

# Devotion to Jesus and Being God's Mouth

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of preserving first love and fervent devotion to Christ, and serving the Lord with joy and love, in order to maintain a meaningful and valuable relationship with Him.*

**Duration:** 59:12

**Topics:** "Spiritual Leadership", "Christian Devotion"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the importance of maintaining fervent devotion to Christ and being the mouthpiece of the Lord in preaching. It emphasizes the dangers faced by elders in churches, such as backsliding, allowing compromise, being influenced negatively, becoming complacent, and losing zeal. The key message is to ensure that every word spoken is precious and anointed, leading to hearts being set on fire for God.

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## Transcript

I want to turn to Revelation chapter 2. As I said, these letters to the elders of these churches, when it says messenger, angel means messenger, it's almost certainly referring to the elder who would most frequently bring God's Word. And in the five out of the seven elders who were backslidden and gone back, we learned some things. You're familiar with the fact that five of these messengers were in a very backslidden state, very, very backslidden.

The one in Laodicea was in a terrible state. And yet the amazing thing is, it says here that verse 20, chapter 1, verse 20, the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches. Now the interesting thing to me is that the Lord still held them in his hand, even though they were in a terribly backslidden condition.

That means he still kept them there as elders, teaching us that the mere fact that we remain in eldership does not mean that the Lord is happy with us. These were elders who were in the Lord's hands, but he was thoroughly disgusted with five of them. It reminds us of God allowing Saul to remain as king, even after David had been anointed and even after the Lord told Samuel, don't pray for Saul anymore, I finished with him.

But he still sat on the throne. It's a very severe warning to us that the mere fact that we remain in a position of elder without having lost that position proves nothing. It proves nothing about the Lord's approval or disapproval over our lives.

And that's why we have to live in fear and judge ourselves. Our salvation lies in judging ourselves. And if we judge ourselves then there is hope.

And so if we look at the behaviors of these folks, we can learn something for ourselves. And the very first one is the elder in Ephesus. And he had so many good qualities.

This is one of the things I find that when the Lord rebukes somebody, it's also a lesson here for us when we correct someone, that he first begins with expressing and even appreciating all the good points there are. Notice this. Here is a church in Ephesus.

He's an elder who has fallen so badly. It says in verse 5, remember from where you have fallen. He's a fallen elder, but he's in the Lord's hand.

And repent. And the fall is so bad that if he does not repent, he says, I'll remove your lampstand out of its place. And the lampstand is the church.

So the Lord is saying, I won't consider this as my church anymore. That's the meaning. The lampstand is gone.

The building, if they had a building, was still there. The 500 believers maybe in Ephesus would still be there. They would still have their Sunday services and their song leaders and their preaching and probably their conferences would all go on as normal.

The Lord would not be there. That's all. That is the meaning, I'll remove my lampstand.

Because the light comes from Jesus himself. If he's not there, there's no light. It's an empty lampstand.

There are many churches which are empty lampstands. I will remove this light from your midst unless you repent. So it's this chap had come to the edge of the cliff, as it were.

And yet, look at the things the Lord says to him. Verse 2, I know your deeds, your toil, your perseverance. You cannot endure evil men and all these false apostles.

You come into a midst, you put them to the test and you find they are false. You drive them out. You have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake there in Ephesus and you've not grown weary.

If you stop there, you think this is one of the best churches. Because all these are tremendous qualities. There's perseverance and activity and exposing false doctrine.

I have nothing to do with all that. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Or you don't love me as you did at first.

Or in other words, all your activities are not coming out of love. Once upon a time, it was out of love. So that teaches us one very important lesson, that we may all have started with great love for the Lord.

So we began our Christian life and when we began eldership, we began to do it out of love for the Lord. But it's so easy for that to become a routine matter, that the love for the Lord is gone, but the activity continues. I sometimes use the example of a newly married husband and wife, fervently in love with each other.

And she just waits for him to come back from work. And when she knows he's come back, she's there at the door, opening it and kissing him and welcoming him. And she's got the dinner ready and so happy to sit together with him.

But go and see that same home 20 years later. And she's not at the door anymore. There's no kissing the husband, no welcome.

And she may even say, hey, I got hungry and I ate. So dinner's on the table, go and eat. Is she still serving? Yes.

