

# Spanning the Infinite Gulf

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** John 8:22-30  
**Preached on:** Sunday, August 24, 2014

We return again this morning to John's Gospel, chapter 8, and I would invite you to turn there with me and we will be examining verses 22-30. I've entitled my discourse to you this morning "Spanning the Infinite Gulf" which I'm confident will become infinitely clear to you as we look into this amazing text. John 8, beginning in verse 22,

22 So the Jews were saying, "Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?" 23 And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. 24 Therefore I said to you that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." 25 So they were saying to Him, "Who are You?" Jesus said to them, "What have I been saying to you from the beginning? 26 I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world." 27 They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father. 28 So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. 29 And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." 30 As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him.

The scale of the observable universe from its smallest subatomic particles to the contents of intergalactic space is vast beyond our ability to even fathom. Imagine the size of an atom in comparison to the size of the sun. That's what our earth is like compared to many known stars. The observable universe is about 46 billion light years in radius and a light year is equal to 5.88 trillion miles. So the observable universe is 46 billion x 5.88 trillion miles. But these calculations are limited because this is merely based upon observable light that we can see and we can only see as far as light can travel. That means that the size of the universe beyond light is unknown. So how big is the universe? No one knows but the Creator.

God has told us in his word that there are three different places in the realm of his universe, in the realm of what is called heaven. We know that the first heaven is what we would call the atmospheric heaven. That's the blanket of breathable air that really wraps around the earth where the hydrological cycle operates to bring the rains and so forth. Then as we look at Scripture, there is the second heaven which we might call the planetary heaven where the stars and the moon and all of the planets make their orbits in an estimated 125 billion galaxies, according to NASA. Then the Apostle Paul describes the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12. This is the dwelling place of God, the dwelling

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place of the holy angels along with saints who have died. We have friends and loved ones there today. We know according to Scripture that the first two heavens will one day dissolve. They will be uncreated. According to 2 Peter 3:10 they will "pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." Only the third heaven will remain. By the way, this is where our citizenship is, right? And this is where our hearts should be also.

I remind you of these facts to stir your hearts with the unfathomable otherness of God, another way of describing the holiness of God, the transcendence of God. He is beyond anything that we can imagine. There is no earthly parallel to which we can compare his Trinity, his glory, his holiness, which in Scripture is the all encompassing attribute of God that portrays his consummate perfection and eternal glory. In fact, it stands alone as the defining characteristic of his person. And because God is totally other, because he is holy, there is an infinite gulf between him and sinful man. This is vividly demonstrated in his created universe and dramatically revealed in his word. He tells us in his word and we know it in our conscience that we have violated his holy law and, of course, all sin must be punished. His wrath, his justice must be appeased and miracle of miracles, God himself provided the means to appease his own wrath so that we could be reconciled to him. He provided, if you will, a bridge that could span this infinite chasm between his holiness and our sin. He provided the perfect substitute, his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who was man to die for man but also who was God to be the perfect spotless Lamb. John tells us in 1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

It is this Jesus that we hear from today, once again recorded in the text that I have just read. Let me remind you of the context: Jesus is in the outer court of the Temple celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a feast that commemorated both God's provision and protection of the ancient Israelites in their wilderness wanderings when they were led out of the bondage from Egypt. But it was also a time of celebrating the future millennial blessings when in the kingdom, the Messiah will come and dwell with all who belong to him. The scene as I just said, is in the outer court in the temple treasury also known as the Court of Women. And by way of reminder of what we studied last week, during this particular time of the feast in this festival, there were four massive candelabras, golden lamps that were erected in this court. The glow of these lights they say illumined all of Jerusalem and every night exuberant worshipers would come and organize processions with torches, dancing and singing and celebrating all that God had done for them to the accompaniment of a massive Levitical orchestra. Of course, the blazing lamps symbolize the presence of God and the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, that not only led the people to the Promised Land but as you may recall, protected them by going between them and the camp of the Egyptians. Some time in the context of all of this pageantry, perhaps at the very end when there was a ceremony to

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extinguish the lights, the very source of light and life makes this stunning declaration in verse 12, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in the darkness but shall have the light of life." Of course, the Jews knew this was a claim to deity consistent with the many promises that they had through the Old Testament prophecies concerning their Messiah and the Jewish leaders also knew exactly who it was who said this, it wasn't that troublemaker, Jesus of Nazareth.

