

The Terrible Tragedy of a Nominal Christian, Part 2

Luke 14:34-35

Turn over to Hebrews chapter 6 and verse 4, because this is the same warning that we hear from the writer to the Hebrews, and no doubt he's taken his cues from the Lord in delivering this warning. In Hebrews 6:4, look what it says there, warning to the drifting, to the falling away, the backsliding those who are staying out, away from the fellowship, those whose saltiness is being leached away by the pressure of the culture around them.

The writer of the Hebrews says this Hebrews 6:4, "For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened," Who's that? Those who have sat in synagogue, maybe sat underneath Jesus' teaching, or maybe some of the apostles, maybe those who have separated from the synagogue, and come to hear the apostles teach in the Jerusalem church? Who are they today, those who sit in churches, who hear truth proclaimed every single week, who come to understand that truth, and maybe

even ascent to its truthfulness. They stop short of true faith because they don't have an affection for it. They don't set their wills toward it. They don't walk after it. They don't obey it, but they do understand it. And they do assent to its truthfulness.

They've been enlightened. "It's impossible in their case, and in the case of those who have tasted the heavenly gifts shared in the Holy Spirit, tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come." Who are those? Again, back in the first century, we're talking about people who have seen Jesus' ministry. In John 6 those who ate of the miraculous supply of bread and fish, but many of them by the end of the chapter, turned away and walked with him no more. Oh, they tasted the power of the Holy Spirit, didn't they? The powers of the age to come; the power of the Word of God. How does that transfer to us today, who are not seeing those same miracles of the apostolic age and that transitionary time in the book of Acts?

What about for us? Man, anybody who sits in our midst and sees a true Christian, being sanctified, that is super natural.

If you take a snapshot of my life, before I was a Christian, and look at my life now, you think you're looking at two entirely different people. And you know what? You are. Today, you look at someone who has changed by the power of God, whose been regenerated to a new life. I'm a new creature in Christ. The old has passed away, it's dead. It's been crucified with Christ on the cross. Behold the new has come, all things have been made new and I continue to change and grow. That is done by the power of God by the power of the Spirit.

It's what is true of all of you. For an unbeliever to sit in our midst, and to see all of that and to say, Yeah, I mean I've seen the same thing in AA. Probably midlife crisis, you know, people go through troubling times, maturity can explain all that. I mean, I had a rebellious kid when he was young, and he got older, he got a job, family, wife, I mean he's totally sorted out now, same thing. There's nothing special here.

What is going on here week after week, month after month, year after year? It's nothing short of supernatural. It's exactly what is described here. This is the heavenly gift of salvation. This is the Holy Spirit working in and among us,

causing fruit to be growing in our lives, starts on the inside comes to the outside. Around here, we taste in so many different formats in so many different venues, we taste the goodness of the Word of God, we experience the powers the age to come. So for those who have experienced all that, and then verse 6, "have fallen away." What is that referring to? The salt, losing its saltiness.

"To restore them again to repentance, to restore them again, since they're crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding them up to contempt." Impossible. Then this beautiful imagery, this metaphor of "the land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

"But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned." The hope that comes in that text for those who are in this condition is the word near to being cursed. I always like to tell people while there's breath, there's hope. Jesus is saying the same

thing in this metaphor about the salt losing saltiness, he's given the same warning.

You can go back to Luke 14. J.C. Ryle says what Jesus teaches here, he calls it a very painful, but necessary truth. And then he goes on to say this, "Nobody, it must be remembered, is in so dangerous a state as someone who has once known the truth and professed to love it, and is later fallen away from that profession and gone back to the world."

And I just want to add as a little parenthesis there (Gone back to the world in their hearts.) They may sit in churches week after week, they may not be running after the bars and all the stuff that pagans do, may not be bowing down to idols. They could be sitting in evangelical churches every single week. And their hearts are clinging to the world. They haven't followed the admonition of John in 1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. For all that's in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life, it's not from the Father, but from the world. The world is passing away and all of its lust, but the one who does the will

of God will abide forever."

