

## Articles and Sermons :: 4 Marks of a Hell-Bound Man by John MacArthur

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### 4 Marks of a Hell-Bound Man

by John MacArthur

As I have been traveling across America this past week and ministering in a number of cities and encountering a number of people, I have been reminded again of the tragic reality that there is a world dying in sin. And as I was thinking about our brief meditation time this morning in preparation for the Lord's table, my heart was drawn to John chapter 8. Would you open your Bible for a moment and look with me at one of the most tragic portions of Scripture reflecting the ministry of our Lord?

In John 8 Jesus says these tragic words in verse 21, "I go away and you shall seek Me and shall die in your sin. Where I'm going, you cannot come." Then again in verse 24, "I said therefore to you that you shall die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." Three times Jesus makes that tragic condemnation...You shall die in your sin...you shall die in your sins...once in the singular, twice in the plural.

You've all heard the expression, "He has nobody to blame but himself." You've probably used it, I have. And while that axiom is true in many ways in the natural world, it is also true in the supernatural and spiritual dimension as well. When anyone dies in their sins, they have no one to blame but themselves. If a person dies in sin, to perish in an eternity of punishment, there is no one to blame but himself. Back in the first chapter of this marvelous gospel as we were being introduced to its truth, the Holy Spirit recorded these words of Christ, "There was the true light which coming into the world enlightens every man. He was in the world and the world was made through Him and the world did not know Him."

It fascinates me that the Holy Spirit has said that the true light, namely Christ, coming into the world enlightens every man. There is a sense in which every man who has ever lived on the face of the earth is responsible for some degree of the light. In Romans chapter 1 we are told that the creation reveals certain things about God, conscience reveals certain things about God. In chapter 2 of Romans Paul says, "Conscience actually excuses and accuses even the pagans." And all of these scriptures remind us that man has been given sufficient light which if lived up to will lead to further light and even the light of the knowledge of Christ. The tragedy is that man does not live up to the light. Man willfully refuses the light and as John 3 tells us, "Man loves darkness rather than light because his deeds are evil."

As wonderful as it is for us to experience the love of Christ and the peace of Christ, the joy of salvation, to know the hope of eternal life, it is equally tragic that there are many who flatly blatantly overtly reject it. They refuse the light, choose the darkness because they love their sin. The amazing part of the passage we just noted, however, is that Jesus was not speaking to out and out wicked people. He was not speaking to the immoral riffraff of His society, He was speaking to the religious leaders. He was speaking to the experts in Old Testament revelation. He was telling the most religious people of all that they were going to die in their sins and never be able to come where He was going.

How did that happen? How is it that people die in their sins unforgiven? How does that happen? Unjustified, unconverted, unregenerated, unredeemed and bound for everlasting hell. Well, there are four attitudes that guarantee you will die in your sin, four attitudes. If you want to die in your sin then these four things will make that a reality.

Number one, be self-righteous...be self-righteous. The first step to dying in your sin is to be completely content with the condition you're in, to feel that you have no need of a savior, you have no severe sin problem, you're a good person, you may even think you're better than average. And certainly when God scores on the little sheet that He keeps, you're going to have more good points than bad ones. Imagine yourself having attained some righteousness through religious activity and ceremony and believe that you have no serious sin problem, therefore no need to bow the knee in humble broken repentance before God and plead for the mercy of the Savior, and I guarantee you will die in your sin.

In verse 21 Jesus said, "I go away and you shall seek Me and die in your sin, where I'm going you cannot come." He said we're going to be separated. We're going to be in different places. You're never going to be where I am because you're going to die in your sin...you're going to die unforgiven, unconverted, unjustified, unprepared to meet God.

What He is saying is very simple. Coming toward the end of His ministry and the end of His life He is saying, "I'm going to return to My Father in heaven, I'm going back to the glory of the presence of God. You...you will vaguely look for a Messiah, you will hopelessly pursue a Messiah, but you have already rejected and blindly misunderstood the Messiah so you will seek and seek and never find and you will die some day but where I go you will never come. There is no way unto God but through Me," he said, "You reject Me and you will never be in the presence of God. The eternal home of the Father which is open to Me is closed to you."

