

Those Who Hear Will Live

John 5:1-47

KV 24-25 “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. 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.”

Have you ever thought about what it means to have life? Do you truly have life? You hear things like, “Life is short,” or, “You only live once.” What these sayings really mean to most people is to do as much as you can in this life before you die. Some may be wholesome activities, perhaps like travelling the world or participating in a marathon – but many activities are also immoral – such as drinking parties or having immoral relationships. King Solomon wrote, “I refused my heart no pleasure ... Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. (Ecc 2:10-11)” Yes, if our definition of life does not go beyond this world, then everything is meaningless, because nothing is gained. We lose everything. But what about eternal life? It sounds like something is gained: and what is gained is life. As we study this passage, let’s think about how can we have this life, this eternal life, this true life.

Last week we heard about Jesus healing a royal official’s son near Galilee, to the north. Some time later after that, Jesus again traveled south and up the hills of Jerusalem for this event called a feast of the Jews. Jerusalem was a walled city, and you could only enter via certain gates. He came to an area by the Sheep Gate, and there was a pool which was surrounded by five covered colonnades. Covered colonnades are rows of columns that have a roof on top, and provided shade and shelter for those underneath. The fact that there were 5 colonnades suggests that 4 colonnades surrounded the pool, and one ran through the middle. This pool was called “Bethesda,” which is believed to mean “house of mercy” or “house of grace.” It’s interesting to note here that Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to the Sheep Gate, and we are about to see an act of grace.

Here at Bethesda were a great number of disabled people – the blind, the lame and the paralyzed. It was believed that at certain times the waters were stirred up by an angel, and the first one in would have his disease cured. Perhaps this great number of disabled people came during the feast hoping that it may be a favorable time for an angel to appear to bless them. There was one there who had been an invalid, or paralyzed, for 38 years. Look at v.6, “When

Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’” Here we see the compassion that Jesus had on those who were sick, helpless, poor or suffering. Bethesda was the first place he wanted to visit – a place filled with disabled people, and his heart seemed to go out to perhaps the weakest one there: a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years.

Look at the man’s response in v.7, “‘Sir,’ the invalid replied, ‘I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.’” This man was both helpless and lonely. He had no friends to help him into the pool. He might have hoped that either someone who was healed would help him in next time, or his fellow men with disabilities might give him a hand – but it seemed here everyone was really looking out for themselves. Though you may have struggles, and though it seems at times there is no one who cares or can help – Jesus does see you. He knows your condition and he knows you need help, and he can help you.

Jesus says to the man in v.8, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. Jesus did not say, “Let me help you into the water,” or, “Get up! And get into the water!” He said to the paralyzed man to get up. This required faith and obedience on the part of the paralyzed man. He could have laughed at Jesus, or doubted Jesus, but he obeyed – and he was healed, not gradually, but immediately. In an instant, this man who had been paralyzed for 38 years was healed. Notice now the next thing Jesus said was to pick up his mat and walk.

The day on which this healing took place was the Sabbath. Now the Sabbath was a day of rest God had instituted for his people so that they may worship him. The Sabbath was made for man because man needs to rest and take some time to worship and glorify God. I even think that’s the reason why we have weekends – if we had worked 7 days a week, I think we could soon break down. The Sabbath was a rest intended for men, and God commands that it be observed. Jer 17:21 reads, “This is what the Lord says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem.” If this man were to pick up his mat and walk, it would undoubtedly draw attention, but I see three purposes in Jesus issuing this command: 1) to draw attention to the miracle which had been done, 2) to illustrate that He is the Lord of the Sabbath, that he did not need to follow man’s rules about the Sabbath, and 3) in order to challenge the hypocrisy of the Jews and expose their error and lack of love concerning the Sabbath.

The man obeyed Jesus, got up, picked up his mat and walked, and he did happen to draw some negative attention. The Jews who saw him said to him, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” It’s incredible that the Jews had completely missed the remarkable miracle of his healing and so harshly enforced their law against him. He replied in v.11, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” We can look at this verse in 2 ways: 1) He was simply answering their question, and at the time did not know who Jesus was (v.13), or 2), it may have revealed that he was not healed inwardly, as he gave way to fear and tried to pass the blame onto Jesus.

Later, Jesus found the man who was healed at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” We find this man at the temple after he is healed, either giving thanks to or coming to worship God for his healing. However, his healing was not complete. Jesus reminded him that he was well, which reminds him of his previous state of paralysis for 38 years, but says to stop sinning, or something worse may happen. Very few things could be worse than going back to being paralyzed, but there are some, such as death and an eternal condemnation. The thing that is more important than physical healing is spiritual healing: we need to be healed from our desires to sin. Without spiritual healing, we can end up worse than before.

