

The Proof of Faith

by Zac Poonen

The proof of faith is not seen in material prosperity, but in our ability to praise the Lord in the midst of trials and suffering.

Duration: 57:42

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:6

Topics: "Faith And Trials", "Following Jesus"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in the New Testament, focusing on spiritual needs, mental and emotional needs, and physical needs in that order. It highlights the example of Jesus choosing weakness and the way of the cross, encouraging believers to follow in his footsteps by being willing to endure trials, persecution, and humiliation for the sake of glorifying God. The speaker challenges listeners to examine their faith, choose the path of genuine faith that withstands the fire of testing, and live a life devoted to God's will and kingdom above all else.

Transcript

You know that nowadays we hear a lot about faith. There's a whole movement called the Word of Faith movement, and I have serious questions about it because it emphasizes only one small part of God's provision for us, and that is how God takes care of our physical and material needs. Now, when faith is limited only to our physical and material needs, we fairly soon descend to the level of animals because they're only interested in physical and material things.

The primary mark of a godly man is that the spiritual means much more to him than the intellectual or the physical or the material. He places the needs of his spirit above the needs of his body. When Jesus taught us to pray, if you look at the Old Testament prayers, they were all prayers related to, particularly in the Psalms, deliver us from our enemies and protect us and provide our earthly needs, bless us materially, give us land to live, houses, good crops, all this type of stuff.

But when Jesus came, he told his disciples, don't pray like that, pray like this, hallowed be your name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. They never prayed like that in the Old Covenant. After that, he said, sure, you can also pray, give us this day our daily bread.

So we can pray for material things, daily bread means food, clothing, shelter, all that we need for life on earth, provided we place our spiritual values first. You see, that's the way you know whether you're

spiritual or not. It's very easy for all of you to discover right now whether you're spiritual or not with a simple question, do you pray the way Jesus said we should always pray? That is, is your primary burden, God's name will be glorified, God's kingdom will come and God's will be done in your life as it is done in heaven in perfection.

And then, Lord, I also have certain earthly needs. If you pray like that, if that is the burden of your heart and your life, you are a spiritual person. If that is not, then no matter how many years you've been in this church or how much of the Bible you know, or however spiritual you think you are, you're only fooling yourself.

So faith in the New Testament is primarily for our spiritual needs, for our mental and emotional needs, and also for our physical needs in that order. I want you to turn to 1 Peter in chapter 1. Here it speaks about the proof of our faith. In 1 Peter 1.6, in this you gratefully rejoice.

What is this? That is, verse 5, you are protected by the power of God through faith for salvation. Verse 5, ready to be revealed in the last time. And you greatly rejoice in this salvation.

And if necessary, even though now, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials. Why are we distressed by various trials? So that the proof of our faith being more precious than gold, which is perishable, though tested by fire, will be found to result in praise and glory in honor of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now, what many people who talk about faith nowadays do not tell us is that a spiritual man will face trials.

Even the Old Testament, it said that many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers out of all of them. Psalm 34 and verse 19. And here also in the New Testament, it's a great theme.

In fact, Jesus said in John 16.33, he said, in the world, you shall have tribulation. He never said that in the world you'll have comfort or ease. He said, in the world, you will have tribulation, but in me, you have peace.

So, if you listen to all the preachers on television, you will not hear what Jesus is saying, in the world, you'll have tribulation, but in me, you have peace. And one day, when the great tribulation comes on this earth that Jesus spoke about and we are here, we'll recognize that word is true. In the world, you'll have tribulation, and we should be ready for that.

And a lot of preaching that we hear nowadays is not preparing God's people for that. It's preaching that's primarily meant for educated, rich people, mostly in Western countries who got a lot of money and who don't have persecution, who can afford to pay these preachers huge amounts so that they can live in grand style. They only move in such circles.

And I want to tell you, that is not the Christianity that I want to listen to. Some of the finest Christians in the world today are in China, where nobody preaches the prosperity gospel, where they are persecuted, where they go through these trials that are spoken of here. We here in Bangalore live in tremendous comfort.

We're like a Western country here, with a lot of people now earning very high salaries and plenty of cars on the road and many, many, many comforts. And it's very easy for us in Bangalore to love to hear this gospel that is being preached on television today. We love it.

It doesn't tell us about suffering. It doesn't tell us about trial. It doesn't tell us about the things Jesus spoke about and the apostles spoke about.

And the end result of this is, after years of listening to this, you'll be defeated by sin, you won't overcome the little, little sins that you're defeated by year after year, if a little trial comes in your life, you'll wonder, why does that happen? Is it because I don't have faith? If suffering comes, you will wonder why. And when the great tribulation comes, and you're still here, like we all will be, we'll wonder why, because we've been deceived. What is Peter saying? You greatly rejoice in your trials because there the proof of your faith is seen.

