

How a Church Backslides

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of passing on the teachings of Jesus to future generations to ensure the continuation of sound doctrine and faithful discipleship. It highlights the need for faithful men to be raised up to teach others, focusing on living out the narrow way that Jesus taught, including overcoming anger, loving enemies, and forgiving others. The speaker warns against the danger of churches drifting away from the truth and the necessity of being filled with the Holy Spirit to boldly witness for Christ in every area of life.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:2, Matthew 28:19, Acts 20:29, Revelation 2:4, Matthew 7:13, 1 Corinthians 11:3, Isaiah 30:10, Jude 1:11, Ephesians 4:14, Ephesians 5:1

Topics: "Discipleship", "Passing on Faith"

Description

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Transcript

I decided some time ago was to come, to go everywhere only for half a conference. Because that is the way we can raise up another generation to run the conference without me. It's very important that we have a burden that the work God has started continues into another generation and to another generation.

See, when Paul was coming to the end of his life, in 2nd Timothy chapter 2, Paul was around 67 years old as far as we know when he died, when he was killed. Paul was 67 years old when he was killed. This is the last letter he wrote in 2nd Timothy.

And he says there in verse 5, 8, the Lord has shown me that my departure has come, time of my departure has come. In the 6th verse of 4th chapter, Paul says, I am not saying that about myself. I am praying that the Lord will help me to live up to a hundred years.

But I don't want to keep on preaching till then. I want other people to come up and preach the word. But Paul told Timothy in 2nd Timothy chapter 2, what you have heard from me, entrusted to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

See, Paul knew that towards the end, people are going to go astray from the truth. And they will not want to listen to the truth. So he was concerned that Timothy must be faithful not only himself but he must raise another generation.

Notice what he says there. Not clever men but faithful men. Faithful in relation to money.

Faithful in relation to their thought life, their language, their speech. Faithful in relation to their thought life, their language, their speech. And they, that is the third generation, verse 2, must be able to teach another generation.

So you see, first of all he tells Timothy, you must, Timothy is the second generation. Paul says this to Timothy, who is the second generation. The faithful men mentioned here are the third generation.

And they must teach others, which is the fourth generation. You see what a burden Paul had. This message must not be lost.

Because he knew, it says in chapter 4, verse 3, the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. The time will come when they will not listen to the truth. Sound doctrine means healthy doctrine.

That means the words that Jesus taught. Jesus told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel, to make disciples in every nation. And teach them to do everything I have commanded you.

That's Matthew 28, verse 19 and 20. And that is the sound doctrine. But people will turn away from that.

They want their ears tickled with things that will comfort them and not teach them to take up the cross everyday. And they will turn away their ears, verse 4, from the truth to all types of myths. So that is my burden also.

Because I already see so many people are turning away from the truth. Even in our CFC churches, I find people are not gripped with the truth of God. The second generation is not being gripped.

All of you who are elders, first of all, you have to make sure your children are gripped by the truth. Every one of them. And if they are married, they must begin to teach your grandchildren right from childhood these truths.

Because the truths that we preach in our church are almost not preached anywhere else. They don't have put emphasis on the things that Jesus taught. And that's not new to our generation.

It's not something new because it happened in the days of the apostles also. See Acts chapter 20. Paul writes to the elders in Ephesus.

See Ephesus was the, as far as we know, the best church Paul planted. The reason we say that is because he could teach the most profound truths in Ephesians which he could not teach in all the other letters. And that is one place where he spent three years more than he spent in any other place.

And he calls the elders one day. And he was about to leave Ephesus. Acts 20.17. He called the elders of Ephesus.

And he tells them in verse 31. Remember that night and day for three years I kept on admonishing each one of you with tears. That means Paul preached in the morning and preached in the evening for three

years.

He never got tired of preaching. And in the midst of all that he was working to support himself. See he says that in verse 34.

You know that with my hands I ministered not only to my own needs but also to the brothers who were with me. Because he wanted to be an example to them. And so when he leaves them, see three years two sermons a day means he must have preached two thousand sermons to them.

And when he leaves he does not remind them of those sermons. He says remember verse 18. The last part.

From the first day I set foot in Asia you know how I was with you the whole time. I served the Lord with all humility. Verse 20.

I did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable to you. I taught you publicly. I went from house to house preaching.

And what did I preach? Repentance verse 21 and faith. And verse 27 I proclaimed to you the whole purpose of God. That is healthy doctrine.

