

(John - Part 25): He departed...into a Mountain Himself Alone

by A.W. Tozer

Jesus' decision to decline the crown and take the cross instead is a powerful lesson for the Church, reminding us of the importance of following God's will and navigating the challenges of the world.

Duration: 52:04

Scripture: Psalm 139:1-12, Isaiah 43:2, Matthew 4:4, Matthew 14:22-33, Matthew 28:20, Ephesians 1:22-23, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that the word of God has multiple meanings and adapts itself to the needs of different individuals. The story of Jesus walking on water is presented as a divine drama, showing his power and authority over the church. The speaker urges the audience not to apologize for or soften the gospel, as Jesus is the head of the church and holds it in his hand. The sermon concludes by highlighting Jesus as the supreme poet, artist, and musician, emphasizing that everything he does is extraordinary and not common.

Transcript

This story, which I read in your hearing previously, of Jesus going up into the mountain, and his disciples going down into the sea, is to be the scripture tonight for a little talk about the coming again of our Lord. Let me begin by saying that Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the supreme poet and artist and musician of all worlds. All that is beautiful and lovely and gracious and desirable gather themselves up in our bridegroom so that our Lord Jesus Christ could never do and cannot do a common thing.

Our Lord stooped to a mortal flesh to be born a virgin Mary. But his birth was not a common birth. Nothing Jesus ever does is common.

His birth was uncommon, and he has, by being born, elevated and dignified human birth beyond all possibility of description. Our Lord humbled himself to work, and he worked at the carpenter bench like other men. And yet our Lord never did a common deed, and the work he did was not common work.

He elevated all work up unto an uncommon level and dignified the humblest toil so that the Christian carpenter, as he saws and planes and pounds the nails, may know that he is doing an uncommon thing because our Lord was a carpenter and elevated toil from the level of the common to the uncommon and

extraordinary. Our Lord suffered when he was on earth, and yet his suffering was not the common, tight-lipped, cold-eyed suffering that is going on in the world so much now, suffering that has long ceased to find expression, suffering that destroys the higher regions of the spirit and bestializes us and makes us like the clay from which our bodies were taken. Not that kind of suffering.

The suffering of our Lord was uncommon because he was uncommon, and everything he did and does and says and said were all infinitely raised above the level of the common. And he raised all of us above the level of the common, if we're his, so that we are not common people and we don't do common things. For the commonest act, which may be done by a sinner and thought nothing of, becomes an extraordinary act when it is done by the child of God.

Our Lord also stooped to die, but his dying was not the common dying of other men. It was not the paying of a debt to nature. It was not the making the last payment on the mortgage that nature had upon him, for nature never held a mortgage on Jesus Christ.

And he never owed a dime to nature. The dying of our Lord, like his own glorious person, was an uncommon, unusual dying. It was the dying of the just for the unjust.

It was a sacrificial dying. It was a vicarious dying. It was a paying a debt he didn't owe for others who were too deeply in debt to ever pay out.

That Lord being that kind of Lord, it is therefore to be expected, and his words are never common words, that they yield a multitude of meanings to the humble of heart and to the meek that never can be understood by the common, that is, the ordinary vulgar rank and file of unconverted men. This has been the testimony of the saints down all the years, for I always try to preach the scriptures in line with the traditions of the saints, the testimony of the great souls that have lived. And this has been their testimony, that they have come to the flowers of the scripture like a bee, and they have gotten all the nectar they could carry away, and then returned again and found that there was as much nectar there as there had been before, and like the barrel of meal that wasted not and the cruise of oil that did not fail, every text of scripture yields its precious treasures, and then upon another visitation yields another load, so that the oldest tottering saint, barely able now to read his Bible, can read a chapter which he has read a hundred or a thousand times before, and say and say truly that he has found new nectar there and sweet honey that he had never seen before.

And so also with the acts of Jesus. This meaningful act our Lord did when he refused the crown and went into the mountain and saw his disciples go down into the sea and then later he went down to them and walked on the water coming to them and they in fear cried out and he said be not afraid of his eye and they invited him into the ship and immediately he was at the shore. Now I am not much of a typologist.