So they once again begin to attack him. They try to discredit him but he refutes them and defends his claim to deity while at the same time exposing their ignorance and their willful unbelief. So this brings us to verse 21, "Then He said again to them, 'I go away, and you shall seek Me, and shall die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come.'" "I go away," referring to his impending death and resurrection and ascension back to the Father. "And you shall seek me," not that they would seek Jesus personally, they hated him, but he was referring to their Messiah, "You're going to continue to seek for your Messiah but you're going to die in your sin because where I am going you cannot come." Now, what follows is a sad yet a very typical example of self-righteous, willful rejection of Jesus Christ. These are very religious people enslaved by their sin and by Satan that they unwittingly serve as Jesus will make clear later on in verse 44.

But also as we look at this text this morning, we are going to see a very kind, meek and lowly Jesus who speaks to them forthrightly concerning himself and in so doing, he systematically dissects their misguided speculations and exposes their irreverent sneers. I wish to explain this text to you this morning under three categories that I believe emerge from it, categories that not only give us great insight into the Lord that we love and serve and long to see face-to-face but also provide for us some very practical insights for Christian living this side of glory. Here Jesus reveals 1: the contrast of two antithetical realms. Secondly, he will reveal the only way to escape the realm of the damned. Finally, he will reveal to us the secret to enjoying the presence and fellowship of the Lord. Frankly, I can think of no better way to worship our heavenly Father in Spirit and in truth than by meditating upon the words of his beloved Son.

So I want you to come with me now. We're going to enter into that outer court of the temple where Jesus continues to expose their ignorance of his origin and therefore the rejection of his deity. Notice at the end of verse 21, "I go away, and you shall seek Me, and you shall die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come. Therefore," verse 22, "the Jews were saying, 'Surely He will not kill Himself, will He, since He says, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' " Now here John, having been an eyewitness to this scene many years earlier, recounts this sneering ridicule of the religious leaders. Incensed by his declaration that they would die in their sin, the Jewish authorities, no doubt speak with sarcasm in order to attack him publicly, suggesting that, "Well maybe, he's just going to kill himself. Maybe he's going to commit suicide." Which is really a sinister suggestion

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on their part. You see, this was meant clearly to discredit Jesus. The rabbis taught that those who killed themselves would ultimately be banished to the blackest region of hell. In fact, the first century Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote about this belief saying quote, "The souls of those whose hands have acted madly against themselves are received by the darkest places in Hades." Isn't it ironic, Jesus' self-righteous adversaries that are twisting his words would soon be the very ones who would murder him?

Dear friends, mark this well: sarcasm, slander and spin are always the favorite weapons of a defeated opponent with evil intentions. Ridicule is a source of joy to the self-righteous because it makes them feel better about themselves. The tactics used by children in the playground are the same tactics that we often see used in the church. But it's important for us to fully grasp the sin of self-righteousness that dominates this chapter and frankly, dominates the entire gospel of John. It is both deceptive and dangerous and frankly, all of us are guilty here at varying levels. When you think about it, by our very nature we are proud. We are hopelessly biased in our own favor. We're deceived into believing that we are far more righteous than we really are and because of this, sinful man is easily drawn into religious systems that provide for him a way of attaining salvation on the basis of his own merits because after all, we think we can do that.

This is a very important introduction to our text. You see, we arrogantly believe that our sin is not all that severe and God's holiness is not really all that pure and transcendent. For this reason, Solomon tells us in Proverbs 16:2, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives." Ah, and dear friends, it is here that we are exposed. Jesus denounced the Pharisees in Luke 16:15 as "those who justify themselves in the sight of men, but God knows their hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God." Beloved, we must never forget that holiness is the antithesis to sin. It stands to reason that if the sinfulness of man is trivialized, the same fate will befall an understanding of the holiness of God and it's for this reason that both ends of the spectrum must be equally infinite, if you will. Holiness and its transcendent purity and sin and its vile corruption. To mitigate one is to diminish the other. Both must be held in equal tension on either end of the spectrum of good and evil. The Apostle Paul, of course, understood this. He even acknowledged his deep love and respect for the holiness of God manifested in the law of God when he declared in Romans 7:22, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man." Therefore, because of his knowledge of the holy one, the corrupting presence and the power of indwelling sin was made very obvious, very apparent to him and then it caused him to say in contrast to that, "but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members." Then he went on to lament, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

