

The Gospel of John (32); The Third Discourse of Jesus (2)

Introduction:

We are presently in John 5, considering the third discourse of Jesus that John the Apostle recorded in this Fourth Gospel. Last Lord's Day we began to reflect on our Lord's words to those who desired and plotted to kill Him. In answering them, Jesus disclosed several amazing and fascinating truths regarding Himself, His relationship with God His Father, and of His work that He conducted in conjunction with His Father. Jesus claimed that He was working with God His Father in the realm of providence. Just as His Father was always working, so, too, He was working. What He meant by this was that He, along with His Father, was controlling all that transpires in history. This self-disclosure of Jesus was so incredible to the Jewish leaders that heard Him, that they accused Him of having committed the capital offense of blasphemy. In their thinking, Jesus had not only broken the Sabbath Day, in which they were wrong, but He made Himself equal with God, to which He had indeed laid claim. He declared that God was uniquely His Father and He was uniquely God's Son, thereby "making Himself equal with God" (v. 18).

In verse 20 Jesus taught that His Father "shows" Jesus "all things that He Himself does." Whenever the Lord Jesus revealed a remarkable insight or performed a miracle that astounded them who witnessed it, it was because the Father was at work in Him and through Him. But even though Jesus had already done so many wondrous works, it was in the Father's purpose to have Jesus do yet "greater works." This was to the end that people would "marvel" at the Son and what the Father was doing through Him.

What were these "greater works" that the Father would have Jesus do? Verses 21 through 23 tell us.

For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

The Father gave Jesus His Son the authority to *impart life* to the dead, which was the same authority as that of His Father (v. 21). But in addition, in an arena in which the Father does not involve Himself, the Father gave His Son all authority to *execute judgment* upon mankind (v. 22). The Father gave this authority to His Son to the end that all (people and angels, I would think) would give the same honor to His Son that they give to God the Father (v. 23). It is the will of God that Jesus is honored in the same manner and to the same degree that all are to honor God the Father.

This passage is one of the clearest statements of the deity of Jesus Christ that we find in the word of God. How could the infinite God (the Father) "show" Jesus all things unless Jesus Christ is also infinite God?¹ How could Jesus have the authority and ability to raise from spiritual death to spiritual life, and from physical death unto physical life, unless He Himself is God? How could Jesus execute the judgment of God on every human being in history for every transgression of the law of God in thought, attitude, action, and words, unless He is God? ."

This desire of the Father for all to honor His Son as He is honored, brought forth the words of Jesus, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." The only true worship of God that He regards and receives is that which glorifies His Son equally as we glorify God the Father.

¹ And yet, we should understand that when it says that God the Father "showed" His Son and "gave" to His Son, it was with respect to our Lord's human nature, for Christ's divine nature is in every way infinite to which nothing can be "added" (or removed).

Now again, the “greater works” that the Father would have His Son do is to impart life to the dead, and to execute judgment upon mankind. Our Lord Jesus sets these works forth in detail in the verses before us today. Here is **John 5:24-30**, the passage under study today:

²⁴“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. ²⁵Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. ²⁶For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, ²⁷and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. ³⁰I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

We should remember the context of these words. This third discourse follows the third sign of Jesus healing the lame man. Here are the words of **F. F. Bruce**:

The incident of the cripple at the pool of Bethesda is a ‘sign’ of this truth; as he received bodily healing through the enabling word of Christ, so it is through his word that men and women receive life on the spiritual plane. The Son, we have already been told, ‘gives life to whom he will’ (verse 21). Now we are told who those people are to whom the Son chooses to give life; they are those who in faith receive his life-giving word. Further, they receive the assurance that they will not ‘come into judgment’. As in John 3:18, the judgment here in view is the adverse judgment reserved for those who reject the Son, but ‘the one who believes in him is not judged’. The believer does not need to wait for the last day to hear the judge’s favorable verdict; it has been pronounced already. Nor do believers need to wait for the last day to experience the essence of resurrection; here and now they have ‘passed out of death into life’. This anticipation of a favorable verdict and resurrection life sums up what in more recent times we have come to call ‘realized eschatology.’²

Before we begin to work through these verses in some detail, let us first summarize the following truths set before us. First, Jesus declared with assurance in verse 24 that His people, His disciples, “have passed from death into life.” They may be assured that they presently have salvation. They do *now* possess and enjoy the gift of God in Jesus Christ, which is eternal life.

