

A Matter of Life and Death

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- [0 : 0 0] Sing about, would we? I mean, stop and think about it. The truth of the matter is, I've only been to one Ohio State game, and I sat where I needed an oxygen mask.
- ! I mean, it was really high. I did bring 10 power binoculars so I could see what was happening on the field. And my takeaway from that is, why sit on cold aluminum benches where you have to use binoculars and you...
- By the way, to buy water there was like \$3 for a bottle. I can get it in my kitchen for free. And a hot dog. I mean, I don't even think it was made by who knows who.
- But it was, you know, like \$5 for one of those things. Forget it! And the thing that really kind of, I thought, what is this all about? When the game was all over, they sang that Carmen Ohio.
- You know, it's like, big deal. I mean, you know, I mean... Gary, forgive me, brother. Okay. For some of you who don't know, Gary is a lifelong usher at the OSU games, and he does get fired up.
- [1 : 0 9] You can ask him in July how many days to starting, but, you know, listening to you sing, I love that. But then I love being able to say this.
- Let's just open the book. I want you to turn your Bibles this morning to John chapter 8, verse 21. So he said to them again, I am going away, you will seek me, and you will die in your sin.
- For I'm going, you cannot come. Let's pray. Father God, for us, prayer is not at all just an exercise or an expression of habit.
- But it is our life. It is a clear indication of our glad dependence upon your sufficiency.
- And I can't help but think this morning of the passage in Zechariah chapter 4 where the prophet uttered these words, not by power nor by might, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.
- [2 : 3 0] And I am thankful that you have given to us, who are your children, the spirit who indwells us. And it is by the spirit's power that I trust to preach the glory of Christ this morning and by the spirit's power that your people would receive it and allow the sweetness of the word to lift their hearts away from being self-focused and gloomy in the midst of the world that you've placed us to be candles.
- And by your spirit's power that those that are here that do not know Christ to be drawn to see that the darkness and the despair and the ugliness of their life has no remedy apart from repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus who came to be the Savior of the world.
- And Lord, I'm thankful that as I preach that I fully know that your people will pray for me that you might be lifted up.
- And we pray this because of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Well, every day that I sit in my office, across my office is on the east, my desk is on the east side, and on the west side is the wall that faces out on the parking lot, and there are two signs that I look at every time I look up.
- One sign says this, how does this testify to Christ?

[4 : 1 4] And I think it's fair to say that really at the heart of what Bible preaching is, is the responsibility and the privilege of lifting up the Lord Jesus Christ that He alone might have preeminence.

Never should a pastor long to hear you say, wow, that was really good. What He should long to hear you say is, thank you for exalting Jesus this morning.

Because here's the truth, everyone who ever stands in this place to minister the Word of God to you who are His people is at best an earthen vessel.

You know why it's that way? Well, here's what it says in the Bible, and we have nothing else to rely upon for absolute clarity other than the Bible. Amen? You know, you guys are moving a little bit towards being a little best, a little stalling, you know.

But not everybody's going to be like me. I admit it. You know, I'm thankful. But, you know, every now and then, just let it rip. I mean, not now.

[5 : 3 8] Just hold on. Look at me! I don't want you to be any more passionate and zealous for the glory of Christ.

Well, I do. But at least kind of do this. If you get kind of fired up about a basketball game or a football game, what is holding you back in the presence of God's people in relationship to the glory of Christ?

You did better. Okay. But anyway, here we go. The goal of preaching is the glory in the person of Christ. And so, the faithful preaching of the Word means making Jesus clear.

It means relying upon the Spirit of God to take the revealed Word and press it into the hearts of people so that, for one, they may come to know Christ and that they may grow to be like Him.

I have to explain, and bear with me as we kind of wind into this, but we'll get there. biblical preaching is not really the mind, the work of a witty mind, nor is it the ability to repackage what the world thinks regarding how to live happier lives or be more self-satisfied or self-focused or wrapped up in your pets and your projects.

[7 : 0 6] It is really about helping you understand the glory and the supremacy of Christ who will inhabit all of eternity, and you and I, when we are in His presence, will join the throng with unbelievable enthusiasm, rejoicing in His person.

