

FOUR WAYS TO MISS HEAVEN

Series: Baptism of Elaine Sullivan
Limestone Baptist Church, Bedford, IN
Rev. Michael Wilhite
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John 8:21-30

OPENING THOUGHTS

- **OPEN IN PRAYER.**
- Take your Bible and open with me to the Gospel of John.
READ JOHN 8:21-30
- You have probably heard the saying before that “He has nobody to blame but himself.” That is a Biblical expression. It is a statement that the Spirit makes a number of times in Scripture about the sinner. And nowhere is that more poignant or clear than here in the eighth chapter of John.
- In the eight chapters of John leading up to this point, Jesus has given sufficient evidence to prove that He was the Messiah, the very Son of God. In fact, sufficient evidence for them to believe in Him unto salvation. In the mind of Jesus, anyone seeing what He did, hearing what He said, experiencing Him and all of those things that went on around Him and not believing, bore the guilt of that unbelief because the revelation was sufficient to make unbelief inexcusable.
- In this context, Jesus once again confronts these unbelieving Pharisees. And what He says to them is absolutely stunning. Verse 21 says this:
21 Then He said to them again, "I'm going away; you will look for Me, and you will die in your sin. Where I'm going, you cannot come."
- And here Jesus crystallizes the central issue in the Gospel of John. Those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will die in their sins. And they will have no one to blame but themselves.
- I can't think of any more terrifying reality than to die and realize that you have lived a lie. You were self-deceived. Your sins were not atoned for; they were not forgiven; and now an eternity of relentless punishment awaits you because you have rejected the only way to Heaven.
- In less than a week, the world will celebrate Halloween once again. Haunted houses are all over the place. Kids will dress up in an attempt to be scary. Ghost stories abound freely and the TV will give honor to a pagan holiday that glorifies the devil. And if we are honest, none of it is really scary. None of it is real.
- Beloved, let me tell you what real fear is. You want something scary? Hebrews 10:31 says this:
31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God
- Do you know what real fear is? Real terror is dying with your sins unforgiven and spending an eternity in the wrath of a holy God. There is nothing more terrifying than that!

- Scripture tells us in Matthew 13:42 that in that place of eternal punishment that we call hell, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And if you go into the original language there, it really means piercing shrieks and grinding of teeth because of the sheer torment and agony that place brings.
- It is eternal. It is described as a lake of fire that can not be quenched. It is a place of sheer agony and torture that never ends. And if you die in your sins, you will fall into the hands of a holy God who deals out eternal wrath for your unforgiven sin.
- Beloved, Jesus' words are a striking death blow to the pride of the sinner. Jesus told the unrepentant Jews that they would die in their sins if they refused to follow Him. I can't think of anything more terrifying to me than to think that people will willingly reject Christ and spend eternity in hell when they don't have to.
- Statistics tell us that about one hundred people die each minute. And that means, then, that probably 99 or more people die each minute and go straight to hell. They die in their sin. They die without forgiveness. They die with full culpability and full responsibility for their own iniquity.
- They die to experience eternal weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, fire, thirst, separation from God, unrelenting remorse and the pangs of a fully informed conscience. And here Jesus is warning about that.
- This morning I want to talk to you about eternal life. You shall die in your sin...verse 21 says. How is it that that happens? Let me give you four ways to guarantee you will die in your sin and I'm going to borrow them from the words of Jesus here. Four ways to guarantee you will die in your sin, four ways to guarantee that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is meaningless to you.

BE SELF-RIGHTEOUS

- Number one – be self-righteous. Be self-righteous. That will do it for sure. The first guaranteed way to die in your sins is to be content with your own ability to please God. Believe that you can be good enough, religious enough, pray enough, give money enough, go to church enough or have good deeds that outweigh your bad on some imaginary scale you've invented. Just be self-righteous. Look at verse 22:
22 So the Jews said again, "He won't kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I'm going, you cannot come?'"
- Now exactly what kind of a response is this? Where did this come from? Understand that they twisted Jesus' words. They were so self-righteous that they took His words and mocked Him. They naturally assumed that He was going to hell because they knew for sure that they were going to Heaven. To the Jews, suicide was such a sin that you could never be forgiven for it. A suicide automatically sent you to hell according to their tradition.