Secondly, in verses 25 through 27 Jesus declared that He had the authority, and therefore the ability, to impart spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead. Jesus is the One who causes people to come forth from having been dead--without the life that is in Him, to live in the glory and enjoyment of that life that is in Jesus Christ. God the Father had given authority to the Son to impart spiritual life, but He also gave Jesus authority to execute judgment on those who continue in spiritual death. God gave this authority to Jesus because He was the Son of Man, in other words, because Jesus was the promised Messiah, the One destined to reign over the Kingdom of God on behalf of His Father.

And thirdly, in verses 28 through 30 we read that God gave His Son the authority to raise all the physically dead from their graves and to judge them. On that great Day of Judgment King Jesus will raise every human being that has ever lived on His earth and then separate His people from all the rest, sending them to their two separate destinies. He will raise His own people unto the resurrection of life. He will raise all others unto the resurrection of damnation.

And lastly, verse 30 reveals that all that the Son of God does and will do is because He is acting on behalf of, and in the authority of, God His Father.

I. Our more detailed consideration of the meaning of Jesus’ declarations.

² F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 131.

A. True disciples of Jesus Christ presently have eternal life (5:24)

We read our Lord's words in **verse 24**, "***Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.***" Our Lord was giving a word that demanded the greatest attention of those who heard Him. Jesus began, "Most assuredly, I say to you." This is one more instance in which the Lord doubled His word, "Amen", in order to arrest the attention and press the importance of His words on His hearers. It would have been better had the translators of the NKJV followed the KJV which recorded these words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." This expression is common to John's Gospel. John recorded 25 times Jesus expressing these words, "Amen, Amen" (Ἀμήν ἀμήν). Here in verse 24 we have the sixth occurrence thus far in this Gospel. The next occurrence is in the next verse, verse 25.

What was it that Jesus wanted His hearers to understand most clearly and thoroughly? Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, ***he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life...***" Jesus used two verbs³ to describe the one who has eternal life. First, he "hears" Jesus' word and secondly, he "believes" in God the Father who sent Jesus. Now, when Jesus spoke of one who "hears" His word, was He speaking of anyone and anybody who simply ***physically*** hears His word? All of us here are "hearing" His words as we are reading them. Is this all that He is suggesting by the verb "hears"? I think not. What Jesus was referring to was not merely listening to Jesus' words as recorded in the Bible as they are read. Jesus is speaking of the one who truly "hears" His word, as the Holy Spirit enables the sinner "to hear" so as to transform him from a sinner into a disciple of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in a similar way of the Christians at Thessalonica.

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, ***you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God,*** which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thess. 2:13)

The Lord Jesus causes people to be saved from their sin, to enter into newness of spiritual life upon ***hearing from Him***. The Holy Spirit is at work when this occurs. As Christians we hear someone read the word of God or proclaim it in our hearing, but when the Lord is at work blessing His Word, we hear it as the Lord Himself speaking to us. While we hear the Word of God as the Holy Spirit enlivens it to us, we believe it to be Him speaking to us. **J. C. Ryle** spoke to this matter of hearing the word of Jesus:

We see in these verses that *the salvation of our souls depends on hearing Christ*. It is the man, we are told, who "hears Christ's word," and believes that God the Father raised Him to save sinners, "who has everlasting life." Such "hearing" of course is something more than mere listening. It is hearing as a humble scholar (student), --hearing as an obedient disciple,--hearing with faith and love,--hearing with a heart ready to do Christ's will: this is the hearing that saves...

To "hear" Christ in this way, we must never forget, is just as needful now as it was eighteen hundred years ago. It is not enough to hear sermons, and run to preachers, though some people seem to think this makes up the whole of religion. We must go much further than this: we must "hear Christ." To submit our hearts to Christ's teaching, --to sit humbly at His feet by faith, and learn of Him,--to enter His school as penitents, and become his believing scholars,--to hear His voice and follow Him: this is the way to heaven. Till we know something experimentally of these things, there is no life in us.⁴

³ More precisely they are two participles rather than verbs. Participles are like verbal adjectives, they have characteristics of both adjectives and verbs. Here the participles are the words "hears" and "believes." It might have been better to translate them, as "hearing" and "believing" in order to give them the emphasis of continuous action.

⁴ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 292.

