

Lake Geneva Bible Conference 1984-02 John 14

by William MacDonald

The Bible has many difficult sections, but with diligent study and understanding of the context, we can come to a deeper appreciation of God's Word and the person of Jesus Christ.

Duration: 37:30

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the difficulty that many people face when encountering challenging Bible verses or stories. They emphasize the importance of not avoiding these difficult sections but rather approaching them with prayer, study, and a willingness to seek understanding. The speaker then focuses on two specific Bible passages, John 13:25 and Philippians 2:7, highlighting the significance of Jesus' humility and obedience. They explain that Jesus willingly took on the form of a servant and humbled himself, even to the point of death, for the glory of God. The sermon encourages listeners to adopt the same mindset of selflessness and consideration for others as demonstrated by Jesus.

Transcript

Last night we announced that we were going to take up a series of difficult Bible verses, or Bible portions. And the Bible has a lot of them in it. I don't know what attitude you have when you come to the Word of God and find some very difficult sections in it.

Thankful I am sure that the Bible is like that. The glory of God is to conceal a matter, but the honor of Jesus is to search for more. A lot of people when they come to the Bible give the presentation that if they don't look, maybe they'll go away.

But they don't go away. And some day, a purpose will come to you with one of these verses. You say it out there, and you don't know how to handle it.

So it's good for us to be diligent students of the Word. People say to me, how do you study the Bible anyway? And I always say, I study the Bible with a question mark to a brain. That doesn't mean I trust in the Bible.

I have implicit faith in the Bible as the insolite, insoluble Word of God. Years ago I accepted the Bible by faith, and God told me that it was His Word. And I never let a shadow of doubt cross my mind concerning the perfect scriptures.

And I never let my mind sit in judgment on the scriptures either. I let the scriptures sit in judgment on my mind. But when I go to the Bible and find a difficult passage, I say, what does that mean? And I sit, and I pray, and I study, until I get the answer.

And I haven't got them all yet. I keep a little notebook with Bible difficulties. This morning God read that passage about David, and the building of the temple, and my mind began to whistle with trouble.

David was not allowed to build the temple because he was a man of blood. I said, well, all the battles he fought were, he was fighting for the Lord. Why does that such a bad thing? And I haven't had a chance to ask God the answer to that one yet.

Tonight I'd like you to turn to John chapter 14, if you would. John chapter 14, and just let me begin reading in verse 25. John 14, 25.

These things have I spoken unto you, be of good cheer. The Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you.

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said I go unto the Father, for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

Hereafter I will not talk much with you, for the Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do arise. Let us go hence.

Did you detect the difficult verse? The difficult verse is verse 28. At the end of the verse, Jesus says, My Father is greater than I. That's difficult, because I was always brought up to believe that God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are equal. And if they're equal, how can the Father be greater than the Son? Problem.

Let me just say at the first, that generally speaking, when you come to a Bible difficulty, usually the answer is right in the same context. You don't really have to go very far afield to get the answer. And whatever the proper explanation of that is, it has to do with the disciples rejoicing to know that Jesus was going back to the Father.

He said, if you loved me, you would rejoice when I say, I go to the Father. For my Father is greater than I. Now, I know the cults come along and they show from this verse, they try to show from this verse, that Jesus, of course, was just a creative being, and that the Father is greater than him. But you see, just saying that has nothing to do with the context of this verse.

The context is, if you loved me, you'd rejoice when I say, I go to the Father, for my Father is greater than I, whatever the proper explanation of that verse is, it has something to do with the disciples loving Jesus and rejoicing at the good news that he was going to go back to the Father. Now let me spend the first few

minutes proving that the Lord Jesus is equal with the Father. And you'll say, what kind of double talk is that? Well, first of all, turn back to John chapter 5, and I'd like to show you how equal, with God the Father, the Lord Jesus is.

John chapter 5. We'll begin reading in verse 25. John 5, 25. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea... Oh, I'm sorry, I've got the wrong chapter.

Now I've got it. John 5, 19. Sorry.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do, for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. This verse of Scripture tells that the Son is equal with the Father in working. Whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.

I know the cults pounce on the first part of that verse and say, well, the Son wasn't omnipotent. It says he can do nothing of himself. Dear friends, that verse has to do with the moral perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That means he couldn't do anything in self-will. He could only act as a man here on earth in perfect obedience to the will of God. In other words, you and I can't say that.

I can't say I can do nothing of myself. I can do a lot of things of myself and unfortunately do. But Jesus was so morally perfect that he couldn't do anything in defiance of the will of God.

He couldn't do anything in self-will. He was perfectly conformed to the will of God and in that moral perfection, whatever he saw God doing, he could do likewise. The Son is equal in working.

Verse 20. For the Father loveth the Son and showeth him all things that himself doeth, and he will show him greater works than these that he may marvel. The Son is equal with the Father in knowing, in knowledge.

The Father shows him all things that himself doeth. This passage of Scripture is intended to show the absolute equality of the Son with the Father in seven different respects. 21.

The Son is equal with the Father in raising the dead. He proved it when he was here on earth, didn't he? Raise the son of the widow of Nain. Raise Jairus' daughter.

