

The Dead Church

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[0 : 00] I'm talking tonight about a dead church. A dead church. The dead church if you like.! It sounds almost controversial that we should be a dead church.

Is what I'm saying tonight. We should be a dead church. Dead in a number of ways. The Bible says we should die in certain ways. And the first way that we should be dead, a dead church, is we should be dead to self.

To die to self. We see that in Luke 9 verse 23. Our Lord says this, And he said it to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Deny himself. It means to disown yourself. To utterly even reject yourself. To take up your cross, he says. To take up your cross, it means that you're on the way to your crucifixion.

Now, nowadays it seems with some preachers, such as the late Robert Shuler, but many alike to him, still alive today, that promote the concept of pamper yourself.

[1 : 08] Pamper yourself. Please yourself. To say we are all naturally good people is the kind of gospel, the false gospel that these people would give. That you're naturally good and you need to just, you just need a confidence boost.

You need to exalt yourself is the false teaching of some these days. But of course the Bible teaching, what our Lord Jesus says, as much as we should have a healthy self-image and a right kind of confidence, the Bible actually tells us that the self, the carnal, sinful nature of man, actually needs to die.

Actually needs to be put to death. Executed. It's talking here of taking up. Taking up your cross. Taking up your cross. What this means in today's terms is, if you like, if you can consider it, where there's still capital punishment, is basically walking down that dark hallway between the prison cells and you're on the way to that final door that leads to the electric chair.

That's what it means. It means you're on the way to your death, to die to yourself. And it's saying here that the Christian is committed to the death, the death of self. A Christian doesn't place any hope in this world.

A Christian dies to his or herself, her own ways and will. We see that as Paul says to the Galatians in Galatians 2 verse 20. He says this, I am crucified with Christ.

[2 : 33] Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

So life lived just for yourself and your own pleasures and ends is vain. It's really vain and a great loss. There's a time where a driver was going down a country road, a gravel road, and he came across this big yellow bulldozer that was crossing the road in front of him.

And he stopped quickly because he noticed there was another man watching this bulldozer and the dozer was plowing through a field and it was going around and around in this lazy circular motion. And the driver asked the other man, how long has he been watching this bulldozer just go round and round in circles?

And he said, ever since I fell off the thing. You know, this bulldozer was just continuing to do its work aimlessly without purpose and without a driver. Purposeless and driverless.

And that's a picture, friends. That's a picture of a life without Christ, without a driver, without a purpose, no real purpose, no real direction. There's a great deal of power there, a potential there, but no direction.

[3 : 48] And when we try to take control of our own lives, we're a bit like that bulldozer, just going around and around in circles. We miss out on the power of God, the knowledge of Jesus as our Lord.

We're missing out on what wonderful purpose he can give to our lives to live for his glory. And instead of letting the Lord direct us, we just become aimless and don't fulfil that potential that we could have in God.

We need to submit to the Lordship of our Lord and Saviour. To let the Lord have the driver's seat. Let him take charge. Die to self. So the question then is how? How do I die to myself? How do I actually make this happen? To crucify the flesh? To die daily? To die, to take up my cross daily?

To deny myself? We see that here in Matthew 6, verse 22. Because dying to self includes dying to our worldly desires.

[4 : 55] And we see in Matthew 6, it tells us how no man can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and mammon or money. So many are caught up in this rat race today. The worship of the almighty dollar, they call it, don't they? And it talks here, in the context it talks about having your eyes single.

Yet some people would say you're being too one-eyed. You're being a bit too narrow. Well, the Bible says we should have one eye. We should have a single eye. A single purpose. There's a story of General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army.

And he was a man who was much used of God. And towards the end of his life, he was losing his eyesight. And his son Bramwell came to his father there and told him of the loss of vision, that there would be no recovery.

He's not going to be able to see again. And the general asked, do you mean that I am blind? And the son said, I hear that we must contemplate that that could happen.