This is a work of God. There are times when God has refused to enable people “to hear” His word, even when they have been physically hearing His word having been rehearsed before them. In Deuteronomy, 40 years after God had brought Israel out of bondage from Egypt, Moses said of them:

²Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: “You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land—³the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. ⁴Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see ***and ears to hear, to this very day.*** (Deut. 29:2-4)

Many centuries later God said to His prophet Ezekiel: “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, ***who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house***” (Ezek. 12:2). I fear that there are multitudes in churches today all over the world who have had the word of God read to them and explained to them and pressed upon them, but they have not and do not “hear” so as to be transformed by His word.

How, then, do we know if we are ones who are hearing the words of Jesus that we are having read and explained before us? I would say that there are three ways. First, we are hearing the words of Jesus rightly if we believe them indeed to be the words of Jesus to us. Second, we are hearing the words rightly if our hearing is accompanied with a measure of understanding the meaning of His words. And thirdly, we are hearing the words of Jesus if we are impacted with the relevance and importance of His words to our souls.

But not only are we to be “hearing” His word, but we are to be “believing.” Jesus spoke of the one who ***“hears My word” and “believes in Him.”*** Take note, Jesus spoke of ***hearing His word***, but then He spoke of ***believing on God the Father*** who had sent Jesus. Even as we truly hear Jesus speaking to us, His words lead us to believe on His Father, who had sent Jesus to be the Savior of sinners.

Sometimes the word of God speaks of us placing ***our faith in Jesus Christ*** for salvation. In other places, like here, the word of God speaks of us placing ***our faith in God the Father*** who sent Jesus to be our Savior.

Just as the Son healed the invalid by the pool of Bethesda by his *word*, so also is it his word that brings eternal life (cf. 6:63, 68) and cleansing (15:3), or judgment (12:47). The one who belongs to God hears what God says (8:47). Hearing Jesus’ word is identical to hearing God’s word, since the Son speaks only what the Father gives him to say. Hearing in this context, as often elsewhere, includes belief and obedience. The belief is spelled out, and its object is the one who sent Jesus—not because it would be inappropriate to specify Jesus as the object of faith (e.g. 3:16; 14:1), but because the immediate context is concerned to show how the Son in all he says and does mediates the Father to us. As the words and deeds of the Son are the words and deeds of the Father, so faith placed in the Son is placed in the Father who sent him.⁵

As we said, Jesus used two participles to describe the ones that have everlasting life. They are ones who “hear” and ones who “believe.” Both of these participles are in ***the present tense*** in Greek, which means that the action of these verbs is ***continuous***. Jesus was not speaking of a one-time hearing or a one-time believing, for He was speaking of the one who “hears” and “believes.” This is what characterizes the true Christian. Therefore, this is no verse to promote a one-time decision to “accept Christ”, which is so popular in evangelical circles. The Bible does not teach such a thing. Spiritual life, eternal life, is enjoyed and evidenced by ***hearing*** the words of Jesus and ***believing*** in His Father who sent Him to be our Lord and Savior. Hearing and believing are characteristics of true Christians. His people began to do so when Jesus Christ put forth His power to raise them from spiritual death unto spiritual life. At that time they passed from death into life and they continue in that state of spiritual life from then unto eternity ***hearing*** the words of Jesus the Son of God and ***believing*** on God His Father for having sent Son.

Jesus declared that the one who is hearing His words and believing on the Father who sent Him ***“has everlasting life.”*** Jesus declared with authority in verse 24 that His people, His disciples, presently possess

⁵ Donald A. Carson, ***The Gospel According to John*** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), pp. 256.

everlasting life. They may be assured that they presently have salvation. They do now possess and enjoy the gift of God in Jesus Christ, which is eternal life. This simple word, “has” is a present tense verb. We who are Christians *presently possess* everlasting life.

Now in the writings of John the Apostle (this Gospel and his epistles), eternal life is often set forth as *the present possession of believers*. 1 John 5:12 records, “Whoever has the Son *has life*; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” In the other books of the New Testament, however, everlasting life is set forth as *a promise* we will one day receive, an inheritance that one day will be bestowed upon us. For example, Jesus said in Matthew 19:29, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and *inherit eternal life*.” In those places in which eternal life is set forth as a future prospect, the emphasis is on *the eternal duration* of life. But here in John 5:24 and the many places in which eternal life is set forth as a present possession, the emphasis is on *the quality* of spiritual life that we now enjoy and will enjoy everlastingly.

