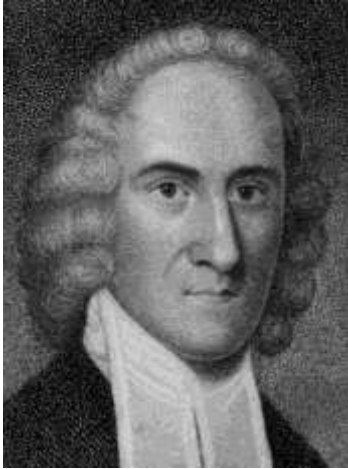


THEME CLASSIC: A Previously Unpublished Sermon by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) on John 3:36.



Jonathan Edwards

Edited for Publication by:

MICHAEL D. McMULLEN
Professor of Church History
Midwestern Baptist Theological
Seminary
mmcmullen@mbts.edu

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This sermon, which is an example of a message Edwards preached and re-preached, with dated notation and alterations for the re-preaching, is a clear message on the uniqueness of Christ. It actually forms part of a pair on the same text, with this sermon being the first of the two. Edwards's point is unambiguous. There is no salvation outside of Christ. Christ and Christ alone, is the only way by which any can be saved, that is how the Father has ordered it. The honor of his majesty has been affronted and only the Son could and did repair it. If salvation was achievable any other way then, Edwards makes clear, the Son has died needlessly. There are also great warnings here. Warnings not to prevaricate, not to be offended and especially, warnings of what terrible suffering lays ahead for those who willfully reject the only means offered to obtain eternal life.

The sermon manuscript is a typical duodecimal booklet, consisting of fifteen leaves, with no evidence of damage. As stated, in the main body of the sermon there are clear alterations, additions and corrections in Edwards's own hand, but nothing on the scale of a major rework of

the sermon as a whole. This sermon has never, to the knowledge of the present writer, appeared in print before. I have transcribed the sermon directly from the original manuscript, which is housed in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University. For accuracy and consistency, some punctuation has been added, Edwards was clearly unconcerned about such things in his own manuscripts. Where Edwards has deleted words, even whole sentences, I have not included those deletions.

In reworking this sermon, Edwards sometimes reproduced later what he had deleted earlier. Had I retained these deletions, it would have lead to significant repetition and an inaccurate sense of Edwards's message. Therefore I have followed the original author's lead and left them out.

One final note, Edwards's abbreviations have been filled out, 'X' for 'Christ' for example, but otherwise his words have not been modernized or altered in any way.

EDWARDS ON JOHN 3:36

December 1734. 4 May 1755. Stockbridge Indians.

John 3:36 (1) Unless persons believe in Jesus Christ they shall not see eternal life.

John 3:36, And he that believeth not the Son shall not see life. These are part of what was said by John the Baptist to some of his disciples when they came to him and told him that he that was with him beyond Jordan, to whom he bore witness, baptized and that all men came to him. The disciples of John did not seem to like it that Jesus should baptize, they looked upon it that in so doing, he took upon him to do that work that belonged alone to their master, they looked upon it as his prerogative to baptize and they supposed that John would resent it when they told him of it. John the Baptist formerly used to be flocked after, all Judah and Jerusalem went out to him to be baptized of him, but now Christ had taken over the work of baptizing and the people began to leave John and to flock after Christ. John's disciples thought that their master would not like this, but that he would look upon Christ as his rival and would be jealous of him, as one that got away his honor and the respect of the people. But John receives their account quite in another manner than they expected, says he, A man can receive nothing unless it be given him from heaven, and tells them that they themselves know that he told them that he was not the Christ, but that he was sent before him, and signifies to 'em that instead of resenting of it as they expected, he rejoiced at it, verse 29, and says in verse 30, that Jesus must increase....He speaks of it

as what he expected and is glad of, and then teaches his disciples how much Christ is above him and how worthy to have honor above him. And not only so, but instead of being jealous of Christ because he had so many disciples, he teaches in the words of the text, the absolute necessity of becoming his disciples, that all must become his disciples, he that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life and he.... In this verse may be observed two things, 1. The benefit of believing in Christ, that hereby we shall obtain everlasting life, He that believeth.... and 2. The necessity of it, here manifested two ways viz.