She's still cooking the meal, she's still keeping the house. And an outsider going in there could say, yeah, she's still cooking the meals for him, and she's still keeping the house and doing everything, looking after the children. But that initial spark of love is gone.

That can happen in our relationship with the Lord, where what we do can be a routine that we've got into. That's what we're supposed to do Sunday morning. That's what we're supposed to do during the week for our flock.

And we do it. We don't pull back from any of our responsibilities in the church. We have to keep the accounts.

We keep the accounts faithfully. You do everything, and you're supposed to go and visit somebody, go and visit somebody. But it is no longer out of fervent love for Jesus Christ.

You have left your first love. And that is the thing that we need to beware of all the time. Because when love does not motivate our action or our service, it has no value before the Lord.

Men can't see that, because men still see that I'm I haven't lost my testimony. I'm not fooling around with women. I'm not cheating with money or anything.

I'm very upright. Who knows that the love you once had in your heart, burning for Jesus, is gone. This is the greatest danger, I would say, that elder brothers who are very faithful in their work, and who are reaching out and preaching here and preaching there, and visiting folks and everything else, and even maybe having discipline in the church, face the danger of having, losing one's first love for the Lord.

And because it is so subtle, it can happen without our knowledge. When, what is the greatest commandment? You know, remember once the Pharisees or the Jews came to Jesus and said, what is the greatest commandment in the law? For them it was just keeping the Sabbath. It was some ritual.

And Jesus said, the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. If you don't do that, whatever else you do has got no value. And combined with that is to love your neighbor as yourself.

So everything hinges on love. If it doesn't spring from love, it has zero value. It's something that we must bear in mind always, because it's only then that we can preserve our flock also in that same devotion to Christ.

If you turn with me to 2nd Corinthians 11, something that I have been speaking about even at the last NCCF conference, Paul says to the Corinthians, I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I betrothed you to one husband, to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I'm afraid, lest as the serpent

deceived Eve by his craftiness, your mind should be led astray from that simple, pure devotion to Christ. That's what happened to the Elder in Ephesus.

So here we are told what was the significance of the Tree of Life. When you read about the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, what does it symbolize? It symbolizes and signifies something. And there in Genesis chapter 2 and 3, we don't know what it signifies.

But here in the New Testament commentary on it, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we realize that the Tree of Life is simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ. Because that is what the devil took Eve away from. That's what it says here.

He took Eve away from, what did he take Eve away from? The Tree of Life. And he says you can also be led astray from that Tree of Life, which is simple, pure devotion to Christ. Then you'll be left with knowledge.

And that's what Eve got. And we can have plenty of knowledge. So this is a serious thing.

And Paul says, I have betrothed you to Christ, and I want to present you as a pure virgin. So how are we presented as a pure virgin to Christ? I'm not a pure virgin for Christ if I'm not in living in fervent devotion to Him, however much the Bible knowledge I have. To me, the Tree of Knowledge is Bible knowledge.

And like I've often said, the Bible can be a Tree of Knowledge for you. And you can be an expert in it and speak profound things from it. But if you allow the Holy Spirit to open up the Scripture to you, it'll become a Tree of Life for you.

And how do you know that? It can lead you to devotion to Jesus Christ. Your devotion to Christ will increase. And it's a thing that we need to ask ourselves constantly.

How is our devotion to Christ? Personal devotion to Christ. Is it the most important thing in your life? If it isn't, something is wrong. If your ministry has become more important, or helping the young people, or even bringing up your family in a good way.

All that is good. But if it doesn't spring out of your being in the Tree of Life, fervent devotion to Christ, this teaches us it's all worthless. And Paul recognized that.

And so he was concerned that all those people in Corinth also should end up as a pure virgin for Christ. I picture, you know, the Old Testament story of Abraham sending his servant to Mesopotamia to get a bride for Isaac. It's a picture, like many Old Testament pictures, of God the Father sending the Holy Spirit, or servants filled with the Holy Spirit, to go and find a bride for his son.

And this servant, filled with the Holy Spirit symbolically, goes and finds Rebecca, separates her from her home, puts her on the camel, and travels this long road, which will take many, many weeks, to bring her to Isaac. The picture of the long journey the Holy Spirit takes us through until we come to the marriage of the Lamb in Revelation 19. And we are the servants.

We are Eleazar, or whoever the servant was, who was bringing Rebecca. And I pictured it like this myself, as an elder, that there are many people along the way who would like to attract this pretty woman, and take her away for a night, or something, and I have to protect her. That's my job.