Their heart is attached to the world, it clings to the world, no matter if they sit in our midst, or they sit somewhere else. Continuing with Ryle, he says, "Such a person has not sinned in ignorance like many have, but has gone away from Christ with open eyes. He has sinned against unknown and not an unknown god." End quote.

In other words, such a one has sinned against the light, and he will be judged according to the love of the light he's received. It's one thing to be a nominal Christian in a squish church that panders after the world. That chases all the worldly fads and loves big rock bands and all that stuff and all the lights and smoke and mirrors and all that stuff to draw people in. For someone who's a nominal Christian, in that setting to go to stand before the judgment is much less severe than from someone coming from this congregation, or any other faithful congregation that serious minded about the truth.

They'll be judged according to the light that's come out of this pulpit. And this is why you who are true disciples, you who

are real Christians, listen, whenever you see someone who seems to be falling away, who seems to be living on the fringe, man don't hesitate. You run, you reach out, you grab that man, grab that woman, you hold on to him, you hold on to her. You warn that person because their soul is in grave, grave danger.

People in this condition, it's so tragic too, I think you know what I'm talking about because you can almost see the lostness in their eyes, that they know that they're stuck, that they're enslaved. That they're under the burden of guilt and condemnation heading for judgment. They seem to want the repentance of your offering and speaking of, they just can't do it.

The world has too much of a hold on their hearts. So off they go. Like the ox to the slaughter biding their time until judgment. It's tragic, isn't it? But still, we try, don't we? We try. It's what James appeals for in James 5:19-20 last words in this mighty little epistle, "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering, will save his soul from death will cover a multitude of sins." Don't you

want to be involved in that work, rescue the perishing right? Care for the dying, for all who come to him in humble repentance, Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save, while there's breath, there's hope.

So we're going after that wandering disciple, that person hanging out on the fringes in our church, we don't want him or her to apostatize, be lost forever. In the meantime, there are fruitless, idle, unproductive people who are attending our churches, they may talk a good talk, they may have learned the lingo over the years, but they're nothing, but nominal Christians. And so they're just faking it, they're hoping no one notices. So that's what we turn to now. What are the implications of all this? We talked about the metaphor, talked about the meaning. Let's talking about the message, Jesus ends with, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

So there's more to hear, there's more to contemplate, more to think about, a message for those with ears to hear. So third point, the message. The direct application of Jesus words, was to a fickle minded crowd of followers; thousand, who are caught up in the hype, they'd a triumphant mentality about following

Jesus that needed to be corrected, they needed to be disabused of this false notion that following Jesus is going to lead to immediate earthly glory. Following Jesus means suffering with him. Following Jesus means the way of the cross. When we're ostracized, when we're marginalized, when we're set aside, when we're mocked, when we're excluded. Listen, that is exactly the way the Christian life is supposed to be.

But a little salt on your food, people like it, you give them more salt to put it on their food. They spit it out, don't they? Peter says 1 Peter 4:12 "Beloved, don't be surprised that the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." I love the way he speaks to us. Don't be surprised I, don't think this is strange, it's not strange. He says instead, "Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." When you're persecuted, laugh. When you're persecuted and shunned and excluded and mocked and scorned and ridiculed, rejoice.

There are a host of people in our churches today, though, who don't expect trials at all, let alone fiery trials. They

embrace a Christianity without a cross. A Christ without any authority to command their conscience, a life of health, wealth, and prosperity, they didn't sign up for suffering. It's not the gospel they embraced. They like good news, gospel of ease and comfort and pleasure. So they never counted the cost. They never deliberated on the radical nature of discipleship. They never deliberated and thought deeply about what Christ is really saying here. They were bored in church.

