

(The Full Gospel) 14. Warnings to the Church for the Last Days

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen warns the church about the dangers of the antichrist in the last days, emphasizing the need for holiness, daily sacrifice, and discernment between true and false prophets.

Scripture: Psalm 121:3, Proverbs 26:27, Daniel 11:31, Matthew 5:22, Luke 16:13, Acts 20:29, Romans 6:14, Ephesians 6:12, Hebrews 12:3, 1 John 2:18, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "End Times", "Church Sanctity"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the warnings found in Daniel 11:31-35 regarding the spirit of the antichrist infiltrating the church, defiling it with impurity, opposition to holiness, and disregard for God's covenant. He emphasizes the importance of standing firm for holiness, righteousness, and against corruption within the church, even in the face of opposition and persecution. Poonen highlights the need for a Daniel-ministry that leads others to righteousness and warns against a Lucifer-ministry that sows discord, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a daily sacrifice, facing persecution with faith, and trusting God's judgment on those who defile the church.

Transcript

"The forces (of the antichrist) will defile the holy place and put a stop to the daily sacrifices....He will flatter those who disregard the covenant of God, and thus win them over to his side.

"But the people who know their God will be strong and do great things. And those with spiritual understanding will have a wide ministry of teaching in those days. But they will be in constant danger, many of them dying by fire and sword, or being jailed and robbed.

"Eventually these pressures will subside, and some ungodly men will come, pretending to offer a helping hand, only to take advantage of them. And some who are the most gifted in the things of God will stumble in those days and fall. (Daniel 11:31-35 - TLB).

This is a passage that refers to the last days, and so there are many warnings that can be found therein for the church - for the spirit of the antichrist will be found even within the church (1 John 2:18, 19).

Defiling the Church with Impurity

The spirit of the antichrist seeks to "defile the holy place" (verse 31). There is tremendous opposition to the message of holiness and righteousness from Satan. The spirit of the antichrist also encourages "disregard of the covenant" (verse 32). The new covenant promises a life of victory over sin. But the antichrist tells believers that it is impossible to live such a life.

The main reason why our own ministry as a church has been opposed in the last two decades throughout India, has been because we have preached holiness and righteousness. We have proclaimed the fact that "sin need not be master over us any longer" (Romans 6:14), that "those who love money cannot love God" (Luke 16:13), that "those who are angry with and despise others are guilty enough to go to hell" (Matthew 5:22), that "those who lust after women with their eyes are also in danger of perishing in hell" (Matthew 5:28, 29), etc. Since these words of Jesus are unpalatable to the vast majority of believers, they have opposed us.

We have stood against the unScriptural salary system for Christian workers (something that was unheard of in the first century) and the unScriptural begging for money that characterises Christian work in India. This has earned us the wrath of those who make a living through their preaching, and who build their private empires thereby.

We have also stood against personality-cults in the church, popery, denominationalism, Western domination of churches in India, and the unhealthy dependence on Western leadership that has hindered the development of the church here. This has infuriated the cultistic groups.

Satan's aim is to corrupt God's sanctuary in one way or the other. He places his "forces" (Daniel 11:31) within the church, in order to destroy God's work from within. The history of Christendom reveals how these forces have succeeded in corrupting group after group, and movement after movement, through all these 20 centuries.

The main reason for the church's failure has been that the watchmen whom God appointed in the church did not remain alert and awake. How did Satan succeed in putting these watchmen to sleep? In some cases, by making them afraid to speak the truth lest they offend some people - especially the rich and the influential. In some other cases, by making them wife-pleasers, and lovers of money and of good food.

In some cases, the watchmen themselves got tired of facing constant opposition to their message, as they sought to maintain God's standards in the church. And so they toned down their messages to please men.

In Hebrews 12:3, we are told to consider Jesus "Who endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that we may not grow weary and lose heart". Who were these sinners who opposed Jesus? They were not the prostitutes or the murderers or the thieves in Israel. Nor were they the Romans or the Greeks. No. The sinners who opposed Jesus constantly, were the Bible-thumping preachers and religious leaders in Israel. They were jealous of Jesus and finally killed Him.

