be heard. It is the voice of Jesus. And what will He say? What will He say?

Well, we're not told, certainly not in these verses, we're not told what He will say, but the implication is clear. The words pronounced, whatever they are, will have as a result the resurrection of the dead. That is what they will produce, these words that will be pronounced, this voice that will speak. The words that are declared will have as their outcome that the dead are raised.

Now, further light is shed by the Apostle Paul on this matter in the first letter to the Thessalonians. I'll just read chapter 4 and verse 16 that gives us greater insight into this matter of the voice that will speak and the words that will be said. There we read, And we focus for our purposes particularly on these words, a loud command. And so this voice that will speak, the words that it will declare will be words of command, a command to rise.

And who will hear this voice? Well, Jesus is very clear. All who are in their graves will hear the voice.

[12 : 39] All will hear. Every man, woman, and child who has tasted death from Adam until that great day will hear the voice of Jesus.

All without exception. It is a sobering thought to consider that those who were deaf to the voice of Jesus in this life will hear Him on that day loud and clear.

And maybe that's you. Maybe today, maybe in this life you are deaf to the voice of Jesus, to His gracious invitation, to His command to repent. You turn the other way. You choose not to hear.

You allow the distractions of this life to not allow that voice to be heard. But on that day, on that day, all will hear loud and clear.

But what will they do, those who hear the voice? Or we could perhaps more personally say, what will we do when we hear that voice? The word hear has in the original Greek a richness and breadth of meaning that goes beyond the simple act of hearing to the sense of understanding, and maybe even more crucially for our purposes, of paying heed. Jesus speaks of all who are in their graves hearing His voice.

[14 : 24] Yes, they'll hear the voice, but they'll understand the voice, and they'll pay heed to the voice. To put it simply, the dead will obey.

Now, while it's difficult for us to fully understand the phenomenon of being described here by Jesus, the suggestion is that we are not altogether passive in our own resurrection.

Yes, it is very clear that it is Jesus who commands, and it is very clear that the command is imbued with resurrection power that is not our own.

And yet, we are the ones who will obey the command. The command is directed to us to rise, and we will obey. We will rise, not in our own power, but nonetheless, there is a sense in which we are involved.

As the command is directed, and as we obey. In connection with this great day, we sometimes hear the language of the sea or the earth giving up her debt.

[15 : 32] We maybe think today as the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic is being remembered, and we could imagine the Titanic giving up her debt on that day, and that is what will happen.

It will be a dramatic scene, and indeed, across the world, what drama as the dead rise from the grave. And we use that language, the sea giving up her debt, the earth giving up her debt.

But such language, though of poetic value, fails to capture what is happening because the earth and the sea, they do nothing. Jesus commands and the dead obey.

This is what we are told. And again, it is a solemn thought that those who lived life in willful and persistent disobedience to the commands of Jesus, to the commands of Jesus will, on that day, obey without question and without hesitation.

Today, you may choose to turn a deaf ear to the voice of Jesus. You may choose to disobey His command to repent and to believe.

[16 : 40] But on that day, you will obey. All will obey. So, Jesus speaks of a time that is coming.

He speaks of a voice that will be heard. But He speaks also of a resurrection that will be experienced. Jesus makes it clear that all will rise.

But He makes it equally clear that the dead will rise to one of two destinies. Some, He assures us, will rise to life.

This is the language. Those who have done good will rise to live. They'll rise to live. And others will rise to be condemned.

Those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. Let's think in turn of these two destinies that Jesus speaks of. First of all, those who will rise to live.

[17 : 39] As we draw on other relevant Scripture, we can comment concerning this resurrection life that Jesus speaks of. First and foremost, it is life with Jesus.

We rise to be met by the embrace of our risen Savior. It is resurrection life where body and soul are reunited to live in the new heavens and the new earth.

That wondrous environment where heaven and earth merge to create something much more glorious and splendid even than Eden. In all its pristine and sinless perfection.

This is the life that some will rise to. When you rise from the grave on that resurrection day, is this what you look forward to?

Well, on what does it depend? Well, Jesus is clear. There in verse 29, He says, Those who have done good will rise to live. Those who have done good will rise to live.

[18 : 46] Now, how are we to understand these words of Jesus? At first sight, it appears to challenge our understanding of salvation. It appears to run counter to the message of the Bible from start to finish that declares that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, not by the good that we do, so that no one can boast.

