

Deconstructing De-Conversionism

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Date: 21 June 2020

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[0 : 00] John chapter 6, if you would stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

Again, I'll read through verse 15, focusing primarily this morning on verses 14 and 15. After this, Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias, and a large crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat? He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, 200 denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, there is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many? Jesus said, have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down, and five thousand were they in number. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated, so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, this is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? The twelve disciples of Jesus Christ had left everything behind to follow him. In the eyes of the world, they were completely sold out to him. They left their jobs. They left their homes. They left behind whatever future prospects that they may have had in order to go with him and for three years to minister alongside him. And so, no one would have doubted the commitment level of these twelve men to Jesus Christ. How many of you, if God asked you, right now, would drop everything like they did to go on a mission trip that would take you far away from home for three years?

[3 : 04] That maybe you would see your family occasionally, but you may not see them at all. How many of you would be willing today to drop everything like that, like they did, in order to follow him?

But as Jesus assembled these twelve men on the evening of his crucifixion to share one last meal together with them? As they were gathered together, he looked at each one of them and he said, one of you will betray me.

And the way in which Jesus said it left no doubt that he meant what he said. He was not pulling some kind of a joke on them because John records that as he said that, he was troubled when he said it, and Jesus was rarely troubled. When he was troubled, he was truly troubled. He knew that in that room, that room that was seemingly filled with sold-out Christ followers, that one of them was a traitor.

And he was moments away from carrying out his plan to hand over the Son of God to his enemies. The disciples were confounded when Jesus said that. They wondered, they said aloud, who could it be?

They even, each of them went around and said, is it I, Lord? Is it me? Of course, we know who it was. It was Judas Iscariot. But at that time, none of them expressed any indication that they had come to any sort of realization over the course of those three years that Judas was secretly not one of them.

[5 : 01] It wasn't as if Jesus said, one of you will betray me, and immediately, all of the rest of their suspicions were confirmed. Well, we knew it. It's Judas, of course. We've seen this coming all along. They had no idea. They truly had no idea. Even as Jesus indicated that Judas was the one who would betray him, when he said, he who takes this morsel that I give him and dips it in the wine after me, it is he who is going to betray me. Even after that, still, some of the disciples thought that when Jesus told Judas to go and do what he must do, they thought that he was going to run some kind of errand for the rest of the disciples, that he was going to buy bread for them because he was their treasurer. They still didn't get it. In the eyes of everyone, even those who are closest to Jesus, in the eyes of everyone but Jesus, Judas was a committed, sold-out, devout follower of Christ. But Jesus was never fooled.

He knew the whole time. He'd always know that Judas would betray him. Judas had everyone fooled. But he could never pass one over on our Lord. And in fact, no one can. No one can. Judas reveals how close a person can be to Christ and yet not truly be saved. It wasn't that he lost his salvation because, again, he never had it to begin with. He was probably enthusiastic when he first encountered Jesus. He excitedly joined with all the other disciples in leaving everything behind in order to follow him. But over time, he must have realized that who he wanted Jesus to be and the desires and the plans that he hoped that Jesus would fulfill were not going to materialize. But Judas determined that he was going to get something from Jesus that he wanted. And so he sold him out. He betrayed him for 30 pieces of silver. A new phenomenon has hit the evangelical church over the past few years and is gaining traction. And it's called deconversionism. Deconversionism.

