

'The Mistakes of Israel and Possibly Ours'

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-sacrifice and service, warning against the dangers of selfishness and prioritizing comfort over God's call.

Scripture: Hosea 10:1

Topics: "Spiritual Fruitfulness", "Selflessness"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the mistakes of Israel, particularly their tendency to serve God while also embracing other idols, leading to a divided heart and spiritual decline. He warns that many Christians today may also fall into the trap of selfishness, producing fruit only for themselves rather than for others. Tozer calls for a return to selflessness and commitment to God's work, urging believers to break up their fallow ground and seek the Lord earnestly. He highlights the importance of being channels of God's blessings, rather than stagnant vessels, and encourages the church to focus on outward fruitfulness. Ultimately, Tozer challenges the congregation to reverse their ways of selfishness and to bring forth fruit that benefits others.

Transcript

"The Mistakes of Israel and Possibly Ours"

Pastor and author Aiden Wilson Tozer

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I want to talk a little about Israel and a mistake she made, and that you and I can make if we don't watch out. It's in Hosea, the 10th chapter. The first two lines in my Bible read like this, Israel is an empty vine. He bringeth forth fruit unto himself.

Now, the prophet Hosea was sent to Israel in one of her low times, or times of declension. Declension is a nice word for backsliding and that's what Israel was doing. She'd forgotten some vital things. She'd forgotten her origins in the covenant of Abraham and she had forgotten in a large measure the God of her father's. And according to this prophet, she had a divided heart. That's 10:2. She had a divided heart. And wherever there is a divided heart there is a civil war. A house divided against itself cannot stand said Jesus. And a divided heart means civil war within, what Bunyan called, The Little Kingdom of Mansoul. Jesus said, ye cannot serve God-and. You cannot serve God and, but Israel was trying to serve God-and.

She had not quite the courage to reject Jehovah, but she was adding other gods and putting up other altars and she was trying to serve God-and.

Now that's to be double-minded, and James warned about being double-minded. Jesus said, a single eye. We were to have a singular, that is one, single focal point to which the eyes look. And another prophet said, son, give me thy hearts. God was speaking through this man. And Israel, according to 9:4 had put herself in a position where God rejected her offerings. And so the Prophet said about Israel. Israel is an empty vine. She bringeth forth fruit unto herself. Look at that a minute.

Now, what's the purpose of a vine. It is to bring forth fruit unto. The fruit of the vine is never brought forth for the vine. The fruit of the vine is not for the vine. The fruit of the vine is a gift from God and the vine receives it as a gift for others. The vine is to bring forth fruit unto others. Israel's mistake was she brought forth fruit unto herself. The vine is to bring forth fruit unto the food of man and the food of other creatures and for the creation of other vines. Every grape has two or three seeds in it capable of producing other vines, and so any given vine produces fruit, receives the sweetness and fragrance and nourishment from God in order that she might give it to others. She's backslidden when she produces it to consume it herself. She brought four fruit unto herself. This was true of Israel and it's true now of many, many churches and many people.

Many Christian people who claim to be God's children, they nevertheless are bringing forth fruit unto themselves. Now, that was Israel's failure. She kept her treasure within herself. For it was not God's wind overhead nor God's rain. It was not God's soft soil. It was not the laws of nature nor anything that you could lay the blame to. It was something wrong with the vine, that instead of the gifts of God externalizing themselves and flowing out into fruit for others and for the production of other vines to come, they stayed within the vine. And the vine had nothing but leaves and no fruit. So the fruit was actually brought forth unto the vine for the vine, and this was the mistake. So, the vine missed the will of God and was an empty vine.

Now applying this to the Christian church, applying it to this church, I would say that our lives can become wholly selfish. Good, honest, Christian people can, unknown to themselves, little by little, become wholly selfish so that it's all in-flow and no out-go. Remember those two rhyming words in-flow and out-go. Ye shall receive power and ye shall be witnesses said the Lord Jesus, and out from within him shall flow. There's the in-flow and the out-flow or the out-go and this is normal. Because what you receive you do not receive for yourself. If the Lord's people could only remember that.