Jesus declared further in this verse, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, *and shall not come into judgment*...” How do we understand this? Some would say, “We take it just as it says, Christians will not have to stand in the judgment of God when Jesus returns, that is only reserved for non-Christians.” There are many who teach this. However, the word of God makes it clear that every human being will stand before Jesus Christ the Judge on the last Day. There is a *general resurrection* at the end of the age followed by a *general judgment* of all mankind. At that time every one of us will give an account of the words we have spoken, the attitudes we have exhibited, the actions we have performed, and the thoughts that have coursed through our minds. For example, we read in Hebrews 9:27, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” That is true of all mankind. And Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” And in Romans 14:10 Paul wrote, “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”

What, then, is meant by our Lord’s words that those who have passed from death into life “*shall not come into judgment*”? It simply means that Christians will not come under condemnation on the Day of Judgment. They will be able to stand exonerated from sin and free of shame on that Day. They will do so, of course, for they will stand in the righteousness of Christ before the Judgment seat of Christ. We will now read the full context of Hebrews 9:27f, “*And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*”

Let us look at the final clause of John 5:24. It reads, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, *but has passed from death into life.*” The beauty of the Greek language is its ability to be very precise in its expression. The verb used here, “has passed”, is a perfect tense verb. What this means is that it speaks of the action of the noun as having taken place at some time in the past, and its effects have continued into the present. It declares that the one who hears the words of Jesus and believes on the Father who sent Him had passed from spiritual death into the spiritual life that they currently have and enjoy. The Lord was not saying that “hearing” and “believing” resulted in passing from death into life, but that their hearing and believing indicated they had already passed from death into life. They had been recipients of a spiritual resurrection from spiritual death into spiritual life, and the evidence of having done so was in their hearing and believing. This has some significant and important implications for our understanding of our standing before our God.

That for one who hears his word and believes God who sent him eternal life has already begun, the judgment of God has lost its fearsomeness, and death had been superseded. What makes this pronouncement special is, of course, that the final decision that determines the life and future of human beings and that is spoken of here and in what follows in eschatological language is transferred from the future to the present, in accordance with the word that Jesus speaks as the one sent by the Father and with the answer people give to it. The distinction between the present and the future is not thereby canceled out, but eternal life does begin qualitatively in the present. Death also gains a different content than what it usually has for humans: already in this life it is experienced as a passage to true eternal life and this

loses its all-threatening, ultimately critical character for the future. It is no longer ahead of a person but behind him or her.⁶

Now in John 3 we considered how the new life that God gives to His people is due to the experience of *the new birth*, of being born again. The same experience of entering into spiritual life expressed here is not that of new birth, but of *spiritual resurrection*. Both are true. Both speak to the same transformative experience that God works in His people when He brings them to salvation. To become born again is the same event as having been spiritually raised from the dead. When the Lord regenerated us, we were born again. When the Lord put forth His power to save us, He raised us from spiritual death into spiritual (eternal) life.

One of the most clear teachings of salvation as a resurrection from spiritual death unto spiritual life is in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. He first wrote of the authority that the Father gave to His Son, then He wrote of how that power is operative in saving people from their life of sin unto spiritual and eternal life.

²²And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵*even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ* (by grace you have been saved), ⁶*and raised us up together*, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 1:22-2:7)

Before we move onward from verse 24, let me illustrate what is meant by the Lord's words, "*he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life.*" Over the years I have often quoted a friend of mine who is now with the Lord. He was a simple down-to-earth man, who was originally from Arkansas.⁷ I recall that he said the Lord used this verse to impart to his soul saving faith in Jesus Christ. As he had read this verse the Holy Spirit made the meaning very clear to his understanding, relevant to his condition, and real to his personal experience. He said that at that moment he knew that he had become a Christian. He had heard the words as having come from Jesus to His soul and the result is that He believed the gospel. The Lord had saved him. Doug had become one whom Jesus said, "hears my word." He also became one who "believes in Him, that is, God the Father, who had sent His Son to be His Savior. True salvation is a work of god's grace whereby the Lord Jesus speaks to His people through His word, imparting true, spiritual, everlasting life.

We read in the next two verses more information regarding this spiritual resurrection unto life that the Lord Jesus performs upon His people.

B. Jesus has the authority and ability to give spiritual life to the spiritually dead (5:25-27)

⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 197.

