

Cast Yourself Into The Sea

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon emphasizes the need to override the default of self-centeredness in human hearts by surrendering to a superior law, the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It highlights the importance of continual commitment to Christ to avoid spiritual loss and degradation, drawing parallels between natural and spiritual maintenance. The message urges listeners to abandon distractions, embrace radical obedience, and experience the liberating power of abiding in Jesus.

Duration: 41:34

Scripture: Romans 8:1, Romans 8:2, Galatians 5:16, Hebrews 12:1, John 21:4, John 21:12, Psalm 51:10, 1 John 1:9, James 4:8

Topics: "Surrender to Christ", "Abiding in Jesus"

Description

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Transcript

Let me start this way. You know, when you step from the passenger boarding bridge into a waiting aircraft, the intention is that you, along with around 300 tonnes and about 400 people and a lot of luggage and a lot of other things, are going to do something that defies the unalterable law of gravity and fly. Now, the only way that this is possible is that another law, a superior law, in this case, the law of aerodynamics, will overrule the inferior law, the law of gravity.

But any failure in respect to the law of aerodynamics and the law of gravity will immediately seize everything about that aircraft and everyone in it, and it will take priority with the inevitable result. You know, the Bible teaches us, it doesn't word it quite this way, but when Adam and his wife, as she was, shuffled away from the Garden of Eden, a law not unlike gravity became the default of their lives. Many, many years later, the Apostle Paul would refer to that law in Romans chapter 8 as the law of sin and death.

In the previous chapter, the 7th chapter of Romans, Paul talks about it without defining it or labelling it in that same particular way. But you know, among the categories of the functioning of that law of sin and

death, and there are many that we could talk about, there is this fact right at the core, it's right at the core of the human heart today, and it's this, that he sees himself as his own God. He is preoccupied with himself, he worships, or she worships herself, and it's ceaseless, it's an ongoing factor, it's the default of human experience, human behaviour.

And you know, to be an authentic Christian man or a Christian woman, that default must be overridden and it will require a force that is greater than any one of us are in and of ourselves. We have no inherent capability to change that default, it's fixed, it's been sort of, as it were, programmed into our lives, it's the bias of our lives, it's the, or better put by the Apostle, it's a law that's functioning, that in and of itself is unalterable. And we've all got stories, either our own, or the stories of other people, who have made their many endless, zealous attempts to change themselves at that level.

We may succeed in behavioural modification, as it's called, we can change ourselves in various degrees, but we can't change that fixed law that's there. Again, it can't be done without a greater force, a force greater than ourselves, a law greater than ourselves, like the illustration I gave of the aircraft. And that force that I'm referring to, that power must be exerted continually.

And that's an important word for where I'm going with this. Now, with this kind of opener, as it were, we could veer off and pivot in many different directions, and we could search a variety of different passages of Scripture, which would come to mind, and which could help elucidate or illustrate what I'm talking about. What I'd like to do in this session is to ask you, if you're turning in your Bible, to turn to John's Gospel, chapter 21.

Now, I'm not going to go directly to it. There's a passage, a section of the chapter that, if I had the option, I would like to read at length, but in this time-restricted setting that I think I'm in right now, I can't do that. I encourage you to read the chapter when you have an opportunity.

But what I'm doing at the moment, before I even go there, I've got my finger in it, but I'm looking into Mark's Gospel just for two words, two verses rather. I'll read them to you, so you know where I am. I'm in the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 1, and verse 16.

Now, as he, that is Jesus, as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets and followed him.

Now, I'm turning over the pages to Luke's Gospel, and in chapter 5, I'm reading in verse 8. When Simon Peter saw it, there's a context for this, of course, which is tied up with the italicized word in my Bible, it. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. And then it goes on, and Jesus says, as we read in the other Gospel, it was so that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon, and then Jesus speaks to Simon, or to Peter, and he says, Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed him. Now, I don't know whether you noticed in these two references, but the idea that I'm drawing on is the fact that Peter, when he heard the call of Jesus to him, and that in itself is worth a whole session to think about, just the wonder of what took place, that this man, Jesus, walks into, in this case, the life of Peter, and simply says, Follow me, and there's this immediate response from Peter. His response is, it's impressive, and the scripture text says, they left all, or they forsook everything.

