

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 74

by Zac Poonen

Jesus' example of humility, persistence in prayer, and willingness to suffer for our sin teaches us the importance of recognizing our need for God's help and valuing the weaker members of the body of Christ.

Duration: 25:22

Scripture: Philippians 3:3

Topics: "Christian Leadership", "Christ's Sacrifice"

Description

This sermon delves into the importance of humility, self-confidence, and total reliance on God in Christian leadership, using Peter's journey of self-confidence to brokenness as an example. It explores Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane, emphasizing the depth of his love and sacrifice in being willing to be separated from the Father for the sake of humanity, highlighting the true meaning of Christ's sacrifice and the necessity of making His sacrifice personal for a deeper understanding of Christianity.

Transcript

We continue our study today in all that Jesus taught, been looking through the Gospel of Matthew to try and understand how we can obey that last verse of that gospel that we are to obey everything he commanded and teach others to obey everything he commanded. And with that end in view, we're not doing an academic study, but seeking to understand how we can obey that command. And with that end in view, we seek to study what Jesus taught by his words, actions, and the circumstances he led his disciples through.

We come to Matthew chapter 26 and verse 31 today. Just after they had broken bread together and Jesus had passed the bread and the cup around, it says they sang a hymn and they went out to the Mount of Olives. And then Jesus said to them, You will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written, I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.

That's from Zechariah chapter 13 and verse 7 where this prophecy was there relating to Christ that the shepherd would be stricken and the sheep would be scattered. But after I've been raised, I will go before you into Galilee. Oh, and Peter heard this.

He said, even though all may fall away, I will never fall away. See, Peter was a very self-sufficient, self-confident type of person, and he was unprepared at that time to be the leader. Any self-confident, self-assured person is totally unfit for Christian leadership.

He may be fit for leadership in the business world, but not in the Christian world. In the Christian world, the most important requirement is a total lack of confidence in oneself and coupled with a total confidence in God. See, there are three types of people.

One is, like Peter, fully self-confident. They are useless to God. And the other is totally lacking in self-confidence, also useless to God.

And the third category that are useful to God are those who totally lack in self-confidence but have complete confidence in God. This is the meaning of circumcision. In Philippians 3, we are told that the new covenant meaning of circumcision, he says, we are the true circumcision who have no confidence in the flesh.

Philippians 3, verse 3. We put no confidence in the flesh. Just like circumcision in the Old Testament was the cutting off of the flesh and casting it off, the spiritual meaning is we have no confidence in the flesh. We have no confidence in ourselves, in the things of God.

We recognize that without Christ we can do nothing. We don't lean upon our own understanding, Philippians 3, Proverbs 3, and verse 5, but we trust in the Lord with all our heart. This is how it is for a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

So Peter needed to be broken of that self-confidence and that's the reason why God allowed him to fail three times, denying the Lord. That broke him completely. Shattered all his self-confidence because he was the one who boasted, first of all, I'm willing to, I'll never fall away.

And Jesus said, well, this very night you're going to deny me three times. He said, no, I'm ready to die with you. I will not deny you.

He was so self-confident. Even though Jesus, the Messiah, son of God, said you will deny me three times, he says no. And he did and that shattered him so completely he lost all his self-confidence in one moment.

He went out and wept bitterly. He was broken. He brought down to zero.

Then he was ready for Pentecost. Then he was ready to be a leader. This has been God's way with all his leaders.

Whether it is Jacob who had to become Israel when his hip was broken or Moses who had to spend 40 years in the desert to get rid of all his self-confidence. This has been God's way with all great leaders. And if you have got any type of responsibility among God's people and you're confident in yourself and in your abilities, you're not fit.

You're not fit until you come to the place where you're shattered and your self-confidence is all thrown away. Then you're truly circumcised spiritually. It's only then that we can serve God.

The old covenant law was very clear that if you're not circumcised, you couldn't be a part of God's people. And in the new covenant, the spiritual meaning of that, it's only those who have no confidence in the flesh who can really serve God. And the other thing I want you to notice here, many of us have thought it's only Peter who said this, but it says here in verse 35, all the disciples said the same thing too.