Let me read to you from the message translation. I know how great this makes you feel when you have a wonderful life when Jesus comes back. Even though right now you have to put up with every kind of aggravation, pure gold put in the fire comes out proved pure.

See, everybody can say that my gold is pure. Well, put it in the fire. And we can think our faith is genuine, and I'll tell you this, this word is so clear.

The way gold is tested is not in the water, it's in the fire. And Peter is saying the only way your faith can be tested is when you go through trial, not when God blesses you with material prosperity. That is no proof of your faith.

Not a single verse in the New Testament teaches that. That is an Old Testament blessing that God gave to people before Jesus Christ came to the earth, before the Holy Spirit was given. And if you want to live in that time under the law as a disciple of Moses, you're welcome.

I don't want to live there. I want to live in the new covenant where material prosperity is never spoken of as a blessing. God provides all our need.

He won't let you live on the pavement on the wayside. He cares for us, sure. But the proof of our faith is not seen in those earthly things that God gives you.

It's very important. You've heard me say this many times. If God gives you a house, that's not a proof of his blessing.

There are millions of godless atheists who've got better houses than you. If God gives you a good job, that's not a proof of God's blessing. There are millions of godless atheists who earn 10 times what you earn.

It doesn't prove anything. But I'll tell you what those millions of godless atheists can't do. When they go through suffering and trial, they can't praise the Lord and say, well, God is good.

They can't do that. That's where you're different. They can't overcome their anger and their bitterness and their lust and their internet pornography and all that.

They can't overcome all that because they don't have faith. It's faith that helps us to overcome these things. And so he says here, pure gold is tested when it's put in the fire and your faith is tested, not when you get answers to prayer and miracles and God allows you to enjoy this, that, and the world, but when you go through trial and you still praise the Lord.

And then it is proved to be pure. Otherwise, your faith is counterfeit. And genuine faith put through the suffering comes out proved genuine.

And, you know, God is very interested in proving that. As I've said before, the first book in the Bible written in the Bible was the book of Job, long before Genesis, Job lived before Moses. And in the first book, in the first chapter, in the first paragraph of the word of God, when God decided to write his book for man, the very first paragraph of that book is how God wants to prove to Satan that he has a man on earth who will stand up for him, even if he goes through trial.

Isn't that interesting? That when God wanted to write a book for man, the very first paragraph of the very first book is about a man whom God wanted to show to Satan, say, there's a man, you can take him through trial and stand true to me. And do you think that was a mistake that God put that as the first thing when he started writing a book for us? No, that's what he's always looked for. And in Job's day, he could find only one.

Satan said to God, all these fellows, they'll serve you when you bless them materially, take away those blessings, and then let's see whether they'll bless you. And God says, well, that may be true of all the other people, but it's not true of Job. Now, you know, Satan saying the same thing to God today, all these fellows who come to church and sing and praise and shout so loudly and think you're a wonderful God and say you're a wonderful, magnificent God, you just take away some of those material blessings they have.

Let them go through a little trial materially, physically, and then we'd see how much of that song of praise comes out of their mouth. And God says that may be true of 99% of those fellows who go to church, but I still have a 1% here and there. How many will he find in this church? How many will he find among those sitting here this morning whom God can point out to Satan and say, but that's not true of that man and that's not true of that woman? Well, I want to say, yes, Lord, you can say that to the devil about me.

Now be careful. Don't say that because next week you may be tested. Are you ready or you'd like to wait? Sure, you can wait.

God doesn't force anyone. Say, Lord, I'm not ready for that, but I want to be there. Well, you can hold me up to Satan and say, put this man through anything.

He'll still praise me. He'll still say I'm a wonderful, magnificent God. Put this woman through anything.

I tell you, such a saint is more valuable to God than a man who boasts that God has blessed me with money. He's blessed me with a good job. He's blessed me with a good house.

He's blessed me with good children. He's blessed me with this, that, and the other, and a good church. A million times more valuable than that is the man who can stand true to God when he's put through trial.

That's what Peter is saying. That's the mark of faith. It's the way Jesus went.

That's the way all the apostles went. And Christianity has chosen a broad way that the world is attracted by. And when you choose that way, naturally, you get crowds.

You preach a Christianity without a cross, you'll get crowds. We read in John chapter 6 how great crowds followed Jesus when he blessed them materially. The 5,000 were fed.

Boy, they all followed. But in the same chapter, you read in John chapter 6, he spoke about the cross, about eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, and dying to yourself. And by the end of the chapter, this great crowd of 10,000 is reduced to 11.

What was it that reduced the big crowd of 10,000 who were following Jesus to 11? The message of the cross. That which isn't preached. And that's the distinctive thing about the New Testament.

