

# If You Do Not Believe...

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Date: 21 March 2021

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[ 0 : 00 ] Once again, we find Jesus teaching in the temple courts. Yeah, he's teaching in the temple courts, and it's been a rather exciting time. Jesus has said some pretty amazing things.

He's been pretty direct. And the response of the people who has been there has been quite interesting as well. Some believe in Jesus. Others are skeptical. Some misunderstand what he's saying.

Others have already made their judgment about him. And then we saw how there are the religious leaders kind of lurking in the background in all this. And finally, last Sunday, we saw how they finally challenged Jesus directly.

Let's pick up the conversation in verse 21. Once more, Jesus said to them, I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin.

Where I go, you cannot come. It's almost the same thing that Jesus told them just the other day. But it didn't stop him from saying it one more time.

[ 1 : 04 ] He said, I am going away. I'm about to leave you all. And as with this last time, he says it again. I'm going somewhere that you will not be able to follow me.

You won't be able to come. Again, he also says, you will look for me. Last time he said, you will look for me, but you will not find me.

This time he says something a little different. He says, you will look for me, and in your sin you will die. It's kind of an ominous statement.

And in your sin, you will die. What does Jesus mean by this? Surprisingly, this statement didn't seem to catch the attention of the people there.

They were more hung up on what he said just before that about going away to this place where they would not be able to come. Verse 22. This made the Jews ask, will he kill himself?

[ 2 : 04 ] Is that why he says, where I go, you cannot come? So yet again, we see that the Jews are confused. They're trying to take Jesus at his word.

They're trying to understand something from what he's saying, but they're puzzled. Some of them are wondering if he's talking about suicide. Like there's only one place that you could go that we wouldn't be able to follow you.

That's death. Are you planning to kill yourself? I don't know what else he could mean. Verse 23. Jesus continues on.

He says, you are from below. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world.

Jesus is trying to help them understand. And this is nothing new that he said. We've heard him claim to be from heaven before. But this time he seems to say it as clear as can be.

[ 3 : 08 ] As direct as can be. You are from below. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world.

I am not of this world. In his appearance, he appears the same as them. As a man. But what he is trying to get across to them is that there is a big difference between me and you.

I am an alien. I am an alien. I am an alien. He doesn't quite say it with those words. But that's probably how some people are hearing these words of him.

Of his. That's what an alien is, right? Someone who's not from this world. That's the language that Jesus uses. I am not of this world.

Of course, Jesus has something that the typical sci-fi aliens don't have. He has flesh and bones just like they do. Let's just say it. Let's just be honest.

[ 4 : 13 ] What are the people in the crowd thinking as Jesus says this? I am not of this world. You are from below. I am from above. What are they thinking?

Some of them are probably thinking, man, this guy is out of his mind. This guy is nuts. Listen to him. He's claiming to be from another world. Yes, he is.

Or more precisely, he's claiming to be from another realm. From heaven. Verse 24. Jesus goes on. He says, I told you that you would die in your sins. If you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.

The people are focused on this whole thing of where is he going? Where is he going? Jesus wants to steer the conversation to this one thing. This very important thing. He says, I told you just a moment ago that you would die in your sins.

[ 5 : 22 ] If you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins. Again, Jesus brings the conversation back to this sobering statement, this warning.

You will die in your sins if you do not believe that I am he. What does Jesus mean by that? What does it mean to die in your sins? It's kind of a strange phrase to us.

It can't mean to just die in the ordinary way. I mean, we all die eventually in the ordinary way.

Specifically, no. Jesus says, you will die in your sins.

That language is the same kind of language that God used when he spoke through the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel chapter 3 verse 16. At the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me, says Ezekiel.

This is what the Lord said. Son of man, I have made you a prophet. I have made you a watchman, sorry, for the people of Israel. So hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.

[ 6 : 32 ] This is the Lord talking. When I say to you, to a wicked person, you will surely die. And you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life.

That wicked person will die for their sin, literally in their sin. There's a little footnote in my Bibles. In their sin. And I will hold you accountable for their blood.

Now there's a whole other discussion going on here about Ezekiel. We're not going to go into all the details of that. God had appointed Ezekiel to be a messenger of warning.

A messenger who would warn specifically wicked people. When I say to a wicked person, you will surely die. And you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life.

That wicked person will die in their sin or for their sins. So what does it mean to die in your sin? It means to die because of your sins.

[ 7 : 36 ] It means to receive the judgment of God that you are due for the sin that you have done against Him, for the wrongs that you have done. It means here in these verses that you did not follow or listen to the warning.

You did not turn away from your wicked ways or seek God's forgiveness. To die in your sin means that you are crossing that threshold now into eternity. And after that there is no way back.

If you cross that threshold and you are still guilty, you have no way to deal with your guilt problem, nothing to atone for your sins, you are in big trouble.

And in these words of Ezekiel I find those words wicked and evil to be so helpful. Let's remember this is God's choice of language.

He's the one who used the word wicked and evil to describe the ways of the people. In our day and age and even in many churches today, unfortunately, the word sin has just lost its vileness.

