

The Danger of Drifting

by Stephen Olford

The sermon warns against the danger of drifting in the Christian life, highlighting the consequences of complacency, worldliness, and indifference, and calling for a life of discipline, vigilance, and attention to God's voice and salvation.

Duration: 31:15

Scripture: Exodus 34:29-35, Psalm 19:14, Luke 9:34-35, John 15:2, Hebrews 1:1-3, Hebrews 2:1-4

Topics: "Drifting"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the danger of drifting in the Christian life. He emphasizes that drifting occurs when there is indiscipline, inattention, and indifference towards spiritual matters. The preacher warns against academically criticizing the sermon without being spiritually engaged. He also highlights the importance of not neglecting the great salvation offered by God and urges the audience to heed God's warnings and woosings. The sermon references the Epistle to the Hebrews, specifically chapter 2, verses 1-4, to support the message.

Transcript

In a little while you will be hearing Pastor Stephen Olford speaking on the topic, The Danger of Drifting. In preparation for that, we will read from God's words, Hebrews 1, verses 1 to 3, and then chapter 2, verses 1 to 4. God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world. Who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.

Chapter 2, verses 1 to 4. Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was said past, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him. God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.

May God add his blessing to this reading of his own holy word. Let us bow together in prayer. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight.

O Lord, our strength and our redeemer, for thy blessed name's sake. Amen. Will you turn with me, please, to the second chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in verses 1 to 4. This the opening Sunday of our Christian Life Convention.

I feel that we should look together at a passage which perhaps explains the purpose and reason for such a convention as we envisage throughout the coming days. A convention is distinguished from a conference in that a conference is the gathering together of people to confer about certain matters and certain truths, whereas a convention is the gathering together of delegates for the transaction of business. A convention isn't so much for the teaching of truth as the applying of truth and challenging and calling for a verdict.

It is the ministry of exhortation primarily in focus at a convention. And I believe that we need conventions to bring home to our hearts that which has been taught us week by week in our churches, in our own quiet times, and anywhere else where we have had the unfolding of the truth of God. And you say, why? Well, because in all of our lives, including the preacher, there is a danger of drifting.

If you don't agree with that, I somehow feel you will by the time we have finished today, if God says to you what he's been saying to me from the words which are before us. So I'm going to invite you to read with me then these words again in verse 1 from Hebrews chapter 2. Therefore he says we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away, as the word is. It's a nautical term.

Lest at any time we should drift away. My dear friend, God has called you to a life of full salvation. The text before us tells us that God has provided us so great salvation.

Dr. Barabas, who has written up perhaps the greatest and most classical work on the whole Celtic movement and convention movement of our time, has entitled his book, So Great Salvation. You notice that the word is neglect so great salvation. I want to ask this morning, are you living in the fullness of God's so great salvation? I'm not asking whether you have rejected it, I am asking whether you are neglecting it.

Are you living in the conscious, glorious realization of a full salvation in Jesus Christ? If you aren't, then you're drifting. Under the pressure of persecution, the Hebrew Christians to which this epistle is addressed were in danger of going back from Christianity to Judaism. And among other reasons, this epistle was written to warn the most solemnly of the consequences of backsliding.

And there are seven distinct passages throughout this Hebrew epistle concerning this matter of backsliding. And the one we're considering this morning constitutes the first. And the particular danger exposed is that of drifting, as I've said already.

The writer obviously knew something of this danger of drifting, and therefore warned his readers to beware of drifting, drifting away from the claims of God's salvation, this so great salvation. Just like a boat, which has lost its anchorage, and its rudder, and its power, begins to drift with a tide, with a current, with a stream. So it's possible for every man and woman and young person in this audience who names the name of Jesus Christ to begin to drift, first imperceptibly, almost unconsciously, until you discover that you're beyond that point of recovery outside of the glorious grace and restoration of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore he says we ought to give the most earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away. To my mind no more relevant warning could be spoken than this to the Church

of Jesus Christ in the world today, and in particular to our beloved United States. I was talking to Mr. Stacy Wood yesterday, asked him what his impressions were after a trip he has taken around the country, and he says to my mind one of the greatest and most serious things I've discerned in coming back after a year or so to this country is the drift away in the Church of Jesus Christ amongst our evangelical life.

A drift away from absolute conviction in the certainty and authority and infallibility of the Word of God. A drift away from the ideals of holiness to worldliness, carelessness, and indifference. And if he says that, I'm sure you say it too if you have a discerning eye, living in our age and our hour.

And so I want to invite you to consider with me first of all the possibility, the possibility of drifting. Lest at any time we should drift away. The words are better rendered, lest possibly we drift away.

Here then we have the possibility of drifting. And the danger of drifting is something then that can actually happen. Actually happen.