In John 7:36 He said, "You will seek Me and will not find Me and where I am you cannot come." Jesus is announcing the doom of an unforgiven sinner. But what as I said is so interesting about this is that these were the religiously elite. These were the people who fancied themselves in the know, who thought that they really knew God. Now if you want to see how self-righteous they are, notice their response to Jesus' statement, the response comes in verse 22. "Therefore the Jews," and by the way that term when used by John generally means the leaders, the Pharisees and the scribes and in this case it does, the Jewish leaders were saying, listen to this, "Surely He will not kill Himself, will He? Since He says where I am going you cannot come." What a strange response that is. What a difficult statement to understand, why would they say such a thing?

Well, first of all they knew He was talking about death when He said, "I go away and you shall seek Me, shall die in your sins, where I'm going you cannot come." They knew He was talking about death, that was clear. But they mocked what He said by bringing up the issue of suicide. Let me tell you why. Orthodox Judaism views suicide as utterly unthinkable. In fact, the Jews believed for centuries that anyone who committed suicide was literally and eternally relegated to the darkest part of the eternal pit of punishment, that someone who committed suicide would go to the darkest part of eternity. Josephus said that and Josephus also said that the Jews believed that a person who committed suicide would be separated forever from the place of comfort and peace known as Abraham's Bosom. So what these self-righteous Jews are saying is this, "Oh, so You're going to a place where we can't come, then You must be going to the darkest part of the pit because we're on our way to heaven." They reversed the whole thing. That's how smugly confident they were in their own self-righteousness, that the sinless perfect spotless Son of the living God whose words they had heard, whose works they had seen, whose character had impressed them was to be jeered and mocked and blasphemed and treated sarcastically and assigned to the darkest pit when compared with what they deserved. What unbelievable and blasphemous self-righteousness. "Maybe He's going to kill Himself," they say, "so He will go to that black pit where we will never go since we are the righteous." That is the amazing and tragic reality of religious self-righteousness. It lives under such boastful pride that it makes unimaginable assumptions and blasphemes even the Son of God.

And so, they stand there, already blinded to His works, deaf to His words and now stupidly they ignore the warning that they shall die in their sin with all the horror that that involves in an eternal hell and they turn it into a mocking joke about Jesus committing suicide. And again they turn their venom on the Son of God.

He was going to a place where they couldn't come. But that place was heaven. That place was the Father's presence. That place was the place of eternal glory. And they were going to another place, a place of condemnation, out of the presence of God known as hell. But they were so self-righteous, they didn't think their sin was a problem and they didn't think they needed a savior, they thought they were all right, they were religious, they were moral to some degree, that was sufficient. You want to guarantee that you'll die in your sin, just live with that attitude and I'll promise you, you'll die in your sin. Believe you don't have a sin problem, believe you don't need a Savior and a redeemer. And they laughed at Jesus and they laughed until they died and then they cried in the hell they never thought they'd reach.

You see, the Jews had developed a system of salvation by human achievement and these were the epitome of the achievers. But as Luke 16:15 says, "That which is highly esteemed in the sight of men is an abomination to God." And they being ignorant of God's righteousness, Romans 10 says, went about to establish their own righteousness and they didn't realize that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight. The way of a fool, says Proverbs, is right in his own eyes. But they were wrong.

So it's very simple, if you want to die in your sin, just be self-righteous. Count on the religion of human achievement, count on crediting your good works and your good deeds.

During a campaign for evangelism in Melbourne, Australia, a Melbourne daily paper received this letter which it printed. "After hearing the evangelist on the air, viewing him on television, and seeing reports and letters concerning his mission, I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul and everyone else's needs saving...whatever that means.

I have never felt that I was lost nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin, although repetitious preaching insists that I do. Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged and teaches children goodness and not sin. If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned." That's his choice, he would have nobody to blame but himself. If you prefer to remain forever damned, then be self-righteous and imagine you don't have a sin problem, you don't need a savior.

Look at verse 23, "And Jesus answered saying to them, You are from below, I am from above." What He's saying here is, "Wait a minute, I think you have the directions mixed. I am a citizen who belongs to the above kingdom, you are a citizen who belongs to the below kingdom. I think you have it reversed." What a blow. They are saying, "Well, maybe He's going to the pit because we're going to heaven." He says, "You've got it reversed, I belong to the above, you belong to the below."

