

The Imitation of Christ (Video)

by Thomas a Kempis

This sermon emphasizes the importance of focusing on the inward life and seeking the kingdom of God within. It encourages turning to the Lord with all your heart, forsaking worldly comforts, and preparing a worthy dwelling for Christ within. The sermon highlights the peace and joy found in the Holy Spirit, the need for humility, patience, and gratitude for the grace of God, and the intimate love of Jesus that surpasses all earthly comforts.

Duration: 45:15

Scripture: Luke 17:21, John 14:23, Hebrews 13:14, Isaiah 62:21, Job 7:18, Matthew 22:21, Luke 14:10

Topics: "Inward Life", "Seeking the Kingdom of God"

Description

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Transcript

ADMONITIONS CONCERNING THE INNER LIFE. CHAPTER I. OF THE INWARD LIFE. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU, SAITH THE LORD.

Luke 17 verse 21. Turn thee with all thine heart to the Lord, and forsake this miserable world, and thou shalt find rest unto thy soul. Learn to despise outward things, and to give thyself to things inward, and thou shalt see the kingdom of God come within thee.

For the kingdom of God is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and it is not given to the wicked. Christ will come to thee and show thee His consolation, if thou prepare a worthy mansion for Him within thee. All His glory and beauty is from within, and there it pleaseth Him to dwell.

He often visiteth the inward man, and holdeth with him sweet discourse, giving him soothing consolation, much peace, friendship exceeding wonderful. Go, too, faithful soul, prepare thy heart for this bridegroom, that he may vouchsafe to come to thee, and dwell within thee. For so he saith, If any man loveth me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

John 14 verse 23. Give therefore place to Christ, and refuse entrance to all others. When thou hast Christ, thou art rich and hast sufficient.

He shall be thy provider and faithful watchman in all things, so that thou hast no need to trust in men, for men soon change and swiftly pass away, but Christ remaineth for ever, and standeth by us firmly even to the end. There is no great trust to be placed in a frail and mortal man, even though he be useful and dear to us. Neither should much sorrow arise within us if sometimes he oppose and contradict us.

They who are by thy side to-day may to-morrow be against thee, and often are they turned around like the wind. Put thy whole trust in God, and let him be thy fear and thy love. He will answer for thee himself, and will do for thee what is best.

Here hast thou no continuing city. Hebrews 13 verse 14. And wheresoever thou art, thou art a stranger and a pilgrim, and thou shalt never have rest unless thou art closely united to Christ within thee.

Why dost thou cast thine eyes hither and thither, since this is not the place of thy rest? In heaven ought thy habitation to be, and all earthly things should be looked upon as it were in the passing by. All things pass away, and thou equally with them. Look that thou cleave not to them, lest thou be taken with them and perish.

Let thy contemplation be on the Most High, and let thy supplication be directed unto Christ without ceasing. If thou canst not behold high and heavenly things, rest thou in the passion of Christ, and dwell willingly in his sacred wounds. For if thou devoutly fly to the wounds of Christ, and the precious marks of the nails and the spear, thou shalt find great comfort in tribulation, nor will the slights of men trouble thee much, and thou wilt easily bear their unkind words.

Christ also, when he was in the world, was despised and rejected of men, and in his greatest necessity was left by his acquaintance and friends to bear these reproaches. Christ was willing to suffer and be despised, and darest thou complain of any? Christ had adversaries and gainsayers, and dost thou wish to have all men thy friends and benefactors? Whence shall thy patience attain her crown, if no adversity befall thee? If thou art unwilling to suffer any adversity, how shalt thou be the friend of Christ? Sustain thyself with Christ, and for Christ, if thou wilt reign with Christ. If thou hadst once entered into the mind of Jesus, and hadst tasted, yea, even a little of his tender love, then wouldst thou care naught for thine own convenience or inconvenience, but wouldst rather rejoice at trouble brought upon thee, because the love of Jesus maketh a man to despise himself.