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Every believer must grasp this simple truth: we will only see our sin in proportion to our willingness to see the holiness of God. Said differently: if you have a low view of God, you're going to have a high view of self. When God is small, sin is insignificant. But when we really see God in his purity as much as we can, as the thrice holy God whose glory fills the earth according to Isaiah 6:3, then we will respond as Isaiah did in that very text and cry out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

In light of this text I recently wrote the following, "This is the kind of vision every man needs, a vision of soul terrifying purity that contrasts the staggering ugliness of our sin. This alone will produce genuine repentance and willing sacrifice. We must see ourselves as God sees us. Such a perspective will instantly end any thought of inherent goodness because nothing human can possibly endure the white-hot light of divine holiness without being instantly incinerated. Only in Scripture and in the person of God's Son can a man behold the transcendent, ineffable glory of the most high God. And in the glow of that vision, every man will gasp at the sheer horror of his sin resulting in a self-loathing and thirst for God. Worshipful obedience then becomes the soul satisfying desire of a man's heart causing him to pant after God until he finds him and experiences his felt presence."

Oh my friends, such a perspective was missing in Jesus' adversaries and sadly it is missing in most people today. Like so many today, the Jews of Jesus' day were convinced that they merited salvation on the basis of their good works, on the basis of their observance of rituals and feasts and ceremonies and their outward obedience to the law. They refused to admit their innate inability to contribute anything to their salvation, to acknowledge as Isaiah said in Isaiah 64:5, "We have sinned and we need to be saved but we are all like an unclean thing and all our righteousness is like filthy rags." Dear friends, who among us could ever stand before God's holy bar of justice and say that we are without sin? James tells us in chapter 2, verse 10, that if we break the law in one place one time, we are guilty of all. You see, the nature of sin is deadly and deceptive. Next to the power of God, it is the greatest power in the universe. We fail to realize that. Therefore, apart from divine intervention, the power of sin in the human heart will never yield to the kind of contrition necessary for salvation, one demonstrated by the tax gatherer in Luke 18 who was unwilling to even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me the sinner."

The testimony of Scripture reveals that sin is man's innate inability to conform to the moral character and desires of God. This is manifested primarily in human self-will, the root cause of all sin. Of course, it is fueled by cherished lies of justified rebellion against God. We can rationalize anything, can't we? We can justify anything we do. Man prefers to obey his will rather than God and this is portrayed in Scripture as the deeds of the flesh

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in Galatians 5, verses 19 and following. Paul gives us a little list their: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things like this. He goes on to say, "Those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Because man is innately a slave to his own sin according to Romans 6, he rejects his Creator causing God to gradually abandon him to pursue the lusts of his heart and experience the devastating consequences of his iniquities, bringing him either to ruin or to repentance.

You know, we learn much about a man's theology at his funeral. It has been my observation that no matter how wicked the deceased, you will never hear anyone even insinuate that this person had died in his sins and is now banished to eternal judgment. There is perhaps no greater example of the deadly deception of self righteousness and man's self-willed rebellion against God than found in the lyrics of one of the most popular of all funeral songs. It's called "My Way." Let me give you just a few words of the lyrics,

"And now, the end is here  
And so I face the final curtain  
My friend, I'll say it clear  
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain  
I've lived a life that's full  
I traveled each and ev'ry highway  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way."

Later the song reads,

"I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way."

And finally, the writer says,

"For what is a man, what has he got?  
If not himself, then he has naught  
To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels  
The record shows I took the blows and did it my way!"

Such a blasphemous eulogy illustrates Solomon's ancient analysis of man's depraved condition when he declared in Ecclesiastes 9:3, "The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives." Well dear friends, this was the character and conduct of Jesus' opponent in the first century and might I add, nothing has changed. Later one converted Pharisee, the Apostle Paul, was divinely convicted of these

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deceptions and he declared in Romans 3:20, "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in God's sight." He also described his kinsman as those who "have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." And of course, this describes the vast majority of people today.

