

Valley View Chapel
April 25, 2010
Love Story 8
Hosea 4:1-9
“When Pastors Go Bad”

Introduction

On February 13 of last year Continental Connection Flight 3407 left Liberty International Airport in Newark carrying 49 passengers and crew. The aircraft was only minutes away from landing at Buffalo International Airport when it plunged to the ground and burst into flames. At first, ice on the wings was thought to be the cause of the accident. The NTSB report, however, determined that ice was not what doomed the flight. The plane crashed because the crew allowed the plane to fly dangerously slow just before the accident. Neither the captain Marvin Renslow nor the co-pilot Rebecca Shaw apparently had a clue what had gone wrong.

To make matters worse, as the plane started to stall during the approach to the airport, Captain Renslow pulled *back* on the controls to pull the nose *up*. He should have pushed the nose *down*. Moreover, Renslow did not add enough power to prevent the plane from careening into the ground. Investigators blamed the crash entirely on “cockpit error.” Officials later discovered that Captain Renslow had flunked several pilot training tests. All 49 on board lost their lives as did one person on the ground.

50 people died because of lack of knowledge.

“Lack of knowledge” can be deadly. The prophet Hosea knew this more than 2,700 years ago which is why he declared in Hosea 4:6, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”

For the remainder of today’s message, I want to try to answer three questions suggested by today’s text.

- What can happen due to lack of knowledge?
- What exactly is meant by lack of knowledge?
- Who is to blame for lack of knowledge?

What can happen due to lack of knowledge?

God said through his prophet in the sixth verse: “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”

In the case of Continental Flight 3407, people lost their lives from lack of knowledge.

While the Hebrew word translated “destroyed” can mean “to die,” it can also mean “to cut off.”

Hosea told the Jews of the northern kingdom that they were in danger of being “cut off.”

Let me establish the context of the book of Hosea up to this point in the fourth chapter.

After the death of Solomon, the formerly united nation of Israel separated into two distinct nations – Israel to the north and Judah to the south. By the time of Hosea, around 750 B.C., the northern kingdom had been around for over 200 years. They had never had a good king. All their kings had led the people into disobedience of God’s laws and into idolatry, primarily into worshiping the Canaanite fertility god named “Baal.” Yet simultaneously Israel continued to practice the traditions and rituals commanded by Moses in the law. In other words, the Jews were working both sides of the street. They thought that as long as they gave God the Sabbath and observed the special feast days that they were doing alright spiritually. It didn’t matter what they did the rest of the time.

Some people have the same attitude today. They think that if they go to church on Sunday and maybe on Good Friday and Christmas Eve, and as long as they sing the songs, give an offering, listen to the sermon and maybe even help out a little bit around the church, that they can pretty much do as they please the rest of the time.

Israel’s problem was *lack of knowledge* because the laws of God had neither been faithfully taught nor consistently obeyed. Their lack of knowledge resulted in a lack of obedience leading God to threaten them with being “cut off” unless they repented.

“Cut off” from *what*? “Cut off” from God’s favor; God’s blessing; God’s kindness; God’s grace and mercy; God’s provision and protection.

Because of a lack of knowledge, we too can be “cut off” from what God wants to do in our lives.

What is the lack of knowledge?

I prefer the *ESV* and *NKJV* rendering of the closing words of verse 1: “There is no...knowledge of God in the land.”

It’s not a lack of knowledge in general that causes people to be “cut off.” The problem isn’t the absence of a good liberal arts education. It’s the lack of *a particular kind of knowledge* – the knowledge of God.

What is meant by “knowledge of God?” The knowledge of God refers to *who God is*; *what God has done*; and *what he requires*.

I wonder what kind of answers we would get if we asked the general public: “Who is God?”

I wonder what kind of answers we would get if we asked the general public: “What has God done?” I wonder what kind of answers we would get if we asked the general public: “What does God require of you?”

Their answers would reveal their knowledge of God. So what does it mean to have “a knowledge of God?”

Knowledge of God means two things.

First, it means *intimacy*.