And so what we've seen is Christian pastors, authors, and musicians whose sermons have been heard by hundreds of thousands, whose books have sold in the upwards of a million copies, whose song lyrics have been memorized by many, whose song lyrics have been heard by many, whose song lyrics have been heard by and has been heard by many. And they've sold out. Auditoriums and arenas have come out on social media and announced that they are now questioning their faith or they've announced that they've left the Christian faith altogether. And so they share these deconversion stories. And they're shocking, especially to those of us who have listened to their sermons, who have read their books, who have listened to their music, and who have enjoyed it, to now hear all of a sudden that this person who was a blessing to me does not believe in Jesus Christ and is questioning everything about the Christian faith. And they've walked away. But as has already been pointed out with the example of Judas, this isn't a new phenomenon. This isn't a new thing. It's something truly that is as old as Christianity is. The Bible is very clear about the fact that a believer, someone who has truly undergone regeneration, that they cannot lose their salvation. Remember, Judas had everyone fooled. Even the other disciples believed that he was a sold-out follower of Jesus Christ, that he had given up everything just like they had. But Jesus knew all along that he was not truly saved. And he knew all along that he never would be. The Bible says that when you are saved, you are saved forever. And I thank God for that truth. The Bible says that when a person comes to know Christ as their Savior, they are brought into a relationship with God that guarantees their salvation and also their eternal security. That they are saved and God will keep them saved all the way into the end and then forever. To be clear, salvation is more than making a decision for Christ. Salvation is more than saying a prayer. Salvation is a sovereign act of God whereby an unregenerate sinner is renewed, is washed, is born again by the Holy Spirit. When salvation occurs, God gives the forgiven sinner a new heart and a new spirit is placed within them. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit, will cause the saved person then to walk in obedience with the Lord as they become more and more like Jesus Christ in their Christian life. Here's what the Bible has to say about this. This is where we get some of the support, of the many support for this truth that once you are saved, you are always saved. From Romans 8, beginning in with verse 30. And those, it says, whom he predestined, he also called.

And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified. This is the golden chain of salvation. Each person in the first group goes into the next, and the next, and the next, to the end, when we reach glorification. No one is left behind of those who are truly saved. Verses 33 through 34 of that same chapter say, who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies, who is to condemn. Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us? And then verses 38 and 39, again, speaking of the fact that once you're saved, you cannot lose your salvation. For I am sure

of this, I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not even you, not even yourself. You cannot separate you from the love of God from your salvation. The same God who saved you is the same God who keeps you. He's the same

[12:10] God who preserves you throughout your Christian life. The Bible also makes it clear that the church will always, in this world, be plagued by impostors. 1 John 2, 19 says, they went out from us, but they were not of us.

For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out, that it might become plain that they are not all of us. In Matthew 13, Jesus spoke of this very same thing, talking about the parable of the four soils. The point of the parable was to reveal that there are those who show signs of spiritual life, but eventually those signs go away. And he makes the connection that such people never truly were saved. They were never truly his followers. Even though they may have risen to a position of prominence, of influence in his church, that they went out from us. And if you go out from the Lord, it means that you never truly were his. You were never truly of us. And so Jesus, at this point in John 6, as we've read, he's performed an amazing miracle. It says that 5,000 men were fed, not including their wives and their children. So that puts the number upwards of around 20,000 people that Jesus fed that day with five loaves and two fish. And so obviously the people were in awe of what they had seen Jesus do, of what they had just experienced. And so they thought that the rational thing to do, the right thing to do, would be to take him that moment and to force him to become their king. But Jesus refused to take part in that plan. And instead he withdraws from them. He goes up to the mountain. We'll see next week that

Jesus and his disciples crossed over the sea that night. They got away from the crowd. The disciples crossed over by boat. Jesus crossed over the sea by foot. And the next day when they were on the other side, that same crowd, realized that Jesus was no longer there. And so they picked everything up to go and find him. And they crossed over to go and find Jesus. Well, why did they do that? Well, because they were really excited by him. They probably desired more of his bread. And so they wanted to have their bellies filled with that. They also had big plans for him. They had plans for Jesus's political career. They had hopes for him that would primarily benefit them in their current situation.

But when they found Jesus, he did not do at all what they expected him to do. He didn't perform any other miracle for them that day. Instead, what he started doing is he started getting theological with them.

He started digging into their Bibles. He started pulling out truths from it about himself and about them that didn't tickle their ears. They weren't excited much longer about what he had to say. And so we see at towards the end of chapter 6, the end of chapter 6, after Jesus has done this, that these same people who were so excited about him leave him. Let's look at that, John 6, 64 through 66.

[15:59] Jesus speaking, preaching, he said, but there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe and who it was who would betray him. And he said, this is why I told you that no one can come to me. No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the father. After this, verse 66 says, many of his disciples, many in that crowd, turned back and no longer walked with him. So here in verses 14 and 15, John reveals three marks, three marks of those who deconvert. The reason for the departure of many of these would-be disciples is often rooted in the response that they have to Jesus that is found in these two verses, verses 14 and 15. And so why is this important? Why should you continue to listen to this message? Well, for one, a question I know that as a pastor, I'm often asked, that pastors are often asked by people is, how can I know that I'm truly saved? How can I know that I'm truly saved? That's an important question. That's not a dumb question.