And these apostles understood it. And listen to this. When Jesus wraps this all up, and this is verse 7, it's your faith.

Listen to this carefully. When Jesus wraps all this up, when he comes back, it's your faith and not your gold that God will display. That means it's your faith and not your bank account, or the size of your house, or your material prosperity that God will display as evidence of his victory in your life.

You know what God wants to display in the final day? He doesn't want to take you up and say, did you see by faith in me what a big house he built, or how much money he made, or how healthy he was up to the age of 95. Is that what God wants to show the devil? The devil will pick out one godless servant of his who will say, God, listen to this. Look at this man.

He lived up to 105, and he was healthy. And he had a bigger house than your servant. If that's what God is going to display, even today, I tell you, God will be put to shame before the devil.

But he'll never be put to shame because the person he's going to manifest to the devil is not one who lived long, not one who had a bigger house or a bigger bank account, but one who could go through trial and praise the Lord. Who could take up the cross every day and never complain about whatever God allowed in his life. And who could show by his attitude to material things that he's detached.

You know, you can have material things, but if you're attached to them, God cannot hold you up. The only person who can serve God is one who is detached from material things. Every material thing we have, that may be little or much, if you want to serve the Lord, I'm only talking to those who want to serve the Lord.

You've got to be detached from it. It's no connection. See, a lot of people are very closely connected to the material things they possess.

Their money, their property, their clothes, their vehicles, and all types of things. They're attached to it. And they're good Christians in the eyes of men, serving the Lord, apparently, worshiping and praising and all that.

But in God's eyes, it's those who may still have those things, but there's no connection. The connection is broken between the things which they have and them. And this is what it means.

You know, this is the connection that Abraham had to Isaac that had to be broken before he could be a worshiper. And when God saw Abraham was so attached to Isaac, God said, you better give that up. Only then you can follow me.

It's the same thing with the rich young ruler. There was nothing wrong with all the money he had, but the Lord saw he was so attached to it. He said, you better get detached to that if you want to follow me.

He said, sorry, I can't be detached to that. The Lord said, well, you can't follow me. You can't follow me if you're attached to those material things.

And I believe that every one of us needs to ask ourselves whether we are attached to things. You love possessing things more and more and more and more. Well, you may get to heaven, but you'll have a lot of regret when you get there that you didn't live a useful life on earth.

See, Christianity is not just coming to meetings, singing songs, praising the Lord, attending meetings regularly. You think God places us on earth just for that? I would not want to live on earth just attending meetings. No, I want my life to count for God.

I want my life to be used by God to do good to others, to deliver people who are in the grip of the devil. Completely deliver them, to deliver people from the power of sin. And I want to say to you, my dear brothers and sisters, don't let the devil fool you that that's only for full-time workers or preachers or pastors.

No, it's for every single member of the body of Christ. See, that's the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, you just could not serve God unless you happen to be in the tribe of Levi.

If you were born in some other tribe, forget it. You could never be a priest, no matter how wholehearted you are. You have to be in the tribe of Levi.

And that's the only tribe that is permitted to be priests. Or once in a while, God would select one David or one Elijah. I mean, if you were just one in a million, God would choose like that.

Where's the chance for us? It's like winning a lottery ticket. No chance. But isn't it wonderful that in the New Covenant, the Lord says it's not going to be like that.

It's not going to be that one in a million. It's for everybody. Everyone can be a king and a priest.

You can rule over sin. You can rule over the devil. You can rule over all this material stuff, which is no power over you.

You can be a priest to God, standing before him every day, praying to him and changing people's lives. You can stand before God, stand before people. And the Bible also says that you can be, you know, in the Old Testament, the great ministries of prophet, priest, and king.

And the Bible says we are made kings and priests to God. And Acts 2, 17 says men and women can prophesy. So every single ministry that was restricted to few individuals is open to everybody, including the sisters.

And I'll tell you this. If your church stops you as a sister from having any ministry, forget your church. Have a ministry outside your church to the sisters whom you can meet and people you know, you can write to them.

You can send emails to them. You can call them up and you can deliver people from the grip of Satan. Even if you belong to a church that keeps all sisters mouth shut.

Sure. Nobody can stop your ministry. No church, no group, no culture, no denomination.

If you are determined that you're going to be the man or woman that God wants you to be. Otherwise, I'll tell you this. You'll have a lot of regret when you get into heaven and discover that God wanted to use you

to deliver a lot of people from the power of the devil when you were on earth.

And you just sort of drifted along attending meetings and singing songs and submitting to the denominational prejudices that your church had against sisters. Please don't be enslaved to that anymore. Even if you have been until now, you say, Lord, I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And I want to prophesy. Like you said, you'd pour out your spirit and your sons and daughters would prophesy. I'm a daughter.