[ 8 : 52 ] We don't think of sin as being wicked or evil. We think of it in terms of more of making a mistake.

But God's punishment doesn't come upon people just because they made a whole bunch of unintentional errors. It comes upon people because we have done what is wicked. We have done what is evil.

And it's no less than we deserve. So to die in your sins is terrifying. It means to face God's judgment with nothing to atone for your sins.

Nothing to take away your guilt. And so what is Jesus saying to them? If you do not believe that I am He you will indeed die in your sins.

He's saying two things. First there is a warning in these words and second there is an invitation. First there is the warning.

[ 9 : 57 ] It's like Jesus is saying I am here now. I'm the one who has come from above. And if you reject me and you look for another Messiah you will not find Him.

I am the one sent from above. I am the one sent from heaven from God to speak God's words to you just like Ezekiel was back in the day. So Jesus is here to give the warning to turn people from their sins back to God.

If you do not believe that I am He says Jesus you will die in your sins. You are headed for disaster. you will receive the judgment due.

These words are a gracious warning a gracious plea so that the people will acknowledge what is coming down the road for them if they do not respond if they refuse to believe in Him.

But these words are also a gracious invitation. There's hope in these words. I wonder do you hear it? Do you see it? Jesus says unless you believe that I am He you will indeed die in your sins.

[ 11 : 20 ] Do you hear that great exception? There's an exception. There's an unless. There's a way that we cannot die in our sins. That we cannot receive what we are due for the wrongs we have done against God.

Those who believe that Jesus is the one are the exception. They will be saved. They will be spared. They will be forgiven.

Their sins will be atoned for. Jesus uses some very particular language. He says unless you believe that I am He. The people in the crowd there they really latch on to that.

That I am He. who are you? They ask. And I don't know the tone of voice as they ask this. I kind of wish I was there to see it and hear it.

Who are you? Is this a sincere who are you? Okay. Well who are you? Tell us. Or is this a skeptical who are you? Who do you think you are?

[ 12 : 26 ] You know? Who are you claiming to be? I don't know but they ask the question and Jesus answers it. Just what I have been telling you from the beginning Jesus replied.

It's an interesting answer. Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. The way Jesus responds suggests that they already know the answer to their own question.

You know who I am. You know who I have been saying that I am. I have been saying it all along. Let's just refresh our memories of some of what Jesus has said about himself up until now just in the gospel of John.

Just a second ago he told him that he was from above that he was not from this world. Back in Galilee he said I am from heaven. He told him on many occasions that he has been sent by his father God.

He's told him that his testimony is true and that he is the kind of person who does not need any human witness to confirm that what he says is true. He told him back in verse 12 I am the light of the world.

[ 13 : 36 ] He's told him that he is the bread from heaven. That special provision of God that gives life to the world. He's told him that he is the son of man. He's told him that he is the one whose flesh and blood must be given so that the world might have life.

He's told him that he is the one that they must believe in in order to have eternal life. He's told him that he is the one who is back in chapter 5 been given authority to judge at the last judgment and to raise people from the dead at the resurrection.

He's told him that he is the son of his father God. The son of God. And the list goes on and on and on and this is just one gospel. I've been telling you from the beginning who I am.

You know who I am. And if you do not believe that I am he you will indeed die in your sins.

This is your chance to be saved. This is your chance to be forgiven to have your your sin problem dealt with your guilt atoned for. Do you hear Jesus pleading with them?

[ 14 : 52 ] Do you hear that compassion in his heart for them as he speaks these words? Jesus goes on in the next few verses about three verses 26 to 29 and he tells them a few more things.

We're not going to go into all the details of these verses. Much of what Jesus says here has to do with his own special relationship with the father. And we've talked about that in a number of messages already.

John tells us in verse 27 that some of the people listening did not understand that he was telling them about his father. Jesus, just to sum it up a little bit, says again that he only speaks what God the father has taught him to say or told him to say.

He tells him that he doesn't do anything independently from his father. He mentions again that he is not alone. that his father is with him. He tells him that he always does what pleases God.

But one thing that really caught my attention here is that Jesus gives them something specific to watch for. Look at verse 28. Yes.

[16:07] He says, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he. At the end of all this conversation, this is the sign he gives them.

When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he. This is to be the confirmation.

Even before it happens, Jesus tells them just how he will die. They will lift him up. They will lift him up to be crucified on the cross.

Just as the snake was lifted up on the pole in the wilderness long ago, that whoever could look to it would be saved. The judgment of God, in the same way, Jesus will be lifted up on the cross so that whoever looks to him can be spared, can be forgiven.

But what's so striking about these words to me, at least, is that this sign that he gives them, this sign that's meant to be a confirmation to them, is also the very reason why some will reject him.

[17:24] Paul wrote about this in his letter to the Corinthians. He said, we preach Christ crucified. That's lifted up on the tree. Christ crucified, and he says this, a stumbling block to the Jews.

amazingly and mysteriously, the very sign that Jesus tells them to watch for, that you will know that I am he. That's the confirmation.

