

INTRODUCTION

I love kids in church. Some children behave better in “big church” than others. Some sit still and fill in the outline and others fidget and make noise and disturb others around them. One mother who was having trouble with her six year old asked another mother how her son kept so quiet and still in church. She said, “Once halfway through the sermon, I leaned over and said, ‘If you don’t be quiet, Pastor David will lose his place and will have to start his sermon all over from the beginning.’ It worked!”

I used to fidget a lot in church, but when my pastor preached on hell, he usually held my attention. Today, I want to speak about God’s Warning Signs on the Road to hell. In the last verses of Chapter 11, Jesus was addressing a hostile crowd of His enemies. He delivered some excoriating words about dead religion to them. In this setting, Jesus was surrounded by a huge crowd; including many of His opponents, but He is speaking these words to His disciples, His friends. If you are His disciple, He is speaking to you, too. Luke 12:1-12:

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak to his disciples saying, “Be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed for the roofs.

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has POWER TO THROW YOU INTO HELL. [Focus on that phrase for a moment until it grabs you] Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

When you are brought before the synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”

People talk about hell all the time in our culture. Some of you may remember me telling you about when I stopped one winter morning to get gas at the station that used to be between our property and Green Acres Shopping Center. It was one of those few bitterly cold mornings we have in East Texas. As I pumped my gas, another car drove up on the other side of the pump and the guy got out and inserted the nozzle into his tank. As he stood there blowing on his hands, he looked at me and said, “Whew! It’s as cold as hell this morning, isn’t it?” Now, how do you expect a preacher to respond to a question like that? I smiled and said, “It sure is cold, but,

friend, you must not know much about hell, because it is *anything* but cold!” He looked at me and figured I was a religious fanatic, and walked into the station without saying a word. People talk about hell a lot, but few people in our culture understand what the Bible says about hell. Surveys have shown while 85% of Americans say they believe there is a heaven, only about 50% of them believe there is a literal hell. Regardless of what Americans believe, Jesus taught there is a hell. The word hell is used 54 times in the Bible.

In Matthew 7:13, Jesus said, “Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.” There is a road leading to hell and most of the people are on it. It’s like an eight lane superhighway and there is bumper-to-bumper traffic traveling at breakneck speed. The sad thing is most people are totally unaware the road they are on leads to hell. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way (road) that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” *The Message* paraphrase reads: “There is a way of life that looks harmless enough; look again—it leads straight to hell. Sure, those people appear to be having a good time, but all that laughter will end in heartbreak.”

I once saw a gospel tract with “How to go to Hell” written on the cover. When you opened it up, it was blank on the inside. The message was that because we are already sinners on the road to hell, we don’t have to *do* anything to go there.

Hell is an unpopular subject, but Jesus said there exists the possibility of each of us being thrown into hell. People often ask, “How could a God of love send people to hell?” God never intended hell for human habitation. Jesus said hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41) And God has gone to extraordinary lengths to warn us *not* to go to hell.

Suppose you were driving down a highway and you saw signs warning, “DANGER, BRIDGE OUT AHEAD!” yet you refused to believe the signs and continued on. Even after you passed a couple of warning signs, I called you on your cell phone and said, “Don’t stay on that highway, there’s a bridge out ahead!” The most heartless thing I could do would be to stay silent and let you continue simply because I might fear you’d be offended by all that “bridge talk.”

In the same way, God has placed a multitude of warning signs on the road to hell. He loves you and He doesn’t want you to go there. In order to end up there, you have to spend your entire life ignoring His warning signs. In this passage of scripture, there are three warning signs on the road to hell. Let’s look at them:

I. THE AWESOME POWER OF GOD

You may recall I spoke on this passage three months ago on the Sunday after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Jesus is telling us, His friends, we really don’t have to fear evil people because the worst they can do is to kill our bodies. He taught that our existence doesn’t end with death. Instead of fearing man, we should fear God. This is the first warning sign on the road to hell. We should

1. Fear Him because He has the power to punish sin

I can never escape from the fact that God has the power to throw me into hell. Most of us know John 3:16 from memory. The scariest word in that verse is the word *perish*. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not *perish* but have eternal life.” “Perish” means to be thrown into hell. We talk about non-perishable food and perishable food. What’s the difference? Perishable food spoils, it rots, it loses its quality. That’s a pretty graphic picture of what happens to a person in hell but the spoiling process is stretched out over eternity.