In other words, it was a clear call that went deeper than just into his mind, or into his emotions, but it reached him at the deepest core of his being, and we could speculate as to what went on inside of him, but that's not necessary. The fact is that the text says, like, immediately, he responded, and left everything, and that's incredible. All right, now you can turn to that 21st chapter of John's Gospel, and I've already apologised for not reading the whole text, but I'm going to drop down on odd verses or phrases here that you'll find when you read through it, because, consecutively, the fact is, of course, in the meantime, Jesus has been crucified, he's risen from the dead, there have been some opportunities for them to see him after his resurrection.

Let me just read, I'll read from the top of chapter 21. Now, after these things, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and on this wise showed he himself. There were together Simon Peter and Thomas, called Didymus and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.

Simon Peter said unto them, I go fishing. They said unto him, we go with thee, and they went forth and entered into a ship immediately, and that night they caught nothing. Let me just stop there.

The question is, what is going on in Peter's life and in his heart? And in asking that kind of question, with the limited information that we have in the text of Scripture, we can only speculate, and sometimes we do that just for our own benefit, when we're alone, perhaps, when we're reading Scripture, and questions come to our mind, and there's no answer to it, because there's no record in the text of Scripture to tell us, so we imagine things. We're not building doctrines on our imaginations, but we're human beings, and as we read, we think. I've said many, many times over the years that I wish the Bible was a whole lot thicker than it is, not just because it's printed on thicker paper, but because we just beg for more information.

We long to know more. But in any event, the fact of the matter is that Peter has now made this statement, I'm going fishing, and the question that I'm asking is why? Why is he saying this? Well, there are some very sort of logical answers we could give. We could say, well, because he's hungry, and a lot's been going on lately.

Another reasonable question would be, well, it would appear to be a commercial fisherman, and he needed some funds to keep going on, it could be said, or was he just simply drawn back to his former trade in this slack period here? But my real question is, Peter, do you remember the way that you responded to the call of Jesus in the beginning? Do you remember the radical response that you made to that call when you first met Jesus? Do you remember what Jesus said to you, the prophetic sort of statement that he made to you concerning your life and concerning its purpose and its future? Peter, had you forgotten that at this time? Do you remember when you left all the fishing behind to follow Jesus? You know, I think what I'm suggesting, at least, is that maybe that default of his earlier life, earlier behaviour, earlier activities, just kicked in here at this point in time. And in saying that, I'm keeping in my mind the fact that prior to this moment, here in the 21st chapter of John, he's actually seen Jesus alive after that brutal crucifixion and his death. He's actually seen his hands and his side.

What's gone wrong? And maybe what I'm saying here, I don't know who I'm speaking to in particular, but just maybe what I'm saying really highlights something about your own life. I think this passage is highlighting to my mind, and I hope perhaps it can do the same for you, that if and when you drop your guard, let me put it that way, if and when you drop your guard, you inevitably have lost your focus and there will be a sense in which the default kicks in. Do you remember my earlier illustration? Now, the issue

here that I'm discussing is not the fact that we, in that time period, in that moment, or whatever it is, we lose our salvation.

I'm not suggesting that at all. But what I am suggesting is we inevitably lose the fruit or the benefit, the richness, the preciousness of what we have known and what we've experienced. Remember I said that the law of aerodynamics must function continually.

In that case, when it ceases to function, there are disastrous results inevitably. And the fact is there's a sense in which that's true in our spiritual lives as well. You know, I live here with my wife and our dog in a big old house, which the Lord has made available for us.

And over the years, we've had Christian meetings here. But because of the COVID thing that's going on at the moment, we're not allowed to have meetings in the home or even meet together in one another's homes, except with certain exclusions. But the fact is, you know, there's just me and my wife, as I say, and the dog doesn't make any mess around here.

But there are times when I go down some steps and I go into a room that we built onto the house, which is our meeting room. And I mentioned to my wife just the other day that there's some cobwebs forming on those stairs down there, because nobody's going up and down and they're not being attended to regularly. I'm making it sound like they need to be.

Well, that's probably true as well. But the fact is, you abandon your house and it will become dusty. If you abandon it for a longer period, it's pretty certain that insects will move in.

And if you leave it for a really prolonged time, eventually the house is going to fall apart. That's called entropy. There must be an energy source and an action which is essential to prevent the natural tendency to degrade and fall apart.

This is true. You know, I've often said that which is true in the natural is true in the spiritual. And I think there's a direct parallel here, which is very obvious and I don't need to explain it anymore to you.

