

John 19:17-27

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?"

— Luke 9:23-25 (KJV)

Bearing The Cross

We've all heard the phrase, "Pick up your cross daily." It's such a common saying in the church today, that it seems to have lost its weight and meaning. I've often asked myself, "what does it mean to pick up my cross daily, and how do I do that?" I believe the answer can be found here in this passage of John.

The crucifixion of Jesus is a story we have heard so many times, and I would even push to say that if one ever becomes tired or bored with the message of the crucifixion of Christ, either the one preaching is preaching poorly, or the one listening lacks the understanding of the weight of this story. All of Scripture is centered around this one event of the perfect Sacrifice coming to redeem God's people. The prophets pointed and looked ahead toward what they did not yet know, and it is our job today to share in the disciples' responsibility of reminding others to look backward to what we now know— that is, the cross.

When Christ was en route (quite literally) to redeem His people, John makes a remarkable statement, "... He went out, bearing His own cross" (v. 17). This is such a powerful verse that it caused me to stop reading and just meditate on that phrase. It's worded in such a way that makes it seem as though John were trying to tell us something.

When Christ told His disciples to "pick up their cross daily," He was not commanding them to live a life of asceticism in which they would practice severe self-discipline and deny themselves of all indulgences, but was instead calling them to deny temporary

pleasures in pursuit of a higher pleasure and greater joy. Sin is at our door, and the Bible even likens Satan to a lion who prowls about roaring and seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus is telling us we must resist the devil and rather than pursue worldly pleasures, which are temporary and will pass away, we must deny those things in pursuit of something greater. What is this thing that is greater? It is to live as though this world is not our home, to live as though we serve a being who is more powerful than anyone or anything in this world, and to serve and obey the creator and sustainer of all things. This does not mean we can't have good jobs and make good money, or get married, or go to school, but it means we must place everything as subject to God's will and law. We serve and obey God first, and if we are doing that first and foremost, then it will cause us to examine everything we do, and the way we live our lives, to ensure that God is our master, not the things of this world. Picking up our cross daily means denying sin and temptation, not allowing anything to come before our pursuit of Christ and obedience to Him, and choosing to humble ourselves in everything to serve others.

What happened when Satan tempted Jesus? He tried to get Jesus to go after the things of this world. What did Jesus do in response? He submitted first to God and denied the things of this world. Satan tempted Jesus with bread; does that mean that eating bread is sinful? Jesus ate bread for the last supper; so what does this mean? It is not sinful to eat bread insofar as it does not cause you to place provision before obeying and submitting to God. Satan wanted to distract Jesus from His meditation and submission, and Jesus denied this. When Jesus had finished being tempted, the angels ministered to Him and Jesus ate. I say all this as a reminder that "denying ourselves" isn't letting go of everything we enjoy, but instead making everything in our lives come second to serving and obeying God.

Jesus bore His own cross. In Hebrews, we read,

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." — Hebrews 4:15-16

When Jesus commands us to deny ourselves and pick up our cross daily, we can trust Him in that, because He can sympathize with us in our temptations. He denied the temptation to go to the Father when He was tempted and submitted to God. “Not My will, but Your will be done” are the words that Jesus prayed in the garden to the Father before being led away to trial. If Jesus gave up temptation and (literally) picked up His cross, and if He can sympathize with us and empower us, should we not trust Him and follow after Him?

Sermon Notes

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. What are some ways in which Jesus denied the pleasures of this world and picked up His cross (besides being tempted by Satan on the mountain)?

2. What are some other ways Jesus can sympathize with us besides the picking up of our cross?

Go

1. What are some ways in which you can pick up your cross daily?

2. What is something that you believe has been taking precedence over your submission to God?

Group Discussion Questions

1. When you hear of the crucifixion, how does it make you feel? Have your feelings about the cross changed over time? If so, how?