⁷ Doug was a second grade public school teacher. He was the only white person in an all-black grade school in north Sacramento. They all loved Doug Moore, because he had a way of expressing himself that was always memorable and generally comical too. He had a way of stating truth in a few words so that when he spoke, every body knew he was right. For example, I recall a situation when all the teachers had a meeting and they were discussing what to do with little Johnny, for he had stabbed a fellow second grader with a pencil. Someone said, "The problem with Johnny is that he does not love himself enough." Everybody nodded in agreement. Then Doug spoke up, "No, the problem is not that Johnny does not love himself enough, but that Johnny doesn't love others enough." Everyone was silent. What could they say?

Jesus spoke of His power to bring forth spiritual life to those who are presently spiritually dead in their sin. We read in **verse 25**: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.*”

This is a statement of the sovereign authority of Jesus Christ to impart spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead. Herman Ridderbos wrote of this verse, “As an expression of Jesus’ messianic consciousness, it may perhaps be considered the most powerful pronouncement in John’s Gospel.”⁸

Here in **verse 25** we have another example of the “Verily, verily” or the “Amen, Amen” in order to emphasize what follows. It is translated in the NKJV as “Most assuredly.”

Jesus then said, “*The hour is coming, and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.*” When these verses are read over quickly without much attention given, because of the expressions, “the dead” and “those who hear will live”, people commonly assume that Jesus was referring to the future bodily resurrection from the dead at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But Jesus’ words make it clear that He was speaking of His ability to bring forth at the present time a *spiritual resurrection* from spiritual death unto spiritual life. Jesus said, “*the hour is coming, and now is.*”

We might understand it of raising of the dead at the last day were it not for the “and now is”. This shows that what is primarily in mind is the present giving of life that characterizes the ministry of the Son. In Him the last age is vividly present. Men’s eternal destiny is determined by their attitude to Him. Those who are spiritually dead hear His voice, and those who have heard it live. “Hear”, of course, means “hear with appreciation”, “take heed”.⁹

By these words in verse 25, Jesus was declaring that the long-awaited Kingdom of God had arrived and He had the authority and the ability to raise people unto spiritual life to enable their entrance and life in the Kingdom of God.

“The hour is coming and now is,” are emphatically forward (i.e. placed at the beginning for emphasis)... The time referred to is that of the New Testament era, which, as Jesus speaks, still “is coming,” since the work of redemption is not yet complete and which yet “now is,” since Jesus is here and his saving word at this very moment rings in men’s ears. It is thus impossible to refer these words to the last day and to interpret them with reference to the resurrection at that day. The Jews to whom Jesus is speaking need not wait till a later time, the hour to escape from death is now right here.¹⁰

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that speaks to this. We might consider just one—Ezekiel’s vision of *the valley of dry bones*. Here is Ezekiel 37:

The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. ²Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. ³And He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

So I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.”

⁴Again He said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, *hear the word of the LORD!*’ ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. ⁶I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; *and you shall live.* Then you shall know that I am the LORD.””

⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.

⁸ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans, 1997), p. 197.

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 318.

¹⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 391.

⁹Also He said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.””” ¹⁰***So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived,*** and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

¹¹Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’ ¹²Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. ¹⁴I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it,” says the LORD.”” (Ezek. 37:1-14)

Ezekiel was a prophet to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. They thought that their existence as a nation had been extinguished. There was no longer any hope for them that “Israel” they might “live” again before the Lord. This prophecy is a word of promise that God would cause His people of Israel to be restored and that they would return to their homeland. They would once again live before the Lord, for the Lord would cause them to come alive spiritually. He would cause them who were dead to come alive. Contrary to what many assume to be the teaching of this passage, it was not fulfilled in the physical return of the people to the Promised Land. Nor is this a prophecy of a future bodily resurrection of Jewish people who would then live on in a future Jewish millennium. Rather, it is a prophecy of new life--spiritual life--that God would impart to His people through Jesus Christ. They were spiritually dead, separated from God and the blessing of life in Him. But God would cause them to live before Him.