To some, it will be the confirmation. They will see him hanging there on the tree, and they will know, yes, he is the one. And to others, it will be the place where they reject him.

And they say, look, see? He wasn't the one. I told you. The final response of the people again in verse 30 to all this is mixed.

Even as he spoke, John writes, many believed in him. Overall, it sounds positive. Many believed in him. But as we'll see after Easter, unfortunately, the kind of belief that many of them here have is not the kind of faith that Jesus is calling them to have.

[18:40] So what do we take from all this? What can we take from this for ourselves this morning? I've said it many times, but I will say it again.

I think we need to emphasize this. The most important thing we need to sort out, first of all, do we believe that Jesus is the one? Do we believe that Jesus is the one?

And I know as I look around the room, I know from, I think all of you, yes, you believe that. And so my application this morning is mainly focused on, do the people around us believe this?

How should we deal with them? How should we talk to them? Jesus said, unless you believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins. Do we look at other people in our lives and in our community and see them through that lens?

I almost wanted to title this message this morning, three or four or five things Jesus would say to the world if he came in our day? What would Jesus have said to the world if he came in our day?

[20:09] I believe that if he came in our day, he would have said the exact same kinds of things to the people of the world. I believe he would have had his mouth into the CBC microphone and looked the camera right into the lens and said, you are from below.

and I am from above. I believe he would have typed into the Facebook comments, you are of this world. I am not of this world.

If he was to get up in front of a crowd gathered in our street right here in Davidson, he would say, I believe, if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.

You will face the just punishment of God for every wicked thing you have done. And the people in our world would respond just the same.

Some would reject him with hard hearts, some would mock him and insult him, others would receive the message positively for a little while and then it would kind of fade into the background and get choked out by other things that are more important to them.

[21:25] And yes, some would receive it and respond from faith and believe and trust him. This is the way it was back when Jesus walked the earth.

And this is the way it still is in our world today. Jesus didn't try to make his message into something that the people would love. Instead, he told people the truth.

He was unashamed. He told the people the truth right to their faces. You are in danger. You are in great danger because of your sins.

Yes, you are guilty before God for doing the wrong things you have done. And unless you believe that I am he, you will die and face judgment. This is an intolerant and unloving message in the view

of some people today.

true love tells people the truth even if it is hard truth that needs to be heard but that they don't want to hear.

[ 22 : 34 ] So I think this is what we can take from this. When we talk to people about Jesus, when those conversations happen where we get the chance to speak about Jesus, we should not be afraid to speak about sin.

We should speak about it gently and carefully and it may be uncomfortable. They may feel convicted. It may be offensive to some but this is the real danger that the people all around us are in.

And unless they believe that Jesus is the one and grab a hold of the lifeline that he is with all their hearts, they will perish. just as we would.

Second, we should not hesitate to tell people that our love and our worship and our loyalty and our hope is found in someone who is not from this world.

Maybe you want to fish for a conversation about Jesus. Tell people that you're waiting for someone who is not from this world to come and fix all of the problems and all of the brokenness in our world.

[ 23 : 45 ] You might get some strange looks, but this is the message that Jesus proclaimed. This is what they need to hear. Jesus was not just an ordinary man who lived in history.

He is from above. He is the one not from this world. They're going to think we're crazy, some of them. That's okay. The good news, our salvation depends on one coming from above, not just one coming from below, from earth.

Third, we should remind people graciously and gently that death is coming for all of us. Time is running out.

Jesus said it. He said, if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins. Many of those people wouldn't have even died for maybe decades to follow.

And yet Jesus reminded them that it is coming. We all will die. Do you have the remedy for your sins, for your guilt before you cross that threshold?

[ 24 : 55 ] Finally, we should point people to the cross itself, to that moment where Jesus was executed, where he died to atone for our sins.

Jesus himself told the people, look to that moment when you have lifted up the son of man, then you will know that I am he. Don't be afraid, don't be ashamed to speak about the cross, an instrument of torture and yet the means of our salvation.

It's at the cross that God's love is most powerfully seen. Some will stumble over this, some will think it's foolishness, but we must proclaim the death of Jesus.

We must proclaim the cross. If Jesus spoke like this and said these kinds of things to the world, how much more should we, as his witnesses, say the same things about him?

This is our task. And I'll leave you with two words, one from the Lord Jesus and one from the Apostle Paul. The Lord Jesus said this, he said, whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

[ 26 : 18 ] God's love. And Paul, he said it this way, and may this be our heart and our mind, may this be our attitude, he said, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, whether Jew or Gentile.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you that you sent your son into this world to save us.

Thank you that he came and fearlessly pled with the people that day so that any who were listening might be saved. We profess our faith in you, Lord Jesus.

Yes, we believe that you are the one. Help us to proclaim that message well in this community.

Help us to share that message well with the people that we know who don't believe you.

Give us opportunities to speak. Give us boldness. Give us courage. We want to be your witnesses and do that role, that job that you've given us to do well.

[ 27 : 40 ] We love you, Jesus. You are our king. We pray this in your name. Amen.