Well, with this rather long introduction, we examined Jesus' solemn words to those who hated him. I might add, a discourse that is doubtless much longer than what we have recorded here. His first line of reasoning centered around 1: a contrast of two antithetical realms. Verse 23, "And He was saying to them, 'You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.'" Now obviously, the first century Jews were ignorant of just how vast the observable universe really is. They didn't have the Hubble telescope orbiting around wherever it's orbiting around out there. They had no grasp of the infinite chasm between above and below where God lives, where he dwells and where we dwell. Nor could they, therefore, understand the disparity between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man and frankly, none of us could ever understand that apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit.

So Jesus contrasts these two antithetical realms, two infinite gulfs that separate sinful man from a holy God, two opposing realms, two radically different spheres, one described as the world below and the other being heaven above. Now, the New Testament term for "world," the word "cosmos," is used especially in this context to refer to the domain of darkness ruled by Satan, an invisible kingdom, an orderly system of evil dedicated to thwarting the purposes of God and destroying man. I might add, a realm that is dominated by those who hate God and hate his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. I like the way John MacArthur put it, quote, "Materialism, humanism, immorality, pride and selfishness, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, 1 John 2:16, are the world's hallmarks." He went on to say, "It is utterly opposed to divine truth, righteousness, virtue and holiness. Its opinions are wrong. Its aims are selfish. Its pleasures are sinful. Its influences are demoralizing. Its politics are corrupt. Its honors are empty. Its smiles are phony. Finally, its love is false and fickle."

As we look at Scripture, as we look at those all around us and even in our own lives, we see that the world is extremely dangerous to the Christian because it appeals to our fallen flesh and it can unwittingly, ingeniously, shape us into its likeness like wind eroding sandstone. The values of the world wear on us. It wears away at our Christian virtue. It imperceptibly conforms us into the image of those who hate Christ. A steady drift away from being in fellowship with him and with other people is always the outcome. Perhaps you're experiencing this today in your life. I see it a lot with Christian people. An estrangement, a separation from God, separation from God's people, from the church. If this describes you, this is what the world is doing to you. We must remember that God

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has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, Colossians 1:13. Our citizenship is in heaven. We have been redeemed and have escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust, 2 Peter 1:14. And for this reason, true believers according to Jude 19, are not to be worldly minded. In fact, John tells us later on speaking of Jesus' words to his disciples in John 15:19, "If you were of the world," Jesus said to his disciples, "the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." My friend, if the world loves you, there is something wrong with your Christianity and if you love the world, according to Scripture, the love of the Father is not in you so don't deceive yourself. The world is a place according to Scripture, 2 Corinthians 4:4, where Satan "blinds the minds of the unbelieving so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

It was for this reason that the Jews could not and would not see Jesus for who he really was so Jesus says, "You are all of this world. I am not of this world." Verse 24, "Therefore I said to you that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." Oh, dear friends, what a dreadful end to unbelief, to pass from life into unending torment when the outcome could have been so gloriously different. But in this statement, Jesus offers 2: the only way to escape the realm of the damned and that is found in the word "believe." "Unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." Now, I want you to look closely at this text. Notice that the word "he" is in italics because that pronoun, he, is not in the original Greek. What it says is, "You must believe that I am," ego eimi in Greek. And this is the Lord's reference to the very name of God, what the old theologians would call the ineffable Tetragrammaton, the too wondrous to utter from the lips four letters. It is translated Yahweh. You will see it in your Bibles transliterated as the word "LORD," with capital letters. This was a word too sacred to even pronounce to the Jews so they would have understood this. So we see for example, this was first revealed in God's self-disclosure to Moses. Remember in Exodus 3:14? "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'""

So, Jesus is saying to his audience here in the temple that, "You must believe that I am Yahweh, that I am who I have claimed to be all along." Jesus used this title to describe himself in John 8:58 where he will tell the unbelieving Jews, "before Abraham was born, I AM." I know it seems a bit confusing but he uses this term to refer to himself in grammatically the present continuous tense and the reason for this even though it seems odd, is he's saying that he has always been and he will always exist so this is a title indicating his self existence. There has never been a time that he has not existed. So wrapping this up together, what we see is that he's telling them that the only way to escape the realm of the damned, the only bridge that spans this infinite gulf between God's holiness and man's sinfulness is for a person to believe that Jesus is the self-