He who loveth Jesus, and is inwardly true and free from inordinate affections, is able to turn himself readily unto God, and to rise above himself in spirit, and to enjoy fruitful peace. He who knoweth things as they are, and not as they are said, or seem to be, he truly is wise, and is taught of God more than of men. He who knoweth how to walk from within, and to set little value upon outward things, requireth not places, nor waiteth for seasons, for holding his intercourse with God.

The inward man quickly recollecteth himself, because he is never entirely given up to outward things. No outward labor and no necessary occupations stand in his way, but as events fall out, so doth he fit himself to them. He who is rightly disposed and ordered within, careth not for the strange and perverse conduct of men.

A man is hindered and distracted in so far as he is moved by outward things. If it were well with thee, and thou wert purified from evil, all things would work together for thy good and profiting. For this cause do many things displease thee, and often trouble thee, that thou art not yet perfectly dead to thyself, nor separated from all earthly things.

Nothing so defileth and entangleth the heart of man as impure love towards created things. If thou rejectest outward comfort, thou wilt be able to contemplate heavenly things, and frequently to be joyful inwardly. CHAPTER II OF LOWLY SUBMISSION Make no great account who is for thee or against thee, but mind only the present duty, and take care that God be with thee in whatsoever thou doest.

Have a good conscience, and God will defend thee, for he whom God will help no man's perverseness shall be able to hurt. If thou knowest how to hold thy peace and to suffer, without doubt thou shalt see the help of the Lord. He knoweth the time and the way to deliver thee, therefore must thou resign thyself to him.

To God it belongeth to help and to deliver from all confusion. Oftentimes it is very profitable, for keeping us in greater humility, that others know and rebuke our faults. When a man humbleth himself for his defects, he then easily pacifieth others, and quickly satisfieth those that are angered against him.

God protecteth and delivereth the humble man. He loveth and comforteth the humble man, to the humble man he inclineth himself, on the humble man he bestoweth great grace, and when he is cast down he raiseth him to glory. To the humble he revealeth his secrets, and sweetly draweth and inviteth him to himself.

The humble man, having received reproach, is yet in sufficient peace, because he resteth on God and not on the world. Reckon not thyself to have profited in any wise, unless thou feel thyself to be inferior to all. CHAPTER III A peaceable man doth more good than a well-learned.

A passionate man turneth even good into evil, and easily believeth evil. A good peaceable man converteth all things into good. He who dwelleth in peace is suspicious of none, but he who is discontented and restless is tossed with many suspicions, and is neither quiet himself nor suffereth others to be quiet.

He often sayeth what he ought not to say, and omitteth what it were more expedient for him to do. He considereth to what duties others are bound, and neglecteth those to which he is bound himself. Therefore be zealous first over thyself, and then mayst thou righteously be zealous concerning thy neighbour.

Thou knowest well how to excuse and to colour thine own deeds, but thou wilt not accept the excuses of others. It would be more just to accuse thyself and excuse thy brother. If thou wilt that others bear with thee, bear thou with others.

Behold how far thou art as yet from the true charity and humility which knows not how to be angry or indignant against any save self alone. It is no great thing to mingle with the good and the meek, for this is naturally pleasing to all, and every one of us willingly enjoyeth peace, and liketh best those who think with us. But to be able to live peaceably with the hard and perverse, or with the disorderly, or those who oppose us, this is a great grace, and a thing much to be commended and most worthy of a man.

There are who keep themselves in peace, and keep peace also with others, and there are who neither have peace nor suffer others to have peace. They are troublesome to others, but always more troublesome to themselves, and there are who hold themselves in peace, and study to bring others unto

peace. Nevertheless, all our peace in this sad life lieth in humble suffering rather than in not feeling adversities.

He who best knoweth how to suffer shall possess the most peace. That man is conqueror of himself and lord of the world, the friend of Christ, and the inheritor of heaven. CHAPTER IV.

OF A PURE MIND AND SIMPLE INTENTION By two wings is man lifted above earthly things, even by simplicity and purity. Simplicity ought to be in the intention, purity in the affection. Simplicity reacheth towards God, purity apprehendeth him and tasteth him.

