

Commitment (4.7.1984)

by Nigel Lee

The sermon emphasizes the importance of making choices in life that lead to spiritual maturity and growth in unselfishness, and highlights the need to abide in Christ and build on the rock of His word.

Duration: 1:02:30

Topics: "Commitment"

Description

In this sermon, Jesus is concluding his greatest sermon ever preached. He presents his listeners with a choice between the broad road that leads to ruin and true discipleship. Jesus uses the analogy of healthy trees being pruned to produce better fruit, illustrating how God's word may cut away certain friendships and habits in order to bring forth more fruit in our lives. The apostle Paul's experience in prison is also mentioned, where he is chained to Roman soldiers and uses the opportunity to share the Gospel with them, resulting in their conversion. The sermon encourages listeners to make a decision to go on with God as true disciples and emphasizes the power of God's word, which is not bound or chained.

Transcript

In fact we're going to try an experiment tonight. I'm going to ask that we stand to read scripture together. And I will read one verse and then you all read in your own languages the alternate verse.

So please stand. We're going to start from verse 13 of Matthew chapter 7. Please pay close attention to the word of God as you read. You read with me the alternate verses.

Verse 13. Then I will tell them plainly. I never knew you.

Away from me you evildoers. The rain came down. The streams rose.

And the winds blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. The rain came down.

The streams rose. And the winds blew and beat against that house. And it fell with a great crash.

As one who had authority. We'll end there. Please be seated.

Let's pray. Please bow your heads for prayer. Father we just worship you.

Language is no problem to you. You caused the nations of the world to speak in different languages. And yet you can speak in the language of the heart to every nation.

Father we pray that you would speak to our hearts tonight as we gather in this tent. We bless you and praise you for the Lord Jesus our Saviour. We glorify you oh God for the cross of Calvary.

We worship you for that power which raised Jesus from the dead. We thank you for the gift of yourself the Holy Spirit to each of our lives and hearts and minds. Oh God we want to live lives that are filled with the Holy Spirit.

We want to know nothing less than that kind of Christianity that you planned before the foundation of the world. Help us as we meditate on scripture tonight. In Jesus name.

Amen. Jesus often asked some very perceptive questions. Questions that left very little room for evasion.

Do you remember how he spoke to that man in John chapter 5 verse 6? Chapter 5 verse 6. The man had been lying there by the well waiting to be healed for 38 years. Jesus said to the man do you really want to be made better? Or have you begun to settle down into this condition in which you now find yourself? Do you remember Christ's question in Matthew chapter 16? Verse 26. How are you better off if you gain the whole world and yet lose your eternal soul? Do you remember Christ's word to the disciples in the boat in Matthew chapter 8? They could see the storm getting closer and closer.

It looked as if the boat was going to sink. Jesus seemed to be asleep. They woke him up.

They were in a panic. They seemed to think that God's eternal plan of salvation was all going to end in a drowning accident. Jesus asked them this question.

Why are you disciples so afraid? Luke chapter 6. Verse 46. Why do you call me Lord if you don't do what I say? I wonder what those disciples felt like as the Lord asked those kind of questions. For many coming on OM is like being asked questions by the Lord himself.

What are you going to do with your life? I find three questions in these last three paragraphs of the Sermon on the Mount. Remember these words were first said to young Christians. In fact we may almost wonder whether they were really believers at all yet.

They were young disciples if they were converted. And yet it was these young men and young women who were going to turn the world upside down. And Jesus has been preaching now for two and a half chapters.

And then we come to these words. He's drawing the greatest sermon that has ever been preached. He's drawing it to a conclusion.

And like any preacher he finally leaves his hearers with a choice. These are his conclusions. As Christ talks about true discipleship.

He says there is a broad road in life. And it leads gently, oh so gently, to total ruin. Christ said there are trees that look outwardly quite healthy.

They produce only bitter fruit. Christ said there are houses that look outwardly like others. And yet those houses that have been painstakingly built have no foundation.