Lest possibly we should drift away. One of the most sobering facts of the Christian life is that having trusted my Savior as Savior and Lord, having been regenerated by the Holy Ghost, having been cleansed by the blood, having been established in the Word, having been planted in the local church, I can drift away. And you can drift away.

To illustrate this, God has given us on record numerous examples of people who actually drifted away from the claims of spiritual things. And we could take all morning, all afternoon and evening, discussing some of these examples. Let me touch on three very briefly.

Think for instance of Lot. Lot was a righteous man, or in New Testament language, a committed man, a Christian man. The study of his life makes it quite clear, moreover, that he never intended to be involved in the sins and evils of Sodom and Gomorrah, the great cities of his day.

But through lack of vigilance and discipline, he was carried gradually downstream in a drift, which is marked by the following. The cause of his drift was, first of all, carelessness. Carelessness.

He pitched his tent towards Sodom. What's wrong with that? Can there be any harm in that? Surely I can be a witness to this great city. And he pitched his tent towards Sodom with every intention of bearing a witness to his God.

But then we read that it developed into worldliness. He dwelt in Sodom, began to become involved in all the affairs and the climate and defilement of Sodom. And then we read, and listen to this carefully.

He pitched his tent towards Sodom. He dwelt in Sodom. He sat in the gate of Sodom.

Carelessness. Worldliness. Spinfulness.

All in a drift. Think of Samson. Samson was a Nazarite unto God, a consecrated man.

While he maintained his vow, he rent a young lion like a kid. On another occasion, with the jawbone of an ax, he slew a thousand men. He carried away the great gates of Gaza upon his shoulders.

Such was the manifestation of physical strength through the power and endowment of the Holy Ghost. But the day came when he lightly treated those holy vows, and he began to drift. It started with an unclean contact.

He ate honey from the carcass of a lion. That led to an unholy companionship. He loved a woman.

He loved a woman whose name was Delilah. That led to an unwise conversation. He told Delilah, if I were shaven, then would my strength go.

And in the embrace and arms and glamorized sex and lust of a woman who had captivated his thoughts and emotions, his head was shorn. And he became as other men and lost the vow of God upon him and the blessing of God upon his life. He lost his sight.

His eyes were put out. He lost his strength. He was as other men.

He lost his service. He ground corn for the Philistines. Think of David.

David was a man after God's own heart. As a shepherd, singer, and king, he boasted of no other ambition than that of fulfilling all the will of God. And yet he drifted.

You can follow the wake of that drift in one of the saddest chapters in the Bible. It began with indolence. David carried in Jerusalem.

Instead of being at the forefront of the battle, fighting for God, he was lazy and remained back home. And then that led to immorality. David sat on the roof of his palace and watched a beautiful woman take a bath.

He looked, but he looked too long and sin conceived in his heart. And this man, after God's own heart, moved from indolence to immorality and from immorality to infamy for on top of his adultery, David committed murder. All because he drifted.

What a terrible thing it is to drift. No wonder the apostle Paul cautions the Corinthian readers with these words, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, take heed, lest he fall. It can actually happen, beloved.

Furthermore, it can easily happen, lest possibly we should drift away. The figure of drifting, which the apostle uses in this particular passage, is a nautical term, as I pointed out. It's very significant.

We all know what it is to lie back in a boat in the water and just drift. Someone has said that drifting is the quickest and easiest and most delightful way of dying. Perhaps this is why so many Christians are fond of drifting away from the so great salvation.

It's so easy to drift. No one would think of blaspheming the name of Jesus Christ. No one would think of carrying to pieces the authority of the word of God.

No one would think of leaping into some great immoral act. But it's so easy just to lie back and to drift and to drift and to drift. It can actually happen.

It can easily happen. Tell me, are you drifting, my friend? Are you drifting? You can easily tell. Are you conscious of a daily, hourly resistance against the currents of evil within and without? If so, rejoice, and by the power of an indwelling Christ, accept the bowels of your boat against that current and go through with God.

Cross what it will. On the other hand, if you're not conscious of effort and discipline living in the sense of standing against every kind of evil that comes your way, then you're drifting in disaster, inevitable disaster, awaits you. Oh, you say, but it hasn't happened.

No, it doesn't always happen as quickly as that. Ahab, who sinned in his heart as no king in all of Israel, was slain, and the dogs licked his blood three years after condemnation was pronounced upon him. But his wife, Jezebel, who was even more wicked than he, she lasted 20 years, but the inevitable end came.

She was thrown out of the window. She was thrust asunder. She was gone over and over with the wheels of a carriage.

The dog ate everything except a miserable head in her two palms. God has his payday, and drifting inevitably ends with disaster. So much then for the possibility of drifting, but the text takes us further and suggests the process of drifting.

And because of time, I want to just pass through on this with a touch here and there, but ask you to follow me closely. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? I want to lay hold of that word neglect for a moment. It occurs three times in the New Testament, and each time gives us a new idea and conception of its deeper meaning.