[6 : 08] And the general, the father said, I shall never see your face again. And the son said, no, probably not in this world. And then Bramwell said, General Booth, to his son, he said, I've done what I could for God and for his people with my eyes.

Now I shall do what I can for God without my eyes. He just had that single purpose that he was committed. He was resolved to serve that single master, to serve that one master.

Because no man can serve two masters, friends. We have to have that single master. We need to serve Christ, to know him truly as the one Lord of our life. The Bible tells us how we should have that single focus.

As an example, an illustration of that, we could think of a famous violinist, Fritz Kreisler, who was a famous violinist. And he said this at one point in his life.

He said, narrow is the road that leads to the life of a violinist. Hour after hour, day after day, week after week, for years I lived with my violin. There were so many things that I wanted to do that I had to leave undone.

[7 : 19] There were so many places I wanted to go that I had to miss if I was to master the violin. The road that I travelled was a narrow road and the way was hard. So, I mean, that's just a worldly example.

And we could think of such situations as like Olympic athletes or someone who's mastering a musical instrument or a career, some learning.

I mean, a sharp focus is important, even in worldly terms. But how much more for you and me that know the Saviour?

How much more that we should focus our lives on this one, our Lord? Focus our eyes. Glue our eyes on Christ, on his way for us. Our walk is closely after him.

And so we set ourselves resolutely, as Isaiah 50 verse 7 says, the prophet says, as in the context of speaking of our Lord prophetically, as he gave his back to the smiters.

[8 : 21] And Isaiah 50 verse 7, it says, in the same context, he says, I set my face like a flint. I set my face like a flint. And that's talking of as our Lord went to Jerusalem.

He set his face towards Jerusalem. He was sold out. He was committed. There was one focus there. Another kind of worldly example is the tenor Luciano Pavarotti.

And he said this, When I was a boy, my father, a baker, introduced me to the wonders of song. And he urged me to work very hard to develop my voice. A professional tenor in my hometown of Modena, Italy, took me as a pupil.

I also enrolled in a teacher's college. And on graduating, I asked my father, shall I be a teacher or a singer? And the father said, Luciano, if you try to sit on two chairs, you'll fall between them.

For life, you must choose one chair. And Pavarotti said this, I chose one. Seven years of study and frustration before I made my first professional appearance.

[9 : 27] Another seven to reach the opera. And now I think, whether it's laying bricks, writing a book, whatever we choose, we should give ourselves to it. Commitment. That's the key. Choose one chair.

And friends, it's the same with your life, isn't it? Choose one chair. You know, the Bible speaks about how we should choose life. How we should stand on the Lord's side.

How we should trust in Christ. How we should make that decision. When we're in that valley of decision. It's almost like there's two chairs. There's two, but you can't sit on both of them.

It's like you can't sit on the fence. You've got to trust Christ or deny Christ. Christ. And just as that famous singer chose his profession, we need to choose Christ.

We need to trust Christ. And know him as our saviour. And really to count everything else as dung. As rubbish. As loss. That we may please God. So we should be dead.

[10 : 32] We should be dead to self. We should die to self. We need to be the dead church, as it were. Dead to self. We need to be dead to worldly desires. We need to, as it were, to take up our cross daily.

To follow him. And then we say, thirdly, we should be dead to sin. Well, we'll go to 1 Peter 2, verse 24. 1 Peter 2, verse 24. It says how we should die to sin.

We talked about dead to self. Dead to worldly desires. Now dead to sin. 1 Peter 2, verse 24. It reads, who his own self. Bear our sins in his own body on the tree.

That we being dead to sin should live unto righteousness. By whose stripes ye were healed. Notice here it's twofold. Dead to sin and alive unto righteousness.

Living unto righteousness. Think of the sinful nature. It's in all of us. How does a worm get inside an apple? Perhaps you think the worm burrows its way from the outside.

