

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

John 5:21-29 (EHV)

Jesus said: ²¹ “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to those he wishes.

²² “In fact, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He is not going to come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life

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. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And 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 ²⁹ and will come out. Those who have done good will rise to live, but those who have practiced evil will rise to be condemned.



Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us so that we may hear your word, believe in you, and do good, for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Most people want to do the ‘good’ thing and be known as ‘good’ people.

Because we want to be good, we don’t want to get into trouble or make life difficult for anyone, because if we did, then we wouldn’t be ‘good’. This means we’ll be tempted to defend our goodness if anyone ever suggests we’re not as good as we intend.

We not only want to be ‘good’ ourselves, but we also expect everyone else to be ‘good’ according to our own standards of ‘goodness’.

This means we’ll get angry with people around us when they aren’t as good as we expect them to be, especially if they hurt us. We’ll often take pride in our own goodness and feel justified in pointing out how bad other people are.

This is common for most people, whether we’re Christian or not.

But for Christians, our motivation to be good isn’t just because of our own pride and distorted view of ourselves, but because we have theological and spiritual reasons to be ‘good’. After all, we hear Jesus tell us today: ‘those who have done good will rise to live, but those who practiced evil will rise to be condemned.’ (Jn 5:29)

Therefore, it’s not just important for us to be good or have a good reputation, but it seems our eternal life is dependant on us being good enough!

It would make sense then that Christians of all people are always striving to be good people. We feel the *need* to be good and fear anyone telling us we’re not good. We *have to* be good because our eternal future seems to rely on this. You see, if we’re not good, we may rise from death only to be condemned!

However, if this is how we’re interpreting this text, we have it wrong!

This is because Scripture tells us we all fall short of the glory of God, which means none of us will ever be good enough. We can't be good enough. It's impossible for us to be good enough. No-one is good except God alone, so we can't be 'good'. This is why our Lutheran Confessions confirm that, on the basis of Scripture alone, we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and not by our own goodness or good works!

So how are we to handle what Jesus says when he tells us the good will rise to live?

Well, we need to understand what Jesus means when he tells us to be 'good'. In fact, Jesus has already told us what is the 'good thing' that we're supposed to do which leads to life eternal.

You see, if we go back to the previous chapter in the gospel according to St John, we hear Jesus talk to the crowds who followed him after he fed the 5,000. He told them they were following him because of the miraculous sign of multiplying the bread to feed such a crowd. He also told them to no longer work for food that spoils, but they were to work for the food which endures to eternal life. They then asked him, "What should we do to carry out the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God: that you *believe* in the one he sent." (Jn 6:26-29)

Therefore, the good work Jesus required of us is to *believe*. Those who do this good work of believing in him will live.

We're to *believe* in the words of Jesus, which means we need to *listen* to his words so that we might *believe* them.

Over 90 times the word 'believe' is mentioned in St John's account of the gospel, including John 20:30-31, which reads: 'Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that *by believing* you may have life in his name.'

It's also consistent with what Jesus says earlier in today's text, where he said: "Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who *hears* my word and *believes* him who sent me *has* eternal life. He is not going to come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life." (Jn 5:24)

This means we're also to *believe the One who sent him*, which means we're to believe God the Father sent his Son Jesus into this world to die for the forgiveness of our sins so that we may be reconciled to God the Father.

As a result of this saving faith in Jesus, who was sent by the Father, we *listen* to Jesus and *believe* in him. We *believe* Jesus is the Son of God who was to come into this world. We *believe* God the Father sent him to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. We *believe* everything Jesus did for us on the cross has reconciled us to the Father. We *believe* we've been forgiven for all our sins by the suffering and death of Jesus. We *believe* eternal life is our present possession because we've been joined to Jesus who has already died and risen again to live with the Father. We *believe* we receive forgiveness, life and salvation through faith in Jesus through his means of grace such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We *believe* Scripture alone tells us we're saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, which gives us joyful hope and a peaceful conscience without any of us ever being good enough.

Unfortunately, it can be tempting to shift our faith focus away from Christ alone to something or someone else, including ourselves and our own efforts.

It's tempting to stop listening to Jesus' words and believe it's still up to us, as if we can somehow still make ourselves good enough.

