

Everyone in prison is innocent. At least that's what you'll hear from everyone in prison. They didn't do it. They were framed. The judge was paid off. Of course we know better. We're not naïve to think that everyone in prison is innocent of the things they're accused of doing. A guilty person getting what they deserve actually gives us a good feeling. That's the way it should work. That's what we expect from the criminal justice system and judges.

But wasn't judging supposed to stop. Tolerance is in. Everyone should be able to do what they want, when they want, and no one can tell them they're wrong. That's the training we've had over the last 20 years or more. We've been taught through repetition to not see differences in people. It's led to a world in which we start thinking there isn't much difference between people. Everybody experiences high points and low points, they begin life similar and everyone ends life the same. They do their own thing and because we're to tolerate everything we can't hold people accountable for anything.

On this Sunday called Last Judgment Sunday Jesus speaks in the gospel about a role that his Father gave him. It might be a surprising role given what we know about Jesus. It might be a role we would expect the Father to have, but the fact that the Son has the same role actually is comforting. Everything is comforting when...

Jesus is our judge
Presiding now over earthly life
Presiding later over eternal life

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." This is a very true, very easy going statement of Jesus. But it made the religious leaders so angry. Jesus was claiming equality with God the Father. Worse Jesus was claiming God the Father was his father. No one should be able to speak about God that way without punishment. Except for Jesus it was true.

Jesus doesn't walk back his answer, rather he continues that not only are they equal in essence but also equal in action. **"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does."** Everything God does he gives to the Son to do too. It wasn't that Jesus didn't have it before but rather he continues to have it and exercise it. No one would argue that God the Father presides over earthly life. So Jesus too was saying his authority and power was to preside over earthly life as well.

Earthly life continues to go on like it always has. People are born, go to school, graduate, get married, have children, and get a job. Not that much difference. And there's no difference either in our spiritual lives here on earth. Each person here is exactly the same. We have our moments where if we were standing before the judge we would be in trouble. Jesus our judge would have no trouble finding us guilty of sin. And at times we claim we're better, that there are differences because we've decided to follow Christ. We've welcomed him into our hearts. We've reasoned ourselves into believing in Jesus. But Jesus is our judge and presides over our earthly life. He has ever reason to find us guilty and deserving of judgment that would send us to hell forever.

Judges can rule one of two ways, guilty or not guilty. Our judge is also our Redeemer and our Savior. This judge has declared us not guilty. Dead people, caught in their sins, are made alive. **"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."** In a surprising move the Father in his grace sent his Son to be our judge and also our Savior. The gift of spiritual life changes our judgment. Jesus takes us from guilty going to hell, to not guilty and bound for heaven. **"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned."** It's through God Word that faith is worked. It's the power of Christ that means you won't be condemned. Dead sinners are made alive in Christ. The power of unbelief is broken. The curse of sin is lifted. The dead receive life.

This judgment doesn't wait till the end of your life but has happened already. You used to exist on a cliff opposite God with no way of getting to the other side. Your side meant death. God's plan always was for our Redeemer to come get us. The sinner **"has crossed over from death to life."** Jesus came to our earthly life and with full and free forgiveness brought us to God's side where there's life. We do nothing to win it, earn it, or pay God back for it. It's ours. We believe in his promises. We trust when we hear his Word. Those who hear and believe in Christ are judged. But it's good and not scary. It's from Jesus our judge who presides over our earthly life right now.

Judges can preside over many cases in their time on the bench. They often specialize in certain parts of the law rather than get involved in all different types of cases. One judge won't have total control over every place that someone comes into contact with the court system. Criminals see one judge; lawsuits of various kinds are handled by many different judges. Jesus is not like that. He has contact over each and every part of our lives. He presides over our earthly life now. His presiding will not stop with this life though. Jesus presides over our eternal life as well.

Jesus is granting life to dead people already now. It's spiritual life. He also reserves the right to raise physically dead bodies back to life in the resurrection on the Last Day. On that day all people, from all time, in the whole world will be raised from the dead. No one will escape. No one will fool God. No one will have any other option but to stand before God. The voice of Jesus to raise those physically dead will be irresistible. But some will be rising to fear and others to joy. **"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."**

Any differences lost today will be clearly seen on the Last Day. For those who died in their sinfulness without a Savior, the Last Day will be one of fear. Do you look back on your life, or on yesterday and see sin there? In what ways have you personally gone against God? What is your hope for the Last Day based on, because you'll be raised on that day too? Do you hope that God was just kidding about that condemnation? That he wouldn't be so mean. Because God loves he wouldn't send you or me to hell. Besides we were better than most; or least not as bad as many.

Careful, because Jesus is not saying you go to heaven or hell based on your good or bad works. Good works are only good to God for one reason, Christ. Christ cannot be excluded when talking about works. All of us have been purchased by the blood of Christ shed on the cross. The final verdict in God's courtroom where Jesus is judge is not based on whether you've done the required good works to get in. Rather the final verdict is based on Jesus Christ, the judge and redeemer, who took away all your sins. His death was what satisfied God and granted us heaven. We hear Jesus' voice in his Word, we are led to faith and trust in that Word by the Holy Spirit, and we are judged to receive eternal life by he who won eternal life for us. Our Savior is our judge presiding over our eternal life.

For every criminal in prison their sentencing day probably still is fresh in their minds. For some the Last Day might cause fear. But you who hear God's Word have already been judged. For you the Last Day has in a way already happened. Your judge already took away your sins. Your judge already set you free and declared you not guilty. Jesus is your judge who presides over your earthly life now giving you peace and life to live for him. And Jesus is your judge who presides over your eternal life promising to raise you from the dead on the Last Day to be with him in heaven.