

Read: John 5:19-24

Not Guilty?!

John 5:21-24

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. 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. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The room was silent. Everyone was waiting as they were staring at one person. What would he say next? Then, finally, he spoke just two words. “Not guilty!”

The courtroom was shocked. What? How could this be? The person on trial had done so many bad things! There was a *lot* of evidence about a *lot* of crimes committed. And yet the judge declared the person not guilty? But not only that! Could you believe this? The judge then said that the person was not guilty because he, the judge, was going to go to prison and take the criminal's place. Incredible!

I think you know that this scene would never take place in our world. We expect guilty people to be punished. Likewise, we would never expect a judge to punish himself and take the place of a criminal. That's not only incredible, it would seem to be impossible. But while this would seem impossible in our world, it is possible in God's kingdom.

In the words from John 5 today, Jesus is talking about how his Father sent him to this world for all people. Jesus did something truly incredible when he came—he offered himself to take the place of all sinners. He suffered the punishment of death and the prison of hell so that he could give forgiveness, life, and freedom to sinners like you and me.

Someday soon, Jesus will come back again on judgment day, and he will be the judge of all. But Jesus tells us something wonderful today. Even though we are spiritual “criminals” who are guilty of sinning against him, he is going to say something amazing to us in his eternal courtroom on judgment day—“not guilty.” Jesus said it this way, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

You see, Jesus our judge is also Jesus our substitute and Savior. He stepped into our place so that on the Last Day he could declare us innocent. Believers who look to Jesus in faith will receive life in heaven, not death in hell.

What an amazing message! What a reason to give thanks! What a message we have to share with others! Jesus declares us not guilty by his grace through faith in him. Thanks be to God!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- What is the day called when Jesus will come back again?
- What will happen on judgment day?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- What does it mean to be guilty of something? Who is guilty in this world?
- Explain why we already can know with confidence what the verdict will be for us on judgment day.

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Agree/Disagree: God is not really a fair God if he declares sinful people to be innocent. Explain your answer.
- Describe how judgment day is similar to a courtroom scene using as many parallels as you can think of.

Closing Prayer:

Dear Jesus, thank you for taking my place to suffer and die for me. Because you are my Savior, I know that you will come back on judgment day and declare me not guilty. Thank you! Amen.