Raise Lazarus and raise himself as well. He said, Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again. And he spoke of the temple of his body.

Also verses 28 and 29 along the same line. Equal in raising the dead. Verse 22.

For the Father judges no man but has committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He's equal in judging. In fact, God has committed all judgment to him.

The Lord Jesus is going to sit on the judgment seat for believers and on the great white throne judgment for unbelievers. Equal with the Father in judging. He's equal with the Father in honor.

He says that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. I like to ask Jehovah's Witnesses, Do you honor the Son as you honor the Father? And they honestly answer, Oh no, we don't.

Well, it's good to spring this verse on them at that particular point in the conversation.

That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him. Then he's equal with the Father in regenerating, in giving eternal life, in giving the new birth.

Verse 24. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth in him that sent me hath everlasting life, shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.

And then in verse 26, He's equal with the Father in self-existence. He's equal with the Father in self-existence. For as the Father hath life in himself, even so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.

Both of them are the fountain of life. You and I have life bestowed upon us, but they are the source of all life. When it says the Father has given it to the Son, it doesn't mean there was a particular gift given in some period of time.

The word given is often used in the Bible to express an assumed fact. Unto you it is given not only to believe on his name, but to suffer. It's an assumed fact that Christians will suffer for the namesake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So he's equal in self-existence, equal in working, equal in knowing, equal in raising the dead, equal in judging, equal in honor, equal in regenerating, and equal in self-existence. But that brings us right back to verse 14, where we read, My Father is greater than I. Together. What we put it together in this way is used in the New Testament, at least two in the New Testament.

There's what we might call positional greatness, and there's what we... For instance, I might... You'd be thinking about the assets that they hold. Positional greatness and personal greatness. Many of the rulers of the world have been positionally great, and yet they were not so personally.

Chapter 14, verse 28. The Lord Jesus is saying, If you loved me, you would be great when I say I'm greater than the Father, for the Father, my Father, is greater than I. Say that for a minute. He's here personally, but greater positionally.

Let me explain it this way. When the Lord Jesus, verse 14 says, He was a man pure on earth. The God-given case.

A man pure on earth. He was being abused by the teachers whom His hands had made. He was being reviled.

He was being seduced. He was being scorned. He was... Nobody ever... Nobody ever grappled the Father in that noisy marketplace in Nazareth.

Nobody ever inflicted wrath on the Father. Jesus is saying, If you really loved me, you'd be great when I say I'm going back to the Father. Why? Because I won't have to endure that kind of teaching anymore.

Because I'll be able to ever see some of the mis-teachings of my teachers. Let's say my Father is greater than I because He's never had to endure. Positionally.

Positionally, greater. In other words, that statement, Your Father is greater than I, is only true when Jesus is pure on earth as a man. It's not true.

It's not true conditionally. For those who think the Lord Jesus is in heaven, a God's right man, given a name above every name, that is the name that Jesus ever used to bow in every tongue of the second Lord unto the glory of God the Father. Let me say this.

When Jesus said, My Father is greater than I, that statement is only true of His incarnation here on earth. It is only true when He was being cast out and tormented and agonized here on earth. And if the disciples really loved Him, they would rejoice to hear Him say, I'm going back to the Father.

I won't have to put up with this any longer. They would rejoice. Because then, in that sense, the Father would no longer be greater than He.

So we must make this distinction in our study of the Word of God between conditional greatness and personal greatness. Now let's take another passage of Scripture and put that to you and see if it will help us. Matthew 11.

I think I'll go back a few verses. The Lord Jesus is speaking about John the Baptist, of course. Let me go back to verse 7. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitude concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in sin's houses.

But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Notice the word greater here again.

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Can you put the key in the door? When Jesus said there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist, does he mean that John the Baptist had a better character than Abraham, Moses, or the great prophet of the Old Testament era? I don't believe he meant that at all.

But greater than Daniel? Greater than Genesis? He is speaking about positional greatness. Nobody up to that time had the position of John the Baptist. What was the position? To be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Nobody sees Jesus coming and saying, Behold, the last God that taketh away the sin of the world. He was a messenger sent before the Messiah. And it was a privilege of, it was absolutely unparalleled in the history of the world.

The Messiah had never come before. No forerunner before. And now John strides onto the stage of human history and he announces the coming of the Lord Jesus.

And so that's what Jesus is saying here. He says among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater positionally than John the Baptist. Great, isn't it? So does the rest of the world.

He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than you. You say, that's me. I'm least in the kingdom of heaven.

You have very small views of yourself. And it says you're greater than John the Baptist. Even with better character? Well, I don't think anybody would claim that.

I don't think anybody would claim to have a better character than John the Baptist. But really, our position today in faith is better than John the Baptist. You know, it's a more wonderful thing to be living today and have the full New Testament in our hands than to be living when the disciples were here upon us.

We don't always realize that. That sweet story of old when Jesus was here among men. How he grew little.

But it's really better to be with him now. You say, well, how can you say such a thing? John the Baptist saw Jesus through John's eyes. Matthew saw him through Matthew's eyes.