When I became a Christian in 1961, I knew I was a sinner, and Jesus died on the cross for my sins, so I trusted Him to save me and He did. At that time I didn’t even know there was a hell. The following summer I went to RA camp and our counselor was talking about hell; he really described it in gruesome details. He talked about fire and brimstone and said it would be like a piece of bacon frying. Some of the other RA’s were crying in fear—but not me. I was smiling, because I was thinking, “Wow! I won’t ever have to go there! Some of my new friends were saved that week because they didn’t want to perish in hell. Whether you accept Jesus out of fear, like them, or out of love, like me, you need to know God has power to throw you into hell. You may think I’m trying to scare the hell out of some of you—that’s not right—I’m trying to scare you out of hell. You may object and say, “I don’t think you should use fear to influence someone.” I don’t think you should fear hell but the point Jesus is saying here is we should fear God because He has the power to throw us into hell. But He doesn’t want you to perish. The Bible says clearly in II Peter 3:9, “The Lord patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

2. Trust Him because He has power to save

God has awesome power: He can throw you into hell—and he can save you, too. Nobody else is strong enough to save you. And nobody is strong enough to save him or herself. Have you ever watched any of those bodybuilding competitions where those guys get up on stage in a Speedo and flex all their muscles? Or maybe your thing is watching professional wrestling—now there’s an oxymoron! These are strong guys—can you say “steroids” boys and girls? But my favorite is “The World’s Strongest Man Competition.” Most of them come from Sweden and are named something like Ima Norstrongmensen. Those guys carry cars and throw boulders. They don’t look like body builders or pro wrestlers; they just look like fat guys. That ought to tell you something. It’s amazing how strong those guys are! I’d like to suggest a new strength challenge. Let them put on a pair of boots and then see which one is strong enough to lift themselves up by their own bootstraps. Let the body builders and the wrestlers try. Watch them strain and pull. Oh, they may jump for a second our two, but that doesn’t count. You see, none of us is strong enough to lift ourselves out of our pit of sin. But I know Someone who is strong enough to lift us right out of the road to hell. Even the strong arm of the law can’t deliver you from hell—but God can.

The Bible says: “With your strong *arm* you scattered your enemies ... your *arm* is endued with power; your hand is strong.” (Psalm 89:10,13) God is so awesome is He can toss a sinner into hell as easily as we toss a piece of lint off our sleeve. That kind of power makes me tremble.

But God is not just terrible in His power—He is tender. That doesn’t make me tremble; it makes me trust Him. Isaiah says, “See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power and his arm rules for him.

He tends his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.” (Isaiah 40:10-11) What a beautiful picture. God loves you so much He longs to gather you in His strong arms and give you safety and security. He is a strong God! He’s not just a mighty God; He is the Almighty God!

I love to sing this song with our kids,

“My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,
There’s nothing my God cannot do.
My God is so big, so strong and so mighty
There’s nothing my God cannot do!

The mountains are his, the valleys are His,
The Stars are His handi-work, too.
My God is so big so strong and so mighty,
There’s nothing my God cannot do!” For you!

There’s this huge sign—can you see it? It’s God’s awesome power. He is warning you away from Hell.

II. THE AMAZING LOVE OF GOD

In verses 6-7, Jesus shows us God is not some disinterested tyrant who is uncaring and unloving. Instead, He is a God who cares for sparrows and for people. In the parallel passage in Matthew, Jesus points out God even notices when a single sparrow falls to the ground. God attends the funeral of every little sparrow that dies! When I preached on this passage three months ago, I mentioned God is so caring He notices when a tiny bird falls dead from the sky. There was a dear couple in our church that had just had to put their little dog to sleep after having him as a pet for something like 14 years. This couple was almost feeling guilty about their feelings of grief, because they wondered how important the death of a dog was in the entire scheme of life. When I mentioned God cares even when a tiny bird dies, it gave them great comfort to realize God understood their grief. Isn’t God good? I know many times God will give you a totally different message than the one I’m preaching—and that’s okay. God *does* care for sparrows. And look at what Jesus said in verse 7: “Don’t be afraid, you are worth more than *many* sparrows.” In God’s eyes, nobody is worthless. Notice a couple of things about God’s love.