I'm a son of yours. I want to prophesy. I want to bless people.

And I may never stand in a pulpit in a church all my life. That's fine. But I'm still going to be a blessing to people and deliver people.

Look at Jesus' life. How much did he stand in a pulpit? He could hardly stand in a pulpit five minutes before they threw him out. Do you know that Jesus never preached in a pulpit? You don't need to stand in a pulpit.

Jesus was blessing people all along the way. He'd go to people's homes and bless them most of the time. Or meet people on the road or here and there.

It's easy for us to follow Jesus. Very easy. But God has to take us through a trial and prepare us for such a ministry.

In the Old Testament, you could go up to the mountain, listen to God, come back and preach it. But in the New Testament, you can't do it that way. You can come to a meeting, fill your head with knowledge, and you think you can go out and preach it.

You can preach it. It'll be like dead knowledge. It's like you go to a place where there's a grand meal being served.

You take a photograph of that chicken biryani and all that stuff on the table. And you show it to people. Does it help them? It makes them more hungry.

That's what a lot of people do. A lot of people go to my website and to our church website and download all the messages. Not for personal benefit.

That would be good if they downloaded to listen to it again and again for personal benefit. But there are many people who download it to get points to preach in their sermons. And they won't even say where they got it from because they're ashamed of that.

Or they want to get honor for themselves when they preach it. And it's like showing photographs to other people of food. It hasn't come out of your life.

It's come out of somebody else's life. But it hasn't come out of your life. And it only brings death.

So we see here that in the new covenant, it's as we go through trial that God produces a ministry through us. And you can be absolutely sure one day you'll discover it. In all the 2,000 years of church history, any man whom God has used has gone through a lot of secret trials and sufferings which he may never talk about.

Do you think Jesus talked about what all he went through in 30 years? Where do you read in the Bible Jesus telling people what all he suffered from his brothers at home or his sisters at home for 30 years? Or what all he suffered from his neighbors or when he was in school? Or from people who cheated him as when he was a carpenter. That was his education. But he never talked about it.

But you see the result of it in his three and a half years ministry. His three and a half years ministry came out of that 30 years of trial and suffering which you and I know nothing about. But you know there's a wonderful verse in John 16 which says that when the Holy Spirit has come, he will take of those hidden things of mine and show it to you.

And I have been so blessed in my life as the Holy Spirit has taken some of those hidden things of Jesus' 30 years of life and shown it to me and said to me, that's the way you are to go if you are to have a public ministry. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you some of the things that Jesus went through when he was tempted in all points as we are and yet never sinned. It's through those trials that he got a ministry.

That's why the Apostle Paul had to be imprisoned and beaten because he had to have such a fantastic ministry more than anybody in the history of Christianity. There was only one person who suffered more than Paul perhaps and that was Jesus himself. But that's because Paul had to write at least 13 books of Scripture.

If you've got to write 13 books of Scripture, it's not enough to have all the knowledge that Gamaliel gave you in your Bible school, Paul. You've got to go through suffering. Gamaliel taught him for so many years in Bible school in Jerusalem and all he got was dead knowledge which made him think that Jesus was a devil and the Christians were all going astray.

That's what Bible school teaches. But then God filled him with the Holy Spirit and took him through another school of being persecuted and he got a sickness in his flesh which he never got healed from. He called it a thorn in the flesh and took him through poverty and took him through times when he didn't have enough money to buy food to eat and took him through times when he didn't have enough a blanket to cover himself.

You know he writes in 2 Timothy, Timothy please get me that blanket, send it through somebody when it's pretty cold here in Rome in the prison and this is God's greatest man on earth. Couldn't God give him a blanket? What a deception it is to think that we have to have everything we need on earth. Most of us wouldn't be satisfied unless we have 50, 100 pairs of clothes.

Imagine, well you'll never become a man of God that way, not in a million years because these things mean so much to you. But Paul was shivering without a blanket and said well Lord that's fine if you want me to go through this. He went through all that, he was shipwrecked.

Once he was out his ship got wrecked. Now you'd think that if Paul was in a ship that ship will never get wrecked. Well it did get wrecked more than once and once he was on the ship got wrecked and he was in the sea for 24 hours.

Yeah, it's a good thing he knew how to swim otherwise you wouldn't have got some of the episodes. God took his servant, you read all this. I'm not telling you stories, you read it in 2 Corinthians 11, the last part.

He went through all that. What was the result? He didn't preach out of his head. No, he didn't preach a message he heard from somebody else.

He didn't preach to get honor. Oh no, he delivered people from the grip of the devil by what he preached because it came out of his life. God had put him into the fire and his faith was proved to be genuine.