And the implication here is that you don't have to wait to be a citizen of that kingdom, you're already a citizen. In verse 44 He says, "You're of your father, the devil. You're children of the devil. You're part already of the kingdom of darkness which in its final form is the eternal hell. But you already have your belonging place there. Your unbelief, your hypocrisy, your false religion, your willful ignorance, your unwillingness to come to the knowledge of Christ are right out of the picture and you represent that, you are under the rule...Ephesians 2 says...of the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience." The whole world, says John the Apostle, lies in the lap of the wicked one, 1 John 5:19.

So, if you want to die in your sin, just imagine that you're fit for heaven on your own, you don't need a savior, and you will die in your sin. Second point, how to die in your sin, secondly, be worldly...be worldly. Verse 23 again, "You are of this world, I am not of this world." Here is another guarantee that a person will die in his sins. Simply be a part of this kosmos. Kosmos here, and we've discussed that many times in our church, but kosmos refers to the invisible spiritual system of evil that fights the kingdom of God...the invisible spiritual system of evil. It is the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches referred to in Matthew 13:22 which chokes out the seed.

We use the term in that way. We talk about the system with the term word. For example, we talk about the world of politics, or the world of education, or the world of sports, or whatever. And what we mean is the system that makes up those particulars. He says to them, "You are of this system." In fact, in Luke 16:8 He says, "You are children of the system, children of the kosmos as you are children of the devil." The world system is opposed to truth, it is opposed to righteousness, it is opposed to holiness, it is opposed to purity. In fact, Jesus gave Himself, Galatians 1:4 says, for our sins that He might deliver us from this present system of evil. The system is hostile to godliness, it is hostile to virtue. Look at the system. By materialism, humanism, sex, carnal ambition, pride, greed, self-interest; pleasure, self-interest; desire, it exists. Its opinions are wrong. Its aims are selfish. Its pleasures are sinful. Its influences are demoralizing. Its politics are corrupt. Its honors are empty. Its smiles are fake. Its love is false and fickle, and on and on and on and on.

And the world will self-destruct. It is a passing world. Remember the words of the Apostle John, "Do not love the world or the system, nor the things in the system. If anyone loves the system, the love of the Father is not in him, for all that is in the system, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life is not from the Father but is from the system, out from the system and the system, or the world, is passing away." Three things characterize it, lust of the flesh, passion; lust of the eyes, covetousness; pride of life, boastful arrogance. That's the system. And if you love the system, the love of the Father is not in you.

James gave us the same truth in different words. "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the system is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the system makes himself an enemy of God." You can't have both. These sinful selfish earthbound souls who live in the system controlled by the prince of this world, the prince of the system are separated from Jesus Christ by an infinite gulf.

The Christian, however, has been crucified to the system. He has died to the system. Oh, it's still there but it's not our life, it's not our domain. We have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. Satan's not our prince, Christ is our King. The old patterns are not those that drive us. Now the law of God is that in which we delight and obedience is our deepest heart desire. For a man to die in his sins, he need only be self-righteous and be worldly.

Thirdly, and here's the crux, be unbelieving...be unbelieving. In verse 24, "I said therefore to you that you shall die in your sins for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." If you don't put your faith in who I am, which e

Everybody all of My person and work, you will die in your sin. That's the crux. Now the way of escape is open, the way of salvation is open. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, said Paul to the Philippian jailer. If you believe in your heart God has raised Him from the dead and confess with your mouth He is Lord, you will be saved. It's available. Salvation is offered. But the one who persists in unbelief, who will not believe that Jesus is God, who will not believe that He is God in human flesh come as a redeemer to pay the price of sin, that He rose from the dead for our justification, that He is sovereign Lord...the one who will not believe that, who will not embrace in faith all that He is and all that He has done will die in his sins. And when He says, "If you will not believe that I am He," He is summing up the fullness of all that He is. God's name, you remember, "I am that I am." And to believe that Jesus is the great "I am" is to believe that He is all that He claimed to be. "I am," He said, "the bread of life. I am the living water. I am the light of the world. I am the good shepherd. I am the vine. I am the resurrection and the life." And if you believe that He is all that He claimed to be, and you place your faith in Him, you will escape death in its eternal consequence. But if you don't believe, you'll die in your sin.

