

Remain True and Faithful

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of staying true and faithful to God, and warns against the dangers of halfway followers and worldly desires.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 24:13, Luke 9:62, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Galatians 3:1, Philippians 3:14, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 12:1-2, James 1:12, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Perseverance"

Description

Erlo Stegen emphasizes the importance of remaining true and faithful to Jesus Christ, warning against the dangers of backsliding and the allure of worldly distractions. He reflects on the Apostle Paul's astonishment at the Galatians' turn away from the truth, urging believers to persevere to the end. Through the stories of Nicholas from Basil and Count Zinzendorf, he illustrates the transformative power of recognizing Christ's sacrifice and the commitment to live for Him. Stegen cautions that rejecting God's call can lead to dire consequences, as exemplified by the tragic fate of Marilyn Monroe. Ultimately, he calls for a deep personal realization of Christ's suffering for our sins and a commitment to serve Him wholeheartedly.

Transcript

Gal 3:1, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?"

* "Jesus Christ clearly portrayed among you as crucified"

Many Christians follow their Lord halfway and then backslide. That breaks the heart when people are not faithful and true to the Lord Jesus Christ. And it even seems to be the fashionable thing nowadays to fall back. But it is abominable and detestable. Jesus said in Luke 9:62, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Remember Lot's wife. The angels had dragged her out of Sodom but she still looked back. And she was turned into a pillar of salt for her sin.

The Lord's word consistently says that only he who perseveres to the end will be saved.

This verse's emphasis is on 'you'. Who has bewitched you to turn back. This astonished Paul for the Galatians were considered to be a very advanced and bright people. Others who are ignorant might turn back, but not you Galatians! That you should turn back is shocking and astonishing.

We are sometimes very impressed with a person's outstanding testimony; or a congregation's outstanding testimony as being on fire for God. And we might expect others to fall back but not such a one. But many times it is that very person or congregation who disappoints terribly. Such a thing is shocking and astounding.

Nicholas from Basil was born to an upperclass family. His father was very wealthy. When he was thirteen he went to some Easter services and they spoke about Jesus' suffering for our sins. It touched him deeply. On his way home he bought a crucifix and put it in his bedroom next to his bed. And every night he knelt before his bed and prayed. He looked at the crucifix and meditated on Christ's suffering for him. It touched him into his innermost being and was burnt into his soul.

And that was how he fell asleep and awoke again the next morning. This became a habit for years to come and he continued in the faith. Then his father pulled him into his business and he started to forget about his faith. When he was twenty his father died and four years later his mother died. It was very painful and he was drawn to Christ once again for a time. The time came for him to marry, but his bride's father refused the marriage for 6 years. He also became more and more worldly during that time and forgot his childhood faith.

After six years his bride's father agreed to the marriage. However, the night before the wedding he meditated on Jesus' suffering and took stock of his life. He met God that night and confessed, "Lord Jesus you should be my first love, but now I have this first love towards my bride. And money, business and parties take all my time." He confessed his struggle frankly to God. It was a great struggle. And he said, "Lord I repent now. From now on I want to live for You only." The next day he sent word to her and her family that they wouldn't get married anymore.

They were devastated and said that he was mad. A few days passed and then he called for her and explained to her what happened to him that night and why he cancelled the wedding. He lived for God from that day onwards. He got himself a Bible, left his business and went to preach the Gospel. At that time the pope was supreme ruler over the church and anybody disobeying him was ex-communicated and sometimes killed and refused a burial. Nicholas had four friends. They hid in the mountains of Switzerland for they were hunted to be killed.

But they spread the Gospel even as far as Holland. Often Nicholas himself won't be able to go but then he would send letters to strengthen the believers. He still lived for another 60 years and spread the Gospel during that time. At one time he requested an audience with the pope to speak to him about the state of Christianity and the lukewarm lives of Christians. He and his friends told the pope that he should do something about the Christians living in sin. The pope at first got angry and asked what he should do?

They replied that he should firstly repent from his own sin, and then they went through a list of specific sins he had to repent of. Then they preached the Gospel to the pope. He became meek, embraced them and requested them to stay on as his advisors. But they declined. However they warned him that unless he repented of those sins he would die before the year was over. He quickly forgot about them, did not repent of his sins and died before the year was over. Nicholas and his friends were known as the friends of God.

That was their reputation. Two of his friends were arrested. At the trial Nicholas received wisdom from God how to answer and they were not executed. When he was already past 90 he was arrested with some of his friends. The court asked Nicholas to condemn his friends as heretics. He refused and then added, "even if you should burn us alive we will awake with Jesus." And that was how he died.

The actress Marilyn Monroe was visited by Billy Graham during a presentation of a show. He said the Spirit of God had sent him to preach to her. After hearing what the Preacher had to say, she said, "I don't need your Jesus". A week later, she was found dead in her apartment, having died a horrible death.

God is not mocked.

If God speaks to you, woe to you if you reject it for death might be very close, even at the door.

When one studies the painting of the crucifixion by the famous Dutch artist Rembrandt, your attention is first drawn to the cross and to Jesus with the words from Is 53:5, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." Then, as you look at the crowd around the cross, you are drawn to the faces of the people involved in the awful crime of crucifying the Son of God. Finally, your eyes drift to the edge of the picture and catch sight of another figure - almost hidden in the shadows. This, we are told, was a self-portrait of Rembrandt, for he recognized that by his sins he helped nail Jesus there!

Someone has aptly said, "It is a simple thing to say that Christ died for the sin of the world. It is quite another thing to say that Christ died for my sin!" Have you realized that Jesus was nailed to the cross because of your sin? Has it been revealed to you that He bore your sin on the tree?

During his Grand Tour Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700 - 1760) visited an art museum in Dusseldorf where he saw a Domenico Feti painting titled Ecce Homo, "Behold the Man". It portrayed the suffering Christ with the subscript, "This have I done for you - now what will you do for Me?" The young count was profoundly moved. He felt as if Christ himself was speaking those words to his heart. He vowed that day to dedicate his life to service to Christ. He had money and fame - everything the world could offer him. But that day he made a full surrender at the feet of Jesus.

There followed an intense and powerful experience of renewal, often described as the "Moravian Pentecost". During a communion service at Berthelsdorf, 1727, the entire congregation felt a powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, and felt their previous differences swept away. This experience began the Moravian renewal, and led to the beginning of the Protestant World Mission movement. We will only find out in heaven the full impact of his life but only two men John and Charles Wesley found Christ through the Moravian Church.

May the death and passion of Christ revolutionise your life that you lay down your life for Him.

* "Who has bewitched you?"

To be bewitched. In Greek the word is "baskaino". It means to fall under a spell, and that you won't like somebody else to have something nice - jealousy. It also has two roots. One being resistance and rebellion - not being one with another, but rebelling against what the other says. Secondly to speak a lot about things you do not know about because of haughtiness to lift yourself up. This particular word is only used in Gal 3:1.

The Native Africans know what it means to be bewitched. When a wife has a hard time with her husband she goes to the witchdoctor and he cuts her in certain places. Then he takes human parts not fit to mention and tells her to put it into his food and it will tame him. It causes him to become weak and he could even die. As she then runs the business at home some of the neighbours would ask, what has become of him that he is so weak and bewitched. He lost all manly strength and can no longer lead the

home.

May God grant us not to be bewitched but be upright, strong and manly - living for God and staying true and faithful to Him.

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