

June 19th, 2016

HOW WILL YOU DIE?

John 8:21-30

How will you die? Jesus in our passage today is placing eternity in our view. Three times He tells the Jews "...you will die *in* your sin...you would die *in* your sins...you will die *in* your sins." You and I only have a fixed set of days before we are called before the judgment seat of God. How will we die? This pronouncement from Jesus is unspeakably terrifying. There is no greater terror imaginable than to die in sin.

The Puritan Ralph Venning argued that "...nothing is so evil as sin."¹ Sin is worse than death, worse than the Devil and worse than hell itself. First, sin is worse than death, because although death separates our soul from our body, it cannot us from the love of Christ. "For I am sure that neither death nor life...can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39) It is better to be killed than to be damned for all eternity.² Second, sin is worse than the Devil. The Devil is our fiercest creaturely enemy, but he needs sin to hurt us. Sin doesn't need him. James tells us that if we resist the Devil and he will flee from us (James 4:7), but while we remain in this state, our sin is ever with us. (Psalm 51:3; Romans 7:24). "It is man who sins, and sin that damns, neither of which can the Devil force upon man."³ Third, sin is worse than hell. The crime of sin is worse than it's punishment. The fact that hell is everlasting should teach us that there isn't enough time in the universe to punish the evil of sin.

There is nothing in all of creation that can cure sin. There is no remedy on earth for this plague that is worse than death, the devil and hell. It took the

¹ Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin*, (Carlisle, PA,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), pg. 177

² *ibid*, pg. 178

³ *ibid*, pg. 187

death of the Son of God to cure the evil of sin. “This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15) There is nothing in all of creation that can cure your sin problem: no amount of good deeds, no amount of money, no amount of knowledge, no amount of friends, not a good family, nothing. In order to stand before a holy God, you must have your sins removed. There are no exceptions to this. That is what Jesus is pressing in our passage this morning: “...unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”

☆ The Ruin of Dying in Your Sins

☆ The Remedy of Dying in Christ

Doctrine

Everyone will die, only those who die in Christ will escape eternal ruin

I. The Ruin of Dying in Your Sins

We saw from last week that the Pharisees refused to believe what Jesus said in v.12 “I am the light of the world.” Jesus was put on the defensive, and now He’s going on the offensive by showing them what their consequences will be if they reject His light.

v.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.”

First notice how the word “sin” is singular here as opposed to v.24 where Jesus twice says “sins” plural as opposed to “sin” singular. The sin in view here is the sin of **unbelief**. The Pharisees, like most of the world today, reject that Jesus

Christ is the *only* Savior of the world. Matthew Henry said “Unbelief is the damning sin; it is a sin against the remedy.”⁴ That’s what Christ is addressing in these Jews, the damning sin of unbelief. So let’s consider the characteristics of unbelief that Jesus lays out.

Characteristic #1 Unbelief seeks other forms of deliverance

Jesus says in v.21 “I am going away, and *you will seek me*...where I am going, you cannot come.” What did Jesus mean here by “you will seek me”? He didn’t mean that they would actually seek him *sincerely*, for we know that Christ said “...whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” (John 6:37). Rather, Jesus is saying that they would seek *another Messiah*. The Jews today are still seeking the Messiah to come. They refuse to come to Jesus, because Jesus says *the main thing they need to be delivered from is their own sin*. The Jews had bought the lie that their main problem was Roman occupation, or a famine, or opposing religious/political parties, or the Gentiles. They thought that they needed a Messiah that would deliver them from those things. And here Jesus comes along and says, ‘No, the main problem is you. Your main problem is not Caesar, your main problem looks at you in the mirror every day.’

Dear congregation, you are the main problem in your world right now. Your sin is your main problem, my sin is my main problem. If that is not what you believe than you are agreeing with the Pharisees. And you will seek for a solution outside of Jesus for your problems.

Characteristic #2: Unbelief is self-righteous

v.22 So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come?’”

⁴ Matthew Henry, Unabridged Commentary On The Whole Bible, OSNOVA’s Kindle Edition, location 243467

The historian Josephus reports that Jews believed if a person committed suicide they went straight to hell.⁵ This helps us to understand the Jews response here, basically they were reasoning that ‘Jesus must be speaking of suicide, hell is the only place we couldn’t *follow* him to, since we are on God’s side.’ We’re going to see next week that these Jews prided themselves because they were the offspring of Abraham (8:33) They rejected Christ because they believed they were righteous in themselves. They fasted, they tithed, they observed all the feasts and festivals, they offered up sacrifices. And on this basis they thought they were accepted by God. Unbelievers are teeming with self-righteousness and this prevents them from coming to Christ. All our best works are but glorious sins. The gospel demands that we would beat our breast and say “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13)

Dear congregation, we are not immune self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is so attractive because it allows us to look at ourselves better than others. In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Luke tells us that Jesus “...told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and *treated others with contempt.*” (Luke 18:9) How do you treat others, *in your heart*? Children, do you exclude others from your circles because you think they are not cool enough? Adults are there persons that you purposely avoid? What if Christ did that to you? These things are anathema to the gospel.