[11 : 37] The worm burrows its way into the apple. But no. Scientists have discovered that the worm comes from the inside. How does he get there? It's simple.

An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. You know, while the tree is blossoming, the egg is laid in that apple blossom. And then sometime later, the worm hatches in the heart of the apple and eats his way out.

Friends, sin is like that, isn't it? Sin is like the worm in the apple. It's in the heart of us. You know, the heart is deceitful above all things. Desperately wicked. Who can know it? Sin is like that worm that begins in the heart.

And it works out through the person's thoughts and words and actions. The heart has to be radically transformed. Paul says in Romans 6 verse 2, God forbid, how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?

You know, that's the Bible model for us. That as God's people, we should actually be dead, dead to sin. That we should be like a dead man to sin.

[12 : 42] Romans 6 verse 6, it goes on. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him. That the body of sins might be destroyed. That henceforth we should not serve sin.

For he that is dead is freed from sin. You know, we need to pray that we are dead. We need to pray that we die, as it were. Die unto sin. That we are dead unto sin. Verse 8, it reads on.

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him. And then verse 11 further it reads, Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead, indeed unto sin, but alive unto God.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now this is such a radical concept really, isn't it? That we should be wanting to die. To be dead unto sin. We'd be like a dead man, a dead woman towards sin.

That sin would have the same attraction to us as to a dead corpse lying in the morgue. Verse 12, it reads, Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lust thereof.

[13 : 49] Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. Don't yield your body as an instrument of unrighteousness unto sin. But, it goes on, but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead.

And your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. You know, these are concepts it's hard to wrap your head around. That we can be such that we are dead to sin.

And the attraction of sin. And that we are alive to God. We're so full of his life. And full of a life lived for him. That we are so alive unto God. That our members, our body, our persons are instruments in his hand.

That we are so held by him as instruments. That we would be so used of God. That he would minister through us as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Sin. It's like that worm in the apple. John Wesley's mother defines sin to him like this. If you would judge the unlawfulness of pleasure, then take this simple rule.

[14:58] And she says this. Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, and takes off the relish of spiritual things, that to you is sin.

So it's like sin is something that gets in the way of truly living for our saviour.

If it's going to hurt our conscience, if it's going to reduce our sensitivity to our God, if it's going to take away that relishing of spiritual things, that's sin.

We need to die to that. Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, and takes off the relish of spiritual things, that to you is sin.

There's this preacher who preached upon the subject of sin, and one time the officials of the church took him aside, and they said to him, his name was Dr. Howard, they said, Dr. Howard, we don't want you to talk as openly as you do about man's guilt and corruption, because if our boys and girls hear you discussing that subject, they will more easily become sinners.

[16:18] Call it a mistake, if you will, but do not speak so plainly about sin. And so the minister, he took down a bottle of poison, and he showed it to the visitor, and he said, see that label?

It says strychnine, and underneath it, in bold red letters, the word poison. Do you know what you're asking me to do? You're asking me to change the label. Suppose I do, and I paste over it the words essence of peppermint.

Don't you see what might happen? Someone would use it, not knowing the danger involved, and would certainly die. It's the same, he's making the point, it's the same with sin. You know, we could tone it down, we could make it more easy to dismiss the subject of sin.

It's like trying to change a label on a bottle that says poison. And, you know, the story's told of people, as we might have heard, such things, where someone might put some weed killer or pesticide in some kind of, maybe whatever was available, like a pop bottle, you know, a lemonade bottle, and then some little child takes that thinking that it's harmless, when it should be clearly put somewhere away and clearly marked as poison.

And friends, we should be dead to sin. We should see sin for what it is. It's something, see the sinfulness of sin and avoid it. Another thing that we should die to is we should be dead to the world.

[17:51] 1 John 2.16, again a familiar verse, it says, For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Verse 17, And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. It's saying here that the world is something we should be cognizant of, we should be mindful of and alert to the danger of the world.

