

THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part thirty-six

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THE WORST THING THAT CAN HAPPEN TO A PERSON

John 8:18-29 - "I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." [19] They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." [20] These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. [21] So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." [22] So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'" [23] He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." [25] So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. [26] I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." [27] They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. [28] So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. [29] And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

I suppose there is something in Jesus' words to these people that doesn't fit with our times. He says things you won't hear in many churches anymore. And so this text has a way of forcing us to look at our understanding of the gospel and the nature of what believing in Jesus is all about with words that lift us above our own culture's blind spots.

We feel a little jolted by the way Jesus repeats the idea of unbelievers "**dying in their sins**" three times between **verses 21 to 24** - "So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." [22] So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'" [23] He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

I say again, we almost feel Jesus needs a bit of an update for today's market. When we in the church consider what "**believing in Jesus**" is all about we usually keep death out of the picture. We've been convinced by a more trendy church that "**believing in Jesus**" is all about **living like Jesus** in this world. It's about **loving like Jesus** in this world. Believing in Jesus is most directly related to those "**What Would Jesus Do**" bracelets.

Yet here, our all-knowing, eternally relevant Lord takes those words about "**believing in Him**" (24) and the first thing out of his mouth relating to it is the great danger of unbelieving people "**dying in their sins.**" And He doesn't just **mention** it. He **locks in** on it - **three times**. We immediately get the image of some 50's evangelist bellowing his old-time religion on some small-town street corner. This Jesus would not go over well preaching like this in most of our churches. We would tell Him this is not how we communicate if we want to reach this world.

My point is this is a very **radical** text. I believe **we** have all become quite comfortable in the same contemporary mold. We're all now pretty much in the same culturally sensitive box. Jesus is decidedly the One **out of the box**. And He's calling us to join Him in a message that is more radical and jolting than we're used to proclaiming or even hearing. You get the impression we have **smoothed out** and **tamed** a message Jesus made very edgy and radical. These words of Jesus have an **eternally urgent** ring to them.

1) **PEOPLE WHO NEGLECT THE IMPORTANCE OF HONORING JESUS CHRIST DON'T FEEL THE SERIOUSNESS OF THEIR NEGLECT RIGHT AT THAT PRESENT MOMENT**

We actually considered **verses 18-20** last week. I only quote them again here because they form a natural bridge into Jesus describing His departure from these people in **verse 21-22**.

John 8:18-22 - "I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." [19] They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." [20] These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. [21] So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come." [22] So the Jews said, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?'"

Jesus is **“going away”**(21). He is going to be **“lifted up”** on the cross (28). He will rise from the dead and ascend to the Father, who **“sent Him”**(18) and who is **“above”**(23).

But the reason Jesus tells them He’s going away is to highlight something they will notice **then** that they aren’t worried about right **now**. Jesus doesn’t play games with these people. He’s as clear as a bell with some painfully direct words - **John 8:21** - **“So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.”**

Death comes to all of us. We usually consider it in poor taste to discuss it, even in church. But Jesus had no such reservations. A time will come, He tells these people, when **they will need Jesus more than they think they need Him right now**. There it is. That’s the life lesson to take home from church today.

Here’s what will happen in churches all over Canada today. There are people with broken lives. People come to church with broken marriages. They come with physical illness. They come with kids far from Christ. They come with bankrupt businesses. They come with things they want to have made better than they are.

They sit and listen to the Word preached. They come faithfully. They pray and ask God to help them. They try everything they can think of. But God **doesn’t** fix their problem. Things get worse instead of better. And it’s what happens next that Jesus is addressing in our text. These people, if they’re not very careful, will decide none of this religious stuff works. It’s not working for them. At least not right now.

And Jesus says they’re not **looking at things properly**. He’s reminding us we all die. Some problem happen to **some** people. And there is one problem that happens to **all** people. To see the blessed relevance of Christ Jesus you have to look at the whole picture of life. You and I can’t be **short-sighted** and fully appreciate what we have in Christ Jesus.

Everyone must leave this world through the process of dying. No one can die **for** you, and no one can die **with** you. Death is the loneliest experience we face. Dying in our sins means we die with our own weight of **guilt**. Dying in our sins means dying with no **hope**. Dying in our sins means looking to the things that brought us joy and pleasure in this world and finding then they mean nothing to us whatsoever. Dying in our sins means finding everything we have lived for to be virtually useless.

But Jesus’ point to these people is we don’t consider these things when Jesus Christ is presented to us in all our wealth and business and health. Then it’s easy to neglect forgiveness and pardon and the call of Christ’s Lordship over our lives. Nothing seems to go **terribly wrong** when we don’t bow our lives before Christ.

