

Holiness of Jesus

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of following Jesus' example in living a holy life, and the power of grace in helping us overcome sin.

Duration: 25:08

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 2:40, John 1:17, Hebrews 2:9, Hebrews 4:15-16, 1 Peter 2:21, Jude 1:24

Topics: "Christian Holiness", "Personal Sanctification"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the often overlooked aspect of Jesus being our example in addition to being our Savior, highlighting the importance of imitating His character of humility, purity, love, and compassion. It challenges the lack of emphasis on personal transformation in Evangelical Christianity and encourages believers to follow Jesus in character individually, focusing on holiness and overcoming sin through the grace that Jesus received.

Transcript

We have been looking at the fact that God our Father sent his son in human form to die for our sins and also to be an example for us. And the reason why I find it necessary to emphasize the fact of his being an example is because in Christendom generally, in Evangelical Christianity, the fact of his being our savior and dying for our sins on the cross is emphasized widely. But the other side of truth that he is our example is hardly emphasized.

It's very rare to find Evangelical Christian preachers preaching much about it and explaining in practical terms what it actually means. Among liberal Christians, there is an emphasis on the humanity of Christ, which leads them to talk about improving social conditions and helping the poor, etc. in practical ways on this earth, but not in terms of character of the individual Christian.

That is what the New Testament emphasizes. The New Testament doesn't tell us how to deliver people from oppressive dictators or how to teach them to dig better wells or grow better crops or even about setting up schools and hospitals. All these are good, but that's not what the New Testament speaks about.

When the New Testament speaks about following Jesus, it's not about delivering people from dictatorships or teaching them to dig better wells or grow better crops, but transforming them into the likeness of Christ in character, individually. It begins with the individual, not with society in general. And here is where there has been a tremendous lack of emphasis in Evangelical Christendom.

And partly because most preachers are not willing to pay the price to follow Jesus in their personal life and to walk the way of humility that he walked and the way of purity that he walked, the way of love and compassion that he walked. And therefore, they don't have the moral authority to speak about his character. In a day and age where many people are seeking for position and titles and honor in Christendom, here was Jesus who lived without any titles.

He told people, don't let anybody call you rabbi, father, leader. No, you are all brothers and you are all servants. That's what he said.

But it's so rare to find in Christendom people who want to follow Jesus in this area. That's part of his humility. He never wanted to exalt himself above any other human being.

He was down at their level. He made himself like his brethren in all things. The first principle of successful Christian ministry is to become like the people you minister to.

And if you want to be a successful and useful servant of God the way Jesus was, the first principle is to become like the others. Don't seek in any way to exalt yourself above the others. Don't seek a title, an honor, a position, anything above the others.

People may respect you as a very godly man, but you make sure that you don't exalt yourself by anything above them in any way. Live at their level, be at their level. Seek to be like them.

I believe that Jesus dressed like the people around him and his whole conduct and everything was just like everybody else's in terms of the way he lived. But in the midst of such a world he lived in purity and with a spirit that was completely the opposite of that of everybody else in the world. Now we want to look today a little bit at his purity.

We've seen his humility. We want to see something about his holiness. The holiness of Jesus was not something he automatically had without a battle.

If it were so, then there would be nothing great about it. You know the difference between an earned doctorate and an honorary doctorate. An honorary doctorate you don't study for, you just get it.

An earned doctorate, you work hard for it and get a degree. But does Jesus' holiness, something given to him on a platter for which he had to do nothing, he just took it? Certainly your holiness and mine is not like that. We are tempted so severely.

We face such severe temptations that it's difficult for a Christian to live even one day without sinning in thought or word or deed or attitude or motive. You and I have to confess that. Temptation is so strong and so pressing on every side and we are so weak that we slip and fall every day consciously and much more unconsciously.

Very often we are aware of a fall only after we have fallen. After we had that wrong attitude for a moment towards somebody else. After that thought came.

Now a thought itself may not be sin because it could only be a temptation flashed into your mind by the devil. You reject it immediately, that's not sin. Let me clarify that so that people don't get into condemnation.

You need to distinguish between temptation and sin. Temptation is a thought flashed into your mind by the devil. The devil flashed a thought into Jesus' mind.

Turn the stones into bread. He said no. He didn't sin even though that thought came into his mind.

Well thought is like if somebody speaks a word to you. How do you sin there? Because he is telling you something. So the devil put a thought into your mind.

He communicated through thought to your thought and you reject it. You haven't sinned. So we need to distinguish between temptation and sin.

It is when my mind agrees to that thought that is flashed into my mind that I sin. Then I agree. It's like a man and a woman joining together.

A conception takes place and sin is born. But if my mind does not agree to that temptation, there is no sin. Ten thousand thoughts may flash through my mind but I reject them.

I don't sin at all. Jesus was tempted like us with thoughts flashed into his mind but he refused at every point. And when you and I realize how difficult it is, I mean every honest Christian will admit how difficult it is even to live one single day, morning till night, without sinning in thoughts, maybe in words we can control ourselves and actions we can, but not sinning in thoughts or in attitudes towards anyone, no selfish attitude or in a motive with which we did something.

