

Singing As We Take Up The Cross Daily

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the concept of something better than miracles, highlighting the call to take up the cross daily, deny oneself, despise shame, and press on to perfection. It challenges believers to prioritize giving up sin, overcoming hindrances, and running the race with endurance while looking to Jesus. The speaker urges a shift from seeking miracles to embracing the better way of dying to self and suffering for Christ, emphasizing humility, dependence on God, and being made perfect through the cross.

Duration: 29:17

Scripture: Hebrews 11:39, Hebrews 12:1, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 10:13

Topics: "Self-Denial", "Endurance in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like to turn to Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 is known as the great chapter on faith and the heroes of faith mentioned here, many of them did fantastic things, amazing things and you know things we've never seen in our lifetime. Walls falling down with just praising the Lord and sea splitting open, lions being killed, but we read in Hebrews 11 verse 39, all of these gained approval through their faith, but they still did not receive what God had promised because God provided something better for us and just think of that phrase.

All those wonderful things they did in Hebrews 11, there is something better than all of that. I think a lot of young people would like to do some of the miracles mentioned in Hebrews 11 and show themselves as great men of God, but what is that something better, something better than pulling down the walls of Jericho, something better than making the sun stop in the sky for 24 hours, something better than killing a lion with bare hands or splitting open the Red Sea. I don't know whether we agree by it.

We live in a Christendom that's so taken up with miracles and wonders and most of them, 99 percent of them fake and you have a multitude of so-called believers who just swallow all that thinking it is all true. When people fall on the ground in some public meetings and show their feet to God, they call that slaying

in the spirit. That's the devil mocking God saying, look at these people instead of bowing their head to you God, like the saints did, they're showing you their feet and these people who do that don't even know that they're insulting God.

Everybody in a heathen country like India knows that showing your feet to somebody is the best way to insult him and they call it slaying in the Holy Spirit. I'm just giving you one example and numerous examples I could give you of deception because they are taken up with these miracles and they haven't seen that God has provided. It's so clearly written in the last verse of Hebrews 11.

Whenever people talk about Hebrews 11, I said never forget the last verse that all of this, there's something more than this, something better, something better. In fact, if you look at the book of Hebrews and study it, the main word there is better, better, better, better covenant and better high priest and it's better. 13 times I think it comes and here's something better for us and what is that better thing? You know what it is? Let me tell you, to take up the cross.

Who has understood that? To take up the cross and follow Jesus, to die to yourself. I'll show you. There's no, in the way Hebrews is written, there was no chapter gap.

Chapters are made for our convenience. It was one continuous letter. So it's a continuous statement, something better for us and that is to, since we have these cloud of witnesses, chapter 12 verse 1, which is this big list of people in chapter 11 are called a cloud of witnesses.

What is this better thing for us? First of all, give up all sin. That's the better thing. Better than overcoming lions and pulling down walls of Jericho, give up all sin.

And once you've given up all sin, give up all the weights, encumbrance of weight, something that's not openly sin, but it's a hindrance, some encumbrance that's hindering us. Give it all up and run with endurance. The race looking at Jesus only.

Who endured the cross? That's the better thing. I don't know how many Christians have understood it. My brothers and sisters in NCCF, have you been gripped by this? Would you rather do a miracle or die to yourself every day? I'm not asking you to give me the official answer.

Ask yourself deep down in your heart, what would you rather do? If God said, I'll give you an opportunity to do a miracle or die to yourself in some difficult situation tomorrow, which would you choose? You think you'd accomplish a great thing for God by doing a miracle and it gets published in the magazine or newspaper that so-and-so did a miracle. You think that glorify God? Do you really believe Hebrews 11:40? That's something better for us to deny ourselves like Jesus did, despising the shame. How would you like to suffer some shame for Christ? That is a better thing.

I don't think many Christians have understood that. I want to ask you brothers, honestly, since the time you've become a believer, when was the last time that you had to suffer some shame for being known as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Can you think of some instance? Can you think of any instance in the past where you had to suffer shame because you were a disciple of Jesus? It could be from people who don't believe in discipleship. It could be because they think you're crazy, talking about taking up the cross and being perfect and all that.

But that's exactly what is mentioned in Hebrews 11:40, being perfect. They could not be perfect. They could kill lions, they could split the Red Sea, they could pull down the walls of Jericho, but they could not

press on to perfection.

Hebrews 11:40, think of two words there, better and being made perfect. Keep those words always in mind, something better and being made perfect. That is what these Hebrews 11 people could not have, and that is what God has reserved for us.

And if we have not seen that better thing as taking up the cross every day, and we have not seen that being made perfect is the purpose of God in our life, we have missed the new covenant completely. See, I want to remind you of what it says in a little verse in Acts the Apostle chapter 17. See, I mentioned this because all of you are not a bunch of villagers.