The point that I'm emphasizing is that that which God starts in the beginning must be maintained. Failure will result in loss. Now then, just to open this a little bit wider, you know, that human default, as I've called it, is such that it moves men and women to gratify themselves, to gratify their flesh.

It's the root of slavery to sin. But, you know, the modern phrase is, well, you know, it's all about me. Once upon a time, I'm certainly not recommending this book and I never read it, but I saw the title decades ago where someone of some degree of notoriety wrote a book and entitled it's all about me.

I've got to be me rather, got to be me. Yes, but we need in our lives this energy source. Now, I've partly quoted a verse of scripture from the book of Romans.

I'm going to read it more fully here. This is how Romans chapter 8 opens up. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

Note the words carefully. Who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

I've been talking to you about the law of sin and death and the need for a superior law to enable us to live above that and free from its power and its influence. And this is what Paul is explaining here in this

wonderful section of scripture. He says it's the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus that releases us and sets us free from the law of sin and death.

Notice, as I mentioned, the particular wording. Paul says the law of the spirit of life, this superior law, this most superior law, is where? It's in Christ Jesus. It's not something like an entity, it's not a product, it's not something that God gives to us.

This is a law that functions in Christ Jesus. And the message here is that the benefit of that superior law to the law of sin and death will only be my experience or your experience insofar as I discover it to be in him and I then am enabled to abide in him. The benefit, the blessing, the release, the victory, and all that goes with it is in him.

He doesn't hand it to me so I can get that as an object in my grasp. The call is to enter into a union with him which God is enabling us to know and to experience. This is where we discover the liberating power.

This is where we experience what we often talk about as being the liberating holy fire of the spirit of God. Or put another way altogether, it's the life of Jesus. It's this factor described in these various ways by me just now, but it's this one single factor that uniquely identifies the authentic Christian man and authentic Christian woman.

They're not flopping all over the place, up and down, in and out, but they've discovered an abiding place in him where we benefit from all of the richness of his liberating power, his cleansing power, his healing power, his refreshing power, and so on, and so on, and all the preciousness of fellowship with him in our hearts. And this is very, very wonderful. Now, without this as a continual experience, or if you prefer to be put this way, without this continual infilling of his holy life, his holy spirit, this holy power, there will be loss and there will be an inevitable degrading that takes place.

You know, I think actually, and I've gathered this somewhat from my own experience in earlier days, but certainly it's been reinforced by talking to a lot of people over these many years now, and that is so many people, in their ignorance, and I'm not insulting anyone by saying that, they view the Christian life as a kind of a product, a kind of a one-time event, a one-time exchange, or a one-time commitment. But you know, it's not that. The true Christian experience is a lifelong, consistent, in-drinking of this holy life of God, where a man and a woman then walk in an undeviating and radical obedience to God.

The Apostle Paul will talk about that in the book of Galatians, in chapter 5, and around verse 16, you can look it up for yourself. I think probably most of the people I'm talking to today are familiar with A. W. Tozer, who has now gone on into a richer experience of the Lord's presence. In one of his books that was written, entitled *The Pursuit of God*, he made this series of statements, let me read them to you.

He said that in this, I don't recall how he leads into it, but he's talking about in this sort of modern evangelical general position, and here's the quote, everything is made to centre upon the initial act of accepting Christ. And we are not expected thereafter to crave any further revelation of God to ourselves. We have been snurred in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found him, we have no need anymore to seek him.

He then goes on to say this is set before us as the last word of orthodoxy and is taken for granted that no Bible-taught Christian ever believed otherwise. But that is not true. That is not true.

And what I think perhaps almost more than anything I want to share in this message is just the need for the ongoing, steadfast, faithful commitment to Christ in our daily walk. Failure to do that will result in loss. You know, I think in so many cases Christianity, we don't find that word in the Bible of course, but Christianity is being reduced to a kind of a theological belief system where, you know, believing is essential.

There's no question about that. We've got scriptures to teach that without any question. Believing is essential, but without receiving what we're claiming to believe, we really don't have anything.

Believing that fails to lead us to an actual receiving of what God is offering is always a faulty believing. And the outcome of that, the result of that is unbelief. And I'm reminded of what the Apostle Paul said.

He said, whatsoever is not of faith is sin. And as the result of that failure, there's no heart transformation. There's no actual victory.

There's no evidence of holiness. There's no radiance of Christ. And certainly this is the experience of all too many.