That's a really, in fact, I would say that's one of the most important questions that you can ask, that you need to have an answer for. In fact, I would say it is the most important question to know that you are truly saved. It's a question that scripture says that we should give serious consideration to. 2 Corinthians 13.5, the Apostle Paul, speaking to Christians, says, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves, or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail to meet the test? 2 Peter, likewise, chapter 1, verses 10 through 11, it says there, therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and

election, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall, for in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So first of all, this message is important for you so that you will analyze for yourselves whether or not your reaction is like that of the crowd who was excited about Jesus initially but then eventually departed from him.

Are these attitudes, are these marks present within you? And if they are, my hope would be that you would see that, that you would repent of your sin, that you would truly turn to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

So it's firstly important for that reason, that you examine yourself as we go through this. Secondly, it's important that as a church we understand the root cause, what is behind those who deconvert. [19:16] Are we adapting strategies and practices that lead to that kind of easy believism where people think that they've been saved merely because they've walked down the aisle towards the front, that they've repeated a prayer or something like that, and we tell them that they're saved because of those actions.

Are we caught up in that easy kind of believism just because we're so excited to see our numbers grow? Are we more concerned then with that in drawing a crowd and tickling ears than we are sharing the true gospel and encouraging those who come here to deny themselves so that they can follow Christ and better follow Christ? Are we pursuing the right kind of growth as a church? Are we taking people deeper into their knowledge of God's word of Christ and deeper into their love for him as a result of that?

Are we more concerned with making church cool and trendy and entertaining for younger generations than we are in grounding them in God's truth and answering their difficult questions and having good answers and being ready when they ask? Are we preparing them, our children, our teenagers, our young people, are we preparing them for the world that they will encounter when they leave your home, when they leave our church, when they go into the workforce, when they go to college, when they become an adult? Are we preparing them for that time right now? Thirdly, this is important because we need to be praying for and ministering to those who have claimed to have known Christ but who now say that they have left him, that they have deconverted. I know that when we hear those stories, a lot of time our first reaction is to vilify them, to pour hatred upon them. But truly, as Christians, what we should be most concerned about is their eternal situation, that they didn't know Christ.

And so we should be praying that they would know Christ. We should be praying that if we can, that the Lord would use us to share the gospel with them some more so that they would hear and hopefully that they would believe. So the main idea for this morning's message is this. Genuine conversion, genuine conversion, it's the first one in your filling, does not result in you conforming Jesus to your image, but his conforming you to his. Christ followers do not seek to use Jesus to accomplish their will, but to be used by him to achieve his. And so today's passage gives us insight into these shallow attitudes that deconversionism is rooted in.

Let's examine these attitudes. Let's examine them for, first of all, again, for yourself, secondly, for our church, and then thirdly, for one another, especially for those whom we knew were once in the church, but they have gone out from us because they were never truly of us. And so the first mark that we see here of those who deconvert is enthusiasm. Enthusiasm for Jesus that is short-lived. [22:57] Enthusiasm for Jesus that is short-lived. Again, looking at verse 14 again, it says, when the people saw the sign, that great miracle that Jesus had done, they said, exclamation point, right? This is indeed the prophet who has come into the world. They are excited.

Jesus has come. They have found him, right? You know how excited you are when you find a new restaurant in town or a good book or a good movie, and you like to be, hey, look what, I found this great place. And you're excited to be the one to be able to have found it first. And so here these people think, we've found him. We've found the great prophet, right, who was to come. And they are excited for Jesus. They had just witnessed, they had just partook of a great miracle. Again, their bellies were full. That adds to the excitement, right? You've ate a good meal. That feels good. And so they are excited for all of these reasons. They understood that Jesus was not an ordinary man to have been able to do such an extraordinary thing. They knew from Scripture also that long ago in their Old Testament, in their Scripture, in their Bibles, they knew that long ago God had made a promise. And he had made that promise to Moses that one day, one day, a prophet like him would arise from their people. In Deuteronomy 18, 18, that promise is recorded. God says, I will raise up

from them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will pour my words in his mouth. He will speak to them all that I command him. Speaking of Jesus. As we'll see later on, they didn't like the words that God put into Jesus' mouth. They'd rather put their words into Jesus' mouth. They'd rather hear him say the things that they wanted him to say.

