



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
May 26, 2019

JOHN 16:1-15

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for who you are and what you do. We admire you, we're grateful for you, we're in awe of you. In particular we're grateful for the personal relationship we can have with you. Lord, we thank you for orchestrating your church to be that place where we can find fellowship and we can experience teamwork in our mission together to serve this community and to reach out to a world that's hurting. So we ask, Lord, that you would sharpen us. Sharpen the cutting blades as we would look at the fields that are ready for harvest. We ask, Lord, that you would give a message to us that we can share that's sharp so that people who are hurting and ready and in need and feel a need for that message will experience it through us, shining as a light. So we ask, Lord, that you would do a work in us. Encourage us today. Use your word to inspire us. We dedicate ourselves again to you today. We thank you for the communion time that we had this morning where we can focus in on the death of Jesus Christ. Lord, teach us what it means to live for you today. In Jesus' name, amen.

The crowds were coming and as Jesus saw them all coming in Luke 8, He decided He would tell them a story – a story that had a moral to it. These stories with morals were called parables. So He told a story that went something like this.

He said there was a man who went to sow some seed on the ground. And as he was sowing the seed, some of the seed fell on the path. And when it fell on the paths, feet trampled on the seeds, and birds came and snatched it away.

But there was also some ground that was rocky ground. And on that ground the seed fell and then it grew rapidly. But then when the sun came out it was scorched. It didn't have enough moisture or roots. So it withered and died.

He said the seed also went on to a third kind of soil. This was the thorny soil, he said. So it grew up, but the thorns around it choked it out so it wasn't able to flourish or produce fruit.

But there was a fourth kind of soil, He said, as the sower was casting the seed, that fell on good soil and it grew up and it produced a hundred-fold. In other words, one seed producing a hundred products. Being very fruitful. So this was very fruitful soil.

The people that were all listening, all the crowds that were listening to this, I'm sure, were confused by this, as were the disciples. But the disciples came to Jesus and they said, "Would you tell us about this parable that you just told? What does it mean?" So Jesus said, "Well I do

tell the parables to the crowds and I'm going to tell you exactly what this means so you understand it."

The seed represents the word of God. And when that word is spread out into our world it falls on different kinds of soil. Sometimes it falls on soil like the path, so the path part represents the fact that sometimes the devil snatches it away before it's even able to have roots and grow.

The second kind of soil, the rocky soil, is like the heart that receives the word of God with joy. But then when stress comes, trials come, challenges come, they fall away. Those are His ways. They fall away because of the challenges or the tests that come into their life.

The third kind of soil is the thorny soil represents the heart that receives the word, starts to grow, but then is choked out by anxiety, pleasures, and riches. And so it can't produce fruit either.

But the fourth kind of soil represents, He says, the good and noble heart who receives the words with gladness, retains it, and then with perseverance produces much fruit. The *with perseverance* is an important word in the passage. Produces much fruit.

What Jesus is trying to share is that the heart is a very important place for the word of God to come, and if not handled well we can have some challenges.

Today I want to talk specifically about why young people often fall away from the faith as they get older. Oh this message could be for anyone because we all know people who have fallen away from the faith. I want to talk about why people fall away. I want to talk about why people become Christians in the first place.

I want to look at the passage in John 16 because in John 16 Jesus starts with those words about falling away. Would you stand with me as I read this passage of scripture? Then we're going to look at it together more carefully.

It says in John 16 – "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he

will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

You may be seated.

Let's start with those first words where Jesus says very clearly – I want to tell you these things *so that you will not fall away.*

If you as a young person have grown up in a Christian home, I would suspect you're in danger. You're in danger of growing up with the faith, experiencing the faith of your family and parents and seeing all of that, and then you become a young person and you start expanding outside of your family with other influences and other friends, you're learning more about life, and there can be a temptation sometimes to make your faith part of what you think you're growing out of. That faith was part of my childhood and my faith now is something I can put aside because I'm growing into something more. I'm growing into something that makes more sense to me. I'm growing into something else. And Jesus wants to provide for us all a warning. A warning that we need to be careful about our hearts. We need to be careful about ourselves because we're in danger.

Now in the parable there are other reasons why a person might fall away and it has to do with the pleasures of this life. It has to do with just feeling anxious about life. It has to do with not being rooted. So the parable itself is intriguing because it shares a lot of reasons of why a person might fall away in their lives and there's a warning here to us to be careful not to fall away.