When that message was being preached, they thought about other things, thought about what's for dinner, thought about the next weeks to do list. They never thought about it. And many times they were never asked to think about it. That's why rather than push back against family demands they cave every time. They can't say no. We understand sometimes when a wife married to an unbelieving husband has a difficult time because she's under his authority and how to work that out. But when a husband can't stand up to a wife who's drifting into bad doctrine, or is bitter in her tongue, or gossipy and he can't correct that and confront it and shepherd his wife to righteousness.

What's going on there? Why can't a husband do that? It could be because his loyalties are not rightly aligned. Rather than discipline, control to self, they give in all the time. Nothing radical, nothing fundamental has changed in them at all. Rather than resetting the priority of their life, they keep living according to worldly priorities. They're like hamsters on a spinning wheel, in a terrarium cage. They work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep, play on Saturday, church on Sunday more play on Sunday. And then they work, eat, sleep, work, eat sleep, they just do that *ad infinitum ad nauseam*, interrupt the cycle every now and again for a vacation.

Some photos for the photo album, but regularly reading the Bible to see what their Lord wants him to do, no. Bearing the cross that results from radical obedience to the commands that they find in Scripture. That's not happening either. There's no real love for God. There's no real devotion to Christ, no fruit of the Spirit growing in their life. They are the nominal Christians. They are the Christians in name only, they look good on the outside, they may look like salt on the outside. They never took time to count the cost, they never resolved to renounce all, take up a cross and follow him. May have attended church all their lives, gave money, sang in the choir, chased

toddlers around the nursery, taught Sunday school.

I'm afraid some of these nominal people have preached messages in pulpits. That's why this is a confrontation for me too, that they will spend eternity with the apostates, pagans and the irreligious, because it didn't count the cost. Let's make sure none of us here miss the message. My concern is the same of that writer to the Hebrews, Hebrews 3:12, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." So to that end, I'd like to close the sermon here. Not now, but in a little bit, close with a list of tragedies really that befall those who are nominal Christians. Those who are living according to a false form of Christianity, a list of tragedies that they face in the end.

As they come to the end of their life and as the stark reality of divine judgment hits them, as they pass through the veil, and now they stand before the throne and they're rejected. The realization of certain tragedies are going to hit their mind with unrelenting force. So we'll just walk back through the text starting verse 25. I'll name a tragedy, elaborate a bit, and

keep moving. Number one, which is verse 26. The tragedy of a misplaced loyalty. Number one, the tragedy of misplaced loyalty. Think about coming before the judgment seat and you preferred your family or preferred your wife or preferred parents or whatever demands your grown kids are making on you, that you conform to their way of thinking, conform to their lifestyle.

And now you're standing before the judgment seat and you realize, what folly. You prefer family relationships over relationships that pertain to the kingdom, nominal Christian prioritizes loyalty to a temporary fleshly bond, allegiance to flesh and blood, that's soon gonna end. Ignorant sentimentality may contribute to this misplaced loyalty but, to continue in it, especially hearing this from Christ is to ignore what Jesus clearly says here.

Those who prefer a spouse to God obeying a wife or a parent, catering to a child, young or old. Only Christ has the right to command a conscience. Only the Christ has the right to determine your behavior, how you live, your lifestyle, the way you prioritize your day, your week and months, your years. Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is

born in the spirit of spirit."

That's why John 3:3, "You must be born again." 1
Corinthians 15:50 "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of
God. All flesh is like grass its glory like the flower of grass,
the grass withers, the flower falls, but the word of the Lord
remains forever. This is the word of the good news that was
preached to you."

Prefer the word over family relationships. When this life
is over, your blood relations will not be there at the judgment
seat to plead their blood for your justification. Only the blood
of Christ matters, which means only the word of Christ in his
command matters. Don't suffer the tragedy of a misplaced
loyalty.

