

Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John*

Mother's Day

What Must One Believe In Order To Be Saved?

John 8:24, (ESV)

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."

What you truly believe determines what you do. If you believe it is more rewarding to be thought well of by the people around you rather than by God, then you will live by the rules of the people around you rather than by the rules of God.

And so, for example, performing an abortion would be something you could do multiple times on a daily basis because the people around you say it's OK and God's command not to shed innocent blood becomes irrelevant in your thinking.

Or if you believe that the moral choices politicians make while "off duty" have no bearing on their ability to make moral decisions while "on duty," then you will have no problem in electing as a senator a man who only three years earlier confessed to an affair and betrayed his wife of 21 years and their four sons.

Or if you believe that people know better than God how the institution of marriage ought to be defined then you will have no problem in jettisoning a definition of marriage that has existed since the foundation of humanity for a more novel definition of marriage which isn't even as old as the cell phone.

Or if you believe that sex is nothing more than pleasurable physical exercise, then you'll have no problem in approving Plan-B, an emergency contraceptive medication, to be made available over-the-counter, without parental consent or doctor consultation, to little girls aged 10 and up.

Or if you believe that the highest Christian value is being non-offensive, then you'll probably never make any declarative statements about Christian doctrine.

Or if you believe that it is better for you to watch TV or play on the computer than it is to read the Bible, then you will spend far more time watching TV and playing on the computer than you will reading the Bible.

Or if you believe that God's primary characteristic is love (and all the other characteristics mentioned in the Bible are not really all that important), then you'll probably never talk to anyone about sin.

Or if you believe that followers of Jesus should model their lives after Jesus' life and speak like he spoke, then you will have to seriously wrestle with how to implement his lifestyle and manner of speaking into your daily routine.

What you believe determines what you do.

This world seems to me to be ever-increasingly on a quickening collision course with self-destruction. Every morning when I read the Boston Globe, I find more and more reasons to be depressed and more and more reasons to give up hope. And every morning when I walk outside to get the Globe, I see more and more weeds all over the yard and that adds to my tendency toward depression.

But after I pick up the paper and turn around to walk back in the house, I see the beautiful red and white tulips that line the flower beds. Then I look at the white blossoms on the tree on the far side of the yard. Those blossoms and those flowers make me smile. They remind me that even though this world is filled with sin, it is also filled with life. Even though there are days of deep downpours of black rain, there are also brilliant days of radiant sunshine.

This reminds me of the gospel—the beautiful, radiant, glorious, life-giving gospel. The gospel is the good news. There is plenty of bad news in this broken world, and yet Christians are the unique bearers of the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. Yes, there is death in this world, but there is also life—life available to all who will receive it.

That is the central question.

What must be done in order to receive the life offered through the gospel?

What is the gospel and what must one do to receive it?

John 8:24, (ESV)

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."

The Bad News

In this conversation that Jesus is having with the Pharisees,¹ he is not shy about telling them the bad news. The bad news is that they have a sin problem. This is not just a problem for the first-century Pharisees to whom Jesus spoke, but for the every human who has ever lived.²

Jesus is very clear about the severity of this sin problem. Those who sin are at risk of **dying in their sin** (cf. 21), which means that their souls would be eternally condemned if their sins were not atoned for **before they died**. The problem of sin must be dealt with *before* death, or else it is too late. Dying in one's sins renders one eternally condemned. Thus, we have Jesus alerting them to their dire situation.

What one believes determines what one does. Jesus believed dying in sin to be a serious problem and so he warned against it.

Unless: The Good News

Having told them the bad news, Jesus now moves on to the good news. He says "unless!" They will die in their sins, **unless...** This is good news because 'unless' means there is a way out of dying in sin. There is a way of escape. They do not have to die in their sins. There is hope! The diagnosis is not terminal. There is a condition which will remove one from the peril of 'dying in sin.' What is it? What is the condition? How are they to escape?

Belief

Jesus says the solution to the problem lies in what one believes. The way to receive the good news of the gospel is to believe something.

