

Teaching Points

The dual destiny of Jesus and His opponents is brought out in this section: He would soon return to the Father, and they would die in their sins. He begins by saying He is going away. He knows where He is going and He knows where they are going. He tells them plainly, “You can’t go where I’m going.” Their response is actually a deep insult against Jesus. The Jews of His time taught that the lowest levels of Hades were for those who committed suicide. They try to twist Jesus’ words to imply that He will commit suicide and therefore be damned.

Discussion Question: Why aren’t they able to follow Jesus to where He is going? What is their problem?

Thoughts: *Their problem is their sin. Because of their very nature, they don’t want to follow Jesus on earth, which means they will not follow Him to heaven. They have no desire to follow him on earth, so what would make them (or anyone who doesn’t want to follow Him on earth) think they would follow Him to heaven?*

They said Jesus would go to Hell (according to their teaching about the consequences of suicide). Jesus answered that they did have different destinies, but not as they thought. Jesus claimed to belong to a totally different world than His listeners. All along, Jesus has been saying that He has come from the Father. That is a place of no sin, no rebellion, no unbelief. An insurmountable barrier separated them from God’s presence here on earth and there in Heaven—sinful unbelief (v.23). People are born in sin (Psalm 51:5). We are in danger of dying in our sins if they are not “dealt with” on this side of death. We can only avoid dying in our sins by trusting in Jesus and His finished work on the cross to save us. Otherwise, we will have to pay for our sins in Hell. Think about how this accusation hit those self-righteous religious leaders!

Discussion Question: Did you notice that verse 21 uses the singular “sin” while verse 24 says twice, “sins”? Why do you suppose that is?

Thoughts: *F.F. Bruce says, “If the singular expresses the root sin of unbelief, the plural expresses those particular attitudes, words and actions which make up its fruit.” In other words, we commit acts of sin because we have a sin nature. Jesus said both aspects make us guilty before God. Notice the “solution” to our sin problem: Believing in Jesus as the Son of God, the Great I Am. Once again, as we’ve seen several times already in John’s Gospel, Jesus takes that great title of deity (“I am”).*

Some questions posed to Jesus are used to discover the truth. Some are used to resist the truth and justify a refusal to believe. If asked from a sincere heart, “Who are you?” (v.25), would a be a wonderful question. But they asked with contempt. They asked out of hostility, much like when they asked, “Where is Your Father?” (8:19) and “Will He kill Himself?” (8:22).

They've had enough of Jesus' extravagant claims. So, this question is more like, "Who are you, anyway? Who do you think you are?" Yet Jesus has been up front with them all along, hasn't He? He's told them over and over again that He comes from the Father. The Father is true and Jesus is only doing what the Father has told Him to do. Therefore, if the Pharisees opposed Jesus, they really opposed God the Father. They didn't understand that (v.27).

Jesus continues to speak about the unity He has with the Father. He does and He speaks what the Father tells Him. The Father has never left Him alone. Jesus always pleases the Father. Despite the opposition and unbelief from the religious leaders, there were many people who believed in Him. The words of Jesus are powerful. The actions of Jesus are powerful. His life and message were consistent. And He was very different from the religious leaders. While the Pharisees worked hard to cultivate an image of intimacy with God, they could tell that Jesus was, actually, close to God.

Discussion: What does Jesus mean by "when you lift up the Son of Man" (v.28)? Is He talking about being "exalted" in the ways we normally think (getting applause, celebrity status)? How can He say they will know that He is the "I am" when they lift Him up?

Thoughts: *Read John 3:14-15 and 12:32-33. Jesus is speaking about the cross, His upcoming crucifixion, when He will be "lifted up" to die. He is not coming for earthly fame in the way of applause and comfort and luxury. He came to give His life as a ransom for many. This "lifting up" would be His vindication. Then it would be manifest that He had acted and spoken throughout by the Father's authority (Bruce). Jesus didn't come merely to debate theological points. That is one thing He did. But it is another thing entirely to "always do the will of the Father" when it means going to the cross. The cross would prove the perfect obedience of Jesus. Take a look at Acts 2:36, 37, and 41 to see how Jesus' words came true. What a wonderful, omniscient, self-sacrificing Savior!*

Prayer Focus

Thank the Lord for His mercy to save even those who peppered Him with insults and accusations. Thank Him for saving us when we were enslaved to our sins.

Ask the Lord to help each one to walk in newness of life where we forsake our sins through confession and repentance on a regular basis.

Praise God for sending His Son who obeyed Him perfectly and ask Him to increase your faith and your desire for Him so that you might walk in greater obedience day by day.