It's contrary to God, and it's contrary to the will of God. Colossians 2.20, it says, Wherefore, if you be dead with Christ, again that dying with Christ, that being dead, if we be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why is there living in the world?

Are you subject to ordinances? It's saying there, it's contrasting that we're not living in the world, but we are dead with Christ. We are dead with him to the world.

And it's a concept, it's hard to truly fathom, but yet the Bible speaks of this very plainly, that we should be dead to the world. To die to the world, what does that mean?

[19:06] To die to the world, the fashions of the world, the rebellion of the world, the desires of the world. It's like we're in a different culture, a different zone.

It's almost like a scuba diver that lives in the water, but breathes the air, and they take their own environment with them. So too for us, we are in the world, but not of the world.

So worldly philosophies and thinking, we are to be dead to that. Worldly culture and reasoning, it's foreign to us. Think of the culture of this world. The world's culture thinks that it's okay to harvest human body parts from babies who've been made in the science lab.

The world's culture would say, it's okay to kill one pair of unborn twins simply because the mum doesn't want the extra workload of having two born.

That's the culture of the world. The culture of the world would laugh at South Park and the crudity of the Simpsons and such crass humour as that, such perversion, perverted humour.

[20:11] And we should be dead to it. I want to be dead to the world, to the things of the world. I don't want anything to do with it. Someone has described the world and the world system and summarised it in four ways.

We see here, yeah. We see someone has summed it up like this, what the world and the world system consists of. And just how one person has kind of summed it up.

For the world, for the one seeking and driven by the world, it's often driven by materialism, driven by money. Some would put their lives, expend their lives simply to amass money.

For some, it's fame or popularity, just wanting to be known by others, to be something in front of others. A third one is power.

For some, they live their lives to have control, to do everything for their own benefit, for their own sense of power. And the fourth one there is for pleasure.

[21 : 20] Just to please one's sensual desires. As the world would say, if it feels good, do it. It's all about pleasure. And we know these things are dangerous for us and we should avoid them.

It's almost like some would carry the weight of the world on their shoulders when really we know the Lord's holding the world in his hand. We need to have that concept.

So not to chase the world in its ways, but to seek after our Saviour, to surrender our lives to him and let him take charge. Let him guide your life, your way.

And just lastly, a fifth point, that we should be dead to the flesh. Galatians 5 verse 24. It says, And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections or the emotions and the lusts.

They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and the lusts. It's talking here about our fleshly feelings and desires.

[22 : 19] We're called to die to the flesh. And friends, we know it can take some time to get there. We know the flesh sometimes flares up and shows its ugly face and we've got to keep killing it, as it were.

And for some, their flesh is all about maybe old hurts or emotional scars. They become touching and unforgiving. There's things that they've not really surrendered to the Lord.

There's this root of bitterness that consumes some people, that they haven't submitted these things to the Lord. There's some of their sensations tingled, the feelings tingled, the senses satisfied, the flesh pampered to, such that that's all that drives them.

And it drives them when they're looking for a church, for example. They just want something that's going to make them feel warm and fuzzy and tingle in and make them feel good without realising, actually, is that the flesh?

Is that entertaining and pleasing the flesh? When really, I need to follow after the spirit. And what does the word say? What does God want? And another problem with the flesh is offending, getting offended.

[23 : 30] It's like one preacher said, the dead men never get offended. We should be such that we are dead. So that our flesh, our sense of pride, of wanting applause and praise, we die to that.

That doesn't drive us. It's not about how we feel or making ourselves feel good. It's about the truth. That's what counts. And we'd be such that we'd be dead that our feelings can't get hurt.

And of course, we're still human. But we ought to be aspiring to that, to die to the flesh. You know, the Eskimos, when they go hunting, people might have heard this story, that what they apparently do is they take a large, sharp knife and they dip it in frozen blood and then they stick it in the snow and then the wolves, these Arctic wolves come along and they're attracted to the blood.

