

## The best news about the worst death

### John 8:21-30

A couple of weeks ago Jas and I finally sold our little Subaru.

It had been on the market since October

but finally we found a buyer after we dropped the price *yet again*.

It was after the final price drop that we found ourselves in the selling zone

and so we had a small rush of interested people in the weeks after Christmas

It's always nerve-wracking experience buying a car, isn't it?

I was nervous selling it, but I wasn't as nervous as them,

they wanted to know that they weren't buying a lemon.

When they came they all went through the same dance:

pop the bonnet, listen to the engine, go for a test drive.

Don't look too keen, look as if you can walk away at any moment.

I doubt many of them know much about what they are listening for,

I certainly don't,

but you have to do some checking

because there is a *genuine risk* when you're buying a car.

And you do want to hear the honest assessment from the seller, don't you?

one guy who came looked at the mileage and said

"100k kms, have you had the timing belt changed?

Didn't change the timing belt in my last car, it snapped and cost me 3 grand!"

I was able to say "yes, and I saw the mechanic change it with my own eyes,

and here it is in the service records"

When there's serious money at stake you want to hear the honest assessment,

you want to ensure that your investment isn't wasted.

And its not only cars that lead us to take a risk with our money,

we invest a lot into our whole lives, don't we?

We invest in our health,

we invest in our families,

we invest in our careers.

Have we ever stopped to think

about whether there's a risk of creating a lemon out of our lives?

Have you ever sought out an honest assessment

as to whether your life's focus is where it ought to be?

In our passage today, Jesus is startlingly honest in his opinion

of where some people's lives are heading:

they're at risk of the very worst kind of death.

Maybe you could say they're at risk of a fate *worse* than death,

it's hard to believe that there is a fate worse than death

but its true and today we're hearing Jesus speak about it.

And Jesus is also honest about how we can overturn this risk.

It's certainly not all bad news as Jesus gives his assessment;  
It's honest news about the real risk of something horrendous  
but also of the very real means of eliminating that risk.

So what is it Jesus wants to warn us about?

We're continuing in our series in John's Gospel  
and we pick things up in John 8:21. Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away,  
and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." <sup>22</sup>This  
made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?"  
<sup>23</sup>But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of  
this world. <sup>24</sup>I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you  
will indeed die in your sins."

Three times in these opening verses we hear the honest assessment:

*you will die in your sins.*

It's a funny thing to say isn't it? *You will die in your sins*

As a church minister I've been to many funerals  
and I've heard all sorts of things said about the dearly departed,  
many of them, no doubt, are true

—"He was a great family man, she loved making the most of life"—  
but never once have I heard someone say, "Well, she died in her sins."

I've heard people speak about the way their loved one faced death.

—"He was stoic and brave. She was surrounded by family and friends"—  
but no-one has ever said "When he died, it was in his sins".

Sometimes the situation arises where the deceased was a terrible person,  
and known to be a terrible person

and so some truth may be spoken in a gentle way

—"she always made sure we were very aware of her opinions"

"He enjoyed a drink, sometimes a bit too much"—

But no-one has ever said "She was a sinner, and she died in her sins"

But, here is Jesus, not leaving it until the funeral to say this uncomfortable truth,  
but giving everyone a warning ahead of time.

"If you're not careful, you will die in your sins".

And it *is* a warning for everyone,

because as David prays to God in Psalm 143:2 no one living is righteous before you.

This is a risk that each one of us is exposed to.

What is wrong with dying in your sins?

Why not just have a good time while you've got the time?

Well, there is a hint as to what's wrong with that plan  
in some of the other things Jesus says here.

Once more Jesus points to his origin and position beyond this world,

Verse 21 "I am going away and later in that verse Where I go, you cannot come."

Verse 23 "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world;

I am not of this world.

Jesus has made the point numerous times that he belongs in heaven,  
that in heaven he has been in partnership with the Father.

Jesus is reminding us that, despite what some sceptics would have us believe,  
there more to the universe than what we can see;

there is a God whom we can and do sin against.

there is a God who will hold us accountable for our actions.

And so to 'die in your sins'

means making your entry into the afterlife with your sins still outstanding,  
with your sins still in tow,

with your sins still credited to your name.

And what do you think God will say when he sees you still with your sins?

What's he going to do?

One thing I've noticed over the last few summers,

is that the hottest Christmas present at the moment is a ... drone!

If you want to get a cool present, ask for a drone!

If you wish to receive a cool present, ask for a drone!

(Don't get me a drone because I live under a flight path,

I might end up receiving a plane as well!)

But not everyone likes them.

I saw in the news this week a story of a real estate agent

who was using a drone to take camera footage of a house that he was selling,  
when the occupant emerged with a firearm and shot the drone out of the sky!

The police were called to the property and upon interviewing the occupant  
they discovered he was in possession of 187 cannabis plants.

"Hello sir, what are these then?!"

No wonder he was bent on shooting down a flying camera,  
he was trying to conceal his guilt!

But once guilt is made evident there is only one possible outcome isn't there?

He was taken to Taree police station and charged with 8 offences

including drug and gun crimes.

And so the expectation is the same for those whose guilt is obvious before God;  
those who die in their sins will have their sins judged.

People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment we're told in Hebrews  
and the result of that judgment is a fate worse than death.