We still want to be the best person we can be, thinking this pleases God. We try hard and burden ourselves

with the unrealistic expectation we can still be good enough. We think we have power to make ourselves good and right and holy. We berate and beat ourselves up whenever we let God or each other down and fear we're no longer good enough.

This means we often feel like failures, unsuccessfully try to make up for our wrongs, or vigorously defend our failures and shortcomings. We keep on blaming others and attempt to hide our failures instead of accepting the forgiveness and peace which is ours through faith in what Christ has done for us. Instead of believing and rejoicing in God's gracious forgiveness for all the times we're not good, we either deny our need for Christ's forgiveness or we wallow in misery as we take our eyes off what Jesus has said and done for us.

What we unconsciously keep doing is we don't always listen for, and trust in, the words and work of Jesus which would grant us joy and peace and hope, no matter how many times we let God, ourselves, or each other down. All too often we listen to ourselves and place our trust in our own words and works, which only leads to further disappointment and despair.

Do you realise there's no limit to God's love for you, no matter how many times you hurt him or fail him? Do you realise God doesn't keep a record of how many times you need his forgiveness? Do you realise the greatest way to honour God isn't to show how good you are (which only shows you reckon you don't need him), but to desire and accept his help and forgiveness and mercy and peace, again and again?

This is what it means to trust in him alone. It means you're out of the picture. Your own attempts at goodness are out of the picture. It's him alone. It's his grace alone. It's his love alone. It's his forgiveness alone. It's not meant to be him...plus whatever you're able to do!

When you listen to, and believe, in Jesus, you have what he offers: forgiveness, life, and salvation. You can't earn or deserve anything he offers, but you receive these heavenly comforts through faith. You rejoice in the holy gifts God sends you, including the gift of life eternal. You don't have to be good enough. God makes you good when you believe what Jesus has said and done for you.

But you might be wondering...where on earth do your own good works come in? Don't you still need to keep God's commands or live as his obedient children?

Well, yes, you do, but your good works which flow from faith and aren't so much to benefit God, or even to benefit yourself and your own pride, but they're to benefit those around you. After all, God doesn't need your goodness. He's already good. You don't need your goodness because you're forgiven and made good through faith. On the other hand, your neighbours need your goodness!

For example, you know Scripture teaches that you don't become good by your own efforts, but you're made good when you believe Jesus takes all your sin away and that he replaces anything bad in you with his own innocence, purity, and holiness. Then, as forgiven and cleansed people made good by Jesus Christ through faith, *his* goodness flows through you. Therefore, through faith in Jesus, you live out *his* forgiving, generous, and merciful nature to those around you. You become God's holy instrument to deliver *his* own forgiveness, service, love, and mercy to your neighbours.

In fact, they don't even need to deserve your goodness for you to be good to them, after all, you didn't deserve God's goodness. You received God's mercy and love, not because you're good enough, but because God is good. Similarly, your neighbours will receive mercy and love through you, not because they're any good, but because you've been made good by Christ through faith.

Therefore, you pass on the love and forgiveness you've already graciously received from Christ through faith. You live out your faith in Jesus by forgiving those who hurt you, even though they'll probably hurt you again. You let God's love flow through you as you love as God loves you, serve as God serves you, and forgive as God forgives you.

This means all those fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, live in you and flow from having faith in Christ alone.

This is the difference between living under the Law, which always expects, always condemns, and always burdens, and living in the Gospel, which always frees you to live and love in peace and joy.

This is the difference between living under impossible expectations, and the freedom of knowing you're loved and forgiven, again and again.

This is the difference between living with regret and self-incrimination, and living in peace knowing God chooses to no longer remember your sin.

This is the difference between constantly judging, criticising, and punishing others for their failures, and living out patience, kindness, and mercy.

This is the difference between the fear of not rising to life eternal because you're not good enough, and the joy of knowing life eternal is given to you as a gift because you listen to, and believe, in the words and work of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, none of you have to *be good*, but you're *made good* when you *believe* Jesus Christ and his words. Listening to, and believing, his promises, assures you he will raise you from your graves and graciously receive you into life eternal with him in heaven.

So then, may your faith in the words and work of Jesus grant you the...

...peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, to guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig
South Burnett Lutheran Parish
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