And so these are the three questions that I believe Christ would ask each of us here tonight. Where are you going in life? In other words what kind of a road are you on? Secondly, what fruit is your life really producing? And thirdly, dear young people, what foundations are you building on? Let's take those three questions one at a time. If you go on as you are doing right now, where will you finish up? That's the first question.

You see life for everyone is a journey. Everybody you ever meet is on a spiritual journey. People that you meet as you travel away to your team place in a day or two.

They're on a spiritual journey. The man who brings milk to this place in his van day by day, he too is on a spiritual journey. The people that you will meet at door after door, they too are on a spiritual journey.

The only question is what is the ultimate destination? Christ says to those that are listening to him that there is a journey in life. And then there is a dividing in the road. And the Christian journey he says has two characteristics.

You can see it in verse 14. The gate is narrow and the road is steep and hard. In other words said Christ right at the beginning that the Christian life is difficult.

And he went on to say that Christians will always be in the minority. You know it's amazing how put off we get when something seems to be difficult. If you think that some course of action may be uncomfortable or hard or difficult for you, the immediate reaction is to try to find an easier road.

Many of you have done that this conference. It's true isn't it that many people want eternal life. They want God's blessing on them.

They want everything that Christianity has to offer. But they are not prepared to get off the broad easy road. You watch people in a huge crowd.

Perhaps a crowd coming out of a football match. And they just drift along together. Pushed by the crowd because it's easier to do that than to turn around and go in a different direction.

Jesus our Saviour described the Christian life in this way. First of all he says there is a door to go through. You come.

I am the door. Come through me into eternal life. And then there is a road that must be travelled.

The man or the woman who has become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has planted in them a desire, an instinct to travel. To go on to know the Lord better until one day you see him face to face.

That desire to go on as a Christian is one of the great marks of true Christian living. True spiritual life. I worked for a couple of years with a fellow who was an expert in animal biology.

He told me about some research that had been done in the homing pigeon. You know the pigeon that will always fly back to its own nest. The scientist wanted to see if he could examine this phenomenon.

And so he got some pigeons. And he blindfolded them all. And he took them 20 kilometers away from their pigeon home.

He let them all free. They were all home before him. And then he decided to do something much more complicated.

He made them all deaf. And he took them 30 kilometers away and let them fly off. Every single one of these 10 pigeons that he was working with, they all got home before him.

So finally he got some electrodes, some wire coils and he fitted them to the sides of the pigeon's head. And he attached a small battery to the back of each pigeon. And he was going to completely disorientate the pigeons so that they didn't know where they were going.

He took his 10 pigeons out 40 kilometers away. Let them all free. Only nine got home.

He thought, I've discovered something. So he drove back to the place where he had originally let the pigeons free. On the way there, he found the missing pigeon.

Do you know what had happened? The battery had somehow slipped round over his wing so that he couldn't fly. And he was walking home. The instinct in that pigeon to get home meant he was going to walk 40 kilometers to get there.

The true Christian wants to go on in true discipleship. He wants to see the Lord. He values fellowship with Christ.

He's getting ready to go home. God has placed that deep instinct and desire inside his heart. But the Lord Jesus wants you to know that the road is going to be a hard one.

Turn to Luke's gospel chapter 14. We read verses 25 to 27. There went with him great multitudes.

And Jesus turned around and faced the crowd that was starting to follow him. And he said to them, If any man come unto me, and hates not his own father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Whosoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Jesus said, you first come to me. And you're going to have to turn away from every other loyalty, every other attachment and make me number one. But it's not just a case of coming unto me.

Christ says you must come after me as well. Those that have been born again, that have been saved, that have their names written in the Lamb's book of life, they now must begin to follow the Lord Jesus Christ to glory. And one of the major problems that I am finding in O.M. these days is that increasingly the young men and women who come do not come from churches that preach discipleship.

And so messages like we heard on Monday night are completely strange and new. Because we have begun to enjoy listening to teachers who only ever teach you about blessings for you. And we gradually develop a completely selfish view of what Christianity is.

And the idea that we should lay down our life for our brethren hardly ever enters into it. My dear friends, you are not your own. You were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.

Have you sat down this conference and just meditated on the price that God has paid for your life and your service this summer? It's not just this summer. You don't repossess your life and take control of it again the moment you go home. Because of the price that God has paid in the death of his son, you are now

never ever again your own.