As you probably know by this time, I am not what you call a preacher of types. I think there are a few types in the Old Testament but I think they have been greatly overdone. I think that we have been bound by a slavish conformity to types which were created for us by Bible expositors that should have been knitting at the time and have saved us a great deal of trouble.

But while I do not go much for types, though I admit that there are some, and thank God for the ones there are, yet you will find not types so much as poetic overtones and a duality of meaning in the Scriptures. To the needy heart it says one thing and to another needy heart it says another and to another needy heart it says another. The same parts of Scripture and the same Lord and the same word falling from the lips of

the same the word falling from the lips of the same Lord yet.

It has a multiplicity, adapting itself to the need of the soul of the various individuals. So that this story that we have here, written for us by divine inspiration, is more than merely a story. It is an enacted drama, if you like, as little as I like the word drama.

It is nevertheless a divine drama. It is God Almighty in his odyssey through the universe, moving vastly, moving through the universe on his way to his predestined end. And it was not by chance or accident or not casually that our Lord went up into the mountain and disciples went down into the sea.

But in addition to the plain historic facts which are before us, I believe that there are an infinite variety of meanings which the soul can gather from this. I do not claim to exhaust it, but I do claim to show you that the Lord was giving us a very beautiful object lesson here tonight, or object lesson which we may take here tonight. Now, the first thing I notice is that our Lord declined the crown and went up into a mountain himself alone.

When Jesus perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. The average man would not have declined the crown. Even Caesar declined the crown only that he might postpone it to a more auspicious moment when he might better and more fittingly take the crown.

That's why Brutus slew him at the foot of the monument. But our Lord declined the crown because he knew the crown they wanted to give him was not the crown he was destined to wear. They wanted a king who could deliver them from the despotic bondage of Rome.

They wanted a king wearing their own garments and speaking their own language and having their own physiognomy, that of the Jew, upon them. But our Lord knew this was no time for the crown. He knew that there must be a cross out there before there could be a crown, so he declined the crown and he went up into a mountain.

If he had stooped to receive the crown they wanted to give him, Israel would have rallied to him in a moment. But he took the cross, rather, in the will of God than to take a crown out of the will of God. Oh, if we could only see that this is the thing to do, brethren, we would not be losing so many good people from the church to the entertainment world, the paid, trained, steely choir singers there that are now singing borderline sexy songs.

The half-dressed females at one time sang, The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want not. I trust great God from this church. But there are, nevertheless, who have sold themselves out to a beautiful voice, who even one time sang from this platform, who is now the forebearer of the nation.

The crown that comes before the cross is a thin crown. It's a gilded crown. And if you were to look upon it, you would find stamped, Made in hell.

For it is not a cross or a crown that came down from the glory of both, but a crown that came up, a false crown that came up, made in hell, for the soul that'll take it before he takes the cross. So Jesus refused the crown and took the cross deliberately, for that was in the will of God. I suppose it's a common thing and almost a religious bromide for me to say it, but I say it tonight, the will of God is always best, ladies and gentlemen.

The will of God is always best. Whatever the circumstances, if you can find the will of God, take that will of God. Even if it means postponing the crown and taking the cross first, take that cross and trust God for the crown.

But don't try to cross-cut and short-circuit your life and go past the cross to the crown, for the crown you receive, I say, will be stamped made in hell and not made in heaven. So our Lord took the Father's will and escaped into the mountains, and his disciples saw him go. And you know historically that's what happened.

He refused that crown that Israel wanted to give him and took the cross that the Romans gave him, and then the third day he arose from the dead and on Mount Olivet, his father's throne, as the Arab parents of that. Now what does Jesus do? What does any good man do? You don't have to ask that question. That praying man of all praying men, that example of all praying men, that most prayerful of all praying men, little before, this guided group which in their ignorance wanted him to become their king and their parrot, praying to the Heavenly Father for his sheep, because there is a superior to the kind to his knees.

If you will remember, Dr. Max Reich was asked one time whether he was a man of prayer. They said, tell us about your prayer life, Dr. Reich. Now Dr. Reich was a Quaker, as you know.