God said okay, go and share that with others. That is the faith that God is trying to equip you and me for and that's why he allows us to go through situations sometimes which we can't explain. Why does God allow us to be humbled in different situations? Humiliated.

I'm not talking about our humbling ourselves, that's also needed. I'm talking about situations where God allows us to be humiliated. Now in the Old Testament, when a king was, the Old Testament kings of Judah were humiliated only when they disobeyed God.

Then the enemy would come and defeat them and oppress them and they'd go as slaves. Samson, for example, he went as a slave when he disobeyed God but until he disobeyed God nobody could touch him. Not even 300 men could come and hold him, no.

But it's all different. One man could beat Paul. One man could spit on Jesus' face.

One man could call Jesus, you prince of devils Beelzebub. You have a demon. People could say all these things.

In the Old Testament, if you ever told Moses, why did you marry this woman? You'd get leprosy. That's how it was. In the New Testament, you could call Jesus a prince of devils and you'd get forgiveness, not leprosy.

Whom do you want to follow? Moses or Jesus? Why does God allow us to be humiliated? Why did God allow Jesus to be humiliated? Humiliation is a fire. The devil says, this child of yours, it's not gold, it's just gold paint. God says, okay, put him in the fire.

Fire of humiliation. He comes out forgiving the people who humiliate him, loving them, completely untouched. To me, that is the picture of the three friends of Daniel in the fire.

Today, the fire is not a physical fire. And Nebuchadnezzar says, make it seven times hotter. And today, the devil says, make it seven times hotter.

And God says, okay, go ahead. And I get into the fire of humiliation, seven times worse than anybody else faces. And I see that Jesus is with me in the fire there, just like those people.

Have you had that experience? If Jesus is with you in that fire, you will not get offended with the people who humiliate you. You won't shout back at them. Maybe your wife is humiliating you publicly before your children.

Have you had that experience? Or your husband humiliates you publicly. Oh, there are so many wicked, evil, godless, demonic husbands in India who humiliate their wives publicly before their children. Okay, I hope you're not one of those godless, demonic, satanic husbands who humiliate your wife before your children.

If you are, you better get converted. You need to be born again. That'll change your life.

But most people are not. A lot of Christian husbands who do that, a lot of Christian wives who yell at their husbands and humiliate them before their children. And the devil says, ah, make it seven times hotter.

Okay, you wonder why your husband or wife is getting so upset. It's because the devil's making it seven times hotter. And God's determined to prove that your faith is genuine.

And you love that person. And you bless that person. I'll never forget.

You know, I was once at a conference. And I forgot. I'll tell you honestly, it was many years ago, more than 20 years ago.

I've forgotten every single message I heard in that conference. There may have been some good things which have blessed me at that time. But I forget, you know.

Even good things that blessed you 10 years ago, you forget. But I'll never forget. I shared a room in that conference with a God-fearing brother who had a wife who went to some other Christian denomination, claimed to be born again.

The denomination that didn't preach victory over sin, that just preached speaking in tongues, praise the Lord and accept the Lord and say you're born again. But no victory. And his wife would not come with him to his church.

And I asked him, can you tell me, he would never talk about it publicly. But I asked him, I said, you and I are living, staying here in the same room. Can you tell me something? What exactly, how does your wife treat you? He said she throws plates and glasses at me and I have to duck in the house all the time as she does all that.

And then finally when she gets over her anger, when everything cools down, I say to her, but you're still the queen in my heart. He was an elder brother in the church. And I told him, brother, you really deserve to be an elder.

You're not like those elders who just get up and preach. You're one who's gone through the fire. Your faith is proved to be genuine.

And when you speak, it comes out of your life. See, humiliation can be a fire. Have you had your wife throw things at you or your husband? You duck all the time.

Can you come out of that and say to your husband, but you're still king in my life. Little things upset us. You know what it proves? I don't want to say it, but perhaps I should.

Perhaps your faith is not genuine. It's only painted gold. What does it say here? Genuine faith put through suffering comes out, proved genuine.

Just like gold put in the fire comes out, proved pure. You go to any goldsmith at these jeweler shops, they won't test gold. If they're in doubt about something, they say there's only one way to test it, put it in the fire.

And throughout the history of man, right from the book of, right from the time of Job, the first person the Bible speaks about, all the way till the end. The book of Revelation, you see the saints are put through the fire. They are humiliated.

See the book of Revelation and chapter 13 in the times of the antichrist. This is speaking about the antichrist in verse two. All the great Bible scholars of every denomination will agree that this is the antichrist.

I saw a beast coming out of the sea with seven heads, 10 horns and seven heads. 13 verse one, the dragon is of course the devil. And this is the antichrist.