If I were speaking to, like I've often spoken to villagers in the villages of India, some of them who can't even read or write. Numerous people in our churches in the villages in India cannot read or write, especially the older women. Somebody has to read the Bible to them or something like that.

They can't read or write. Then I would not need to mention this, but in a crowd like yours in NCCF where all our graduates and post-graduates, and I don't know, there may be PhDs there or all, anyway, a bunch of intellectual people, that's what all of you are. Is that a handicap? It is a handicap.

It's a tremendous handicap. Because Jesus said in Matthew 11, 25, I thank you father that you've hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and clever people of the world. And you have revealed them to those who are like little babies.

So it's a handicap. I mean, I discovered that. I'm not dumb.

I'm not stupid. I said, Lord, unfortunately, I happen to be intelligent, but it's not due to me. You allowed me to be born that way.

What can I do? You put that into my genes from my parents. What can I do? Now, what shall I do? I don't want to be one of those who miss out on revelation on your word, just because I'm intelligent. But you said these things are hidden from the clever and the intelligent.

And the Lord said to me, well, just accept the fact that that's not going to help you my word. But be like an infant, be like a baby. Helpless, dependent, acknowledging the important things of eternity you know nothing about.

A true holiness of God you know nothing about. Acknowledge all that. You may be knowing a lot of things about science and English and military warfare and all that, but that's not the important thing.

You know nothing about the genuine way of the holiness of God or the perfect love of God or inner purity. Acknowledge that you know nothing. You don't know much or almost nothing about helpless dependence on God like a child.

So you come to my scriptures like a little child in helpless dependence, acknowledge every day, and then in spite of your intellectual handicap, you'll understand my word. And I want to say to you, that's how I've come to God's word. Acknowledging it every time I come to this word, Lord, when it comes to your word, I know nothing.

Comes to the worldly things, I know a lot. But when it comes to the word, I know nothing. I'm like a baby, a newborn baby.

What does he know? Newborn baby does not even know ABC. The newborn baby does not know what two plus two is. Come to the word of God like a little child.

What I want to show you is Acts of the Apostles chapter 17 and verse 21. The people in Athens, well, like most of you, very clever, intelligent, educated. Greece was supposed to be the greatest nation in the world with philosophers and scholars and intelligent people.

And Athens was the capital of Greece. Rome may have been a great military power, but the intellectual power of the world was in Greece. And the capital of Greece was Athens.

And it says in Acts 17 and verse 21, that all the people in Athens used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new. And we can have church meetings like that, where we have a great desire to hear something new, which you've never heard before. And those who share the word can have a great desire to tell something new, because we are preaching to a bunch of Athenians, not like the dumb people in some other part of the world who are headhunters and uneducated.

No, we are speaking to the Athenians of today. And they always like to hear something new. And when they speak, they like to say something new, something that will make people, it will impress people.

I'm not a dumb chap. I'm an Athenian. Be careful, brothers and sisters, that's a great danger you face in NCCF, I might as well tell you.

Be like a little child and be willing that other people think of you, that you're a little kid, you don't know much, but you know God. That's the important thing. And so I, in the early days when I was immature, I didn't know that, but I got rid of that.

I said, Lord, I don't want to be always saying something new. I want to say something that's helpful to people, which will bless them. And if it's the same tablet to be taken three times a day for the next 20 years, well, that's the thing that'll bring healing.

Same tablet, three times a day for 20 years, because it's got to bring healing. Until the person's healed, you've got to take it. So being made perfect, something better than all these miracles, taking up the cross, denying yourself, despising the shame, that is what it means to follow Jesus, pressing on to perfection.

He's called in Hebrews 12 to the perfecter of faith. I want to follow the perfecter of my faith. I had faith.

I had faith when I accepted Christ 61 years ago, but it is not perfect. The more I become like a little child in helpless dependence, the more I become like a branch, helpless dependence on the tree, the more my faith will be perfected. And the more I think of how clever I am and how much I know the Bible and how I can impress people with my sermons and my preaching and et cetera, et cetera, my faith is not yet perfect.

My dependence is not on God. My dependence is on myself. I don't seek for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

We think of the fullness of the doctrine. No, it's a life of perpetual, helpless dependence upon God. And that's what the cross is.

You know, the cross, when it has finally done its work, we are dead. Paul said, I'm so dead that when he said in Galatians 6, 14, this world is crucified to me and I am crucified to the world. The world cross had done its work in Paul.

The living Bible paraphrases it as I have as little interest in this world as a dead man has. I tell you, I've meditated on that. Lord, can I say honestly, I have as little interest in this world as a dead man has.

Not that I don't live responsibly, but I accept everything. What God gives, I accept. I don't covet for more.