Right? And the goal of preaching is to lift up Jesus so that instead of being here unhappy and moody because we're focused on ourself, we lift up our eyes and see Jesus and say, Lord, thank you for what you've done in saving me, and till you draw me home, I want to be a candle for your glory.

Amen. Amen. I say this because this morning's sermon is a hard one, but it comes from the mouth of Jesus.

I want you to take just a moment and put your finger on one little statement that Jesus repeats three times. Verse 21, Verse 24, You will die in your sin.

Verse 24, You will die in your sin. The phrase is stunning. It's a sobering reminder of eternal judgment and hell and the terrible everlasting consequences of rejecting Christ.

[8 : 5 3] So if I were to give you a one-sentence summary of what this morning's sermon is all about, let me tell you this. Jesus came to save us from our sins and deliver us from the holy wrath of God against our sin.

That being said, let's look at the text and recognize that what we are being told here is that the offer of salvation ends at death.

Let me read the verse. So he said to them again, I'm going away and you will seek me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.

We should understand that by this point in John's gospel, what we have seen is that Christ's ministry had come fully to the forefront and people who were listening to him preach understood what he was saying.

There was a growing hatred for what Jesus had to say. There was grudging admission that his miracles were authentic and there was nothing, nothing that people could do to deny the truth of what his ministry was.

[10 : 10] And I want you to understand that every step of Christ's public ministry and gospel offer was resisted as you work your way through the book. He fed the throng on the Sea of Galilee.

Following that, he took advantage of that great crowd of people to preach a clear gospel message in which he made it clear that faith in him was the only way to heaven.

And what was the result of the clear preaching of the gospel? We understand that what happened was this, is that the vast majority of people walked away and left him. They said, this is a hard saying.

If you think hearing the news that there is no salvation through any means except in Jesus is hard, it's far harder to hear the rest of the sentence where Jesus says this, and those who do not believe me will spend eternity in hell.

We see not only that he preached there by the shore of Galilee, we also see that in the Feast of Tabernacles he came up and he said, listen, I am the bread of life in six and in seven and eight we find there that he comes in and he says, I'm the light of the world.

[11 : 25] And instead of receiving that statement, understanding it in the biblical and messianic context of the scriptures, the response that the crowd had, in particular the religious leaders had, was that they accused him of petty self-deception and dishonesty.

And it is in that frame that we hear this very chilling announcement, I am going away and you will seek me and you will die in your sin.

There are several things that deserve our attention as we think about this statement. For one, the offer of salvation will end at some point for every man.

The offer of salvation will end for every man. One, when Jesus spoke of going away he wasn't speaking about going to another town. He was speaking about his own death but in a larger sense he was also speaking of the fact that his purpose for being there as the savior of the world and the offer of salvation that he made through believing in his finished work on the cross would someday come to an end.

And this ending happens in a sense, in a present sense when individuals repeatedly refuse to respond to the sweetness of the gospel.

[12 : 44] Let me have you look at a passage where we see how God kind of lets people go the path they want. turn over in your Bible if you will to Romans chapter 1. You're there in John chapter 8 but just skip ahead.

Romans chapter 1. The apostle writes this in verse 21. He says, For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him for they became but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

See, make no mistake, recognize that the truth of the word of God is that every man receives ample insight and light with which to come to grips with the reality of their own dark soul.

Friday, as I had an extended opportunity to share the gospel with an individual, it was very interesting, this individual was clear in his own thinking of how dark the world was around him.

He was also clear in his own thinking of just how dark and deceitful his own heart was. And I said to him over and over again, you really don't need any more evidence of just how desperately you need the work of Christ in your life because things are a mess.

[14 : 09] And here's the truth that we need to recognize. when men repeatedly refuse to listen to the word that God gives them, calling them out of darkness into his marvelous light, God says, go ahead, go your way.

Look at Romans 1, verse 24. It says this, therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their heart to impurity. In verse 26, for this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions.

And in 28, and since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

I want you to understand this morning as we look at this passage that it tells us that what happens is individuals can turn their back on the sweetness of the gospel and God says, go ahead, you go, you go.

And I don't know as I preach this morning and I'm going to make an appeal to you, if you're sitting here and you do not know Christ, I would plead with you in Christ's stead, do not refuse the offer of salvation that he makes to you.