Mark knew John. They saw Jesus through their own eyes. We see them through all our eyes, don't we? We know the Lord Jesus today by the Spirit of God in a more wonderful way than when they were here on earth.

And not only that, but our position with regard to the Lord Jesus is greater. John spoke of himself as a friend of the bridegroom. Right? We're members of the bride.

Those of us who are saved by grace through faith. This is greater, to be a friend of the bridegroom or to be a member of the bride. He spoke of God's order to be a member of the bride.

But remember, we're talking about position. We're not talking about person at all. Our position, just think of it.

Are we rejoicing that later? Our position today in faith is greater than John the Baptist rejoiced when he was here on earth. I think that he helps us in understanding the faith that fits this. That's great.

Let's turn to another passage, Philippians chapter 2, verse 7, and put the key in the door again. Philippians chapter 2, verse 7. Now, let me say, we'll begin reading in verse 4. Philippians 2, chapter 4. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the palm of God, thought it not robbery or a prize to be equal with God.

Now, that made himself of no reputation in the liberal transgression thereof, but emptied himself, emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, through the glory of God the Father. I'm thinking of verses 6 and 7, who being in the palm of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

Now, you probably know that most of the great heresies that have arisen in the Christian church have arisen with regard to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And many church officials have skipped to the truth that when the Lord Jesus came down to earth, he voluntarily laid aside some of the attributes of deity. He emptied himself of the attributes of deity when he was here.

I'm really amazed how man, in his cautiousness and arrogance, tries to analyze the person of the Lord Jesus. I'm really amazed how human comprehension contradicts. Jesus himself said that no one will revere him without difference.

No one learns here when it says that he did not think it robbery, a pride, to be equal with God. Is he talking about personal equality? Not for a moment. The Lord Jesus cannot be anything less than full God.

You can't lay aside attributes of deity and still be deity. And the whole thing is bizarre and wrong. To be equal with God, he was seeking the position in heaven.

But he didn't think that that position of equality, that position of equality with God in heaven, was something he had to hold on to at all costs. He didn't say, I have to stay here in heaven at all costs. He emptied himself, don't think for a minute that he emptied himself of any attribute of deity.

It's not only untrue, it's impossible. He knew where all the fish were in the Sea of Galilee. He knew what men beside him were thinking, although he never exposed them needlessly.

Contend earnestly for the absolute deity and perfect humanity of others' position in heaven. That's what he emptied himself of. It was a positional emptying, not a personal emptying.

I remember Charles Van Ryn saying to me, Bill, that the best way to explain he emptied himself is to just quote the verses that follow. And there was great wisdom in that. You'll never run into heresy if you do that.

He explained he emptied himself by just the verses that follow. By becoming a man, by becoming a servant, by going to the cross, by dying there, the death of the cross. Let me just put it this way.

Jesus, as a man on earth, was not God minus. He was God plus. So what do you mean by that? Jesus, as a man here on earth, was not God minus some of his qualities, some of his characteristics, some of his personal excellency.

He was God plus humanity. You know, he emptied himself by taking on humanity. Standing on his head to attract attention.

And that's what this paradox is designed to do. Jesus was God plus humanity. It was no emptying for you to come in the form of humanity.

It was no emptying for me to come in the form of humanity. There was no other way for us to come. But I'll tell you, it was a marvelous emptying for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and glory, to come in the form of humanity.

Maybe we have time to look at verse 22. And the angel came in unto her and said, Hail thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee. Women.

Verse 42. And she spoke out with a loud voice and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Now this has to do with the position of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

But I really believe that Mary, the Virgin Mary, was sinless because she needed a Savior and her soul rejoiced in God, her Savior. And she said so. Her womb was the antechamber by which there was no other woman than anyone who had ever gone before.

Although I wouldn't entomb her character, she rejoiced, young Israeli woman. And God chose to be the vehicle for giving birth to his beloved. She needed a Savior.

She said, My spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior. But did you ever know, blessed in the fact that she believed in Jesus, than in that she was his mother? Turn to Luke chapter 11 and verse 27. These words, It came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman out of the company lifted up her voice and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bear thee, and the pot that he should lay.

Rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it. In other words, to be the mother of the world is to hear his word and to keep it. Who said that? Jesus said that.

Mary's position was a marvelous position. Unique, of giving birth to Mary, was more blessed in the fact that she believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, than in the fact that she gave him birth. So I'd just like to leave this little thing with you tonight.

When you come to the word greater, and the whole discussion of position, remember that greater can be used of position, or it can be used of person. It can be used of the office a person holds, or it could be used of his personal character. And if you make that decision, it helps a lot.

Paul recognized the position of the high priest, that he didn't respect him as a man, a difference between the two. He had a valid position, but his character didn't match up. That's it.

May the Lord bless these words, that I hope to know. If some of you have difficult questions, that have bothered you over the years, I'd love it if you'd share them with me. We might take up some of them this week.

But I'd really appreciate it if you'd tell me some verse, that has really been murdering you, that you'd really like to get out there. I'm not saying I can help you, but I'd like to add it to my collection. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for your precious word.

We adore the infinity of scripture. We stand into all truth. We thank you for those tonight.

I thank you for providing the word of truth. We ask it in Jesus' name.

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