In v.15, the man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Again, there are 2 interpretations of this verse, and good commentators and preachers disagree on this point – but I will present both and may the Holy Spirit help you decide. First, it did show that this man had changed for the better, and testified boldly about Jesus once he found out. Or second, it showed that this man continued to live in fear and was unreformed, since it seems he had betrayed Jesus for his own safety. But with this 2nd interpretation, let us look also at ourselves soberly, and realize that outward actions, even if they appear to glorify God, mean nothing if inwardly we have not been changed. Our words and our actions will eventually reveal the truth that is in our hearts.

So whether or not the healed paralytic had good intentions, when the Jews heard that he was doing these things on the Sabbath, they began to persecute him. But this works out for our good, because next we see Jesus 1) proving his authority as Lord over the Sabbath, by proving that he is the Son of God, equal to God, and 2) challenging the hypocrisy of the Jews, showing us that we are not saved by our own works, but by faith in Him alone. Look at v.17, “Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at work to this very day, and I too, am working.’” This is one of the strongest statements Jesus makes about himself. He says to them, “My Father.” He has just called himself the Son of God, which makes himself equal with God. For anyone else, ever in

history, to make this statement is outright blasphemy, but for Jesus, this is the truth. Jesus is the Son of God, He is the Lord, and he is always at work, even on the Sabbath. First of all, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, so he can make the rules concerning the Sabbath, yet, even with this power Jesus does not violate the Sabbath, contrary to what the Jews believed. Matt 12:11-12 says, “He said to them, ‘If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’” All that Jesus does is good, therefore he never really breaks the Sabbath law even when he is always at His work.

Verse 19 continues to build the case that Jesus is the Son of God. Please look, “Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.’” It’s not that the Son does not have enough power to do anything by himself, but it’s that he absolutely will not do what is outside of God’s will. It’s like saying, “I can’t steal money from my friend,” you may have the ability to do it, but you will never do it because it’s wrong. The Son does not exert an independent will against his Father, but is in complete unity and harmony with the will of God. God’s will is His will, and His will is God’s.

Their relationship is further expressed in v.20 “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.” Any father who loves his children shows them what they do. I noticed Msn. Gideon’s children like to draw. Before my stepfather passed away, he used to show Joe everything he did. He loved cars, and Joe had a massive toy car collection, and when he was 4 he could tell you the make and model of each car. He had little toy tool sets because my stepdad was a great handyman. Jesus was with God at the creation of the world, when the foundations of the earth were laid, when the heavens were created, when the animals were made and Adam and Eve first formed from the dust of the ground. And now, as Jesus is performing the work which God has commanded him to do, God is showing him His will.

A few weeks ago we saw Jesus change water to wine. Last week, he healed a boy 20 miles away by simply saying the word. Today, he miraculously healed a man who was paralyzed for 38 years – but God will show Jesus even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it (21). God is the creator and author of our life and the universe – he has the power to give and to take life away, and this power is bestowed upon the Son. Notice – the Son gives life to whom he is *pleased* to give it. What does this mean? It means that salvation is not dependent upon the will of man, but only upon the will of God. We cannot give ourselves life, we have no such power; this power belongs to the Son. It means we cannot save ourselves – only God can

save us. But what does this benefit, that salvation is dependent upon the will of God? 1. All the glory goes to God, none to us. 2. We have a sure salvation. Man is weak, and makes mistakes. God is strong, and perfect – we can trust his salvation. 3. It magnifies the praise and thankfulness in us personally to God, because we know we cannot save ourselves, but it was his good

pleasure to give us life.

Look at v.22-23, “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father.” Friends, let us be thankful for now that the Father judges no one, because no one can stand up to his judgment. When the 10 commandments were written in Exodus 20, there was great thunder and lightning, the people trembled in fear and stayed at a distance, and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die. (Ex 20:19)” Our darkness, the sin in us is so great, that we will burn and shrivel up, compared to the holiness of God, which I think may be why God had to conceal himself from us once sin came into the world. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, including you and me – we stand condemned already because we do not believe in God. I have attended a few weddings where the minister will not mention God once in the ceremony, but after the bride and groom repeat their vows, he says something like, “And these things you said (loving one another, respecting, cherishing, honoring), were but things that were already written on your heart.” If there is no God, who wrote those things in their hearts? But see how the world denies the existence of God, see how the world will **deny** the **source** of all these good gifts: life, hope, love, joy and peace – it is no wonder we live under guilt and condemnation.