But if you mean a continual unbroken communion with God day and night under all circumstances everywhere I am, and continual unbroken fellowship that prays always out of my heart to God, then I can say that I pray without ceasing. Now that's the kind of praying our Lord is doing in the glory on earth. It is not necessarily that dramatic, down on your knees, beating the bench type of prayer, though we must do that on occasion.

It can be a wordless prayer. It can be put in words. We all call them unspeakable.

And those unspeakable things are the eternal things that you will have at last. Remember that God is giving us to live on this religious plane, organists and pedditors, external garb of religion. Superior to that, there is the spiritual essence of it all, and that spiritual essence is what I am pleading that we bring back to the Church of Jesus Christ again.

Somebody talked about truth, which began and ended in itself, and said that if truth was not given moral expression, it was no good. I fully agree. They start here and circle full around on themselves and end here with the benediction of the visible.

If you cannot touch that which is intangible, and if you cannot hear that which is inaudible, and if you cannot know that which is beyond knowing, then I have serious doubts whether you are crisp up, trying to make the Holy Ghost our servant, and begin to live in the Holy Ghost as a fish lives in the sea. It is a glory that we know nothing about now. But there are those that want the Holy Ghost in order that they might have the gift of healing.

Others want the Holy Ghost for the gift of tongues. Others want the Holy Ghost they might preach well. Others want the Holy Ghost their testimony might be effective.

All that I grant you is a part of the total pattern of the New Testament. But brethren, let us never make God our servant, and let us never pray that we might be filled with the Holy Ghost for a second purpose. God wants to fill you with the Holy Ghost as an end in your moral life, in order that there might be other ends that will grow out of that one end.

They all come and they are all there, the Spirit of God. I listened this morning to that number. Bless the Lord, O my soul, bless thou the Lord, O my soul, that lovely thing.

Do we ever sing any common song? I wonder why we ever stoop to the rank and file of cheap things. With God and was not for God took he, and he left behind him. He was not Bernard of Cluny, not the man who wrote The City, two different Bernards.

This was St. Bernard, the man who was canonized 20 years after he was dead. The song of Solomon, which I've been dipping into. When I read that radiance, and I see the shining glory of that man's life and words, I wonder why we ever stoop to read anything else but that which is elevated and divine and wonderful, because God has given it to us and told to us through the hearts of some in certain other great religious books.

Now, he declined that crown and went up into the mountain, and his presence there is the prayer. His very presence there. It's not everlastingly telling his deeds before the presence of the Father, and saying, Father, bless this one and Father, bless that one, and endlessly talking, as some of us Christians do, and covering our inward fears by a multitude of words.

But it's his presence at the right hand of the Father that's the prayer. His presence there, the fact he's there at all, is a mighty prayer. And it says, they went down, and even was the light of the world went away, and the night is daytime.

But when I leave and go away for a while, it will be night. And so the night has settled on the world, and the Church has worked in the darkness all these years. I don't mean the Church has not had light all these years.

I suggest to the historians that we change it from a few centuries to centuries. We change it and call it all the time since the Son of Righteousness withdrew. It's been dark all over the world.

Now these disciples that went down into a ship and went down into the sea, what about them? Ah, my brethren, it doesn't take a giant intellect to see the Church there, for he had not more than reached the sea. They were all filled. The Church of Christ was launched on the sea, the dark sea.

And she's been on that sea ever since. Now what is the relation of a ship to the sea? It is the relation of propinquity, propinquity in contact without merger. And that ought to be the relation of the Church to the world.

The world is the sea, like the troubled sea that cannot rest. You will find in the scriptures every place of the world to mean the sea, the disturbed, turbulent, treacherous, deadly, cruel sea, the sea so rich and so unpredictable, so calm today, so violent tomorrow, bearing her cargoes over her bosom today in peace and tomorrow dashing them to the blue depths. Cigars and drink liquor together and tell jokes together and have their pictures taken laughing together, and the next day war breaks out and they're enemies, and they would kill each other at the drop of a hat.

Cruel, treacherous. We can't withdraw from it any more than the sea, but we're here in it. It is contact without merging.

And the woe of it all is with soft words. Don't be hostile, let it be through our, when the whole topside of the building is made. But I also know that I am telling truth, brethren, which will stand when the worlds are on

fire.

