

'To walk even as He walked '

by Fred Tomlinson

This sermon emphasizes the importance of walking in a distinctive manner as true Christians, highlighting the metaphor of walking used in the Bible to represent spiritual truth. It discusses the need for a distinguished walk that sets apart believers from the world, emphasizing the transformation and empowerment by the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life. The sermon also addresses the enemy's tactics to distract, steal focus, kill fellowship with Jesus, and destroy the Christian witness, urging believers to walk circumspectly and maintain diligence in their walk to please and honor God.

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Scripture: 1 John 2:6, Romans 6:4, Ephesians 5:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 1 Thessalonians 4:1

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Description

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Transcript

This morning I would like to start off in this way. I'm thinking of the city in which I presently live, which is Abbotsford in British Columbia, and the motto of the city is The City in the Country. And there's a lake in the centre of the city, which is very attractive, and there's an almost one and a half mile trail that circles it.

And Sheila and I quite frequently find ourselves there with a cup of coffee. We've done a bit of walking along the way, but we don't always walk. Not right now, because Sheila has a lot of trouble with sciatica.

But very often as we sit there, we will watch the various people walking around the lake as well. And one of the intriguing things that catches our attention is not the fact that people are walking by, but the way in which people are walking by, the manner in which they're walking. And that takes my mind back to the scriptures and to the words of the Apostle Paul, as you will know from reading through his epistles, that he frequently uses the metaphor of walking to highlight spiritual truth.

And he speaks of walking as the exercise of Christian living, in one way or another, depending on his particular context. As a matter of fact, he does this on no less than 29 times in nine of his epistles. You will perhaps also know that the Apostle Peter uses it on one occasion in one of his epistles, as does the Apostle John.

So I'm having trouble with my voice. You can tell that. I'm sorry about that.

But let's pursue this metaphor a little bit, shall we? Let me tell you, first of all, what I believe God is after with each and every one of us. And I believe it's this, that the true Christian, I'm sorry I have to say that, because what kind of person or Christian is that one who is less than true? But we'll leave that for a debate on another occasion. But I can say this, that the true Christian man and woman are planned in the heart of God, ordained in the heart of God, to have a distinguished walk, catching up the metaphor as the Apostle uses it.

They will always be set apart from the rest of the people. We're told that we're not any longer to walk as do the Gentiles. You can hear what Paul is saying there, that the true Christian man, the true Christian woman, are to have a distinctive walk that is different from the walk of every other person who is not in the same category, who is not a Christian in the truest sense.

There will be that which somehow distinguishes them. Now I'm looking down, I can't deal with all of the 29 references that Paul uses this word in, but I'm looking into the first epistle of John, as a matter of fact, for my starting point here. And in this magnificent epistle, which it truly is, if God gives me the opportunity, I'd love to work systematically through this epistle with you, but we'll have to see how that is made possible.

But in this wonderful epistle, we've worked our way perhaps through the initial chapter, which is so, so important, and filled with such important, crucial truth. Then we move on into what is chapter 2 in our epistle, and without reading more than I have time to just now, I'm looking down to the 6th verse of 1 John chapter 2, verse 6. He that says he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked. That is, of course, a reference to the Lord Jesus.

Let me read it again. He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked. What an incredible statement.

I'm seeking to draw your attention to that which God is after, that which God is seeking to accomplish in each and every one of your lives. And it's going to be a walk which is different from everyone else. We know that there's some wonderful people who live in the world who are not Christian people.

We fully understand that. We're not being foolish about this, but we're simply saying that the true people of God will be distinguished from the others. They'll be a called-out company, a set-apart people.

In seeking to open this up, I'd like to tell you why it's impossible for anyone to just wake up one morning and say, well, today I'm going to walk the way Jesus walked. You see, that's just not possible. And notice what the apostle says.

He says, He that abideth in him. He's talking about a select category. He's talking about an experience in the life of a man or a woman that is not the product of their own efforts or of their own discipline or even their own desires.

He's talking about something that only God can accomplish, and we need to start here. Before we have any hope at all of walking, we may say that we abide in Him, but those who truly abide in Him will be the people who will truly, authentically experience what it is to abide in Him and to walk in Him. And imagine... I'm thinking of a song that was sung just a little earlier before I started recording this message.