I've been given that commission, to bring this girl to the husband. So I have to look at the church like that. That's how Paul looked at it.

I'm jealous for you. I'm afraid that somebody else will come and draw you away on this journey, and I don't want, I'm not, I'm not gonna allow that. I'm gonna fight with that person, that you've got no right to take this girl away.

She's the bride of my master's son. And that's the meaning here. I'm jealous for you.

I can imagine Eleazar, the servant, would have been very jealous to protect, protect her. And I can imagine that all along that journey, he would have been telling her all about Isaac, all that he knew. And that's my calling, in the church, to show the glory of Jesus to the flock.

It's a beautiful picture, and I've often meditated on it. What would that servant, we've been talking to Rebecca about, and if Rebecca was a real bride, and the spirit of the bride, what would she have been interested in knowing? Not how much money Isaac has, what type of man is he? Tell me more about him. I want to know about him before I meet him.

And so this is the picture here. And it all depends on fervent love for Christ. And if that fervent love for Christ has gone out of my heart, I'm no longer fit to be an elder, as far as God's concerned.

He says, I'll remove the lampstand. You can sit there as an elder, and get all the honor, and continue preaching. But I derecognize you.

And the people in your church may not know that I have derecognized you, because you sit there. But those who have discernment, which may be just a few, maybe five percent, they will see that your love for Christ is not the same as it was many years ago. And if they have discernment, they will see it.

And they'll see that your messages don't have the same ring that they had ten years ago. Because you have backslidden inwardly, not outwardly, because you're still, you're way ahead spiritually, and all the other people in your church. It's your fervent devotion to Christ, that simple devotion to Jesus Christ that's gone.

It's very, very important to me. Because anything I do, apart from that love for Christ, has no value. If you love me, keep my commandments.

If you don't love me, forget it. In the Old Testament, it was not like that. The Old Covenant was, keep my commandments, whether you love me or not.

You've got to keep it. If an Old Covenant person gave a tithe, for example, with much reluctance, he had obeyed the commandment. He had not disobeyed any commandment by giving the tithe with reluctance.

He gave. He was supposed to give 10% of his grain, 10% of his flock. He did it.

He was grumpy and sour about it when he gave them over to the Levites. He had kept the commandment. But in the New Covenant, if you put one dollar in the box, without a cheerful heart, you'll disobey.

Because in the Old Testament, it was a question of how much you give. In the New Testament, it's a question of how you give. Second Corinthians 9, 7 says, God loves a cheerful giver.

So if I don't give cheerfully, there's no value. If I don't serve the Lord cheerfully, there's no value. And there's that Old Testament reference.

Let me see if I can find it in Isaiah chapter 64. You know, in the New Testament, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. So if I serve the Lord without joy, there's a reference to that in the Old Testament, which slips my mind now.

Because you serve the Lord without joy. And do any of you know where that is? It's either in Deuteronomy 28 or Isaiah. It often comes to my mind.

Yeah, here's one reference. This is one in Isaiah I was looking for. Isaiah 64, you meet him who rejoices, in verse 5, in doing righteousness.

Not just the one who does righteousness. The Lord meets with the one who rejoices in doing righteousness. Who does this thing, which may be very painful, and says, hallelujah, I'm delighted to do this.

And when that joy goes out of my life, then the Lord doesn't meet with me. You meet with him who rejoices in doing righteousness. And that is the verse in Deuteronomy somewhere.

I think it's in Deuteronomy 28. 28-47? Yeah. Yeah, because you did not serve the Lord with joy.

Deuteronomy 28-47, with a glad heart. Therefore you will serve your enemies whom the Lord sends. You know, apply that to your life.

If I'm not fervent in love for the Lord as I preach God's Word and I serve God's people as an elder, if ever that becomes a burden to me, oh, I have to do this, I have to do that, I have to be hospitable now, I'll serve my enemies one day. Because you did not serve the Lord with a glad heart for all the abundance of things that God gave. So it's very easy.

I think of another verse which the Lord gave to me when I was a very young man concerning this matter of serving the Lord with joy, sorry, with love. I felt there were, you know, I would read some of the poems and hymns of these mystics like Ter Stegen and Henry Sousa and all. They seem to have, they were Roman Catholics, but they seem to have far more devotion in their expression of affection to the Lord more than many Protestant hymn writers.