But he says I know what will happen after I leave. People will say Paul was too strict. God is a loving kind God.

He is always forgiving. You know like the false prophets in the old testament would preach peace peace when there is no peace. So after my departure just like Paul told Timothy people will want other type of preachers who will say smooth things to them.

That is what the people of Israel told the prophets, the true prophets. Preach to us smooth words. Don't preach all this hard stuff.

But the prophets did not bother what they thought. They preached what God told them to preach. The sad thing is in our day most preachers do not know God.

They know the bible they know the doctrine but they don't know God. And so they can't hear God speaking to them about the need of the people. They just want to say clever things which will earn them a good name as a great bible teacher or something like that.

See bible teachers don't get crucified. Only prophets get crucified. People would prefer to be a bible teacher than to be a prophet.

Church can only be built through prophets. So he says I know that after my departure verse 29 all the wolves will come inside. These wolves were waiting outside the door of the church in Ephesus.

Who were these wolves? People who called themselves Christians, nice people, probably rich people. People who could influence the leaders in the church with their money. People who are influential in society, whom the leaders would want to please in some way.

Paul never cared for all that. To Paul everybody was the same. Rich or poor, big man or small man on the earth makes no difference.

But I have found very few people like that in my life. To whom there is no partiality. All people are exactly the same.

Not my community or wealthy or high position, nothing. Not my community or wealthy or high position, nothing. So he says these wolves will come in and they will destroy this church.

And some of you elders, verse 30 will also start saying all types of things to draw disciples after yourselves. Now can you imagine maybe there were 4 or 5 elders sitting there listening to Paul. What do you think they would have thought? What do you think they would have thought? They would have thought, who does Paul think he is? As if he is the only spiritual man around here.

You think he is the only one who knows God? We also know God. That is how Korah rebelled against Moses. You think you are the only one who knows God? We are also God's people.

You know how God dealt with them. The book of Jude, he warns about people who can go the way of Korah in the last days. Anyway, those people would come in and the church, they did not take Paul's warning seriously, these elders, so the church in Ephesus was destroyed.

So you read the second letter to the Ephesians. No, no, no, second letter to the Ephesians. That is in Revelation chapter 2. Revelation chapter 2 is the second letter to the Ephesians.

Like 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, there is 1 Ephesians, 2 Ephesians. Like 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, there is 1 Ephesians, 2 Ephesians. That is in Revelation chapter 2. And there the Lord says, I am going to take the lampstand out of the place where it is fired.

The lampstand is the Lord recognizing that as his church. Now when the Lord takes it out, the people of the church will not go away. The 500 people in the church in Ephesus will remain there.

They will still have their Sunday meetings, their conferences, everything will go on like normal. But the Lord himself would have departed. But the Lord himself would have departed.

So here is the church with 500 people, regular meetings, midweek meetings, prayer meetings, but the Lord is not there. They glory in the fact that this church was founded by Paul, not by any ordinary person. But this church is not like what Paul taught.

It is so bad that Jesus says, I will not be here anymore. Because what Paul predicted, the wolves have come in. And among the elders there was conflict.

So what would happen? Does that mean that in Ephesus there will be no more witness for Christ? Yes, there will be. Because he says in verse 7, to those who overcome. So in the church in Ephesus, the Lord gives a call to few people out of these 500 people who want to be overcome.

For whom devotion to Christ and becoming like Him is the passion of their life. They see the decline going on in the church, but they still see the Lord is there. They see Jesus is there, still patient with the church.

These sensitive people recognize one day that the Lord is gone. Only those with spiritual sensitivity will recognize that. You know it is like a blind man, he won't know whether the light is on or the light is off.

So those who are spiritually blind will not know whether the Lord is here or he is not here. Look at the number of people today sitting in dead churches, saying Lord Jesus, where two or three are gathered

together in your name, you said you would be in your midst, thank God you are here. So many churches like that.

The Lord is not there. But like blind people they don't know that. But the overcomers, they see.

They see the bridegroom has left the building. The bridegroom. And what will the bride do when the bridegroom leaves the wedding hall? She is not going to be there.

She will also leave. So the overcomers will leave that church. No, the overcomers in that church will leave that church.

Maybe 10-15 people out of the 500. And they will start meeting with the Lord somewhere else. They won't have such a grand building like the first church in Ephesus.

10-15 people will meet in a house. But the Lord will be there. And that will be the real church in Ephesus.

Throughout 2000 years, the Lord has never left himself without a witness on this earth. If the majority of Christians fail him, he will still have a few overcomers who are true to him. So, see these churches, 7 churches we read in Revelation.

