

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

By Dr. Alan Cairns

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: 1 Peter 4

Preached on: Sunday, June 4, 2000

Faith Free Presbyterian Church

1207 Haywood Road
Greenville, SC 29615

Website: www.freepres.org/church.asp?greenville

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/faith

1 Peter chapter four and verse 12.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.¹

Amen. The Lord will add his own blessing to the reading of his precious Word for his name's sake.

Let's briefly bow in prayer.

Oh God, our Father in heaven, this is thy Word and we have gathered to hear it. We pray in the name of Jesus that though would open thy Word to every heart and open every heart to thy Word. Oh God, address us personally and powerfully. Shut out every distraction and shut us in with thyself. We have been singing about eternity. We pray that the reality and the solemnity of God's eternity may descend upon this gathering and that thou will do business with souls in the light of eternity. God grant that those who are going on careless, heedless to the danger of their souls may this night be wrought upon by the Spirit of God to convict them of their sin and need of Christ and to bring them in repentance and faith to receive him. To this end fill me with thy Spirit. Grant the anointing

¹ 1 Peter 4:12-19

he alone can supply. God, grant though will use the Word preached as the power of God unto salvation. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago one of England's most renowned actors died just a few years short of 100 years old. Sir John Gielgud was a Shakespearean actor of very rare talent. He was a man blessed with a very acute intelligence and just about the perfect voice. When you heard the three great English Shakespeareans—Olivier, Richardson and Gielgud—you realized that only one of them had the perfect vocal instrument. And that was John Gielgud.

Last year when I was back in Britain I watched an interview that Sir John Gielgud gave to the BBC covering his career, his beliefs (or lack thereof), his attitude to death and his view of eternity. He spoke as an atheist. He assured himself and his listeners that he had no immortal soul, that death would be the absolute end of him and that there was neither heaven nor hell for him or anybody else to be concerned about. He was very specific. There was no life beyond the grave.

Within a year of giving that interview John Gielgud died in that faith. As I thought of that I realized that he has already discovered how immeasurably mistaken he was, for he was mistaken and fatally so.

That is the plain testimony of the Word of God. It is the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the clear teaching of the passage we read together this evening.

I was greatly struck as I read this passage that Peter here asks two questions, two questions which God demands that every person and especially every unconverted person would answer.

In verse 17, "What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel?"² And verse 18, "Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"³

Now these are very penetrating questions. They are neither idle nor speculative. Peter does not raise these questions in the manner of some worldly philosopher simply to air a matter of interesting discussion. This is nothing or has nothing to do with vain philosophy. No, Peter asks the questions because he intends us to grasp the answer to those questions. And there is an answer. Obviously the answer to these questions must come from one specific source. These questions are of such importance that we can't leave the answer to speculation. We can't leave the answer to the world's great thinkers.

I could turn you to the pages of books that give you the rationalizations and the insights of the world's great philosophers from Socrates onwards on this question of life after death and of eternity and the variety of opinion would make your head spin. Obviously the questions are of such importance we cannot possibly leave the answer to somebody's opinion. Nor can we leave it, even to a matter of dogma. The Church of Rome will give

² 1 Peter 4:17

³ 1 Peter 4:18

you one answer. Protestant churches will give you another answer. The various sects and cults will give you yet different answers and they enthrone their answers on the throne of dogma and expect you to believe them on that basis. But we cannot answer the question merely because some of men have enshrined it as dogma.

In the very nature of the case no man can give an answer to the question. You stop to think of it. We are not talking about the world. We are not talking about life. We are not even talking about death. We are not talking about anything upon which men can exercise investigative skill. This is a question of eternity and to verse 17 and verse 18 and the questions they raise only God can give an answer. If we are to know an answer to these questions we must have a clear statement from him who alone in the history of the world could say, "I am he that liveth, and was dead."⁴ Or "was made dead," referring to his crucifixion. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."⁵

Now obviously one who died and remained under the power of death and came forth as he said he would from the grave in the body in which he was crucified and it was exalted to heaven and can claim to hold the keys of hell and of death in his own hand, he is the one uniquely qualified to give us an answer about what lies beyond death, what lies before us in eternity.

