

Epistles of John Chapter 2 the Walk

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of following Christ's example and living a life of love, devotion to God, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Luke 2:49, John 4:34, John 13:34, Philippians 2:5, 1 John 2:6

Topics: "Imitating Christ", "Christian Conduct"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the call for Christians to walk as Jesus walked, highlighting that our conduct should reflect His character and life. He discusses the importance of understanding the motives, principles, and standards that guided Christ, urging believers to imitate His love, devotion, and service. Simpson illustrates how Jesus' life serves as a complete example for all stages of life and encourages a deep longing to embody Christ's character. He concludes by reminding us that through the Holy Spirit, we can be transformed to reflect Christ's image in our daily lives.

Transcript

He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (1 John 2:6.)

The life naturally leads to the walk. The term describes the course of life, the conduct, the practical side of our Christian life. The reference to the walk of our Lord Jesus Christ recalls His character and life. The character of Jesus stands out as the divinest monument of the Bible and the Gospels.

Even men who do not believe in Him as we do have been compelled to acknowledge the grandeur and loftiness of His incomparable life. Here are some of the testimonies that the world's illustrious thinkers have borne to Jesus of Nazareth. Renan says, "The Christ of the Gospels is the most beautiful Incarnation of God. His beauty is eternal; His reign shall never end." Goethe says, "There shines from the Gospels a sublimity through the person of Christ which only the divine could manifest." Rousseau writes, "Was He no more than man? What sweetness! What purity in His ways! What tender grace in His teaching! What loftiness in His maxims! What wisdom in His words! What delicacy in His touch! What an empire in the heart of His followers! Where is the man, where is the sage that could suffer and die without weakness or display? So grand, so inimitable is His character that the inventors of such a story would be more wonderful than the character which they portrayed." Carlyle says, "Jesus Christ is the divinest symbol. Higher than this human thought can ever go." Napoleon said, "I am a man, I understand men. These were all men. Jesus Christ was more than man. Our empire is built on force, His on love, and it will last when ours has passed away."

But if Jesus Christ thus appears at a distance to the minds that can only admire Him, how much more must He be to those who know Him as a personal Friend and who see Him in the light of love, for

The love of Jesus, what it is,

None but His loved ones know.

The character and life of Christ have a completeness of detail which no other Bible biography possesses. The story has been written out by many witnesses, and the portrait is reproduced in all its lineaments and features. He has traversed every stage of life from the cradle to the grave, and represented humanity in every condition and circumstance of temptation, trial and need, so that His example is equally suited to childhood, youth or manhood, to the humble and the poor, in life's lowliest path, or to the sovereign that sways the widest scepter, for He is at once the lowly Nazarene and the Lord of Lords. He has felt the throb of every human affection. He has felt the pang of every human sorrow. He is the Son of man in the largest, broadest sense. No, His humanity is so complete that He represents the softer traits of womanhood as well as the virility and strength of manhood, and even the simplicity of a little child, so that there is no place in the experiences of life where we may not look back at this pattern life for light and help as we bring it into touch with our need and ask, "What would Jesus do?"

God has set forth the life of Christ as our example and commanded us to imitate and reproduce Him in our lives. This is not an ideal picture to study as we would some paragon of art. It is a life to be lived and it is adapted to all the needs of our present existence. It is a plain life for a common people to copy, a type of humanity that we can take with us into the kitchen and the family room, into the workshop and the place of business, into the field where the farmer toils, and the orchard where the gardener prunes, and the place where the tempter assails, and even the lot where want and poverty press us with their burdens and their cares. This Christ is the Christ of every man who will receive Him as a Savior and follow Him as an example and a master. "I have given you an example," He says, "that you should do as I have done." He expects us to be like Him. Are you copying Him and being made conformable unto His image? There is but one pattern. For ages God "sought for a man and found none." At last God produced in humanity a perfect type, and since then God has been occupied in making other men according to this pattern. He is the one original. When Judson came to America the religious papers were comparing him to Paul and the early apostles, and Judson wrote expressing his grief and displeasure and saying, "I do not want to be like them. There is but one to copy, Jesus Himself. I want to plant my feet in His footprints and measure their shortcomings by His and His alone. He is the only copy. I want to be like Him." So let us seek to walk even as He walked.