But there is hope. Moses wrote in Deut 18:14-19: “The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb (where the 10 commandments were written) on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.’ The Lord said to me: ‘What they say is good. I will raise up from among them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.’”

This is the prophecy and promise Moses wrote of one who will come as a man, and speak to us in the name of the Lord. We cannot face the Lord alone, for his righteous and just anger burns against us – but thanks be to God, who sent his Son to be the atonement and propitiation for our sins. Jesus came to die for us, taking upon himself the full wrath of the anger of the Lord – that our sin was credited to him, so that his righteousness was credited to us. But his death was not the end, when he died, the greatest miracle happened! He rose to life, destroying the power of sin and death. Our guilt was taken away, our condemnation removed, because Jesus came to pay the price to purchase our souls, and redeemed us with his life. Therefore all judgment has been entrusted to the Son who has the authority to give life to whom he pleases, that all my honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Jesus says in v.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.” The Bible holds the words of Jesus – these verses are the words of Jesus. To hear Jesus’ words means to listen to them, and obey them. Sometimes we hear words, and they fall right back out of our ears – but that’s not hearing. Hearing is listening, remembering and responding. Here are some words Jesus says to the church in Sardis in Rev 3:1-3, “These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.” Cultivate a habit of listening to Jesus every day, set apart time morning and evening to read the Bible, and you will receive a new word each day. Read through the entire Bible, systematically, in order, a little bit at a time. Memorize Scripture. Let the word of God dwell in your heart and abide in you, and you will become like a tree planted near streams of living water.

The one who has eternal life also believes him who sent Jesus – this person believes in God. Now what does it mean to believe? It means to give your heart to something, to trust something completely. Some people may confess that they believe in God, but are they believing in the right God, or are they believing in a false God? To believe in God means that you believe in the Creator of the universe and the author of your life. To believe in God means that you believe he is God, that He is the Lord of your life, and that your life is not yours, but his. To believe in God means to believe in his absolute holiness, his righteousness and goodness, that you would trust him even if it means your life.

If you can hear the words of Jesus, if you believe in God with all your heart, Jesus says then you have eternal life and will not be condemned, you have crossed over from death to life. He says you have eternal life, you possess it – as soon as he says the word, immediately. He healed the royal official's son immediately, he healed the paralytic immediately – eternal life is yours immediately, you receive it now. This is the true life – it is the life Jesus has, it is living in communion and being reunited with God through Jesus Christ.

Look at v.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." This verse has two meanings, and it's not an either-or, but both at the same time are true. First, a time is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. This time that is coming refers to Jesus' second coming and the resurrection of the dead. It's important though, to take this verse in context with verse 24 – so the dead here are those who received eternal life through hearing the word and believing in God, and they will rise again to everlasting life. The second meaning is, a time has now come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. This one is applicable to us now. Notice that Jesus says the "dead" will hear the voice. Of course, everyone starts out as dead, before receiving the true life, but let us as believers confess how dead we are without Jesus, and remember how we were paralyzed in our sins before him to help ourselves, and grateful that he sought us to give us life.

Jesus is the wellspring and the source of our life – without him we have no life. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. Our life originates from Jesus, who is the life, and he has the power to give life to who he pleases. Look at v.27, "And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." The Son of Man was familiar to the Jews as a name for the Messiah (Dan 7:13-14) – but this name also proves that he was sent by God, and he was God on earth in the form of a man. Jesus had the complete power of God on earth, for he was given authority to judge. Jesus had judicial power (judge laws) – as all judgment was entrusted to him (v.22), he had legislative power (make laws), illustrated in being the Lord of the Sabbath (v8), and he also has executive power (enforce laws) – the authority to judge – to give life or to condemn.

According to v.28-29, 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. It's already quite amazing that he has the power to give life, but what will be even more amazing is the event just described, where at his second coming he will call out all who ever lived – all the dead from the beginning of time: and each one will be judged. Everyone will live for eternity, there is no exception – and each will go to one of two places: to heaven,

and enjoy eternal life in perfect communion with the source of life, or to hell, to eternal condemnation eternally apart from God forever. These eternal destinies will be exactly what each one deserves – for Jesus’ judgment is just, because it is based on God who is always good and always righteous. By himself, Jesus can do nothing; he judges only as he hears from God, and his judgment is just because he seeks not to please himself but God. It seems that sin comes from seeking to please ourselves – out of that comes the pride, the lust, the greed, the selfishness and many other sins – but God is holy and without sin: his judgment is always just, and he is the King of justice.