1. God knows everything about you—and He still cherishes you!

He cares so much for each of us that every single hair on our heads has a number. And if God is concerned about something as insignificant as the number of hairs we have on our scalp, then He is certainly interested in the big issues in our lives.

This past week, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was answering questions about the war. A reporter asked him if he thought Bin Ladin’s days were numbered. Mr. Rumsfeld gave an answer that revealed deep wisdom. He said, “You can say that about each one of us—our days are numbered.” God not only numbers our days, He has numbered our hair. What a caring God!

Sometimes we are afraid to let people know us because we think, "If people really knew what I'm like, they wouldn't like me." That's why we all wear masks. But here's the good news: God knows everything about you—and He still loves you. He not only knows how many hairs you have on your head, He knows how many times you've messed up and failed and you are still valuable to Him.

I heard a preacher express it this way once, "God loves you, warts and all!" Then he had everybody in the congregation turn and say it to their neighbors. I thought it was a great idea, so when I got back to my church in Alabama I tried it. I asked the folks to turn to their neighbor and say, "God loves you, warts and all!" After the service one of my friends came up and said, "Pastor, I tried to do what you said, but when I turned to the man next to me, I noticed he really did have a big wart on his face—so I just said, 'God loves you ... He really does!'" That's the last time I tried that! You can see warts, but we all have invisible imperfections only God can see. So, turn to your neighbor and say, "God loves you, imperfections and all!"

Have you ever been so lonely you've asked, "Does anybody care?" Have you ever been so depressed, or so discouraged, or so much in pain you asked, "Does anybody care?" Sometimes, people can be uncaring, but you need to know God cares. The Bible says in I Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you." Notice also:

2. God will never stop loving you!

God has always loved you and He will always love you. From before the creation of the world, God loved you enough to plan for a way for you to spend eternity. When you came into this world, a sinner, He kept on loving you. He demonstrated His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And no matter how old or how bad or how sick you become, God will never stop loving you. The older I get, the more I appreciate the promise of God found in Isaiah 46:4: "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you." You can have old age without gray hairs, thanks to genetics or chemicals. And you can have gray hair without old age, like me. But no matter how old you get, God promises to love you, to carry you, and to sustain you. I am about to make a statement that will surprise some of you, so pay attention. You can live your whole life rejecting God and refusing to love Him—and He will still love you. You can walk out of this building today and shake your fist toward heaven and shout, "I hate you, God!" And He will still love you and cherish you. And you can die without Jesus—and be thrown into hell—and He will love you even as it is happening. Love is not sentimentality. Parents, when you have to punish a rebellious child, you don't stop loving that child. In fact, it hurt you to punish them because you love them. I read about a judge whose rebellious son was sentenced to life in prison for a terrible crime. It broke the father's heart, yet he agreed the sentence was just and right, yet he never stopped loving his son.

My friend, God loves you so much, and He doesn't want you to go to hell. He has given you a free will to choose, and if you insist, you can ignore the huge flashing warning sign saying, "God loves you." If you are bound and determined to go to hell, God will let you, but He won't stop loving you. Let's look at another of God's Warning Signs:

II. THE ACTIVE SPIRIT OF GOD

In verses 8-12 Jesus mentions the role the Holy Spirit plays in salvation. Let’s summarize them:

1. He convicts you of sin

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He promised to send the Holy Spirit. In John’s gospel, He calls the Holy Spirit “the paraclete” which literally means, “one called alongside.” The word *parakletos* is often translated Comforter, Counselor, or Helper. Jesus said: “When he comes (the Holy Spirit), he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement.” (John 16:8) The reason we all start out on this road to hell is because we are sinners. God sends the Holy Spirit to “arrest us” by giving a sense of guilt and responsibility for our sin. I can stand up here all day telling you you are a sinner but it won’t make a difference in your life. Scary stories can bring fears and sad stories can bring tears, but only the Holy Spirit can bring conviction.