I would suggest that if you go to university today, you're going to experience some challenges. Jesus is going to tell them about the persecution they're going to experience. He's already told them in the passage He wants them to be ready, He wants them to be warned. You might think that the persecution will be something like they're going to attack the authority of God's word, which is true. They'll attack that. They're going to attack the fact whether Jesus was even a real person, let alone the Savior of the world. They'll attacked whether God exists. Yes, those kinds of things they'll attack. But on college campuses today, we're finding attacks that are much more personal than that. I'm going to share just a couple of examples with you.

At Appalachian University a resident assistant posted a bulletin board that was shaming Christians. This was in a university environment. The students are coming home or back from classes and they come into this environment and in the foyer is a bulletin board dedicated to shaming Christians. I'll just show it to you. I don't know if you can read it, but it says: "Unpacking Christian Privilege" and there are little statements about Christians. That Christians think they're so privileged. They think they can just take off work on their holidays, but they don't have to acknowledge the holidays of other religions. That they believe the money given to their organizations, their churches doesn't have to fall under the same scrutiny that other faiths experience. That the money may be going to terrorism or something, like in Islamic faith. It's comments like that that are on this bulletin board. And the whole purpose of it is to shame Christians.

Now those things are partially true. But you find yourself coming in, seeing this bulletin board, you find yourself as a Christian defending things. You're all of a sudden defensive about what's going on. It's an attack on Christians to make them look weird, odd, privileged.

At Ohio State University there was a required course, a psychology course, in which there was a preparatory test that the students could take in preparation for the exam. One of the questions on the exam implies that people who are Christians have lower IQs than atheists. I'll just show you the question. This is taken right off the test that a student snapped a shot of. It says this: "Theo has an IQ of 100 and Aine has an IQ of 125. Which of the following statements would you expect to be true?" And the correct is "A) Aine is an atheist while Theo is a Christian." The implication is you're not as smart as atheists. Of course atheists can give up their fantasy life. They've risen above something like faith to rely on.

Now if you're in that situation and you're in a school environment then it can be rather challenging. What are you going to do now if you like to be liked, if you like to fit in with other people, if you don't like conflict? You've got a problem if you're a Christian in that environment. And Jesus is warning them.

Before we go back to the passage, I want to take you on a history lesson. I want to talk about the early church. Because Jesus is talking about people back then that would be persecuted. He's not necessarily talking about Christians today (although the applications we bring in today). But He's talking about the Christians back then that would be persecuted. It's just a few years later where the persecution continues and gets pretty graphic. We can read about some of it in the book of Acts. Let me explain to you what was going on in the world back then so you understand why the Roman government and people in the culture were persecuting Christians. You just have to understand what was going on at the time.

You see, when the Roman Empire took over various countries, they allowed them to keep their religion, allowed them to keep their practices. So the Jews continued to govern themselves. In fact they have governmental leaders that are Jewish and they could do so much, but there are some things they couldn't do, like they couldn't do capital punishment. That's why in the crucifixion of Christ we have this appeal going up and up until the Roman government gives the okay for Jesus to be crucified. The point I'm trying to make here is when the Greeks had kept their government, those people around Ephesus kept their government, the Jewish people kept their governing and their customs and so on. The Roman government wanted to be very tolerant of all kinds of different perspectives on life. They just required that they pay their taxes. Other than that, we're just going to be tolerant of everybody else's opinions and allow them to do what they want to do.

Within the Roman government, in the Roman culture, in the Roman world there were a lot of gods. All kinds of gods. Not just religious gods. There were household gods. And there were business gods. There were all kinds of gods that existed. So if there was a large household gathering then there would be a tribute to the household god in your family. And every family had some kind of a god that they would pay homage to. Or if you had a business you would have a little statue there and people would put fruit there or they would put money there in order to honor or pay tribute to the god. So there were all kinds of gods. When Paul went into Ephesus

there were lots and lots of gods that people had. It was just common. Everybody had their god and that was all fine in the Roman world.