- That's why they asked if He was going to kill himself. It was a way to mock Him. Since they were going to go to Heaven, they naturally assumed He was going to hell because He said He was going somewhere they could not go. And they could never go there.
- They were good, moral Jews. They were guaranteed Heaven in their minds. It was automatic Heaven for them. They kept the Law perfectly in their minds. If there was anyone making it into Heaven, surly it was them.
- They turned Jesus' stern warning to them into some kind of a sick joke about suicide. Do you see the self-righteous attitude in that? They didn't think they needed a Savior. They were good enough on their own. They didn't need someone to save them from their sins. They had already done that for themselves by keeping the Law, so they thought.
- Yes Jesus was going to die. But it was not going to be suicide. Voluntary yes. Willingly yes. Self-sacrificing yes. But not by His own hands. It would be by the hands of self-righteous sinners just like these Pharisees.
- Their ignorant mocking came as a result of their self-righteousness. Do you understand that? The whole idea of them dying in their sins was ludicrous to them. After all, they were the spiritual ones. They were the religious elite. They kept all the Law and the rituals that went with it.
- They had absolutely no idea that they would ever go any place other than Heaven. They turned Jesus' warning into a joke and they laughed until they died. Then they cried and they still do as they endure torment for all eternity because they died in their sin.
- So confidently self-righteous that they could mock the Savior. So confidently self-righteous that they could mock the idea that they would die in their sins. I warn you, beloved, self-righteousness is a fast track that will send you straight to hell for all eternity.
- If you do not admit your total inability to save yourself, you will not see Heaven. If you do today what is right in your own eyes, you will pay the high price for your sins. If you do not admit that your good works achieve nothing by way of eternal salvation, if you do not admit all your religious activities, ceremonies, hail Mary's and prayers and all of the rest of the religious garb contribute nothing to your salvation, then I warn you, you will die in your sin.
- But when you admit that, you will cast yourself at the feet of Jesus, with total humility and know that you cannot earn anything worthy of His salvation. But apart from that, you will die in your sin.
- Paul said it so eloquently in Galatians 2:16 when he said:
16 since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified
- You cannot do anything good enough to ever contribute to your salvation. It is entirely the gift of God. Don't be like the Pharisee in Luke 18, who began beating his breast and said, "I'm glad I'm not like other men, certainly not like that dirty sinner down there. I tithe and I fast and I do all of this." And Jesus said that man did not go home justified.

- It reminds us of Proverbs 12:15 which says:
15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.
- And there's no greater fool than a self-righteous fool who cuts himself off from salvation by grace because he thinks he can make some contribution to it.
- So, you guarantee that you'll die in your sin by just being self-righteous. Just be certain that you're not a sinner. Just be certain that you don't need saving. Just invent a life style of religion that fits you. Don't admit you need a Savior. Don't pound on your breast and say, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Trust your works, trust your religion, trust your rituals and I'll guarantee you you'll die in your sin.

BE WORLDLY

- So if you want to die in your sins, then be self-righteous. There is also a second guilt-edged way to die in your sins and we find it in verse 23.
23 "You are from below," He told them, "I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.
- You are from below, that is to say that they are of the devil and He is of Heaven. They had that reversed and that really goes with the first point about self-righteousness. But then Jesus says that they are of this world and He is not of this world. And that brings us to the second guaranteed way to die in your sins – just be worldly. Just love this system that the world loves. That will do it for sure.
- Now the word world is used in many ways in John's Gospel. Sometimes it just refers to people, sometimes to various ideologies. But here it refers to a system of ideologies that people buy into. It's talking about the spiritual system that dominates the world. This system is evil.
- If you want to die in your sins, then just love this world. Be pre-occupied with the world. Live for the world. Live how you want to live. Live for the ideologies of this world system. If you do that, I guarantee that you will die in your sin.
- 1 John 2:15-17 tells us:
15 Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. Because everything that belongs to the world--
16 the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's lifestyle--is not from the Father, but is from the world.
17 And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does God's will remains forever.
- The world is God's enemy. If you love this world, the love of the Father is not in you – that's what 1 John tells us. If you want to make sure you die in your sins, then just live your life following in your own path. Ignore God's warnings to you. Ignore your conscience. Ignore what the Word of God tells you and live for yourself.
- Being a friend of the world will guarantee that you stay an enemy of God and you will not see Heaven when you die. You will die in your sins.