No good action will be distasteful to thee if thou be free within from inordinate affection. If thou reachest after and seekest nothing but the will of God and the benefit of thy neighbour, thou wilt entirely enjoy inward liberty. If thine heart were right, then should every creature be a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine.

There is no creature so small and vile but that it showeth us the goodness of God. If thou wert good and pure within, then wouldst thou look upon all things without hurt and understand them right. A pure heart seeth the very depths of heaven and hell.

Such as each one is inwardly, so judgeth he outwardly. If there is any joy in the world, surely the man of pure heart possesseth it, and if there is anywhere tribulation and anguish, the evil conscience knoweth it best. As iron cast into fire, loseth rust, and is made altogether glowing, so the man who turneth himself altogether unto God is freed from slothfulness and changed into a new man.

When a man beginneth to grow lukewarm, then he feareth a little labour, and willingly accepteth outward consolation. But when he beginneth perfectly to conquer himself, and to walk manfully in the way of God, then he counteth as nothing those things which aforetime seemed to be so grievous unto him. Chapter V. Of Self-Esteem.

We cannot place too little confidence in ourselves, because grace and understanding are often lacking to us. Little light is there within us, and what we have we quickly lose by negligence. Oftentimes we perceive not how great is our inward blindness.

We often do ill, and excuse it worse. Sometimes we are moved by passion and count it zeal. We blame little faults in others, and pass over great faults in ourselves.

Quickly enough we feel and reckon up what we bear at the hands of others, but we reflect not how much others are bearing from us. He who would weigh well and rightly his own doings would not be the man to judge severely of another. The spiritually minded man putteth care of himself before all cares, and he who diligently attendeth to himself easily keepeth silence concerning others.

Thou wilt never be spiritually minded and godly unless thou art silent concerning other men's matters, and take full heed to thyself. If thou think wholly upon thyself and upon God, what thou seest out of doors shall move thee little. Where art thou when thou art not present to thyself? And when thou hast overrun all things, what hath it profited thee, thyself being neglected? If thou wouldst have peace and true unity, thou must put aside all other things, and gaze only upon thyself.

Then thou shalt make good progress if thou keep thyself free from all temporal care. Thou shalt lamentably fall away if thou set a value upon any worldly thing. Let nothing be great, nothing high, nothing

pleasing, nothing acceptable unto thee, save God himself or the things of God.

Reckon as altogether vain whatsoever consolation comes to thee from a creature. The soul that loveth God looketh not to anything that is beneath God. God alone is eternal and incomprehensible, filling all things, the solace of the soul and the true joy of the heart.

CHAPTER VI. OF THE JOY OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE. The testimony of a good conscience is the glory of a good man.

Have a good conscience, and thou shalt ever have joy. A good conscience is able to bear exceeding much, and is exceeding joyful in the midst of adversities. An evil conscience is ever fearful and unquiet.

Thou shalt rest sweetly if thy heart condemn thee not. Never rejoice unless thou hast done well. The wicked have never true joy, nor feel internal peace, for there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

—Isaiah 62, verse 21. And if they say, We are in peace, there shall be no harm happen unto us, and who shall dare to do us hurt? Believe them not, for suddenly shall the wrath of God raise up against them, and their deeds shall be brought to naught, and their thoughts shall perish. To glory in tribulation is not grievous to him who loveth, for such glorying is glorying in the cross of Christ.

Brief is the glory which is given and received of men. Sadness always goeth hand in hand with the glory of the world. The glory of the good is in their conscience, and not in the report of men.

The joy of the upright is from God and in God, and their joy is in the truth. He who desireth truth and eternal glory careth not for that which is temporal, and he who seeketh temporal glory, or who despiseth it from his heart, is proved to bear little love for that which is heavenly. He who careth for neither praises nor reproaches hath great tranquillity of heart.

He will easily be contented and filled with peace, whose conscience is pure. Thou art none the holier if thou art praised, nor the viler if thou art reproached. Thou art what thou art, and thou canst not be better than God pronounceth thee to be.