But imagine yourself... Let's put it this way. Imagine finding yourself in a pit, a pit which at its bottom is filled with mud and slime, and by one means or another you find yourself in this situation and you realize that you're sinking and that all things being equal in a very short time because there's no way to get out of the pit, you're going to die. Death seems inevitable and is inevitable.

When suddenly a rope is dropped into that pit and you hear a voice shout, Grab! Grab the rope! You know, as a preacher of the Gospel, I have one mandate. As a matter of fact, I believe that everyone, every Christian actually, but certainly everyone who will declare and preach the message of the Gospel, that we have one mandate. There are many things that I could talk about.

There are many things over the years of my life that I've read, I've listened to, been taught, and so on. And I've accumulated a lot of information, a lot of angles on interpretation of various passages of Scripture, some of which are very popular today and very attractive or appealing. But I remember a statement that Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones once made.

He said, The preacher has one mission, and one mission alone, and that is to preach the Gospel. As a preacher, as a Bible teacher, I have one primary mandate. If you like, one topic, one theme, one purpose, and that purpose is to be a rope thrower.

It must be the essence of all of my ministry. It's that important. Charles Wesley said, Tis all my business here below, to cry, Behold the Lamb.

The primary message, the primary message that we need to get is that we get hold of the rope that is handed to us and do not let go of it. It's the miracle provision of God in his love and his calling upon our lives, and there is nothing more important than that. A dear friend of mine who's gone to glory now, I remember him saying to me, he said, Fred, we've only got one message to preach, but it's amazing how many ways we can put it.

And that really is what I find in the New Testament. The one message, the primary message, is presented in a variety of different ways, but we need to be sure that we get hold of it, because it's only when we get hold of this truth, this way out, this way of release, this key that God is offering to us in the Christian Gospel. No wonder Paul said, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto deliverance to everyone that believeth.

It's that important. And here's the fact, as we embrace that opportunity that God has extended to us, this miracle opportunity, we are enabled then, as the result of that, and there's more detail to add to this, I realise that, but to put it into a nutshell, as the result of grabbing that rope and holding on to it permanently, we experience the power of the Holy Spirit enabling us to walk, to walk in newness of life, as Paul would put it, writing in the Roman Epistle, the two key verses perhaps on my mind, in Romans chapter 6 and verse 4, and chapter 7 verse 6. But here's the truth. You can't walk this walk without God.

That's the bottom line here, and it's the starting point for what I want to put before you today. You just can't do it. With all the goodwill, with all the efforts, with all the legalism and all the other things we can pile in

together.

You cannot walk as he walked, apart from the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, and here lies the great need today. Only that will provide this transformation of walk so that we walk no longer as the Gentiles walked, but we walk as he walked by his enabling. It's the product of a miracle.

Frankly, in saying that, I believe it's a truth which is either absent or it's so poorly presented these days that few people really grasp it. This truth is presenting a miracle that only God can accomplish. In fact, I believe that it is the greatest miracle that we can experience this side of eternity.

It's so easy to be distracted to other things that seem to be very important and have biblical foundations for them, but we're just talking about the foundation. We've got a lot of buildings being built not too far from where I am right now, and some of them are going to be pretty high, and so it's interesting seeing all of the efforts and attention that's given for so long and by so many to establishing the right foundation. We need the right foundation, and the right foundation for the Christian experience and for the Christian walk, if you will, is a work of God, and we want to emphasize that's a miracle. It really is.

Let me put it this way. The new birth is God's means to this end that I'm presenting to you. It's God's way of doing it.

It's described in different ways. John, he caught hold of this metaphor, this approach to what we're talking about when he quotes Jesus speaking to Nicodemus, he said, you must be born again. It's God's means to God's end, and the result of this miracle of God which is far infinitely beyond, it's got nothing to do with just a mental ascent to truth about it.

It's when the Spirit of God is allowed to actually accomplish this in our lives, and this he longs to do in each and every one of us, but what he does at that point via this new birth is he changes, he transforms the default that is embedded in our spiritual DNA, if you will. He reprograms the heart. Do you see? It's a miracle, and that in itself is a fulfillment of an aspect of the great new covenant.

Read again in Ezekiel 36, and around verse 26, and you see it promised there. This is what God is longing to accomplish in each and every one of our hearts, and only as we surrender ourselves to this great truth and embrace it, we grab the rope, we hold on to it forevermore, we grab it as tightly as we can by faith in our inner man, that we find that by nature we begin to walk in newness of life. I hope I'm making this clear.