1. In the impossibility of obtaining life without it, viz. that he that believeth not the Son shall not see life. That is, they shall have no part nor portion in it, however they may endeavor after it, if they don't believe....they shall never reach it.

2. The positive misery that they are the subjects of, the wrath of God. In the former clause is his privative misery, 'tis the clause that signifies the impossibility of not obtaining life without believing that.

I would speak at this time from this.

Doctrine. Unless persons believe in Jesus Christ they shall never see eternal life.

I would here shew briefly, 1. What is meant by believing in Christ, 2. That it is so, and secondly, Why it is so.

I. What is meant by believing in Jesus Christ, and here take this definition of faith in Christ. It is the person's soul entirely uniting in, or closing with Christ for his Savior; acquiescing in his reality and goodness as a Savior, as the Gospel reveals him. It is necessary that there should accompany faith, a sense of our own sinfulness and our own misery, for without this a man's heart never will close with Christ for his Savior, for he sees no need of a Savior that don't see the evil he needs to be saved from. A man unless he be sensible that he is sick, won't apply to a Physician. So there must accompany a true and saving faith, a sense of our own utter unworthiness of any mercy, and worthiness or desert of eternal perdition. For if a man ben't sensible that he don't deserve salvation himself, he won't see any need of Christ to deliver from misery, for if he don't deserve it he can't see why he mayn't be delivered from misery on his own account without a Savior.

Thus he that truly believes in Christ is sensible of his necessity of a Savior, so he is convinced that there is a Savior. He is convinced of the reality of Christ as a Savior. He sees that he is the Son of God and the Savior of the world, and the way of salvation revealed in the Gospel is the way to life, and he sees the excellency of Christ, his beauty and loveliness is inwardly revealed to him, whereby he appears more worthy and excellent than all creatures, and he sees his goodness as a Savior.

[He is] convinced of the desirableness of that that is offered through him, the desirableness of salvation from sin as well as punishment, the desirableness of that kind of happiness that he has purchased that consists in holiness, and he sees that Christ is sufficient to procure and work out this salvation, and he sees the excellency of the way of salvation by him. It appears a desirable and excellent way to him. The soul is so convinced of these things that it rests in them, it entirely acquiesces in it, that Christ is the Savior, that he is an excellent and glorious One, and a sufficient Savior, and that his salvation is good, and that he is a Savior suitable for him, fit for and adapted to his case. And hence the soul entirely closes with this Savior, the whole soul closes, opposition is overcome, the soul chooses this Savior, it flies to him, it cleaves to him and trusts in him and gives up itself to him. This is saving, justifying faith in Jesus Christ.

II . Unless persons do thus believe in the Lord Jesus Christ they will never see eternal life. I shall mention no other evidence of it but this, viz. that God hath declared that it shall not be.

He hath peremptorily declared it not only in our text but very often elsewhere: Mark 16:16, he that believeth not shall be damned; 1 John 5:12, he that hath the son hath Life, but he that... John 3:18, he that believeth not is condemned already; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting d.; John 8:24, If ye believe not that I am he ye shall die in your sins; John 12:48, he that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words hath One that judgeth him, the word that I have spoken the same shall judge him on the last day; 2 Thessalonians 2:12, That they all might be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness; Hebrews 2:2,3, How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?; Hebrews 3:18, And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest but to them that believeth not; Hebrews 12:25, If they escaped not that refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; Revelation 21:8, The fearful and

unbelieving shall have their part in the lake that burneth....Thus you see how often and how plainly God has declared that those that do not believe shall not be saved but shall perish eternally.

Here therefore, let it be considered

1. That God is the dispenser of life. None can give it but he. If he refuses to give life 'tis impossible it should be obtained. Men are not stronger than God, they can't wrest salvation out of God's hands. We are entirely in his hands, in body and soul at his disposal and he can dispose us to life or death and make us happy or miserable just as he will. Heaven and hell are his, he has the keys of them and he opens and no man shuts, and he shuts and no man opens, Revelation 3:17. Therefore, since he has so often and so peremptorily declared that no man that don't believe in Christ shall ever see Life, we may be sure it will be so.