The secret of a Christlike life lies partly in the deep longing for it. We grow like the ideals that we admire. We reach unconsciously at last the things we aspire to. Ask God to give you a high conception of the character of Christ and an intense desire to be like Him and you will never rest until you reach your ideal. Let us look at this ideal.

I. THE MOTIVE OF HIS LIFE

The key to any character is to be found in its supreme motive, the great end which it is pursuing, the object for which it is living. You cannot understand conduct by merely looking at facts. You want to grasp the intent that lies back of these facts and incidents, and the supreme reason that controls these actions. When a great crime has been committed, the object of the detective is to establish a reason for it, then everything else can be made plain. The great object for which we are living will determine everything else,

and explain many things which otherwise might seem inexplicable. When the ploughman starts out to make a straight furrow he needs two stakes. The nearer stake is not enough. He must keep in line with the farther one, the stake at the remotest end of the ridge, and as he keeps the two in line his course is straight. It is the final goal which determines our immediate actions, and if that is high enough, and strong enough, it will attract us like a heavenly magnet from all lesser and lower things, and hold us irresistibly to our heavenly pathway. The supreme motive of Christ's life was devotion to the will and glory of God. "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" This was the deep conviction even upon the heart of the child. (Luke 2:49.) "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." (John 4: 34.) "I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me." (John 5: 30.) "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38.) This was the purpose of His maturer life. "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You gave me to do." (John 17: 4.) This was His joyful cry as He finished His course and handed back His commission to the Father who sent Him. Is this the supreme object of our life, and are we pressing on to it through good report and evil report, caring only for one thing, to please our Master, and have His approval at the last?

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF HIS LIFE

Every life can be summed up in some controlling principle. With some it is selfishness in the various forms of avarice, ambition, or pleasure. With others it is devotion to some favorite pursuit of art or literature or invention and discovery. With Jesus Christ the one principle of His life was love, and the law that He has left for us is the same simple and comprehensive law of love, including every form of duty in the one new commandment, "A new commandment I give unto you, That you love one another; as I have loved you." (John 13:34; 15: 12.) This is not the Old Testament law of love with self in the center, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But this is a new commandment with Christ in the center, "that you love one another, as I have loved you." Love for His Father, love for His own, love for the sinful, love for His enemies, this covered the whole life of Jesus Christ, and this will comprehend the length and breadth of life of His followers. This will simplify every question, solve every problem, and sweeten every duty into a delight. It will make our life, as His was, an embodiment of that beautiful ideal which the Holy Spirit has left us in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians: "Love suffers long, and is kind; love envies not; love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

III. THE RULE AND STANDARD OF HIS LIFE

Every life must have a standard by which it is regulated, and so Christ's life was molded by the Holy Scriptures. "These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." (Luke 24:44.) It was necessary that Christ's life should fulfill the Scriptures and He could not die upon the cross until He had first lived out every word that had been written concerning Him. It is just as necessary that our lives should fulfill the Scriptures, and we have no right to let a single promise or command in this holy Book be a dead letter so far as we are concerned. God wants us while we live to prove in our own experience all things that have been written in this Book, and to bind the Bible in a new and living edition in the flesh and blood of our own lives.

IV. THE SOURCE OF HIS LIFE

Whence did He derive the strength for this supernatural and perfect example? Was it through His own inherent and essential deity? Or did He suspend during the days of His humiliation His own self-contained rights and powers, and live among us simply as a man, dependent for His support upon the same sources of strength that we enjoy? It would seem so. Listen to His own confession (John 5: 19, 30; 6: 57.) "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do. . . . I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge. . . . As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eats me, even he shall live by me." This seems to make it very plain that our Lord derived His daily strength from the same source as we may receive ours, by communion with God, by a life of dependence, faith and prayer, and by receiving and being ever filled with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Would we therefore walk even as He walked, let us receive the Holy Ghost as He did at His baptism. Let us constantly depend upon Him, and be filled with His presence. Let us live a life of unceasing prayer. Let us draw our strength each moment from Him as He did from the Father. Let our life for both soul and body be sustained by the in-breathing of His, so that it shall be true of us "In him we live and move and have our being." This was the Master's life and this may be ours. What an inspiration it is for us to know that He humbled Himself to the same place of dependence to which we stand, and that He will exalt us through His grave to the same victories which He won.