Show me thy face, O Lord, one transient gleam. This is a prayer. Show me thy face, O Lord, one transient gleam of loveliness divine.

I shall never think or dream of other love save thine. All lesser light will darken quite. All lower glories will wane.

The beautiful of earth will never seem beautiful again. I used to sing that again and again and again to myself as a young Christian. Show me thy face, O Lord, in my heart.

Just one transient gleam of loveliness divine. I shall never think or dream of other love save thine. All lesser light will darken quite.

All lower glories wane and the beautiful of earth will never seem beautiful again. And I say, Lord, this is how I want to serve you all my life. I sing it even now to the Lord, just between me and the Lord.

To me, the gift of tongues as well is a it's an expression of love to the Lord. It's a private love language between me and Jesus. Never for public display, just like when a wife is expressing her love for her husband.

She doesn't want anybody else to hear it. That's how I understand. That's why I see the gift of tongues.

That's how I see Paul used it. So abused, so misused, like so many other things are misused and abused. Because why is it so much of Christendom has gone astray on this gift of tongues? I haven't got it right.

Because they don't love the Lord. If they loved the Lord, they'd get the right answers to all these things. And because they don't love the Lord, it's what is meant to be a private love language between man and God is being abused.

Paul says, I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church, I won't even speak one word in a tongue. I'll speak in a known language.

Then you ask Paul, where in the world do you use it then? Between me and the Lord, privately. So it's everything that we do must come out of that fervent love for the Lord. Otherwise, it has no value.

And one of the words the Lord gave me at that time was, not the Lord gave me, which I read and challenged me, was when I was just about 21-22 years old, I was reading the Bible. And I read this in Genesis in chapter 29. Genesis 29, it says here, in verse 20, you know, Jacob had just got cheated by marrying Leah and, but he really loved Rachel.

And Jacob loved Rachel, 29-18. And he said, I'll serve you seven years for your younger daughter. And listen to this verse 20.

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel. And they seemed to him but a few days, because of his love for her. And I said, Lord, if a man can serve seven years for a woman, and it's just like a few days, I want to serve you all my life.

And it'll only be like a few days. I can never become weary in serving the Lord, no matter what I have to sacrifice. No matter what sleep I have to lose, no matter how much suffering I have to go through, no matter how much inconvenience, I lose my health, it's fine.

Or people ill treat me or treat me badly. Because of the love I have for you to be nothing. Does the service of the Lord ever become heavy for you? Do you feel that people are taking advantage of you as a elder? How it would have been easier for you if you were not just not an elder just coming along? So many things you have to do because you're an elder, and unlike other pastors who've got plenty of time and get paid for it, you don't have plenty of time, you're not being paid for it.

Fine. It's not a very weary Lord. It's nothing.

It all depends on love. If you preserve yourself, and it's very easy to discover in our life whether that first love for the Lord is gone. If you look back to the days you were first converted, what love you had, what sacrifice you're willing to do.

You're not an elder, but you're willing to do so many things because you love Jesus. I never want to lose it. I remember how it was with me in the early days when I got converted.

I had all these other ambitions in the world when I got converted, and they all disappeared like that. I didn't have to struggle one bit for it to go. It just vanished.

It's like a girl who was madly in love with a boy. It's not a good boy, and the father tries to wean her away from him, but he doesn't succeed. She's always sending text messages to him in secret, and the father just doesn't succeed.

He doesn't know what to do, and all of a sudden one day she comes and says, I've given up. I've given him up. The father wonders, how did that happen? I found a better boy.

That's how it happens when we find Jesus. That love for the world, you don't have to struggle to push away the love of money, or the love of comfort, or the love of pleasure, or anything. I found something better.

I found someone better. It's the expulsive power of a new affection. This new love can expel.

It's got tremendous power to expel all other loves and interests. I say, Lord, the day I lose that, I don't want to live anymore on this earth. I never want to lose it.

I don't believe I will. I mean, I've been going 58 years, and I don't believe I'll lose it, because all the time I have to check myself, is there anything else on this earth that interests me? Am I looking for some fame or honor before others? Do I want to be recognized as an elder? Do I want to be recognized as some senior elder, or some more spiritual than all that rubbish of comparing ourselves with others? Far from it. I don't want any recognition from anybody.

