

Drifting From Desire

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Date: 19 July 2015

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Can we turn back for a little while this evening to Sam 73 in the book of Sam's in the Old Testament on page 586 and we're going to take a look at this Sam this evening and it's entitled Drifting from Desire and what I really love about this Sam is its searing honesty and the fact that holy scripture and the word of God is so blunt and honest and real and I think that's one of the great lessons before we learn anything else about this Sam is the truth of a real person with real faith in a real position who is really struggling and if nothing if we learn nothing else then surely we must learn that the Christian life as we take it and broaden it into our post-cross experience is going to be one that's peppered with battles and struggles and the sooner that we confess that and recognise that and share that with others and seek their help and strength then the stronger we will be one of the great weaknesses and one of the great challenges of a growing church is that as we grow you can become almost living in a shallow experience of the Christian faith because there's lots of people around and we don't get beyond the surface that's a huge weakness that we need to guard against in our Christian life you must find people and you must be in real enough relationships with people with whom you can share struggles and battles and fears and not maintain some kind of stiff upper lip as if you have no problems and no difficulties and no needs spiritually because here is a Sam part of inspired scripture written by one of the leaders of the praise in Israel Esaaf around the time of David who we can clearly see from his remarkable honesty and openness under the inspiration of God who was drifting from desire and drifting from God I nearly lost my foothold my feet had almost slipped and I just say for a very short aside this is the leaders in the church this is a leader of the praise can I remind the leaders in this church of that fact and can remind you as people in the church about your leaders those who've been set over you and spiritual things that they are not above doubt and fear and turning away from God and battling and struggling and they need your prayers and did we need one another's prayers as we recognize that we don't really know anything else about

Esaaf we don't know anything about his life about his personal life about whether he was married or family or whether he lived but we know he was set aside he would be one of the trial Levi and he was set aside to be part of those who led the praise in the temple and in his life he found himself looking away from God and looking around at the world around him there was obviously straight tensions and strife and difficulties and those who didn't believe were flourishing doesn't sound terribly unlike the society in which we live in today and as he was looking at them his feet almost slipped because he saw the prosperity of the wicked and every way they seemed to be having a great life and that is what he saw and he struggled with that their lives seemed to be carefree it seemed to be easy for them it seemed to be that they could blaspheme against God and God did nothing about it it seemed that they could question God and say God how does God know how does the most high have knowledge and they could put their fingers up at God as it were and God would do nothing about it and it seemed that their lives were easy they could sleep well at night they were healthy and strong they were free from the burdens common to man and it's very interesting even at this point how irrational his complaint became you know he was looking at the world through kind of inverted rose colored spectacles and he was saying that those who didn't believe it seems to be that everything was tremendous everything was good and everything was easy in their lives now I don't think that was the case then and I'm sure it's not the case now but we can we can look like that sometimes can't we and we can look at those who aren't believing and say their life is easy their life is problem free they don't have the weights and the burdens and the struggles and the ethics and the morality and the worship and the truth and the burdens that we seem to have and he is out of all proportion looking at their lives with a degree of envy and with a degree of longing and what's interesting is that he sees not just the kind of wealth and ease of their lives but he also

sees their evil and I never really never really picked that up before that you know he talks about pride as their necklace violence callous hearts evil conceits scoffing speaking with malice and saying all these things and he knows these things but he's still attracted by it he's still attracted by their life and that's an interesting thing for him this leader of the praise this significant spiritual man his feet his feet had almost slipped and he feels that his life and the purity of his life as a believer it was a waste of time surely in vain I've kept my heart pure in vain I've washed my hands in an instance the same kind of word that's used by Ecclesiastes the vanity of life and he is it's been a waste of time for him to follow his God and to serve his God because it seems that those who don't follow and don't serve are having a much better life and are having much more enjoyable experience so there's this looking around him and he is drifting from God in his life but he recognizes that as a heart problem in verse 21 he says it was when my heart was grieved and my spirit