It is almost impossible because we are so weak. And when we see how easy it is to sin in these areas, then we see what a miracle it was that Jesus lived 33 and a half years without sinning once in any area. Now if you say that he did that, he lived like that because he had a holiness which was given to him, it was impossible for him to sin and he had this holiness and so he just lived.

Then of course he is no example for us because you and I don't have that type of thing. He can never say to any of us, follow me, he has to say to us, admire me, he has to say to us, you fellows can never follow me, don't even attempt it because you won't be able to do it. You'd never be able to read a verse like this in scripture.

Amazing words, 1 Peter chapter 2. Peter says, Christ suffered for you in 1 Peter 2.21 leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in his mouth. Did you read those verses together? He has given you an example to follow in his steps who committed no sin as you look at the steps of Jesus. There was never a step into some sinful area.

It was always holiness, humility, love and never did he step into some area that was sinful and he says you must follow in his steps who never committed a sin. Now if Peter were preaching that today, most evangelical Christians would turn around and call him a heretic and a false teacher for teaching such things but they don't know what to do when it's written in their Bible. They call it heresy, they say this is the word of God but they don't take it seriously.

I'm sure many of you who listen to me have never taken this seriously in your life because immediately the devil tells you that is impossible. What God says is possible you say it's impossible. I agree with men it is impossible.

It's absolutely impossible but with God Jesus said all things are possible. It's like the disciples once came to Jesus and said who then can be saved? He said with men it is impossible according to Matthew 17. So we need to see that Jesus was tempted like us.

Hebrews 4 and verse 15 is clear. He was tempted like us in all things and that is why he can sympathize with our struggles and our weakness. He knows how weak we are when we are tempted.

It doesn't mean that he condones our sin. Oh no there is not a single verse anywhere in the Bible that says God condones our sin. He sympathizes with us.

He recognizes our weakness but he doesn't condone our sin. Oh no. He's been tempted like us but he was without sin and therefore it says in the next verse we can also draw near and get the same grace that he received from his father to overcome sin.

What does the word say in Matthew 6 verse 14? Sin shall not have dominion over you because you are under grace. If grace is over me and I'm under grace, if the grace of God is upon me I cannot sin. That grace keeps me from sinning.

Without grace it's impossible. It's like when the electricity is flowing through the bulb it burns but if the electricity stops it stops burning immediately. If grace departs from my life I fall into sin immediately but as long as grace is there it's like the electricity flowing and the bulb burns.

It's not some great credit to the bulb it's because of the flow of electricity which is continuous and if the flow of grace comes upon me and it does come upon everyone who humbles himself sin cannot rule over me. It is impossible. I mean if I can keep a book held up like this against the law of gravity so that it doesn't fall do you think Jesus cannot keep holding me up so that I don't fall into sin? Of course he can if I trust him.

Everything is dependent on faith. If you don't believe that Jesus can do that for you of course he won't be able to do it for you. A blind man once came to Jesus and said Lord I want my eyes to be open and Jesus asked him do you believe I can do this for you? He said well I think you can open one eye.

He got only one eye open because Jesus said according to your faith be it unto you. Not according to my faith according to your faith. If you come to Jesus and say Lord can you forgive my sins? He says do you believe I can do this for you? You say yes Lord I believe you can forgive my sins.

According to your faith be it unto you. You are forgiven immediately. And then you go to him and say Lord can you give me victory over sin? And the Lord says do you believe I can do this for you? Do you believe I can give you victory over sin? The Lord says according to your faith be it unto you.

You'll never get victory over sin because it's according to your faith. Do you believe I can do this for you? Not do you believe that you can do it yourself? That of course the answer is always no. Do you believe I the Lord says can do this for you? Do you believe I can keep you from falling like it says in the book of Jude verse 24? You say no Lord I don't believe you can keep me from falling.

According to your faith be it unto you even 50 years from now. The reason why most Christians have not experienced the promise of God is because they do not believe. They believe for all types of other things which are not written in scripture like getting a better house or a better car or something like that.

But the most important thing you need in your life is not a better house or a better car it's freedom from sin. From anger and from lust and from telling lies and from all the other wretched things that are making you useless in God's service and could one day take you to hell. You know you can go to heaven living in a small house and riding a bicycle and you go to hell with a big house and a big car.

So those are not the things we should be pursuing. Those are added extras, bonuses that God throws in. Our main aim in life must be to pursue his righteousness.

Jesus said seek the kingdom of God in Matthew 6.33. Seek to be holy and don't seek after material things. These other things God will add to you as he sees fit and as he sees you need it. But we have a Christendom today that has stopped seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness and is seeking after all these other things exactly what Jesus told them not to seek for and there are preachers who teach them to seek that.

False prophets, plenty of them in Christendom today. In Luke's Gospel chapter 2 you see there some amazing words. If I were to ask you who was the first human being upon whom the grace of God rested? Do you know who the answer is? What the answer is? The answer is Jesus.