John 8:24 (ESV)

²⁴ "... unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

Jesus said that the way to avoid 'dying in sin' is to "believe that I am he." In the Greek the word 'he' does not appear. The translators of the ESV have supplied it. If you have the NASB you'll notice that 'he' is in italics, which is their way of alerting you to the fact that it does not appear in the original manuscript.

The verb is simply *egō eimi*, which is "I am." Literally Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I am , then you will die in your sins." So escaping dying in sin, according to Jesus, is directly related to "believing that I am." In order to avoid dying in one's sin, one must **believe** something about Jesus. But what exactly does it mean?

¹ See Jn 8:13.

² "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Rom 3:23 (cf. Rom 3:9-20).

What must one believe about Jesus in order to avoid being condemned by one's sins? So what does Jesus mean?

To answer this question we must ask, "What did the original hearers understand him to mean?" This phrase *egō eimi* is a phrase that Jesus often used in several different ways. Sometimes he used it with a predicate as in each of the Seven I Am Sayings.

1. "I am the bread of life," (Jn 6:35, 41, 48, 51),
2. "I am the light of the world" (8:12),
3. "I am the gate for the sheep" (10:7, 9),
4. "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14),
5. "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25),
6. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6), and
7. "I am the true vine" (15:1, 5).

Other times he used it without the predicate in an absolute sense, as here, in 8:24, again in 8:28, and then again in 8:58.³ In 8:58, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." The response of the Jews to this was to pick up stones to kill him, because they understood him to be making a blasphemous claim of equality with God. On that occasion, Jesus miraculously escaped being stoned by the mob.

He then said the same thing again, just a short time later after he healed a man born blind. What Jesus believes about himself becomes crystal clear in John 10:30-33.

John 10:30-33 (ESV)

³⁰ I and the Father are one." ³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³² Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" ³³ The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

What Jesus means is unmistakable. The Jews understand him to be claiming divinity. When Jesus used the term, *egō eimi* it "represents the divine name."⁴ In Exodus 3:14 when God revealed his proper name to Moses, He said his name was, "I AM WHO I AM." The "I am" portion of Yahweh's name are the exact same words⁵ that Jesus used to refer to himself (8:24 & 8:58).

³ He also used the same phrase in Jn 18:5-6 in the Garden of Gethsemane when the band of soldiers and officers of the chief priests and Pharisees said they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth. In that instance, when Jesus used the words "I am," the entire mob was knocked backward and fell to the ground.

⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *John: The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol. 4, Gen. ed. Leon Morris. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 138.

⁵ *Ibid.*

When Jesus says, "I am" he is claiming for himself that name which, in the OT, was only ever used in reference to one true God who created all things and who redeemed Israel from the "iron furnace" slavery in Egypt.

What Must One Believe In Order to Be Saved?

So what must one believe in order to receive eternal life? One must believe what Jesus believed about himself. What did Jesus believe about himself? Looking across the gospel of John there are six truths that stand out.

1. **That Jesus is equal with God.** Clearly the first thing Jesus expects his followers to believe is that he is equal with God.⁶ This is clear from the very first words of John's gospel (Jn 1:1, 14) and it is a truth attested to throughout the entire gospel.

John 1:1-3 (ESV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Jesus was not merely a man who taught good moral doctrine, he was God himself who existed before matter was created, before time itself and who then who put on humanity.

John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

2. **That Jesus is Messiah foretold in the OT.** Jesus is the one long ago promised throughout the OT to be the redeeming Savior of Israel and all those, both Jew & Gentile, who have the faith of Abraham. When Jesus spoke with the woman at the well she said,

John 4:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "**I who speak to you am he**" (Greek *egō ho laleō sou eimi* Lit. "I, the one speaking to you, am").

See also 5:39; cf. Lk 24:47.

⁶ See Jn 1:1; 5:19, 23, 26; 8:19, 28, 42, 58; 10:30, 38; 14:9, 11; 15:23; 20:28.

3. **That Jesus is the unique Son of God.** The apostle John, speaking of Jesus wrote,

John 1:34 (ESV)

³⁴ I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.

John 1:49 (ESV)

⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

John 3:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believe in the name of the only Son of God.