Perhaps even more solemnly, it appears to place us all in a somber place of hopelessness. For as the Bible rightly concludes, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

There is no one righteous, no not one. As Paul very clearly declares to the Christians in Rome in his letter to them.

How then are we to understand the words of Jesus, where he declares those who have done good will rise to live? Is he teaching that our salvation is earned by the good that we do, a reward for good behavior?

By no means. Notice what Jesus himself said on this very occasion in verse 24, this same conversation or discourse to his disciples.

[20 : 05] Let's notice what he says there in verse 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. He who believes has eternal life now. He has passed from death to life now.

But, and this is the issue, this new life, this eternal life becomes visible in the life that we live, in the good that we do.

The life that we live as Christians, as those who do believe, as those who are trusting in Jesus as our Savior, the life that we live serves as the test or evidence of the faith that we profess.

What does Paul say in the passage in Ephesians that so explicitly explains that salvation is by grace and through faith.

[21 : 11] We read these familiar words in the second chapter of Ephesians. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

So it is not the works that save us, but it is the works that give evidence of our salvation, of what God has done for us. We also are reminded of what James says in his letter, faith without works is dead, or no faith at all.

The final judgment that serves as the entrance to the enjoyment of resurrection life will be based on the works that we do, the life that you live, as the fruit of the faith that you have been given by Jesus.

And so, Christian friend, this morning I ask you the question, do you do good? Are you a do-gooder? That is an epitaph or an adjective that usually is thought of as being very negative, to be a do-gooder.

[22 : 28] Of course, as Christians, that is what we ought to be. We ought to be those who do good. That is what we have been saved to do, to do good, to produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

Is that what you are doing? You who profess to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. So there is this one destiny that is spoken of by Jesus for those who will rise from the grave.

Some will rise to live. But there is another destiny for those who will rise on that day. It is a very solemn one.

But Jesus is very clear concerning this. He says there in verse 29, Take note that the contrast is not as we might expect between life and death.

We might have expected that contrast. Some will rise to live, others will rise to die, some will rise to life, and others will rise to death. But that is not the contrast, symmetrically pleasing as that might have been.

[23 : 43] The contrast is between life and condemnation. We will all live eternally. We will all experience resurrection life.

It is in the nature of that life or existence that the distinction lies. What determines that some will rise to be condemned?

Well, Jesus is clear. He says those who have done evil, those who have done evil, those who have done evil, and those who have never enjoyed the forgiveness of that sin, of that evil that they have done, those who have failed to heed the voice of Jesus, offering forgiveness and eternal life, they will be condemned.

They will hear the voice that commanded them to rise, speak these words. Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat.

I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes, and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison, and you did not look after me.

[25 : 06] They also will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or needing clothes, or sick, or in prison, and did not help you? He will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. You see the contrast again, not between life and death, but between life and punishment.

And the language here, the language of Jesus in John's gospel that we're considering, and the language here in the passage that we've just read from Matthew's gospel, the language is again of obedience to the command of Jesus.

In Matthew's gospel, we read of Jesus commanding those on His left, depart from me. And those commanded obey, just as they obeyed when they were instructed and commanded to rise from the grave, now they will obey as they are commanded by Jesus to depart from Him.

They are not hurled, kicking, and screaming into hell. They obey the command to depart from Jesus, to go where they belong.

[26 : 30] What about you? You will die. That is certain. You will rise again. That is equally certain.

But what will you rise to? Will you rise to live? Or will you rise to be condemned? What must you do?

Will you simply ponder on these things? Will you allow yourself perhaps to be distracted by the things of time and to put to one side matters of eternity?

Will you perhaps marvel at these truths? Take note of what Jesus says in introducing these truths. Do not be amazed at this.

Don't simply stand back in awe and wonder and marvel and amazement. What you must do, what we must all do, is listen to the voice.

[27 : 29] We have spoken of this voice. Well, listen to the voice of Jesus. Listen to the voice of Jesus today, this morning, that small voice, voice.

Well, that same voice that will command you on the last day as He speaks to you this morning, as He speaks to you and bids you come, as He speaks to you and would command you to repent, to believe from past, from life to death.

Listen to His voice as He speaks to you this morning. Let us pray.