I want to ask you some questions. And I want you to hear the word of God tonight. And at the end of this meeting I am going to call for a public response.

Because we need to know whether or not we will walk with God. I don't know of anybody ever anywhere in any nation who has walked with God by accident. It begins with choice.

It continues with choice. And in order to walk with God you have to be going in the same direction. The Lord says he is going to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Have you faced that for your own life? You want to be his fellow worker? Will you go where he is going to do the work? Walking with God means also talking with him, listening to him. When did you ever go out for a walk with someone and walk in total silence from the beginning to the end? When did you go out for a walk and you did all the talking? You listen. To hear what he is saying.

That is what walking with God means. And I am going to ask you tonight, what has God been saying to you this conference? What are you going to say back to him in return? You know, I am away from home a lot with my work. And I like to phone up my wife and my kids.

It is very interesting talking to a person who has walked with God. Talking to a three year old on the telephone. They don't listen to a thing you say.

They tell you about the sweets they had, the ice creams they had, how they won the race at sports in the running races. They just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk all the time. I don't mind that.

That is childish, but I don't mind it in a three year old. But I have also a nine year old. I have a wife who is older than that.

And when we talk together on the phone, there is conversation, there is listen, there is give and take. Are you learning to listen to God? Or is the conversations that you have with him all one sided? If I hold a little baby in my arms, that baby at six months old may look up, into the face of its daddy and go, I don't mind that. Because it is only six months old.

That is the way six month old babies go on talking to their daddies. But if my nine year old tried talking to me like that. You see how you listen and how you talk with God our almighty creator, matters.

I want to ask you, how are you going in your Christian life? Are you making progress? If you go on as you are, where will you end up? Are you on a road towards spiritual maturity? Are you learning to love the unlovable? Are you growing in unselfishness? Where are you going? Let me ask you that second question. What is your life producing? What fruit are you growing? Just as there are two roads and you have to choose, so there are two kinds of fruit and you have to choose. I had tremendous problems as a teenager.

I had become a Christian. It was as if I was just sort of inside the door of the kingdom of God. But I wasn't making much progress.

Now I come from a Christian home, a pretty stable Christian home, I thank God for it. And I think there are some real difficulties for those that come from stable Christian backgrounds. Sometimes we become so idealistic, particularly about our parents.

And we get deeply offended inside because our Christian parents aren't as we wish for them to be. And it is a major shock when we discover that our Christian parents are sinners just like us. And they also face problems with their temper and problems with laziness.

They get angry with each other. They have dry periods in their Christian life. Where do you think you got all those things from in your life? It was from them.

And as a young Christian, I wanted my own identity. I didn't want second-hand Christianity. I didn't want to be known as a Christian simply because, well, my parents were, my father was a minister, I grew up in it, so, well, I had no other chance.

I wanted to be a Christian because God had called me and spoken to me. I wanted my own independent Christian life. So I was idealistic.

And yet at the same time I was torn apart inside. Because there was such a contrast between my good desires and my very poor performance. I think for many, many people from that kind of background OM is tremendously valuable.

Because it enables you to become an independent adult Christian standing on your own two feet. Many of you are going to do things that your parents would never have dreamed of doing years ago, even though they may have been Christians. The way in which God is going to answer your prayers as a team concerning finance, concerning petrol, concerning food and evangelism, for most of them, they wouldn't even imagine it.

And I'm encouraged by these verses here, in verse 17 and 18. In the long run, the good tree will produce good fruit. If God has planted the seed of His Word and of spiritual reality in your heart, it will produce good fruit in the long run.

But we face the fact in the same paragraph that the Lord talks about those that are Christians only in name. Do you know, there are going to be prophets, people with the gift of prophecy, people who are miracle workers, who go to hell. Why do I say that? Because I got it straight out of Matthew chapter 7, the Lord Himself said it.

The Lord will say to some, I knew you. How can I be sure that I'm going to produce spiritual fruit in my life? Turn with me to John chapter 15. Let's read just from the first five verses.