They'd rather him be the kind of Messiah that they wanted him to be. And you know what? Things haven't changed all that much still today. Still, you'll hear people use Jesus. They'll quote him, but what they're doing often is they're misquoting him. They put words in his mouth that he never said. They put thoughts in his mind that he never pondered. They claim to speak for Jesus, but they don't truly know him. Got to be careful when we speak for our Lord. And so these people perceived that Jesus must be this one, this long-awaited, promised prophet. They were right. Moreover, they again had witnessed a miracle that seemed to gel with their perception of the Messiah that would come, that was promised again.

And there's scriptures that would lead their nation into a period of great prosperity. And so as Jesus was performing this miracle, probably one of those verses that came to mind was Psalm 132, verse 15.

[26 : 06] There the promise is made that the Messiah would provide bread for the hungry. It says, I will abundantly bless her provisions. I will satisfy her poor with bread. And so the people look at these promises. They filter them through their own desires of who they wanted that Messiah to be, what they wanted that Messiah to do. And so they concluded that Jesus must be him, this long-awaited one. And in their enthusiasm for him, they sought to then make him their king. But then, as has already been mentioned, when they heard Jesus speak the very next day about deep theological truths, and they understood that he would no longer perform miracles for them at their beck and call, their enthusiasm for him came to a sudden and abrupt end. And they left. They gave up on him. Why? Well, initially in Jesus, there was something that they were greatly attracted to. There was something that they were very enthusiastic about, which ties into the next mark of those who deconvert, which is a desire for Jesus that is self-serving. Desire for Jesus that is self-serving. Enthusiastic for the Lord that is short-lived.

Desire for Jesus that is self-serving. Again, in verse 15, perceiving then, it says that they were about to take him by force. Jesus left. The crowd, again, they're enthusiastic for Jesus. They want him. They desire him. They would support him as long as he gave them what they wanted. But once they found out that the bread would stop flowing, they started going quickly. We'll see a similar reaction to Jesus in John chapter 12 with the triumphal entry. Remember that? Jesus is brought into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Again, fulfilling prophecy. And the crowds there, they are enthusiastic that Jesus has come, that Jesus is on the scene. They lay down palm branches on the ground where that donkey was walking. They even took off their own jackets, their own cloaks to throw them on the ground. They held Jesus in such esteem. They were so enthusiastic about him on that day. They were chanting, Hosanna, Hosanna, which means save us, save us, at the top of their lungs. Save us, Lord, save us. And then they realized, as this crowd did, that Jesus wasn't going to be the kind of Messiah that they wanted him to be.

And so unfortunately, many who were probably in that same crowd chanting, save us, save us, were there in the crowd with Pontius Pilate shouting, crucify him, crucify him, crucify him. People can be so fickle, can't they? What happened? How did they lose that enthusiasm so quickly? Well, there is such a thing as loyalty that can be purchased. And so as long as Jesus fulfilled the will of the people, they wanted him.

[29 : 49] Like modern day politicians, you know, you make those campaign promises. I will give you what you want as long as you vote for me. And then once voted for, right, if they're going to be reelected, it depends upon whether or not they fulfilled the will of the people who voted for them.

Once they realized that Jesus was not going to do that, they rejected him. They wanted to, they were trying to make a deal with him, right? Keep us fed. You do what we say, what we ask, what we desire. You make our lives seem like every day is a Friday for us, and we'll be with you. We'll go with you. We'll follow you. We will say great things about you. You prosper us first, and we'll prosper you next.

Now it can be easy for us to sit here and be repulsed by such an attitude. The attitude that existed in those mobs who rejected Jesus, that mob who chanted, crucify him, crucify him.

But are we so different? Are we really that different? William Barclay, commenting on this text, said this. He said, when we want comfort in sorrow, when we want strength in difficulty, when we want peace in turmoil, when we want help when life has got us down, there is no one so wonderful as Jesus.