2. Describe what you know about a crucifixion. Why do you think God chose this to be the form of death for Jesus?

3. What do you think it would have been like for Mary as she stood at the foot of the cross? When Jesus makes arrangements for her care, what does this show about Jesus' character and His concern for His mother (and others), particularly in times of loss?

4. Is there any particular loss that you are currently grieving? How can your group pray for you?

5. As you meditate on the crucifixion, how would you like for God to change your heart towards His suffering and death? Ask your group to pray for you.

Additional Reading

From *Deny Yourself for More Delight* by John Piper¹

What does it add to the command of cross-taking when Jesus precedes it with “Let him deny himself . . .”? It adds how we can do this most difficult task. Something must happen to us for us to be willing to take up our cross. Notice that Jesus introduces here a new self. If I deny myself, there is the “me” who is denying myself, and there is the “me” who is being denied. There is a denying self, and a denied self.

What’s the difference? When the old, denied self looks at the opposition, shame, suffering, and death Jesus calls for, it says, “No! I will not do that!” That old self loves human approval, honor, comfort, and life more than it loves Jesus.

But the new, denying self says to the old world-loving self, “You are not in charge any longer. I love Jesus more than human approval, honor, comfort, and life. So, I am ready to endure opposition, shame, suffering, and death. There is more gain in following Jesus, even with suffering, than there is in walking away from Him, even with ten thousand earthly benefits.” That’s the way the new self talks.

You are a new self. Act like it. Deny the old, comfort-craving self and embrace the superior joy of knowing Jesus, no matter how high the cost on this earth.

¹Piper, John. “Deny Yourself for More Delight.” *Desiring God*, 30 May 2017, www.desiringgod.org/articles/deny-yourself-for-more-delight.

John 19:28-30

“Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

— Isaiah 53:12

Mission Accomplished

John 19:28-30 is a very small passage of Scripture, yet it holds some of the weightiest material and perhaps one of the most significant events in all of history. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, has given up His spirit and died, thus completing the entire work of redemption. The Greek word meaning “finished” in this passage is *tetelestai*, the last word of Jesus on the cross in this Gospel. The Greek form here indicates that the action has been totally completed, coming from the word that means “end” or “goal.” *Tetelestai* has been found in historical manuscripts being placed on receipts for things such as taxes, meaning “paid in full.”

What is the significance of Christ accomplishing all things in full? First, we see that Christ freely gave up His spirit. His words, “It is finished,” were not a groan, but rather a proclamation of triumph. His spirit was not taken from Him, unwillingly, by the Father. He was the victor over death, not the victim of death, like the rest of mankind. Christ had sovereign control over every aspect of His life, death, and resurrection. When we arrive at verse 28, all things had been accomplished, except for one prophecy. Psalm 69:21 says, “For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” So, the soldiers gave Jesus wine to drink. Even they were under God’s divine control. There were numerous times throughout Jesus’ life on earth when Satan attempted to end Him, but because Christ’s hour had not yet come, it was unsuccessful. However, it was not just His life that was over. He was concerned about purpose, as well. His mission was now over.

Secondly, through Christ's death, Satan was defeated and sin was destroyed. Everything the law of God required, everything foreshadowed by symbolic ceremonial law, full atonement for sin, was done. The wages of sin were settled, and the ransom was paid. There is nothing we can do to add to this work on the cross. No good work, no baptism or other sacrament, religious ritual, nor any amount of self-righteousness can supplement what Jesus did for us. He accomplished His purpose. Christ died to atone for sin, to save sinners. This is the divine purpose of the death of Christ. What a victory!

Sermon Notes

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. What makes the death of Christ unique?

2. In what ways does the knowledge that Christ paid our debt affect the way we live our lives?

Go

1. How would you explain the significance of Christ's death to an unbeliever?

2. In what ways does Christ's death offend modern audiences?

Discussion Questions (please note that these questions pertain to John 19:31-42 as well)

1. Think of a time you finished a project you planned and worked on for a long time. Share the details and how it made you feel when you completed it.