We are not like the Dead Sea to receive always and give nothing off, except what is taken away by evaporation. But we are channels to give. We are not lakes not lagoons. He did not say, when the Holy Ghost comes, you'll be like a lagoon. He said, when the Holy Ghost comes, you'll be like a like a river, and the rivers always flowing. That is why you can hardly pollute a river. You can pollute a pond or lagoon or a little lake. But it's very hard to pollute a river, because it's always flowing.

There was a little saying back among the hills of Pennsylvania where I grew up, that if water flows over two stones and purifies itself. I think that perhaps was overstated. But that was the way we boys decided whether we could drink out of a stream we happen to come to. If it was flowing, and there were two rocks there, we said it's clean. Well, the river keeps itself clean by flowing. And the Christian and the church, for what is the church? It's a lot of Christians working together. And what this church is, is what we Christians are.

There isn't any mysterious, mystical third thing called a mysterious church. There isn't any invisible church here. The church is you and me in this congregation. And therefore, whatever we are, the church is. And the total cannot be greater than the sum of its parts. The total at the bottom cannot be greater if it's properly added up, than the parts above it. And so, this church is what we are. It is no less than that, but is no more than that. So, it's true of us that there must be in-flow and there must be out-go, out from within him shall flow. But we often are like the vine that brought forth fruit, but kept it inside of itself, and had nothing but leaves. Our lives are selfish, wholly selfish.

And then, the second thing is, that it reveals itself in this, that we're careful to spare ourselves. I was thinking, somebody said to me last week in New York City, this doctor's orders business; and he gave me quite a little lecture, not talking to me. He was talking about somebody else, but I was getting the lecture and I enjoyed it; this doctor's orders.

There are so many preachers sitting around afraid to move for they'll drop over. There were two men out on the West Coast. One of them, a great tall fellow, Robert Kilgore, a good friend of mine and a hard-working Christian brother. The doctor said to him you have, I forgot what of the heart, and you're going to die. You take these little tiny white things. What is it? I started to say dynamite. No, not digitalis. Anyway, they put them on their tongue and dissolve them and that, nitroglycerin, that's it. And he said, now, Brother Tozer, we were out to the council out there, and he looked down at me, for he was a great, tall fine-looking man. He said, Brother Tozer, there are three of us preachers out here on the coast, and he said, we've all got heart trouble. We are cardiac cases.

Now he said, if I slow down and take it easy, retire and don't do anything, I may be can stretch my life a little while. He said, I'm not going to do it. I'm going to serve God. He lived about a year, and they found him lying quietly on the floor beside his bed. But he served God that year. He didn't vegetate. He didn't sit around and rust. He served God that year. Two other fellows are still out there waiting, waiting, looking every day down the street wondering if that long black car is coming for them, waiting. Doctor's orders they say, doctor's orders.

Now, brethren, I wonder if there doesn't come a place in the Christian's life when he stops listening to doctor's orders and he begins to hear God say I count not my life dear unto myself. We talk about Dr. Jaffrey. Dr. Jaffrey never should have gone as a missionary in the first place. He had an enlarged heart and diabetes. And the AMMO, which has kept a great many people home, would never, never have sent him out, but somehow, they got him through in those early days. And you know what he did? He went over there and shook a continent and the islands. Then when he got old and they said it's time for you to retire, he said I'm going to do that very thing. Retire means put on new tires. So, he put on new tires and opened another whole world, we used to call Indonesia. Doctor's orders would have said you go back to Toronto, that beautiful Canadian city with all her parks and beautiful buildings. One of the cleanest, most beautiful cities in the world that I've ever seen at least is Toronto. And he owned stock and was part owner of the greatest newspaper in the city.

