

The Impossible Sermon on the Mount

by F.J. Huegel

The sermon explores the transformative power of Christ's resurrection in enabling believers to live out the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, which are impossible without divine assistance.

Duration: 36:41

Scripture: Matthew 5:43

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "Loving Enemies"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a story about a British soldier named Dusty who encounters a wounded officer. Dusty questions why the officer is not doing anything to treat his wounds. This leads to a discussion about the despair that comes from relying on natural means. The preacher then shifts to the story of Paul, who comes to the end of himself and realizes his need for deliverance. Through the Holy Spirit, Paul has a fresh vision of Jesus and experiences freedom from the law of sin and death. The sermon concludes with a reading from Matthew 5:43-45, where Jesus teaches about loving one's enemies. The preacher emphasizes the transformative power of Christ and shares a story of a bandit who finds hope and redemption through Jesus.

Transcript

May we bow our heads in prayer. We remember, blessed Redeemer, how Thou didst say, Without me ye can do nothing. Lord, we're just glad tonight that it's even so, For apart from Thee we want nothing, Only that Thy name may be magnified.

And then, Lord, we remember that other word, Paul speaking, I can do all things through Christ, Who strengthens me. And so we are resting in Thee tonight, Lord, The rock, the smitten rock, Hiding in Thy wounded side. Knowing that Thou wilt not fail us, Lord, May we not fail Thee, To be all that Thou wouldst have us to be, Lord, For the praise and the honor and the glory Of Thy name.

Amen. The theme that's upon my heart this evening as we open fire in this series of meditations upon the Word might be entitled, and I hope you won't be shocked, in this fashion, The Impossible Sermon on the Mount. Now, I realize that that does not sound good.

It sounds like irreverence, as though the preacher were speaking lightly. But I need not assure you that such is not the case. I am confident that if you will follow the unfolding of the thought of the evening, you will come to the same conclusion.

May I read from the Gospel according to St. Matthew, the fifth chapter, the words of the Lord Jesus, Ye have heard that it has been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. For he maketh his Son to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Now, we realize as we read these words that such a code, such a system of ethics, such requirements go infinitely beyond the possibilities of human nature. As far as the most distant star, one might say, is removed from the earth.

It's just not in man to love his enemies, to bless those who curse him, to do good to them that hate him, to pray for them that despitefully use him and persecute him. Why we must confess that we do not even love as we should our very own, our immediate, those of our immediate family circle, those of the same Christian family. And here we have the Savior bidding us love our enemies and bless them that curse us.

Why, even the ancient law, the law of Moses, as Peter put it when the first church council was held in Jerusalem regarding the matter of the law, circumcision, the yoke was too much for the fathers. They couldn't bear it. The Jews never lived up to the requirements laid down at Sinai.

Why, it was under law that they crucified their Lord and Savior. And here we have the Savior going infinitely beyond the mosaic institutions. They of old have said, but I say, love your enemies, bless them that curse you.

Why does not the Savior accommodate to the possibilities of human nature the requirements he lays down here, the laws of the kingdom? Why something that is altogether impossible for human nature? Well, the reason is to be found, my dear brethren, Christian friends, in the fact that the Savior was forever looking beyond. In the days of his public ministry, as he wrought his miracles, as he taught and as he walked among men, preaching the word, he was ever looking beyond to the great consummation of his work. Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.

Forever referring to what awaited him at the end of the road, after the confession, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. You will recall how Matthew tells us that it was then that the Savior spoke very freely, very clearly regarding his death and his resurrection. John tells us in the twelfth chapter of his gospel how the Savior said, No man taketh my life from me, I lay it down, that I may take it again, take it up again.

Freely he laid down his life. And it was in view of this consummation that the Savior spoke. He knew full well that there on Calvary's cross he would not only be taking away the sins of the world, my brethren will recall how he spoke in the upper room as he took the cup, my blood which he shed for the remission of sins.

I say he knew that there on the cross he would not only be taking away the sins of man, but that he would be putting an end to the old creation. It would be the end of the old life, that in the power of his resurrection he might bring to light the new. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

Old things have passed away. All things have become new. Paul, Saul of Tarsus was called, the Savior himself appearing to him, that he might be his witness taking his name before the Gentiles and before kings, called to be the interpreter.

Yes, indeed, the interpreter par excellence of the cross and the empty tomb, for this was Paul's great theme. And he tells this in his epistle to the Romans, the sixth chapter, that the old man was crucified together with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed. And then comes the command that we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive unto God in the power of the Redeemer's resurrection.

Well, I fear this is going to be too much for some. It's getting a little drafty. For those who stand, thank you brother, with the Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship, the participation of his death and of his resurrection, having come to the end of themselves, having signed their own death warrant, those who with Paul say, it is no longer I but Christ, I am crucified together with Christ, the life which I now live in the flesh.