[15 : 17] Why? Because he may just say, hey, go ahead. But in a more certain way, I want you to understand that the final offer of salvation ends forever at death.

It says in Hebrews 9, verse 27, it is appointed for man once to die and after that comes judgment. Can I tell you something if you're sitting here thinking, well, there'll be another time, there'll be a later moment and maybe after I've lived my life, I'll kind of step in and grab the brass ring at the very moment when I'm ready to pass.

I don't know if you know this, but in the theology of the Middle Ages, particularly affected by Catholic thinking, the best way to die, are you listening to me so you understand this?

The best way to die was to be baptized moments before you slipped into eternity. Why is that? Their thinking was the baptism washed away sins. We're going to have four people baptized this morning and I've got to tell you not one of them is getting their sins washed away.

That was done by the blood of Christ. That was done by their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But anyway, in that old Middle Ages thinking, the best time to be baptized, in fact, many, many people just kind of delayed it to the last minute and they're like, whoop, get a bath and off you go, right?

[16 : 38] So, that's not true. What is true, though, is that at death it's over. As it says here in the scriptures, after that, the judgment.

Now let's come back again to that passage in John because I want you to look at it just for a moment and recognize that Jesus is speaking to people whose hardened hearts had resisted every gospel appeal that had been made and here's what he says, you will die in your sin.

He was speaking of the fact in broad terms there are two ways to die. How many of you thought about that? I remember when Tom Parsons, bear with me, Linda, if I may speak of your dear husband, Tom Parsons wrote eloquently about how he would die, I mean not that he would die but he, I remember Kathy, where is Kathy?

Is she in here this morning, Kathy? Oh yeah, well you know, Mandy you're here, I'll blame you. I don't know how Kathy read the chapter from the book that Tom had written during his lifetime about dying.

He talked about dying in a fiery car wreck or dying just you know at home and truth of the matter is if anybody gets to choose how they go, I want Tom's way.

[18 : 00] Kind of raised up in bed, took a gasp and he was gone. That's me, I want that one. Here's the deal, we only get to die two ways.

What do you mean? Well you may die in the Lord. You may die in the Lord. It was my privilege last week to do Barbara Armstrong, her name is Friday in case you're wondering, do Barbara Armstrong's funeral and I talked about the fact that in the scripture it says, blessed are all they who die in the Lord.

It's not a bad thing to die in Jesus, do you understand that? I love here, I like being around you, I love my bride, but I have no hesitation about when the call comes, I'm going.

You know why? It says this, absent in the body, present with the Lord, it will get better. This is not as good as it gets. And in Revelation chapter 14 verse 13 it says, blessed are they who die in the Lord Jesus.

That's the one way. You may die in your sin. John chapter 8 verse 21, he said to them, I'm going away and you will seek me and you will die in your sin.

[19 : 17] Verse 24, I told you that you would die in your sins for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sin. What is the significance of that?

Well, I want you to understand this. Hell is the permanent home of sinners. Look at the passage. Here's what he says.

Verse 21, you will die in your sins where I am going you cannot come. The person who dies in their sin will not spend eternity in the presence of Christ.

It is the reality of hell. It is the certainty of the holy judgment of God that makes gospel issues so profoundly significant that we who by God's grace have been delivered from darkness and drawn into his kingdom have an unrelenting interest in seeing other people come to Christ.

Isn't that true? I want you to understand that what Jesus was saying here is that those who die without faith in Christ will spend eternity in hell.

[20 : 46] those who die in their sin will spend forever in that state. And how can I say this? Well, here's the truth and I want you to get this very clearly in your mind.

I have no basis on which to say that other than the word of God and the clear words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you understand that? I am not up here reciting some psychologist that kind of tells you about an afterlife or talking about Tibetan prayer flags or something else like that.

I am telling you on the basis of the word of God that there is heaven and there is hell and those who have faith in Christ spend eternity with him and those who reject the Lord Jesus will suffer forever.

I want you to understand that the Bible is clear that the sinner will spend forever in a place that Christ describes in terrible terms. For starters, most of what we know about hell comes from information Jesus gave us.

John MacArthur comments that though every New Testament author writes about hell, Jesus has the most to say about it and I suppose that's appropriate because he was the one who came to save us from our sin and deliver us from the certainty of hell.