I'm trying to make it simple. It's one of the profoundest truths that exists. I've told you, I think it's one of the, if not the greatest miracle of all, but may we embrace that truth.

Don't let's settle for anything less than the very highest that God is addressing, what he's describing, what he's making available to us in these days. Now that walk, as perhaps I've already indicated, will be a very distinctive walk, and that, the distinctiveness of our walk, or our manner of life if you prefer, will in itself validate our witness. I'm looking back to what John said, he that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.

The way the walk is being expressed will validate the claim of a man or a woman who says they abide in him. In other words, there's got to be a correspondence. The Christian message is not something which simply gives us something to talk about and to say we believe in and advertise, but it's something which by the power of God actually accomplishes something in our lives that transforms us, which in itself validates our claim and our witness.

Beyond any doubt. The question is, what would that distinctive feature be? Can we narrow it down? Can we be sort of more specific here? Well, there may be a variety of answers to that question, but I'd like to suggest that we go back to Romans chapter 5 and verse 5, where the Apostle Paul says, The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us. The love of God.

Once again, Charles Wesley. He said, Love divine, all loves excelling. You know, I've said already, there's a lot of good people out there in the world.

There are people who demonstrate love one to another, and we're always grateful for that because in the bigger picture, there's a lot of hate and there's a lot of wickedness and division. But here again, we as Christian believers and Bible believers, we're seeing that when the Bible speaks about love in these contexts, it's the love of God. It's the agape of God.

And Paul says in the verse I've just quoted to you that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It's interesting that the words which is translated in our Bible shed abroad, it's only used on one other occasion. And that occasion was when that woman who you may recall from your reading of Scripture, she goes to Jesus and she breaks an alabaster box of ointment.

Do you remember the text? And it says that the whole house was filled with the aroma of the ointment. And Paul is using the same word. He's talking about the love of God, this love divine, all love's excelling.

It's shed abroad by the Holy Spirit who now is within us. And it fills the whole house, the whole house of our lives. Amen.

And if there's going to be any sense in which we walk even as he walked, it will be because the Holy Spirit is empowering us, but he's shedding the very life of God, the love of God. Love is not merely something God does. It's who he is.

It's the essence of his being. When he's there, his love is there. You know, if I can just be personal for a moment, in my own growing up, I grew up around some very wonderful people.

Of course, there was my mum and dad who loved the Lord Jesus. But in the assemblies that we were part of in those days, there were some wonderful people and there was some great teaching. And some of you will have heard me say that, I mean, in the vestry or the smaller room in our assembly building, there was a huge chart on the wall and it was entitled, I'll never forget this, it was entitled The Epochs and Dispensations of Scripture.

And then it was a big breakdown chart of how certain people believed everything fitted together and would work together. The point is, okay, whether I still agree with everything that might have been on that chart or not is a different topic altogether. But the fact is, there were wonderful, sincere people there that I was surrounded by and so on.

And then just fast forwarding somewhat, I became a police officer. And I'm only mentioning that to indicate that I was not completely immature and I don't think I was particularly gullible at all. But nevertheless, at that time, I was conducted by some friends into a house in Liverpool and we went down into the basement level and there's a little kitchen set up there and I met a handful of people there that I'd never met in my life before.

And I could talk a lot more about that. But the fact is, that when I got home from that visit, Sheila, my wife, she knew where I had gone and there's a lot of other information I can give you that would add more colour to this moment. But when I got home, Sheila said to me, how was it, Fred? And this was my reply verbatim.

I said, Sheila, my name is Sheila. Sheila, I've never seen love like that. And it wasn't because these people were all sort of hugging one another and all kinds of emotional foolishness.

There was nothing of the sort. There was just this sense of the very presence of God. There was love there and it was impacting my life.

It was challenging me deeply in spite of all my Christian profession and all my bits and pieces and whatever I'd picked up and learned along the way and my Bible reading and so on. But in that moment, with that little group of people, I knew I was in the presence of Jesus and his love was impacting my heart and challenging everything that I knew and thought I knew. And as I say, I wasn't stupid, I wasn't immature, I wasn't gullible.

This wasn't some weird cultish thing at all. I sensed that this was indeed the real thing. And I believe with all my heart that love, that is the love of God made available by the presence of ministry of the Holy Spirit, is the distinctive feature of God's work within us that is expressed then in the way that I walk.