2. At the end of His suffering on the cross, Jesus declares, "It is finished." What does this mean and why is this significant? How do you think Jesus felt when He made this declaration?

3. John mentions several times in chapter 19 that the crucifixion events fulfilled the Scriptures. Why was this important? How might this strengthen your faith?

4. Who made arrangements for Jesus to be buried? Why was this an act of courage? What do you think this revealed about their faith (see John 3)?

5. How would you like for God to increase your faith and courage in Him? Ask your group to pray for you.

Additional Reading

From *Jesus Paid it All* by John Piper¹

We should beware of distancing ourselves from these words, of assuming that we are far removed from their relevance in our twenty-first-century world. Instead, we are beckoned to draw near, to hear the Savior say to us, again, through the description of his ancient pains,

Child of weakness, watch and pray. Find in me your all in all.

Your all in all, Jesus might say. Your only hope. Which means, to bring it home a little more, Isaiah 53 is for you. Can you feel the weight of these words? Do you sense the wonder of what Jesus has done for you?

Jesus has borne your grief. Your sorrows are the ones he carried. Your transgressions—all your sins—were the ones that pierced him, the ones for which he paid. For you. He was crushed, viciously slaughtered, for your iniquities. It was a slaughter you deserved—a punishment reserved for you—that he took upon himself, in your place, so that you get peace. By his wounds you have been healed.

Jesus has died, and he has died for you. The stain of sin that marred your life has now been washed white as snow. He has paid your debts. All of them. Jesus has paid it all. He has paid it all.

And so what do we do? We trust him. We look forward to that day when we will stand before his throne, repeating the wonder that he died to save our souls. Yes, we will trust him today, and forsake the foolish pursuits that used to consume our lives. We will stop condemning ourselves for past sins. We will relinquish the shame we've harbored for so long and we will abandon our self-absorbed efforts to make ourselves worthy. We will turn from our sin, we will trust him, and we will sing. We will sing and,

Praise the One who paid our debt, and raised our lives up from the dead.

Yes, we will sing, both now and forever.

¹Piper, John. "Jesus Paid It All." *Desiring God*, 21 Feb. 2016, www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-paid-it-all.

John 19:31-42

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

— Zechariah 12:10

He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. — Psalm 34:20

Mundane Meets Sovereign

This passage is striking in the way that it juxtaposes the mundane details of everyday Jewish life with the fulfillment of Scripture. By combining these two things, we can draw conclusions about our own lives. First, the mundane. After Jesus died, it was up to His friends and followers to figure out what to do with His body. They had to figure out when and where to take Jesus' body. They were up against the clock with the Sabbath hour drawing near. Once they had answered the question of where to put the body, they then had to prepare it for burial. Again, this required the logistics of getting the proper materials, and then actually doing the work of wrapping Jesus' body. There are so many parallels from our own lives that can be extracted from this passage: sometimes the work is unpleasant, sometimes it is unexpected, sometimes we feel ill-equipped, sometimes God sends helpers to minister alongside us. I cannot imagine what was going through the minds of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two men who witnessed the ministry of Jesus, as they prepared Jesus' body for burial. This was their savior. They had believed Him, believed in Him, and now He was dead? I think many of us can relate to the mix of emotions we sometimes feel when God calls us to seemingly impossible tasks. When grief is real and immediate, we still have to fulfill the task to which we are called. Sometimes it is easy to see the mundane details of our lives as having no connection to the sovereign work of God.

But hopefully, in this passage, you can see that God orchestrates even the most mundane aspects of our life to bring Him glory, and He is always faithful to equip us with what we need to complete the task, whether it be the logistical details, the materials or the friends to come alongside us to help.