I just love Jesus, and any service I do is just between me and him. I want to encourage all of you, my brothers, to seek to serve in your position as an elder, to be like that. And if you find some younger brother, or one of your other fellow elders, being more accepted, it should thrill your heart.

Wonderful. That brother is getting more accepted. I'm glad to step back and let him go forward.

Let him take my place. That's the attitude of one who loves Jesus, because he's not in any competition. He just wants the work to be done.

And if somebody else wants to come and do it, and it's like, if you're carrying some heavy stuff into your car, and somebody says, hey, I want to come and help you. You're not gonna say no, no, you can't do it. You're younger than me.

Oh, thank you. This is how true service for the Lord should be. But it's so rarely seen in Christendom today, and a new covenant church must demonstrate it at a great height, at a great height of perfection.

That we serve without an atom of competition, when the thing doesn't even enter into my mind, to see whether others appreciate that brother more than me. I'd be delighted if they do. It's exactly what I want.

Glad to pull back, because I only do it out of love for Jesus, not for any. We listen to all this, and I'm sure we agree with it all. But because we have a flesh in which dwells nothing good, if you live in the Lord's presence, you may discover some of these things that I'm speaking about, raising their head in your heart.

Make sure you kill it, as soon as it comes up. It's a temptation. It'll come up.

So that is why, that's what, those are the little things that make us lose our first love. Now we are doing the same thing, but we're doing it with some other motivation. We may not, I think none of us would go and serve the Lord for money.

I don't think any of you will do that. But there can be a desire for honor and acceptance, which can be just as bad as serving for money. That you do something or you share something, hoping that people will honor you, accept that.

They will esteem you. I don't think there's any difference between that and you're getting up and preaching and hoping somebody will give you some money. When you finish preaching, they'll be so appreciative of that, they'll come and give you some money.

I don't want that. But if you're seeking honor, hoping that somebody will come and give you some honor, it's not much difference. Or hoping that people will appreciate your word more than that other brother's.

All of this disappears if we preserve that simple, pure devotion to Christ. For the serpent is so subtle, as he deceived Eve, he will lead you away from that tree of life. See, the tree of life in Genesis 2 was easy of access.

But the tree of life at the end of Genesis 3 was not easy of access. There was a flaming sword, it says in Genesis chapter 3, verse 24, that went all around that tree of life. There was no sword in front of the tree of knowledge.

You could go straight up to the tree of knowledge and pluck as many fruit as you like. But if you wanted to go to the tree of life, before there was no sort of sword. But now, ever since sin came, there's a flaming sword around the tree of life.

You read in Genesis 3, verse 24. So if I want to get to the tree of life, I have to let this sword fall upon myself. And that's the reason why many people never get there.

That sword has to fall and slay my self-life, every ambition that self has and anything connected with self. It's got to slay that. And the more I allow it to slay that life, the more access I have to the fruit of the tree of life.

Simple, pure devotion to Jesus Christ. The only thing that hinders that is my self-life. That's why Jesus said you've got to hate yourself if you want to have eternal life.

He who hates his own life in this earth. See John chapter 12. That's referring to this tree, to this sword in front of this tree.

John chapter 12 and verse 25. He's talking about eternal life. Who can have eternal life? There are many passages in the New Gospels where Jesus spoke about eternal life.

But most people tend to take the easy ones. The gift of God is eternal life, Romans 6 23. But here it says if you want eternal life, you've got to hate your life in this world.

He who hates his life will keep it a life eternal. That is the one statement of Jesus which I discovered was most repeated in the Gospels. Try and search the Gospel to find is what is the statement of Jesus repeated the maximum number of times in the Gospels.

It is he who hates his life or he loses his life. Seven times it comes in the four Gospels. It must be the most important statement Jesus ever made.

To lose your life and hate your life and the most important statement that Jesus ever made is the least understood statement and the least practiced. Eternal life is to know Jesus and to know the Father. And if I want more of that, I've got to hate my life in this world.

I'm going to hate this life, this flesh life. So that thing which the Lord spoke to this leader in Ephesus is very relevant for us today. You have left your first love, then I'll remove the lampstand.

The anointing can go. That's removing the lampstand. I can still continue to preach.

The anointing left Saul and he continued to be the king. It's the number one danger that we have to fear. If you turn to Revelation 2, let's look at a second danger here.