And it's so to be true for you and for me. You know, at that time, I'm thinking of a young man. He was 18 years of age at the time and he sat and listened to a man of God.

He'd come from the same background as me and he was watching and listening to a man of God and he came to me. I had not yet been down those stairs into that room, I'd not been there yet, but he said to me, as he was trying to influence me of the genuineness of what he had found, this 18-year-old young man, he said, the man who was preaching had white hair, but more than anything else in the world, I felt I wanted to be like that man. Now that was his way, I believe.

It was his way of saying that he found himself in the Lord's presence and he sensed the sweetness, the fragrance of the love of God emanating from another human being that was stirring his inner man. Beloved, don't let's settle for anything less. This is the Gospel, this is the message.

Hallelujah. And, you know, I think it was last week I was talking about the proof that we're filled, the proof that we're filled with the Holy Spirit will be the overflow. And I repeat that again in this context now.

You're as filled with the Spirit as you are filled with the love of God. His love doesn't come separate from who he is. None of the fruit of the Spirit that Paul will mention to the Galatians comes separate from him.

They're all expressions of who he is. That's why it's silly when we hear people saying, I need more peace or I need more something. We need more of him.

He is all of these things. And when our lives are filled with him, it will be manifest. There'll be the witness confirming the fact that what we're claiming is true.

Amen. But before I finish, let me say this. This distinctive life is to be maintained by constant diligence.

And the reason I say that is because we, as Christian men and women, have an enemy. And that enemy has an agenda. We could go elsewhere in Scripture to sort of fill this out, but there is an enemy that we

face.

He's the archenemy of Jesus Christ. And insofar as the Holy Spirit of Christ dwells within our hearts, it's as though I've got a target on my back and on my front. And we have an enemy who is after us continually.

And, you know, in the broadest sense, as I think of the enemy, I could say that his mission is to dominate the world. I believe his mission is to discredit Christ. He will bruise his heel.

Remember those words? He will also, or his agenda also, is to dilute the Gospel that we're talking about this morning. His mission is to defeat the Christian. And the Scripture text that we could go to to support each of those points, he's out to dominate the world and to discredit Christ and to dilute the Gospel and defeat the Christian.

There it is, in a nutshell. That's what he's doing. And in a broad sense.

But in a more targeted sense, his intent at coming against me, and I believe against you also, is as the result of walking through what is enemy territory. The enemy is seeking to do something. He's intent, and I'm thinking of the words of Jesus when I say this, he's intent upon stealing from me.

He's intent upon stealing from you. There are many ways to describe what I'm thinking about and what we are to think about in saying that. But perhaps I could just try and just put a few sharp points on these items here.

He's seeking to steal from you your focus. To keep you distracted. And who can doubt or question the fact that that's what's happening in the world around each and every one of us.

There's so much that is so geared and sometimes we even sense in a clear way, this is a demonic thing that's happening, but there's so much distraction to keep men and women away from their focus on Jesus. And it's a reality that's happening. You know, when I was part of the training in the police, there came a point in this and developing items that were all being part and parcel of the training where we were issued with a warrant card.

In the UK, policemen don't have badges how they do in the United States. We have a badge on our jacket, on our cap or whatever it is, but it hasn't got a number on it. It doesn't register, it doesn't mean it's not my number on my badge.

But we have a warrant card and I can still remember being told as these were being issued to us, you must keep this card with you at all times, whether you're on duty, whether you're off duty, wherever you are, you must never let this card be outside of your possession. And, you know, there's a sense in which this great truth that I'm trusting I'm able to communicate to you, remind you of, or refresh to you this morning, is that this gospel, this privilege of walking as he walked by the power of the Holy Spirit is under attack and the enemy is seeking to steal the impact, the dynamic of it from me. It's as though he's trying to steal my warrant card from me.

And without my warrant card at that time, I became Joe Public. I remember the Apostle Paul telling to the Corinthians, chapter 2, he says, as a context, he says, you become carnal and walk as other men. You just become ordinary.

We're not to become ordinary. We're to recognize that we are the product of the miracle power of God and we're to walk in that. We're to be focused upon it.

We're to hold on to this like our inward warrant card. The enemy in this territory, in this world, is seeking to steal that from me. He's seeking to kill something as well.