The Holy Spirit may use your conscience. Your conscience was given to you by God; you’d better listen to it, but don’t ever say, “Just let your conscience be your guide.” You can manipulate your conscience until it becomes dead and you can commit wickedness without any remorse. You need to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Do you hear a still voice in your heart telling you you are sinner and you need a Savior? The devil is the accuser and his voice always drives you to despair and guilt. The Holy Spirit is the friend who points out your need and then points you to the solution—Jesus. Next,

2. He draws you to Jesus

We sometimes use phrases like, “when I came to Christ” or “when I found the Lord” as if we came to Him on our own. But the truth is if you are Christian, the Holy Spirit attracted you to Jesus like a magnet attracts iron filings. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” (John 6:44) Jesus uses Himself, the Spirit, and the Father interchangeably in these passages on the Holy Spirit. So, when the Father draws you, it is His Spirit.

If you are not a Christian, in a few minutes you’ll have a chance to come forward and speak to someone about accepting Christ. We’ll all be standing and singing, and you’ll be feeling this strange “tugging” at your heart. You can grab the back of the pew in front of you until your fingers turn white, and you can choose to ignore this tugging but it is the Holy Spirit, drawing you to Jesus.

3. He leads you to publicly confess your faith in Jesus

In verse 8 Jesus mentions how important it is for each of us to acknowledge Him before other men. Some people say, “my religion is a private thing, I don’t have to show it off to anyone.” That’s not what Jesus said, and if you aren’t willing to confess Jesus before others you must have some other kind of religion.

From the time of the first Christians, 2,000 years ago, the way of publicly confessing your faith in through Believers' baptism. That's why baptism is a public event rather than some kind of private ritual; it allows you to show you are a follower of Jesus.

Now the Holy Spirit will convict you, draw you to Jesus, and lead you to confess your faith but He won't force you to do that. God is too much of a gentleman to force His way into your life. You don't have to do what the Holy Spirit leads you to do. But if you refuse, you must face the consequences and in verse 10, Jesus says the consequences can be severe. He speaks about an unforgivable sin.

There is so much confusion about what the unforgivable sin is. Many Christians live in despair and agony because they fear they have committed this unpardonable sin. Jesus said it is "blasphemy" against the Holy Spirit. "Blasphemy" simply means to "speak against." Socrates was sentenced to die for "blasphemy" against the state. So to blaspheme the Holy Spirit means to speak against what He is saying to you. Let me make it simple: THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN IS SAYING "NO" TO THE HOLY SPIRIT. It's saying "no" when the Holy Spirit tells you you are sinner. It's saying, "cut it out" when the Holy Spirit draws you to Jesus. It's saying, "you gotta be kidding" when the Holy Spirit leads you to confess your faith in Christ. So a Christian cannot commit this sin. Billy Graham said:

"No one has committed the unpardonable sin who continues to be under the disturbing, convicting, and drawing power of the Holy Spirit. But when a person has so resisted the Holy Spirit that He strives with him no more, then there is eternal danger. In other words, the unpardonable sin involves the total and irrevocable rejection of Jesus Christ. It is rejecting, completely and finally, the witness of the Holy Spirit, which declares that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who alone can save us from our sins." (*The Holy Spirit*, p. 124)

It's saying "NO" so many times to the Holy Spirit, you no longer hear or respond to His voice. Have you noticed how easy it is for children to trust Jesus? When the Holy Spirit leads them to be saved, they jump at the chance. I don't think I've ever known one child who said, "No I don't want to be forgiven for my sins." But the older you get, the more hard-hearted you become. The voice of the Holy Spirit is still speaking to you, but it's as if you don't even hear Him anymore. That's the unforgivable sin.

And the reason it's an unforgivable sin is because the person in that condition will not *ask* the Lord to forgive them and save them.