And his answer is final. He has given us an answer, first, in his own words from his own lips while he was here on earth and then through his inspired apostles, one of whom was Peter.

So in stating the questions Peter is also giving us the answer to those questions. In fact, he makes a very powerful statement in asking these questions, a statement that no thinking person can rightly ignore.

What Peter is driving home to our hearts is that he eternity is real. And we must realize that all in the church or outside of it, all without Christ will be forever lost.

I want you to think of his description of souls without Christ. He refers to them as sinners, as ungodly and as disobedient; sinners who have broken God's law.

Nowadays, of course, that is very old fashioned. Sinners is a word that is all but eradicated from our vocabulary unless it is to describe a particular class of people because of their uniquely wicked lifestyle. But generally people don't think of themselves as sinners. That is an old fashioned word.

All the force of modern psychology and, indeed, modern evangelism are behind the move away to call people sinners. Years ago it was recognized that people didn't like that description. Therefore evangelistic societies began to think of other ways in which to approach sinners. The four steps that Bill Bright invented became very popular. And the

⁴ Revelation 1:18

⁵ Ibid.

first one, instead of saying to a man, first off, “The Bible wants you to know that you are a sinner who has broken the law of God,” was to say, “God has a wonderful plan for your life and let’s go from there.”

You can see, immediately, we are talking about a different God, a different Christ, a different gospel, a different salvation. Sinners.

We live in a world in which there is very little shame anymore. In fact, the biggest thing that marks what used to be called the generation gap is that young people educated in the educational system of the last 15 to 20 years really have been given very little basis upon which even to understand what shame and guilt are all about. It is as if we were talking a different language all together.

But the Bible never changes whatever the fashion of the hour may be. And the Bible’s message is that people without Christ are sinners. God has set a standard. Again, that is old fashioned. But that happens to be the standard of the eternal God. He has set a standard. It is not a movable standard. The morality of Scripture is not something that changes from generation to generation. When God said, “Thou shalt not steal,”⁶ that is as true today in the year 2000 as it was the day that he first gave it. When he says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,”⁷ it doesn’t matter whether the U.S. Senate says it is ok, whether the high court says it is ok and whether every politician and preacher from here to the North Pole practices it, it is not ok. It is God’s mark. It is God’s standard.

Now God’s standard is not just in these great moral crimes. God’s standard through his law is absolute obedience to him, perfect righteousness in obedience to his law, a heart that is totally, absolutely conformed to God’s law and to God himself, a heart that loves him with all the fulness of its power and passion. That is God’s standard. And every man ever born by natural generation has failed to meet it. Sinners have missed the mark.

As the famous words of Romans 3:23 put it, “All have sinned.”⁸ That’s past. We sinned in Adam. We were born in sin as a result. All have sinned. But the next part says, “And,” if I could give it its literal force, “are continually coming short of the glory of God.” There is the mark, the glory of God. And we are all coming short of it.

I used to hear preachers say, “Some people may come short by a mile. Some people may come short by an inch. But we all come short.” When I got a little older I realized that was so much rubbish. We all come short by an infinitely great margin. Never get the impression that there is one of us who comes within an inch or two of reaching the glory of God. All have sinned and are constantly coming short with every breath we breath, with every step we take, with every word we speak. We are coming short of the glory of God.

Sinners: the first description of souls without Christ.

⁶ Exodus 20:15

⁷ Exodus 20:14

⁸ Romans 3:23

Ungodly. I can be very brief on that word having spent some time expounding it just a few weeks ago if I may remind you of what we then saw. Ungodly scripturally means we are without God. Ephesians two describes the unsaved person as without God and without Christ in the world and without hope; without God, without Christ, without hope. Those three things go together. Without God, unlike God. We were made in God's image. Sin has sadly defaced the image and the longer men live in sin the more defaced that image becomes. They are not only without God, they are unlike God. They are against God. Sinners without Christ are against God. They have made God their fall man. They have entered into the lists of combat against the eternal. They struggle against his will. They fight against his purpose. They make themselves enemies of everything that God has ever revealed of himself and of his grace in Jesus Christ.