Three ideas which are inherent in this word neglect. It starts with indiscipline in the Christian life. Indiscipline.

Indiscipline denotes neglect through laziness. This is why Paul employs this word neglect when writing to young Timothy when he says, Neglect not the gift that is in thee. Neglect not the gift that is in thee.

Timothy, you're in danger. You're in danger of not using that which God has given you, not stirring it up and causing it to be used in your local assembly. Now all believers differ one from another so far as the grace of gifts is concerned, but God expects the use of discipline in the employment of those gifts day by day.

But what is true of our gifts is true of our living. It's true of our living. Indeed, there is hardly an aspect of Christian life which is not bound up with some great word of discipline.

And although I believe with all my heart in the rest of faith, and although I believe that faith in Jesus Christ in me does and can do what I can ever achieve of myself, that does not in any way excuse me or avoid me from the responsibility of carrying in my vocabulary and in my Christian living these words of discipline. To start the Christian life we must try to enter in. That word in the Greek is agonize.

Agonize. To live the Christian life we must labor to the ambition that we may be accepted of him. To set my ambition as my goal that I'm not going to brook any interference with to be accepted of him.

To know the Christian life we're to study. We're to study to be diligent to give every one of our powers to study to make ourselves approved unto God work from the feet if not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth. To win the Christian life we're to fight the good, fight the faith.

That's our Greek word again. Agonize. To strive, labor, study, fight are the key words of a disciplined Christian life.

Today's motto is take it easy. Take it easy. Take it easy.

The device of the enemy to stop the catch of Jesus Christ drifting. If they're not found in your vocabulary these words and experience your drifting and never forget that drifting is always in one direction. Always from right to wrong.

Always from light to darkness. No man ever drifted into joy. No man ever drifted into purity.

No man ever drifted into holiness. No man ever drifted into victory. No soul ever found himself flying to heaven ever effortlessly.

Indiscipline in the Christian life. That's the process of drifting but not only indiscipline in the Christian life but in the second place inattention in the Christian life. Inattention signifies neglect through heedlessness.

That's its meaning right in this passage here. This is the primary use of the word in this passage. That's why the writer says how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? It's a stage in the drift of the soul when spiritual things fail to grip the attention.

Warnings and woings of the gospel are unheeded. I'm asking a question here this morning. Tell me, can you sit through a service like this and doze? Can you sit through a service like this and say, so what? Had you got to the place where you academically criticized destructively or constructively merely the bones of the salmon, the skeleton, the team, the sequence, the delivery? Has the grip of God, has the grip of God left you? Are you not brought under a sense of awe in the presence of God, God Almighty in His temple? He is speaking.

He is breaking through from heaven. He is saying a word to you. Let me ask you, are you heeding Him? Remember that He that often being reproved hardness His neck shall suddenly be destroyed.

and that without remedy. The process of drifting comes to its full conclusion when we come to indifference in the Christian life. First indiscipline, then inattention, and then indifference.

Indifference indicates neglect through carelessness. This aspect of the meaning of the word neglect is found in a story in one of the Gospels. And there's a phrase in that story which is one word in the Greek, same word, we translate neglect.

The story you are in will remember describes how the king spread a feast in honor of his son and invited certain guests who ungraciously made light of it. Made light of it. It's the same word.

The same word. We observe that making light of food is the most serious indication of neglect. It betokens a fatal attitude of careless indifference towards spiritual things.

Like, like birds in the belfry become habituated to the sound of loudest peals and people who live on the banks of the great Niagara Falls never hear those falls, never hear those falls. Their ears have become so accustomed to the falling water and to the roar of that great fall that they don't even notice it. They don't even notice it.

And when people make light of food, when they leave the house of God after a convention meeting or after morning worship and glibly talk over their dinner tables or lunch tables about needless things, small things, small talk, small talk, you can take it from me, they've reached the place of indifference. They've drifted. So the process of drifting begins with indiscipline then glides into inattention and then, before we are aware of it, reaches indifference.

How they should make us pray for safe anchorage day by day, to fail to pray for vigilance, for discipline, for seriousness, my friend, is to come to what is our next point, the penalty, the penalty of drifting. For if the words spoken by angels were steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just

recompense of reward, how shall we escape? If we neglect so great salvation, verses two and three, the answer to that question, there is no escape. The principle of judgment which operated under the law on all transgression and disobedience in olden times is still operated today.

Don't let our cheap exposition or preaching of grace blind you to the fact that God's judgments are still in the air. On the contrary, let us be careful to see very carefully here this morning and very seriously here this morning that transgression and disobedience still receive a just recompense of reward. Transgression is the positive sin of violating the law of God in olden days.

