

# Grace strengthens our hearts and the Lord never forsakes us

by Zac Poonen

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of obeying God's commandments out of love, highlighting how loving God and loving others are essential commandments from Jesus. It also discusses the humility of Jesus in John 21, showcasing the significance of starting where we are in our love for God. The sermon further delves into the need for believers to focus on grace and truth, to be content with what they have, and to avoid being carried away by strange teachings. It concludes with the encouragement to continuously bear fruit in every season by trusting in the Lord and meditating on His word.*

**Scripture:** John 14:15, Matthew 22:37, John 21:15, Hebrews 13:9, Hebrews 13:5, Jeremiah 17:7, Psalms 1:2

**Topics:** "Obedience to God's Commandments", "Humility and Love in Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

To follow on from a couple of things I already heard, if you love me, keep my commandments. Is that a command or a promise? It's wonderful to hear what Jeremy said. It's a promise.

You will keep my commandments, because I'm going to help you, the Lord says. But it's also a command, because once when we read in Matthew 22, people came up to Jesus and said, what is the greatest commandment? He said, the greatest commandment is you will love God with all your heart. So to love God is a commandment, according to Jesus.

You love me, that's a command. So what we heard today is a command. The other thing I want to go on from what Paul just shared, from John 21, I see the humility of Jesus there in the way he spoke to Peter, which unfortunately does not come through very clearly in the NASB or any English translation.

But it comes out more clearly in the Amplified Bible. And the Amplified Bible sort of expands the original Greek from which the English was translated. Jesus didn't speak Greek.

He spoke a language called Aramaic. But the Holy Spirit inspired John to write it in Greek, what Jesus really meant in Aramaic. John 21, 15 is, let me read to you in the Living Bible.

It says, Simon, son of John, do you love me with that total commitment and devotion that a man should have for God? It's a Greek word called agape. And Peter replies saying, I love you with filio, which means I have affection for you as a personal friend. He says, okay, even that's good enough.

Feed my lambs. Even if you don't rise up to the height he's calling you. Jesus is asking him, you love me with the supreme love that man should have for God.

He says, I have this human love for you, Lord. He's so honest. He doesn't pretend because he betrayed him a few days ago.

So Jesus says, that's fine. You start there with that human love. You can still feed my lambs with the little love that you have.

Second time, he says, Simon, do you love me with that total commitment and devotion, this agape love that a man should have for God? Again, Peter says, Lord, I love you with this human love as a personal friend. And the Lord says, that's fine. You shepherd my sheep as well.

Don't just feed my little ones, but you can shepherd some of my older believers as well. The third time, Jesus comes down. This is a wonderful thing, the humility of Christ.

He comes down to Peter's level and says, okay, Peter, I'm not going to ask you whether you love me with agape type of love. Do you love me with this filio, from which he got the English word filio, this human affection? Do you love me at least with that? And Peter was grieved. Why? He was, I'm sure there were tears in his eyes when he saw Jesus came down to his level.

That's what Jesus always does, my brothers and sisters. If you can't rise up to the height, he calls you to. You're honest.

Don't pretend that you're there when you're not there. Don't pretend you will do it. Say, Lord, quite honestly, this is all that I have right now.

I want that higher level. What I have right now is here. And I tell you the good news.

Just like Jesus came from heaven to earth, he'd come down to your level. You know, Jacob saw a dream once of a ladder that came from heaven to earth. And Jesus said, that ladder, pictured in John 1.51, he said, you'll see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

That's what Jacob saw, the angels ascending and descending on a ladder. And the wonderful thing about that ladder is that it reached right down to earth. The foot of that ladder was on the earth.

The lower end of that ladder was not about one mile above the earth. No, it was right at earth level. That's how Jesus is.

If you can't rise up to his level, this is okay. You can still do work for me. You love me only with a human love? Sure.

Feed my lambs with that. A new convert who says, oh, what can I do, Lord? My love is so little. Okay, you can also do something for those who are a little younger than you.

The little lambs, the little children, the ones who don't know as much as you. We can obey the command to love Jesus and obey his command to feed the lambs. Maybe you can't feed the sheep.