Ungodly: without God, unlike God and against God.

And then, disobedient. This is not done in sheer ignorance. I want you to understand that.

In 1 Corinthians chapter one we read, "The world by wisdom knew not God."⁹ Boasting of the light that was in them men denied their God. In Romans chapter one we are told that all men are "without excuse."¹⁰ How can that be? This is true of people who have a Bible and people who have no Bible, people who listen to the gospel every week and people who have never once heard that gospel. God is dealing with men fundamentally as they stand before him and he is saying, "I have revealed myself and you are willfully blind to the revelation that I have given you." He has surrounded us with the revelation of himself. There is not a blade of grass that grows, but that bears upon it the stamp of its creator. There is not the feather in the wing of a bird, but that if you take it in your hand will be a potent witness to its creator. There is not a cloud that cross the sky. There is not a breath of air that reaches your lungs, but that all cry out in witness to the God who gave them. And yet men are willful in their disobedience to that revelation, willfully blind, rejecting the Lordship of their Creator. You can many, many times multiply that guilt when people take a Bible in their hand and they read there the story of incomparable grace and mercy in the person and through the blood shedding of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they then despise the Savior that God has provided.

Sinners: missing the mark.

Ungodly: without, unlike and against God.

Disobedient: trashing the revelation of God's greatness and grace.

Now you would expect Peter to say to these Christians, "Look around you and you will see the heathen temples full of these people." No doubt he could have done that. But that is not how he pursued the subject. He tells us that these people are in God's house. That is the whole force of verse 17.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:21

¹⁰ Romans 1:20

You see, it is easy to come to church and look out and say, “Oh, yes, there are sinners in the bar. There are sinners in the den of vice and of iniquity. There are sinners in heathen temples.”

All that may be very true, but, you see, the Holy Ghost never allows us to become hypocrites who can sit very comfortably preening ourselves on not being what other people are while we may be just as vile in the sight of God.

He says, “Look inside the Church and you will find sinners, ungodly and disobedient.”

I want you to stop there. First of all it tells me God almighty is looking inside the Church. This church included. The Almighty knows his people. “The Lord knoweth them that are his.”¹¹ Our hearts are open unto Christ and he is the one with whom we have to do. There is nothing hid from his eyes. The Almighty is looking upon a meeting like this tonight. And he says, “Look in the Church, for I am looking there.” See people who are yet sinners. They are yet against God and they are yet disobedient to the Word of God, despising the grace of God.

Let me ask you tonight if that description fits you. Think of this very carefully because, really, there is no more dangerous place on earth for a sinner to try and hide than in the church. Oh, you may fool a preacher or a board of elders or a congregation of people. Yes, it is possible to make people think you are a saint while all the time you are a sinner. That is easy to do to a certain extent. It doesn’t change the fact to be in a church without Christ is the most dangerous place on earth because God says, “Judgment will begin at the house of God.”¹² That is where he starts his judgment. He is not going first to the bar and the brothel, but to the church pew. That is where he starts.

I wonder what he finds when he comes. There is no hiding behind vestments for a preacher. No hiding behind choir robes for the musicians. No hiding behind empty profession in any pew in the place. Sinners in the Church with all the advantages of a praying people around them, with all the advantages of gospel preaching in their ears, with all the advantages of constant invitations to come and repent and receive the Savior. And yet sinners, ungodly, disobedient.

I trust you will be honest with yourself tonight and say does this describe you, because if so this whole text, then, is specifically speaking about you. You should take very urgent notice of it because this is not a small thing.

I have to emphasize this as we come to the second great consideration in the text. I have often spoken to people who have, you know, sort of shrugged off the urgency of being saved because they think, “Well, you know, I know the way. This is a fairly small matter. It can be dealt with any time.”