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existent eternal one who has always existed and who always will exist. I AM. I am the self existent, eternally existent, uncreated Creator of the universe. This is what John has described earlier in John 1. This is the one who has come to purchase our redemption. You will recall that the very purpose of John's gospel as recorded in John 20:31, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Dear friends, I pray that you believe this, that you are not like the unbelieving Jews here, blinded by prejudice, blinded by said Satanic deception so evident in their religious system. Dear Christian, all of us who know and love Christ need to fall on our faces because we can understand what he is saying by his grace alone because we believe, according to 1 John 5:20, "we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." But blinded by their prejudice, blinded by their self-will, their willful ignorance, they are bewildered with Jesus' statement. Verse 25, "So they were saying to Him, 'Who are You?'" You know, this is such a powerful example of spiritual blindness and the desperate need for inward illumination. I mean, think about it: despite all of the miracles that Jesus performed, some of them having been recipients of those miracles, I mean, there wasn't any disease basically in the whole realm by this time but despite all of that, they still would not believe. It is my conviction though the text does not say this explicitly, that their question stinks of sneering sarcasm and ridicule. "Who are you? Who do you think you are?" "Jesus said to them, 'What have I been saying to you from the beginning?'" Verse 26, "I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world." You see, their hardhearted and willful unbelief warranted words of judgment which would be perfectly consistent with the will and the words of the Father who sent the Son because he is true. Despite all that Jesus had done and said, they still had no spiritual discernment.

Verse 27, "They did not realize that He had been speaking to them about the Father." Are you kidding me? Isn't it amazing? I've been there before with people. You explain to them the gospel so clearly. You give them the word but unless the Spirit of God gives them the light, 2+2 is 5 every time.

Verse 28, "Jesus said, 'When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.'" Now I believe there is a double force to the phrase "lifted up." It speaks not only of Christ's death when he would be lifted up upon the cross but it also speaks of him being lifted up at his resurrection and ascension back into glory where he was to be seated at the right hand of the Father where he exists today. What he is saying is that, "Those combined events will one day vindicate my claims to be the Messiah of Israel and it will

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also help you to understand that I was sent by my Father to accomplish his saving purposes." We know that on the day of Pentecost and the immediate days following that, that many Jews did believe. I'm sure some of these people did.

Verse 29, "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him. As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him." By the way, as a footnote, we will discover in 31 through 36, those verses, that for most of these people, their belief was only superficial.

I want to wrap things up this morning by focusing on a very precious and profound statement here in verse 29 and here we have the third little category in my outline to you where Jesus gives us the secret to enjoying the presence and fellowship of the Lord. Again verse 29, "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." Those words struck me deeply as I meditated upon them. "He is with Me; He has not left Me alone." Now to be sure, the point of the passage is to once again affirm the deity of Christ and to validate his intimate relationship with the Father but, friends, there is a great lesson here that we don't want to miss especially for those of you hearing my voice right now that are experiencing some distance between you and the Lord you love. Those of you that are experiencing the pains of loneliness. I want you to think about this: Jesus was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. Men regarded him as an imposter, even a blasphemer. Even by now the disciples are arguing about who is going to be greatest in the kingdom. Later on they will not watch and pray with him in the Garden. Peter would deny him him three times. Jesus predicted this in John 16:32. He said, "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." So think of the intense loneliness of our Savior, the sorrow and the grief that he experienced. What was the secret to enjoying the presence and fellowship of his heavenly Father who never left him even on the eve of the cross? My friends, the answer is right here. He says, "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." You see, Jesus experienced the heartfelt presence of his Father as a direct result of his decisive determination to be perfectly submissive to his Father's will.

Perhaps some of you feel as though friends and family have deserted you and you are alone. Relationships just aren't working out. That icy grip of loneliness has taken hold leaving you discourage, defeated, perhaps even angry. Do you know what? This is precisely what Satan wants you to experience. You begin to feel sorry for yourself. Nothing brings greater joy to Satan than seeing you defeated and discouraged, worthless in the fight of faith. This is a sign that you have been deceived, my friends. You've taken off your helmet of salvation; you've forgotten who you are in Christ. So what's the remedy? The remedy is to run to God and to beg him to help you examine your heart and find out those ways that you are failing to be pleasing to him. But beloved, there is

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# Spanning the Infinite Gulf