[22 : 04] Do you understand that? The one who is willing to die for my sins is the one who tells me undeniably what the future is and what the consequences of not believing and not repenting are going to be.

I mean, why? Listen to me. Why would Jesus die on the cross if everybody went to a better place? Do you follow that? Does that make sense? Why do that?

Let me read to you several of the things that are clear about hell. For one, it will be a place of permanent separation from the glory and presence of Christ. What he said there in verse 21 is this, where I'm going you cannot come.

It will be a place of permanent separation from the glory of Christ. It will also be a place of weeping and of gnashing of teeth. Over in Matthew chapter 8 verse 12, and we're not going to look at that, but he talks about the fact that hell will be a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And those words express, extreme heartache and discomfort. It will also be a place of outer darkness.

[23 : 17] Matthew chapter 22 verse 13 says, it will be a place of outer darkness. Furthermore, in Mark chapter 9 verse 48, it says it will be a place of unquenchable fire.

Now stop and think about that. I have heard people get kind of up in my face about the fact, well how can hell be a place of unquenchable fire? Well, I don't know.

But here's what I know. The God who created everything that exists out of nothing, let's go slow, out of nothing will not have a problem with doing something with unquenchable fire.

Do you follow that? And if he tells me that's the way it's going to be, I would be unwise to not take him at his word. It will also be a place of eternal torment.

Over in Luke chapter 16 verse 23 and 24, it talks about the fact that hell will be a place of eternal torment. And I want you to think with me just for a moment that some of the torment of hell will not just be physical.

[24 : 27] Are you paying attention? It will not just be physical. It will also be the unrelenting replay in your mind of the bitterness and the anguish and the heartache and the irritation of your soul.

How many of you have ever laid awake at night really been irritated with somebody else? Raise your hands. There's only four or five of you. I'm impressed. Okay, let's try it this way.

How many of you have ever laid awake at night really been irritated with yourself? Oh. Hey, we've all done both. I got to tell you one of the nice things about doing so is that eventually sleep overtakes you and you slip into that senseless oblivion where you get a little bit of a break from that.

Can you imagine staying awake forever to be bitter at other people and bitter at yourself and regretting all the bad decisions that you've made and the wickedness of your soul and the hardship of other people's lives and still having no relief?

I want you to understand when Jesus said, where I'm going you will not come. The thing that is striking about this is that some will willingly, willfully reject the truth.

[25 : 58] Look at verse 25. Just listen to this. So they said to him, who are you? Now, how many of you understand that tone of voice is really big?

Do you follow what I'm saying? I see Judith is sitting back there and after 46 years of marriage we still have those tone of voice issues, don't we honey? It's more me because I'm more emotional, you know, what do you mean with that?

Tone of voice is like, I mean, let's try it this way. Who are you? You know. But when you say, who are you?

And I was like, get out of my space. Who are you to tell me I'm going to hell? And here were the Jews actually challenging Jesus when he told them, hey, where I'm going, you're not coming.

Now listen to what they say because this is actually a little interesting. In the passage, he said in verse 24, he said, who are you?

[27 : 02] And they said, he will kill himself since he says where I'm going you cannot come. Listen to me carefully. A little bit of Jewish theology helps you at this point, right? You can take this home and try it around the dinner table. The Jews believed that anybody who committed suicide went to the lowest part of hell.

Low. Worst. And here he said, where I'm going you can't not come. They're saying, oh yeah? You're thinking about committing suicide, right?

Yeah, that's what they were. No, that's not what he was saying at all. You guys are going to hell. You've rejected me and you're not going to be where I am. So let's come back around because there's a very interesting statement Jesus makes in verse 21.

I'm going away and you will seek me. Oh. Does that mean that people get a second chance in heaven or in hell? Everybody look at me.

I'm going like this. No, no, no. Nor is the false doctrine of purgatory ever found in scripture.

[28 : 07] The idea that I can drop money in an offering plate or I can burn candles to have a friend kind of move up the food chain and out is not true. I want you to understand what it is saying when it says they will seek me.

Turn over in your Bibles if you would please to the passage that we just touched on briefly earlier just in passing. Turn to Luke chapter 16 verse 24 and 27.