I mean, they didn't say it as strongly as Peter, but they all said, we will not deny you. We will not fall away. But yet they all ran away from Gethsemane when the soldiers captured Jesus.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane and said to his disciples, sit here while I go over there and pray. And he took with him Peter, James, and John and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and distressed. He was human, and it is human to be grieved and distressed.

And he said to these three, my soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and keep watch with me. This is an amazing example, not only of his humanity, but of his humility.

His humanity in the sense that he was deeply grieved. It's possible for a godly man to be deeply grieved and not to sin. He never sinned.

To have deep grief, to be distressed is not sin. He was bearing, preparing to bear the sins of the world. He was bearing the burdens of others.

And anyone who selflessly seeks to serve others will at times go through grief and distress, like Jesus did. It's only a person without feeling who will remain without grief and distress. God has created us with feelings, and especially if we love others deeply, like God loves us, we will go through times of grief and distress.

But the humility of Christ is seen here in that he was willing to ask such junior people like Peter, James, and John to pray with him. I mean, why in the world would he want these immature people who are unbroken? Peter just manifested how confident he was in himself, totally unbroken, but yet Jesus selected these weak, stumbling disciples for some spiritual fellowship. See, that really teaches us that we must value the weaker members of the body of Christ.

I mean, think of the difference between Jesus and Peter, James, and John. It's such a huge difference, spiritually. And the difference between you, my brother, or sister, and someone else in your fellowship who you look down on is much smaller than that.

There is a difference. Maybe you're better. Maybe you're more spiritual.

But the difference is so tiny compared to the difference between Jesus and Peter, James, and John. And yet Jesus was willing to seek fellowship with Peter, James, and John and even ask them to stand with him while he was praying. That teaches us his humility.

And there we see our own pride where we think that we're so spiritual that we can't pray with some of these other people. I find some believers like that who think no end of themselves, that there are only certain elite, upper-class believers who can pray with them. They haven't understood what Jesus did in Gethsemane.

Then he went a little beyond with them. You know, what he told them was keep watch with me. That means let's wait on God and be alert.

Keeping watch is an expression for being alert. Help me to be alert. You know, it's always easier to be alert in prayer when you're with others than alone.

When we're alone, we tend to go off to sleep easily. But when we are with others, it's easier to be alert in prayer. And he went a little beyond them and fell on his face and prayed, saying, My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not as I will, but as thou wilt.

You know, he repeated that prayer more than once again. It says in verse 44 a third time, saying the same thing. So this is obviously some big struggle that was going on.

If it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not as I will, but thou wilt. And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping and said to Peter, So you men could not keep watch me for one hour? See, this prayer that was going on that's mentioned in verse 39 was not just one sentence that finished off in half a minute. It was for one hour that he had been praying.

And the substance of his prayer was, Oh, please take this cup away from me. Take it away. I don't want to drink it.

But, if it's your will, I will drink it. And he told his disciples, Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Keep being alert in prayer.

Don't doze off to sleep. Be alert spiritually and pray. Pray means ask God for help.

Recognize your need for God's help. Because however willing your spirit may be to live for God and to be useful to God and to be pure and to overcome temptation, however willing your spirit may be, recognize that your flesh is weak. The flesh is weak.

And that's why we lose our temper so easily. And that's why we don't trust in God. The flesh is weak.

We're so self-confident. It's a mark of the weakness of the flesh. But, they didn't believe that.

They said, Oh, we're okay. They went off to sleep again. He found them, verse 43, sleeping again.

He went and prayed a second time and said, Father, if it cannot pass away unless I drink it, then thy will be done. And he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And he left them again and went away and prayed a third time saying the same thing once more.

There are a number of things we can learn here. One, of course, that there's nothing wrong in praying for the same thing again and again and again for one hour. And going back and praying again.

And going back and praying again. Jesus taught us the necessity of persistence in prayer. Two instances of that.

One is in the story of the widow in Luke chapter 18 who wanted justice. An enemy had probably encroached into her property knowing she was a helpless widow with no man in the house, no husband, no son. If she had a son, her son would be the one in the parable going to the judge.