So the elder in Pergamum writes, I have a few things against you. Verse 14, and once upon a time in your church you held fast to my name when there was another elder here called Antipas who was a faithful witness. But now you're the new elder and I have a few things against you.

Because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balaam to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel to eat things offered to idols. Now what I see there is the doctrine of Balaam is, first of all he himself was a lover of money. When Balaam called him to come and curse Israel, he said I can't come.

Then Balaam said I'll give you more money. Then he said let me pray about it. So whenever I have to pray about something, when there's an offer of money coming up, which earlier on I had rejected and I felt that God didn't want me to do that, but now there's a bigger offer of money and I want to pray about it.

You know that's, you're going the direction of Balaam. Because that's exactly what he said to Balaam. God's told me not to come.

He says I'll give you more money. Okay then let me pray about it. And when he discovered that he could not curse Israel, because God did not permit him, he was faithful.

He, not that his curse would have made any difference, but he did not even pretend to curse Israel. He knew he couldn't. There was a certain amount of fear of God in that man.

What did he do? He told Balak, and you see that by comparing numbers 25 with Revelation 2, that he taught Balak, see listen, I can't curse them, but I'll show you how you can make God himself curse them. You just send some of these pretty Moabite girls into their midst and they'll fall for them. God himself will curse them.

You'll have nothing more to do. That is the stumbling block that Balak put before them. In Numbers chapter 24, it says how the end of that story where Balak could not, Balaam could not curse Israel.

And the very next thing you read in Numbers 25 is, end of Numbers 24 is where Balaam arose, Numbers 24-25. Balaam arose and departed. Balak also went his way.

But it doesn't tell us what Balaam suggested to Balak. That we read in Revelation 2. And then that you read in chapter 25, verse 1 of Numbers, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.

That's a result of Balaam's suggestion.

And then they invited them to their gods, and the Lord was angry against Israel. What Balak, Balaam could not do, but what Balak wanted. Balaam said, without our doing anything, God himself will curse them.

You don't want me to curse them. So there we see how we can, we don't want to do something wrong, and we've tried to be faithful, but we allow some type of compromise to come into, I don't know how it applies in your own situation. Some type of lowering of the standards.

That's the teaching of Balaam. He says, you've got to be careful. That was the warning to the second.

It also involves, probably Balaam got some money from Balak for him, because his trick succeeded. God cursed Israel. He was angry with him.

The third one, I just want to go quickly through that, is to the elder in the church in Thyatira. I have something against you, that you allow that woman Jezebel, in Revelation 220, to lead my bond servants astray. And in some translations it says, you allow your wife Jezebel to lead my bond servants astray.

We have to be very careful that we don't allow our wives to influence us in decisions concerning the church. I believe it's right to consult our wives in matters concerning the sisters in our church, because we may not have such free access to find out what problems they face, because of any decisions we take. And also, when I want to know about some particular young sister, who we consider for marriage somebody, I find I always have to ask my wife, because I don't get to meet those sisters so freely.

That's okay. But this may not be a problem for any of you, but it is a problem, I know, for some elders I've seen in India and some of our churches. The wife is a controlling force behind the husband, in making him do certain things in the church, behind the scenes.

I have this against you, that you allow your wife Jezebel to control you. I trust that's not a problem for any of us. We can go through that.

And then we go to number four, which is the elder in Sardis. This is something that can easily come to us. You have a name that you're alive, but you're dead.

It's very easy, after some years of preaching, to get a name. Revelation 3 verse 1. And that's the time we are in danger. The days when we were despised and persecuted, we were saved.

It's happened to every movement in Christian history. When they were persecuted and criticized and called heretics and false teachers, whether it is Martin Luther's time or John Wesley's time, they were saved. There was a covering of reproach that protected them.

But after a while, we find that situation now in India. We had a covering of reproach for a number of years, but that seems to have gone. People have begun to appreciate us and they say we're in greater danger now.

People are coming to us because they have begun to respect us. You have a name. You've made some effort to get that name and you've got a name that you're alive.

You're a living church. The Lord says there's death behind the scenes. That all is not so, all is not well as it appears on the surface.

And you know that. And you try to cover it up. We shouldn't cover it up.

Lord, show me the areas where death is coming into our church, maybe into our young people, maybe into the way they have started dressing up now. It's not like that in the old days. Maybe some of the other sisters or brothers where they've begun gossiping or something.

