



## Will Christianity Have a Funeral or a Future?

By Ryan Reese

---

*We envision a congregation whose love for Jesus and one another leaves a clear and compelling witness for Christ.*

---

This question beckoned local Christian leaders to attend a lecture by Seattle pastor Mark Driscoll about one month ago. The question is also the subtitle to his forthcoming book, *A Call to Resurgence*, which will be released in November. My instinct was to immediately answer with Scripture: “the gates of hell shall not prevail” against the church Jesus is building (Matthew 16:18). Of course Christianity will not have a funeral. But I also know that Pastor Driscoll is aware of this truth, which he would not deny. So what exactly does he mean?

Brian and I attended the lecture and discovered that Driscoll is not declaring the death of Christianity in the United States *per se*, but the loss of our respected seat at the cultural table enjoyed throughout our brief history. Christianity is no longer the culturally-accepted default belief of most people in America, but is now moving toward the periphery of acceptance and influence. In other words, if there was once pressure to fake Christian beliefs or morality, that pressure is gone. In fact, as nearly all of us can attest, the pressure from our fellow man now runs in the opposite direction: outspoken Christian faith and practice will be socially costly.

Does this mean that *the church* is dying? Most statistics and surveys, broadcast within and without the church, might lead us to believe as much. Fewer people are identifying themselves as Christians. Church attendance in many denominations is stagnant or in decline. But Driscoll doesn't think this means there are fewer Christians than there used to be. “It's not that

Christianity is plummeting,” he said, “but that we are now getting a more honest accounting.” Driscoll said a recent survey revealed that only 7 to 8.9 percent of Americans are Christian, if using the following rubric. To be a Christian is 1) to believe in the Bible (as the Word of God), 2) to trust in the cross (Jesus died to atone for sin, rose from the grave, and he is the only way to be saved), 3) to be converted (someone's life has been transformed), and 4) to be active (Christians actively practice their faith).

Ed Stetzer, President of LifeWay Research, agrees. In an October 2013 issue of *Christianity Today*, Stetzer reassures us that all is not lost. “Christians are not leaving the faith in droves, even though some people are screaming that loudly,” he said. “In many cases, people who once called themselves Christians are simply no longer doing that.” Rather than dying, Stetzer believes the church is “just being more clearly defined.” His research reveals that of the 75 percent of Americans who call themselves Christians, only a third of them are what he calls, “Convictional Christians...people who would say they have met Jesus, He changed their lives, and since that time their lives have been increasingly oriented around their faith in Him.”

Yes, it's true—the church of Jesus Christ will not be destroyed by any human culture. Jesus promised as

much. But here is a promise he *never* made: the Christian life and mission of the church will be easy. We are just beginning to sense opposition to our faith and mission in ways that the majority of Christians throughout history knew (and know) on a daily basis. Though we are right to mourn a culture rapidly distancing itself from God and His people, we should rejoice in the new clarity it gives us in the church. The death of nominal Christianity should be heartily applauded. And rather than panic or hide under a rock until Jesus comes, “Convictional Christians” need to embrace the mission Christ gave us—to make disciples—with renewed joy and vigor. As the culture continues to change, we must change along with it. Not by doing or believing something *new*, but by getting more serious about the ancient things Christians have always done and believed. Here are a just a few suggestions in preparing for more difficult times.

**Get serious about one another.** Paul commanded the Thessalonian Christians to “encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thess. 5:11). Several of our church members are the only Christians in their workplace or families. Some of us are the only believers on our block, or the lone Christians in our class who aren't undercover. That's okay—praise God that He has put you in that place! But the loneliness is difficult, especially when opposition arises. Elijah

*continued*

Christianity, if false,  
is of no importance,  
and if true, of  
infinite importance.  
The only thing it  
cannot be is  
moderately  
important.  
C.S. Lewis

## Will Christianity Have a Funeral or a Future? *(continued)*

the prophet had seen God do miraculous things. But once he started thinking that he was the only one in the fight for God's glory, he wanted to crawl into a cave and give up (1 Kings 18-19). The presence of one another reminds us that we aren't the only ones. Seek each other out. Spend time together outside of the church building to encourage each other. Join a devotion group. Pray together. Remind one another of God's power and purpose.

**Get serious about Jesus.** We must surely be the most distracted, over-stimulated, entertainment-driven culture that has ever walked God's earth. Our minds flit from one thing to another and we aren't often too discerning about just who or what is driving our thoughts. We need to keep Jesus on our minds. We need to give ourselves often to prayer. We need to feed our minds daily on God's Word,

staying enamored with His character, His deeds, and His commands. Our children and grandchildren must be disciplined – equipped to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Shallow and soft Christianity might appear to sustain one in lazy times. But as our faith and practice make us increasingly out of step with the culture at large, only a strong trust in the Lord grounded in truth will sustain us.

**Get serious about the world.** The tempting response to a hostile culture is to return hate for hate. But this is not the way of Christ and His followers. Instead, we are commanded to love and pray for those who find our faith worthy of scorn (Matt. 5:44). The unbelieving world is not our enemy, but our mission field (Eph. 6:12; Acts 1:8). The Great Commission given by our

Lord needs to be the central "purpose statement" for all of our lives. The mission of the church, to witness to the resurrected Christ, should be priority one. We need to love our neighbors as ourselves, and the *most* loving thing we can do for them is tell them who Jesus is, what He has done, and how they can know the God who made them for His glory. It is not uncommon to bump into a person who doesn't even know a real Christian. Isn't it a strange thing to talk to someone who knows absolutely nothing of the Christian Gospel? They have plenty of caricatures in their minds, many preconceived notions, but haven't encountered the real thing. Build relationships, serve others, and show them the difference between what they've heard and what is in fact true. These are serious times. The church needs a seriousness to match.

## What's Happening at Pinehurst?

There are many events coming up over the next two months. You may want to put these on your calendar.

### OCTOBER

Friday the 25th: *Fall Family Fun Night*. This is a fellowship opportunity for the whole church. We will serve pizza, and there will be pumpkin painting, cookie decorating, activities and games. There will also be safety awareness with Donna and Ruben and story time with Matt Kamps and Pastor Ryan. The event is from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m.

### NOVEMBER

Sunday the 3rd: *Daylight Savings Time ends*. Remember to set the clocks back one hour.

Sunday the 17th: *Voice of the Martyrs Sunday*. Our guest speaker will be Jay Todd from Voice of the Martyrs.

*Thanksgiving Fellowship* at 4:30 p.m. We will have Thanksgiving together a little early.

Friday the 22nd: *VOM Fellowship and Ministry Night*. Enjoy fellowship with the church family as we work on a project for the Voice of the Martyrs. We will make little parachutes to drop Christian literature and write letters to imprisoned Christians. There will be VOM-related activities for kids. Pizza will be provided. This event for all ages begins at 5:30 p.m.

### DECEMBER

Friday the 13th: *Parents' Night Out and Youth All-Nighter*. Parents are invited to drop off their kids at the church from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. in order to take some time to shop, relax, have a date night. Our youth will help take care of the kids, and then will stay for an all-nighter at the church.

Sunday the 15th: *Third Sunday Fellowship*. The theme is "Festive Favorites".

Tuesday the 24th: *Christmas Eve Service*.