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** John 8:22-30

**Preached on:** Sunday, August 24, 2014

something even worse than loneliness and it is what I would call a spiritual deadness. It's that uneasy feeling that things are not right in your heart before God. This is such a dangerous disease of the soul that I fear affects the majority of Christians today. It's when you experience spiritual lethargy and coldness and deadness. Your prayers are lazy. They are formal. You have lost your appetite for the word of God. You feel like you're out of fellowship with the Lord. You're out of fellowship with friends. You no longer pant after God but frankly if you're honest, you find the world more appealing. You begin to drift into religious formalism. You go through the motions of Christianity. You no longer experience sweet communion with the Lord. Frankly, if you're honest, you don't even really value it anymore and down deep you know that you've distanced yourself from him. You've grown accustomed to loving the Lord from greater distances and if you're really honest, you will have to admit that you really no longer desire him. And so he withdraws his presence from you. What lover wouldn't?

I believe this is the besetting sin of modern Christianity. We've neglected a personal pursuit of holiness. Our religion has become something of the mind, not something of the soul. We've stopped fearing God. We've stopped cultivating an intimate relationship with him in our soul. We've allowed the world to fashion us into its image and because of this, we so seldom witness any Christians today that rise above the level of the ordinary. We're content with mediocrity. Beloved, if this is you, if you feel this deadness in your heart, you're in trouble. There is something drastically wrong with your Christianity and I exhort you to wake up and to repent lest Satan deliver such a fatal blow to you that you will never recover. I've seen this all too many times. You've got to resort to violent measures to extricate yourself from this trap before some greater disaster befalls you. You've got to get serious about God's command to keep your heart with all diligence and like Christ, you've got to commit yourself to doing the things that are pleasing to the Father. If I could put it this way: if you are not enjoying Christ despite whatever circumstances are in your life, if he is not filling your heart with satisfaction, it's not because he has moved, it's because your soul has gone in silent search of other lovers that will never satisfy. You've got to wake up to it or you will be destroyed. This is a hard lesson to learn. The Lord wants us to say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And besides thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

In closing, I'm going to give you four remedies for this very quickly. I have given this to John to put on the screen but I'm going to ask you not to do it because in my mind right now I'm changing what I told you to say. I want you to order your life in four ways. If this is you. This is very practical, very simple. I could preach a sermon or two on each one of them and you will see it. Here's what I want you to do: 1. Spend more time alone with God. Real simple. Spend more time alone with God in prayer and in Bible study. Get disciplined about your secret devotion to God. This is where you cultivate godliness in

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your soul. This is where you commune with him and he with you. 2. I want you to spend more time reading great Christian works. Not this frivolous drivel and so much of it is heresy that we see in the Christian bookstores but read great biographies about standing servants of God. Read church history. Read rich theology. Read the Puritans. Read the dead guys for the most part. If you don't know what to read, call me. I will give you a list. You say, "Well, I'm not a theologian." Well, then you're not a Christian. Good grief, if you're a Christian, you're a theologian so get serious. You know, I have never known or heard of a remarkable saint that did great things for God who wasn't a reader so spend more time reading great Christian works. 3. Spend more time serving Christ. Use your spiritual gifts. "Well, I just don't know where to serve." Alright, I'll help you. Ask God this week to show you just one person in need and serve them to the glory of God for the next several months. Or pick out five people and ask them how you can pray for them and then follow up with them every week for a year. You start doing things like this and I'll tell you, God will give you more opportunities to serve him than you can shake a stick at as we would say here in Tennessee. 4. You need to spend more time with God's people. Fellowship is not only a gift from God, it is a command. We are members of a body. There is no Lone Ranger in Christianity. This is the powerful means of grace that God gives us. It is therapeutic. It is edifying. It is a means of demonstrating our love for Christ and a love for our family and without it you will be like a lone sheep. You will become vulnerable, lonely and confused. There are four things, I could give you some more. Let's work on those, okay? Let's just work on those.

Well, I trust our time in the word this morning has stirred your heart to love our glorious God who has spanned the infinite gulf of our sin in his holiness through faith in the person and the work of his beloved Son.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for these eternal truths. May they bear much fruit in our heart. Lord, for those that do not know you as Savior, I plead with you consume them with conviction and draw them unto yourself that they might be saved. To the praise and glory of our Savior the Lord Jesus in whose name I pray. Amen.*

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