

When Someone Lets You Down

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and trust in the Lord, even when Christians fail us.

Duration: 19:55

Scripture: Psalm 3:7, Psalm 66:18, Matthew 6:33, Luke 23:34, John 13:34, Ephesians 4:32, 2 Timothy 4:16

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his own experience of being deserted by his friends during a trial. He acknowledges that people can forsake you in difficult times, even those who were once strong supporters. However, he finds solace in the fact that the Lord stood by his side and gave him strength to proclaim the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. The speaker emphasizes the importance of keeping our focus on Jesus rather than relying solely on the support of others, as they may fail us. He encourages listeners to be encouraged by their brothers and sisters in Christ and to reach out and do what God wants them to do.

Transcript

The Apostle Paul, as you know, was originally called Saul of Tarsus, and he was a persecutor of Christians. He was ravaging the church, making a mess of everything, hauling off Christians to prison who were Jewish. He was a Jewish zealot in the school of the Pharisees, and he rejected that Jesus was the Messiah.

But then on the way to the road to Damascus, where he was going to make more trouble for Christians, the Lord appeared to him. In a noonday sun explosion, where he heard the Lord's voice, said, Who is this? And he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Paul was not persecuting Jesus, but you see how Jesus identifies with his body, the church? He was persecuting the church, and Jesus said, Why do you persecute me? So when you persecute someone in the church, you persecute Jesus, because he's the head and we're the body.

How many are happy for that? Say amen. So then he went and became a Christian, wanted to join himself to the other believers, but they were scared of him. Nobody could believe that he was for real.

He was so famous for messing up with Christians and persecuting them, that when he tried to join with believers, they said, No, it's a fake. He's playing us, wanting to get close so that he can report us and haul us off to prison. Finally, Barnabas, who is a great man, son of encouragement, a man of encouragement,

he was the liaison who told the leaders of the Christian church, Calm down.

He's been converted. I know this for a fact. And then they began to accept Paul.

So Paul, for a while, taught in the church in Antioch for over a year with Barnabas and others, and then was sent out by the Holy Spirit to do mission work. And he went on either three or four missionary trips. From these missionary trips, he visited places, which he then wrote letters to, which have now become our New Testament.

They're called books of the New Testament. They're really letters from Paul to churches that he had founded or to people who were in leadership. The last, the way that it found in the New Testament, the first book that he wrote, the first letter is the one to Romans, but that's not the first letter he wrote.

It's not in chronological order. The last letter though, the experts tell us for sure, is 2nd Timothy, because in that letter, he already says that the Lord has shown him that his time for departure is near and he's leaving. He's going to be gone.

So these are his last words. He's now a seasoned veteran apostle, been through so much in prison, beat half to death, traveling sleepless nights, persecuted, chased, hated by the Romans, hated by the Jews, lied about by false Christians, false teachers, false apostles. I mean, his life is just, only the grace of God kept him from having like 25 ulcers because he just was, you read it, you wonder how a man could go through it, but he was a great man of faith and God used him.

And now he's in prison, but he's not getting out of this one. It seems he knows it and his time is drawing near. So at the end of the letter, he says these things, which really don't really have content to them.

It's just people. Listen, greet Priscilla and Aquila, the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth.

I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter. Ubbilis greets you and so does Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers.

His last sentence, the Lord be with your spirit, grace be with you. Now, but what's his last thought? So right before those names and say hello to everybody and all of that, he says this, at my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. At his first trial, at this point here, he says, at my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me.

Who's everyone? The Christians. They couldn't take the heat. They deserted him.

May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength so that through me, the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So what he's saying is this fulfills what happened to me, fulfills what Jesus said.

You'll haul, behold before judges, magistrates, leaders. Don't panic. Don't be afraid of their threats because even in the trial, you'll have a chance to witness for me.

The important thing is that you stay strong and witness. If I permit you to come home early, then you'll come and be with me. Paul's concept of death, as I was saying earlier today, some people were so different than ours because we're scared to death of death.

But Paul was like to be absent from the body is to be what? Present with the Lord. So he said, I'm torn. If I stay and I live, I can be a blessing to you.

But then again, something better. If I get out of here and die, I'll go to be with the Lord. Precious in the sight of God is the death of his saints.

We have gotten wrapped up by the culture around us and she died. Oh, he died. You think he would come back? You think any Christian would come back after being with the Lord? You can go, oh, and they've gone all for you.

I'm with the Lord. I'm not coming back no matter what. Come on.

Can we say amen to that by clapping our hands? Oh God, increase our faith and our spiritual vision so that we can see our reward and don't have our horizon just be this life on earth. Heaven is waiting for us. So Paul says this at my first defense, everyone deserted me.

No one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. That's a strong word, desert. Now, who's he talking about? He's talking about Christians.