There’s a difference between “knowing about,” “knowing,” and “knowing intimately.”

I “know about” Billy Graham although I’ve never met him.

I “know” Josh Dean and Robbie Gross because they’re my friends and I’ve worked with them almost every day for a number of years.

But there’s only one person I know intimately, and that’s my wife. I know her intimately because we’ve shared the joys and sorrows of life together on a daily basis for almost 39 years.

God wants more from you than to know him as a “good luck charm” when you need a favor or like a spare tire which you never think about unless there’s an emergency. He wants you to know him as the love of your life.

Listen to the desire of God’s heart as expressed in Hosea 2:20: “I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall *know* the LORD.” (ESV)

The same Hebrew word for “know” – *yada* – was employed in Genesis 4:1, “Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain....” Genesis 4:1 (NKJV)

God said that he wanted to “know” his people with the same kind of intimacy that Adam knew Eve when Cain was conceived. God wants to know *you* like that and he wants you to know *him* like that!

Second, “knowledge of God” means “integrity.” To “know God” with integrity means that *we behave* according to *what we say we believe*. *We walk the talk*.

The word “integrity” was used in Matthew 22:16 and Mark 12:14 when some men came up to Jesus and said: “Teacher, we know you are a man of *integrity*.” (NIV)

The word “integrity” denotes “true” as opposed to “counterfeit”; “real” as opposed to “phony.”

We “know God” the way he wants to be known when we have a personal and intimate relationship with him and because of the depth of that relationship, our *performance* matches our *profession*.

Who’s to blame for the lack of knowledge?

Who was ultimately to blame for the crash of Continental Flight 3407? Certainly Captain Renslow and co-pilot Shaw bear some responsibility. The transcript of cockpit conversation revealed that they weren’t paying close attention to the airplane in the final minutes before the crash. They were violating FCC rules by talking about non-flight related topics as they were making the approach to Buffalo International. That’s not all. Inexplicably, the flight data recorder revealed that the plane had been set on auto pilot.

But those in charge of the training process were also at fault. Captain Renslow never should have been flying without knowing what to do in an emergency situation. The son of a passenger killed aboard the flight asked the question: "What was this guy doing flying this airplane?"

Somehow I think that the plane would have landed safely if Chesley Sullenberger had been at the controls.

Hosea left no doubt where the blame should be placed for the peoples’ lack of knowledge – at the doorstep of the priests, the spiritual leaders of Israel.

“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, *I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God...*” Hosea 4:6

Because the priests failed in their duty toward the people, we read in the ninth verse: “Like people, like priests.” The *people* were disobedient because their *priests* were disobedient.

John Maxwell said that the most important leadership principle in the world is: “People *do* what people *see*.” Followers usually do what they see their leaders doing.

Recently I read a fascinating book by Alan Deutschman entitled *Walk the Walk: The #1 Rule of Real Leaders*.

Deutschman gave three examples that bear out the truth that “people *do* what people *see*.”

- “When Alice Waters would see a vase of flowers placed a quarter of an inch off center on a table at...her renowned restaurant in Berkeley, CA, she wouldn’t explode at her staffers. She would simply move the vase to the precise center by herself, knowing that someone would be watching and would learn from her example.”

- “When Fred Smith walked around Fed Ex’s hub operation at Memphis International Airport, he took the same approach. One Fed-Ex employee said: ‘He is the type of a person who would walk into a hanger and if he saw a grease spot on the floor, instead of ordering someone else to clean it up, he’d do it himself.’”
- “When Ray Kroc came to visit McDonald’s, he didn’t tell his franchise owners to pick up the trash from their parking lots. He did it himself while they looked on.”

The priests failed the people in three ways. And pastors go bad in the same three ways.

Pastors go bad when they don’t know the truth

The priests weren’t students of the Word of God. They relied on their prestige, their power, their position, their title to get them by.

The number one job of a pastor (after cultivating his own authentic relationship of intimacy with God) is to *know the truth*. There’s no such thing as a “good pastor” who isn’t a serious student of Scripture. He must read it devotionally to feed his own soul. He must read the best commentaries he can afford to help him get the sense of the passage he is planning to teach. He must be disciplined and ruthless in carving out time during the week to know the truth and to allow the truth to grip and transform his soul.