And they lick the blood off the knife until they don't realise it, but they're slicing their own tongue.

And they're consuming not just the blood of the knife, but their own blood. And this insatiable desire kills the wolf.

And that's like the flesh. It's a picture of the flesh. The flesh cannot satisfy. You know, we can seek after the flesh. We can be driven by the flesh. We can be drawn by the flesh. And it's empty and it leads to destruction, just as it does to that wolf that's licking the knife.

[24 : 51] Friends, it's just going to destroy us. If we're led by the flesh, the affections and lusts, the ambitions, the passions, the self-will, we need to surrender.

And let the Lord be. Let the Lord be our driving passion. Let Him be our overwhelming desire. Let our love, our fulfilment, our purpose be in Him, in Christ.

So, friends, the solution to offences, you know, we can all be offended and bear things that we hold some grudge or hurt or some sense of being done wrong.

We should die to self. Don't carry that. Trust Christ. Let your identity and your fulfilment be Christ. In knowing Him, in loving Him, in dying to self, letting Christ live His life through you such that you will die to self, die to the flesh.

James says, submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. So, as we surrender to God, as we submit to Him, as we come under His leading, under His direction, then we resist the devil and it promises us that the devil will flee.

[26 : 05] Submit yourself to God and the devil will flee from you. We heard this morning, Ephesians 2, about how the enemy, Satan, would hinder us and how we, in times past, it talked about how we walked according to the course of this world.

We're not there anymore. God helping us. We're not living according to the direction of this world, but we're living according to God's direction.

God helping us. And so, let's be encouraged to see the flesh for what it is, recognise it when it shows itself. Hold those offences, those emotions, those hurt feelings and give them to the Lord. Submit them to Him. Let's not let anything offend us or get in our way of serving our Lord. Let not anything stop us from knowing Him, from living for His glory.

Let's be such that we'll truly die to self and they will be immune to offences. That we would be such that we would consider ourselves almost as if we were dead, actually dead, a dead body towards such things.

[27 : 21] Now, really, the Christian message, the Bible direction for life is so contrary to other philosophies, to worldly teachings.

For example, we see there's a big long list here of what other kind of philosophies would say. For example, Greece, they would say be wise, know yourself. Rome would say be strong, discipline yourself.

Religion would say be good, conform yourself. Epicureanism, which is about the seeking of pleasure as if pleasure drives you. Be sensuous, enjoy yourself.

Education says be resourceful, expand yourself. Asceticism, which is like, you know, real privation of your, you know, real strict living.

It says be lowly, suppress yourself. Psychology would say be confident, assert yourself. Materialism would say be satisfied, please yourself. Pride would say be superior, promote yourself.

[28 : 20] Humanism would say be capable, believe in yourself. Legalism would say be pious, you know, be religious, limit yourself. And then philanthropy, you know, which is being benevolent, being a giving kind of nature, would say be generous, release yourself.

You know, all of these things really fail to really deliver what God says we ought to have for ourselves. Really, the Bible message, the message of our Lord is be a servant of God, serve others and die to yourself.

Die to yourself. We see Titus 2, the next there, verse 12, it talks about grace teaching us. Titus 2, verse 12, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

Again, deny yourself, deny ungodliness. You know, make that decision, I'm going to say no, I'm going to say no to ungodliness, I'm going to say no to worldly lusts, and I'm going to say yes to living righteously, living soberly, living godly.

It's about that decision point, that you're not sitting on two chairs. You're going to say, I'm going to live for Christ, I'm going to live for the Saviour. You know, there's stories we could tell of great accomplishments of men.

[29 : 41] There was an explorer in the Antarctic, Ernest Shackleton, trekked for 127 days, and then they never made their goal, they had to turn back. And what it is that obsessed them as they had to, as their ponies died, their rations were all but exhausted, they had to turn back towards base, what obsessed them was the hunger that they had.

