

“YOU SHALL DIE IN YOUR SIN—UNLESS...”

John 8:21-29

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

A well known preacher and author recently received much criticism for writing a book critical against those who undermine the reality of “absolute truth claims.” He was told that he was too harsh and that he should have been more conversant with those in error; after all, Jesus would never have treated erroneous teachers that way. So, he decided to do some research into all of Jesus’ dealings with those holding wrong views of Scripture. Now he has written another book—guess what he concluded? That he was probably too soft on those teaching error!

Our text today is another example of this conflict with false teaching religious leaders. This is a continuation of the conflict that we noted with the Pharisees last week in 8:12-20. Now, these leaders are called the “Jews”, John’s typical name for Jesus’ religious opponents who did not accept His messianic claim. This scene likely takes place a brief time after the events of vv. 12-20; how long we cannot be sure, but not likely very long after.

In this portion Jesus makes it clear that some people, though very religious, will not make it to heaven. In fact, they will actually “die in their sin,” without God and without hope. There is only one way that they can be saved—they must “believe” that Jesus is God and trust in Him.

Unfortunately, these men were not about to admit their error, and only turned the discussion more antagonistically against Jesus by attacking His person. They could not answer His theological points, so they ridiculed Jesus. Jesus warned them that one day they would realize their error, but that then it would be too late. Knowing that Jesus is truly God and that He is one with the Father, always doing the things that please God is not comforting when your fate is settled and you are dying in your sins.

Your position concerning Jesus Christ is not a game; it literally has “life and death” consequences. **Unless you believe in Him, trusting in His atoning work on the cross and the only sufficient provision for your sin, YOU CANNOT AND WILL NOT EVER GO TO HEAVEN!**

I. YOU CAN’T MAKE YOUR WAY TO HEAVEN (21-22).

A. A Great Gulf—“I go away.”

This is a gulf too wide for you or anyone to cross.

B. False Seeking—“You will seek Me.”

But this is seeking for man-centered reasons—due to stress, danger, selfish needs, etc. Especially at the time of death—in desperation and fear.

C. No way to get there—“Where I am going, you cannot come.”

Contrast what Jesus says to His disciples in 13:33--cannot come now; can later (14:1-3).

D. Death in Sin—i.e. in the state of sin; condemned by sin; lost; without hope.

If any particular sin is thought of, it is the sin of rejecting Jesus.

E. Excuses—22

1. Ignore Jesus' pointed statements about their spiritual needs
2. Mockingly comment on Jesus' possible suicide

II. YOUR NATURE IS OPPOSITE GOD'S AND CANNOT EXIST IN HEAVEN (23-24).

- A. Below/above
- B. Of This World/Not of This World
- C. False/true (v. 26b)

God is true in His nature, and His words are true.

You reject His messenger and thus His Sender—God. **You are in Error.**

Contrast Col. 3:1-2 of believers.

- D. Die in your sins (plural here—their individual sins for which they pay the penalty.)

III. YOU CANNOT GO TO HEAVEN UNLESS YOU AGREE WITH GOD CONCERNING JESUS (26-27; 28b; 29)

- A. You have got to listen to the Lord's authoritative pronouncements concerning you (26).
Much to speak, and thus to “judge”—for you are not right with God.

- B. Your position in diametrically opposed to God's

- C. Jesus always speaks in agreement with His Father and Commissioner (26-28)

1. He “heard” His orders as part of His commission to this world (26).

He was “taught” what He should say by the Father (28).

The Father “sent” Him (26).

2. He speaks exactly these things (26, 28)

3. He speaks them “into” the world. The idea is a wide dissemination to the entire human population—not just the Jews.

4. His commission comes from the Father in Heaven (27).

Amazing that they could be so dull about this!

- *But, remember how dull even Jesus' disciples often were.*
- *Human depravity is really quite profound. As one commentator remarked, “The ignorance and stupidity of unbelief are sometimes almost unbounded” (Plummer, 121).*
- *Some time had elapsed between vv. 12-20; some of these persons were likely different. {Note “Pharisees” vs. “Jews.”}*

5. He never acts independently of the Father—“I do nothing on my own initiative.”

- D. He is always in the presence of His Father—His Commissioner (29)

1. The Father is “with” Him.

The Father “sent” Him, but never really let Him go away from Himself.

2. The Father never “left” Him alone. **Jesus is never alone, and thus He promised never to leave His own alone (Mt. 28:20).**

- E. Jesus **always** does “the things that are pleasing” to God.

REALLY, CAN ANY MERELY MORTAL MAN MAKE SUCH A CLAIM?

As Plummer pointed out, it would be “blasphemous effrontery” for anyone else to say this. **Can you imagine even a good and holy teacher or preacher saying such a thing? NOOOOO!** What saint or prophet ever dared say this? (Compare also v. 46; 14:30; 15:10).

The stress here is on His *active obedience*, not merely His sinlessness.

IV. YOUR UNBELIEF PREVENTS YOU FROM BEING SAVED (24b-25, 28)

You will die in your sins unless you “believe” that:

A. Jesus is the Son of Man—Messiah (Cf. Dan. 7)—v. 28

B. Jesus is God—“I am” (24, 28).

This expression could mean:

1. “I am what I say.” (i.e. “the Light of the World.”)
2. “I am He.” (i.e. the promised Messiah—So the NASB).
3. “I AM”—absolutely. (The divine name of Ex. 3:14; Deut. 32:39; Is. 43:10).

TRUE SAVING FAITH MUST HAVE ACCURATE INTELLECTUAL CONTENT!

In reacting against “faith” as merely a firm acceptance of intellectual propositions, we must not go too far! It is not “entirely a matter of personal relations” (Morris). It is not good enough to ask “Jesus into your heart.” **Who is Jesus?** They ask this very question in v. 25. Not that they did not know what He had been saying—they mock Him again. Moreover, they look for a clearer statement that can be used against Him to bring condemnation in their court.

At any rate, “it is impossible to have the kind of faith that John envisages without having a certain high view of Christ. Unless we believe that He is more than man, we can never trust Him with that faith that is saving faith.” {Morris}

C. Jesus is the Atoning Sacrifice (28)

1. Jesus would die on the cross

See 3:14—His elevation on the tree like Moses’ serpent on the pole.

For John, the crucifixion is consistently the first stage of Jesus’ exaltation. He Must suffer and die before rising and ascending.

2. The Jewish Leaders would kill Him—and thus exalt Him!

Compare Acts 2:36—“Jesus, whom you crucified”

Acts 3:13, 15—You delivered up, disowned, and put to death “the Prince of Life.”

D. Jesus is The Exalted Lord (28)

He Arose! He ascended! He reigns!

CONCLUSION

1) Sinner, repent now. Humble yourself before Him and call on His name. Stop playing games with your soul. The consequences are eternal!

Believer, you need to get passionate about telling people the truth. They will not go to heaven without a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. THEY WILL DIE IN THEIR SINS.

What are you doing about it? Some of you have loved ones who are lost. Are you passionate about giving them the truth so that they might be saved? What are you waiting for—for them to die? Then it is too late. What about your friends and neighbors? Do you really care?

Jesus cared, and that is why he told people the truth. Some day the people we have an opportunity to reach will die in their sins, and their “blood will be upon our hands” (Ezek. 33:8; 3:18). Oh that our hands could be free from the blood of all men—as were Paul’s (Acts 20:26).