

The Background of the Shocking Youth Message

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Question: One of the sermons you're most known for is the Shocking Youth Message or the 2002 Evangelism Message where 5000 youth heard you preach on Matthew 7. I've heard a little bit of the background, of the atmosphere of the other preachers at the conference and what was going on with the music. What was the background that happened before you preached that message? And the reason I ask is so that people know you weren't just up there ranting about things that didn't apply to your immediate audience. Maybe if you could just give some of the background.

Paul: There was a sermon which made a lot of people laugh. And then towards the end, after all the laughter died down, an altar call, as it's called, was given. And somewhere around, I don't know, I don't think it would be wrong to say 2-3000 kids went forward laughing, and all sorts of things - I'm sure there were some sincere young people in there, but it just seemed to me to be... it was shocking! I mean, as I watched them, as I looked at them, I was thinking: where is the reality of Christ, where is the reality of sin, where is the reality of salvation, hope, eternal things? Nothing. It was like Pavlov's dog, you know, in the experiment where they tie a dog down and they electrocute him, electrocute him, and then they take all the bands off the dog's legs and they electrocute the dog and the dog just stays there, they're trained to respond to stimuli. It's the same way. So many of our youth have been brought up with this idea of altar call and this is what you do, and you go forward... Not so much to blame that one preaching, it's just what our whole Christian culture has created, it's this idea of "after the sermon you go forward". But the reality of Christ and of conviction wasn't there. And I'll argue with any man, it wasn't. I was there.

Also at that conference there was a young man who had been greatly persecuted, kicked out of his home, everything else, from a Muslim family, who got up and shared. There was the reality of God all over that young man, all over what he said. It was absolutely amazing, I was floorboarded. And almost no one in that audience moved. I mean, there wasn't a tear, there wasn't a 'go forward', there wasn't a 'receive Christ'. And I saw him walk off that platform just totally dejected as though he had done something wrong. But I think the big thing that got me is when the supposed worship band, or whatever, came out. And all the students ran forward to the stage and were jumping up in the air and screaming and everything else. And my wife was there on the front row and 3 or 4 times a young man bumped into her so hard while he was doing his... whatever they were doing, slam-dancing or whatever you want to call it, almost knocked her back into her seat. And finally she had enough, she pushed him halfway across the thing to protect herself. And then, when I saw them pick up girls and pass them over their heads, on the crowd... I was like: what on earth is going on here??

The moment came, when I said the first few minutes of that sermon about American Christianity... and then everybody clapped. What you need to know is that salvation is by faith, and faith alone in Jesus Christ. And faith alone in Jesus Christ is preceded and followed by repentance, a turning away from sin, a hatred for the things that God hates and a love for the things that God loves. A growing in holiness and a desire not to be like Britney Spears, not to be like the world and not to be like the great majority of American Christians, but to be like Jesus Christ! I don't know why you're clapping, I'm talking about you! I didn't come here to get amens, I didn't come here to get applauded. I'm talking about you. I realized, for the sake of love I had to say something that would so jar them out of the trance they were in. And so that's what came out.

You know, I've listened to some of that sermon - it's been greatly criticized - and you know, God used that... We get testimonies, even at HeartCry, a thousands, a tens of thousands of people, everywhere from Japan, to Australia, to England, to Poland, South America, everywhere people that have been saved. But as I look through that, you know, in my emotion, in my broken-heartedness, whatever... You know, I made a few statements like 'repentance is a part of salvation', 'repentance is something that's prior to faith, after faith' that's not what I meant to say. You can't do a chronological order of repentance and faith. Faith and repentance, they occur... you have to... If you believe, you repent and you have to repent to believe. I mean, it's all there together. But what's amazing is, people will write literally pages critiquing that one statement and trying to throw out the whole message, when they can't see that it's been used to save I don't know how many people.

And another thing, let me say this: at the office at HeartCry, I have probably never heard any sermon I preached on the internet or any blogs about me or any criticisms or any good things said because when all this started - quite unknown to us because we didn't put it out on the internet - I knew that if I read things that were positive, it could greatly, greatly tempt me and turn me away from Christ with flattery. If I heard things that were greatly negative, it could crush me. I've kept myself open to criticism of godly men but let me say this, I want to make it very clear: a lot of things were said about me on the internet, maybe you could call it persecution, when Jesus was persecuted, when people said bad things about Jesus, they were always wrong. When people make critiques of me, they are not always wrong. We are men. We are weak, we are failing. And I just want people to know that when someone says something about me that's not very positive, they may be right. And I want them to know that I know that they may be right. And it breaks me. And I do want to be more exact, I do want to be more holy. I don't want to put an end to the emotions that God has given me, but I do want them to be sanctified and to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

I was just recently in Detroit and apparently some of the callers-in in a radio program where I was, they were saying: the man looks so miserable all the time. He just never laughs and he looks so sad. And if alright, I'd like to address that just for a moment.

First of all: the friends who know me, their greatest critique of me is that I joke too much. My home is a home so full of laughter. We're homeschoolers, but most strict homeschoolers would think that we were too wild in my house. A lot of dancing, a lot of really fun stuff going on. But we are living in a time where billions of people are dying without Christ, we are living in a time when millions of so-called evangelicals do not even understand the Gospel. We are living in a time when some of the greatest 'evangelical heroes', if they were simply critiqued in light of historical Christianity, they would be proven heretics. Shouldn't somebody be disturbed? Shouldn't someone be broken and shouldn't someone stand up and say 'this is wrong'? This is wrong! And it is wrong. It's very, very wrong.

And I look at the prophet Jeremiah, I wouldn't have called him the happiest man on the planet. He was a weeping prophet. Jesus was known as a Man of Sorrows. Yes, He was a man of great joy, but He was also the Man of Sorrows. These are serious, solemn times. Our country could be on the verge of destruction, the West is entirely being destroyed, there are things going on, judgments of God, other things that are fallen... This is a time not to laugh our way straight into hell, to have godly joy, yes, but to realize: these are the worst of times, these are the best of times. This is a time in history, when much will be determined. We need men who will see this and fight. And you're not going to stand up against the world, you're not going to be able to stand up against a... I don't even know what you would call it anymore... a 'churchianity' in America, you're not going to be able to stand up against that without people really, really coming down on you. But it's worth it. It's worth it, because the Gospel is at stake and because the souls of people are at stake, because the glory of God is at stake. I'm not trying to be hard for the sake of being hard. Do you realize how much love it takes to stand before 5000 people and tell them that American Christianity is almost totally wrong? Do you know what it's going to cost me to never be asked back again to something like this? To be unpopular? Do you know why you do it? You don't do it because you get paid well, you don't do it because men love you, you do it because you love men and because more than that, you want to honor God!