See also John 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31.

4. **That Jesus was sent by the Father.** Jesus did come to do his own will. He came here in submission to the will of the Father. Jesus came to earth because the Father sent him here and he obeyed his Father's will in all he did, and not his own.

John 8:42 (ESV)

⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me."

Thirteen times in the gospel of John, Jesus teaches that he was sent by the Father. John 5:23, 36, 37; 6:44, 57; 7:18, 28-29; 8:16, 18, 26, 42; 10:36; 12:49; 17:21, 25; 20:21.

5. **That Jesus is the Lamb of God who died to atone for sin & was raised give eternal life.** This notion carries within it the idea of *repentance*, though John does not use that particular word.

1. **Atonement for sin** - Twice John refers to Jesus as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29, 36).

One must believe in the substitutionary death of Jesus. The lamb was sacrificed as a substitute for the worshipper. Lambs were slain so that sinners could live. Jesus is the lamb who died in our place so that we could live. He paid the price of sin, so that we would longer live in obligation to sin.

See also Jn 4:42; 8:54.

2. **Giver of eternal life.** Jesus was a lamb who, not only was slain, but who was also raised from the dead in order to give eternal life. Jesus also purchased for us a new way of living.

John 3:36 (ESV)

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 5:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself."

John 17:1-2 (ESV)

¹ When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him."

Implicit within this understanding is the notion of **repentance**. Jesus paid the price for our sins in order that we who were enslaved to sin (Jn 8) might therefore be freed from the dominion of sin. If eternal life is to be embraced, then sins must be forsaken. [This begins the process of sanctification whereby we become more and more practically holy in our daily lives.] In repentance we turn away from our own way of living and begin to obediently follow the way of living prescribed by Jesus. This will happen at various speeds in the lives of various people, but it will happen nonetheless.

See also Jn 3:15, 16; 4:14; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25-26; 17:3.

6. **That Jesus' words were the words of God the Father.** One must also believe that Jesus words are as authoritative as God's words. The teaching of Jesus is the teaching of God. What Jesus taught were not suggestions, but commands to be obeyed because his words are God's words. Jesus' commands are to be obeyed. In order to be a true follower of Jesus one must daily walk according to the commands that Jesus has given.

John 3:34 (ESV)

³⁴ "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God."

John 7:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me."

John 8:26 (ESV)

^{26c} "... I declare to the world what I have heard from him (i.e. the Father who sent me).

John 8:28b (ESV)

²⁸ "... I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me."

Matthew 17:5 (ESV)

⁵ "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." (cf. Mk 9:7; Lk 9:35)

See also Jn 5:30; 7:18; 8:14, 16, 47, 51.

What should you do when people do not believe these facts about Jesus? You keep pointing them to Scripture (encourage them to read the Bible themselves & not to just take your word for it) and keep telling them the truth. "Whoever is of God hears the word of God" (Jn 8:47). "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or where I am speaking on my own authority" (Jn 7:17).

God works in different ways in different people's lives. For some His work is an like and explosion, a sudden flash of light and then everything changes. For others, it is progressive work, more like a slow dawning, or a gradual awakening.

Some people do not instantly accept all of these truths at one time, but others do. So be patient with people and keep speaking the truth to them in love. Keep grounding what you say in Scripture and let their argument be, not with you, but with the teaching of the Scripture.

Do not stop using the language of sin. We live in a culture that would remove that word from our language altogether. We must not give in to that lie. Using the word sin to describes those things which will eternally separate people from God is not hateful, but the most loving thing one can do. Jesus used sin in his vocabulary, and so must we.

What we believe will determine what we do. If we believe that sin is what separates men from God, then we must warn people that there is a way to have one's sins taken away. This is the gospel. By believing in Jesus, one can have one's sins removed. But if people refused to believe in Jesus, according to Jesus' teaching, then they will die in their sins.

Do we believe this?

Let us not examine what we believe so much as what we do. What we do will more accurately instruct us on what we truly believe.

May the LORD fill us with his Spirit so that we will be bearers of the good news this week?