BE UNBELIEVING

- There is a third way that you can guarantee that you will die in your sins. And this is the crux of the passage. If you want to make sure you die in your sins, then just be self-righteous. Just think you've got it all down and have no need for a Savior and trust in your own good works to get there. Then be worldly and love this world more than anything else.
- And thirdly, look at verse 24:
24 Therefore I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."
- The third way to die in your sins is simply this, be unbelieving. That's really all it takes. Just be unbelieving. Reject who Christ said He was. The only way to salvation is to come to saving faith in Christ. If you remain in your unbelief until you die, you will die in your sins and you will end up in hell.
- Jesus is very direct here. What exactly are we supposed to believe? Notice that He uses the words "I am" here. Here once again Jesus identifies Himself as the great I AM of the Old Testament. I AM is the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3.
- Jesus is saying that He is God. He and the Father are one. If any man rejects Christ, there is no other hope for that man. Acts 4:12 tells us:
12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."
- No other name can save. Christ Himself said in John 14:6
6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."
- That is a very exclusive statement. And in so saying this, Jesus has once and for all shut out the possibility that salvation can come from any other source. He is the only way to Heaven. He is the only eternal truth. He is the only true source of eternal life. And you cannot go to Heaven unless you come through Him.
- If you want to guarantee that you will die in your sins like the Pharisees did, then just reject Christ as Lord. Totally reject what He says. Refuse to turn to Him for salvation and you can rest assured that you will spend eternity apart from Him in hell.
- "Unless you believe that I am He" the Bible says, you will die in your sins. Unless you believe that Christ is God; that He lived the sinless life that you could not live; that He died on the cross as the full sacrifice for your sin; that He rose from the dead on the third day so that He would prove His power over death; unless you believe in this Christ, you will die in your sins.
- How can we ever have any difficulty in believing that this is the Christ that we must turn to for salvation? Yet so many people refuse to believe this. Yet this is the truth and this is what all true Christians believe.

- So you say, "well what about those who believe in God, but not in Christ like this?" They're not Christians! They will die in their sins. And you say, "well what about people who believe this about Christ, but also believe that they have to go through some ritual like baptism or keep some other ceremony?" They're also not Christians.
- Grace plus anything else is no longer grace. Salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. There is no other way to salvation. Good works cannot save. Christ alone and Christ completely is the sacrifice for sin to which nothing can be added. His work on the cross is finished and it is payment in full for sin to those who will believe.
- If you want to guarantee that you will go to hell when you die, then just refuse to trust in Christ alone for salvation. Just be unbelieving. That will send you straight to hell without a doubt.

BE WILLFULLY IGNORANT

- There is a fourth way that you can guarantee that you will miss Heaven. You can be self-righteous, be worldly, be unbelieving and in verse 25 this is just so amazing. Be willfully ignorant.
25 "Who are You?" they questioned. "Precisely what I've been telling you from the very beginning," Jesus told them.
- Still after all of this, after everything they had seen Him do, yet they were so willfully ignorant. They had seen Him do all of these miracles, teach in such a way that they could find no answer to rebuke Him and so much more. And yet after all of this, they refused to acknowledge Him.
- This is nothing more than obstinate sneering. It is as if they are saying, "Who are You to talk to us like this?" "Who are You to act as if You are God and tell us how we should be acting?" "What gives You the right to act as Prophet or purveyor of truth?" "Who do You think You are speaking the way You speak?"
- They should have known who He was. It was blatantly clear that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It was abundantly clear by His miracles, teaching and life that He commanded nature to obey Him, the spiritual realm was at His command and yet they refused to see who He was. They were obstinately ignorant and they wanted to remain that way.
- Why were they willfully ignorant? John 3:20 makes it clear:
20 For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.
- These Pharisees hated the light. They were wicked. They were quite content with their power and standing in the community. Even though they had an outward appearance of righteousness, they were evil deep down inside. They refused to come to Christ because they didn't want their evilness exposed.
- And Christ lays it on them thick. In verse 26 He says to them:
26 "I have many things to say and to judge about you, but the One who sent Me is true, and what I have heard from Him--these things I tell the world."