Five of them, the Lord found nothing to really appreciate there. There were a few good things, but the presence of the Lord was not there. They didn't love Jesus fervently.

Christianity was a routine affair they did on Sunday and Wednesday and nothing more than that. That is the only type of Christianity the New Testament speaks about. But there were two churches like that, Smyrna and Philadelphia.

So what we see is, out of all the churches planted by the apostles, almost all of them drifted away except a few. And what was the reason? The reason is the theme we have for this conference. They stopped preaching the narrow way that leads to life.

And so, they were afraid if we make it so narrow, some people will leave our church or they will go somewhere else. That can be a temptation to CFC elders too. If we make the way so narrow, a lot of people will get offended and leave.

What did Jesus preach? What did Jesus tell his disciples at the end of his time on earth? Please read Matthew 28 verse 19 and 20. In every nation, he said we must make disciples. That means a church must comprise not just of people who say, I want to go to heaven.

No, they are not interested in such people. Not just those who say, I want my sins forgiven. But those who want to, disciple means those who want to follow Jesus Christ every day of their life.

And that is a very small number. But that is the only real witness for Christ. In every nation, make people who will follow me every day of their life.

So now, all of you brothers, I want to ask you this question. Are you a person who is really seeking to follow Jesus Christ every single day of your life? You young people in schools and colleges, are you seeking to follow Jesus? It will make you different from other children in your school and college. But it's such a temptation to be like them in order to be popular.

Or the rest of you who work in offices or do your own businesses. Are you seeking to follow Jesus in that office and in your business? Jesus also was a businessman for about 12 years of his life. No, for 12 years.

For 12 years, he was doing business. From the age of 18 to 30. For 12 years, he was a businessman.

But how did he do it? Do you want to do it like that? That is the question. This is what it means to follow Jesus. He has given us an example in every area.

When my children went to school, I would tell them, can you think of how Jesus was when he went to school? Think about it. I ask myself how Jesus was when he went to school. That's what I told my children to think about.

Which type of children would he make friends with? How would he behave with the other students? What I am trying to say is, at every level, Jesus can be an example to us. Whether you are a school student or a businessman or a full time worker. Or a full time Christian worker.

He is an example in all areas. So we can follow him as a disciple whatever we are doing. Even a wife in the way she submits to her husband.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 11 that Jesus is the example for a woman in the way she submits to her husband. The way it says here, 1 Corinthians 11 verse 3, the head of Christ is God. And the head of the woman is the man.

The meaning is, just like Christ submitted to his father, the woman can submit to the man. So, even for a woman, Jesus Christ is the example. So what I am saying is, for every one of us, if you seek the Lord, he is an example for you.

He has shown in his life how we are to live. And then, that is a disciple. And those of us who are called to teach the word of God, that is, every elder of every church, what is their calling? It says here in verse 20, Matthew 28.20 Teach the people to do every single thing I commanded you.

So, I have not finished my task as an elder if I have not taught every single thing Jesus commanded. So, I have not finished my task as an elder if I have not taught every single thing Jesus commanded. It says here, only those who do these things is the promise given, verse 20, Lo I am with you always to the end of the age.

No, you see, that promise everybody takes. Oh, Jesus said he will be with me to the end of the age. Always.

But for whom it is given? It is not given for everybody. You read to whom it is given. If you go and make disciples, and you don't have to be a preacher to do that.

You can be a college student and make a disciple in college. You can be a college student and make a disciple in college. You can tell them about Jesus.

Tell them how you followed Jesus and how they can follow Jesus too. And to have the boldness to do that, you must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, you cannot have the boldness to do it.

When I was 21, I was just 2 years after my baptism. I wanted to witness to the Lord, but I didn't have boldness. I began to seek and seek for the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire.

God met with me. That is how I got boldness. Otherwise, I was a very shy person, not willing to speak boldly to others.

So, if you are like that, you must seek God for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. That's what changed me. And it will change you.

And it changed those 120 disciples on the day of Pentecost. They were sitting inside closed doors before that. Afraid.

Afraid to witness. When they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they threw the doors open and they came out and began to boldly witness. The same thing happened to me and the same thing happened to you.

And I fear that many many of us have not filled with the Holy Spirit like that. When we come to the meetings and we want to hear the word of God, all that is very good. But you are supposed to be a flaming fire for God wherever you are living or working.