If thou considerest well what thou art inwardly, thou wilt not care what men will say to thee. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. 1 Samuel 16 verse 7 Man looketh on the deed, but God considereth the intent.

It is the token of a humble spirit always to do well, and to set little by oneself. Not to look for consolation from any created thing is a sign of great purity and inward faithfulness. He that seeketh no outward witness on his own behalf showeth plainly that he hath committed himself wholly to God.

For not he that commendeth himself is approved, as St. Paul sayeth, but whom the Lord commendeth. 2 Corinthians 10 verse 18 To walk inwardly with God, and not to be held by any outer affections, is the state of a spiritual man. 7 Of loving Jesus above all things.

Blessed is he who understandeth what it is to love Jesus, and to despise himself for Jesus' sake. He must give up all that he loveth for his Beloved, for Jesus will be loved alone above all things. The love of created things is deceiving and unstable, but the love of Jesus is faithful and lasting.

He who cleaveth to created things will fall with their slipperiness, but he who embraceth Jesus will stand upright forever. Love him, and hold him for thy friend, for he will not forsake thee when all depart from

thee, nor will he suffer thee to perish at the last. Thou must one day be separated from all, whether thou wilt or wilt not.

Cleave thou to Jesus in life and death, and commit thyself unto his faithfulness, who, when all men fail thee, is alone able to help thee. Thy Beloved is such by nature that he will suffer no rival, but alone will possess thy heart, and as a king will sit upon his own throne. If thou wouldst learn to put away from thee every created thing, Jesus would freely take up his abode with thee.

Thou wilt find all trust little better than lost, which thou hast placed in men, but not in Jesus. Trust not, nor lean upon a reed shaken with the wind, because all flesh is grass, and the goodness thereof falleth as the flower of the field. Isaiah 40, verse 6. Thou wilt be quickly deceived if thou lookest only upon the outward appearance of men, for if thou seekest thy comfort and profit in others, thou shalt too often experience loss.

If thou seekest Jesus in all things, thou shalt verily find Jesus, but if thou seekest thyself thou shalt also find thyself, but to thine own hurt. For if a man seeketh not Jesus, he is more hurtful to himself than all the world and all his adversaries. Chapter VIII.

Of the Intimate Love of Jesus. When Jesus is present, all is well, and nothing seemeth hard. But when Jesus is not present, everything is hard.

When Jesus speaketh not within, our comfort is nothing worth. But if Jesus speaketh but a single word, great is the comfort we experience. Did not Mary Magdalene rise up quickly from the place where she wept, when Martha said to her, The Master is come, and calleth for thee? John 11, verse 28.

Happy hour when Jesus calleth thee from tears to the joy of the Spirit! How dry and hard art thou without Jesus! How senseless and vain if thou desirest aught beyond Jesus! Is not this greater loss than if thou shouldst lose the whole world? What can the world profit thee without Jesus? To be without Jesus is the nethermost hell, and to be with Jesus is sweet paradise. If Jesus were with thee, no enemy could hurt thee. He who findeth Jesus findeth a good treasure, yea, good above all good.

And he who loseth Jesus loseth exceeding much, yea, more than the whole world. Most poor is he who liveth without Jesus, and most rich is he who is much with Jesus. It is great skill to know how to live with Jesus, and to know how to hold Jesus is great wisdom.

Be thou humble and peaceable, and Jesus shall be with thee. Be godly and quiet, and Jesus will remain with thee. Thou canst quickly drive away Jesus and lose his favor, if thou wilt turn away to the outer things.

And if thou hast put him to flight and lost him, to whom wilt thou flee, and whom then wilt thou seek for a friend? Without a friend thou canst not live long, and if Jesus be not thy friend above all, thou shalt be very sad and desolate. Madly, therefore, doest thou, if thou trusteth or findest joy in any other. It is preferable to have the whole world against thee than Jesus offended with thee.

Therefore of all that are dear to thee, let Jesus be especially loved. Let all be loved for Jesus' sake, but Jesus for his own. Jesus Christ alone is to be specially loved, for he alone is found good and faithful above all friends.