Now they thought, they talked about, you know, I don't know if you had your tea yet, but, you know, anything delightful that you can eat, all the gourmet delights that they knew back home, the sumptuous menus, and as they staggered along, they were suffering from dysentery, not knowing whether they would survive, they just kept talking to each other about eating, and about what they, what they were looking forward to when they got to, back to civilisation.

And friends, really, we've got that same inner drive, that sense of, of wanting something. And our Lord says this in Matthew 5 verse 6, as we could think of it in comparison with feeling really hungry, we should get really hungry and thirsty after righteousness.

He says, blessed are they. You know, they're happy, they're glad. Those are the ones that are truly blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. And he says, they shall be filled.

You know, do we have that desire, that hunger, that longing, that quest, that obsession to be dead to sin, to be alive to God, to hunger and thirst after him, to know him and his righteousness, to know him who makes us righteous, to know him who is our righteousness.

[31 : 19] And such that we would have, our attraction to sin would be like it would be for a dead corpse, like someone in the morgue with a ticket on his toes. You know, we should have such a, that we should be like a carcass towards sin.

So really, I urge you today, think of these things, how do we, how do we fathom it, how do we make this happen? It's only by the grace of God, isn't it?

We can only, we can only trust that he will affect that work in us. It can't be really of ourselves, it has to be really that we surrender to him and his control.

That we would be an obedient Christian, really, is a dead one. A dead one. And we should be, as it were, a dead church. A dead. We should die. We should die to self.

We should die to worldly gain. We should die to sin. We should die to the world. We should die to the flesh. The question is, are you dead yet? I hope you are. We need to be a dead church in these regards.

[32 : 20] A dead church. Dead to sin. But of course, alive. Truly alive. So when we're dead to sin, then we're truly alive. We're truly alive to God. And Paul said, I die daily.

I die daily. And we have really true new life as we read in 2 Corinthians 5.17. Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he's a new creature. Old things are passed away.

Behold, all things are become new. And all of these things we're talking about really, we're speaking really to believers. Yet, it starts with this. It starts with that new life that's found in Christ.

That if we can find Christ, if we can trust Christ, if we are in Christ, if we know him as our saviour, the Bible says, we made a new creation, a new creature. A brand new heart happens.

A brand new start. A brand new life. A brand new way of living. And the old things are passed away as if they're dead and gone. And everything is new. Renewed in Christ.

[33 : 18] We're alive in Christ. We have new life. New life in Christ. So, contemplate these things. I suppose, really, it's as we are saved that we will die daily. We'll start to die.

Maybe the dying process might be over an extended period of time. That we'll actually die to sin. Amen? Don't you want that? That sin would not have that attraction.

That you would die to self. That it won't be self sitting on the throne room of your heart. But Christ, that you would die to worldly gain, to worldly thinking, to the world and its ways.

And that you'll die to the flesh. That that flesh can be nailed, nailed, crucified, dying daily, dying daily. That we can have that same response to something fleshly that a dead body would have towards it.

That we would be dead towards that and alive to God. That he could affect that amazing holiness that is really his work from start to end, really, isn't it?

[34 : 21] That we can really submit to his work of holiness in our hearts. And that we'll have that hungering and thirsting for it. And he will give it to us. They shall be filled.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you are the effector of our salvation and of our sanctification. Lord, we know salvation is your gift and likewise sanctification.

Our holiness holiness is really your holiness affected in us. It's when we get out of the way and let your Holy Spirit make us holy. Lord, help us to be such that we will see a deadening of ourselves, that we'll be a dead church towards sin, self, and flesh, the world, and we'll be alive unto you.

Lord, we'll be truly alive that our life is you. You are our life. For me to live is Christ. Lord, we thank you that we can have that heart that will be truly dead to that which you want us to die to and truly alive to that which you want us to live for unto you and unto your praise we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.