She has to go herself because she has no male member in the house. And an enemy took advantage of that and probably encroached upon her property. And she goes to the judge and says, please give me legal protection against my opponent.

And she persists and persists and persists and wears out the judge by going to his house at all odd hours of the night in the morning till he gets fed up and says, okay, although I don't fear God or respect men, Luke 18.4, because this widow continues to bother me, I'll give her legal protection. So that was a parable on prayer where Jesus was trying to teach them men ought always to pray and never to give up or lose heart, Luke 18.1. The other parable on prayer, Jesus only spoke two parables on prayer. And the other parable on prayer is in Luke chapter 11 verses 5 to 8. And there again the message is the same.

He has a man who's going to his neighbor's house to get some bread for a visitor who has come at midnight. And he keeps on knocking till the man opens the door. He knocks unashamedly till the man opens the door and gives him the bread.

So in both those places, the only two parables Jesus spoke on prayer, the emphasis is persistence. You pray for the same thing again and again and again and you find here Jesus doing exactly the same thing for we don't know, maybe a couple of hours or three hours, I don't know how many times he prayed the second and third time. But we know he did pray for one hour the first time.

And the substance of his prayer throughout that time was take away this cup. I don't want to drink it. But not as I will but as thou wilt.

I've often said you can ask God for anything under the sun. You can ask God for anything anywhere, provided you conclude your prayer with not as I will but as thou wilt. If you can pray that as your last sentence, you can ask God for anything.

Because then you've submitted to his will and say, Lord, I really don't want my own will. I'd be happy to accept what you give me. And so, what is this cup? This is the important question.

What is this cup that Jesus was so reluctant to drink? It's important to understand that. Was he afraid to go to Calvary? Was he afraid of the pain and the death? Impossible. Because we've heard of martyrs who've joyfully gone to the stake to be burnt and joyfully sung songs when they were thrown to lions in the Roman amphitheaters in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

Now, Jesus surely wasn't a coward. No, he would have been ready to face a thousand deaths on Calvary for us because he loved us so much. So it's obviously not physical death that he was shrinking away from.

A lot of people have tried to meditate and come to some conclusion, study, come to some conclusion what this cup is. Then another theory is that Jesus was so drained of blood at this time as he was sweating like great drops of blood and he was exhausted and weak and that he was afraid that he would die right there and he was praying that God would not let him die but help him to drink and avoid that cup. None of these really satisfy.

That's not really the answer. There's something that he was struggling with and it was not premature death. It was not death on the cross.

He was not afraid to die for the sins of the world. He came for that purpose. But there was something else that bothered him and we can ask ourselves when we pray with tremendous burden for something, it's usually something that touches what we value most in life.

Then we can ask ourselves what is it that Jesus valued more than anything else in his life? It wasn't comfort. It wasn't his own life. Definitely not money or property.

None of these things. There was only one thing that Jesus valued more than anything else in his life and that was his fellowship with the Father. From all eternity he had been in fellowship with the Father forever and ever and ever.

But that fellowship was going to be broken now. He knew it would be broken for a while because he was going to take the sins of the world. The punishment for sin is not physical death.

Because if the punishment for sin were physical death, then when we die we have paid the punishment for our sin. Every man dies he's paid the punishment for his sin and every man who dies has to go to heaven because he died. So the physical death of Jesus was not the price he paid for our sin.

We know that the punishment for sin is eternal separation from God, being forsaken by God for all eternity. So if Jesus did not suffer eternal separation from God on the cross, he has not taken the price for our sin. The price for our sin is not physical death.

It's not even three hours in hell. It is eternal cutting off from God because of our sin. That's what hell is.

Jesus used pictures like fire and worms and all to teach us the horribleness of hell. The horribleness of being forsaken by God. There's no place on the earth which is a God forsaken place.

Hell is the only truly God forsaken place and it's awesome to think of what it will be like over there. In this world, even among unbelievers and atheists, there's a certain grace or mercy of God upon them. There's a certain restraining force of God that prevents evil from coming upon even unbelievers.