And it goes on to say the whole earth, verse three, middle, amazed, it was amazed and followed after this beast. And it's going to be a person like that. The antichrist was going to come up in the last days and people in the world are going to follow him.

And they worship Satan because he gave his authority to this antichrist. And they worship the antichrist saying, who is like this antichrist who's able to wage, who can wage war against him? And he was allowed, that was given to him. He was allowed to speak arrogant words of blasphemy against God.

And he was allowed by God to rule for three and a half years, 42 months. And he opened his mouth and blasphemed him and God and his name Tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven. And then listen to this.

He was, it was given, power was given to him to make war with the saints and overcome them. I thought the saints could not be overcome. They can't be overcome spiritually.

What he means is he, they could, he could kill them. He could kill their bodies. But he couldn't kill, he couldn't touch their spirit.

Now here is where a lot of denominations, 95% of Christians won't agree. They say, no, no, no, no believers there. Who are these saints then? These are not saints who offer lambs and goats for their sins.

That's all over. It's all finished. Jesus finished with all that.

These are Christians. There's only one way to be a saint after Jesus died and the Holy Spirit came. There's only absolutely only one way to be a saint.

And that's by receiving Christ as your savior and being filled with the Holy Spirit. These are people who received Christ as their savior and filled with the Holy Spirit. And I call them Christians.

And they are here during the time of this three and a half years of great tribulation when the Antichrist is there and the Antichrist is permitted to kill them. And there's another beast, a false prophet, verse 11, and his job is not persecution. His job is deception.

Verse 14, he deceives all those who dwell in the earth because he does so many signs. He's allowed to perform so many signs and lead people to the worship of the Antichrist. And he says, finally, let him who has understanding, verse 18, calculate the number of the beast.

His number is 666. You know what that means, 666? Six is the number of man. Man was made on the sixth day.

And three is the number of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So 666, three sixes, is a picture of man, symbolic, a man trying to make himself like God. That's basically what it means.

And the book of Revelation is full of symbolic language. And you read that without symbolic language in 2 Thessalonians 2, where we read that the Antichrist is someone who, he says, concerning the coming of Christ, let me tell you something, 2 Thessalonians 2, don't be disturbed by all types of preaching and somebody says a message and the Spirit saying, thus said the Lord, prophecies and any such thing

saying and deceiving you, because let no one deceive you, verse 3. And what a word we need that today. That day, the day of the Lord will not come until first the man of sin, the Antichrist, is revealed.

How much clearer can it be than that in Scripture? And yet people twist the word of God because they don't like to face the fact that we shall go through a tribulation. Even though Jesus said it, even though Paul said it, Paul said, don't be deceived. That day will not come until the man of sin is revealed who opposes and exalts himself, verse 4, above every so-called God and sits in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

That is 666, man displaying himself as God. Don't you remember that when I was with you, I was telling you about these things that that day will not come till the man of sin is revealed. But you know what is restraining him till that time? What is restraining is the power of the Holy Spirit.

There's only one thing that's restraining the Antichrist from coming forth. One day God will remove that power of the Holy Spirit from that restraint rather, and then he'll come forth because God, nothing can happen till God permits, you know, like the devil couldn't do anything to Job till God permitted it. When God withdrew that restraint on Satan, okay, go ahead and attack Job.

So there's a restraint put upon till the time comes when the Antichrist will come forth. But the point is this, from the beginning of Christianity, New Testament Christians proved their faith in the fire. In the Old Testament, Daniel's three friends could escape the fire without any smell of fire on their bodies.

But in the New Covenant, early Christians, many of them were burnt. We saw John Hus, there was that movie of John Hus, burnt. And, you know, I really moved always by that time when he knew he was going to be burnt the next day.

He was a man like you and me. This is where in the 1400s or something in Europe, this man of God, he would not give up and he was being burnt by other so-called Christians because he preached that salvation is by faith and not by submitting to the Roman Catholic Church or anything like that. Other Christians, bishops with crosses on their heads were the ones who ordered him to be burnt and he was locked up in this prison.

And I'll never forget that part in that movie where he knows he's going to be burnt the next day and he's lit a candle and he puts his hand over that candle fire just to see how does it feel like to be burnt. And he pulls his hand back. He says, boy, this is what I'm going to face my whole body.

You know, no angel came and delivered him. He didn't become prosperous. He didn't become a millionaire.

But he has no regret in heaven today. His faith was put in the fire and was proved to be genuine. I don't believe in this type of faith that gets you a better car and a better house and a better money.

I believe in that type of faith. I'd rather follow John Huss than all the television evangelists you hear nowadays, every single one of them. They're deceiving you.

Follow examples like these godly men who were put in the fire. Jesus, Peter, Paul, John, John Huss. These are the men.