¹¹ 2 Timothy 2:19

¹² See 1 Peter 4:17

I remember some years ago telling you about a young man I met when I was but a student minister in a little village called Dunmurray outside Belfast, Northern Ireland. He stood outside a bar listening to us preaching the gospel at our church open air meeting. And as others preached I got talking to him and his friends and he made it clear, “I know what I am going to do. I am going to live for the devil. I am going to live for sin and I am going to have my fling,” as he put it. “And then when I am old and done then I will turn to God for mercy.”

The whole idea there is this is a small thing and it is easily dealt with. But notice the question in verse 18. “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”¹³ This is not a small thing. Peter talks about the difficulty of saving souls. If the righteous scarcely or hardly or with difficulty are saved... Now get the import of that.

There are many millions of people in this world whom God has saved, but everyone of them has been saved with difficulty. There has not been one easy case among them. It was no easy matter even for almighty God to save sinners. We don’t, I think, pay enough attention to this. If I could—without in any way demeaning the divine majesty in creation—if I could put it this way, comparatively speaking creation was an easy thing for God. It is so complex that the more men think they know about it the more they have got to recognize they don’t know about it. And that will be true however long they live.

But how did God create? To his infinite and wisdom all things were immediately and intuitively clear. And he spoke the worlds into being. To create the worlds what did God have to do? Simply speak. What a marvelous God we have. “God said, Let there be light: and there was light.”¹⁴ Right down the process of creation in those creative six days God said, God said, God said and it was done as he said it, when he said it, carried out without a flaw.

But when it came to saving sinners there was no such easy way of doing it. God—may I say this very reverently—could not merely speak a sinner into being a saint.

You see, the great impediment to the salvation of souls was the justice of God.

Nahum chapter one verse three says, “The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.”¹⁵ That is a plain statement.

Exodus 34 verse seven. God is giving the great revelation of himself to Moses and he says, “God will by no means clear the guilty.”¹⁶ Sinners are wicked. Sinners are guilty so how can they be saved? Sinners are guilty. God will not clear the guilty. Sinners are wicked. God will not acquit the wicked.

¹³ 1 Peter 4:18

¹⁴ Genesis 1:3

¹⁵ Nahum 1:3

¹⁶ Exodus 34:7

It would appear on the surface of it that salvation is impossible. It was a problem, one that only divine wisdom could possibly solve. And what a solution God provides in the gospel.

Summing it up in Romans three verse 26 we read that God and yet he is able to justify sinners who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷ Now how on earth could he do that? How could God acquit guilty sinners without compromising his own perfect justice?

Again, let me stop there and say that the question doesn't appear to be very difficult at all to ungodly men because they have a notion of mercy that simply says, "Well, now I feel warm and fuzzy toward you. I will overlook all that you have done." Men can say that because the man conferring the mercy, at heart, is as big a sinner as the one on whom he is conferring it. But God is absolute in holiness, absolute in purity, absolute in justice. There can be no deviation from what God is. If he deviates from what he is, he is no longer God. God is what he is necessarily and eternally and unchangeably. Therefore how can he who will not at all acquit the wicked, how can he save guilty sinners without compromising his own perfect justice?

Every human religion proposes a way of salvation whereby God will accept people because they have attained a certain standard of righteousness. That is human religion. It doesn't matter whether it is dressed up under the name of Christianity—falsely dressed under those colors—or whether it is called by some other name. Human religion always, invariably proposes that God will justify the righteous. He may compromise his standards by saying, "Instead of wanting you to be perfectly righteous I will justify you at least if you are partially righteous." But it is always the justification of the righteous.

The Bible's revelation is altogether different. Notice the words of Romans chapter four and verse five. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."¹⁸ Now stop and read that again. Does it say God justifies the ungodly? These are the people we are talking about: ungodly, unlike God, against God. Human religion says, "Make yourself a little more presentable to God. Work and fast and pray and be good and do your best and when you have attained a certain standard of righteousness then God will justify you."

The Bible says, "Nonsense." You can never be saved by doing your best.

If salvation were in those terms God would un-God himself and sinners would find salvation fairly easy. No, no. God justifies the ungodly.

That is an astonishing statement. And as soon as you recognize the meaning of the words you will see clearly that he doesn't justify them on the basis of anything they can do. They are ungodly. They are still ungodly when he justifies them. There is no change in that there is nothing they have done to effect the change to make God accept them. He justifies the ungodly.