He could have gone back there, had a fine apartment or an estate outside the city somewhere on the edge where you could have lived in the suburbs and all would have been well with him. He might have stretched his life a long time, but he put on four new tires and went back to Indonesia. He died out there as you know. He died in a pig pen, where the Japs put him. He died, well, he didn't actually die in it. He died in a poor homemade hospital on a cot. But he had been kept in that pigpen by the Japs. But in the meantime, he opened all that area, and there are Christians over there now because he went there. Ed Maxey's out

there with Shirley because he went and opened it up. Walter Post's out there and Harry Post because he went out and opened it up after he should have according to doctor's orders, gone back to Toronto and waited for the end. No, my friends, as long as we keep sparing ourselves to bring forth fruit unto ourselves, you are to bring forth fruit unto others. And then we refuse to inconvenience ourselves.

So, the Lord's work is carried on like the birdwatcher's society. The tattered edges and the leftover pieces of our time and strength and abilities, or like a crocheting guild, where when they've slept all they can and sat around and eaten all they can and nothing else to do and they're bored with being at home. They go to the crochet guild and sit around gossip. And the crocheting guild gets the tattered remnants of their time.

Well, the church of Christ is being run, and mostly like a birdwatcher's society or a tatters or crocheters guild, from the tattered remnants of what is left of people's time. And so, because we refuse to be inconvenienced, we're bringing forth fruit unto ourselves. When I heard that organ there with that offertory, I raised my eyebrows at Mr. McAfee and I said to brother Jake Hoeber, do you know what that is? That was one of Simpson's numbers. That was put in my feet to go and put in my heart the woe.

Now, that doesn't sound like a birdwatcher's guild. That sounds like somebody given up to something. They have a word they're using here and there in the world now. It's too bad the world had to teach it to us. It's the word committed. They say, he's a committed man. They say of the communist leader, they're committed men. They believe in their devil's philosophy, but they believe so fully that they're committed men, and they're ready to be expendable and die for it. And some of them do. They put it across because they're committed men. But we who know the Red Cross of God, who've seen Jesus die on it for our sins and know that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, we insist upon giving God the tattered fragments of our time. And Christianity for the most part is run by a bored, blaised, burned out people who've been Christians so long, the joy has worn off. Like an old, married couple sitting around behind their newspapers, the freshness and beauty of the dream has worn off and the glory has departed, or as Hosea said here in this book of his, thy glory has flown away like a bird and always centering around ourselves.

You know what the cure is my friends? The cure is found in the twelfth verse. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it's time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you. I'm not going along with all of those who are saying, let's meet and pray all night for revival. Let's meet and pray for revival. I said to the man that approached me about it, all right Brother, the day that the evangelical forces of Chicago will come to me and say, we have been bringing forth fruit unto ourselves. We have been astray from the Scriptural pattern. We have added a thousand anti-scriptural gadgets to the pure work of God. We are careless about the Lordship of Christ. We are not living as we should live and I want you to join us in the prayers of repentance. And then we promise to go back to our churches and straighten out and get right and clean up from the ground, and from the bottom up. Clean up our churches and cast the money changers out of the temple and the sellers of bulls and cows out of the temple and start clean according to Book of Acts New Testament Christianity. I'll join you. I've never heard from them since. Nobody wants to do that. We want to revival but we want it the cheap way. We want God to come roll over us with a huge wave of emotion. And if we have a huge wave of emotion, each go to the other and say I thought a bad thought about you two years ago, forgive me and everybody have a good cry, and then go back to our idols and back to our selfishness and back to our carnality.

No, there's only one way to repent and that is to reverse our ways. And instead of doing the way we've been doing, do the way we ought to do. You don't have to notify God. He knows. Those two boys that Jesus told about, the father said to the boys go work in the vineyard today. One of them flared up and said I won't go. The other one said all right, Father, and then he went fishing. But the boy that had got angry and said, I won't go, he saw sadness and hurt in the Father's face. Twenty minutes later, and he was down on his knees saying, O God, what a scoundrel I was and he went right out into the vineyard and worked all day. The father came back and found the boy that said he would go didn't, and the boy that said he wouldn't-did, and Jesus said, that's repentance. There's repentance. We say, let's meet and have an all-night of prayer. Yes, Father, yes, Father we'll work in thy vineyard, but the next day we go back to the old rule again.