2. God cannot lie or repent. 'Tis Impossible that God should declare that he will do thus and thus, and not make it good. Numbers 23:19, He is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man.... Hath he said and shall he not....God's Word is firm and more steadfast than the mountains and everlasting hills. His Word is established in the heavens. Matthew 24:35, Heaven and earth shall pass away but my Word.... Therefore as God will not and cannot lie, so surely those that do not believe in Christ never shall see life.

I proceed now to show,

III. Why it is so. Why God never will bestow life on 'em that don't believe in Jesus Christ.

1. The Truth of God in the Law will not allow. The Law of God is an established rule of proceeding with men that God has fixed and will never depart from. Matthew 5:18, For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, not one jot nor tittle....The Law requires perfect obedience and threatens eternal death to the breakers of it, and therefore as we have all sinned, we are all under the condemning sentence of the Law, and therefore as the Law stands good 'tis impossible that we should be saved unless it be by One that has fulfilled and satisfied the Law. They that are under the Law are under the curse, for 'tis written, Cursed is everyone that continueth....Galatians 3:10, and therefore we can't be delivered but by him that was made a curse for us, and so is made satisfaction to the Law, verse 13, and we can't have the benefit of his

satisfaction, unless we are in him and united to him, and we can't be united to him unless our hearts close with him by faith.

2. God will not bestow eternal life on those that don't believe in Jesus Christ, as he has respect to the honor of his majesty. We by sin have affronted the majesty of God and cast contempt on him, and therefore as God has respect, we cannot be accepted but through him who has repaired the honor of God's majesty. If we come to God out of Christ he will be a consuming fire to us, will glorify his majesty that we have injured in our everlasting destruction. If God should accept of a sinner to life that don't believe in Christ, he would thereby greatly dishonor himself, he would lay his own honor in the dust. But has too much respect to his own glory to do thus, he will not and cannot dishonor himself.

3. He will not....As he has respect to the honor of his Son. God hath appointed his Son to be the Savior and he hath designed him to this honor of being the author of eternal salvation, and therefore if we could obtain salvation out of Christ, God would thereby manifest that his Son is a needless Savior. This takes away from Christ the honor of his dying love, for if so Christ laid down his life needlessly, he might have spared his blood. There is a great show of kindness in Christ's dying a cruel death but all for nothing. If righteousness comes by the Law then Christ is dead in vain, Galatians 2:21. God designed his Son the honor of being the only Savior, that that should be his prerogative to save men, that he should be the medium of all salvation, that he should be the only means of eternal life to the children of men. But if men could be saved without believing in Christ, Christ would lose this honor. But Christ shall not fail of his due honor. God will see that his Son obtains the honor that he designed him, and he will not so order things in his providence that he should be deprived of it. We have account in John 12:28, that Christ when going to Jerusalem prayed the Father, saying Father, glorify thy Son, and he was answered by a voice from heaven: I have both glorified and will....God infinitely loves his Son and will see to it that he has the honor of the only Savior and therefore will bestow life on none but them that believe on him.

Application.

1. The use may be of awakening to unbelievers or to convince unbelievers of the doleful state that they are in. This doctrine may well be terrifying to you, for you are the person spoken of in the text, That believeth not the Son. You are one of that sort of persons that remaining

of that sort never obtain eternal life. You do not believe on Christ but are an unbeliever, are one of them that know not Christ, that continues in rejection of Christ, one who stumbles at the Word being disobedient. Christ is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to you. You will not come to Christ that you might have life. You are one that never acted one act of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in your life. You are one of those children in whom there is no faith spoken of in Deuteronomy 32:20. You are one of those that know not God and obey not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are one of that same sort of persons spoken of in Luke 19:27, But those mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me.