embittered I was senseless and ignorant I was a brute beast before you and immediately we are taken to the heart the root of the matter for him and that's great and it's significant and it's important to note at this stage that his drifting from God was a matter of his heart because he had left God out of the equation of his own heart and soul and his heart atrophied his heart become hardened and embittered against God and that embitterment colored everything of his life and that is such a strong and powerful recognition for us about the importance of dealing with not everybody else's heart but our own heart before God and remembering the significance of the forgiveness that we've received and the love of Christ that has been poured out into our hearts so that we follow him and serve him because when we stop doing that when we stop dealing with God at a heart level this morning at Buclou I preached what I preached previously in Camelden which I preached previously in St. Colomans a few weeks ago but Daniel in the Lion's den and how his life whatever was happening on the ups and downs was molded by this relentless pursuit of prayer is three times a day this consistent ritualistic but real relationship with God which fixed his dependence on God and his need for God in his life there's nothing more of a more accurate gauge of our understanding of our own hearts and of our own understanding of our own spiritual life than our prayer life and our need for prayer and our need for coming to God because when we fail to see that and when we fail to deal with our hearts in a day to day basis then what we find is we become senseless and ignorant I was a brute beast before you so we all it's like he's saying we become like animals soulless as it were no spiritual dimension to our lives and that's how that's how the majority of people who aren't Christians are living their lives I'm not saying they're bad people in terms of the you know the way they live and their basic morality they're certainly like us all guilty before God but I'm saying they're soulless in that they don't have that they're spiritually dead not that relationship with God and it's as if Asaph is saying here that's what I became again I became like a brute beast without soul life without relationship with God I was living simply to satisfy my instincts like a wild animal just living at that base level of getting up eating drinking laughing playing working going to bed eating drinking and and that kind of almost thoughtless soulless existence and simply living at that level and it was his heart experience because his heart had become grieved and embittered nobody else's heart it was his own and I do think there's tremendous power in the Psalms and in the word of God which consistently reminds us to guard our own hearts spiritually it's the ongoing isn't it it's the ongoing activity of being part of for example as we look at the word here part of the worship ourselves that we're not just receiving a lecture or a talk on the word of God but we're we believe the Holy Spirit is taking of his word and asking us to examine our own our own lives and our own hearts so that each

time we worship each time we come to God's word each time that we're in fellowship with God's people there's a sense in which there's a self examination going on there's a guarding of our hearts and lives before God and seeing and looking at what he's saying and could it be that in our lives at this point we're looking at the world longingly looking at the life of those who are not believers longingly this is easier it's hard being a Christian it's a struggle it's a battle could it be you feel like a staff that you're imprisoned in religious works coming to church reading the Bible praying occasionally that it's become a ritual that is lost its joy and lost its passion and lost its reality for you and could it be that your own summary or could it be that my own summary might well be one that God in his inspired word has given us that our feet have almost slipped nobody else knows we look great on the outside and we say all the right things and we smile at the right places and we sing when we're supposed to but our feet have almost slipped and we're struggling to maintain our Christian the reality of our Christian life we can maintain the shell that that's not at least for a while

it's not that difficult but the reality of a living relationship with God has become something that has almost left us in our lives we've almost slipped spiritually and this a Sam like this is given to us because God loves us and he wants us to be alert and aware of this dangerous place to be and to encourage us all to look into our own hearts and to deal with our own hearts and our own needs and that is really the great challenge for us in our lives that that that is what we must deal with the gospel is about transformation and it's not about flash significant wonderful whoop-de-doo kind of transformation that makes us attractive and seen in a dramatic way it's the transformation that deals with the bitternesses of our hearts the ease with which we allow our hearts to be protected from his change and we channel that to other people and we leave ourselves unmoved and untouched ourselves because you know it's tough it's a difficult journey to take but it is the it involves the pain of healing and the presence and love of Jesus Christ it is the place where we must go to deal with the grief that the grieved heart that we may have and the embittered heart that we must that we may have to deal with that before God and we see that very much in the Psalm because it's not just a Sam which allows the expression of almost giving up completely the Christ the faith the covenantal faith of the fathers and the personal faith that a staff had but it's a recognition that there is an answer to that for us in our lives and that's very significant is very important when I tried to understand all this verse 16 it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God then I understood their final destinies it's it's looking at the whole problem with a different perspective now with a spiritual perspective and he's looked at it just as we would look at other people in a kind of envious way but it's this the perspective of looking at it through the prism of of the truth and of God and for us with Calvary that great perspective that changes everything for him and it's interesting because he uses the same slippery terminology that he changes it he said my feet in verse 2 had almost slipped I'd nearly lost my foot hold but then in verse 18 he sees those who are not believers who don't trust in God who have gone their own way who have abandoned truth who have no longer believed surely you place them on slippery ground and he sees that actually it's something different that is the reality he sees that there is a terrible future for those who maybe in the short term have life easy who aren't in a spiritual battle who seem to be happy in their pursuit of wealth who are not taken to account for their violence and yet they have a desperate future away from God and Christ and he realised and he recognised that his only hope his only future

[17:25] as ours is my heart my flesh and heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever this isn't a heck of a salmon talking about self help it's not saying you get your act together so come on chivying people up and saying get your heart right you know who can do that who can do that spiritual tremendous guilt comes on us if we feel we have to put ourselves right spiritually and get our own act together but here we're reminded that God himself is the strength of his heart and his portion and that's where our hope and that's where our freedom and that's where our recovery lies as believers and his the change came from him when he entered the sanctuary of God and I understood their final destiny so it was in the presence of God and can I say because we're going to enlarge this a little bit beyond the Old Testament temple you know the sanctuary of God the place where