Remember Jesus said, to steal, to kill. To kill my fellowship with Jesus. If I lose my focus, I lose my fellowship.

I'm not talking about losing my relationship, but I lose my fellowship. I lose the freshness, the wonder, the miracle of first love. And I'm left with a name that I live, but I'm dead.

And this is exactly what the enemy is out to do. He's out to destroy, to steal, to kill, to destroy. He wants to destroy my witness.

Let me tell you, my dear beloved, there are a lot of people that are counting on you insofar as you are claiming to abide in Him. There are people who are counting on you that in your life and through your life, through your yieldedness to God, those rivers will be flowing. The river of life will be flowing.

Your walk will be distinctive. Your walk, your manner of life will not be ordinary, won't be like the Gentiles anymore. It will be transformed by a miracle of God.

Amen. So we must never forget that there's an enemy that we're targeting. And we must never underestimate the enemy's tactics and his ways.

In other words, beloved, we can't ever become just casual about this. We dare not become merely casual. I must never be found on this battlefield territory dressed for the beach.

You know, I don't wear flip-flops and I don't go to the beach particularly. But I mustn't be found, as it were, dressed for the beach with flip-flops on and carrying a can of Coke or something. You know, no.

Everyone who walks in that manner in the world, who professes to be a Christian, they have a death wish. They really do. Because you will be defeated.

You know, in the book of Ephesians, just one other reference before I finish. In chapter 5, the apostle uses a word. I was forgetting the verse reference.

It's 5 and 15, I remember. He says that we are to walk circumspectly. That's an important word.

The Latin word here, I understand, I'm told because I don't go first-hand. It means looking around. We're to live, we're to walk looking around.

It's a word that has to do with precision. It has to do with accuracy. There have been times in the past when I've illustrated this, what it is to walk circumspectly by a scene that was very common in my childhood.

Living in a little old house in Liverpool, England. A brick wall around our little tiny backyard, which wasn't a garden, it really was a yard. Because there were people who would break in, we were vulnerable.

Many of the neighbours, on top of the wall, which was perhaps about, I don't know, eight foot high, they put cement. Into the cement, they would embed pieces of glass, glass bottles they would break and put

the glasses, cemented into the top of the wall. Here was the issue.

There was a man once, a friend of my dad's, who said, he said, you know what it is to walk circumspectly? He said, just watch a cat walking along the backyard wall. Because as it moves its four paws and it's putting them down, it avoids all of the glass as it walks around. It's walking very carefully.

It's looking around. It's walking with precision. And this indeed is exactly what God is looking from you and from me, that we should walk in that way, that we can't be casual about this.

We need to be on full alert continually. And the Apostle Paul will say to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, the verse preceding the one I want to read is verse 11, which says, as you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father does his children, and here's the verse, that you would walk worthy of God who has called you into his kingdom and glory. Amen.

This great message of responding to God's leading and walking cautiously, circumspectly, will bring glory to God. Its purpose is that we may bring glory to God. I'm looking on still in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, it says, furthermore then, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus that as you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God so you would abound more and more.

Amen. And I'd like to talk more about that but I must move on. The fact is that this is our calling and the purpose of all this is not just so I become satisfied or fulfilled or I'm doing this right.

The whole purpose of walking as he walked by his empowering, walking in a manner that honours God, it pleases God that we should walk in this way. By so doing, we demonstrate our integrity and our devotion to him. And also, I might add, at the same time, we demonstrate our commitment to Christ to those who see us and those who watch the way we're living our lives and we want, by God's grace and God's enabling, to walk continually in this newness of life.

Let me just pray as we close. Father, we thank you for this great truth that which is called the Gospel, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel of God. Lord, we thank you for your grace in making this available at a price that we cannot begin to calculate.

We thank you also, Lord, that today your Holy Spirit is speaking to our hearts and stirring us, Lord, refreshing, as it were, in our understanding and in our inner heart the wonder of the truth of the Gospel. And we pray to you, Father, that everyone who is listening and hearing these words will find the Spirit of God quickening them within their own being. Lord, we pray that you will have great success by your Spirit in enlightening the minds of men and women, quickening in their understanding and in their beings a sense that you have yet some greater, some richer, some more perfect and wonderful experience of the blessing of the Gospel to find fulfilment in their lives.

And I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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We've sort of done some work on that a couple of days ago. Do take a look at it, mckenziefellowship.com. And God bless every one of you. Amen.

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