Characteristic #3 Unbelief is worldly

v. 23 He said to them, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

Jesus is not speaking about location here primarily. He’s pointing out that unbelievers only reason from a worldly, carnal mind. Jesus was completely above worldly pursuits, He had no aim for money, no aim for bodily comforts,

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 1-11*, (Chicago, IL,: Moody Publishers, 2006), pg. 344

no aim for the praise of men, He was completely given over to the will of His Father.⁶ These Jews on the other hand, though they practiced an outward religion were completely worldly. They were just as worldly as the Romans albeit their outward form was different. Jesus already spoke on this as a major stumbling block to belief. He said in **John 5:44** “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

Worldliness is attractive brothers and sisters because it wins the approval of the world, and it is always seeping into the church. Paul told the church in Corinth in “...you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?” (**1 Cor. 3:3**) Dear congregation, were the Corinthians the only church that struggled with worldliness? If you are not at all content with your communion with God, is it possible that you are worldly?

Characteristic #4 Unbelief is blindness

Skipping ahead to v.25, the Jews ask: “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge...” The Jews were blind to the Messiah. The Hope of all the OT was standing right before them, and they didn’t know who He was. Furthermore, they were blind to God the Father. v.27 says “They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.” Blindness to the gospel is a **judicial blindness**. Unbelievers ignore and refuse to look at their own remedy for sin, and therefore God gives them over to a further blindness. We’ve seen this in John already “And this is the *judgment*: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” (**John 3:19**) Loving the darkness makes you blind to the light of the world. When the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were struck with blindness in the OT, they could not find the door no matter how

⁶ Matthew Henry, Unabridged Commentary On The Whole Bible, OSNOVA’s Kindle Edition, location 243459

much they groped for it. And that is what unbelief is. It is complete and utter blindness. Unless the Spirit of God sovereignly grants faith and repentance in the new birth, this blindness will end in eternal death.

Characteristic #5 Unbelief seals all other sins to the soul and brings eternal ruin

When Jesus moves from the singular to the plural in v.21 to v.24, from *sin* to *sins*, He's indicating that the sin of unbelief is what seals the soul in damnation. v.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." Unbelief seals the soul over to eternal condemnation, irrevocably. **Mark 16:16** "...whoever does not believe will be condemned." **John 3:18** "...whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." **John 3:36** "...whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

Unbelief drives the sinner away from Christ. It's not that unbelief is the only sin that will be punished. There are millions who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, who will be condemned because they sinned against the light they received. But unbelief deprives the sinner of the only light of the world. It is the most diabolic of all sins because it cuts the soul off of any hope of rescue. That's what Jesus is threatening in these verses: hell. Those who reject the light of the world will end up in outer darkness. These are for whom, as Jude says, "...the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever" (**Jude 13**) Unbelief cause the sinner to be an enemy of the Living God. Unbelief cause the sinner to stand naked in his sin before God whose eyes are "...purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong," (**Hab. 1:13**) This is the ruin of the soul.

II. The Remedy of Dying in Christ

We're going to see four elements of Christ's remedy for the ruin of sinners: 1) Jesus offers Himself willingly; 2) Jesus' enemies will know He is the remedy; 3) The Father is pleased to have Jesus be the remedy; 4) Faith is the only condition to receive the remedy.

Jesus willing offers Himself as a remedy

Look again at v.21, Jesus says "I am going away..." John just said in v.20 that Jesus' hour had not yet come. But Jesus is saying that his hour is coming soon, and He will go away *willing*. Meaning He had His death in view from moment one.⁷ He was the lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world. And if Jesus wasn't willing, who could be saved? Who has the power to crucify the Son of God? When the soldiers do come to arrest Him in John 18, they fall back on the ground when He speaks. Jesus is omnipotent and all-wise King of the universe and no counsel can stand against Him, and none can stay His hand. If He wasn't willing to go to His death, there would be no remedy for sin.

Jesus' enemies would know that He is the remedy

Jesus says in v. 28 "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." The crucifixion of the Son of God serves as the ultimate convincer to these unbelieving Jews. Jesus does not mean that all of them would believe and be converted, but that all of them would be convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He is sent from the Father. Whether this happened when Jesus was actually lifted up on the cross, or whether it will happen on the day of Judgment matters little. Their eyes will be opened and

⁷ Nobody had a knowledge of Jesus' death at this point. In **Luke 18:31-34** we hear Jesus say: "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." ***But they understood none of these things.*** This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said."

they will be convinced of the truth. One day the whole world will be convinced that all other gods are false and Jesus Christ alone is the light of the world.

This is how the Apostle says it: "...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (**Phil. 2:6-11**)

All will bow on that day, and all will confess. All of the enemies of Christ will know that Jesus spoke the truth.

God the Father is pleased to send Christ as a remedy

v.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." Everything Jesus accomplished on planet earth brought pleasure to the Father. God was pleased that Jesus would bring salvation to blind, self-righteous, and worldly sinners. God was pleased that Jesus would bring salvation to prostitutes, and tax-collectors, and murders. God was pleased that Jesus would lay down His life for His enemies. **Romans 5:8** "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." **Isaiah 53:10** says that it pleased the Lord to crush Him. The Father was everywhere smiling on His Son's work. God is not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but He does take pleasure in His Son being a sacrifice for sinners.