I live by the faith of the Son of God. He is my life. It is no longer I. To those who accept the verdict of Romans 6 and are willing to stand by faith in union with the crucified risen Lord, finding in him their all and in all, the Sermon on the Mount not only no longer is impossible, the Sermon on the Mount becomes something natural.

The believer is no longer acting while within he may be feeling something very different. That's not living the Christian life. That's being an actor.

I say for those who are willing for the Holy Spirit to apply the power of the cross, the virtue of the cross, to the old life that it might be annulled, that it might be put away, that it might be buried, for we are told in Romans 6 that we not only share the Savior's cross, his death, but even his tomb. I say for those who have come to realize that the Savior doesn't expect of them in the natural fulfillment of a requirement found in the Sermon on the Mount, I say for those who are willing to come to the end of themselves and rest in the arms of Jesus and find all, their very all and in all, in the power of his resurrection, it's not a strain. It's something natural.

It's something spontaneous. Why, friends, the principles that we find here in the Sermon on the Mount are all in the new life. They will never be found in the old.

They are inherent in the new life. That's the way the new life operates. Now, there was only one prior to Calvary in the empty tomb.

Whoever lived according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, that's the one who gave the Sermon on the Mount. And I repeat for those who are willing to go all the way, willing for Calvary to be the end of their old life, the natural, that in the power of the Savior's resurrection they might find the new life. The Sermon on the Mount is no problem.

Paul had to go this way. Paul learned it, learned the lesson through bitter tears. You have the story in Romans 7. In Romans 6 he tells us of how believers are to consider themselves dead in the Savior's death, to sin and alive in the power of his resurrection.

But in Romans 7 he goes even beyond. And to make it very telling, he speaks of his own experience. He lets his own experience tell the story.

There we have Paul groaning in an effort to fulfill the requirements of law. Now some feel that it was the ancient law, the mosaic. But as you read the entire chapter you come to realize that it's really Paul, the Christian speaking.

Oh, he would so love to be like Jesus and walk as he walked, love as he loved, bless as he blessed. But he doesn't find it in himself. And he struggles.

The good that I would do, I do not. The evil that I would not do, I do. Yes, I delight myself in the law of God according to the inward man.

But there is another law in my members which takes me captive to the law of sin and death. Oh, wretched man that I am. Now the sermon on the mount just leads to that kind of despair, friends.

While we stand on the ground of the natural, it leads to that kind of despair. Paul comes to the end of himself. Oh, wretched man that I am.

Who will deliver me from the body of this death? Well, the Holy Spirit was working all the time. And in that moment he draws aside the veil and Paul has a fresh vision of his Savior and he screams, I thank God through Jesus Christ the Lord. And then he begins to sing.

And he dances, as it were. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. And now we have Paul expressing a confidence, an utter confidence.

Why now he says that even more, he is more than conqueror through him who loved him. And he is absolutely certain that nothing, neither height, nor depth, nor angels, nor principality, neither the present, nor powers to come, nor any creature shall be able to separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And now he can say, I can do all things through him, through Christ Jesus.

My Lord, it is no longer I. Now only Christ can fulfill the requirements of the Sermon on the Mount. You just get out of the way. You just be willing to be nothing.

You just be willing to die. The mystics were so, were constantly referring to the need of entering into their nothingness that Christ might be all. Then you rest as a babe in his arms.

You expect nothing of yourself. You know it's not there. You've come to utter bankruptcy.

You know it can never be found there. It will never be found save in the Lord Jesus Christ. But then you learn to draw upon him moment by moment, and he becomes your life.

In things great and in things small, in church and on the street, at home and in the office, at play and at work, he's your life. Many of you, no doubt, have been reading after that great Chinese pastor, Watchman Nee. We're all eager to get word regarding his state.

Every now and then it comes through that he has been taken home to glory, and then again it comes through that, no, he is still in prison. In Uruguay, some months ago, we were told that relatives of the immediate family had fled and escaped from China, were living in Uruguay, saying that all is well with Watchman Nee. Twelve years in prison.

But I was told in Japan that he sings with one another to Christ there in prison. He tells in, I think a sit-walk stand, of how a Chinese Christian farmer came to speak to the members of the board, the official board,

consistory of the church, regarding a problem. He said, you know, brethren, a neighbor is stealing my water.

These rice paddies and irrigation, this neighbor, he said, was getting up very early in the morning and stealing the water before through these irrigation ditches it reached his field. Now he said it isn't right. Well, his brethren turned upon him saying, you know, it isn't a question of right and wrong.

It's a question of cross-bearing. Now you go to your neighbor and tell him that you're going to see that he gets the water before you do. You look after it yourself.