For his sake and in him, let both enemies and friends be dear to thee, and pray for them all that they may all know and love him. Never desire to be especially praised or loved, because this belongeth to God

alone, who hath none like unto himself. Nor wish thou that any one set his heart on thee, nor do thou give thyself up to the love of any.

But let Jesus be in thee, and in every good man. Be pure and free within thyself, and be not entangled by any created thing. Thou oughtest to bring a bare and clean heart to God, if thou desirest to be ready to see how gracious the Lord is.

And in truth, unless thou be prevented and drawn on by his grace, thou wilt not attain to this, that having cast out and dismissed all else, thou alone art united to God. For when the grace of God cometh to a man, then he becometh able to do all things, and when it departeth, then he will be poor and weak, and given up unto troubles. In these thou art not to be cast down nor to despair, but to rest with calm mind on the will of God, and to bear all things which come upon thee unto the praise of Jesus Christ.

For after winter cometh summer, after night returneth day, after the tempest a great calm. CHAPTER IX. OF THE LACK OF ALL COMFORT.

IT IS NO HARD THING TO DESPISE HUMAN COMFORT WHEN DIVINE IS PRESENT. IT IS A GREAT THING, YEA VERY GREAT, TO BE ABLE TO BEAR THE LOSS BOTH OF HUMAN AND DIVINE COMFORT, AND FOR THE LOVE OF GOD WILLINGLY TO BEAR EXILE OF HEART, AND IN NAUGHT TO SEEK ONESELF, NOR TO LOOK TO ONE'S OWN MERIT. What great matter is it, if thou be cheerful of heart and devout, when favour cometh to thee? That is an hour wherein all rejoice.

Pleasantly enough doth he ride, whom the grace of God carryeth. And what marvel, if he feeleth no burden who is carried by the Almighty, and is led onwards by the Guide from on high! We are willing to accept anything for comfort, and it is difficult for a man to be freed from himself. The holy martyr Lawrence overcame the love of the world, and even of his priestly master, because he despised everything in the world which seemed to be pleasant.

And for the love of Christ he calmly suffered even God's chief priest, Sixtus, whom he dearly loved, to be taken from him. Thus by the love of the Creator he overcame the love of man, and instead of human comfort he chose rather God's good pleasure. So also learn thou to resign any near and beloved friend for the love of God, nor take it amiss when thou hast been deserted by a friend, knowing that we must all be parted from one another at last.

Mightily and long must a man strive within himself before he learn altogether to overcome himself and to draw his whole affection towards God. When a man resteth upon himself, he easily slippeth away unto human comforts. But a true lover of Christ, and a diligent seeker after virtue, falleth not back upon those comforts, nor seeketh such sweetness as may be tasted and handled, but desireth rather hard exercises, and to undertake severe labours for Christ.

When, therefore, spiritual comfort is given by God, receive it with giving of thanks, and know that it is the gift of God, not thy desert. Be not lifted up, rejoice not over much nor foolishly presume, but rather be more humble for the gift, more wary and more careful in all thy doings. For that hour will pass away, and temptation will follow.

When comfort is taken from thee, do not straightway despair, but wait for the heavenly visitation with humility and patience, for God is able to give thee back greater favour and consolation. This is not new nor strange to those who have made trial of the way of God, for with the great saints and the ancient prophets

there was often this manner of change. Wherefore one said, when the favour of God was present with him, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved.

But he goeth on to say what he felt within himself when the favour departed, Thou didst turn thy face from me, and I was troubled. In spite whereof he in no wise despaireth, but the more instantly entreateth God, and saith, Unto thee, O Lord, will I cry, and will pray unto God. And then he receiveth the fruit of his prayer, and testifieth how he hath been heard, saying, The Lord heard me, and had mercy upon me, the Lord was my helper.

But wherein, Thou hast turned my heaviness into joy, Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness. If it was thus with the great saints, we who are poor and needy ought not to despair if we are sometimes in the warmth and sometimes in the cold, for the Spirit cometh and goeth according to the good pleasure of his will. Wherefore holy Job saith, Thou dost visit him in the morning, and suddenly thou dost prove him.