If we follow Jesus, we will face opposition from the same group of people even today. Our greatest opposition will come from the preachers who have lowered God's standards and corrupted the church. These will be Satan's chief agents to oppose us. It is very easy for us to get tired of facing this constant opposition, and to get discouraged.

Satan tries to "wear down the saints of God through persecution" (Daniel 7:25). The only way to overcome is by looking at the example of Jesus Who faced opposition constantly, until He was killed by His enemies.

We too must be willing to "be faithful unto death". Any preacher who is unwilling to face opposition until the end of his life, will end up as an ear-tickling preacher, who will "flatter people to win them over to his side" (Daniel 11:32), and end his days as a compromising Balaam.

Our calling as a church is to preserve God's standards at any cost in our midst. We have to be on guard against the forces of the antichrist at all times. Paul had preserved the church in Ephesus in purity, by God's grace, during the three years that he was there. But he told the elders when he was leaving that he was certain that corruption would come in, after his departure (Acts 20:29-31). And sure enough, it did, as we read in the Second letter to the Ephesians (Revelation 2:1-5).

The Daily Sacrifice

We read further in Daniel 11:31, that one of the things that the antichrist will put an end to is "THE DAILY SACRIFICE".

Jesus constantly spoke to His disciples of a daily sacrifice - a daily sacrifice that he Himself had in His life: "If anyone will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross DAILY...." (Luke 9:23).

This message has been eliminated by Satan from Christendom. And so the holy place has been corrupted. When the preaching of the cross disappears from any church, sin and worldliness soon take over.

The way into the most holy place lies through the rent veil (the crucified flesh). There is no other way to dwell with God, The Most Holy One. That was the way for Jesus - and there is no other way for us either.

Did you take up the cross yesterday? Maybe you did. But that was sufficient only for the evil appointed for you to face yesterday (Matthew 6:34).

Today is another day. And you have to offer your body and your self-will as a sacrifice again today. Today you have to die to your lusts, to your anger, to your pride, to your love of money, to your love of man's honour, to your bitterness etc. These lusts are still present in your flesh, and will be with you as long as you live. That is why you need to have "a daily sacrifice", right until the end of your earthly life.

Is there a daily sacrifice in your life?

If not, the spirit of the antichrist has certainly deceived you.

Jesus was anointed with the Spirit at the same time as He was baptized in water. Jesus being immersed in the River Jordan symbolised His accepting death and burial. This was to teach us that the way to live under the Spirit's anointing was by accepting death to Self.

In baptism, we are pushed into the water in God's Name, and we accept it, knowing that the one who pushes us into the water will also lift us out of it. So must it be when we face situations in life where we are pushed down and oppressed in any way. We must recognise that God is "delivering us over to death for Jesus' sake" in such situations (2 Corinthians 4:10, 11). And when we accept death to our self-life, we can be certain that the God Who led us into that death will raise us up too.

If those who had been baptised in the Holy Spirit in past decades had maintained the daily sacrifice in their lives and in their churches, they would have had tremendous power and influence for God in our land. But Satan succeeded in sidetracking most of them, by leading them to emphasise speaking in tongues,

healing, working-up of the emotions, and various forms of religious activity, instead of the way of the cross.

The only way to overcome Satan, and to preserve the power of God in our lives, in our homes and in our churches, is by maintaining the daily sacrifice at any cost, without any compromise whatsoever.

Those who have read the HIDDEN TREASURES paper over the years have read this message of "taking up the cross daily" again and again. But very few among them have been gripped by it.

Herod "used to enjoy listening to John the Baptist" (Mark 6:20), because John the Baptist was a fiery preacher, interesting to listen to, unlike the boring Pharisees. Many enjoy reading HIDDEN TREASURES for the same reason. But they do not become any more spiritual than King Herod!!