And you witness to him. Tell him about Jesus. Well, he did that, and he won Him for Christ.

Not a question of right and wrong. Oh, yes, a question of the Sermon on the Mount, but that takes you to the cross. Question of cross-bearing.

Not long ago, it came to my hands, our boy brought into the home a book written by the chaplain of Princeton University, an Englishman, in World War II, an officer in the British Army. In this book he tells the story of the bridge of River Clyde. It's come out in movie form.

I haven't seen it, I'm told. And in this book he makes certain corrections, errors in the movie. And he tells how in those concentration camps, British officers trained in Cambridge, Eton, had been reduced, he says, in the book, to the lowest possible level of human life.

Suffering, disease, hunger, the abuse of their Spanish overlords, their Japanese overlords. They had come down so very low, he said, that they would snarl at each other like dogs over a crumb of bread. And then he said one day, they walked into the camp, a British soldier, they called him Dusty, also a prisoner, who, as he came to this officer who writes the book, saw the condition of his body, why, Captain, aren't you doing anything for these wounds? Please turn the tape over at this time.

Why, Captain, so Dusty gets water and Dusty comes to the officer and bathes his wound. And one after another. And this went on for some time, and the officer says that he finally said to Dusty, but what does this mean? Oh, he said, I learned to love Jesus at my mother's knee.

And the Captain tells how the spirit, Dusty's spirit, began to move in the life of the camp, to make itself felt. And the officers went in search of their Bibles. They had Bibles and got them out.

Formed a Bible class. The Captain said he was made the teacher of the class. He knew nothing of the Bible, but they thought he, being an educated man, he began to study the word.

Now he's chaplain at Princeton University. And he goes on to tell how it brought such a mighty revolution in the life of the camp that it spread. There were a number of camps up and down the river.

This spirit, Dusty's spirit. Oh, Christ Jesus the Lord in Dusty. And then when victory came and the British forces moved in and these officers were liberated, the Captain says that they rose up in defense of the Japanese soldiers and officers for the British becoming aware of the sufferings of their companions and the cruelties of these Japanese officers were about to butcher them all.

No! They saved their enemy. Then he goes on to tell how the Japanese officers became their prisoners, prisoners of war, and how in the camp they stooped to wash their wounds. These men who for five years had tormented British soldiers in prison camps, they washed their wounds.

And then one day the Captain said he turned to a companion. Now this happened before the victory of the British forces. He said, have you heard anything about Dusty? What's become of Dusty? Oh, the Japanese nailed Dusty to a tree.

He refused to obey some order that was contrary to his Christian convictions. The Japanese nailed him to a tree. Yes, it's not a question of right or wrong.

It's a question of cross-bearing credits. Shalu Sundar Singh, some of you have heard me tell the story, tells of how when he was on a missionary journey in India he would want to go over the Himalayas to Tibet. Some bandits bounced down upon him and stripping of everything he had, leaving him beaten in the way on the road, hastened on with their, well, you'll have to pardon me if now and then a Spanish word comes in.

After 43 years trying to learn Spanish, I can't talk English. They're despoco. What is the word there in English? The, well, yes.

But the evangelist arose and cried out, sir, don't go any farther. Sir, I have more for you. I have more for you.

Come again. Come, I have more for you. And they returned to look him over.

Well, we thought we'd taken everything. What more do you have, sir, as I have the Lord Jesus Christ. And one of the bandits, greatly moved, invited him to spend the night in the cave where he lived.

And he accepted the invitation. And on the following day the bandit took him to a deep pit, a grave full of bones and putrefying corpse. These are my crimes, cried the bandit, bitter tears falling from his cheeks.

Is there hope for me? And the evangelist's reply was, for you Christ died. And according to the story, the bandit became a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, living a transformed life from that hour on. It's natural.

When we take our place with the crucified in death and the old life is put away, buried, the natural, what we are by nature, then it becomes natural, for the risen life of Christ in the believer expresses itself in a spontaneous manner, according to the principles laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. Yes, impossible for the natural, for the new creation life in Christ, perfectly natural, to love even the ugly, even the enemy, to bless those who would curse you, and to do good to those who would spitefully use you, and be perfect in the sense, we know that all through the New Testament this word means maturity, to come to a full orb of life, of freedom and victory, to find the answer in Christ, as we turn and look at ourselves in the strength of the natural to measure up to the requirement of the Sermon on the Mount, and we realize that Thou does not require of us what Thou art not ready to give. This is ours in Christ Jesus, who took us with himself to the cross and to the grave, and then in the power of his resurrection with himself to the throne.

O Father, enable us to draw in an ever fuller measure upon throne life, the life of our blessed enthroned, glorified and enthroned Savior, that these principles that we find in the Sermon on the Mount might find a natural expression in our walk, in our conversation and all. It is above every name. In the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

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