But now people are becoming Christians. And when people are becoming Christians they're believing in one true God. So these Christians then are looking at the Ten Commandments where it says *you shall have no other gods before me*. And the second command which says *you shall not make for yourself an image* or worship it; you should not have that image. So now the Christians are coming into this social environment and they're saying, "I can't bow down to this particular god. I just can't do that because of my faith." So now the Christians are viewed as intolerant of other people. The Christians are viewed as people who are privileged, who think they are better than us. So it's creating some social conflict among the people, and people are starting to hate the Christians.

See it's not just the Christians who believed in one God. Remember the Jewish people also believed there was only one God, but the Jews were an ethnic group where the Christians were permeated all forms of society. So they had guards within the Roman government that were becoming Christians. We read in the scriptures they had slaves that were becoming Christians. It was permeating all of society.

So the Christians are saying, "We can't do this. We can't live life like everyone else." So the Roman government and others were persecuting the Christians. And when I say persecution, what I mean is, yes, they were killing some of them. They were beating them, hauling them into jail for what they were doing wrong (that is, they were professing faith). But they also would have a hard time getting a job. Oh you're a Christian? I'm sorry, we're not hiring Christians. There were shops that would close themselves off to Christians because we're not going to allow Christians to come in. And there was a form of persecution for them too.

So we've got all this persecution going on. So you have to ask yourself, why would anyone become a Christian in the early church? With all the hassles that are going on and all the problems that Christians are experiencing, why did Christianity grow so quickly? Why were so many people wanting to be Christians in the midst of all the persecution that was rampant in the Roman world? Well the answer is that people were attracted to Christianity for a number of reasons. Some of which is the social mission they were on. They were different.

For example, there was a practice within the Roman world, various parts of the culture, where if you didn't want the child that you had, then you would put the child out in the weather or you'd leave the child and the child would die. And Christians took a stand against that and they worked to rescue children. They had a high view of life in the early church.

They abstained from sex except within heterosexual marriage, which was different than the culture because in the culture, especially married men were allowed to have sex with a prostitute (that was accepted) or with slaves or with children. Christians did not participate in that. They valued sex and they raised the value of that in their own view. So people are starting to look at this and saying these people have something different about them that's attractive.

The Christians were also people who would give generously. They would give to their church, and the church would develop social programs, and they would care for the poor and the needy. And it wasn't just for their family and it wasn't just for one ethnic group. It was across the board. They were caring for people and giving to them. Wow. That's attractive to some people.

There are some who were attracted to the fact that this faith, this Christianity spread within the culture and wasn't just something for the elite and it wasn't just something for the poor. It wasn't just for some people of certain colored skin or not. It was for everyone. And many people from various forms of life were attracted to that.

There was also this sense of nonretaliatory response to the persecution that they were experiencing. They were forgiving their enemies. Their response was one that was very different than they were used to. So people were attracted to this social movement, this way that people have values that they're putting into practice that wasn't just something they tagged on a belief as they're walking through a door, but this meant something to their lives.

People were also attracted to Christianity because there was this statement that you could actually know God. You could know Him. It wasn't just about knowing about God. It wasn't just about practices that you would do if you were religious. This was about you could really know God. Some people were really attracted to the fact that you could really know God. Christianity gives you that opportunity.

Some were attracted to Christianity because it offered something for their soul, forgiveness, that they desperately needed for a life that had gone wrong and the regrets that they had. There was this promise for eternal life.

So people who were attracted to Christianity for a number of reasons, then they found and they got inside and started looking at it and studying it and realizing, wow, this is the truth. It rang true for them. They start studying the gospel, they start seeing the truth. That it's not just something on the surface, but there's a depth here that I need. People came to Christ. They came to Christ because it met this deeper need that they had in their hearts and it was true. It's a lifestyle. It's taking Jesus home. They knew it in the early church. That's what they wanted and that's what they needed in their lives.

Why was there persecution? Why did people become Christians in the middle of all that? Now let's go and continue in the passage. He says – *They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.* See there are people in the times He's saying that are going to think they're doing the world a service by crushing Christians, by trying to stamp it out, by killing people, by persecuting them, by making Christians look like they're odd or weird or silly. They think they're doing the right thing. They're confused.

He says in the next verse (here's the main difference) – *They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.* You see, knowing God is going to be this crucial difference between a religion and a relationship. That's what it's going to be. It's not just about this religion where you have all these gods. It's about knowing God and experiencing Him. They didn't know

the Father. We know the Father. We know Him. We know Jesus Christ. Because of that, it just affects and permeates our lives in a way that's much deeper than we imagined.

