

“Will your anchor hold?” (9)

One day, a great storm broke out while this man was sailing in his dinghy down the Thames, the wind was blowing and the river was raging, so he tried to tie his dinghy to the harbour wall. The next thing he knew there was a great big cruiser ship which collided with his dinghy and substantially damaged his boat. Furious, he yelled, "Are you aware that power gives way to sail?" to which the owner of the cruiser replied, "I am aware of this but I happen to be anchored." And I'm wondering how your anchor is holding this morning.

1 John 2:18+19 “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”

Now we're not going to look at the antichrist today but the next time were together but I want us to focus on 1 John 2:19 because this is often quoted and used to prove the impossibility of apostasy in the religious world today. Where people say that those who John said, 'went out' were supposedly never converted. However, this verse states quiet clearly that at the time of their departure they were not 'of us'. In other words, they weren't faithful Christians when they left.

You see this idea of 'once saved always saved' is false doctrine to the core. Now the word apostasy means to backslide or withdraw, or what we would call fall away. And the New Testament is filled with warnings about the possibility of falling away from the Lord. That's why John tells us in 1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world or anything in the world.”

The apostle Paul reminds us that, that world reliance can lead to us falling away. You see loved ones falling away is a real possibility for all of us. In 1 Timothy 1:19+20 we find that “Hymenaeus and Alexander rejected the faith” and Paul says that they had “shipwrecked their faith” because of that rejection. In 2 Timothy 2:16-18 we find again that Paul says that “Hymenaeus and Philetus were replacing their faith with godless speech.” And finally, in 2 Timothy 4:10 Paul says that “Demas deserted him and the faith because he loved this world.”

And so one of the ways to help us remain faithful is to understand why some Christians 'go out' from among us. And that's what I want to spend the rest of the time looking at this morning. We're going ask the question, will your anchor hold? You see loved ones we're all just a few steps away from falling away. And you may not have even noticed that you're slowly drifting away from the Lord and His church, so what I'm going to try to do this morning is help you gaze just exactly where you're at with your faith.

A new minister in a small Oklahoma town spent the first four days desperately calling on the membership, begging them to come to his first services but sadly he failed. He placed a notice in the local newspapers, stating that as the church was dead, it was his duty to give it a decent Christian burial. The funeral would be held the following Sunday afternoon, the notice said.

Morbidly curious the whole town turned out. In front of the pulpit, they saw a high coffin smothered in flowers. The minister read the obituary and delivered a eulogy; he then invited his congregation to step forward and pay their respects to the dearly beloved one who had departed. The long line filed by. Each mourner peeped into the coffin and then turned away with a guilty, sheepish look. For in the coffin, tilted at the correct angle, was a large mirror where everyone saw themselves.

Take a moment this morning to take a look at the people around you. Who do you see? Faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Who do you not see? Faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Now I know that many of you have seen many faithful brothers and sisters in Christ over years simply disappear into the sunset. Some still faithful to the Lord but moved homes or jobs and some who have simply fallen away.

And they fall away for a number of reasons, and the 1st reason we're going to look at is this, “Their anchor didn't hold because it got tied up in temptation.” When Jesus is sharing the parable of 'the seed sower' He says that “some of the seed fell among the rocks.” And so in Luke 8:13 He says that, “Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.”

Now the **King James Version** uses the word “**temptation**” where the **NIV** uses the word “**testing**.” But really that’s what the word “**Temptation**” means; it means “**a testing**” or “**trial**.” But it also means “**a submission to sin**.” In the film “**Shawshank Redemption**” which is about a prisoner called **Andy** who got convicted of crime he never committed. Now **Andy** was struggling to come to terms with life in prison and one of his friends says to him, “**life in prison does strange things to a man, first you hate it, then you get used to it until finally you learn to depend on it**.”

And really that’s how sin works in your life. Oh maybe when you first became a Christian you hated yourself for getting drunk one night. But after a few times of getting drunk you’re getting used to it now and after a while you’re looking forward to it and learning to depend upon it. Maybe you hated yourself for gossiping about another member of the Lord’s church because you knew it was wrong. But after a while you get used to people knowing you as the church gossip and you kind of like it like that.

Maybe you used to come to every worship service, every Bible study, every Men’s Class or Ladies Class, every time there was something happening at church you would be here. But then you started to miss a few of these days and you hated it at first, but now your just in the habit of missing out and whatever it is your doing in it’s place is just too important for you miss out on.

You see that’s how sin works, sin grows and if you don’t put a stop to it, it will end up killing you. That’s what James was saying in **James 1:12-16** “**Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.**”

James says that when you get involved with sin then it’s only going to lead to one thing and that’s spiritual death. And don’t be fooled loved ones, this testing that James and Jesus talk about can come to us in different forms. One of which Peter warns us about in **1 Peter 4:3+4** “**For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.**”

Peter says that our old friends can come along and test us. We’ve all got history and we’ve all probably been involved in some ungodly activities at some point in our lives. But when we became Christians that ungodly behaviour came to a stop. And Peter says, “**Listen, when you meet up with old friends, they are going to come along even though they know you’re a Christian and tempt you.**” They are going to tempt you to go back to the way you were before. And so loved ones we need to be on our guard against that. **Do your non-Christians friends have more influence in your life than Jesus Christ does?** Because if they do, you could be one step closer to going out from among us.