Number two, the tragedy of what I call usurped ownership,
the tragedy of usurped ownership. Again the true disciple verse
26, he comes to Jesus hating not just his family that is
deprioritizing his family in comparison to Christ, but hating
his own life as well. The word here is actually *psyche*, his
soul, he entrusts his soul, he relinquishes it himself, of being

the owner and the captain of his soul, and he entrust it to the care of the savior. He realized that everything he has, including a soul is what comes from God. It's not his anyway, it's only on loan from God. Nominal Christian though has usurped the ownership of his own soul.

He holds on to what he cherishes most, whether it's his personal autonomy or his comfort or his ease, or his opinions or his judgments or his pride of thinking, pride of place, he thinks his soul is his own and he can hold on to it forever. Remember the wealthy fool, Luke chapter 12? Remember what he said? "I'll say to my soul," I love how he speaks to a soul. "Soul, you have ample goods later for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry. God said to him, 'Fool, this night, your soul is required from you.'" Don't be like the rich fool. Don't suffer the tragedy of usurping God's ownership over your soul. Your soul is God's to command, not yours to coddle.

Tragedy of misplaced loyalty, usurped ownership resulting in, thirdly, number three, the tragedy of forfeited glory, the tragedy of forfeited glory. This is, looking at verse 27. Nominal Christian claims to follow the way of the cross, but at

some point in time, perhaps unnoticed by others around him, but he quietly set down his cross and he's tried to blend into the crowd. Nominal Christian doesn't want to bear the weight any longer.

So he gives in to cowardice. He doesn't like to offend people, doesn't like to hurt feelings, rejects the shame of being associated with Jesus Christ. Because Christ is offensive. Absolutely tragic, he is making a foolish trade here. He is preferring the temporary earth bound approval of human beings. Or more often, he simply wants to avoid the disapproval of his fellow man and just coast through life.

But in this trade, he's forfeiting the approval of God and therefore the glory of God. In John 12:42, we read about the tragedy of those who refuse to bear their own cross, many of the Jewish authorities, even on the Jewish Sanhedrin, they actually believed in Jesus, but it says, "For fear of the Pharisees, they didn't confess it, so that they wouldn't be put out of the synagogue. They love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God." Listen, those who eschew that nominal form of Christianity, those who reject that, who take up

their own cross, follow Jesus Christ to death. They realize the way of the cross is glory through suffering. It's not the avoidance of suffering, its glory through suffering. "For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us in eternal weight of glory, beyond all comparison, as we look to the things not that are seen, but the things that are unseen."

The things that are seen are transient, they're passing, they're going away, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Jesus calls true disciples to share in his suffering in verse 27, to share in the shame of burying our crosses along with him to share in his rejection, and it could potentially lead to quite literally our own death.

Why does he call us to that? Because he wants us to suffer like he did? No, there is no suffering like he did. Only he bore that suffering, it's unique, one of a kind, only he could bear it. Is it because he's sadistic, and loves to put us through torture? Does he want to make us earn our stripes to get to heaven? That is not it at all. He wants us to understand the grace of God that ministers to those who are suffering. He wants

us to understand what it is to identify with him through it all.

That to go through the battle together, to go through the difficulty together, that forges such a unique bond of relationship. And he showed us that the suffering is a prelude to glory. Hebrews 12:2 "Look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." That is, to make light of that shame. "And he's seated now at the right hand of the throne of God," glory.

Don't try to find your best life now. Don't experience the tragedy of forfeited glory. So the tragedies of misplaced loyalty, usurped ownership, forfeited glory, all those things come an burst into the mind at that moment of the judgment seat, standing before God and being turned away by Christ.

Fourthly, at that moment, you're going to realize the tragedy of a wasted life. Number four, the tragedy of a wasted life, you had an entire life, to give to the glory of God, to live out as the stewardship and you wasted it. The nominal disciple, nominal Christians portrayed as a foolish builder, in

verses 28-30. He dives into the project with haste. It's the person with a rocky soiled heart, Luke 8:13, "He hears the word receives with joy falls away under testing." No thought, no reflection, no counting the cost, nothing but ignorant zeal, foolish action, running into the fray without any idea what he's doing at all. May throw himself into building with great enthusiasm, but he only gets as far as the foundation before he has to abandon the entire project all together.