Jesus makes belief the only condition for the remedy

Calvin rightly says that "...as soon as a sinner groans [for Christ], he will be ready to assist him."⁸ Jesus is not waiting for the sinner to get better in

⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 331

order to save him, He's waiting for him to groan for Him. The only condition to be saved is to believe. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (**Acts 16:31**) Jesus said "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (**John 5:24**) "...these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (**John 20:31**)

Saving faith is surrender to Jesus Christ. Unbelief refuses to surrender. Unbelievers refuse to give up their own goodness, their own sense of righteousness. They refuse to give up hope in finding deliverance from another source. They refuse to give up their worldliness.

Saving faith on the other hand says "Jesus take it all! I am not righteous, I am wicked. I am a worldly blind man and I have no hope of deliverance from anyone else. I surrender. I groan for you. I am yours, save me."

You see it's not belief that saves us properly speaking, it's Christ. But belief is what brings us into union with Him, it's what connects us with Him. Belief is just the instrument that brings us to Christ, like a straw that brings us to the drink. Jesus says "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." Faith is how we drink.

This is what these Jews were refusing to do. They wouldn't drink. They wanted no union with Christ. They wanted no part of Him, and thus Jesus says "...you will die in your sins." (**John 8:24**)

How will you die? Let us not be so naive to believe that everyone here is in union with Jesus Christ. I plead with you to consider Jesus' words: unless you believe that I am he, unless you believe that I am your only hope of rescue, you will die in your sins. Will you die in your sins, or will you die in Christ?

Application

Our Doctrine: Everyone will die, only those who die in Christ will escape eternal ruin

For those of us that have been Christians for some time, we might deceive ourselves into thinking that since I already understand the gospel this message is really for unbelievers. But let's once again consider the state of these Jews at the Feast of Booths. 1) They were religious (like you) 2) They believed that salvation came from the Lord (like you) 3). They were devoted, they spent money and resources in getting there (like you) 4). They were anticipating the Prophet to come. (like you) But they missed Jesus!

So the question is: how? How did these religious people miss the Lord whom they believed delivered them? Consider for a moment how the Feast of Booths was supposed to effect the soul. Every year for seven days they were to replay God's delivering them from Egypt, by building booths, by pouring out the water, by lighting the lamps. It was to be celebrated and proclaimed. Leviticus 23:37 "These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall **proclaim** as times of holy convocation...[v.41] You shall **celebrate** it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It is a **statute forever** throughout your generations; you shall **celebrate** it in the seventh month."

These celebrations were to be perpetual, that is, they were to continue to come back to their deliverance again and again. But the problem was that they Because they started to view **their deliverance as a means to another end rather than the end of their need**. Or to put it in our vernacular, **they started to view the gospel as a starting point of their spiritual life rather than the substance of their spiritual life**. They began to move to the "higher things" of religion, and put the gospel behind them. But the Feast of Booths was meant to be a continual reminder that they needed to "remain" in their Redeemer continually.

Why do we need to hear the gospel again? Because we need to remain in our Redeemer continually. Christ is not a means to another end, He is our end. **If you ever graduate from Christ, I promise you, you will adopt all the characteristics of these Jews.** They sought after another deliverer (v.21), likewise you will start to seek after other remedies for what ails you as opposed to going to Christ. They became self-righteous (v.22), likewise you will start to view yourself in a more flattering light the further you get from Christ. And this will blind you to the truth just like it did these Jews. These Jews became worldly (v.23), likewise you will become worldly when you try and graduate from this gospel.

Our Duty: Rejoice that your name is written in heaven

Jesus constantly was pointing back to the gospel whenever He sensed that His disciples were trying to move on to “bigger and better things.” On one occasion He sent out seventy-two disciples out to preach the gospel. Luke 10:17-20: “The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. **Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**” Jesus acknowledges that mighty works are done by their hands, he acknowledges that Satan fell at their preaching, that they have authority, and that nothing shall hurt them. These are great things to rejoice at. But what does Jesus says to them? **Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**” What is Jesus doing? He’s preventing them from rooting their joy in other than the gospel. Why would He do this? Because this is the proclivity of all of us. Dear congregation, what do you root your joy in?

Our Delight: "He has not left me alone"

Consider again at v.29, Jesus said "And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone..." When we are united to Christ by faith, this promise becomes ours. Many in the crowd would die in their sin, but we will die in Christ. Dear congregation, all of us will die. There are tragic reports of death all around us. Some of you are closer to death than others. But if you are in Christ, the Father is with you, He will never leave you alone. **Hebrews 13:5-6** says "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" If you have been washed in Christ's blood, the Father will never leave you. If you have been covered in the righteous robes of Christ, Father will never forsake you. You can look death in the eye and say "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55)

This is what Christ has accomplished for us, and it is the answer to the question "How will you die?" I will not die alone, for the Father is with me. I will not die alone, for the Father cannot forsake His own. I will die in Christ, in the beloved, because He died for me!

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