V. THE ACTIVITIES OF HIS LIFE

The life of Jesus Christ was a positive one. It was not all absorbed in self-contemplation and self-culture, but it went out in thoughtful benevolence to the world around Him. His brief biography as given by Peter is one of practical and holy activity. "He went about doing good." In His short life of three and a half years He traveled on foot over every portion of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, incessantly preaching, teaching, and working with arduous toil. He was constantly thronged by the multitudes so that Luke tells us "there was not time so much as to eat." Once at the close of a busy day He was so weary that He fell asleep on the little ship amid the raging storm. Leaving His busy toil for a season of rest, still the multitudes pressed upon Him, and He could not be silent. After a Sabbath of incessant labor at Capernaum, we find Him next morning rising a great while before day that He might steal from His slumbers the time to pray. His life was one of ceaseless service, and even still on His ascension throne He is continually employed in ministries of active love. So He has said to us that we must copy Him. No consecrated Christian can be an idler or a drone. "As my Father has sent me even so send I you." We are here as missionaries, every one of us with a commission, and a trust just as definite as the men we send to heathen lands. Let us find our work, and, like Him, "whatsoever our hand finds to do, do it with our might."

VI. SEPARATION

The true measure of a man's worth is not always the number of his friends, but sometimes the number of his foes. Every man who lives in advance of his age is sure to be misunderstood and opposed, and often persecuted and sacrificed. The Lord Himself has said, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you. Marvel not if the world hate you. If you were of the world the world would love his own." Like Him, therefore, we must expect often to be unpopular, often to stand alone, even to be maligned, perhaps, to be utterly and falsely assailed and driven "without the camp" even of the religious world. Two things, however, let us not forget. First let us not be afraid to be unpopular, and secondly let us never be soured or embittered by it, but stand sweetly and triumphantly in the confidence of right, and our Master's approval.

VII. THE SUFFERING LIFE

No character is mature, no life has reached its coronation until it has passed through fire. And so the supreme test of Christ's example was suffering, and in all His sufferings He has, as the apostle Peter expressed, left "us an example, that you should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2: 21.) He suffered from the temptations of Satan for "he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," and in this He has called us to follow Him in suffering and victory, for "in that he has suffered being tempted, he is able also to succor them that are tempted." He suffered from the wrongs of men, and in this He has left us an example of patience, gentleness, and forgiveness, for "When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judges righteously." Never was He more glorious than in the hour of shame. Never was He more unselfish than in the moment when His own sorrows were crushing His heart. Never was He more victorious than when He bowed His head on the bitter cross and died for sinful men. He is the crowned sufferer of humanity, and He calls us to suffer with Him in sweetness, submission, and triumphant faith and love.

VIII. THE FINER TOUCHES OF HOLY CHARACTER

The perfection of character is to be found in the finer touches of temper and quality which easily escape the careless observer. It is in these that the character of Christ stands inimitably supreme. One of the finest portraits of His Spirit is given by Paul in the third chapter of Philippians as he tells us of His humility -- He might have grasped at His divine rights, but voluntarily surrendered them, emptied Himself and gladly stooped to the lowest place. (Phil. 2: 5-8.) His unselfishness in dealing with the weak and the selfish is finely expressed in Romans 15: 1, 3, 7, "For even Christ pleased not himself ; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached you fell on me." His gentleness and lowliness is finely expressed in His own words, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." The highest element of character is self-sacrifice, and here the Master stands forever in the front of all sacrifice and heroism. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Here we are taught what it means to walk even as He walked. It is the surrendered life. It is the life of self-sacrifice. So the apostle has finely expressed it in Ephesians 5: 2, "Walk in love as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." This is love, self-sacrifice, and this is to God as sweet as the fragrance of the gardens of Paradise. There was something in the spirit of Jesus, and there ought to be something in every consecrated life, which can only be expressed by the term sweetness. It is with reference to this that the apostle says in 2 Corinthians 2: 15, "We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." God give to us this heavenly sweetness that breathes from the heart of our indwelling Savior.