What do we learn from this? We learn first lesson. Christians are wonderful. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are all members of the body and we're supposed to be helping each other. Amen. And all of us are here today, partially because some member of the body of Christ preached to us, prayed for us, encouraged us, picked us up when we fell.

Am I correct or not? Every one of us. But now we know because this was put in scripture, there are times when even Christians fail you. At my first defense, no one came to my support.

Everyone deserted me. So if your eyes are on brothers and sisters in Christ as your support and not on Jesus, it could happen that one day the whole bottom falls out. But if your eyes are on Jesus, the bottom can never fall out because he's the one who said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So what's the lesson from all of this? Let's be encouraged by brothers and sisters. Let's reach out and do what God wants us to do. Don't get crazy.

If a day comes when the people closest to you either ignore you, are so preoccupied with their problems, they don't understand what you're going through. I doubt whether any of us are going to go through a trial where we can say, you know what? Everyone forsook us. No one even showed up.

My lawyer, my public defender didn't even show up. That's probably not going to happen to us, but it does happen in life. When you feel you need a word and encouragement, sometimes the people you feel should do it or it will help you will not be there.

Do we all say amen to that? Why would God inspire Paul to write that unless it was for us too? So that day will come when your own wife, your own husband, possibly your brother and sister in Christ, your pastor, whatever, they will fail you. They will not be there when you need them. So you better have your eyes on Jesus.

Now, number two lesson, may it not be held against them. What a great Christian Paul was. He's like our Lord who was on the cross, who said, Father, punish these people who are crucifying me.

Give them thunder and lightning like they've never seen right now. Did he say that? What did he say? Father, forgive them. What did Stephen say when they were stoning him? He used an accounting term and he said, Lord, don't put it on the ledger against them.

Now Paul is saying, this is harder sometimes when it's Christians, when it's opposition and enemies against the cross, there's hostility. But Paul is saying now, these Christians who fail, Lord, don't hold it against them because you know, they just got weak. Don't you want to be mature enough to be able to look at people who fail you and instead of saying, you dirty dog, I don't believe that when I was on trial after all I did.

How many times did I teach you? How many times did I pray for you? Didn't I risk my life to start that church? Didn't I lead you to Christ and now I'm up before the judge? And where were you? Oh, no. Some are laughing, but you know what? Some of you are holding on to bitterness even now. Get rid of it before you take communion.

You're holding bitterness against people who let you down. The point is not that they let you down or not let you down. The point is, are you going to hold on to it or are you going to be like the apostle Paul who's imitating Christ and saying, Lord, don't hold it against them.

Haven't you ever been weak? Haven't I ever been weak? What if the Lord would remember stuff against you and me? Has he not just forgiven us? How many are happy? He's forgotten everything. What does this cup mean except their iniquities? Not only their sins I'll forgive, but their iniquities I will remember no more. That's what this cup means.

So the apostle Paul said, everyone forsook me, but he didn't panic and get nasty. You can be a Christian and have an edge and a nasty attitude and notice feel justified because they did forsake him. That was not a false accusation.

They forsook him, but he was so filled with the love and grace of God. He was so amazed by what God had done for him that he found it easy to forgive others. Just think what God has forgiven us.

How many would like to have all your sins put up in PowerPoint tonight? Come on, any takers here? You'd be running out of the building, wouldn't you? But God has forgiven us. It's so interesting about Paul because chronologically in the Bible he calls himself first the least of all the apostles when he defines himself in his earlier writings. Then years go by and he calls himself, I'm the least of all the believers.

I'm the least. Not even now he's the least of the apostles. He says, I'm the least of all the believers.

What humility. Then in his last letter he says, I'm the chief of sinners. I'm the least of the apostles.

No, no, I'm the least of all the believers. No, no, no, no. I want to tell you something.

I'm the chief of sinners. What I did against Jesus and he forgave me. The more you see how nasty you've been and God has shown mercy to us, the better we can treat other people.

Amen? Come on, let's put our hands together and affirm that. So the first lesson, what's the first lesson is that people can forsake you at a given moment at a certain time. Now look, he had a lot of strong friends.

He mentions those friends. He mentions Onesiphorus who at one time came to him in prison and stood with him. But why didn't they show up at the trial? Because they were scared to death that the net would bring them in and they would be with Paul in prison and be and be decapitated or hung or whatever.

They killed him, crucified upside down or whatever. They got afraid. Haven't you ever been afraid? People cave to hold it against them or they're distracted.

No, Paul says, no one stood with me, but the Lord was with me. You know, people can go up and down, but the Lord never goes up and down. But don't, Lord, don't hold it against them because those are my brothers and sisters.

So they had a bad day. They got weak. They're still my brother.

They're still my sister. He's still going to spend eternity. So what are you making a big thing out of it for? But the Lord stood by my side.