God was condescended to be in the presence of his covenant people in the holy of holies you know that the Ark of the Covenant was there and God condescended to dwell with his people in the holy of holies and he would be with them they would be his people he would be their God and so it's he's saying he's not saying when I went to church he's not saying when I just went to a building he said I went to the place where God was where God promises to be with his people and let's take that out of the shadow of the Old Testament at different levels and remind us that the New Testament description of that would be different for us as Christians we remember because we were singing about it in the power of the cross what happened when Christ died in the cross was the curtain of the holy of holies was ripped in two from I'm going from bottom to it was actually ripped to from top to bottom miraculous act of God opening up direct access into the presence of God and into the fellowship of God and therefore the the temple in the New Testament it's not this building it's my heart as a believer the Holy Spirit dwells in my heart your heart but also together the people of God is the foundation is the building of God is the body of Christ is the temple is what he is built is the kingdom and so if you broaden this to with New Testament eyes we find that his healing began as he returned to God's presence and I believe to the people of God's presence you know one of the things we do most easily when we're struggling as Christians in our hearts is to distance ourselves

from God's people now maybe that will be because we've distanced ourselves from God first or it may be the other way around but there's an important spiritual reality for us that strength and the wholeness comes from the company of God's people and the worship of God's people don't Paul says to the church don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together now I'm sure lots of you dragged your feet coming tonight man I could do without this tonight but I hope and very often we'll hear that maybe even more particularly say on a Wednesday night or something we come together I really couldn't be bothered coming out but having been with God's people and prayed together and worshiped together you come away saying God fed my soul and I've seen things from a different perspective because God has ordained that you know it's not it's not about just ritualistic living and it's not just about going through the motions of coming along to church he has ordained praise he's ordained that we come and we are fed by that by the mutual encouragement of saying shoulder to shoulder with one another and worshiping God it changes our perspective and also it reminds us of the presence of God among us and in our hearts and so we enlarge what he says here about coming to the sanctuary of God and it reminds us of our wider responsibility to come into Christ's presence and of course to return primarily to the cross that's why we've given us the sacrament the sacrament of the Lord's Supper which takes us back not to Bethlehem it doesn't take us to the sermon on the mount it doesn't take us to the money changing in the temple it takes us to the cross because the cross is the place where we begin to understand secularism and unbelief and spirituality and puts it in its rightful place so that we're not just kind of treading water and going through the motions and thinking it doesn't really matter the cross gives our faith a great sharpness because we begin to see what has happened there not some mystical amulet that we stick somewhere and not just the facts of the cross but the person and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross which reminds us of this immeasurably great act of love and the great cost that was paid to release us and to free us from living a life without him and isn't it ironic that we spend a lot of our lives singing about the cross and about the Savior and about being Christians and yet much of the time we're wanting to go back to where we were before we were Christians and it's sneakily sinning we think God will not see us and loving the things that cost him the immeasurable price of salvation and so we find that the cross reminds us of our own relentless selfishness and pride and sin and points us to the great and glorious grace that sets us free and gives us a different perspective and reminds us of one further very important thing is that those who are not Christ's have a destiny that is unspeakably bad too hard almost to mention we don't speak about separation from God easily and we don't speak about hell easily I don't struggle because it's so unspeakably awful but we need to recognise that to be apart from God it leaves us spiritually in a dreadful place and when we lose sight of that we will lose sight of the cross itself the cross will have no meaning you know a God who was nailed to a tree won't be meaningless unless we understand that that price had to be paid unless we understand that everyone will stand before the judgment seat of God individually and will either be covered in the righteousness of Christ which is what Esaaf came to recognise or will it will be indeed the most terrible of all days so he returned to God and in returning to God he knew healing and renewal and I think I mentioned this at the very beginning and just before we finish this Sam and this journey which the Samus takes it takes us deep into his soul and into his character even though we don't know him and it's brutally honest and we thank God for Esaaf and for his honesty can you imagine that happening today God coming and speaking to someone say expose the absolute back slidness of your heart write it in poetry and let it become a song and help people to see how difficult it is and this is a leader in the church and I think what's tremendously important for us to recognise from a Sam like this is the importance of being like that with one another as I said earlier our Christianity needs to move beyond shallow religiosity it really does both corporately and individually you know let God in Christ take a grip of your selfish greedy proud heart and I'm looking in the mirror when I'm saying that and deal with it and that is where we will find the heart of Christianity as we take time to let God's light shine in the darkness not of other people souls but of your soul and of my soul to deal with the okay but Esaaf was really personal I'll be very personal for a minute the longer you go on in the Christian longer I've gone on the Christian life the darker and the more selfish I recognise myself to be self-centred to the nth degree and it leaves you exposed and helpless unless you take it to the living God there's that great sense in which we it is a painful place to be until we deal with it and allow him to heal us but it's like all of these things isn't it unless we root out the sin unless we deal with that unless we expose that unless we allow his is great healing power to deal with that then we will remain spiritual pygmies we will

remain very small we will not grow we will not develop we will not mature and that is an intensely personal thing but it also is a corporate reality in that we need