The refinement of Jesus Christ is one of the most striking traits of His lovely character. Untrained in the schools of human culture, He was, notwithstanding, as every Christian ought to be, a perfect gentleman. His thoughtful consideration of others is often manifest in the incidental circumstances of His life. For example, when Simon Peter was distressed about the tribute money at Capernaum, and hesitating to speak to the Master about it, the Lord "prevented him"; i.e., anticipated his very thought, and sent him down to the lake to catch the fish with the coin in his mouth, and then added with fine tact, "That take, and pay for me and you," assuming the responsibility of the debt first for Himself to save Peter's sensitiveness. Still finer was His high courtesy toward the poor sinning woman whom the Pharisees had dragged before Him. Stooping down He evaded her glance lest she would be humiliated before them, and as though He heard them not He finally thrust a dart of holy sarcasm into their consciences which sent them swiftly like

hounds from His presence, and only when they were gone did He look up in that trembling woman's face, and gently say: "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more." So let us reflect the gentleness and courtesy of Christ, and not only by our lives but by our "manner of love" commend our Christianity and adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

There is one thing more in the spirit of the Master, which He would have us copy, and that is the spirit of gladness. While the Lord Jesus was never hilarious or unrestrained in the expression of His joy, yet He was uniformly cheerful, bright, and glad, and the heart in which He dwells should likewise be expressed in the shining face, the springing step, and the life of overflowing gladness. There is nothing more needed in a sad and sinful world than joyous Christians. There was nothing more touching in the Master's life than the fact that when His own heart was ready to break with the anticipation of the garden and the cross, He was saying to them, "Let not your heart be troubled. Let my joy remain in you and your joy be full." God help us to copy the gladness of Jesus, never to droop our colors in the dust, never to hang our harps upon the willows, never to lose our heavenly blessing or fail to "rejoice evermore."

IX. THE POWER OF HIS LIFE

But we must hasten to notice finally some of the positive elements of forcefulness and power in the life of Jesus. It is possible to be sweet and good and yet to be weak and unwise. This was not the character of Jesus. Never was gentleness more childlike, never was manhood more mighty and majestic. In every element of His character, in every action of His life, we see the strongest virility and we recognize continually that the Son of man was indeed a man in every sense of the word.

Intellectually His mind was clear and masterful. There is nothing finer in the story of His life than the calm, victorious way in which He answered and drove from His presence the keen-witted lawyers and scribes who hounded Him with their questions, and who were successfully humiliated and silenced before the jeering crowd until they were glad to escape from His presence, and after that no man dared to ask Him any more questions. So majestic and impressive was His eloquence that the officers which were sent to arrest Him forgot all about their commission as they stood listening to His wonderful words, and went back to their angry masters to exclaim: "Never a man spoke like this man." There was about Him a dignity which sometimes rose to such a height that we read on one occasion as He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, "As they beheld him they were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid." In the darkest hour of His agony He reached such a height of holy dignity that even Pilate gazed with admiration, and pointing to Him even amid all the symbols of shame and suffering, he cried: "Behold the man!" Even in His death He was a conqueror, and in His resurrection and ascension He arose sublime above all the powers of death and hell.

In conclusion, how shall we walk like Him?

1. We must receive Him to walk in us for He has said "I will dwell in them and walk in them."
2. We must study His life until the story is burned into our consciousness and impressed upon our heart.
3. We must constantly look upon the picture and apply it to every detail of our own conduct and so "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

4. Do not be discouraged when you meet with failure in yourself. Do not be afraid to look in the glass and see your own defects in contrast with His blameless life. It will incite you to higher things. Self-judgment is the very secret of progress and higher attainment.

5. Finally, let us ask the Holy Spirit, whose work it is to make Jesus real to us, to unveil the vision and imprint the copy upon our hearts and lives, and so shall we be "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

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