There are some who read HIDDEN TREASURES in order to get fresh points - which they don't find in other books - for their sermons. Since God Himself has said that He is against those who steal messages from others (Jeremiah 23:30), there is very little hope for such preachers - who are always looking out for points for their sermons, instead of judging themselves and allowing God to speak to their own need.

If, for example, you are offended because someone did not give you the respect that you think you deserve, or because you were not given some position of responsibility in the church, that is a clear indication that the daily sacrifice has been eliminated from your life. If you die to Self, you will never get offended with anything or anyone at any time.

True and False Prophets

We read in Daniel 11:32, that those who are influenced by the spirit of the antichrist will use smooth words (flattery) to draw people to themselves. The one unmistakable characteristic of every false prophet in history has been flattery. And the one unmistakable characteristic of every true prophet has been rebuke. False prophets flatter people in order to win them to their group, or to build their own kingdoms, or to get honour, or to get money, etc., Many of these false prophets correspond faithfully with people, in order to retain their personal hold over them. Their letters will not however contain words of rebuke and correction (like the letters of the Lord and of the apostles contain - as we read in Revelation 2 & 3 and the epistles). They will only contain words of appreciation, commendation and flattery.

Remember that smooth words will only defile your heart with pride and self-satisfaction. Words of rebuke on the other hand will cleanse your heart and make it pure. Jesus said "Those whom I love, I reprove and I discipline" (Revelation 3:19). Rebuke is one mark of Divine love.

When God sends a prophet into our midst, to rebuke us, that is a proof of the fact that God loves us. When God forsakes a church, it will "no longer have a prophet in its midst" (Psalm 74:1, 9) to rebuke it. Instead, it will have preachers who preach smooth words (2 Timothy 4:3, 4). That is a sad condition for any of God's people to be in.

In Revelation 2 & 3, we see that even though five of the seven churches there were in a bad shape, yet the Lord had not forsaken them as yet. The proof of this is seen in the fact that He sent a prophet (John the apostle) to rebuke and correct them through his letters.

John had strong words even for the elders - words such as, "You have left your first love....ou are spiritually dead....ou are wretched and poor and blind and naked". If those elders and those churches did not respond to those words of rebuke, and repent, they would be forsaken.

Once the Lord "takes away the lampstand" (Revelation 2:5), He will not send His prophets to rebuke that church any more. The false prophets will then take over, and smooth words will be heard regularly at the meetings, Sunday after Sunday!! This has happened in church after church, in generation after generation, throughout these twenty centuries. And it is happening all around us today.

It is at such a time, that there is a great need for those "who know God, who are strong, and who will do great things for Him" (verse 32). Because they know God, they will fear no man. But there is only one way to know God - and that is through the daily sacrifice. The veil has to be rent if we are to enter into the Most Holy Place where God dwells. So don't ever allow the daily sacrifice to be taken away from your life.

If your husband or wife treats you badly - DIE. When you suffer unrighteously - DIE. If your brothers betray you and hate you - DIE. As you die to your Self-life, you will get to know God and Jesus better.

The Right Attitude Towards Our Enemies

Even if people scheme against you to harm you, you don't have to worry. God will take care of you and He will deal with your enemies as well.

"He Who keeps you will neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:3, 4)

And since God is constantly awake, we can afford to go to sleep.

In the book of Esther, we read of Haman and his wife staying awake a whole night, scheming and plotting against Mordecai and preparing a 75-foot gallows to hang Mordecai on. (A 10-foot gallows is actually sufficient to hang a man. But they made a 75-foot one, so that everyone in the city would be able to see the hanging, so that Mordecai would be humiliated even further). But Mordecai was fast asleep, and God took care of him. The gallows that Haman prepared for Mordecai finally became the very gallows on which Haman himself was hung (Esther 5:14; 7:10). God is an expert at turning the tables on Satan.

Your enemies may go from house to house, speaking evil against you, scheming your harm, and even seeking to "hang" you. But you need not fear. They themselves will hang on the gallows they prepare for you.