[28 : 42] one another to do that to pot with just being a Christian on your own and to pot with just giving up the the stiff upper lip and saying everything's fine be honest with a core of people that will challenge you and to whom you'll be accountable and who will expose sometimes the sins of your heart and likewise them to you and you to them in a loving and gracious and humble way so that there's a reality about our Christianity here that can only come from him and then lastly very briefly we see that and the great thing about these Psalms is that it goes full circle and there's renewed desire in his life as he recognises who's he is and who he serves yet I'm always at you hold me by your right hand you guide me with your counsel you take me into glory whom I have in heaven and earth that there's nothing I desire besides you so in this space of a short time he's come a huge journey and his desires his heart has changed and his foundation has changed and his foot hold has changed and he knows a new intimacy in his heart you hold me by your right hand this is the covenant Old Testament God this is a great Yahweh of the Old Testament and they say he is as you hold me by your hand because like a dad he's like a loving father who leads and guides him and there's this great intimacy and closeness to him that belonging that love this is not a cold religious relationship he has this is an intimate spiritual relationship with his heavenly father that is what we were created for and a manly and a womanly way we're created for this relationship with the living God in a spiritual family where he is completely trustworthy and where he is completely protective and where he leads us because he knows where we need to go even when we don't and so there's that move from intimacy into guidance you guide me with your your counsel and afterwards you take me into glory counsel of God we can't grow and develop and mature and no intimacy without counsel in other words without his truth it's not about just fuzzy warm feelings it's about being guided in his counsel and his counsel if because he's God it will always take us places we don't want to go if your

God always takes you where you want to go he's not God he's an idol he's someone you've made up you've you've unwrapped him in a Christmas present but he's not the living God because the living God will always lead us where we don't necessarily want to go because he knows better and because he knows everything and he sees the end of the road and we can't and so this is the kind of God we have who guides us by his counsel by his advice by his word by his truth which is living an active and sharper than a double edged sword and that encapsulates our emotions in our minds as we sit at his feet we have to be doing that we have to be open to his word it can't just be something that is a passing phase or fad with us it must be that we recognise the guidance that he gives us and the power of that and of course it's intimacy and guidance and great exclusive love you know whom have

I in the heavens no one nothing I desire beside you can you see the great change he was desiring everything but God I think a lot of us including myself are in that place sometimes aren't we we desire everything but God many other reasons we will not come into his presence because we desire everything but God and here he's come round to desiring nothing but him and there's this reality a living reality that has transformed his life and he is seeing clearly for maybe the first time in a while and he's left with that reality that there are those who are far away from God I don't think that is something that he's careless about I think that's something that he is indifferent to but he knows for him as for me it is good to be near God and that's the only place that we can actually be of help to those who are far away you know we talk about coming near to people and building relationships and coming alongside them and all these things are hugely important but the most important thing for our burdened concern for the lost for our brothers and sisters for our mothers and fathers for our neighbors our colleagues the most important thing for us for them is that we stay near to God you know sometimes you'll say well

I'll kind of go down their road just to come alongside them that will not work we need to be near to God in order to have any use for them and if we don't desire God a sure thing none of our friends are going to desire them either are they and so our task is not to see that the other Christians are near God although we want that of course that's not our primary task our primary task is to make sure we are near to God our personal responsibility that is what is good make the sovereign Lord your refuge and recognise that that is the place where our desire will be will blossom and that's really what we long for isn't it a desire for God and a blossoming spiritually as we allow him near our hearts to change and move us and if you're not a Christian tonight please take note of these words

they're very solemn they are God's truth and to be out of Christ whatever is that is attracting you and keeping you from him is a terrifying place to be please do consider the truth of God's word and his invitation to you to come to Calvary let's bow our heads and pray Father God we thank you for who you are we thank you on this summer's evening that we can find in the Psalms written centuries ago absolute association that we know what the psalmist is speaking about we've been there our feet have almost slipped and we pray that we would not allow that in our experience because you have given us the Psalms and other areas of scripture to guide us to counsel us to warn us to drive us back to your wonderful heart to your protection to your fatherly care to your warmth and to your protection and help us we pray this evening to make time and have time to do soul business with you and not to allow the myriad of time consuming activities keep us from that may it not be that we will spend hours and hours on other activities that will keep us from these moments that we must that these concentrated rich moments of spiritual fellowship which will renew our perspective and vision help us we pray and guide us and forgive us and may we know freshness and desire and newness in our Christian lives for Jesus sake.

[37 : 22] Amen.