Then we talk to him, and walk with him, and open our hearts to him. But when he comes to us with some stern demand for sacrifice, with some challenge to effort, with the offer of some cross, then we will have nothing to do with him. When we examine our hearts, he says it may be that we will find that we too love Jesus for what we can get out of him. And when he comes to us with his great challenges and demands, we too grow lukewarm and even resentful. And he concludes by saying, this is one of the reasons why the Bible speaks so plainly of our need to deny our self and our selfish desires as Christians. Scripture records many verses that often use terms like death and crucifixion regarding our self-denial. Romans 6, 4 through 6 says, we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

[33 : 12] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. Another passage, Galatians 2, 20.

Paul there declares, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. So along with the message in Scripture about death and denial when it comes to our own desires, there is also wording about resurrection and great fulfillment when we do. But denial comes first.

It always comes first. There must be a death before there can be an abundance of spiritual life. That's the way it works.

Dying to self means desiring God's will above your own will, no matter what the case may be. And so how do you know? How do you know if you are today putting God's will above your own?

[34 : 44] Well, one way I think you can know for sure is when you stop complaining. When you stop complaining. When your times of prayer become less about your complaints with your position in life.

And in other way too, the Bible says a lot of how we're complaining is done in this way. It calls it murmuring. You guys know murmuring, right? Yeah, right, yeah.

Tell your kids, you know, it's time to go to bed, brush your teeth. Murmuring. Why? Because they don't want to go along with your will. And so murmuring is like your way to rebel in a sort of passive-aggressive way.

It's uttering and expressing doubt about your, whomever it is, parent, boss, God in our case as Christians, about what he wants you to do.

The reason why we murmur is that we really don't want to do what God wants us to do. I don't want to do that, right? Ask somebody else to do that.

[35 : 58] Or I'll pray about it, right? Just give me some time to pray about it some more. And here's the thing. And if you murmur a lot in the church, if you murmur during the sermon, that's not right.

That's not what I think. If you murmur as you read God's word, well, that was them back then. That's not me. God doesn't want me to do that. You are expressing your desire for your own will that is counter to God's will for you.

Those who deconvert often do a lot of murmuring prior to their outright rebellion. They slowly, over time, grow more frustrated with the Jesus of Scripture, with the words that he said, with the demands that he's placed on their life.

And slowly but surely, they decide, I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that. I don't believe that. I'm not going along with that anymore.

It's hard. But it's the truth. Jesus asks us not to indulge ourselves in this world, but to indulge ourselves in him.

[37 : 18] He says, I'm the treasure. I'm the pearl of great price. I'm the one who can give your life meaning and purpose. And I'm the only one who can satisfy you completely, not just in this life, but in the life to come.

So he's not asking you to deny yourself because he's cranky or strict, but because he loves you. And he knows that those who indulge themselves on the thing of this world die. And they die the second death. And they miss out on that fellowship with God now in this life and in that great fellowship that is to come when we're with him eternally in his kingdom forever. The third mark. And all of these, one leads into another. They're enthusiastic. They're enthusiastic about a set of desires that they have for Jesus. And the desires they have for Jesus is reflected in their plan.

Plans for Jesus. This is the third mark. Plans for Jesus that are short-sighted. Plans for Jesus that are short-sighted. Plans for Jesus. So again, the rest of verse 15 reveals that Jesus, knowing their plans for him, retreats away from them.

[38 : 29] He goes up into the mountain. He didn't want anything to do with their plans. He didn't want to have any part in their plans for them. Again, what was their plan? Well, we see it was to make him king.

Why? Because they hated the Romans who they were underneath, who had come in and who was occupying their land. And so they wanted Jesus to ascend to power and overthrow the Romans. They wanted to use him as a political figure to accomplish their political agenda. I've had people try to convince me how Jesus would vote or what party he would belong to. I've had Democrats try to convince me. I know you're laughing because you probably had that too. If Jesus was in America today, no doubt about it, Democrat. And I've had other people say the other thing.

No, no doubt about it. Jesus is alive today. He's a Republican. And I've seen both use him and use his words and twist his words.

[39 : 44] You've seen it too. You've seen our politicians quote scripture. What are they doing? They're using him. To support what?