And I suppose if there's anything even sadder, it might only be this, that for so many who claim to be Christians, they've never even seriously entertained the possibility that they may be missing something. And for many people, when they're faced with that fact that there is something more perhaps than what you've experienced, they're offended and become attempting to justify their position. And sometimes it's worse.

You know, in my days in England, in the fellowship where we were there for many years, the house that we were meeting was a big old, I don't know if this will mean anything to many of you Americans, but it was a Georgian styled house with a great big, heavy, thick front door on it. And we would get close to 200 people in the meetings in this big house. And I can remember without any question and doubt in my mind, occasions when during the course of the ministry of the word of God, there would be people who would get up from the meeting and they would run down the hallway.

We could hear them going down the hallway. The door had a unique kind of catch on it that you'd press a button and it would click off to open and you'd hear the click, the door would open and the door would slam so hard you think the front of the house would fall off. But they wanted to get out.

It was not for them. They were offended. And I could tell a number of stories along that line.

But you know, we had many occasions when during the preaching, not after as the result of an invitation, but during the preaching of the word of God, people would get out of their seats in a very different manner to the manner I've just referred to. And they would come and fall on their faces at the front of the meeting because they wanted to give themselves to God. They wanted to receive what God was offering.

In my chapter here of John, John chapter 21, do you remember I read to you the last part, this is the way the verse starts, it says, I go fishing and the last words in the verse are these, that night they caught nothing. You know, if in fact we find ourselves drifting spiritually, we may get involved in things, even things that may be considered to be Christian works, things which are good ideas, but at the end of the day, they produce nothing, nothing that is of value in terms of eternity, things that will very likely be burned up in that day. But to catch nothing, I'm thinking if we face it in the moment when it may be our experience, it's disheartening.

We realize it's been a waste of time, a waste of years. There's some songs been written about that, about the wasted years when a man or a woman has permitted themselves to be drawn away by their flesh, they've been drawn away from that sacred place of abiding in him, where alone there is victory and joy. And you know, this man, Peter, I've already referred to him as a commercial fisherman, and his colleagues, they were fishermen, they knew fishing, they knew how to fish, they knew when to fish, they knew where to fish, and they'd been fishing all night and they caught nothing.

And I suspect that was unusual for them. But I'm wondering to myself, did it ever occur, I'll have better things to talk about with Peter if I ever get to meet him in heaven, than to bring this up. But I've wondered to myself, Peter, did it ever occur to you that it was actually God that chased the fish away from your net? I don't know how he'd respond to that.

I think by the time I would get to speak to him, if I ever do, he would agree with me wholeheartedly. But at the time, I'm not so sure he would have agreed. But you know, God does chase the fish away in our lives.

You know, there's so many records of Scripture that we think about. He causes water to dry up, you know, important water that was desperately sought. He causes a food supply to dry up.

I'm thinking of Elisha when I say that. You know, he causes plans that we make to fall flat. He causes businesses to go belly up.

He causes relationships to collapse. He causes assemblies to shrink. Why? He does it because he loves you.

He does it because sometimes there's no other way for him to get your attention, where he has you in a position where you're facing up to the fact that you have actually allowed yourself to be drawn away and you've been missing out, you've been experiencing spiritual loss, and perhaps it's gone way beyond that even. But nevertheless, it can certainly be those things. And sometimes there's just no other way, it seems.

This is how I would analyze it anyway. For God to really get my attention, he has to sort of break the cycle of resistance. He has to, in some cases, he has to deflate our egos and highlight to us our helplessness and our need.

But you know, in this unfolding story in John chapter 21, there was actually a new day that was dawning. Let me just read you a verse in the chapter, verse 4. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said unto them, Children, have you any meat? And they answered him, No.

You know, let me tell you, there's always a new day dawning when the man is standing on the shore. And the man was not some fish wholesaler, anxious to get their catch, so he could profit from it. This man was the Son of God.

He was the man on the shore. Hallelujah. At first he was unknown to them, but then he begins to unveil himself to them.

In the lingo I'm more familiar with, how's it going, boys? You know, I can't digress to tell you a story, but I stood on one occasion as a police officer, right next to another police officer, and we were there to sort of, because it was a formality, and then among all the cars that were parked along the sides of the curb, a

very plush, black Jaguar pulled up, double parking, and the man we were expecting got out of the car. He was the chief constable, or the chief of police, as you'd call him perhaps, of the city, and he came toward, he got out the car, came toward us, and stopped right in front of us, and he said this, How's it going, boys? So you see where I'm making the connection. Within about five or ten seconds of that question, I'd been stabbed and thrown 12 feet with a knife in my back.