Now, I want to tell you about two men. Two men that talked to me this morning. Those two men never dreamed that I would mention it. And I'm not going to mention their names and I'll keep you guessing for the rest of your lives. I will not tell you. Two men saw me today. And they're men who are honored in this church and who are in official position. One of them met me and said, Pastor, my hours are such that if I work, I can't attend the meetings of this missionary convention. So, I'm taking one week of my vacation now in order that I can stay home and go to every meeting of the missionary convention this week. Now, he doesn't have to send a telegram to heaven. God knows that kind of activity. God recognizes practical doings. He recognizes actual doings. That man is doing his Christianity. He'll be here at every meeting, because he's taking his vacation now, part of it, half of it, now, so that he'll be home able to, instead of sending back cards, wish you were here, he'll be here.

Now I don't say you have to do that, but I point that out. As long as we've got our hard cores, the Baptists call it, I'm a little afraid of that expression. I'm afraid it's a little too hard, often, but as long as we got a hard core of that kind of spiritual men in this church, I'm not afraid to stay around here.

Another man said to me, and he's in a position where he could have lots of lectures. He said to me, you know, Pastor, I think he included his wife in this. I don't remember for sure, but I know he said himself, that I've decided on fewer luxuries. He said, I've decided on fewer luxuries. The work of God needs it. And I've decided fewer luxuries and more self-sacrifice. The kind of works I believe in.

One of my friends and I met last week in New York. He had written me a letter, one of the most wonderful letters about what God had been doing for him. And I saw him. He lost weight actually. He said, look here and showed me his belt and said, look, I'm losing weight. He said, you know why? He said, I'm getting up early in the morning and meeting God. I'm eating less. I'm missing some meals in order that I might meet God. And his church is going like a prairie fire. Lean godliness, that's what we need ladies and gentlemen, lean godliness. We got too much fat in our spirit. We need lean godliness. Too much being careful to spare ourselves, and excusing ourselves on the ground that it's doctor's orders. I'd spend three fourths of my time in Florida if I listened to doctor's orders. And I'm not going to listen to doctor's orders. I'd rather die five years sooner and get something done while I live than to vegetate like an old cabbage.

So, let's remember. Let's reverse our ways of selfishness and let's bring forth fruit not unto ourselves, but unto others. I have confidence in this church. You know this church has suffered over the last two or three years. You know what's happened. It's not been from within. It's not been from the pulpit nor from the board nor from any of the congregation. It's been from a changing social order here. And almost every other church has fled the neighborhood. We're still here. And somebody would say, well, we're down. This is going be a low convention. I don't believe a word of it. We may, times ahead, we may have to relocate.

We've got our committee. We'll talk about that later next fall, but now we're here and you're here. And God has sent his messengers here. And we own this place and we don't owe a dime on it. And in spite of the fact, we lost a whole church in numbers over the last two years who have moved away and out into the suburbs, into Wheaton and all over the country, we still had \$36,000 for missions last year. So there isn't any reason in the world why we will reverse our laziness and our love of luxury and all the rest. There isn't any reason why this can't continue to be one of the strongest and most godly and most Christ-like churches.

Israel brought fruit unto herself. Too bad. She had all the light. She had the sunshine. She had the soil. She had the rain. She had everything. But she turned in on herself and she never got a grape for some for weary bird. God wants you and me to keep pouring out of our life and love and sacrifice and money until instead of it saying, that Alliance Church brings forth fruit unto itself, it can be said that church brings forth fruit unto the ends of the earth. Amen. Amen.

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