Luke chapter 16 verse 24 and 27 actually begins there in verse 19 where Jesus tells an account of a rich man in Lazarus.

The rich man incredibly financially endowed. He had everything you wanted. You know he had a motor home. He had a retirement place in you know southern Ohio and he had property in Canada for the summer and he had property in Florida.

Well actually in Jamaica for the winter. You know I mean bring the missionaries in while we're at it. You know it says hey he had it all. He died and he went to what? He went to hell. And you look there in verse 24.

[29 : 17] He called out Father Abraham have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue. And that doesn't happen.

Verse 28. I have five brothers. He says send someone to my father's house. I've got brothers. I don't want them to come here. I want you to understand that one of the bitternesses of eternity will not be.

I want you to think with me carefully. Follow me. Oh by the way. This evening I am going to preach on how can a loving God send people to hell forever.

Huh? One of the hardships of eternity. will not just be that there is no second chance.

It will be that people who are in hell will not want a second chance. Hey if you spent your life rejecting Christ while you're alive and you've resisted every indication of the glory and wisdom of God and all of his goodness in this brief life.

[30 : 37] Why would you want to have it full bore in heaven forever? The unrepentant will remain unrepentant. In fact hardened in his state. And we'll look at that a little bit more later.

So here we understand that those who go to hell will remain there in all of eternity under God's judgment resenting his holiness.

Resenting the marvelous offer of salvation through the atonement. Resenting all and everyone and everything just in a bitter, angry, hateful, sorry, painful mess.

Can God be loving and also just? That's the practical question that comes to us as we look at this passage here in Matthew chapter 8.

And let me just kind of touch on several thoughts in relationship to that. For one I want you to know that when Jesus came back into Jerusalem in the week preceding his crucifixion it tells us that as he looked upon Jerusalem that holy city that was going to refuse his offer and crucify him it says this that he looked upon them and he says oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem his heart was broken by the hardness that sin had produced in them and he grieved over that city's abject rejection of the sweetness of the gospel.

[32 : 11] And here's something stunning. When Jesus marched with resolute determination to the cross there were many women who moaned moaned and groaned at the physical evidence of his suffering.

Do you know what he said to them? Don't cry for me. Cry for those who will suffer in the coming judgment that is going to come on the city of Jerusalem.

Do you wonder what the heart of Christ is like towards sinners?

It is compassionate. It is tender. It is sympathetic. One of the things it says in the book of Ezekiel it says this. It says God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

If you ever wonder about how deeply Jesus cares about sinners and how seriously takes the matter of hell, you stop and realize that he was willing to go to the cross to keep you from that place.

[33 : 31] And so when we preach John chapter 8 and we hear Jesus say that where I'm going you cannot come. You will die in your sin.

The practical question that a pastor should ask when he preaches a passage like this will you die as one who has come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ or will you die in your sin?

That's it. Will you die as one who's come to faith in Christ or will you die in your sin? There are some of you thinking, well it looks like he's coming to the end and I'd like to go out and have dinner.

I'm not. The purpose of preaching is to put people on the spot of saying yes or no to God.

Let's pray. Father God, this morning heaven and hell is what is before us.

[35 : 07] when we stop and consider we who know the Lord Jesus Christ of the unbelievable blessing that you have given us in delivering us from the kingdom of darkness and bringing us into the kingdom of your dear son we understand why our lives should amount to more.

And there's some of us here this morning that need to repent for being so self-consumed in the reality in the face of the truth of the darkness and suffering of eternity.

We want to live holy winsome joyful sweet humble lives in the presence of an unbelieving world that is staggering towards hell.

We want the things that we are remembered for not to be the substance of our possessions but the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are some here today that do not know the Lord Jesus and it has been my prayer and it is the prayer of every one of God's people this morning that today the spirit of God would bring conviction and repentance that sinners confessing the darkness of their soul and their complete inability to save themselves would be drawn to understand that there is no hope apart from Christ that today where they sit with broken humility they would confess Father God I stand justly condemned and yet you have sent the Lord Jesus Christ to bear my sin upon the cross and you have offered me salvation through believing in his finished work and I claim your promise salvation and forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ

Amen Amen Ask thee holy