I am the true vine, and my father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that bears not fruit, he takes it away, and every branch that bears fruit, he cleanses it that it may bear more fruit. Already, however, you disciples are cleaned by the word which I have spoken unto you.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, so neither can you except you abide in me. I am the vine.

You are the branches. He that abides in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit. Jesus speaks there, first of all, of the father's responsibility, then, secondly, of your responsibility.

What is the father's responsibility? He is the one who prunes, who cares, who cleanses, so that each individual bush may bring forth more fruit. God knows your needs. God knows how to bring forth more fruit in your life.

My responsibility is simply to stay in touch with my Lord Jesus Christ. And as I stay in touch, living, touch with the living God, the father will prune me with his word. The amazing thing is that the farmer can actually do that cutting without damaging the plant.

Have you seen a man in a vineyard? Going down the rows of vines, I've watched them in South Germany. It amazes me sometimes how much they cut off, how they slash and cut and clip to get the thing out of the vine. They seem to produce better grapes.

They seem to cut away so much and yet they don't damage that plant. It is the father who wants to produce fruit in your life. And he's going to do it with his word.

You may well find that his word cuts. He perhaps cuts away certain friendships, certain habits, so that you may bring forth more fruit. And you come here on a whim.

And you found that all these things are coming out. Problems with your tongue, problems of impatience, problems of frustration. God is bringing these things to the surface so that they may be cleansed away.

So that your life may be fruitful in the long run. By allowing God's word to be applied to my heart. And you read in Galatians chapter 5 of the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

Go on being filled continually with God's gracious, merciful Holy Spirit says Ephesians 5. You know we face a world that's hurting. Marriages breaking up. Children being abandoned.

Children being just thrown away really by their parents. Children being thrown out of a job. This world is absolutely full of hatred, injustice and people hurting on the inside.

Remember this every morning as you wake up. The great majority of the people that you will meet each day may never once in their life have knowingly experienced anything of the love of God. How else can you live except filled with God's Spirit in response to that situation? Physical problems.

Leadership difficulties. You may find you get out on a team and the leader that's been appointed to you maybe shouldn't have been. Or maybe the post doesn't get through.

And you go for weeks and your exam results haven't come and you haven't heard about this crisis or that crisis back home and day after day you're getting more frustrated because there's no mail. Or you get hurt by the carelessness of other people. Day in and day out.

How are you going to react? Are you going to live lives that are filled with God's Holy Spirit? So you react with love? With forgiveness? With patience? You react as Christ would react? How do we know what you're filled with? We shake you and see what comes out. You often face difficulties and then you see what splashes over. What is your family life producing? Is there fruit of godliness growing in your character? Since you became a Christian has your family life been better? Are you seeking to win other men and women to Christ on a regular basis, not just for a month in the summer? Christ says there's two kinds of tree.

Some of them have got loads of leaves. But when you taste the fruit it's bitter and sour to the taste. And then the third question.

What foundation are you building on? The Lord speaks there of two men. And they both want to build a house. They're both going to actually put the thing up themselves.

And both these houses are going to face the same weather conditions. The batterings of the storms of life are going to come on both those houses. I go with my kids to the beach sometimes in the summertime.

We build sandcastles. We work, we construct beautiful great castles and seagull feathers. We have a great time.

And the tide comes in and washes the whole lot away. You go back to the same place the next day and the sand is as smooth as if you'd never started. Is your summer crusade going to be just a sandcastle? Yeah, you work hard for a month.

And a month later you might as well not have bothered for all the difference that it made to you. The flood of temptations has come in and washed away everything. The difference between those two houses that these two men are building, you couldn't tell what difference it was from the outside.

The difference lay entirely below the surface. Out of sight where nobody but you and God knows. If you're taking shortcuts in spiritual things, if you're turning a blind eye it's you.

You're like a man trying to build a house and yet totally ignoring the advice of an architect and a builder. Jesus says if you build on his word then the house is as solid as a house on rock. Are you building a life of agreement with God's word? A life of obedience? What do you build on? You build on your feelings? Feelings go up and down? And before Christmas you'll have felt like immorality? You'll have felt like leaving your Bible closed on the shelf for week after week? You're not building on anything solid, you're building on sand.