The apostle Paul says in 2 Cor 6:2, “I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” It will be too late when Jesus comes again to receive the salvation to eternal life. Jesus has testified to us of the truth, in v.19-30, but in the remainder of chapter 5, he does us a favor by setting aside his own testimony, and presenting to us a number of other weighty witnesses in order to secure our faith. Let us go over them quickly. Look at v.31-32: “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid.” It’s not that Jesus’ testimony is invalid – actually his testimony is all you need, because he came from heaven and he testifies to everything he has seen, even to God. But in order that we may be saved, he abides by his own law, which requires at least 2 witnesses for a conviction (see Deut 17:6).

The first extra witness in v.32 is another who testifies in Jesus’ favor, and Jesus knows his testimony about him is valid. This witness is believed to be referring to God, which Jesus will bring up again. The next testimony is from John the Baptist. The Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was, but he confessed freely, “I am not the Christ,” though he pointed toward the Christ (John 1:19-20). For a short period of time, the Jews listened to John, and enjoyed his testimony to the truth. He was a powerful witness, but they only chose to enjoy his light for a time, because soon he was put in prison for rebuking the immorality of Herod the Tetrarch (Luke 3:19-20).

Then there is the testimony even weightier than John – and that is the very work he was doing. The miracles, the healing ministry and raising the dead testified that the Father has sent his Son. Even in this chapter, the healing of the man who was paralyzed for 38 years, should have been a testimony to these Jews that Jesus was from God. Nicodemus came by secretly when he saw the miracles, in John 3. And in v.37 Jesus again says the God the Father himself testified concerning Jesus. When Jesus was baptized by John at the beginning of his ministry, a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. (Matt 3:17).” These were all testimonies and witnesses the Jews could have experienced firsthand one or more times – many

Jews heard John preach, many saw the miracles Jesus was doing, and many were there the day he was baptized.

Despite the indisputable evidence, they stubbornly refused to believe Jesus – so the word of God could not take root in their hearts. They study the Scriptures, but if they don't believe Jesus, they miss the most important parts of the Scriptures, and incorrectly depend on the Scriptures to give them eternal life, instead of the source of life himself. **They refused to come to Jesus, because they loved praise from men.** Matt 23:5 says, "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'" Because of their refusal to believe Jesus, their rock, which was the Scriptures, becomes their stumbling block. The Jews claim to believe Moses, but Moses wrote about Jesus – so Jesus does not have to accuse them for not believing, the testimony of Moses in the Scripture already condemns them.

Jesus says in v.44, "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" This can be a great hindrance in truly believing in God, as it was to the Jews. Look at the motive of why you do things – is it for the praise of men, or for the praise which comes from God. We can attend church every Sunday, study the Bible every day, have 7 or 8 Bible students and serve the church with all of our might – but if we are doing these things for the praise of men, then we are doing them for the wrong reason. Jesus taught the paralytic that inner, spiritual healing was the most important – and now Jesus is cutting through the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, exposing that their deeds were for the praise of men, and not for the praise of God.

When we do things for our own glory, it will be hard for us to believe in God, because we will want that glory for ourselves. Instead, let us first come to Jesus, let us seek for his glory, and let us make every effort not to work for the praise of men, but for the praise that comes from God. Jesus said, "I do not accept praise from men," so let us exchange the praise from men for the praise that comes from the only God. It's still good to go to church, to study the Bible, to teach the Bible, these things are very good: but let's do them to please God, regardless of whether we receive praise from men.

The final witness here is the Scriptures. Through the Scripture we find the writings of Moses, the Prophets, and Jesus' disciples which testify about Jesus. It contains the words of

Jesus, which we should dwell in us and which we should live by. Most of us know Q1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, but here is Q2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. Jesus has given us his testimony, along with God's, John the baptist's, the miracles and the Scriptures which all testify that Jesus is the Son of God, but the Scriptures are the witness that we can still see today, and contain his word.

In closing, Jesus says in v.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." Today Jesus has come to Bethesda, the House of Mercy and has learned about your condition and asks, "Do you want to get well?" You are sick with sin, and you are sitting in condemnation under a just and holy God. There is nothing you can do to redeem yourself, but yes, thanks be to God, there is a Redeemer. His voice, he calls out to you, "Do you want to get well?" "I have paid the price." Jesus told the paralytic: "stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you." How are we to stop sinning? Without Jesus, this is impossible, because we are born sinners. There is nothing you can do, but come to Jesus and believe in Him. Then, his Holy Spirit will come and dwell in you, and you will receive the power to stop sinning. Even if you have been saved, you still need to wash your feet every day. Be washed in the word of the Lord. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Can you hear his voice calling out to you? Come, and be clean. He has the authority to give you life: a new life reconciled to peace with God beginning now and lasting to eternity.