How's it going, boys? Well, at first I think Peter thought, well, I need to read a bit more of the verse. Jesus said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship and you shall find. And I think at that moment, there must have been a question in the minds of these fishermen, like, we've been out there all night trying to get there.

Let me pause here in saying that, it just could be that there's one or two or maybe many more than that listening to me this morning, and you have come to the recognition that you've lost out somewhere. You've lost your way, you've pivoted off for one reason or another, to one place or another, to one experience or another, but you've left that central point of bliss, and now you're aware of it. It's as though Jesus is standing on the shore of your life, and you're becoming aware of the fact that, yes, you're not where you should be.

Perhaps, and I have no idea, just exactly how God may speak this word to you, but maybe there's something in some vague way equivalent to cast your net on the right side, you know, to do something that seems foolish, it seems inappropriate for one reason. And maybe you think, maybe you just dismiss it. Maybe Peter was tempted to dismiss it, but he doesn't, and that's the good news.

He may have thought it was crazy, he was slow to discern what was going on, but they go out, they throw their net in, and there's this huge catch that is described in the section of scripture, and it's wonderful. And it was at that moment that I read in verse 7, therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved, that's a reference to John, the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, it is the Lord. John was quicker to discern that the man on the beach was in fact the Jesus that they had known, the Jesus who had been crucified and raised from the dead.

It was he who was standing there. But here's the point, I'm back to Peter again. In that moment there was something about that transcendent authority of the man on the beach who told them what to do and they did it with this remarkable result.

John makes the statement, it's the Lord, and as soon as Peter recognised that, you know, the light went on. We have a silly expression from decades ago in England, it has to do with old-fashioned telephone kiosks and things we talk about right now, but we talk about the penny dropping. The light went on, Peter recognised truth, and in that moment Peter's focus was transformed.

Can I suggest to you it's as though the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus kicked into him, and in that moment his response was radical. He immediately, the scripture says he plunged into the river, into the lake rather. He threw himself in.

My dear friend, that's exactly what you must do. We all must do it. We must do it continually.

We must continually be throwing ourselves into the very heart, the open embracing heart of Jesus, and give ourselves to him. There was unreserved abandon for this man at this point, and it happened because of this fresh revelation of Jesus, and it overrode the default in his life, as I was calling it earlier. Amen.

You know, by the time I reach verse 12, I've got Jesus saying to these men, come and come and dine. He was inviting them, he was inviting them in the context in which they were at that point, into a fellowship experience that was beyond compare. They would receive bread from heaven, certainly.

Before just closing this talk I'm giving, let me just ask a question, a personal question. Are you ready perhaps in your own life to face up to what might be your version of fishing, or your fishing default, if you will? Are you really ready to leave your fishing forever? Are you really prepared to give yourself without reservation to God? Are you really ready to take your obedience to him to another level, and abandon all of the distractions? You know, as we glance back before we leave this situation, what we see there in this morning light, the seven men who were gathered around the fire, but the seven men, their names, we read them earlier, they're transfixed by an eighth man who was there. This is the man who stood on the shore.

This is the Jesus that they had known, and I believe that as the seven sat around him on that occasion, they're transfixed with him, filled with wonder. This was the most stunningly amazing supernatural transcendent experience that could be imagined, all things considered, and they sit there. I see them just gazing upon him in silent wonder.

It's interesting that the number eight in the Bible has a significance. It always refers to new beginnings. Now when morning was come, it was going to be a day of a new beginning, and it would be a day of new beginning because of the eighth man that was there, who really is the first man, and they would partake of the fresh bread and fried fish.

I don't know quite how it looked in particular, being served to them by hands that bear nail prints. The man from heaven is feeding them. It would be a meal that they would never ever forget, and truly in those moments gathered there, any form of default that they had had and been subjected to, or allowed themselves to be subjected to, had been eclipsed completely by the powerful love of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Let me just pray. Father, I just pray here in the closing moments of this talk, and I don't know who you're speaking to, Lord. I don't know anything about their circumstances, but I pray, Lord, that by your Holy Spirit, you will cause this communication to be more than words of a man, but we pray, Father, that the very Holy Spirit of God would take these words and plunge these words deep into every listening heart, Lord, and do which only you can do, Lord.

We pray that you'll quicken an understanding and quicken a response in the heart, and come and meet these precious souls in a fresh and wonderful way today, and I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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