We have seen time and again, that those who have secretly schemed against us in the church have had the tables turned against them always. We haven't found any delight in seeing such brothers hang on the gallows that they prepared for us. We have always forgiven them and blessed them, and hoped that they would repent and find their way back into the church. But God's laws cannot be changed: "The man who sets a trap for others will get caught in it himself. If you roll a boulder down on someone, it will roll back and crush you. God catches the wise in their own craftiness" (Proverbs 26:27 - TLB; 1 Corinthians 3:19).

No-one can avoid reaping what he has sown.

So what should we do, when people plan to hang us?

SLEEP!! For "God gives His beloved sleep" (Psalm 127:2).

In Acts 12, we read of Herod imprisoning Peter, planning to kill him the next morning. But God gave Peter sound sleep that night (verse 6). The angel of the Lord then went down, woke Peter up, released him and sent him home (verse 7). But that is not the end of the story. The angel of the Lord paid a second visit to earth, and this time he smote Herod and killed him (verse 23)!! God turns the tables on Satan again and

again.

Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. But what happened to Judas? He died even before Jesus died (Matthew 27:5).

If you fear God, you need not fear the Hamans or the Herods - or even the Judas Iscariots - who plot your harm.

No-one can fight against God - or against God's church - and succeed. Many have tried to do that in past years - but they have all failed, without a single exception. We are on the victory side.

Persecution is Inevitable

That does not mean that we will never be persecuted or killed. We read in Daniel 11:33, that in the last days, godly people will be attacked, imprisoned and killed. True servants of God are always persecuted.

James was killed by King Herod (Acts 12:2). No angel came to set him free. Abel was killed. Every true prophet in the Old Testament was persecuted (Acts 7:52). John the Baptist was beheaded. Jesus was crucified. Stephen was stoned to death. Paul was beheaded. History tells us that Peter himself was finally crucified - and no angel came to rescue him then. As far as we know, all the apostles, except John, were killed. Many God-fearing missionaries have been killed in heathen lands.

The Bible clearly teaches that the church will go through the great tribulation before Jesus comes, and that many of God's finest saints will be killed during that time (Revelation 13:7). Some of God's finest saints have been killed in Communist lands even in our lifetime.

God's purposes are different for each person. But one thing is certain: If you desire only to glorify God in your earthly life and to walk in the will of God, you will be immortal until your life's work is done.

"Those who have spiritual understanding will have a wide teaching ministry in the last days.... Wise leaders of God's people will share their wisdom with many others." (Daniel 11:33 - TLB & GNT).

On the other hand, there will also be many in the last days "whom the Lord hates, who go around sowing discord among the brothers" (Proverbs 6:16-19). We do not fight against such people, because we refuse to fight with flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). We fight only with Satan, and we leave it to the angel of the Lord to deal with all our human opponents.

Many years ago I decided that I would never fight with any human being concerning any matter - and I have never regretted that decision. When anyone comes to quarrel with me, I either keep quiet, or get up and go away. When people accuse me by letter, I do not reply. It is sheer waste of time to reply to such people. I only forgive them, bless them, love them, AND LEAVE THEM ALONE. I want to concentrate my energies on fighting Satan. I have realised that God can deal with these agents of the Accuser better than I can. Vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19).

We read further in Daniel 11:34 that "many will join with these evil men in their hypocrisy". Many will become hypocrites in a time of persecution. They will act like wholehearted brothers when in the midst of the church, and talk about judging themselves and taking up the cross etc. But when they are in the midst of their worldly friends and their unconverted relatives, they will seek man's honour and behave with them and speak with them in such a way as to be accepted by them.

There are many believers today who having a root of bitterness within them have defiled many others in the church (Hebrews 12:15). But God has been long-suffering with all of them, and so they are all still in the church. But in due course, they will all be exposed (if they don't repent), and then they too will fall away, like others before them.