In John chapter 3, you remember the last verse, verse 36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who doesn't obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him." Just don't believe and you'll be damned forever. To die in your sins, all you have to do is be self-righteous, don't think sin is a big problem and believe you're already good enough, be worldly, get yourself totally engulfed in this system, be driven by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, serve your father, Satan, and then just refuse to believe that Christ is all that He said He was in a full expression of faith that embraces Him fully as one's own redeemer, just don't do that and you'll die in your sin.

Fourthly and lastly, be willfully ignorant...be willfully ignorant. It's unimaginable what their response is to this conversation in verse 25 and so they were saying to Him, "Who are You?" That is an unbelievable question. You know, that is an unimaginable response when you stop to realize the ministry that Jesus has had up to this point...healing people, creating food to feed the mouths, as it were, of multitudes of people, walking on the water, creating wine at a wedding, incredible power. They had seen this, many of them first hand, they had heard His powerful words, words which had never been spoken by any man. And yet they say, "Who are You?" It reminds me of the blind man in chapter 9, they came to him and said, "Who is He that did this? Where is He from? And he said, You mean, you don't know where He's from and He made me see?" If he was living today he would say, "Come on, give me a break. You ought to know where He's from. I was blind, He made me see. Take a wild guess." Here they ask the same sneering question in different form, "Who are You...You, literally, You, who are You? Who do You think You are telling us these things, saying these things? What in the world gives You a right to assume that You're going to go above and we're going to go below? That we're going to die in our sins and You're going to go somewhere in the presence of God where we can't come, who do You think You are? Who are you?"

This is just willful ignorance. It should have been patently obvious who He was. How else could it be explained that He was God, if not by what He did, what He said, what He was, and they had seen it all. And Jesus responds by saying, verse 25, "What have I been saying to you from the beginning? I've been telling you who I am, I've been telling you over and over who I am. It's not a secret." Early on He said the temple was My Father's house. He said, "You destroy Me and three days I'll rise again." He said to Nicodemus that He was the Son of God. He said to the woman at the well that He was the promised one, the Savior. It was clear. The message had been given. He had said in that tremendous section in John chapter 5 that all judgment had given from the Father to Him, that He would literally raise the dead, just and unjust, to the resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation. It was obvious who He was. He had said, "I am the light of the world, you follow Me, you'll never walk in darkness." He said, "I'm the water of life, you drink of Me and you'll never thirst." He said, "I'm the bread, you eat of Me you'll never hunger." He said, "You better eat My flesh, drink My blood or you'll never know God and be saved." He had said it all and He had verified it with a powerful display of miracles. And then stupidly they stand there and say, "Who are You?" And He says, "What have I been saying to you from the beginning?"

And then He says this in verse 26, "I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world." He says, "I have more to say to you and what I have to say to you comes from God and God is true and God wants Me to speak these things. I have more to say and these are words of judgment. And they're not His words alone, they're the words of God who is the judge." Back in verse 16 He said, "My judgment is true, I'm not alone in it."

So, He's saying to them, "Hey, I've said a lot to you and you ought to know who I am, and now since you've come to the point where you don't know who I am, I have something more to say to you but what I have more to say to you is about judgment." So you move fairly rapidly from chapter 8 verse 12 where He says, "I am the light of the world, he that follows Me shall not walk in darkness," there's an invitation, now comes a condemnation. "I have more to say to you but I

t's about judgment and I get it from God." And to show you how ignorant they were, verse 27, they didn't realize He had been speaking to them about the Father. They didn't know who He was and they didn't know who His Father was and they didn't even know when He was talking about God. That's how ignorant they were and ignorant because of willful rejection.

In verse 28 He said then to their ignorance, "When you lift up the Son of Man then you'll know." What does He have in mind there? His crucifixion. He says, "When I'm crucified, lifted up, then you'll know that I am He and I do nothing on My own initiative but I speak the things as the Father taught Me. You'll know I am the promised one. You'll know I came from God. You'll know God sent Me and speaks through Me. You'll know it when I'm lifted up."