Hear what John saw in the book of Revelation, from ch 21:8 the cowardly, the  
unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the  
idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the  
second death."

I mean dying once is bad enough,

but dying in your sins leads you straight to this horrendous 'second death'.  
There are any number of ways that we might pass away,  
But what you don't want is to die in your sins,  
that's worse than any disease,  
that's worse than anything humankind can do to one another,  
and so this is why Jesus has this warning.

But the good news is that this risk can be eliminated.

In the space of a few verses  
the *worst* death is counterbalanced with the *best* news.  
Right before we hear of the lake of burning sulfur we hear these words in  
Revelation 21 To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of  
life. <sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my  
children.

And in our passage in John's Gospel,

Jesus immediately proceeds to speak once more  
about his mission to eliminate the need for anyone to die in their sins.  
Ch 8:25 "Who are you?" they asked. (Scholars suggest the tone here is "Just who  
do you think you are, telling us we'll die in our sins?") "Just what I have been  
telling you from the beginning," Jesus replied. <sup>26</sup> "I have much to say in judgment of you. But  
he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."

At some points in John's Gospel we're told that Jesus is not here to judge the world.

In Ch 3 he says For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to  
save the world through him.

Verses like that are getting at the distinction  
between Christ's first mission and his future return.  
His first mission was to not to judge but to offer salvation,  
However his return will indeed be to judge  
and the offer of salvation will have lapsed.

I think verse 26 gets at the same thing.  
He's saying "Man, I could say a lot about you guys and your attitude towards  
me. You don't realize it but you are in the mouth of hell right now, but, I'm  
here to tell you—and all the world—what I've heard from the father.

Jesus says that now is not the time for judgment, now is the time for him to speak,  
and it's by him speaking and us believing what we hear  
that this risk of dying in our sins is eradicated.

As Jesus said earlier in Ch 5.24 Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and  
believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from  
death to life.

When I'm not selling cars I'm driving them,

and I try my best to be a good driver but I do not have a perfect record.  
You have 13 demerit points that you can acquire before you lose your licence,  
once I gained 8 points in a week.

What happened is that we had just moved to a new area  
 and it takes a while to learn the local roads (that's my excuse).  
 On the way from our house to work I had to drive through a school zone,  
 and they put a speed camera right in this zone.  
 It's called a license for the state government to print money.  
 And so it must have been 8:01 in the morning,  
 and so it goes from 60 to 40 in a second.  
 And so that was once, then I got pinged again later that week  
 "AWW that's right! It's the school zone here!"  
 Down to 5 points. I was very careful from that point on, let me tell you!

Now demerit points not only effect your licence but also your insurance premium.  
 So even if you still have your licence you can suffer other consequences  
 And so I was counting the days—1095 of them to be exact—  
 until those demerit points were wiped from my record,  
 because they stay on your record for three years but after that they're gone.

It's a trivial example but it does serve to illustrate the purpose of Jesus ministry.  
 He was sent from God with a mission.  
 Not a mission to allocate demerit points, but  
 A mission to speak the truth about God the Father,  
God the Son and God the HS  
 A mission to die on a cross as away of taking away our sin  
*A mission to leave us with no record of wrongdoing.*

How do we ensure that mission was for our benefit?  
 We listen to Jesus  
     we believe what he says  
         and we start living like we believe it.  
 No matter what else they might say at your funeral,  
 and they might say some very nice things, the thing you *want* them to say is  
 "She trusted Jesus and he was her Lord",  
 "He believed Jesus and followed him"  
 "She died, not in her sins, but as a forgiven person".  
 That's the kind of death you want,  
 and it's a death that's possible if we turn from our sins  
and trust Jesus to wipe them from our account.

But some people have trouble believing, we see some examples in our passage  
 Verse 22 This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come?'"  
 Verse 27 They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.  
 And so Jesus speaks about the final great sign  
 that will demonstrate once and for all that he is who he says he is, verse 28

So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.

He's speaking of course about his death on the cross,  
but I think he's speaking not only about his death  
but also about what comes afterwards,  
his resurrection and also his sending of the Holy Spirit.  
I get that impression from the term 'lifted up';  
it brings with it connotations of Christ being exalted and glorified,  
which happens on the cross but also happens through his resurrection  
and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

"There is coming point" Jesus says "when you'll know with certainty who I am,  
you won't have any excuse because the resurrection will happen  
and people will see that I'm not dead  
and the Holy Spirit will do his thing through my church  
and that will be hard to ignore. You'll know!

And we do know, don't we? We know,  
but not everyone chooses to act on this knowledge.  
For whatever reason, and we see this in the NT,  
people play the risky game of not acting on what they know of Christ,  
Instead, they choose to die in their sins.  
Don't make that mistake.  
We've heard the honest assessment from Jesus,  
let's believe what we hear,  
let's turn away from our sins  
and let's ask him to wipe clean those sins we do commit.

Let's pray right now.

Heavenly Father we have heard the warning about dying in our sins, and so we acknowledge that we are in danger of having our sins count against us. We are sorry for this rebellion of ours against you. But we have also heard the news of Christ's mission. That he came from heaven to speak the truth about you, about how he came to be lifted up on the cross so that we might not have to be judged for our sins. We accept this generous act on our behalf, we believe what Jesus teaches us, and we wish to become his followers and learn more from him. Accept this prayer and help us continue to learn and understand more about your son. In his name, Amen.