I don't lust for more. I say, Lord, I want to earn enough so that I'm not dependent on anybody else. I can take care of myself, my family, but I don't want to anchor after something I don't need.

No, I'm not saying there's no place for ambition in your work. By all means, advance in your work and cost of living goes up. Try to earn more money.

All that is okay, but don't let your interest, your primary interest be in that. Let it wave down at the bottom of your list, those other things. Let your primary interest be to be perfect, to follow Jesus and taking up the cross, despising the shame.

That is the better thing. When God says that is the better thing, I want to say to myself, that is the better thing. Believe it.

There's nothing better than that, and the good things in the world can be the enemy of the best. You know that expression in English, the good is the enemy of the best, and we can seek out to something good. It's not evil.

It's good, but it can be the enemy of the best, which is to take up the cross and be perfect. I thought of that in relation when we come to the breaking of bread. If you turn with me to Matthew 26, this is where we read about Jesus taking up the bread, verse 26, and the cup, Matthew 26.

While they're eating out there, Jesus took some bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to the disciples, saying, take, eat. This is my body, which is broken for you. Then he took a cup, and this is the only time in Jesus' life where he spoke about covenant.

This is the blood of the covenant. I think Luke's gospel says the blood of the new covenant. It's the only time Jesus spoke about the new covenant.

New covenant Christian fellowship, NCCF. You know the only time Jesus spoke about the new covenant when he was breaking the bread, when he was symbolizing the cross on which he was going to die. That's the only time he used the expression new covenant.

Search the scriptures, and this is my blood of the covenant. Drink from it, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins of many. I will not drink of it again till I drink it new in the Father's kingdom.

And after that, they sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives. That gripped me. They were not gloomy.

Oh, now I've got to die now. Hallelujah. I'm going to the cross now.

They sang a hymn and went to the cross. The next time you have to die to yourself, sing a hymn and die. When somebody insults you, sing a hymn and die.

When somebody cheats you, sing a hymn and die. Whenever you have to take the cross in any situation, sing a hymn and say, let's go. That's what Jesus said in the gospel.

It says, as the Father has given me commandment, let's go. The one who's betraying me is just going to come. Let's go.

Let's sing a hymn and go. This guy's coming to betray me tomorrow. Let's sing a hymn about it.

What a triumphant Christian life that is. That is what taking up the cross really means. They could never do that in the Old Testament.

Oh, no. They were always thinking of taking revenge on the people who tried to hurt them in any way. Even David, the man after God's own heart.

And all those people, if you made fun of Elisha's bald head, you'd have bears coming and eating you up. That's how it was in the old covenant. It was not, hallelujah, I've got a bald head.

So what? I'm taking up the cross and following Jesus. It doesn't make a difference if I got a bald head. So many things, you know, we got to see what is the true Christian life.

The better thing is to take up the cross. And anything that makes you smaller than others, you're not as smart as them. You can't do this, that, and the other.

Brother, it's unimportant. If you have died to the world and the world is dead to you, it will not disturb you one bit. What they say about you, what they say against you, or what happens, I have as little interest in this world as a dead man has, Paul said.

God forbid that I should glory in anything other than that. Read Galatians 6.14. That's the meaning of breaking the bread and drinking the cup. Lord, I want to do this with meaning today.

Judge yourself, it says in 1 Corinthians 11, and then take part of the cup. What does it symbolize? Dead to myself, dead to sin, and dead to the world. Yeah.

Well, three things in Galatians. Galatians 2.20. I'm crucified with Christ's self. Galatians 5.24. The flesh is crucified.

And third, Galatians 6.14. I'm dead to the world. The world is dead to me. Those are the three things about the cross that Paul speaks in Galatians.

And that is the better thing. We need to meditate on the cross. I don't know whether all of you meditate on the cross enough.

In the early days, my meditation on the cross was basically that Jesus loved me so much and died for me. I meditated on that and that and that. I never knew much about being crucified with Christ those early years because I never had a spiritual father to teach me.

But I meditated on how much Jesus loved me and that kept me. It kept me when I saw that it was my sin that crucified Christ. How much he loved me to give himself for me.

What should I hold back from him? Nothing. And it was a meditation on the cross of what Jesus did for me that held me for years until finally the Lord revealed to me that I also died on that cross. I never knew that.

I mean, I could repeat the verse, memory verse, I'm crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. I could go on repeating it, but it wasn't true.

Till God opened my eyes to see that something happened that day. Even though you were not alive 2000 years ago, because I knew you from the foundation of the world, I put you in my son and you died there. You died.

Recognize it. Did I see my sins put on Jesus' body on the cross? No. How did I, how do I have faith that all my sins were put on the cross? The word of God.

How do I know that I was crucified with Christ? The word of God. And there the Lord says, I decided that you should be dead to this world in which you live and the world should be dead to you. That's why I put you on that cross with my son.