He's wasteful. He's lost his original investment. He loses future income, he loses his reputation, his honor. He's known in the community as an idiot. In other words, wasted life. He's blown his one chance of stewardship, to render a good account to the God who gave him everything, and nothing but eternal scorn remains. Listen, don't be a foolish builder.

Number five, the tragedy of eternal regret, eternal regret. No true king facing the reality of being attacked by a superior force, that's verses 31-32 is either gonna rush off halfcocked, into battle on a suicide mission, kill himself, and all of his men. Neither would a true king, lock himself in his palace, procrastinate, drink wine, do nothing, like Belshazzar. He's

gonna deliberate, a true king is gonna deliberate and then he's going to act appropriately. Listen, the nominal Christian is completely unlike this king. He lives his life in a foolish unthinking manner, by not deliberating about his life, by not reflecting on what really matters, he is one day going to face a superior force of judgment, and it's going to expose his thoughtlessness.

It's going to reveal his lack of planning, his lack of forethought, his lack of deliberation, it's gonna overcome him completely and destroy him utterly. Added to the experience of loss and suffering is going to be the tragedy of eternal regret. I should have thought more about this, about what really matters. Don't let that be you. Do not live a thoughtless non reflective life. Don't, you'll regret it. Tragedies of misplaced loyalty, usurped ownership, forfeited glory, wasted life, and the regret of knowing it forever.

Number six, tragedy of ultimate loss, this is verse 33. The tragedy of ultimate loss, for all those who resist Jesus' call, in verse 33. To renounce all that we have cut the heartstrings that keep us attached to the things of the world,

they will forfeit all in the end, they'll experience ultimate loss. Mark 8:36-37. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but forfeit his soul? What can a man give in return for his soul?" A loss of the soul means ultimate loss, existential loss, forfeiture of self, everything, self-loved and held on to all gone. Everything the self-lived for, gone, obliterated, do not let that be you.

And finally, seventh, the tragedy of really utter uselessness, utter uselessness. Because the nominal Christian comes to realize he's like the useless salt that Jesus has described here. When the salt was leached out from the bulk supply, all that was left is look like substance, it's good for nothing at all. Couldn't use it for the table at home, couldn't use it for animal feed, couldn't use it even to enrich the soil. You couldn't even use it to mix with manure.

Life of the nominal Christian is like that, it's good for nothing, not even good for the manure pile. Since he was a Christian in name only, he lacks the substance of what it means to be a Christian. He's been faking it. He's been taking on identity that's not really his. So he's no good to the church.

And he's no good to the world either. He's useless in both realms, because he's living on the fence. That's utter uselessness.

And to realize this at the end of your life is a terrible tragedy. But it is one that is avoidable through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He's been sitting in the pew, he's been in close proximity to the truth. The message of salvation is very near to him. He continues on as he is as a nominal Christian, he's going to be judged against all that truth, against all that light that went through his ears. Without the ears to hear the truth did him no good.

All it did was accrue to his judgment and his just condemnation, such a person cast away, remanded to eternal judgment. He's forgotten forever in the dustbin of history. May the Lord deliver us from such an outcome, Amen? May he deliver all nominal Christians that are in the hearing of these words to true salvation, to radical discipleship to what is true joy, even joy through suffering.

I'm really happy to say that for most of you, I believe in the words of the writer to the Hebrews. I believe this of you "Beloved, we're convinced of better things concerning you. Things that accompany salvation, though we're speaking this way." But isn't it useful to speak in this way to hear Jesus say these things? Because man, it reminds us how great our salvation is. We could have been lost in the same way and reminds us to get back on track with radical commitments.