In this prophecy we read of the sovereign work of God in bringing salvation to His people. These were spiritually dead people; their bones were very dry. We also see the role of the word of God preached through which God works to create spiritual life in dead sinners. Only God could cause life to enter where there was only death. We see the role of the Holy Spirit in blessing the preaching of the word of God. God commanded Ezekiel to preach the word of God to these dead, dry bones. But God caused and enabled these spiritually dead corpses to hear His word, and as a result they came to life (vs. 4, 6). God used His instrument of the word preached to impart the Holy Spirit into them, thereby causing them to live. Just as God had originally breathed into Adam who was but dust and the result was that he lived, becoming a living soul, so He performs the same kind of miraculous work in raising the spiritually dead to spiritual life. What is proclaimed in Ezekiel 37 is being realized in this current age in which Jesus Christ is Lord. “Even now” He causes people to be raised from spiritual death unto spiritual life through His word, enabling them to enter and live within His realm of the Kingdom of God.

We read further in John 5:25 that Jesus said, “The hour is coming, and now is ***when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.***” Earlier in verse 24 the emphasis was on continual hearing (and believing). Here, however, the first “hear” is future tense, they “will hear.” He works His salvation in those who are dead but He has purposed that those He has purposed to save “will hear.” The second “hear”—“those who hear”, is actually speaking of those that had come to life did so when they had “heard.”¹¹ It is the voice of the Son of God that they heard that resulted in them coming to spiritual life from the state of spiritual death.

In verse 21 it is the fact that the Son “makes alive,” *bestows life* on the dead. In verse 24 it is the fact that the believer *has life*. Now it is the fact that the believers *shall live*, namely on and on to eternity.¹²

¹¹ The clause, “who will hear”, in this translation and the other more popular English translations is set forth as future tense. However, the Greek participle is in the aorist tense. It should be translated, “those who heard”, which speaks of the moment of the Lord having imparted spiritual life to them.

¹² Ibid, 391.

We next read in **John 5:26** and **27**, ***“For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, ²⁷and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.”*** The first word, “for”, is an explanatory conjunction; it begins a sentence that provides the explanation why Jesus is able to do this work of imparting spiritual life to spiritually dead people. “The explanatory “for” signals that Jesus is explaining the source and power behind the life the Son provides.”¹³ God the Father has life in Himself. It is His very nature. Life is not derived from or dependent on any other or anything outside of Him. Where God is, life is. And this same life that is in the Father is in His Son. Spiritual life can come forth from the Son of God to raise the spiritually dead to life, because He Himself is life, the nature of life, the source of life, the meaning of life. “Jesus being what He is, can do what He says.”¹⁴ “The restorative life the Son provides comes from the very life of God, both Father and Son.”¹⁵

Verse 27 states that God the Father has entrusted His Son the authority to judge the world. The Father gave Him this authority because He is the Son of Man. “The Son of Man” was our Lord’s favorite self-designation in the gospels. It normally should be understood to identify Him as the promised Messiah. Here, however, the Son of Man may be speaking of His human nature. God the Father gave Him authority to judge the human race because He Himself was human; He was a Man who would one day judge all men. He would do so, however, on behalf of His father.

C. Jesus has the authority to raise all the physical dead from their graves and judge them regarding their eternal destiny. (5:28-30)

We read **verses 28** through **30**, “

²⁸Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. ³⁰I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

This is not the same resurrection that was addressed in verses 25 through 27. That was a spiritual resurrection; this is a physical resurrection. It could be said that every true Christian experiences two resurrections, both spiritual and physical. The spiritual resurrection in verses 25 through 27 speaks of the first resurrection. The physical resurrection in verses 28 through 30 speaks of the second resurrection.

Our Lord began this statement of verse 27 with the words, ***“Do not marvel at this.”*** Now if we were to ponder at any length of time and with any depth of reflection about the future day when the Lord Jesus will raise to life all the dead of all human history, we could not help but “marvel.” And yet, our Lord declared, ***“Do not marvel at this.”*** Why did He say this? I think for at least ***two reasons***.

First, we should have such a high view of God that we should consider the bodily resurrection of the human race and bringing them into judgment not a difficult or unreasonable work on His part. God is infinitely powerful, and life resides in Him; therefore, He can quite easily impart life to whomever and however many He chooses. We should not think that this would be such a tremendous challenge for our God. The apostle Paul would later reason with King Agrippa, “Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?” (Acts 26:8). It is understandable that the Lord Jesus Himself would say regarding the prospect of the resurrection from the dead at the end of the age, “Do not marvel at this.”

But there is a second, more significant reason that our Lord might say, “Do not marvel” regarding the future bodily resurrection of the dead. This is because He is contrasting it with the spiritual resurrection that He had just addressed. It is as though He said, “If you are going to marvel, marvel that God can raise those who are spiritually dead to spiritual life; do not marvel that God can raise those who are physically dead to physical life. In a sense it is a much easier thing to raise a physically dead person to physical life than to

¹³ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 289.