But you are not ashamed to let everybody know that you are a follower of Jesus Christ. I know when I was in the Navy, I knew that if I want to be a witness like that for Christ, my chances of promotion will go down. My salary will not go up.

I have to make some decisions. What is more important for me? Advancement in my profession and a higher salary or being a bold witness for Christ? I thank God I made the right decision 60 years ago. And you do like that, the Lord will be with you always.

It says here, till the end of the age. So through the centuries, churches have gone down spiritually because they stopped proclaiming the way as a narrow way. We don't have to make the way more narrow than what Jesus made it.

See the Pharisees for example, had so many traditions which Jesus threw away. It's all rubbish. Important things they didn't obey.

But they made silly rules like you must wash your hands up to your elbows before you eat. Criticizing Jesus' disciples because they were not doing that. Or why do you proclaim a grain on the Sabbath day? But more important things like, don't squeeze rent out of that poor widow who has rented your house.

Those type of things they were not serious about. They were serious about rituals and traditions which did not cost them anything. I want to speak the truth.

It's possible my brothers and sisters that your Christianity is costing you nothing. You are glad to be in a good church. It's such a wonderful church, it doesn't even take an offering.

And we can come for conferences, everything is free. And year after year after year there is no passionate witness for Christ where you are living and working. You have to ask yourself whether you yourself are walking the narrow way.

If you preach everything that Jesus taught, it will become a narrow way. See if you turn to Matthew chapter 7, where he spoke about the way is narrow that leads to life. Verse 14, where did he say it? At the end of Matthew chapter 5, 6 and 7. Which people call the sermon on the mount.

So, what he is saying at the end of this sermon, he is saying what I have told you so far is a very narrow gate and a narrow way. And if you go through Matthew 5, 6 and 7, you will see it is true. It's a very narrow way.

You have to overcome anger. You have to overcome dirty sexual thoughts. You have to love your enemies.

You have to forgive everybody who has harmed you. When you do anything good, don't let other people know about it. You must never be anxious.

You must not love money. Isn't that a narrow way? Even any one of these things by themselves is a narrow way. And the Lord said people will not preach that as you come to the end of time.

They will turn away from the truth. And the truth is all that Jesus taught. Why do they make the way broader? They say it's not anger.

It's not such a serious thing. Everybody gets angry once in a while. It's not serious.

But what did Jesus say? Let us take one example. Anger. Matthew 5, 22.

He compares it to murder in the Old Testament. Verse 21. Old covenant was don't commit murder.

But I am telling you, don't get angry. He is comparing it with murder in the Old Testament. To me the meaning is like this.

As seriously as the Israeli people took murder, I must take anger just as seriously. If I get angry with somebody, it's like an Israelite going and killing somebody. How many Christians take it like that? How many preachers take it like that? If you get angry with your brother, you are guilty.

That is in your heart, anger. Now if it comes out of your mouth and you say something bad to him, then you are more guilty to a supreme court. And again if you go and say something in anger, more than that, then you can go to hell.

How many people preach that anger can be the first step to hell? Have you heard it anywhere other than CFC? I have not heard it. This is what I mean by now. And this is what people try to make broad saying, you can't take anger seriously.

Everybody gets angry. It's not so serious. Some of you may not say it, but that's how you behave.

It's normal for all married couples in the beginning to get angry with each other. Especially when they have a baby. All types of things that irritate them.

Now if they take it seriously and say, Lord I repent that this is wrong, then there is a hope that maybe after a few years they will overcome it completely. It won't happen in one day, but it will definitely happen in a few years. I know because it happened in my life.

I also know people who even after 20 years of married life, they still get angry with each other. So what should they say? They should say, well this is not so serious. And gradually they make the way broader.

Because more people come in. Somebody says I am getting angry. Oh that's ok brother.

Everybody gets angry. I also get angry. Don't worry.

And like that more and more people come to the church. And not a single one of them is interested in overcoming anger. Is that the type of church we are building? Someone will come up, God will raise up somebody to preach the narrow way once again.

And that's what's happened throughout the generations in the last 20 centuries. When a church begins to die, just like the church in Ephesus, God will raise up someone to proclaim the narrow way again. And after 30-40 years it declines again.

And again God is to start anew. And that's how all these denominations have started. Now we don't have to worry about what happened in the 2000 years.

But we have to worry about ourselves. Are we preaching discipleship in our churches? Are we preaching all that Jesus taught in our churches? Or are we keeping quiet about some things and gradually the way becomes broader? That's what we need to think about seriously.

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