How would they know it? Well if they had their eyes open, just standing there at the base of the cross and watching what He was doing would have revealed it enough. After all, the centurion said, "Truly, truly this was the Son of God." How did he see it? He saw it in just what was happening on the cross. Add to that that the graves burst open and dead people came alive. Add to that that the veil of the temple was ripped from top to bottom and the access to God was thrown open. Add to that that in 70 A.D. 1.1 million Jews in Jerusalem were massacred and 72 A.D. 20 thousand were slain in Galilee, ten thousand Jewish throats were cut in Damascus in one day. Add to that fifty years later Hadrian destroyed 985 towns in Palestine and slew 580 thousand men and many more were killed in the concomitant events of that massacre.

Stop and look. Add to that that a church was born and Apostles went out in miraculous power preaching and healing, casting out demons and the church was growing and exploding and they filled Jerusalem with their doctrine and they turned the world upside down. He says lift Me up and you'll know...you'll know that I am He and I speak for God. The cross will be the point at which history will be so dramatically altered you'll have to know if you're not blind by your own desire. You'll know.

And then Jesus adds again the most essential aspect of His claim, His relation to God in verse 29, "He who sent Me is with Me, He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." He just sort of wants to make sure they realize again that He is not operating independent but He is equal to God.

How do you die in your sins? Be self-righteous, be worldly, be unbelieving, and just be willfully ignorant. And you know the sadness of it all? Even after the cross they knew. Hey, they knew He rose from the dead. They paid the soldiers to lie about it because they knew it. They knew the church was born. They knew the phenomena of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in, as it were, great cloven tongues of fire. They knew that Peter was healing everybody in his shadow. They knew that the lame man in the temple could walk. They knew. But sin loves darkness. And it is willfully ignorant.

You want to die in your sin? Be self-righteous, worldly, unbelieving and willfully ignorant. But there's another alternative, look at verse 30. Thank God for this. "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him." Isn't that wonderful? What about you? Those people who believed, they went where Jesus is. They did not die in their sins. They died with their sins completely paid for. Only such people enter into heaven and only such people share this table. Shall we bow together in prayer?

Father, as we come to this time of remembrance of the death of our dear Savior, our hearts are filled with joy and yet with the desperate need for confession, for we must examine ourselves, to be certain that we do not partake in an unworthy way. There cannot be anything between us and You, and so we come now to this time of confession. Father, if there are any in our midst this morning, and I'm sure there are, who are going to die in their sin, who are holding on to their own religious achievement, who are holding on to the world, who have refused to abandon themselves in full faith and belief in Jesus Christ, who are willfully ignorant, O God, may they turn from that, even now, and reach out and embrace the Savior and believe like those that day. Father, may they in believing be cleansed and fit to partake of this table which remembers Your death and Your saving work.

And then, Father, for those who are Christians, may this be a time of confession for us. We get our hearts right with You so there's nothing between us and Yourself.

Let me lead you in a prayer and just pray with me. Lord Jesus, I sin, I see my sin, grant that I may never cease grieving because of it, never be content with myself, never think I can or have reached a point of perfection. Lord Jesus, kill me

y envy, command my wayward and unruly tongue, trample down myself and pride. And, Lord Jesus, give me grace to be holy, kind, gentle, pure, and peaceable, to live for You and not for self, to copy Your words, Your acts, Your attitude, grace to be transformed into Your likeness, to be consecrated holy to You, to live entirely to Your glory. And deliver me from attachment to things unclean. Deliver me from wrong relationships, wrong associations. Deliver me from the predominance of evil passion. Deliver me from the hypocrisy of an outward mask, without an inward purity. Deliver me from the sweetness of sin as well as its bitterness. Lead me to an earnest heart searching and a casting of myself on You, to trust You, to cry out to You, to be delivered by You from the sin which so easily besets. And may I know, O God, that You are the eternal all and all and that all things are shadow but You are substance, all things are quicksand but You are a rock, all things are shifting but You are firm. All things are ignorance but you are truth and wisdom. And if we sin willfully and grievously and even unwittingly, may Your grace take away our mourning and give us music, remove our sackcloth and clothe us with beauty, still our sighs and fill us with a song, wash and cleanse us, Father, in this hour, even as we pray.