Their agenda. Not his agenda. Listen, politics has been around for a long, long time. There was a lot of political things going on during Jesus' day.

You had a lot of zealous Jews who wanted an end to the Roman occupation. Now, there was a lot of benefits with being under the Roman occupation, especially during that time. There was peace. There was a lot of prosperity. There was a lot of good. But they were harsh people. And if you weren't a Roman citizen, then you were down here somewhere. And they hated it.

And imagine that. If anybody came into our country, another nation, and they occupied us, and we saw their soldiers everywhere we went, with their flag on their sleeve, right?

[40 : 41] We would be really upset about that. We would want that to change, especially in the United States of America, where we are proud of our liberty and our freedom. And thank God that we have it.

Thank God that we have it. But listen, there was a lot of those things going on during Jesus' time. And he didn't spend any of his time dealing with any of that.

He didn't. He didn't. That wasn't his primary concern. Well, what was his primary concern? Saving sinners.

Going to the lost. Sharing the gospel. Dying in their place for their sins. His primary agenda was not for any kingdom of this world.

It wasn't for the Jewish nation. It wasn't for the Roman Empire. His primary concern was for the kingdom of God. And so, yes, vote.

[41 : 46] Please vote. Pray before you vote, right? Pray for our leaders, whomever they may be.

Pray and vote according to what you believe Scripture says. The morals and the values that we are taught as followers of Christ to live by and encourage others to do the same.

But most importantly, our primary allegiance is to the kingdom of God. We don't want to be used by, or we, I should say, don't want to use Jesus to further our agenda, whatever it may be.

Our hope and our prayer would be, Lord, use me to further yours. And I'm telling you, what I believe, and I know I'm kind of stepping on some toes here.

What I believe this nation is going to be best served by is not the conversion of one group over to the other, but the conversion of people to Jesus Christ.

[42 : 50] That's the message that we want to share first and foremost. I am a Christian. I am a follower of Christ.

Let me tell you why. Let me share my testimony with you. I was dead. I was lost. I had my own agenda and my own will. Jesus found me, and he's completely transformed me forever. And, you know, I hope for peace in this world. I love my country, but what I care about most is the kingdom of God and making sure that you're ready for that.

Also, the health and wealth gospel seeks to use Jesus to achieve short-sighted plans. Well, I want to be healthy now.

I want to be wealthy now. And so they think that they can back Jesus into a corner as if he was some kind of a genie and utter the magic words by faith, and he will bless them with all kinds of great material rewards here on earth.

[44 : 01] But again, that is using Jesus to fulfill your agenda, not his. He wants to prepare us for his eternal kingdom.

And so let's be kingdom people now, seeking to share the gospel with everyone, that they would come to faith in Jesus Christ. That's what's going to be the greatest blessing to our nation and to our world, is converting people to be disciples of Jesus Christ and encouraging Christians to live more like Jesus.

Jesus Christ. You know, it breaks my heart when I've been in youth ministry for, you know, quite some time.

That's how I started and I'm still involved here because I have a love for our teenagers. I'm at the point now where some of my teenagers, more of them, with each year, they're adults.

They've graduated from college, many of them, or they're working in the workforce. You know, they're doing well. They're married.

[45 : 12] They're having kids. And it doesn't break my heart because it makes me feel old, but it breaks my heart for the ones that I knew were in our church and who I tried to share the gospel with and to see that they aren't involved in the church, that they don't go anymore, or judging by the posts that they share that they weren't truly of us.

And it's heartbreaking. And it's also convicting. Because sometimes I wonder, were we too concerned with making it fun for them?

Were we so excited when we would have a lock-in, an event, they would invite all their friends and we would play games, we would share good food, we would go do fun things, but maybe they got five or ten minutes of the gospel in that.

But we thought we had been successful. And even for the ones who grew up when I did, and afterwards in youth groups, you know, we look around at our churches today, and many of them seem to be so more concerned about enthusiasm, about bright lights, flashing lights, short sermons that are centered on people in the pew to make them feel better.

And it's no wonder. This is what we've trained them up to get used to experiencing. It's all about fun. It's all about you. It's all about making you feel good.