If things are easy for you, then you'll go on as a Christian. Do you build on the praise of other people? You only really make progress when people are patting you on the back and saying how well you're doing. Look my friends, when you build on God's word in your life, in obedience then can you trust his sovereignty in all things.

I've been reading Philippians for my morning readings in the course of this conference so far. And you remember how in the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians? Verses 12 and 13. Now I would have you know brethren that the things which happened unto me he's sitting in prison writing this letter the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather that my bonds, my chains became manifest in Christ throughout the whole Praetorian garden to all the rest.

Paul was building his life on the foundation of Scripture and he found himself shipwrecked. He found himself stoned. He found himself in prison.

What effect do these things have on him? Very little effect at all. Paul is sitting there in the jail thinking back living through this jail experience. I'm locked up here in this prison.

Do you know what these crazy Romans do? They chain a soldier to me, one each side. And every four hours they change the guard. He said I've never had an entire congregation of two chained to me before.

God knows what he's doing. They clip on the chains and I go to work. He can't get away.

It's his job, he's paid to sit there. And I share the gospel with this man. And after four hours he goes away and someone else comes and joins in.

And one after another these soldiers are getting converted. How else was God going to reach this regiment? This was the finest regiment of Roman soldiers that the Roman army ever had. They were the elite, they were the tops.

And how is God going to get some of these men converted? By chaining the apostle Paul to them one after another. Paul says God's word is not bound, not chained. God is working his purposes out.

Paul could have quit the Christian life or quit the life of a disciple years ago. I was serving God one day and the wretched ship sank underneath me. I had to float around in the Mediterranean for two days hanging on to a fish box.

I'm not going to carry on serving a God who can't look after his servants better than that. That was not Paul's attitude. He allowed God to take him right into the heart of Rome.

Eventually Paul stood before the emperor Nero. God wants even rotten characters like Nero to hear of his forgiveness and his salvation. And if there is no other way for Nero to get the gospel except the apostle Paul's stand accused for his life then God will do that.

Have you got a confidence in God? Do you trust him? Does he know what he's doing with your life? Are you building on what his word says about your life? Will you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Trusting that all these other things that you want will be fulfilled. Maybe some of you have never really yet given God control over your life. What about your money? What about those bank balances sitting back home? Are they in the Lord's hands? What about the money that's a little bit closer than the bank at home? It's in your pocket.

Is the Lord in control of that? Is God in control there? If God wants to take that friend out of your life for his own good, sovereign purposes will you let that person go? What about your future plans? Where do you want to go? What do you want to achieve? You know, I believe it's easier sometimes for God to fill a tent like this than it is to fill your hearts. The winds and the waves obey God but it's often our own sinful, wretched human hearts that are so stubborn and rebellious. You've come to adulthood.

You are now called to true discipleship. To stand out, some of you, from under your parents' umbrella and to say, Lord, I want all of your will for all of my life, forever. I don't ever want to build on a false foundation.

I want my life to be as fruitful as you can make it. I want to live a life that's filled with the Holy Spirit. A life that touches other people's lives with life.

And if the road is hard and rough and steep then I'm willing, Lord, I'm going with you. I want to embrace your will for my life, forever. God is speaking to you.

You should respond. I'm going to ask that people take a piece of paper. I am not going to ask that people stand up to their feet before the Lord because many of you may not know why you stand.

But I want to ask you to write down on a piece of paper two things. First of all, what do you believe God is saying to you during this conference? And then secondly, what you are going to do in response to his word. You can write in any language.

You can ask for God, not for me. Can I ask that people eventually come at the end of the meeting when we're all finished and place them before the Lord in this box at the front? Because if God speaks to us we

have to respond. Doing nothing is itself a response of rebellion.

Let me go back over what I've just been saying. Getting on a particular road involves a choice and you have to make that choice. It's not made for you by God or the person sitting next to you.

You just need to burn your boats and say, Lord, I want to be a true disciple. Did you ever read in your history books about that man Cortes from Europe who went over to America the year 1517? And they arrived on the shore. They were going to take America in the name of Spain or Portugal or wherever it was they came from.