¹⁷ See Romans 3:26

¹⁸ Romans 4:5

How on earth can he do it? I have already quoted from Romans chapter three. But the passage is so important that I am going to read it with you and I trust you will give it your wholehearted attention because this is, in many ways, along with Romans chapter five, twelve to the end, this is the focal point of the whole New Testament. This is the heart of the entire biblical revelation. This is what God wants men to understand.

Verse 21 of Romans chapter three. Having, in verse 19, found the whole world guilty before God and every mouth stopped, without excuse.¹⁹ Now verse 21. “But now...”²⁰ Stop there. “But now...”²¹ Here is the hinge of history. Here is the focal point upon which all human history and all your history and all my history will turn. Until now it is story of sin and doom and gloom, inability to ever do anything that would make us right with God. The law has been given. All it can do is show us our sin. It cannot give us the power to become saints.

“But now the righteousness of God...”²² That is, the righteousness God provides to justify sinners,

...the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being [or having been] justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation...²³

That is, a sacrifice to appease divine wrath.

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.²⁴

That is how he does it.

As Romans five puts it:

By the offence of one [that is Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [that is Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobe-

¹⁹ See Romans 3:19

²⁰ Romans 3:21

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Romans 3:21-24

²⁴ Romans 3:25-26

dience many were made [or constituted] sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.²⁵

Again, as Paul puts it, “God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”²⁶

Now how does he do it? Obviously this was no easy way. It was so difficult and so amazing that when the angels first heard of it, Peter tells us, they desire, that his they long to stoop down to look into this.²⁷ Some people have translated that in ordinary, every day language, “They were craning their necks to get a look into this,” so amazed were they. God made him to be sin for us. In other words, this cost God everything. He couldn’t redeem us with silver or gold.²⁸ Salvation meant that he appointed his own dear Son to become the Savior of sinners, to come into this world in a true incarnation, God manifested in the flesh, to take to himself a true body and a reasonable soul, to be born made of a woman—the virgin birth—made under the law, to live in humiliation and suffering, to undertake all the legal obligations of his people becoming their prophet to declare to them the way of life, their priest, by the shedding of his own blood to purchase for them eternal life, their king by whose power sin, Satan and hell would be subdued and they themselves subdued to his grace, to become their sacrifice, their substitute, their sin bearer, to suffer the hatred of men and of devils, to bear the wrath of a sin hating God, to go all the way to Calvary’s center cross, to die in agony, ignominy and shame in the darkness bearing all the outpoured wrath of offended deity, all the essence of the agonies of hell in the place of his people.

When you hear the agonized cry of Christ out of the darkness, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”²⁹ you realize that it was with great difficulty that God saves or saved sinners.

This is not a small matter. And it is in the light of this that Peter asks, “If the righteous or the justified are saved with such difficulty, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”³⁰ especially as these are the very people described in the previous verse as those that obey not the gospel.

Just think of the disobedience of Christ-rejecting souls. From Peter’s words it is clear that salvation depends on two things: perfect righteousness, which no sinner has, but that God has provided in Christ; and obedience of faith. You see this gospel that I have just been outlining, this gospel makes certain demands of its hearers. What I have just outlined to you is something that shocked the sinless angels of heaven. So radical was it, so beyond anything that even an angelic intelligence could ever have imagined, shocked the angels of heaven. After all, they had seen angels fall into sin and God never stirred a fin-

²⁵ Romans 5:18-19

²⁶ See 2 Corinthians 5:21

²⁷ See 1 Peter 1:12

²⁸ See 1 Peter 1:18

²⁹ Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34

³⁰ See 1 Peter 4:18

ger to save a fallen angel. And yet they see Adam's race fall into sin they see God go to the ultimate in making his own dear Son the head of a new race to become a man to die that we might live. The angels were so amazed it should tell you something. This gospel is not to be treated cavalierly. This gospel is not to be shrugged off lightly. You are not dealing with some religious fairy tale. You are dealing—if I could use the words very reverently—you are dealing with the agony of the heart of the eternal God. And this gospel demands that you believe it.