Starch from the milk, from that other thing altogether. I am sure that that terrible stormy night, the sea arose and hurled itself down, bailing out of the water. And two or three learned apostles there to tell them, stop bailing.

Theology is a seventeenth-century theology. Why don't you help him come up to the present time? Let the water come in, it won't hurt him. Because he could, it was a question.

Believe it or not, it's a question to today. Father, look, the ax lies at the root of the tree, and if that tree doesn't bring forth fruit, there will be someone to chop it down, and God will raise another tree. God isn't worried about It isn't God's business to preserve the alliance, it's to save the world.

If God can evangelize the world, let's dissolve earth, we have to, and evangelize the world. God isn't here. And the great need of the hour is that the Church, the Church of Christ, the spiritual Church, regardless, should be saved from this little bit of the world, and that little bit of the world, and that other little bit of the world moves into the Church, ever sinking The disciples went down into the sea, and they were sailing toward Capernaum and home.

We are out on the ocean sailing. I told Brother McAfee tonight, I guess I'm getting to be quite an old sentimentalist. I love those good Bible names, don't you? Capernaum, isn't that a good Capernaum? And the disciples were in the ship.

There's the ideal church that I mean when I sing that one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord. That's one church, that's the ideal church, which I suppose doesn't exist at all. And then there's the real church, not fixed up and garnished and made beautiful, but just as she is.

Those disciples were not ideal men. They smelled of the sea. Their language wasn't as good as, and they were sailing home, praying for them while they sailed home.

And they were plain men, and they weren't ideal. And no doubt the conversation that went on between them wasn't a perfect saintly conversation. There might have been arguments.

Somebody might even salt a little on the way. And one man might even have gone to sleep and not pulled his load. They were all sailing home, and they all had somebody in this real church, this real church, not the ideal, poetized dream church of the hymns.

But the real church of Christ isn't a perfect church. I wish it were. If it were, I'd come crawling on my hands and knees and ask for admittance.

But we're a long way from being a perfect. Disagreements among the people of God, even among the saints of God. There oughtn't to be, but there are.

And there were in Paul's day, and there are now. And there's a lot of imperfections. And there are things we wish weren't there, but are.

All that's real, all that's there. We might as well be realistic, ladies and gentlemen, and call things by their right names. I suppose that we, in the sight of God, don't present, we Christians of the present hour, don't present much a cleaner picture, a nicer picture, than those disciples that night out on the sea, tired and sleepy and weary and homesick, sailing on their way toward Capernaum and Rome.

But we're the apple of his eye nevertheless, and it's for us that he's on the mountain interceding. It was now dark, says the scriptures, and Jesus was not yet come. Well, brethren, if we would only confess, wouldn't this be our testimony, O Lord Jesus, it's dark and you haven't come.

It was dark in the first century and you didn't come. It was dark in the second century and you didn't come. It was dark in Constantine's time and you didn't come.

It was dark when the Bernards lived and you didn't come. It was dark when Luther preached and you didn't come. It was dark when Wesley stood on his father's tombstone and preached and you didn't come.

It was dark when George Fox walked up and down the hills and vales of England. Claim we're disappointed because that we would offend against the generation of thy people, as David said. We don't want to admit we're disappointed, but there's disappointment nevertheless.

It was an eye-opening thing when the World Council of Churches declared as their theme, Jesus or Christ, the hope of the world, and said they were going to emphasize eschatology, and they ran into a theological snag there at Emerson because there were those who don't believe that the coming is the second coming. It was embarrassing for those old boys with their entrenched privileges and their vested interests and their oaths and chains. They had the world at the tail and the Church in their hands and they thought, and they didn't want to think, the Lord should come.

Somebody said to the Kaiser, they tell me during, and they tell me that somebody said to the Kaiser, preach the sermon just before 1914. And the Kaiser got up and stared down the man who had dared preach the second coming. He said, don't you preach anything about the second coming in my presence again.

It would ruin my plan. And that's why the World Council couldn't tell our plans. The schemes that have been dreamed up out of my empty head.