I want to make it clear what we're talking about when we describe a Christian. Because these are the four tenets of evangelical Christianity. One is the belief that the Bible is our highest authority. Number two, the belief in Jesus is the only path to salvation. Number three, the people must go through a conversion experience to be saved. Number four, that evangelicals share their faith with others. That's what it means to be an evangelical Christian.

So as you young people are facing the world or facing the challenges, or you businessmen, or you business women are involved in the things that you're doing, you may face persecution, you may face challenges. You need to understand who you are and what God has for you. I just want you to understand what it means in this case to be defined as an evangelical Christian. That's what we're talking about when we understand this idea.

If we continue on in the passage it says in verse 4 – *I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them.* So in part, this sermon is a warning. It's a warning for you in case you come to that place where you're saying faith isn't that important. I'm going to drop out of the church. I'm going to drop out of reading my Bible. I'm going to drop out of hanging around God's people. You're in danger. And Jesus wants to warn them about that because of that danger.

It's a warning because if we move out of a relationship with God then we're in trouble. I would suggest that for young people it's very important for you to make sure you move Jesus Christ into every new stage of your development. Otherwise you'll feel like Jesus was part of the previous stage of life. You've grown out of that now. But that's not just for young people. That's for all of us. We must recognize that we must bring Jesus into today. We can't just have Him as our Jesus for yesterday. That Jesus is working through the situation in our lives right now. He's not old, He's not irrelevant. He's part of what we're doing right now in our lives. It's not about following this list of rules and regulations. It's about a relationship with Jesus Christ and trusting Him in our lives.

I want to jump ahead to verse 7 now because in verse 7 He talks about the Holy Spirit. He calls Him the Advocate. He calls Him the Spirit of truth down below. But notice I want you to see here the Holy Spirit has a role in the life of a nonbeliever. That's what this passage is about.

He says in verse 8 – *When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong.* He's talking about the world. He's not talking about the Christians. He's talking about the world here. He's going to talk about the Christians in a moment. Which means that the world, all the people in the world, there's the Holy Spirit at work in their hearts.

That's very important for you to know because as you are in a position where you are sharing the message of God with someone, maybe someone is attacking you and making you feel silly or foolish because you're a Christian or you're odd or weird. Or you may confront them or you may argue with them. You may love them. I don't know. However you're going to respond to them. You may never win that person, but there's somebody over here watching and there's somebody

over here watching and the Holy Spirit is working in their hearts. God is at work in the lives of nonbelievers. And that's why nonbelievers become believers. God is drawing them to Himself and something very important is happening in their lives. So just remember that the Holy Spirit is working in the lives of nonbelievers. It's important that they understand the difference between this religion and relationship. Let me just point out some differences so you understand why we have this relationship with Christ.

Religion keeps God at a distance where relationship with God provides this intimacy with Him. In religion I obey and therefore I am accepted. Where in this relationship with Christ, I am accepted, therefore I obey. It's completely different. Christianity is a relationship with God that's very different than a religion. The temptation, I just want to suggest to you young people, is that even though you have a relationship with Christ, even though you are growing up in a home where Christ is exalted, you can start to form in your mind a religion that confuses that relationship. So when I talk about religion, I'm not just talking about people out there that have a problem. I'm talking about ourselves. We need to be careful in our own hearts that we don't turn this relationship we have into something pharisaical. That we turn it into something that's more about a religion than a relationship.

In religion I obey to get things from God. In a relationship I obey to please and enjoy God. In religion I am motivated based on fear. If I don't do this, God's going to do something to me. Where in a relationship the motivation is based on this sense of love that we have. In religion when things go wrong, I'm angry at God or myself since I believe that anyone who's good deserves a comfortable life. Ooh boy. That's hitting kind of close to home. Where in relationship when things go wrong I struggle, but I know that all my punishment fell on Jesus and that God will care for me as a Father in the midst of my trial.

When I'm criticized in a religious mindset, I'm furious, devastated because it's critical that I think about myself as a good person. And you're attacking me. Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all cost. But when it comes to relationship when I'm criticized, I struggle, but it's not essential for me to think of myself as a good person. My identity is not based on my record of good performance, but on Christ.