The judgment on that was the curse. The curse implied the law of communion with God, the liability to all miseries in this life and at the last death. Daniel sums it up when he prays, All Israel have transgressed thy law, therefore the curse is poured upon us.

The oath that is written in the law of Moses in the New Testament language, John says, Sin is the transgression of the law and there is a sin unto death. And he's talking to believers. There is a sin unto death.

And he's talking to believers, regenerate men, linked with heaven, saved, cleansed by the blood. There is a sin unto death. So let us never imagine that God can condemn sin in the sinner and condone it in the saint.

The Lord shall judge his people and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. You say, well does a man then lose his eternal security? No. But if he's cut off by death or judgment because he continues to sin against God, God says, I won't deal with you anymore here as a son.

I'll meet you at the judgment seat of Christ. And as Dr. Jahan was pointing out in one of his most solemn sermons here during the prophetic conference, I agree with him. Hebrews chapter 6, that most solemn passage that is often pounded off onto apostates and so on, is the believer judged in the presence of God in that day.

Disobedience also has God's hand of judgment upon it. And if transgression meets with a curse, disobedience meets with chastening. The chastening of the Lord.

If we had time this morning, I could demonstrate from these early chapters of Hebrews three ways in which the children of Israel were chastened in the wilderness. Because of their disobedience, they never entered into God's so great salvation. Or died on the banks of Jordan.

They never went through Jordan to the land of Canaan. They never ate of the corn. They never tasted of the wine and the honey.

Except for Joshua and Caleb. They all died in the wilderness. All these things happened unto them for example.

And they are written for our admonition. For our admonition. They are marked by three things.

There was a life of restlessness. God had to swear that the children of Israel should not enter into his rest. And they moved around with ceaseless restlessness.

You never read a story of such restless people as those thousands and thousands of the children of Israel who wandered around the wilderness. It was a life of aimlessness. The record tells us that they were forty

years in the wilderness.

They camped here and then they went and camped there and they came back and camped where they were before. And from there they moved to another place and then returned again. Utter aimlessness.

Frustration. And lack of purpose and direction. Worst of all it was a life of wastefulness.

Listen to the awful words that are used to describe the wasted lives of those children of Israel whose carcasses fell in the wilderness. Chapter 3, verse 17 of this very epistle. Instead of entering into victory into the fullness and blessing of Canaan they were cut off.

They were cut off because of disobedience. The word means they fell limb from limb in the wilderness. Their carcasses bleached in the hot sun of the desert.

Why? Because of unbelief. Because they were not prepared to go through with God and through transgression and disobedience they fell short of God's best God so great salvation. In a similar way Christians can suffer the same penalty today.

It is Christ himself who uses the vivid picture of the vine and the branches when he says if a man abides not in me he is cast forth as a branch. And his women whose carcasses fell in the desert. But in a closing sentence I want to say just a word on the preventive of drifting.

The secret of course is in our original text. Therefore we ought to give a more earnest heed to the things which we have heard. Hearing Christ heeding Christ God breaks through in that glorious revelation one of the greatest statements of our whole book of Revelation the Bible.

In the opening words that we heard this morning God who at sundry times and in divers manners taken times past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us said his last word embodied everything he hath to say in time and eternity God has spoken unto us in his Son. And there's no other voice but that. That's why God blotted out Moses and Elijah and the disciples when the cloud came down on the mount of transfiguration and God said this is my beloved son hear he him.

There's no other voice but that. Not your wife not your husband not your children not your business associates ultimately it's Jesus Christ you've got to hear him before you address him. And that calls from you up to allegiance up to allegiance to everything he said.

And he's going to say a lot of things this week. A lot of things. He's saying some right now.

Question are you going to hear him? Are you going to hear him? Are you going to give him your ears? Your entire being? An utter allegiance of hearing. And then the other word of course is heeding Christ. There's no good hearing without heeding.

And if hearing calls for allegiance heeding calls for obedience. And in my judgment that word obedience sums up the total Christian life. And as Dr. Fitch of Toronto said at the great Catholic Convention last year in Chicago one point of disobedience constitutes total disobedience.

If I ascend in one point in terms of my life and say well I've obeyed this and I've obeyed that and I've obeyed the other thing I've obeyed everything that God has said except this one little thing does that really matter? That constitutes total disobedience. For if I keep the whole law and if I ascend in one point I disobey the law. And what is true under the old system is true under grace.

If there's any point in my life at which I'm not going clean through with obedience to Jesus Christ I disobey the law. Hearing Christ heeding Christ allegiance obedience in everything the preventive of drifting. Are you drifting? Are you drifting this morning? We're going to meet around the Lord's table in a moment as we bow before his presence take the bread and the wine speaking of his allegiance to his father and his obedience to his father.

I'm going to invite you to stay with me and together to stop our drifting and get back to God his son his word a life of obedience.

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