4. He lives in you to empower you

Once you receive Christ, you will want to publicly confess Him, and you will find there is a new presence in your life. Our body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "The Spirit of Truth—the world cannot accept him. But you know him, for he lives *with* you and will be *in* you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:17-18) Did you notice Jesus said the Holy Spirit will be *in* you? Then He said, "I will come to you." When we talk about Jesus living in our heart, it's the Holy Spirit who lives there. Jesus said if you are ever in a jam and need some help, don't worry, the Holy Spirit will give you the words you need to say at that very

moment. I have found through the years when I’m talking with someone about trusting Christ, I’ll say things to them I’ve never thought about before. It’s like I’m talking to them, and I can step back and say, “Wow, I can’t believe I said that—I’m not *that* smart.” I’m not. It’s the Holy Spirit. If you are Christian, just start talking to someone about Jesus, don’t worry that you don’t know everything you are going to say; just watch while the Holy Spirit takes over.

CONCLUSION

God’s Spirit can use a variety of methods to call you to Jesus. He recently used caller ID. Perhaps you read about this true story. On a Saturday night several weeks ago, a pastor was working late at church, and decided to call his wife before he left for home. It was about 10 p.m. but his wife didn’t answer the phone. The pastor let it ring many times. He thought it was odd that she didn’t answer, but decided to wrap up a few things and try again in a few minutes. When he tried again she answered right away. He asked her why she hadn’t answered before, and she said it hadn’t rung at their house. He thought it was a fluke and forgot about it—until the following Monday. On that day, he received a call at the church office, from a man who wanted to know why he’d called on Saturday night. The pastor couldn’t figure out what the man was talking about. Then the man said, “It rang and rang, but I didn’t answer.” The pastor remembered, and apologized for dialing the wrong number, he explained he’d intended to call his wife. The man said, “That’s okay. Let me tell you my story. You see, my life has been a mess and I was planning to commit suicide on Saturday night, but before I did, I prayed, ‘God if you’re there, and you don’t want me to do this, give me a sign now.’ At that point my phone started to ring. I looked at the caller ID, and it said, ‘Almighty God’. I was afraid to answer!” The reason why the name “Almighty God” showed on the man’s caller ID is because the church the pastor serves is named “Almighty God Tabernacle!”

God may not call you on your phone but He is calling you right now by His Spirit. Will you come to Jesus? God loves you so much He has placed many signs along the road to hell to warn you to turn away and go in another direction. There are three of them: the awesome power of God, the amazing love of God, and the active Holy Spirit.

OUTLINE

I. THE AWESOME POWER OF GOD

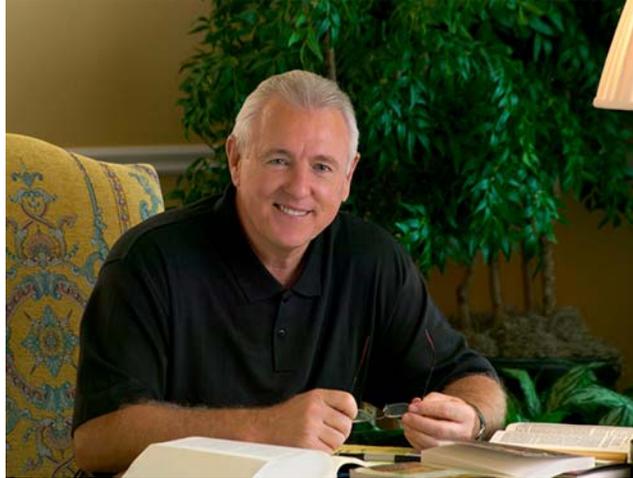
1. Fear Him because He has power to punish sin
2. Trust Him because He has power to save

II. THE AMAZING LOVE OF GOD

1. God knows everything about you—and He still cherishes you!
2. God will never stop loving you

III. THE ACTIVE SPIRIT OF GOD

1. He convicts you of sin
2. He draws you to Jesus
3. He leads you to publicly confess your faith in Jesus
- The unforgivable sin is saying “NO” to the Holy Spirit**
4. He lives in you to empower you



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes