

A Split-Sermon Transcribed

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AVOIDING THE DRIFT

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Feast of Tabernacles 2016

Good afternoon. Thank you, brethren, for that special music. Very nice.

We've been talking about engaging fully in what God has called us to do while attending to all we have to do in this physical life. This live can be so overwhelming it's easy to put what we have to do spiritually on hold or even let it drive out everything we value most.

We've also looked at the need to renew our commitment daily to become a living sacrifice, not on a superficial level but to dig down deep to uncover those things we must really be overcoming.

The fact is, we can't do it alone. We need each other for one simple fact. We don't know ourselves. We drift and we take tangents and we can't see it happening in real time. We get caught up inside our own head. And finding our way out is next to impossible without some help.

American Theoretical Physicist, Richard Feynman, who was once dubbed the smartest man in the world, put it this way in a commencement address at Cal Tech in 1974. He said, "*The first principle is that you must not fool yourself. And you are the easiest person to fool.*" It's another way of saying what Jeremiah was inspired to write in Jeremiah 17 and verse 9. He wrote:

**Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"**

Because of this fact, we don't know when we drift. And we do. The pulls of this world water down our engagement and compromises our commitment to this way of life. And so we drift. We tend to drift away from what God wants for us. Locked inside of our own heads we rationalize those things that we should be doing and consequently generate thinking that suits our situation, our temperament or our comfort zone. Everything important in our life is uphill. We have to work at it.

A good relationship is uphill. It doesn't just happen. We don't drift into discipline. We don't drift into the fruits of the spirit. We don't drift into prayer and Bible Study. We don't drift into good health and exercise. These things require effort.

The second law of thermodynamics states that, "in a closed or isolated system entropy increases over time." That is to say we tend to go downhill if left to ourselves. We don't get better without input, without outside help. We tend towards the lowest common denominator if

left to ourselves. This not only happens to individuals but it can happen to families, teams and whole organizations. Any closed system deteriorates over time.

But, in an open system deterioration can be reversed. Our energy can be renewed. Our commitment strengthened. We are better when we are connected to each other. Fortunately we have not been called to do it alone. We were called into an ecclesia, a community. But communities are messy. They're unpredictable and sometimes they get off script. But they can also be encouraging and uplifting.

The Church was never meant to be a country club for people who have it all together or none of us would be members. It's for broken people who have been called by God to a life and to a whole bigger than we are. Each year we celebrate that life and that hope through God's Holy Days. One thing we should be learning from them is that we're in this together. God wants to build a family.

Getting comfortable with this is always been an issue for the Church. We like to distance ourselves from people who we feel haven't grown as much as we have so that nobody might think that we're anything like them. But if we could only see ourselves we would see that we have different but just as deep-seated problems that they appear to have. We all drift!

So, how do we solve this problem? The author of Hebrews addresses this issue in Hebrews 3 beginning in verse 12. He writes:

**Hebrews 3:12 See to it, brothers (and sisters), that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.**

The first thing to notice here is that he's addressing you and me and everyone else in this room. This isn't just for me. This is for all of us. What he's saying here is that each and every one of us has the capacity to turn away from the living God. He's pointing out that we tend to drift away from God. We tend to say "no" to God. Then he describes a heart issue. The heart that turns away from God begins within.

We begin to drift because of something going on inside of us. It starts small – a temptation, a dissatisfaction, a doubt, a question. "I'm not so sure about that anymore." "I'm getting really tired of this." "This is boring." "This is the same thing over and over again." This is all inside stuff. This is what goes on inside our heads. And no one knows about it unless they are looking after you. Nobody knows unless they have access to you, unless you let people in.

Showing up at services isn't enough because we're pretty good at looking good here. We can go from a bad situation at home or a squabble in the car with the kids and then pull into the parking lot and say, "We'll pick this up later." And walk in like we are different people. We put on our "church face". And then we get back into our relationships and things fall apart and nobody knows.

The only way anyone is going to know about our sinning, unbelieving heart that turns away from God is if we are in relationships where people have access to us. When we have intimate

relationships with others we pretty well know when something is going on. So, if we don't have those kinds of relationships with others we're going to struggle alone. Verse 13 of Hebrews 3:

**13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.**

The word translated here 'encourage' means to comfort, appeal to, exhort, urge, strongly entreat or beg with the idea of strengthening one another. One of the main themes of Hebrews is to strengthen our faith and commitment to avoid the deceitfulness of Satan. The author of Hebrews understands how Satan works.

So, in our defense against Satan's deceitfulness we are asked to encourage each other. How often? It says daily. It means ongoing. Not once in a lifetime. This is about relationships. You have access to people and they have access to you. And this is a key point. You have to have a relationship with someone to do this because you don't walk up to a stranger and begin to exhort them. That doesn't feel like concern. That feels like judgment. He adds:

**...as long as it is called Today,**

He's placing some urgency on this because the time is short. He's saying that we live in an age where we need this daily. Satan is always at work. And this physical life tugs at us. It overwhelms us. It discourages us. It deceives us. So we need to be in each other's lives.

He's saying I want you to be in each other's lives. I want you to know what's going on. I want you to notice when they begin to drift. I want you to notice when they don't show up, when their attitude goes south. I want you to be in their lives enough or to the extent that you can say something.

No one should ever have to struggle alone with something nobody knows about. We need to make sure that someone has access and permission to say something to us. How different might your family life had been if your mom and dad had relationships with others that could have said, "Hey, I've noticed something? Are you okay?" How different might your life have been if you were in a relationship with people who had permission to say, "Hey, I've noticed something? Are you okay?" Then the author tells why. He says:

**...so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.**

Here's what we want to avoid, a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God or a mind that is hardened by sin's deceitfulness. A person that can't be told. A person that can't learn. Sin deceives you and me. It's not just an event. It resides inside us and it deceives us and we have to understand this and its uncomfortable implications. We talk ourselves into stupid thinking and we don't even know we're doing it. It seems totally reasonable because it's coming from inside of us. We are not alone in there. There is a battle going on in there with an adversary that seeks to destroy us. We need outside help.

Sometimes we think, "I deserve it. I'm forced to do this. Who would blame me for doing this? I would be happier if only"...whatever it is. And we start to believe the stupid things we

say to ourselves. We plant seeds that grow into thoughts and actions that turn us away from the living God. The drift begins within us. So he's saying, "Guess what? The best defense is not you. The best defense is all of us together."

What have you begun to tell yourself these days? What is the thought that's growing within you every time they say that, every time you see her, every time you think I'm tired of this? I don't think I believe that anymore. Why am I doing this?" What are you telling yourself these days that if you were to tell someone else they would think you have lost your mind?

Most of us don't tell anyone else what we're thinking because they would think we've lost our minds. But if you tell them they will tell you you've lost your mind. That is the most self-destructive thing I can think of. You're hurting yourself. You are not thinking straight.

The power of this is when we get these things out, we say them to another person or persons and they begin to repeat them back, we begin to see it differently. And yes, they may think you're crazy but they may keep you from 'crazy'. They may save your life.

What if someone had been there for you years ago? What if you had given access or permission to someone years ago. What might you have avoided? This is the power of community.

So, he's saying that if you will allow someone in while you're in your life, while it's still a seed, while it's still within, while it's still in your heart, it will keep you from drifting. We serve each other as guardrails. One of the reasons we hesitate to do this, of course, is because we don't like being judged or gossiped about. If we are judging others it's because we don't really understand Satan. We don't really understand sin and we forget what was highlighted earlier in the story of Cain and Abel. God told Cain in Genesis 4 that "sin lies at the door" and that applies to each and every one of us. We are in no position to judge. Where someone else is crazy in one area, I'm crazy in another.

Then he completes the thought in verse 14 with this. He writes:

**14 We have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly till the very end.**

If we hold onto our original conviction, we share a common goal, a common commitment by not drifting into deceit and unbelief. It's that little thought that begins within that causes us to drift. It's that little thing that makes its way into our marriage, that makes its way into our beliefs, that makes its way into our finances, that makes its way into our relationship with God. And if it's left unchecked it leads to unbelief out here. It leads to sin. It leads to a hardened heart.

One area of drift can undermine everything. One thing can lead you to the place where you don't believe anything. When you begin to do the things you shouldn't be doing, when you decide it's time for divorce, when you meet the girl you shouldn't be dating, when you stop observing the Holy Days, it's not because you don't believe in God anymore. But, after you

drift, after you justify the things you do, now you begin to not believe in God and everything He says in His word.

But it starts off as a little thing, a little thought that has now impacted everything you believed, everything you originally committed to. And the way you stop, the way you avoid being tricked by the deceitfulness of sin is being in a relationship where someone has the permission to speak to you. Satan is working on you and me continuously. Hebrews is asking us to be exhorted by one another daily because Satan is working on us. He's working on me. And if he can get us thinking in the wrong direction it has the potential to undermine everything, to take us away from God.

We lose what we have come to share in Christ bit by bit. We never intended to give the whole thing up and we won't if we are paying attention to the little things. And the way we pay attention to the little things is by allowing someone in. If we don't pay attention to the little things then they will cost us everything.

We are being instructed to see one another on a regular basis so that none of us is tricked by the sin that dwells within us and thereby drift away from the faith. We are told to get into each other's business. Of course this is scary. Do you recoil when someone talks to your children or talks to you, even? Do you feel like they have no business? Are you afraid of feedback? It's scary because we are so good at doing this in a self-righteous way with each other and not so adept at doing it in "hey, I'm just like you" kind of a way.

We've all watched someone else make a bad decision. It's so obvious! But we can't see it in ourselves as Richard Feynman and Jeremiah said. We fool ourselves. But the point here in Hebrews is that there is someone here, right here, right now who can easily see what you can't see in your own life. And you will either give them access or you will not. So, to avoid the drift, someone must have access. The permission to appeal, exhort, implore and if need to, to beg.

Last week one of you sent me an email that was positive, encouraging. I didn't know how to respond to it except to say, "thank you." But, as I thought about it a bit it made we want to do better. I felt I needed to raise the bar in my own life.

Who has access to you? Who is there to keep you from drifting? Who has permission to say something to you?

The American Sociological Review found that the number of people who say they have no one to talk to has tripled in the last few decades. More people say that they have no one to confide in than those who say that they do. That should never be in God's Church. If overcoming is our goal in an effort to become more like Christ and to preach the gospel then learning has to be our focus. We need to be investing in the lives of others and they need to be investing in us.

In a truly functional community we can be vulnerable and still know that we belong. That is the power of a healthy community. Too often we see people making decisions out of their

disconnectedness. Disconnected people are lacking something. They're either not giving or receiving. But either way they are not functioning in reality. We correctly say that they are out of touch. Disconnected people aren't connecting the dots in the way that they should. They have difficulty seeing the consequences of their own behavior. They only see what they want to see. They frame things in ways that support their one-sided view of the world they inhabit.

We need to work with each other. It's not just old people cautioning young people either. As a recovering young person I can tell you there's a lot we can learn from them too. They often can spot the things that we have grown very comfortable with.

In our society, our focus is often on the lone hero who did something great. But when you pull the curtain back there was someone there who helped to make it possible. Our success is either improved or diminished by the people in our community. We are not taught community in our society. We should be learning it in our families but too few actually function at this level. This is uncomfortable. It's mutual submission in action. Mutual submission is the most influential, relational dynamic there is. And it's attractive because it's inclusive. It says, "You matter". If we are to get this right we all have to get uncomfortable. We are not the same but we can get past that by focusing on, as it says in verse 14, what we have come to share in common, our original conviction.

Are we lifting up those around us? Are we investing in their success? Overcoming is not about trying to control our reactions. It's not about trying to control or change what we say to another person. But it is actually having different kinds of things come out of our mouth because we are different. We have become different so our interactions are different.

This kind of growth happens in good relationships. Without good relationships we usually fail. We need God's Holy Spirit to give us the courage that we need to do this. The stakes are too high and the time is too short. Our will, reason and character are not enough to defeat the self. Everyone needs help from the outside to exhort us, to advise us, to encourage, to support and inspire us along the way. We cannot afford to be closed systems. We can't overcome the way we need to without waging a campaign against the self that includes input from God through His Holy Spirit and from those He has chosen to rally around us in this most important calling.

So, we owe it to each other to ask God to help us to be the kind of people that support growth in others, the kind of people that encourage others, the kind of people that look out for each other. One of the ways that we do this is by allowing others to help us to...