Pastors go bad when they don’t teach the truth

There are two ways that pastors go bad when it comes to teaching the truth.

First, they can teach false doctrine. Or they can teach right doctrine but in a dull and uninspiring way. It’s a sin to take the most exciting, life-changing message in the whole world and make it boring!

But it’s hard work to teach the truth! You need a basic understanding of the text; a logical outline; compelling illustrations; a convincing appeal; and you need to know when it’s time to quit.

One of my favorite preachers, Stuart Briscoe, told about the first sermon he ever preached. He hadn’t thought out a good conclusion for the sermon, so he simply confessed: “I’m not really sure I know how to end my message this morning.” A little old man in the back said for all to hear: “Shut up and sit down.” An effective preacher needs to know when it’s time to “shut up and sit down.”

Pastors and teachers do their people a sinful disservice by being *intellectually sloppy* in their *preparation* and *artistically sloppy* in their *presentation*.

Pastors go bad when they don’t live the truth

It's not enough for a pastor to *know* the truth and *teach* the truth. He must *live* the truth. This applies to mothers and fathers; Sunday school teachers; children's workers; adult volunteer leaders; and Bible study teachers. You dare not teach the Word of God in any context – church, home, or community - until you've lived-out consistently the truth you're teaching. My old friend Richard Allen Farmer once said that his grandmother gave him good advice when she heard he was going to be a preacher: "Don't ever preach on Daniel in the lion's den until you've been there!"

There are some "teaching" or "coaching" situations where it doesn't much matter what your moral or ethical character is like.

Case in point: Rick Pitino, head coach of the University of Louisville basketball team. Last year it was revealed Coach Pitino had an adulterous relationship with a woman he had just met earlier that evening. When she became pregnant, this married father of five children paid for her abortion.

Apparently Pitino's "indiscretion" had no adverse affect on the university's commitment to him as a role model for the young men who look to him for leadership.

Dr. James Ramsey, the University of Louisville president, issued a statement that read: "Rick Pitino is the University of Louisville's basketball coach. He has been a role model for countless young people and a positive influence on this community.... He's clearly made errors in judgment that have come under intense public scrutiny. We can't ignore these errors in judgment, and they have saddened and disappointed me. As we try to teach our students, when you make a mistake, you admit it and right it as best you can. Coach has done that today."

Pitino's attorney Steve Pence, the former Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky, defended the university's decision to keep Pitino as the coach on the grounds that "the coach has not done anything illegal."

God holds pastors, preachers, and all those who are in a position of moral and spiritual influence over others to a much higher standard than the University of Louisville holds Rick Pitino. It's not good enough for spiritual leaders to have "done nothing illegal."

Jesus said in Luke 17:1-3, "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves."

The damage done to others by a spiritual leader who fails to practice what he preaches can be devastating. That's why James issued a serious warning to those with aspirations to spiritual leadership: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." James 3:1 (NIV)

Conclusion

Before I close, some of you may be tempted to think that if you have a “lack of knowledge” then it’s someone else’s fault. Not so fast. *We* have a responsibility to take advantage of the resources our generous Lord has made available to know him intimately and to represent him authentically. How many Christians don’t “know God” at the level God intended because they have been captivated by the things of this world instead of by a passion to fulfill the purpose and potential God had in mind when he saved them?

Paul’s admonition to the Colossians is one that all of us need to hear and obey: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Colossians 3:2 (NIV)

Are you doing your part to “know God” as he desires and demands to be known? Or have you let the things and concerns of this world crowd him to the margins of your priorities?

Pastors “go bad” when they don’t *know* the truth; *teach* the truth; or *live* the truth. So does everyone who has a spiritual field of influence. May our passion from this day forward be to *know* the truth; *teach* the truth; and live the *truth* so that those who depend on us as a source of their spiritual knowledge not be “cut off” from God’s best for their lives.