No matter who fails you, who stays with you, who goes up and down, one thing you can be sure every morning you wake up, the Lord is with me. I will never leave you nor forsake you. No matter what happens, the Lord will never leave us.

But Pastor Cimbalo, I'm not the Christian I ought to be. The Lord is still with you. Are you a believer? The Lord is with you.

The Lord will stand with you. I know, but I haven't grown the way I should. The Lord is still with you.

Look to him more. Talk to him more and he'll help you grow. But he's with you.

You can't live one day on earth not knowing the Lord is with you. And it's crazy now in our country. It could very well be getting crazier and more hostile against Christians.

And what I'm saying to you now is you have to know every day the Lord is with me. The Lord is my shepherd. Come on, let's put our hands together.

The Lord is with me. The Lord is with me. But the Lord stood with me.

The boss is saying this, but I'm not going to panic because the Lord is right there. I can't see him, but I know he's right there. By faith, I know he's with me.

And Paul says the Lord was with me. And he helped me. He strengthened me.

So I want to tell you tonight, the Lord will strengthen you. I know, but they so disappointed me, they let me down. But the Lord will strengthen you.

Thank God for the times people have strengthened you. But even when they fail, the Lord will strengthen you directly. He won't even use people.

He'll go direct. But make sure you don't lay it to their charge. Make sure you can say tonight, don't count it against them, Lord.

Root of bitterness, resentment against people. I've seen it spoil so many. It's the fly in the ointment for so many of us.

Let's ask the Lord for more grace to just let it go. Boy, in that other building, we were there just about a year on Foppish Avenue, and this man came from the Midwest. I had heard great things about him.

He was a good preacher, a real man of God. He preached a sermon that day, I'll never forget. It was on this subject of forgiveness.

So he told us a story. He broke down because the story wasn't so old. So he and his wife were raising the apple of their eye, their little, their daughter.

And she grew up. And some guy with bad intentions got close to her, got some kind of hold on her. And the father tried to fight it, fight it, fight it, break it up, fight it, go against the guy, warn the guy.

And the guy just blew him off and said, I'll be with whoever I want to be. And then the apple of his eye, his only daughter, that guy gets her pregnant. And she has to drop out of school, and the whole thing comes crumbling down.

So we're all listening, and it's emotional, and he's telling us. And then he says, I got such a hatred for him. I couldn't even live without thinking of him.

I thought of him every hour. If I could have laid my hands on him, I would have. Look what he did to our daughter.

And then as soon as she got pregnant, I mean, he was like, later, I don't know you. But they were living all together in the same town, small town. He said that when I picked up the Bible, I couldn't read the Bible.

I couldn't preach. Because when you got bitterness in your heart, you can't preach. Oh, you can get up and preach, but you can't preach.

You can't have God use you when you hate somebody. Am I correct or not here? Right. So if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

You can't pray, you can't preach. And the Word of God becomes just a rebuke. Because he said every time I opened the Bible, it says love one another.

I was like, ah, forgive one another as Christ has forgiven you. Ah, stop. Give me another verse like, like break their teeth and smash their heads.

Oh, Lord. Right. And he broke down, telling us the story.

He said, and then I couldn't take it. And I came to a crash. And I said, God, I cannot change my heart.

But I know you can. Give me love for him. And the Lord came through.

Lord took away that bitterness, vengeance, all kinds of crazy things were in his mind. In my past years, I have fought some of those same battles. It's hard.

Only the Lord can take it away from you. Take the sting out of it. Make you forget and give you a good spirit like Paul.

Lord, don't count it against them. Don't count it against her. How many want that in your life? Just lift your hand up.

I know we can't do it. But whatever God calls you to do, he will enable you to do. This is a promise in the Word.

Don't just read the command, read the promise. Whatever God commands, it is incumbent upon him to give us the grace to do it. God has no, he has no purpose in his mind to tell us to do things that he won't help us to do.

So he'll do it. Let's pray. Every eye closed.

Anybody just want to stand and say, Pastor, I'm in need of extra grace from God. Been let down, hurt by people. I want him to take it from me today.

Just stand where you are. Just stand where you are. God will see it.

No one's staring at you. Just stand and I'll pray for you. Father God, we pray that you will help our brothers and sisters who are standing, that they'll be able to say with the Apostle Paul.

Yeah, I got let down. Everyone deserted me. When I needed them the most, they were nowhere around.

But Lord, don't count it against them. Because although I missed them, I always had you. And Lord, remind them that if God is for us, who can be against us? What does it matter who fails us at a given moment? As long as Jesus, you're by my side.

Be by my side. Be by our side. And we release whatever we're battling with, resentment, bitterness, unforgiveness.

We release it in the name of Jesus. And everyone said, Amen. You may be seated.

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