They are much older than you. Feed my lambs was the first command. Shepherd my sheep and feed my sheep.

You will one day come to the level of feeding the sheep as well. But start with feeding the lambs. Read John 21 carefully.

Read the Bible carefully, my brothers. So much we miss when we rush through something. Read slowly and carefully.

And then I want to share something further about what we heard about grace and truth. Please turn with me to Hebrews 13. It says here in Hebrews 13 verse 9. This is the one passage in Scripture which tells us clearly where grace gives, that grace is strength.

It also says that in 2 Corinthians 12. But here it tells us clearly grace is the strength. Hebrews 13, 8, that strengthens my heart.

See, we read in Philippians 2 that God writes his love in my mind and my heart. Philippians 2, 12 and 13. To write it in my mind means he gives me a desire to do God's will.

I think many of us have that. I believe many of you who listen have got a real desire to do God's will. My dear brothers and sisters, don't ever, ever, ever think that you produced that desire yourself.

You did not. He wrote his law in your mind. That's what made you different from that other unbeliever or atheist or even from that other half-hearted believer who doesn't have a passion to obey God.

Don't ever think that you did something better than him. No. God wrote his law in your mind and gave you a desire to do his will.

Recognize that and it will keep you humble all your life. Even in the desire to do God's will is from God. That's why you ended up in NCCF and not in some dead church.

Don't pat yourself on the back for that. Humble yourself before God and say, Lord, when I loved you with a human love, you came down to my level and brought your law in my mind. And always want to be thankful for that.

And then he says he'll write it in your heart next. When you allow this desire in your mind to really say, Lord, I want to do it and I'm not able to do it, God says, then I will write it in your heart. And here it's explained in 13 Hebrews 39.

It's grace that strengthens the heart to do his will. And that connection, it says earlier in verse, sorry, Hebrews 39 it is, Hebrews 39. It says, don't be carried away by strange teachings.

There are so many strange teachings today. It's a sad thing that I've seen. I'm not a person gets involved in politics at all.

I'm not interested in it. Not even when I was in India all these years. But I do read the news.

If the tower in Siloam fell, I need to know about it. I will know about it like Jesus did. And I see what's happening.

And I see so many Christians, people who claim to be filled with the spirit. I've read some of their so-called prophecies in the last three or four months. So many false prophecies.

It's now some of them have the honesty to acknowledge it was false. And others, you know, go beat about the bush and say something else. It's good for Christians not to be carried away with strange teachings.

Quoting this scripture, that scripture, and getting involved in political decisions which have nothing to do with. The Bible says, pray for those who are in authority. Not to decide who we're going to vote for.

That's not what he's telling us to do. He says, pray 1 Timothy 2, 1, that we Christians, verse 1 Timothy 2, 2, may lead a quiet, peaceful life in all godliness and dignity. Yeah, that's what I want to do.

Not to pray that this person will be elected or that person will be defeated or this thing, that thing. Or to answer people's questions. Are you conservative or are you liberal or left or right? I say, listen, I'm a Christian.

I don't belong to this world. My citizenship is not of this world. My citizenship is in heaven.

A lot of Christians in this particular past few months have forgotten that. And even those who were involved in some of the riotous things that happened. They were talking about Christ there, some of them.

Can you believe it? Did they lead to a peaceful and a godly life? It says we must pray that we must lead a quiet, peaceful life in godliness and dignity. The very opposite of what some Christians were involved in. Dear brothers and sisters, don't get involved in that.

You have years to hear, you will hear. So, we can have your political convictions and vote for whomever you like, but don't pressure other people to do that. And don't talk about, that's not the main thing in life.

Help people to know how their heart can be strengthened by grace. And pray that, because almost all politicians tell lies. What they promise to do, they often don't do after they get elected.

I've seen that for years and years in India, and it's true in every country in the world. What shall we pray for? We shall pray, Lord, I don't know who's the right person to be elected and all, but I know one thing. I have to pray, and my prayer will be answered, that we can lead a quiet, peaceful life in godliness and dignity.