If we know God, we will remain "rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:17) - and rooted in the church too. If others hate us and betray us and kick us out of their houses, we will forgive them, love them and wait for another opportunity to serve them. And when that opportunity arises, we will be quick to grasp it, to bless them to the best of our ability. No-one will be able to make us evil. If another person's evil behaviour makes us evil, then we too become servants of Satan like him.

We are told that in the last days, "even those with insight will fall" (Daniel 11:35). But if they humble themselves and judge themselves, there will be hope even for them. They can then be "refined, purged and made pure" (verse 35). Those who don't judge themselves however will fall into Satan's hands, even though they had insight and understanding of God's ways at one time. Today is the day of grace, and those who repent and judge themselves can still ascend to great heights spiritually. But you have to be honest and you have to walk in the light.

This refining and purging will carry on until "the end of time" (Daniel 11:35), so that God can fulfil His goal of conforming us to the likeness of Christ. So we must not expect an easy time on earth, until Jesus comes. In the world we shall have tribulation - CONTINUOUSLY.

A Daniel-Ministry and a Lucifer-Ministry

Daniel (who wrote this prophecy) was one of those men whom God could use in his generation. When he was a 17-year old young man, "he determined in his heart not to defile himself" (Daniel 1:8). And when Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah saw young Daniel taking a stand for the Lord, they too got the boldness to stand for the Lord themselves (Daniel 1:11). They did not have the courage to stand on their own. But they became bold when they saw Daniel's stand. There are many people like that today, who do not have the boldness to stand for the Lord alone, but who are waiting for a Daniel to take a stand. Then they will join him.

Will you be such a Daniel? Will you say, "I will not defile myself. I will not seek to please the king, or the commander, or any backslidden elder, or anyone. I shall stand 100% for what the Word of God says."

There is a great need for a Daniel-ministry in our land today - men and women who will "lead many to righteousness" (Daniel 12:4). That verse does not refer to preachers who preach about righteousness, but to those who lead others to righteousness - by word and example.

We read in Scripture of yet another ministry - and this is the exact opposite of this "Daniel-ministry" - a "Lucifer-ministry".

In Revelation 12:4, we read that Lucifer succeeded in getting millions of angels to follow him in his rebellion against God. Why did God permit Lucifer to lead so many angels astray? So that heaven could be purged of all the disgruntled and rebellious angels. Their evil hearts would not have been exposed, had not a Lucifer arisen in their midst to lead them in their rebellion against God.

And so, even today, God will allow brothers and sisters to have a Lucifer-ministry in the church. They will be permitted by God to go around from house to house backbiting, accusing, telling lies and speaking evil,

so that all the disgruntled, rebellious and worldly believers in the church can be identified, exposed, gathered together and taken out of the church - so that the Body of Christ can be purified.

God will not stop those who are engaged in such a Lucifer-ministry from moving around the church, any more than He stopped the original Lucifer in heaven, millions of years ago. That is Divine wisdom.

We are never to fight with such brothers and sisters either. God Himself will preserve the church, and at the right time, He will destroy those who defile the church (1 Corinthians 3:17). But God is long-suffering and waits many years before He judges - because He does not want anyone to perish, but wants everyone to repent. In Noah's time, He waited 120 years. But when God does judge, His judgment will be severe.

It is foolish therefore to boast that a church has never had a split. There was a split in heaven itself, among the angels, right at the beginning. Such splits are necessary, for "there must be divisions, so that those who are approved (by God) can become manifest" (1 Corinthians 11:19).

The light has to be separated from the darkness. That is not a split. It is a cleansing. Without it, God's testimony on earth will be corrupted.

All of us can have either a Daniel-ministry - building unity and fellowship in the church - or a Lucifer-ministry - sowing discord.

We cannot be neutral. Jesus said that those who do not gather with Him are scattering people away from Him. There are only two ministries in the church - gathering and scattering (Matthew 12:30).

May we have grace and wisdom to live in these last days, as God wants us to live, so that the church can be built as a pure testimony in every place for the glory of God's Name.

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