When he came as a human being he gave up those resources he had as God though he was God himself. He lived as a human being and human beings need grace we read in Luke chapter 2 verse 40 these amazing words about Jesus right from the time he was a child. It says the grace of God was upon him and Romans 6.14 says when the grace of God is upon someone he gets victory over sin.

So in Luke chapter 2 verse 40 when it says the grace of God was upon Jesus it kept him from sinning all through his life. That's how he overcame sin. We need to see that.

The trouble with a lot of Christians is that they've already formed an opinion in their mind concerning what's right. Every group of Christians has an inherited tradition from what they've learned from their pastors and leaders in their churches and they're unwilling to change it. They read a verse and they pour it into their preconceived theology.

The result is they live defeated lives constantly. If you want to be free you must be willing to let God break those traditions and teach you the truth. The truth will set you free and the truth is that because Jesus was tempted in all points as we are and did not sin Hebrews 4.15 therefore the next verse says go and get this same grace to help us in the time of our need from the throne of grace.

Which grace? The same grace that Jesus received. Did he receive grace? Well it says here from the time he was a child the grace of God was upon him and up to the time of his death we read in Hebrews 2 that it was by the grace of God Hebrews 2.9 up to the time of his death he could not have gone to the cross if the grace of God did not help him to go there. From childhood we read in Luke 2.40 to his death in Hebrews 2.9 what was it that carried Jesus through? Grace.

Grace by the way is not God's unmerited favor as some people say it is. That is another unscriptural definition. Unmerited favor every human being on the face of the earth gets it.

Godless people terrorists God gives them health God gives them food God gives them children you think it's all merited? Completely unmerited. God is showering his favor on all types of people on physical blessings material blessings and even spiritual things unmerited favor. But the Bible says in John 1 in verse 17 that grace came only through Jesus Christ it's only from the time of Christ that grace became

available and he was the first person who experienced that like it says the grace of God was upon him and because of that he overcame sin he had to be an example for us in holiness.

Holiness means freedom from sin without grace. We need to know the distinction between mercy and grace in Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 15 we saw that wonderful verse which says Jesus was tempted in all points exactly like us but he did not sin therefore what shall we do? I mean is that just something we have to admire? Oh that's wonderful it's not just something to be admired it is something from which we have to get there must be a result from that there must be something which we do because of that and that's what it says in the next verse therefore what shall we do?

We shall also go to the throne of grace and when we go to the throne of grace what do we get there?

First of all we get mercy all of us need mercy Jesus never needed mercy mercy refers to forgiveness for our past failures we have all failed so badly that we need forgiveness and that's called mercy there's plenty of it in the Old Testament references to it in the Old Testament the mercy of the Lord endures forever his mercy is from generation to generation etc we never find in the Old Testament that God gave grace to people he gave them mercy today we can get the same mercy because we have fallen so many times but God wants to give us something more than mercy and that is grace grace is God's power to help us Hebrews 4.16 in our time of need our time of need is when we are tempted when we are tempted we are tempted to fall we are tempted to fall and at that time we need grace to help us

to stand let us go to the throne of grace and get it just like Jesus prayed and got from the Father we can also go to the Father and get to use an illustration we can picture ourselves like mountain climbers climbing up a mountain and say in one place you slip and you're about to fall fingers but you're too proud to ask for help and you slip and you fall and you break your bones and you're lying at the bottom and then you ask for help and the ambulance comes along picks you up takes you to the hospital that's mercy that is help after you have fallen coming to forgive your sin to cleanse you to restore you to fellowship with God that's help that's good that you ask for help then but that's the second best the best is while you're hanging there by your fingers about to slip and fall you cry

out to God for grace Lord I'm weak I acknowledge my weakness I need help please come and help me now then you'll find amazingly grace lifts you up from the rock from which you were about to slip and fall then you don't need the ambulance because you didn't fall grace to help us in our time of need now this is not just a beautiful illustration if it were a beautiful illustration it wouldn't just a beautiful illustration it wouldn't be worth even talking about it it's practical and real you can try it out next time do this next time when you're tempted instead of being proud and saying I can resist that on my own I can manage on my own humble yourself and say I can't manage on my own I'm not able to get victory this temptation is too strong for me whatever it is whatever your temptation is

and you know what it is in your life will you humble yourself and go to God and say Lord this is too strong for me I cannot get victory but I believe you can help me to overcome it I'm coming to your throne of grace please forgive me for all the years when I've fallen into this sin but now I have learned the secret I'm going to come to you and ask you for grace before I fall when I'm slipping when I find the pressure too much I'm going to ask you Lord give me grace for example let's take a practical case supposing you're being tempted to get angry or you're tempted with tremendous pressure to watch pornography yes and you find you're slipping you're slipping you're trying to resist it but you slip you're like about to fall from the cliff ask God say Lord will you give me grace right now

that I can stand that I don't fall you will be amazed to find how a power comes to lift you up and make you stand on the rock without falling and God helps you to fall that is the will of God for you and me I want to say to you that Jesus received help from his father because he cried out with loud crying and tears it says in Hebrews 5 7 and he stood and we can stand too he says to us follow me may God bless you

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