And one more. If you're caught up in religion then it can build this pride inside. Whereas if you're built on relationship, if you understand this relationship with God, it does something inside to produce a humility inside of our hearts. That's what we need. That's what we want. And that's what God wants to do inside of us. Create this humility.

There's a difference between religion and relationship, and the Holy Spirit now comes into all of our lives. In the nonbeliever He's trying to move them from religion to relationship. He's trying to move them significantly in their lives. So young people, be on guard. If you're developing a religion, you're in trouble. If you have a relationship, you're right where God wants you and you're able to carry that through every step of the way, even into challenging experiences you find in a university or work world or wherever you are.

Toward the end of the passage we read today are these verses that talk to us as Christians. And this is how the Holy Spirit relates to you and me. He says – *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*

It's got to be confusing to know how to respond to a teacher who's talking about history and leaving all of Christianity out of history. Kind of rewriting history as if God doesn't exist. It must be difficult to know what the truth is and how to respond to that. It must be difficult to know how to handle a classroom where the science teachers are writing science as if God doesn't exist. It must be really hard to be in that situation and tempting because they're so academic. Because they're so well-respected. Because they could talk so well about these things. They seem to have the latest truth that seems to give the impression that the truth we have is like antiquated somehow. I want you to know that the Holy Spirit helps you in the midst of that. The Holy Spirit guides you into all truth. Not to be deceived by fancy talk or what appears to be academic language, but you're able to understand that there is real truth and the Holy Spirit wants to help you with that truth.

Notice it says in verse 14 – *he will receive what he will make known to you.* And then the last statement – *That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.* There's this sense of God wants to make known to us something very important and the Spirit reinforces that, reveals that to us.

I want you to know that there are scholars within the academic community who are Christians who study these things that non-Christians are studying. The debate is out there. It's a good debate. It's healthy for us to be engaged in that debate. Whether the Bible is really true. Whether Christ really existed. There are scholars on both sides that are evaluating that and I think it's a healthy dialogue. So I think it's great for you to explore those things. But understand that just because someone's out there telling you something and they seem to have a position of authority in school or some other place doesn't mean that what they're saying is true. The Holy Spirit will reveal to you what is true.

The persecution was so bad in the early church that people were being killed for their faith. One example of that was Stephen. He was one of the first leaders in the church. He was one of the people who was leading others and helping out in the church. And he refused to give up his faith. He refused to allow others to say that you have to give up your faith or I'm going to kill you. So he ends up being killed.

Now we have this record in the scriptures where Stephen was stoned to death. But the interesting thing about the story is as they're telling this sad story about how one of these early Christians was killed, it says that there was a man standing by there and people were putting their coats by his feet. In other words, he was the guy in charge. And his name was Saul. It's interesting that God was already having this tug on Saul's heart so that later as he is on his pilgrimage to kill Christians and to take them to jail and haul them back to the religious leaders in Jerusalem, that God knocks him off of his horse and he has this experience of knowing God personally. And when he did, his life was transformed. All this passion for killing Christians now is a passion for serving Christ with all of his heart. It's powerful.

As Jesus gives the parable and He's warning the crowds and then warning His disciples, what does He say is the key here? He's saying that you take the word of God and you have a soft heart that is good and noble, that receives the word of God, retains it, and with perseverance bears this fruit. The word of God needs to be in our hearts, we need to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That's what's being taught in this passage today.

I trust that you will consider your own relationship with God. Don't allow religion to creep in and make it stagnant. You want to have a personal relationship with God that is meaningful and you're carrying that forward. That's rooted in God's word that is our authority. So understand God's word and how it applies to our lives. So we face the challenges, we face the pleasures or riches, or the anxieties of our lives. We have a rock. We have Jesus Christ who is that rock and that relationship that we enjoy.

Would you stand with me please and let's pray together.

If you've not accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, it is a relationship and I invite you to do that today.

[PRAYER Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word and for the way that it has to convict us, but also to empower us. Lord, we're grateful to be part of the Christian movement around the world. We know that the church cannot be stamped out by other religions or by government. But Lord, sometimes we face challenges that we don't expect. And I know you're trying to warn us in this passage of what to expect as we serve you. So give us a confidence that we have truth on our side, even when others try to belittle us or attack us. Lord, we thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.