That is the first thing.

The very first great text the Savior ever preached—recorded for us in Mark chapter one, verse 15—is “Repent... and believe the gospel.”³¹ This gospel...if all this is true—and it is and it is a million times more glorious than I could ever express, more mysterious than I can ever describe, more amazing than I can ever make you understand—if this gospel is true, we must believe it. To take this Bible and wave it in the eyes of God and in the face of the eternal and call him a liar, which is what every Christ-rejecting, gospel-denying sinner does, is the ultimate insult. Believe it and obey it.

What is its call? In the terminology of Romans chapter 10, the call of the gospel is to submit yourself to the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. What does that mean? It means that you come before God recognizing fully and finally without excuse, “I am the sinner that the Bible describes me as. I am the ungodly. I am the disobedient. I have no righteousness. My church going, my tithe giving, my goodness to others, my kindness, my sympathy, my praying, my Bible reading, none of these things have accrued to my account even one ounce of merit before God. I have no righteousness. I stand before God condemned, unclean, filthy, guilty and fit for hell. And if God were to send me to hell I would have to cry from the depths of hell, ‘I deserve it all and God is right and God is righteous.’”

But I believe that Christ is the Son of God, that he came, the last Adam, to take the place under God's wrath of all who believe in his name. And I shelter under his great sacrifice. I have no righteousness but Christ, no covering but his righteousness and blood, no hope but the promise that he gives. I submit myself to the righteousness of God to take Christ on the terms on which God offers him to me in the gospel.

That is what Christ-rejecting sinners refuse to do when it says they do not obey the gospel. They go about to establish their own righteousness. They deny their need. They deny their danger. Like John Gielgud they may even say there is no hell to fear. In a word, they prefer their sins to Christ. And they will take their chances.

If you are one of those who is disobeying the gospel I want you just to stop for a minute and I hope that God will write in your heart what it really means. God tells you of his love, draws your eyes to Calvary. You look upon Christ and you say, “There is nothing in him to attract me.” You despise him. You love your sin.

³¹ Mark 1:15

I am always foolishly amazed at this. I see the picture in the newspaper of some rock star who looks like a devil and realize that for love of something like that there are people who would reject the lovely Son of God.

God sets his Son before you, but you say, “Away with this man. I don’t need him. I can live without him.” Like Gielgud you may say you can die without him. But that is terribly foolish because the last great point that Peter makes is the destruction of Christ rejecting souls.

“Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”³² I want you to notice this. They will appear. They have an end, but death is not the end. John Gielgud could not have been more wrong. Death is not the end.

Where will they appear? They will appear before God. Revelation chapter 20 gives the picture of dead small and great standing before God. The ocean gives up the corpses that it has been hiding. The earth is opened up and every grave yields the corpses it has been hiding. Every sinner will appear before God.

Where will they appear? They will appear where they deserve to appear. Sin will find them out.

The psalmist said in Psalm nine verse 17, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”³³

What will the end be?

If I may put it this way, the never-ending end of the sinner is eternity without Christ. To die as an atheist is to die as a fool. To die as a person who knows the Bible, believes the Bible would not contradict one message or one doctrine of the gospel, who has heard the gospel call 1000 times and rejected it because of love of self and sin is to die as an even greater fool. The wicked shall be turned into hell. It is the ultimate answer to where they will appear.

John Gielgud didn’t believe that, but let me tell you, he believes it now.

You may not be so foolish as to say what he said, but some of you are still trying to live your lives without one single thought of eternity. This text demands that you consider eternity.

I have often quoted the message of the old headstone one of my ministerial brethren found in the south of Ireland, an old dilapidated cemetery with the weeds growing around it he found this little verse—that, as I have said, I have often quoted to you:

³² 1 Peter 4:18

³³ Psalm 9:17

Consider man as you pass by,
As you are now so once was I,
As I am now soon you will be,
Consider, man, eternity.

In the words of the hymn we sang this evening, “Where will you spend eternity?”