I want rather to fit into the plans of God so that my plans would not be embarrassed nor in any wise disrupted if the Lord were to come tonight walking on the sea. You're a king and now you're not even a helper. And the sea rose and the great wind blew.

And has the Church not, even in our lifetime, has the Church not known three wars? Has the Church not known the threat of the atom bomb? Has not Euroclid arisen at that dramatic hour when the apostles on the sea, on their way to Rome, said the south wind blew softly away? And they went on sailing, believing that all would be well, when suddenly there came down a consensuous wind called Euroclid to rock upon the ship and hurl them every direction. And for days and days and multiplied nights and days, they saw not the stars by night, nor the sun by day. Euroclid was upon them.

A type again, or a picture at least, perched on the waters. I remember in 1917 the swift wind, Euroclid, swept down and they called it the Bolshevik revolution. The royal rule was upset and the Bolsheviks took over.

Later they got rid of that ugly word Bolshevik and called themselves communes. We have Euroclid upon us today. I listened to the news report today and I learned two things, just no later than today.

One is that Radio Peking, this fellow Zhou Enlai, has declared time is now ripe and they're going to deliver for Moses. I learned that the little island with the unpronounceable name is now under fierce bombardment

from the communists, and there is a small war now going on between them. Is this the old saber-rattling the Kaiser did, that Hitler did, that Mussolini did before these other wars? Is this it? I don't know.

I only know that Euroclidin still sweeps over the surface of the deep, and I know that the Christians are dying and their churches are being burned, and they're being driven into the woods and the great steel curtain has been pulled by carrier pigeons, not a balloon sent by the wind. Quick winds of Euroclidin have caught the ship and are trying to tear it apart. The south wind will blow softly for a little while.

The church composed of all the saints and the people of God will never perish. In Iraq I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail again. Churches can die, but the church must live.

The church in Wu Chao can die, but the church still lives. The church in Colombia, her pastor can be slain, and her people chased into the hills of rocks to hide in fear of their lives, but the church can never die. But their lives for Christ's sake are preserved.

Their spirit goes to the God who gave it, a soul that's given his life for Jesus Christ. Since Euroclidin broke on the world in 1917, or for that matter, in the year 100, they're being taken the gold and they're being gathered into the great beautiful garner. In the meantime, the church floats on the sea, and the disciples are all in distress, and they see Jesus walking on the water.

He couldn't stand it any longer. He was seeing them all the time down there and they didn't know it. He was seeing them all the time, whose eyes had never closed, whose eyes could see through the fog in the night.

They were held in his hand, but they didn't know it. He cannot soften his gospel to make it acceptable. Let's not qualify statements to make them softer.

Let's not argue in defending. He needs no defense. He holds the church in the hollow of his hand, even while she's being tossed in the sea.

He couldn't stand it any longer. He left the mountain and hurried down, walked out on the water. Are you clean enough and pure enough to see and hear him? He's not here yet, but he's coming, and he's walking on the sea, and he's approaching the ship.

He's no longer awake, and we all know that the keen interest he has in his people won't very much longer permit him to stay at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. But he's going to come walking on the sea, and do you know it? It is all that is within me. I believe that Jesus Christ, the Sovereign, walks on the sea, and I believe he will walk on the sea, jaw in life.

Now, why have we always got men with big hearts and little mouths walking our lives? But we always have to get men with big mouths and little tight hearts. Mussolini had a big jaw and a big mouth and a heart the size of a peanut. His guttural of German gave us the impression that he could shout and be heard on the planet Mars, but he had a heart the size of a walnut.

Now comes Joe and Lye. Why do they always get names you can't pronounce? I like them. But they really are Moussidou with his big mouth and Joe and Lye with his big mouth.

That's the wind that stirs the sea. But there is one walking on the storm. You ought to be ashamed to be scared.

Never should we be frightened, never for a moment. He's the Sovereign Lord. It wasn't the Calvinists that gave us that expression, but wherever it came from, I love it.

The Sovereign Lord, his Sovereign. His Sovereign, they mark out his confines. They used to, it took them this long, say, Rex so-and-so, the such-and-such, and then they told what he was the Sovereign of India and Ireland and South Africa and what have you.