Otherwise the devil would make every unbeliever possessed with a demon. So it's a restraining force and the mercy of God that is there even on this earth. But in hell, it's all completely removed.

Eternal hell is the punishment for sin. Now did Jesus suffer that? Yes he did. In the three hours on the cross when he said my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He was suffering being forsaken by God.

That was hell for three hours. Three hours became eternity for him because he's infinite. I mean for a man, three hours would be three hours but for almighty God who is an infinite being, three hours was like eternity.

And he experienced in three hours the eternal pangs of being separated from God forever. I mean the pain of a billion people being separated. Billions of people being separated from God forever and ever.

He took that. He took it as God. Only God could take the punishment for our sin because nobody else could suffer eternity in three hours.

And only God could take the punishment for our sin because it would be unrighteous for God to punish somebody else for my sin. That would be completely against the principle of every law. But God himself could take it.

And that's what proves that Christ was no created being, no angel. He had to be God himself. If it was not God himself who died as a man on the cross, then I want to tell you your sins are not forgiven.

This is where we disagree with the Jehovah's Witnesses and others who talk of Jesus as a created being. Then their sins are not forgiven. Because it was totally unjust of God to punish another created being for my sin.

Just like it would be unjust for a judge to punish one man for my sin. But because he was God, he could take that punishment himself. And in those three hours, what had never taken place in all eternity, took place for three hours.

That's why the earth shook and there was an earthquake and there was darkness because the father had forsaken the son. There was a break there. It's absolutely unimaginable to understand what Jesus went through like that.

The Bible says God is the head of Christ in 1 Corinthians 11. It's like the head being wrenched off the body and spiritually. That was the thing Jesus dreaded.

He dreaded being cut off from fellowship with the father more than anything else. He was willing to suffer any pain, any ridicule, anything, but being cut off from the father. He dreaded that and that was the cup he said, please, take it away, take it away.

He struggled with it. Isn't there any other way? I mean, I'm willing to go through anything else, but not this father. When I picture this sometimes for myself, I make it personal.

Like the cross of Calvary, I make it personal for my sin. When I think of Jesus going through Gethsemane, I make it personal for myself. When I say what he went through there was for me.

And so I say, what was he going through? I can imagine, I try to imagine a conversation going on between him and the father in Gethsemane and saying, oh, father, I never want to lose my fellowship with you. I've had this with you from all eternities, the thing I value more than anything else. And I don't want to drink this cup.

I just don't want it. And I can imagine the father saying, well, you can, that's fine, you can come right up to heaven from right there from Gethsemane. You don't have to go to the cross at all because you've lived a perfect life.

You have not sinned. You can come right up from Gethsemane to heaven. But Zach will go to hell.

I make it personal. And then Jesus says, oh, he'll go to hell. Okay.

Then I'll drink the cup. I'll go to the cross. I'm willing to go through even that which I hate being cut off from you.

Father, I'm willing to do that for Zach's sake. Make it personal, my friend. Make Gethsemane's agony and the death on the cross personal.

And then you will understand true Christianity. Otherwise, you don't understand it. Most Christians just talk so glibly about Christ dying for their sins.

They don't understand what that death meant to be separated from God the Father because that's the price for our sin. And so I see the love of Christ for me in Gethsemane which led to Calvary. And he said, okay, I will do thy will.

Finally, a third time, he was convinced that for my sake, he has to go. He comes back, verse 45, and sees the disciples still sleeping. And he says, okay, the hour is at hand.

The Son of Man is being betrayed in the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going. The one who betrays me is at hand.

And he gets up and goes for me. For you. He goes through, determined, setting his faith steadfastly to go to the cross, to be willing to be forsaken.

We must remember this. It's only when we see Jesus face to face one day when he comes and we see love personified there. And that day when our mind becomes clear, we will see how much he loved us to be willing to suffer the greatest agony that any human being could ever face.

Eternal hell and three hours on the cross just because he loved you and me. May the Lord help us to respond to him in love. We'll continue in our next episode.

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