Lord, I'm taking this bread today and this cup to say that I accept it. I accept it. I don't want to play the fool with you, Lord.

I really want to, I mean, I know I won't understand it all in one day, but let me have a beginning. Let me learn the ABC at least today of, I'm as dead to this world as a dead man is. I haven't understood it fully.

I try to understand it, but it's getting more and more clear to me. I try to understand it in relation to honor, money, the world's pleasure. These are the three things.

The Bible says in the last days, men will be one second Timothy, three lovers of self, lovers of pleasure and lovers of money. Those are the areas we have to die to. Self, pleasure and money.

That's the world. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and pride of life. And I say, Lord, I want to, as I break bread today, I don't want it to be an empty ritual.

I want to yield to it. You know, we think of the bread that we break. It's so, I've often meditated on that.

It's, you know, the bread we break is so soft to just touch it and it breaks. You don't have to tear it or get a saw or something. It's so easy.

Just touch it and it breaks. And I say, Lord, I want to be like that, that you touch me through somebody who hurts me or steal something from me or does some harm to me. I must break immediately.

I shouldn't be like hard, like a rock. The Lord has to hammer me, hammer me with many, many messages before I break. No, I'm breaking bread saying, Lord, make me soft like this.

And to drink your blood, to drink the cup, to signify that you shed your blood for my sin, not somebody else's sin, my sin. I want to take it seriously, Lord. It wasn't yours, even one sin.

You don't have to shed your blood. I don't want to take even one sin lightly, anything. And the biggest of all sins is pride.

Beware of that. That's the thing that's most undetected in us, every one of us. I say to myself, there's more pride in me than I have seen, more.

I have not yet become like Jesus. And he said to me, learn from me for I'm humble. I want to learn.

I want to learn. I haven't learned. I've learned a little bit, but I've got a lot more to learn.

And I learned it only as if I accept every opportunity to take up the cross. It says he humbled himself and went to the cross, Philippians 2. You can't go to the cross if you're not willing to humble yourself. Philippians 2 is very clear.

He humbled himself. He became a servant and then he humbled himself to be crucified. So all of that, I'm testifying to when I break the bread, I'm going to sing a hymn at the end of it.

Yeah. So sing a hymn and go to the cross. That's how Jesus went.

I love that. As far as I know, that's about the only place in the gospels where we read that he sang a hymn. And it was not at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

It was not at the end of some miracle that he did. Oh, let's sing a hymn. Somebody's healed here.

Or 5,000 people were fed. Let's sing a hymn. No.

We're singing a hymn. What for, Lord? Because I'm going to die. In a few hours, I'll be dead.

Let's sing a hymn. I love that. God has provided something better for us that we might become perfect.

If you want to get in the spirit of the breaking of bread in that first time it was done, say, Lord, I want to sing a hymn when I have to die. I want to sing a hymn when my respect is taken away from me and my rights are taken away from me. And when people take advantage of me and they know that I will not respond because I'm a Christian, they know that I will not fight back because I'm a believer.

They know that I never struggled with flesh and blood so they can take advantage of me. Praise the Lord. I'm going to sing a hymn and do it.

God will never, never allow them to tempt me beyond my ability. I have a promise from scripture. My father has told me, don't fear.

I'll tighten the screw if they ever try to do too much against you. They won't be able to move. Who's harming you today? God has tightened the screws on them if it goes beyond your ability to handle.

I thank God for that. Otherwise, it's impossible to live in the world. Everybody will take advantage of me and crush me into the dust.

No, it's impossible. Are some of you afraid of that, that somebody will take advantage of you and it'll become too much for you? Do you believe in 1 Corinthians 10, 13, that God will never, never allow you to be tempted beyond your ability? That's why we're willing to die. That's why we're willing to make it public that I've died to the world.

I'm not going to fight with you for my property or my money or anything. You relatives of mine who didn't give me my share of my property, keep it. We have had numerous cases in CFC of some elders who walked away with church buildings that we built for them.

Go ahead. I will not fight for these things. I have as little interest in these things as a dead man has.

I'll fight for the rights of others, not for my own. Proverbs 31 says, speak up on behalf of those who are helpless and who are being taken advantage of by others. Have you read that verse? Proverbs 31, eight and nine, speak up on behalf of those who are helpless.

That I'll do, but never on behalf of myself. Never, never, never. Because I'm dead.

And we sing a hymn as we go to the cross. So let's keep that in mind, dear brothers, as we come to the breaking of bread today, and the Lord will be glorified through us. Amen.

Jesus said that the patient unto the day is the evil thereof. The last verse of Matthew six, which means there is a certain amount of evil every single day that we shall face. So there's a cross for every day.

And so there's a song for every day.

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