We can usually find **happiness** in a host of other things. Life doesn’t seem to be falling apart for your unbelieving friends and neighbors. People who are devout in other world religions that don’t give New Testament space to Jesus Christ as God the Son do just fine for the most part in this world. It’s very hard to picture them as **dangerously wrong**. In fact, it’s **impolite to do so**.

My very simple opening point is if we never consider the prospect of **dying in our sins** responding in faith to the Christ, God the Son, will never seem an urgent issue. And the church doesn’t talk very much anymore about **“dying in our sins.”**

2) **JESUS STRESSES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “DYING IN YOUR SIN” AND “DYING IN YOUR SINS”**

Notice His words carefully: **John 8:21 & 24** - **“So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come....[24]....I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”**

If the first case the **sin** is **singular**. The second two times **sins** is **plural**. Does this matter, or is it just a typo? I think it matters a great deal. In the first instance (**sin singular**) our essential problem is exposed. We are creatures with **sin in our hearts and nature**. We are **fallen** and **sinful** in terms of **who we are** - not just **what we do**. This is exactly what Jesus was pointing out in **verse 23** - **“He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.”**

The point of this reminder is to draw us to Christ and His work on the cross. Our fallen hearts can’t be raised up in any other

way. There is no other hope to free us from the bleak prospect of **“dying” in this sin(21)**. This can’t be educated out of our hearts. Raising the standard of living can’t change this inner condition. Going to church or growing up in a Christian home can’t erase this.

This is the urgency of proclaiming the atoning Christ of the New Testament. We are bent in the direction of latching on to false hopes. And there are no other hopes for the **condition of sin** - of being creatures who are **“of this world” (23)**.

Then what is the meaning of moving from the singular (**“sin”**) to the plural (**“sins”**) in **verse 24**? I think the reason is seen when **verses 24 and 25** are read together - **John 8:24-25** - **“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” [25] So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.”**

These are the same people Jesus has been preaching to since **John 7**. They’re still asking Jesus, **“Who are you?” (25)**. They chose to hear and yet **not** hear. They don’t **want** to be convinced. They only talk to Jesus to **discredit** and **trap** Jesus (**8:6**). They **pretend** to be more interested in the truth than they really are.

Does that sound familiar at all? They go to church. They carry a Bible or iPad. They sing the songs. They like the idea of the friends and programs. But, when the voice of discipleship begins to crowd their own agendas, they skirt around the way they know Jesus wants to shape their lives.

And here’s my point. Jesus, for all His grace and love and patience, never plays that game. The shift from **sin** as that deadly inner condition of heart, to **sins** that begin to form a specific **list** that has a number attached to it, comes from the tabulating of **all precious shunned opportunities** where truth was heard and grace was offered - **verse 25** - **“...Just what I have been telling you from the beginning!”** And the people who **scheme** around Christ begin to pile up specific evidence of guilt. And it’s the guilt of **refusing to believe** in Christ on repeated occasions.

Please notice the line that is crossed. Notice the logic in Jesus’ words. He tells them He has no new message to give them. He could only repeat what He had been telling them from the beginning. Do you see what that means? It is urgent to apply what Jesus is saying. He’s telling these people their rejection of Him isn’t a rejection **based on ignorance of the truth**. They would like to **excuse** themselves. They would like to think what they have lacked is either **evidence** or **opportunity**. And Jesus won’t give them either one.

It takes a fair amount of **humble muscle** to take that truth from Jesus. All they had to do was **bow** before Him and receive His love and pardon. They can’t do it. That is a profound lesson for any church goer.

3) WORDS OF GRACE AND JUDGMENT BOTH NEED TO BE CONSIDERED AND APPLIED TO OUR HEARTS

John 8:26-29 - **“I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” [27] They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. [28] So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. [29] And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”**

Look at those wonderful words in **verse 26** - **“I have much to say about you and much to judge....”** We are watching Jesus **reigning in** pronouncements of judgment on these hard hearts. We are beholding the **patience of grace**. There is no excuse for not listening to Jesus. What He speaks to them and to us in the pages of the New Testament is **absolutely true** and **firmly reliable**. That’s what Jesus means when He says **“...but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.”**

But why does Jesus delay with any further words of judgment? What could be His purpose? He didn’t come to **condemn** sinners. He came to **die for them** - **John 8:28-29** - **“So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. [29] And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”**

Yes there is firm warning. Yes, Jesus sees **great danger** for these people. But He still waits for the work of the cross. He still knows why He has been sent by the Father.

If **dying in your sins** is a terrible fate, **dying in the Lord** is the greatest of all treasures - **Revelation 14:13** - **“And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”**