Some death has come in. I must stand against it without partiality. Remember what you were once and repent.

And the last one is the elder in Laodicea. The Lord says to him, I know your deeds. You're neither cold nor hot.

Because you're lukewarm, I'll spit you out of my mouth. I think that refers to being the Lord's spokesman. When I'm in the Lord's mouth, I'm a spokesman.

When he spits me out of his mouth, I'm no longer the Lord's spokesman. But I still have all that knowledge of Scripture that I can get up and preach sermons for the next 50 years. And why does he spit me out of his mouth? Because I'm neither cold nor hot.

In other words, what the Lord is saying, you know, there's a saying in the world, something is better than nothing. But here something is not better than nothing. When the Lord says, if you're not on fire for me, just go right out and be worldly.

If you'll either be hot or cold, I wish you were cold. I wish you were worldly, out and out worldly, so that no believer will be deceived by your church or by you. But because you're neither worldly nor wholehearted for me, therefore I'll spit you out of my mouth.

And as we look at the way movements have declined through the years, every movement in history over a period of time, decline sets in. And the decline sets in because we sit back and say, we've got a name now. Some of you, the churches once upon a time, including ours, once upon a time we were despised, rejected.

But maybe those days have changed a little now. And you're beginning to get a name. Be careful that you don't become lukewarm.

Remember, Romanian, that fervent devotion to Christ is very, very, very important. I believe that everything we do must come out of that devotion to Christ. I want to say a few words about being the Lord's mouth.

I don't want to be spat out of the Lord's mouth, which means I'm no longer speaking the word of the Lord. I'm speaking good sermons. It's one of the things I sought God for very early.

How can I be your mouth? There are two words the Lord gave me. One was Jeremiah chapter 15, where the Lord says, if you do this, you will be my mouth. Jeremiah 15 and verse 19.

If you extract the precious from the worthless in your speech, you will be my mouth. So I realized that that is the first requirement. That if I want to be the Lord's mouth when I'm in the pulpit, I have to select the

precious words that come into my mind and speak them and reject the useless words.

And that's not in the pulpit, in my ordinary conversation. In the pulpit, of course, we will only speak precious words. You don't need an exhortation for that.

So what I learned from that verse is that if I want the Lord to be with my mouth in the pulpit, I have to ensure that he's with my mouth throughout, throughout the day and throughout the week and wherever I am, I have to make sure that what I speak is something I can speak in the presence of the Lord, that I recognize he's hearing me as I speak now, your place of work in your office, wherever you are at home, your wife. There are many thoughts that come into our mind when we want to say something. And there must be a process of elimination of filter between my mind and my mouth where I filter out all the worthless words and let the precious words pass through.

That's the meaning of this verse. And it will take some time because we are so used to mixing the precious and the worthless words when we speak. But if I'm really faithful, little by little by little, I begin to speak only the precious words and very often I'm restrained and keep quiet because I don't know what to say.

But I'm determined not to send forth any worthless words from my mouth. You will find when you get into the pulpit, the Lord gives you his word and the Lord makes you his mouth and takes gives you his word exactly according to the need of different people in the church. And that's what we must all long for.

Lord, I want to be your mouth. That's another passage of scripture that came to me many years ago when I began to preach from 1 Samuel and chapter 2. In 1 Samuel and chapter 2, it speaks about Samuel as a young man. Sorry, not chapter 2, chapter 3. 1 Samuel chapter 3. It says in those days, verse 1, the word from the Lord was very rare.

The Bible was there, but a prophetic word from the Lord was rare. This is absolutely true of many, many of our churches. I don't know how it is with your church.

But a prophetic word from the Lord is rare. An anointed word from the Lord is rare. And it was rare in those days and very infrequent.

And at that time, the Lord called Samuel. And it was very different. Samuel, when he spoke 1 Samuel 3 verse 19, the Lord did not allow any of his words, the margin it says, to fall to the ground.

It's a literal translation. God did not allow any of Samuel's words to fall to the ground. When I read that years ago, I said, Lord, here I'm in the preaching ministry.

And I don't want some words that I speak before it reaches that guy's heart and goes piercing into his heart to fall to the ground here. The Lord of preachers words fall to the ground. It's a good prayer to pray. Lord, don't let any word of mine fall to the ground.

Make me like your mouth. Let the words that come out of my mouth, if they're really like your mouth, be like, it says in Isaiah 55. And verse 11.