But it's silly to call him Sovereign and then mark out his territory, isn't it? It's silly to say he's Sovereign, but he can't cross over there without a passport. He can't go over here without a visa. He can't cross over that river without asking permission, yet he's a Sovereign and wears a crown.

What kind of crazy use of language. The word Sovereign means absolute, infinite, unqualified boss in all realms in heaven or--and that's what our Lord is. He's a Sovereign Lord.

In his providential plan for a little while, he's imposing upon himself certain limitations for the purpose of fulfilling his eternal plans. At any moment he wants to do it, he can walk on the waters of the earth and the fires of hell and the golden streets of heaven, for he is All-Sovereign Lord. And he does as he pleases in the armies of the heavens and in the earth beneath, and no man can hold his hand and say, What are you doing? He answers to nobody, and he takes orders from nobody.

And he calls no counselors in for star chamber sessions. He has no assistant lord that he must go and chat with. He has no secretary to the throne that he must call in and say, What do you think of this situation? He knows in one effortless act all that can be known, and he's already lived all our tomorrows, and holds the world in the palm of his hand.

That's the Lord I serve and whose I am, the soft, curly-bearded Jesus of the Italian artist, and the pompous, fast-talking Jesus of the American businessman I wouldn't suit to worship him. I wouldn't get on my knees and call him Lord. He's as weak as I am, let him get on his knees to me.

Let's do it a turnabout anyhow. Glory be to God, he's infinitely beyond all men and all angels and all seraphim and all cheraphim, the demons and all archangels. Powers and might and dominions and things visible and invisible, he's risen above them all.

Sovereign in his own right forevermore. So he walks on the sea. He's there if you can only see him.

If you lose your job, afraid Eisenhower can't keep us out of the Depression, afraid of John L. Lewis, who are you afraid of? He's walking on the sea and he's coming our way. It's dark and the winds blow loud, but he's on his way here. Now let's do what they did.

So they invited him into the ship and willingly received him. And it says immediately they were at the shore where they were going, immediately. Now you don't have to be technical about the second coming of Christ.

I think we have spoiled the hope of Christ's coming by a lot of nonsensical technicalities. And the prophets have been wiser than Isaiah and have known more scripture than Daniel. And with their charts and their meticulous detailed plans of the second coming and prophecy, they have frightened decent people away from belief in the coming of Christ.

I still believe it. Somebody else with his chart and his red pencil can give me the details and I'll smile and wait for the coming of Christ. But I believe he's coming.

And I believe that he's going to walk down there and he's waiting for the church to invite him in, waiting for us to invite him in. We don't need him bad enough yet, brethren. We don't need him bad enough.

When we need him so bad that we can't get on without him, he'll come. But we don't need him bad enough yet. We can still get along without him.

You don't need him, do you? I mean, you need him as Savior, but really now we don't need him in the world. Aren't we Republicans doing pretty well? I don't think we need him as bad as we might. Oh, our politicians are telling us to go to church and be good and pray because that's the way to fight off communism and curb juvenile delinquency and comic books.

And in other words, it's serve God for a secondary reason, prostitution, gentlemen. Whenever I serve God for any other reason than he is God, I'm prostituting my worship. Whenever I get on my supple knees and cry to my Father in Heaven and make him a means to another end, my worship is no better than the worship of Baal.

God is the end, secondary. I don't get converted to be a good American. I get converted for Christ's sake to be a Christian.

I don't want a revival to stop communism. I want a revival to glorify God and enjoy him forever. I don't want a revival for political reasons.

Politicians have always used the church wherever they could, always, no matter how slimy the politicians are and how crooked, no matter how selfish, no matter how drunk with lust for power. There's always a reverend or two that'll grab a black book and appear with a solemn, holy look on his face and mumble some prayers for the politicians. There's always one little unheard.

I'll never buy, never get anything I say or write, ever, to advocate Christianity for any other reason than Christianity's sake. Never Christ for the Republicans' sake. Never Christ for the Democrats' sake.

Never Christ for free men's sake. But always Christ for God's sake. In the meantime, he's waiting to be wanted.

He's waiting to be invited inside.

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