And Cortes lined the men up on the shore and they were completely burnt. Those men saw their only way home going up in flames behind them. Burn your boats.

Say, Lord, I'm only going in one direction. I'm going forward with you. If something is holding me back, Lord, I want to feel the sword of your word cut that burden away tonight.

The Lord is calling you to get onto the road of true discipleship. It's nothing instant. I, too, have got a long way to go.

And the road is as hard and rough and steep for me as it is for you. Not many of you know of the tears that I've wept in my life as a Christian far more than before I ever became a Christian. But I'm only going in one direction until I see the Lord face to face and that's forward.

So you may have to take a choice to be a true disciple. And then the Lord spoke of fruit and the two different kinds of fruit. And that's not a question of a particular choice in life.

That's a question of the character that you are. The fruit you produce depends on who you are, dear Christian friend. And then the Lord spoke about your workmanship.

What are you going to build on? What are you going to do in your life? What are you going to look back on as your life's achievement? As the Lord said, you come walk with me. Imagine. If only you will build on the word of God.

Will you come? Will you ask God to fill you with his spirit, take control of your character, teach you and mould you from now on? Perhaps tonight a decision to go on with God as a true disciple is the first little bit of real foundation stone that's going to be laid for you. What do these disciples do? What did Christ preach? What effect do you think it had on them? Young men? Young women? Hardly knew him. They hardly knew him.

Do you think they sat there feeling almost exactly like you're feeling right now? They knew that there was a voice of authority because God had spoken to them. They may not have known very much about how the future would develop. Some of you have begun to think about going to the Muslim world.

Six months ago you never thought about it. I wish you could have been in our leader's coordinator's prayer meeting tonight and hear one of my brothers praying for you that some of you will go to the Muslim world. Crying out to God that some from this meeting tonight will be moved to go to the Muslim world for Christ.

These things are serious because God calls you. God is able to care for your needs. You can trust him.

But there is a tremendous world where men and women are passing into a lost eternity day after day while so many of the Christians play games at home. And they live for Christ about two hours a week. And their Bibles they never open.

And I want to ask you how does that fruit taste to God himself? Yes, they bring forth fruit. But as God tastes it, it's bitter. If the Lord speaks we must respond.

And the reason why these men and women were able to go out and speak themselves with such authority to the ends of the earth was because they were under the authority of God themselves. God knows that you have heard the Sermon on the Mount and its conclusion tonight. Christians too must choose which road which road for me which foundation for my life.

I know I'm only getting there, but I've got to start. I know I'm only starting, but let me begin. Every journey you ever take you have to set off.

You'll remember that on Friday morning. Maybe some of you need to begin to move on with God tonight and let his Holy Spirit apply his word in your heart. We're going to pray.

I want to ask that after we have prayed you fill out those pieces of paper for the Lord, not for me. You lay them in the box before the Lord. And there may well be folk here tonight who are really struggling with something and they'd like someone to pray with them.

They feel God has been asking them questions that are almost too big to be answered. You'd like help. You'd like the wisdom of an older Christian.

Well, when others go you just stay in your seat if we can. We'll pray with you. We'll talk with you and share Scripture with you.

Because we are your brothers and sisters. Just maybe a little bit further down that same road we've walked over the territory that you're now walking over. Let us come alongside you and we'll walk together.

Maybe many of you know what you have to say to the Lord. And you put that response on a piece of paper. You put it in the box.

Let us bow our heads. Oh God, thank you for Calvary. Thank you for those little times in our life when you lift a curtain and we see just a bit more of what it cost you.

Thank you that you never say a word to us that's not in love. Thank you that you have a place reserved in heaven for the safe arrival of all those that have trusted in you. Lord, help us to choose.

Help us to grow. We want to travel with you. Lord, we want to be again among a group of lives that you have picked out in the 20th century that the world might be turned upside down again.

Lord, we sometimes feel we're doing so little. And yet you are doing so much. Oh God, be glorified in our lives we pray.

For Jesus' sake and for his name and for his glory. Amen.

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