You are one that neglects so great salvation. You are one of them that refuses him that speaketh from heaven. You are one of them that has made God a liar and do so by your daily practice by your living in the sin of unbelief, for this is the sin not only that you have [been] guilty of once or twice, but that you have lived in all your lifetime. You have had great advantages for faith. You have lived under great means of faith but yet never have believed. Your unbelief is not circumstanced as the unbelief of the heathen and of the Papists and many others is, but you remain in unbelief though you have had instructions and Gospel calls and invitations all your days. How terrible therefore may these words be to you that are in the text, He that believeth not the Son shall not see life. If you continue in the state and condition that you are now in, it is impossible you shall obtain salvation.

However easy and quiet you may be in your present condition, yet this assure yourself of, that if you haven't a great alteration in your state you never shall be saved. Let those that are under the convictions of the Spirit of God and are concerned for their salvation, consider this, you are concerned that you may obtain life. You are making that enquiry, What shall I do to inherit eternal life? But take notice of this that unless you believe you shall not see life. You stand in great need of eternal life and how doleful will your case be if you never obtain it but how much soever you need it you never shall obtain it unless you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you desire earnestly to see life, if you are afraid of death and are earnestly seeking that you may escape, if you are in never so great distress about, and wish and long never so much that you may obtain salvation, yet it will not be without faith in Jesus Christ and faith is what you are [a] stranger to. How doleful a state and condition therefore are you in.

Here consider

1. How dreadful that death is that you must see if you don't see life. I mean that eternal death that is threatened in the Law. You must see life or death. Temporal death is awful and terrible. Men have a great dread of it, it is the king of terrors. But what is temporal death to eternal? What is the first death to the second? What are the pains and agonies of a dying man to the agonies of the soul in hell? What are the dark and melancholy circumstances of the dying and dead body, the pale countenance, the distressed features, the eyes set and the ghostly appearance of the dead corpse, to the inconceivably dark, gloomy and dreadful horrors of the damned soul? What is the pit of the grave to the pit of hell? The circumstances of the body in the grave, all turned to putrefaction and worms, is but a shadow of the dismal circumstances of the soul that has the torment of the worm that never dies under the second death.

Men dread death, so if they were sensible what eternal death is, would dread it thousand ten thousand times more. Temporal death under its most dreadful circumstances and appearances is but a flea bite to it. Our longest line is not sufficient to measure the depth of woe and misery that the soul is sunk into. Under the second death the abyss of sorrow and despair that they are in, is unfathomable, who knows it, who can tell it? Who can describe the blackness of darkness? What tongue or pen sufficient to set forth the dolefulness of the horrors and desperation of the damned? Psalm 90:11, Who knows the power of thine....

2. Consider that you are now in a state of spiritual death, and so have been ever since you were born you have never seen life. Your soul is dead, 'tis separated from the fountain of spiritual life and remains therefore in a dismal state and condition. You are as it were, a walking corpse, and if your heart was exposed to view and all the evil and wickedness that reigns there, you would appear more awfully than a dead corpse. If the filth and abomination that is in your heart were exposed to view you would appear more loathsome than a dead corpse that is rotten and turned to corruption. This is the state that you are and the state you have continued in all your days hitherto. Unbelievers are dead men, Matthew 8:22, Let the dead bury their dead.

3. You shall see others admitted to eternal life when you, if you continue in unbelief shall be shut out from it. You shall see others admitted into glory who shall come and sit down in the Kingdom of God and shall be received by Christ and admitted as his friends and shall be confessed and acknowledged as such by him before his Father and before his angels. You shall see multitudes of all kinds, and nations of all ranks

degrees and orders of men, and you would feign enter in but you shall be thrust out. Luke 13:28,29, There shall be weeping and gnashing.How will you plead, Lord, Lord, open to us....You will see others that you have known and have been acquainted with....

But you if you don't believe in Christ, you never shall see life. Let you do what you will. Let you labor never so hard and long. Let you make never so many prayers. If you should give all your goods to feed the poor and should give up yourself, all your life, to fasting, and should weep an ocean of tears and yea, tears of blood and should at last give your body to be burned you never shall see life unless you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.



Michael D. MacMullen