- He said that He has been speaking and speaking and what He has been speaking is the very Word of God. But they were so willfully ignorant that verse 27 says:
27 They did not know He was speaking to them about the Father.
- Are you kidding me? After all they had seen they literally had to ignore everything Christ had ever done! Yet that is what they did. They refused to know because they loved their sin. You want to die in your sin? Be self-righteous, be worldly, be unbelieving, be obstinately and willfully ignorant and you will die in your sin.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- Verse 30 ends this thought on a positive note.
30 As He was saying these things, many believed in Him.
- That would be my prayer this morning as I have reiterated Jesus' very words to you. It is my prayer that this morning you will come to believe in Jesus Christ. He alone has the power to save you. He alone has words of life. He alone is the Author and Finisher of our salvation.
- Do you want to die in your sins? Then just continue on in the way you are living. Just believe that you are good enough to get to Heaven by doing your good works. Just carry on your love affair with the world and all that is in it. Love your sin so much that you will not see Christ for whom He is and refuse to acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.
- But to do this, you are going to have to stumble over the cross. This morning Christ has been glorified and presented as the only hope for man. He is the only way to Heaven. His death on the cross is our only hope.
- This morning, if you are going to continue on in your sin, you will have to reject Christ yet again. The cross has been presented in all its glory and in just a few minutes, it is going to be presented once again as we baptize Elaine into new life. You are going to have to stumble over the cross yet again.
- It is inconceivable, really. Why would you choose to continue to live in your sin when you could have eternal life? Yet, if you chose this morning to stay in eternal death, you will have to once again reject Christ.
- Why will you not be like the many here who have believed and who do not want to die in their sin? Why will you not accept atonement for your sin? That really is the all encompassing question.
- And the answer is because you are self-righteous, you're good enough the way you are. You love the world too much, you refuse to believe or you love your sin and cherish the darkness and the ignorance that comes with it. In any case, the price is eternal and the consequences are real.
- Proverbs 14:12 tells us:
12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

- No matter how right you may seem to be in your own eyes, it is not your own opinion of yourself that ultimately matters. It is only what God thinks of you that makes any difference at all.
- You can live your life in complete disregard to the Law of God and be totally right in your own eyes. Most people do that. You might even be very sincere in what you believe. There are millions of people who have believed a lie and will pay dearly for it in eternity. It really doesn't matter whether you believe yourself to be in the right or not. You can earnestly believe that $1 + 1 = 6$ all you want, but you are still in the wrong.
- Only the number 2 is the right answer to that question. Anything else, no matter how sincere it may be, is a wrong answer and a lie. There is a way that seems right to you, but it leads only to death.
- This morning, I am imploring you to come to Christ. Christ is your only hope for salvation. I am imploring you on behalf of God Himself to come follow Christ. I am begging you to take up your cross and be willing to die to your sin. Crucify your old self and take the cross of Christ as your only hope.
- Throw yourself down at the feet of Jesus and beg Him to save you. Beloved, the real question this morning is not will you accept Christ as your Saviour? The real question is whether you will throw yourself down at Christ's feet and beg Him to accept you?
- And the Bible tells us that all who do that will be saved from the eternal wrath to come. Luke 13:3 tells us:
3 unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.
- Come to Christ. Repent of your sin and turn your life over to the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe on His name and you will be saved.
- **LET'S PRAY.**