So shall my word be, which goes out of my mouth, it will never return empty. That is my goal in my preaching that every word I speak, you know, it's an area where we press on to perfection, you don't reach there overnight. But if you don't start on the journey, you'll never reach any further.

Lord, I want my words to be like your mouth. And the word that goes out of God's mouth, it will never return empty, without accomplishing what the Lord desires and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. So these words can be true in our lives.

Because the ministry of the word is what most of us are involved in in our churches. And I must never be satisfied with an unanointed word even one single time. I have experienced times when I was not as anointed as I wanted.

And I've gone before the Lord and wept and said, Lord, tell me what's wrong with me, Lord. I don't want that to happen. I let you down today.

Something is wrong somewhere in me. I can't blame the congregation of the people or I was too tired or I was busy, nothing of that sort. It's the Lord did not use me as my mouth today.

There's a reason for it. I want to know it Lord, I don't want it to happen again. And if the Lord sees you're serious about it, he'll work on you, make you his mouth.

But if you can say, go through a message and you felt it, you just fell to the ground, nothing happened. You say, okay, that happens sometimes. Then the Lord sees you're casual about it.

I say Lord, it must not even happen once. The other passage that relates to this that I was challenged by was Jesus walking with the disciples to Emmaus. A long three hour journey.

It says in Luke 24, 13, that the distance was seven miles. And that must have taken three hours and a measurely walk. So Jesus spoke to them for three hours on that trip.

And at the end of it, the disciples said, didn't our hearts burn within us? Verse 32, when he was speaking to us. That is how the words from the Lord's mouth are. It makes people's hearts burn.

Isn't that a good prayer for us to pray? I say Lord, if I'm really, if you really made me your mouth, people's hearts would burn when they hear. Even if it's a three hour sermon. I won't reach there overnight, I know.

But I want to press on to perfection. How eager are we to make sure that we are the Lord's mouth? Basically two things in what I shared today. One is to live in that inward, fervent devotion to Christ at all times.

Never to go away from that and outwardly in the preaching of the word. To make sure that our words are fiery, that they burn. I don't mean this human type of fire that a lot of preachers have.

But I don't think Jesus is yelling and screaming when he was speaking to them. He wasn't stirring their emotions. His words were quiet and soft but went straight into their heart.

And their hearts burned within them. I personally don't believe that we should ever preach a boring sermon, even once. That can never be the will of God.

Jesus was never boring at any time. And that should be our goal. And where you slip up, we come before the Lord and say, Lord where I slip up? And the Lord may say, you spoke too long, that's why you were boring.

I've heard messages from brothers in some of our CMC churches in India. It was wonderful, anointed for the first 15-20 minutes. But then he didn't sit down.

He went on for another 25 minutes and spoiled the whole thing. And the picture I get in my mind is, in Jesus' carpenter shop, a carpenter is making a table. And it's perfect.

It's done. Ready to be given to the customer. But he says, oh I've got another hour before five o'clock, so let me do some more work.

He planes it and ruins the whole thing. It was perfect. Why in the world did he go and plane it after that? It was perfect in the first 15-20 minutes.

Why did he want to continue after that? Because he says many preachers speak 45 minutes, so I better do that and ruin the whole thing. Who said that? Most of Jesus' sermons were 15 minutes. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost was like that.

The point is now Jesus spoke for three hours to Emmaus. I agree. If you have that measure of anointing, it's very important for us to not imitate other preachers.

You'll ruin yourself and you'll ruin your ministry. Be the Lord's mouth, measure in which the Lord has given you grace. It says in Romans chapter 12, a very very important word concerning this.

I, through the grace given to me, he's such a mighty apostle but see how humbly he speaks. I say to every man among you, Romans 12 3, not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, and if your gift is prophecy, verse 6, please prophesy according to the proportion of your faith. What that means is if you write a check, write a check according to the size of your bank account.

Don't try and impress people with a check for five million dollars because somebody else could write it. According to the size of your bank account, according to the proportion of your life, is the proportion of your faith. Prophecy.

I believe if we take some of these things that I shared with you today about one fervent devotion to Christ inside and the way we allow the Lord to make us his mouth, I believe there will be a tremendous difference in the quality of our ministry and thereby in the quality of our churches. That's often my burden when I share with brothers in our church in India. Can we spend a few moments in prayer?

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