¹⁴ Lenski, p. 393.

¹⁵ Klink, p. 289.

raise a spiritually dead person to spiritual life. Paul reasons that it is the same power that God employed in raising Jesus from the dead that raises spiritually dead people to spiritual life (Eph. 1:18-20). And in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul wrote that it was the same power that God put forth to create the heavens and the earth that imparts spiritual life to sinners. He wrote,

³But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴whose minds the god of this age (satan) has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. ⁵For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:3-6)

We then read, Jesus said, "***for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.***" Now a simple, plain, literal reading of that clause would lead to the conclusion that the Lord was speaking of ***a single event in the future when this general resurrection of all the dead will take place.*** He said, "the hour is coming" when this event would occur. All who are in the graves, both the saved and the unsaved, would come forth in that hour.

This verse, in my opinion, if taken at face value, interpreted simply and clearly, renders premillennialism to be unbiblical. This verse, in my opinion, renders popular dispensational teaching, a form of premillennialism, to be unbiblical. The reason we can say this so forthrightly is that these few verses (among others) teach a future general resurrection of all humanity as a single end-time event. Premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism has no place in their thinking for a single, all-encompassing general resurrection of the dead. Those endtime scenarios teach that there is a separation of at least 1,000 years between the time that the Lord will raise Christians from the dead and the time that He will raise the unsaved and bring them before His judgment. If I could modify verse 27 a bit to fit their theology, it would read like this:

Do not marvel at this; for the ***hours*** are coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, ***and then 1,000 years later***, those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Of course the Lord Jesus never said or intended to say such a thing. There will be one general resurrection of all mankind at the end of the age followed by one general judgment of all mankind in which all will be consigned to one of two destinies: eternal life and eternal death. But we will need to address this next week, Lord willing.

D. All that the Son of God does is on behalf of, and in the authority of, God the Father. (5:30)

In verse 30 Jesus declared, "***I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.***" Everything that Jesus ever did or ever will do He does so as to fulfill the will of His Father. It is not possible for them to work at cross purposes, for they are one God, of one essence, of one mind, of one purpose, and of one will. All administration of justice by King Jesus on the Last day will be just, measured, and appropriate. His judgment is righteous, for it is consistent with God His Father who is altogether righteous, on behalf He will consummate history and usher in the new heavens and the new earth.

II. Several implications and applications of Jesus' declarations.

1. In our passage we see the true blessings of being Christians.

The privileges of a true Christian are greatly underrated by many. Chiefly from deplorable ignorance of Scripture, they have little idea of the spiritual treasures of every believer in Jesus. These treasures are brought together here in beautiful order, if we will only look at them. One of a true Christian's treasures is the "presentness" of his salvation. It is not a far distant thing which he is to have at last, if he does his duty and is good. It is his own in title the moment he believes. He is already pardoned, forgiven, and saved, though not in heaven.—Another of a true Christian's treasures is the "completeness" of his justification. His sins are entirely removed, taken away, and blotted out of God's book, by Christ's blood. He may look forward to judgment without fear, and say, "Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. 8:34). He shall stand without fault before the throne of God.—The last, but not the least, of a true Christian's treasures, is the entire change in his relation and position toward God. He is no longer as one dead before Him,—dead, legally, like a man sentenced to die, and dead in heart. He is "alive unto God" (Rom. 6:11). "He is a new creature. Old things are passed away, and all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Well would it be for Christians if these things were better known!¹⁶

2. We see that our Lord Jesus has the power to save our loved ones and others for whom we have concern for their salvation.

No one is beyond Christ's ability to raise from spiritual death unto spiritual life. He is not under obligation to save everyone. And the ones for whom we are concerned certainly have no claims on God to expect or demand mercy from Him. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ has the power and the desire to save sinners, even great sinners. We should pray fervently and regularly that He would do so.

3. That we are the undeserving recipients and are ones who contributed nothing to our salvation, but received everything freely from Him, how grateful and indebted we should be toward our Lord and God!

4. That we are so indebted to the grace of God for all that we will have and enjoy in eternity, how humble we should be before Him and others.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,
so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.
To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time,
apart from sin, for salvation. (Heb. 9:27f)

¹⁶ Ryle, pp. 293f.