Job 7 verse 18. Whereupon then can I hope, or wherein may I trust, save only in the great mercy of God, and the hope of heavenly grace? For whether good men are with me, godly brethren, or faithful friends, whether holy books or beautiful discourses, whether sweet hymns and songs, all these help but little, and have but little savour when I am deserted by God's favour and left to mine own poverty. There is no better remedy, then, than patience and denial of self, and an abiding in the will of God.

I have never found any man so religious and godly but that he felt sometimes a withdrawal of the divine favour and lack of fervour. No saint was ever so filled with rapture, so enlightened, but that sooner or later he was tempted. For he is not worthy of the great vision of God, who for God's sake hath not been exercised by some temptation.

For temptation is wont to go before, as a sign of the comfort which shall follow, and heavenly comfort is promised to those who are proved by temptation. As it is written, To him that overcometh I give to eat of the tree of life. Revelation 2 verse 7 Divine comfort is given that a man may be stronger to bear adversities, and temptation followeth, lest he be lifted up because of the benefit.

The devil sleepeth not, thy flesh is not yet dead. Therefore cease thou not to make thyself ready unto the battle, for enemies stand on thy right hand and on thy left, and they are never at rest. Chapter 10 Of Gratitude for the Grace of God Why seekest thou rest when thou art born to labour? Prepare thyself for patience more than for comforts, and for bearing the cross more than for joy.

For who among the men of this world would not gladly receive consolation and spiritual joy if he might always have it? For spiritual comforts exceed all the delights of the world and all the pleasures of the flesh. For all worldly delights are either empty or unclean, whilst spiritual delights alone are pleasant and honourable, the offspring of virtue, and poured forth by God into pure minds. But no man can always enjoy these divine comforts at his own will, because the season of temptation ceaseth not for long.

Great is the difference between a visitation from above and false liberty of spirit and great confidence in self. God doeth well in giving us the grace of comfort, but man doeth ill in not immediately giving God thanks thereof. And thus the gifts of grace are not able to flow unto us, because we are ungrateful to the author of them, and return them not wholly to the fountain whence they flow.

For grace ever becometh the portion of him who is grateful, and that is taken away from the proud which is wont to be given to the humble. I desire no consolation which taketh me away from compunction. I love no contemplation which leadeth to pride.

For all that is high is not holy, nor is everything that is sweet good. Every desire is not pure, nor is everything that is dear to us pleasing unto God. Willingly do I accept that grace whereby I am made humbler and more wary and more ready to renounce myself.

He who is made learned by the gift of grace, and taught wisdom by the stroke of the withdrawal thereof, will not dare to claim any good thing for himself, but will rather confess that he is poor and needy. Give unto God the thing which is God's. Matthew 22 verse 21.

And ascribe to thyself that which is thine, that is, give thanks unto God for his grace, and for thyself alone confess thy fault, and that thy punishment is deserved for thy fault. Sit thou down always in the lowest room, and thou shalt be given the highest place. Luke 14 verse 10.

For the highest cannot be without the lowest. For the highest saints of God are least in their own sight, and the more glorious they are, so much the lowlier are they in themselves. Full of grace and heavenly glory, they are not desirous of vain glory.

Resting on God and strong in his might, they cannot be lifted up in any wise. And they who ascribe unto God all the good which they have received, seek not glory of one another, but the glory which cometh from God only. And they desire that God shall be praised in himself and in all his saints above all things, and they are always striving for this very thing.

Be thankful, therefore, for the least benefit, and thou shalt be worthy to receive greater. Let the least be unto thee even as the greatest, and let that which is of little account be unto thee as a special gift. If the majesty of the giver be considered, nothing that is given shall seem small and of no worth, for that is not a small thing which is given by the Most High God.

Yea, though he gave punishment and stripes, we ought to be thankful, because he ever doth for our profit whatever he suffereth to come upon us. He who seeketh to retain the favor of God, let him be thankful for the favor which is given, and patient in respect of that which is taken away. Let him pray that it may return.

Let him be wary and humble that he lose it not.

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