These are my heroes. The missionaries who went out and suffered and gave up everything in order to bring others to Christ, whose life was devoted to delivering others from Christ, not just to make life comfortable for themselves. The people who, if they had extra money, they used it for God, not just for themselves.

Those are the people I want to follow. Those are the people I wanted to follow from my childhood. And I've decided that I don't care how other Christians want to live.

It's not my business to judge them. They can go whichever way they like. But I've decided I have to answer to God for my life.

I can tell other people how they should live, whether they listen or not. That's up to them. But I don't want to have any regret when I stand before my Savior.

I don't want to shout empty, thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord, over there without living for him right here on earth.

Oh, no. All my thank you, Lord, will sound hollow when I remember in eternity, when I say, thank you, Lord, how I lived on earth for myself. But it's not going to be hollow because I decided I'm not going to live for myself.

I'm going to follow these people. And I'm not going to be fooled by the gospel that's being preached nowadays in the world around me. I know that God allows us to be humiliated.

Why does he allow us to become weak? Why doesn't he make us strong? Why did he make Paul weak with a thorn in the flesh? The Old Testament, Samson, when the spirit of God came upon him, he was so powerful, he could kill lions. But the New Testament, Paul, when he's filled with the spirit, he's weak. Have you understood this? God says, my ways are not your ways.

Isaiah 55, verse 89. God says, my way of thinking is completely different from yours. He allows us to be humiliated.

He allows us to be weak instead of strong. We don't like to be strong. But it's because we are so strong that we sin so much.

The weaker you are, the less you will sin. I'll tell you that. You know, I've heard people tell me this.

I've said this before. Oh, brother, I'm so weak. I still get angry.

I say, brother, you're not weak. You're strong. You need to become weak.

And here's the example I always use. Here's a strong man who goes into the hospital. He's got all types of aches and pains.

And he's yelling at the nurses and cursing the doctors. And he's angry, angry, angry, angry. One week later, he's become a little weaker.

The drip and all, and he's not so angry now. You go and see one week later, he's got no complaint against anyone. When was he angry? When he was weak or when he was strong? Tell me.

Clear. Don't ever say, oh, brother, I'm so weak. I lose my temper.

No. Say from today, I'm so strong, brother. That's why I lose my temper.

Ask God to put you in a hospital with a drip for two weeks. You'll lose your, you'll get to overcome your anger, at least for a short time. But there's a better way.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit and choose the way of the cross. Choose the way where God allows you to become weak. You choose to be weak.

It's like Jesus saying, I have power with one word to call 72,000 angels to come and fight these soldiers. Have you read in the book of Kings? How one angel came from heaven and killed 185,000 soldiers in one night. The king of Assyria sent his soldiers, Sennacherib.

185,000 soldiers were killed in one night. Can you imagine 72,000 soldiers? I mean, the entire Roman empire would have been destroyed. Not just those few soldiers who came to capture him in Gethsemane.

But he said, I won't call them. There's a song about that. He could have called 10,000 angels.

But he died alone for you and me. That's weakness. Weakness is not when you don't have power and people oppress you.

When you have power and you don't use it, that's the type of weakness Jesus had. See, if you're a beggar on the street, you have no power over anything. People oppress you.

That's no great. There's nothing great there because he can't call even one person to help him. But see this verse in 2 Corinthians 13.

2 Corinthians 13. And you see, these Corinthians were taken up with whatever was the equivalent of the prosperity gospel in those days. They thought the great thing is to trust the Lord and become rich and famous and big and all that.

And Paul says, you guys, you haven't chosen the way of the cross. That's why you're babes. You're babes because you haven't chosen the way of the cross.

And that's why you're defeated by sin. And he says now, verse 3, since some of you have been demanding proof that Christ speaks through me, OK, I'll tell you how he speaks through me. Jesus was crucified because of weakness.

Have you read that? What weakness did he have? He wasn't physically weak. I believe Jesus was a strong man. Imagine if you worked as a carpenter with your own hands for 12, 13 years, you'd be very strong.

And he wasn't weak physically. He wasn't weak intellectually. He wasn't weak emotionally.

He wasn't weak spiritually. In what way was he weak? He chose not to retaliate to the people who attacked him. He didn't fight back.

He chose not to call the angels. He chose to be weak. You choose not to reply the way the other person speak to you.

You can if you want. He called you a bad name. You got 10 worse names than that, that you know from your unconverted days stored up in your memory.

But you won't use them. You're stronger than that other person, but you won't use your strength. That's what it means to go the way of the cross.

I can call 72,000 angels, but I won't call them. I can retaliate if I want to, but I will not. That's weakness.

That's the weakness Jesus chose. He was weak. That's why he was crucified.