Another reason as to why some people go out from among us is because “**their anchor gets tied up in this life.**” Jesus again when He’s talking about the “**seed sower**” says that “**some seed fell among the thorns.**” He says in **Luke 8:14** “**The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.**”

Now I believe that these are probably the most popular ways of falling away. Worry, riches and pleasures! Christians get so tied up in this world and they get so involved in their jobs, their professions that their love for God takes **2nd place** in their lives. Christians start worrying about having enough money for this and that and so they start to work longer hours and before they know where they are they haven’t been to church on the Lord’s Day for months. Now I understand that some Christians have to work on the Lord’s Day but if that job means that you’re missing out in worshipping your God for months on end, then you need to be careful that you’re not on the slippery slope to falling away. Because there’s a big difference between working to live and living to work.

Jesus said in **Luke 12:15-21** “**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**” And he told them this parable: “**The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'**” Then he said, “**This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'**” But God said to him, “**You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’**” This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

Jesus says in **Matthew 6:33** “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” You see money has caused people to fall; money has caused people to grieve. **1 Timothy 6:10** “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

It was the love of money that caused **Judas** to betray Jesus according to **Matthew 26:14-16**. Money caused **Ananias and Sapphira’s** death because they lied to God according to **Acts 5**. But again Jesus keeps on reminding us in **Matthew 6:33** “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

And don’t fool yourself into thinking that you’re doing it all in Jesus Name for God’s glory. **Hebrews 10:25** “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” If you’re spending less time with God and His people and spending more time in perusing sport and pleasures, or making money then you could be on the slippery slope to falling away.

And then finally some people fall away because “their anchor got tied up in false doctrine.” John warned these early Christians in **1 John 4:1** he says, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Jesus warned His disciples in **Matthew 7:15**, He says, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” The apostle Paul described them as being “Tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” in **Ephesians 4:14**

Now we need to understand that the Bible wouldn’t warn us about these things if they weren’t a reality. People still teach false doctrine today. The religious world has a thousand ways to be saved. The religious world has a thousand gods. The religious world has a thousand gospels. No wonder people are confused, no wonder Christians who don’t acquaint themselves with God’s word fall away.

People would rather trust people than trust God’s word. Some people would rather rely on visions of angels than God’s word. Some Christians would rather trust other Christians rather than trusting God’s word. Some Christians rely more on the preacher’s word rather than the word He’s preaching from. And if you’re like that then you need to make sure that you’re not starting on that slippery slope to falling away.

The church in **Galatia** was dealing with the same problem that many Christians face today in the world, false teaching. Paul said to the church in **Galatia** in **Galatians 1:6-9** “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

How many souls have you witnessed baptised into Christ only to find out a few months later they have joined a denominational church? How many souls have you witnessed starting off on fire for the Lord only to be led astray by someone who says come to our church it’s more lively? It’s astonishing isn’t it? It’s astonishing how they can leave the grace of Christ and turn to a different gospel which really is no gospel at all.

That’s what Paul warned the church in Galatia about, **isn’t it?** **Galatians 1:6-7** “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”

Because you see loved ones not only do those who teach false doctrine have a penalty to pay, so do those who fall away. **Hebrews 6:4-6** “It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”

You see the Hebrew writer was writing to Hebrew Christians who were saved. He says that they have tasted the heavenly gift. They have received the Holy Spirit. They have tasted the goodness of God's word. They saw and heard about the miraculous events through the Holy Spirit. But because Christianity wasn't their idea of Christianity they wanted to go back Judaism.

And what the Hebrew writer is saying that if they went back to Judaism, they're rejecting their salvation. And when you reject your salvation, you're rejecting the very fact that Jesus was the Christ and so in truth you're rejecting the gospel. Now it's impossible to come back to repentance because you've rejected the need for repentance. Listen some people can become Christians and months or even years later fall away and don't come back, not because they can't but because they won't.

And that is the kind of thing John has in mind in 1 John 5:16 "If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that."

John says that those who do "go out" or turn their back upon the faith are in the grips of spiritual death. Because any sin that a Christian will not confess to God is a sin that leads to death. And why? 1 John 1:6-9 "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Now I'm not going to say too much about "The sin that leads to death" at the moment because we will look at that in more detail soon.

But I want to leave you with some good news. Those Christians who fall away can return, if they so desire too. James 5:19+20 "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."

I don't know how your anchor is holding up this morning, but I do know that God does. And please don't think that you are beyond falling from grace, because nobody is. I have heard Christian after Christian say, "I will never leave the Lord and His church." Only to find out a few years later they have fallen away. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:12 "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

And if you're finding yourself slipping from the faith then take Isaiah's advice. He says in Isaiah 55:6+7 "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

Because loved ones there is only one thing more tragic than falling away from the Lord and that is dying in that same condition. Because it's only faithful Christians who have the hope of eternal salvation. And Hebrews 6:19 tells us that, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

And I hope that your anchor is steadfast and sure even though the billows are rolling. I hope and pray that your hope is anchored and fastened to the Rock Jesus Christ, grounded firm and deep in our Saviour's love. Will your anchor hold?

Now if you think you've been falling away from the Lord in some way then please just pray to God about it or speak to one of our more mature Christians here about it and they will pray for you and with you. But you're not a Christian this morning then you haven't tasted the goodness of a Christian life yet. And if you've heard many different gospels in your life time then please don't leave here today without speaking to someone about the true gospel, the full gospel, not some watered down gospel.

But the gospel which Paul calls in Ephesians 1:13 "the gospel of your salvation."