With the dignity that is becoming of a servant of God, of a child of God, who acknowledges that our citizenship is not of this world. And I tell you, here people make so much choice that this is this person, that person. In India, the choice is between one non-Christian and another non-Christian.

Both groups support abortion. Both groups support a lot of ungodly things. Which shall I choose? You don't have the luxury there of choosing between certain things like some people think they have here.

What about all the, more than 180 countries in the world? Many of them heathen. They should all pray for those in authority that they'll live a peaceable life in all godliness. Don't be carried about by strange teachings.

Concentrate on Hebrews 39, that your heart should be strengthened by grace. Otherwise you'll go astray. And what is anything other than, see the context in which it comes.

Hebrews 13, 8. Jesus Christ is exactly the same. Yesterday, today, and forever. His teachings have never changed.

So don't be carried away by other things that Jesus never taught about. We heard that today. Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world.

If it were of this world, my servants would fight. Like you saw those people fighting earlier, a few days ago in Washington. My kingdom is not of this world.

How can such people call themselves Christians? Jesus Christ is the same. He hasn't changed. A lot of Christians think he has.

A lot of Christians think he has come to decide whether you should fight with the Romans and overthrow the Romans and establish the kingdom of the Jews in Jerusalem. No, he has not. He said to Pilate, if my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight.

And I want to say to you that every person who fights for earthly things is proving thereby, my kingdom is of this world. Jesus Christ hasn't changed. Don't be carried away by strange teachings, but concentrate on your heart being strengthened by grace that you live a pure life in your thoughts and in your words.

Concentrate more on never getting angry with your wife or your husband throughout 2021. That's a much better goal to work for than to decide what we should do in some political situation. Concentrate on overcoming anger.

It says here in Hebrews 13 and verse 4, the marriage bed must be undefiled. Concentrate on total purity. You married people as well in your sexual area because anyone who's a fornicator or adulterer, if it was written in the 21st century Britain, any fornicator or adulterer or a man who watches pornography, God will judge.

That'll be added there because he's an adulterer. He's a fornicator. He's enjoying somebody having sex with somebody else.

He's not faithful with his wife there when he's watching pornography and an unmarried person is wishing that he would have sex with some evil woman who's doing something for money. God will judge definitely. Make sure your heart is strengthened by grace.

It's the only way you will overcome in these last days. Don't get sidetracked with strange teachings. There's a lot of them these days.

And the other thing is, he says here in verse 5, it's all in the same context, Hebrews 35, make sure your character is free from the love of money. We also heard about that. There's nothing wrong in earning money.

There's nothing wrong in saving money. The Bible says, go to the end. See how it saves for the future.

Good lesson for us. But there's a dot. There's earning money, saving money, loving money.

Three completely different things. You can earn, you can save, but don't love it because it will destroy you. And why should we not love it? Because we must be content with what we have because he has said, I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you.

For here is a commandment and a promise. And like we just heard earlier, for every promise, there is a condition. There is a promise.

I will, Hebrews 35, the Lord says to you, my brother, sister, those of you who are listening, I will never desert you. I will never forsake you. What is the condition? No condition.

I accepted the Lord 20 years ago. No, that's not the condition. The condition is here.

Be content with what you have and don't love money. That's the condition. Then he says, here's my promise.

I will never desert you. I will never forsake you. Whatever need there is in your home for your children, for their health, for their education, for anything, even if you're rock bottom poor, I will never leave you nor desert you or forsake you.

I'm telling you I have proved, I left my job 56 years ago, more than 56 years ago. And I've never asked anybody for money and God's taken care of me. And I'll tell you this, I proved the reality of it.

I said, Lord, I will be content with what I have. When I had little, I was content with what I had. When he gave me more, I used more.

But he has never deserted me or forsaken me till today. I often think of the Apostle Paul. He earned his living by making tents.

You know, Paul is a great example. We've taught in all our CFC churches that no CFC elder should take money from the offering box for his support. And all of our, more than 100 elders have followed that.

And no CFC elder must send prayer letters asking for money. And all of us have followed that. We, like Paul, we support ourselves and serve the Lord.