[46 : 48] But we've not really given them any kind of deep spiritual truth when they were kids and teenagers. And so no wonder that a lot of our churches today look like youth groups in the adult worship service.

with an attitude that asks, what's in it for me? You know, in thinking about our church, thinking about a lot of churches, when was the last time that we witnessed one of our teenagers express that they had been called to ministry?

When's the last time that we saw one of our teenagers become a missionary or a pastor? What are we teaching them?

What are we showing them in our lives, in the way in which we worship? Do we show them how great Jesus is? Are we too concerned with getting them here by making things fun for them?

Short-lived enthusiasm, self-serving desire, and short-sighted plans are the marks of those who deconvert. And so as a church, how...

[48 : 07] What can we do better is the question I think we need to ask. What can we do better? We know that God is sovereign in salvation, but we still have a responsibility. What can we do better?

Well, going to our application now. First, we see that in pursuing the best Highland Park in 2020 that we build community. Well, how do we do that?

Well, we invest in one another's lives, right? It means that I don't just see you on Sunday, but hopefully I see you throughout the week or I'm checking in on you because I really want to be a part of your life because you're my brother or sister in Christ.

And again, going to our young people. What does this mean? It means you investing in them. You taking the time to acknowledge them, to be praying for them, to speak to them.

I can think of men in my life, one in particular, who when I was a boy and a teenager, he was a single guy in his 70s, 80s, but he just cared about me.

[49 : 07] He'd always come and find me before or after church, and he would ask about whatever I was doing. He knew what I was involved with. How's baseball going? Or how's school going? Or, you know, your dad told me this happened, or whatnot. He would send me letters.

Even when I went to college, I would get a letter from him in the mail. Those types of things go a long way. Anybody can do that kind of thing. Invest in the lives of our young people.

And you may think, well, they don't care about me. I can't relate. But I promise you that they do. And I promise you that it means a lot.

And so building community, I think, isn't just building it for us here, but building it for the future generations and thinking about them. You know, one day, I'm going to go and be with the Lord. And I'm going to be with Christ. And I'm not going to be in this church anymore, but I've got to prepare the next generation who comes here to take over, to be ready to lead this church in our community and in our world until the Lord returns.

[50 : 13] Secondly, we equip believers. Again, this involves you pouring your life into somebody else. It involves us coming to church, not thinking about ourselves or our own agenda, but looking around at one another and paying attention when we ask, how are you doing?

And they say, well, I have this going on. I have this medical issue or I have this problem with work. And you know what? We listen and we don't just say, I'll be praying for you, but we actually pray for them.

And we check back up on them during the week and we equip them by caring for them and showing them God's word when they're doubting, when they're fearful, when they are anxious and just sharing God's word with them, and pouring God's word upon them as a blessing.

If you've been in a situation as a believer where another believer has done that for you, I know that it was a blessing. So let's do that. Next, share Jesus. Share the true Jesus.

Know his word. Know what he's said. When people refer to him as if he's a genie or their good buddy or their spiritual guru, remind them that, no, Jesus doesn't ask to be those types of people in your life.

[51 : 29] He says that he is your Lord and he is your Savior. As Lord and Savior, the agenda that you should care most about in this life is not your own, but his.

And so you share Jesus and you go to those who have a misconception of him or who are misquoting him and you share the truth of Jesus with them. And again, in this world, we are going to make, we pray, converts to Christ.

And it requires us to share Jesus in order to do that. And then lastly, we teach the word. Again, in order to teach the word, you must know the word. And the better you know the word, the more you're able to counter untruths.

You're better able to point people back to the truth of what God has said. Especially right now, you can talk to people about what the Bible says about justice, but one thing that we're kind of forgetting about in our nation is that just as the Bible says a lot about justice, the Bible says a lot about grace and forgiveness.

And so we are those who go and talk about the forgiveness of God, the grace of God, found only through Jesus Christ.

[52 : 44] So may our agenda always be the agenda of Jesus Christ. As we see those who deconvert, may we not vilify them, but may we seek them and pray for them.

And let's look introspectively as well. You might truly be saved and I know it's happened for me, truly being saved, but still you can wander over this way where you're still wanting to use Jesus to get what you want.

And if that's the case, you just have to repent and confess and do what the Lord has called you to do in this world as a follower of Christ.

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