If he was, if he had chosen to be strong, oh, the Roman Empire would have been wiped out. But here he was, the soldier hammering the nail into his head, laughing, making fun of him. He doesn't say anything.

Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. And so he says in this new covenant, because we follow Jesus, we also were chosen.

We are weak in him. I'm not trying to show that I'm some type of Samson or some type of David who can drive the Philistines out. No, no, no.

I'm not following David. I'm following Jesus who was weak, who chose to be weak, who chose not to use power that he had. He could turn stones to bread, but he wouldn't use it.

No. And because he lives by the power of God, not by my own power. See, most of us live by our own power.

That's why we get angry. We lust and we do all types of wrong things. But if you choose to be weak and say, Lord, I want to live by your power and not mine, we will live with him because of the power of God.

And that's why Paul's life was such a tremendous blessing. The power of God directed towards the Corinthians. And then he says, you Corinthians, now let me ask you, test yourselves.

Do you have this type of faith? Do you have this type of solid faith? Examine yourselves. And I would say the same to you. Have you got this type of faith that you heard of today where you can even die and the Lord doesn't come to rescue you? When Daniel was in a lion's den, hundreds of hungry lions and none of them could touch him.

But you know, in the Roman audit, in those Roman, those open stadiums, when they threw the Christians to the lion, the lions just ate them up. Where was the God of Daniel? The God of Daniel was still there. But these were new covenant Christians, not old covenant Jews like Daniel.

And they were going to be, they were going to glorify God while the lion would open the mouth to bite off this fellow's neck. He'd be singing praises to Jesus. That was wonderful.

That glorified God more than if God shut the mouth of those lions. And you know what used to happen in those Roman amphitheatres? These Christians would go singing the praises of God and everybody expected them to be scared like all the other heathen when they were thrown to the lions. And they would sing praises to God and the lion would eat and they would praise the Lord and somewhere standing in the amphitheater, some guy would be convicted and say, I also want to be a Christian.

And they say, throw him down to the lions and they throw him also. That's how some people got, became Christians those days. Not by some wonderful preaching or by some prosperity gospel.

They saw a man being eaten up by a lion and praising the Lord and they got converted. That was solid conversions. Not like these cheap type of conversions we see today where people are half converted.

No, I believe that's the type of Christianity we need to demonstrate in the world today. God allows us to weep. God allows us to be perplexed also.

You know perplexity is also a mark of weakness. In the Old Testament, God would speak to people, go here, go there. I simply read in the Old Testament, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah so clear, word for word for word, he could speak to people.

But in the new covenant, it's not like that. You know, we wonder, is God leading me? We live by faith, you know. The older we grow in the Lord, I found that in my younger days, guidance seems to be so clear because I was a babe.

You know, like when we teach children, brush your teeth, go to bed, have a shower. Every little thing. But as they grow up, we tell them less and less and less and less.

I mean, you don't tell your grown-up children, brush your teeth, have a shower, change your clothes, no. And as we grow up spiritually, God has to tell us less and less and less and less. That's what assured me that I don't hear guidance so clearly.

And the Lord says, that's because you're grown up. You want me to tell you to brush your teeth and go to bed and all that now? No, I've grown up. And the Lord says, I know you can take care of yourself.

And so I seek God's will, I don't have an answer. And the Lord trusts me to take the right decision, even though I don't get an answer from heaven. Boy, I'm encouraged.

I say, Lord, this is wonderful. This is better than God speaking from heaven saying, OK, Abraham, do this. OK, Elijah, do this.

I'd rather have this way. This is what it means to walk by faith. He allows us to be perplexed.

Even Jesus, the God of Gethsemane, he was struggling. Father, what is your will? What is your will? He never asked us to go through what he didn't go through himself. So dear brothers and sisters, when we go through this way, the fire of various sorts, let's come forth as gold, proving that our faith is not some cheap faith that's interested in earthly things.

It's genuine stuff that's going to glorify God in our life and make us a tremendous blessing to other people before we leave this earth. Let's pray. Let's bow our heads before God.

I don't want anybody here to feel discouraged this morning. The word of the Lord is not to discourage you, but it's to alert you so that you live the rest of your life no longer for your own selfish desires, but for the will of God. Don't feel bad about the rottenness you see in your nature because all of us have got the same nature.

Say, Lord, I hate it. I want to turn from it. I want to live for you in the coming days.

I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Help me to overcome and get light on my selfishness. Help me to get light on my pride and help me to humble myself and deliver me from being preoccupied with myself.

Help me to seek your kingdom first. Guide me. Lead me, Lord.

And I pray that you'll be able to hold me up, Lord, before Satan as one who can go through the fire and give me grace when I go through the fire to be an overcomer. Lord, I believe you'll help us to be ready for the days to come here in India. Thank you, Father.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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