If somebody happens to send a gift like Paul received from the Macedonians, we accept it, but we don't depend on that. We support ourselves. But I thought of how the devil must have thought, wait till this guy gets old.

And then let's see whether he can stitch tents and earn his living. Now he's healthy. And sure enough, Paul crossed 60 and he became old and he was imprisoned.

He could not stitch tents. And if you read between the lines, you read that in the closing chapters of Acts 20 onwards, 21 onwards, that Paul's sister's son came along. And I believe he gave him some money.

That's why Paul became a fairly rich man towards the end of his life. Even the King Felix knew that Paul had enough money to give him a huge bride. He didn't give it.

And I see in the last chapter of Acts that Paul was so rich that he could rent his own house in Rome for two years. Can you imagine renting your own house in Manhattan for two years? How much that'll cost? Particularly if you had earned your life stitching tents. Paul got, his father was a rich man and he got an inheritance.

That's how God provided for him in his last days. He made a fool of the devil. So what I'm saying is, you be content with what you have.

God has miraculous ways of providing your need if you fulfill the condition, I will not love money. I will never love money. I will earn money.

I work as hard as I can. I'll be wise for the future to save money for myself and my children. Like it says in 2 Corinthians 12, 14, to save for my children, but I will not love money.

And I will always be content with whatever I have. Your sisters especially. Wives, don't pressure your husbands to get this and get that.

He's the one running the finances. He knows what you can afford. Please submit to your husband's wisdom there.

If he says, no darling, we can't afford that. Please submit to that. Be content with what you have.

I can assure you, you'll experience the reality of this. He will never desert you. The picture the Lord gave me as a young Christian worker years ago was, think of the disciples who were feeding the 5,000.

12 men were feeding 5,000 men. Can you imagine how long it took? They were all hungry. The disciples who were feeding the food, giving out the food were hungry.

And if you give food to others and you're hungry, you'll feel more hungry. When other people, you see other people eating and you haven't got it yourself. And I can imagine some of those disciples wondering, I hope there's something left for us when all this is over.

And you know how much was left? Why 12 baskets? Why not only 10 to the 12 disciples? God made sure that every disciple would have a full basket when he went home to take to his family much more than all the others got. You serve the Lord and that's what the Lord said to me years ago. You serve me.

Don't think of yourself. Think of the 5,000. Think of the others.

Give yourself completely and I'll have a basket for you at the end of your life. I've proved it. And you'll prove it, my brother.

Don't miss out on experiencing these wonderful things when you follow the command. I will not love money. I will be pure in my sex life and my thoughts.

And I will always be content with what I have. He will never desert you nor forsake you. And I will not allow all these strange teachings to carry me away.

I'm concentrating on Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will bring fruit from my life always, always. And my heart will be strengthened by grace.

Okay, I want to say one last thing which occurred to me when Sunil was speaking from Jeremiah 17, you know, where he says that we must always bring fruit in our life. Jeremiah 17, 8. That the man who trusts in the Lord is blessed. Verse 7. Jeremiah 17, 7. He'll be like a tree planted by the waters.

He will always bring forth fruit. Never cease from yielding fruit even when there is a drought all around. The year of drought.

Brothers and sisters, which was the year of drought? 2020. Did you bring forth fruit? It says here even in the year of drought, Jeremiah 17, 8. You will not be anxious, but you will bring forth fruit continuously in season and out of season. There's no such thing, we heard, as this not being the season for pigs.

For Christians, the season is always. So I thought of that in connection with, I like to compare scripture with scripture. I have it for years.

And I compared that with Psalm 1 where it says, blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord. Psalm 1, verse 2. He meditates on the law of the Lord day and night. And it says here, he will yield fruit, verse 3, in its season.

How does that fit in with Jeremiah 17, 8? The answer the Lord gave me was, for a Christian, season is 365 days of the year. There's no such thing as a particular season. You're in season the whole year round.

Every day. I thank God there's no contradiction in scripture. I thank God that when he says, if my heart can be strengthened by grace, he does it.

And I thank God that even a weak person who loves Jesus with a human love can have a ministry to help the little lambs who are younger than him. I pray that will be true for all of you. God bless you all.

Amen.

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