Second, the fulfillment of Scripture. If you have been a Christian for any length of time, or maybe a short amount of time but have attended Easter services with a nagging relative in the past, you are likely familiar with this passage. And familiarity can often cause complacency when it comes to reading the Bible. However, this passage perfectly displays how Scripture supports Scripture. How the seemingly meaningless prophesy of the Old Testament is fulfilled in this very moment. I often wonder if the prophets of the Old Testament really understood the words God directed them to write? Or, because of their faithfulness, they simply wrote down what God revealed to them, trusting it would be fulfilled at some point in the future, likely when they were no longer alive. When Scripture is reinforced by Scripture it should stop us in our tracks. It should take our breath away because this is evidence of God's hand throughout history, proving that nothing is ever random. Fulfillment of Scripture is proof that, in God's kingdom, nothing is lost, nothing is wasted, and nothing is too small a detail for God to take note.

So, as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus worked out the logistical details of Jesus' burial, they were just a small part in God's larger story. They were following in the footsteps of men like Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah, who were faithful to God in the midst of uncertain times. Throughout the course of your days, you will likely bump up against a lot of mundane acts. Never allow yourself to believe these acts are without meaning or are things that God cannot use to tell His bigger story.

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Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Can you think of a situation or circumstance that felt meaningless at the time, but which you look back on now and see God's faithfulness and the bigger story He was writing?

2. Does Scripture still stop you in your tracks or take your breath away? How can you fight complacency with the Bible as you mature in your faith?

Go

1. In what "mundane" areas has God called you to be faithful to Him?

2. How do you think God can use our faithfulness to Him to reach an unbelieving world?

Discussion Questions (please note that these questions pertain to John 19:28-30 as well)

1. Think of a time you finished a project you planned and worked on for a long time. Share the details and how it made you feel when you completed it.

2. At the end of His suffering on the cross, Jesus declares, "It is finished." What does this mean and why is this significant? How do you think Jesus felt when He made this declaration?

3. John mentions several times in chapter 19 that the crucifixion events fulfilled the Scriptures. Why was this important? How might this strengthen your faith?

4. Who made arrangements for Jesus to be buried? Why was this an act of courage? What do you think this revealed about their faith (see John 3)?

5. How would you like for God to increase your faith and courage in Him? Ask your group to pray for you.

Additional Reading

From *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers¹

Never choose to be a worker for God, but once God has placed His call on you, woe be to you if you “turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (Deuteronomy 5:32). We are not here to work for God because we have chosen to do so, but because God has “laid hold of” us. And once He has done so, we never have this thought, “Well, I’m really not suited for this.” What you are to preach is also determined by God, not by your own natural leanings or desires. Keep your soul steadfastly related to God, and remember that you are called not simply to convey your testimony but also to preach the gospel. Every Christian must testify to the truth of God, but when it comes to the call to preach, there must be the agonizing grip of God for that very purpose. How many of us are held like that?

Never water down the Word of God, but preach it in its undiluted sternness. There must be unflinching faithfulness to the Word of God, but when you come to personal dealings with others, remember who you are—you are not some special being created in heaven, but a sinner saved by grace.

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”-Philippians 3:12-14

¹Chambers, Oswald. “Is There Good in Temptation Comments.” *My Utmost For His Highest*, utmost.org/held-by-the-grip-of-god/.

John 20:1-18

*Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine
on you. — Ephesians 5:14b*

Day-by-Day, I Rise

The setting is a key element to understanding any story. The setting of a story gives the reader a world to live in. It provides context, atmosphere, or even mood. The setting of every story is found in Genesis 1. After the introductory sentence we read this detail:

*And the earth was formless and void and darkness was over the
face of the deep.”*

From the beginning, there is a chaotic darkness. The Hebrew words *tohu, vavohu*, are translated “formless and void” in the verse. This means chaos. Chaos is connected to darkness (Hebrew word *choshek*), and it is the state before God starts creating. Graciously, God speaks, and as He speaks, He creates order and beauty. He commands light. This is the creative power of God’s Word working with the Spirit. God speaks into the darkness and overcomes it with light. God’s Word is Light.

John’s gospel explains more of this setting. He asserts that it is Jesus there at the beginning, and He, with God, is the one who was creating and shining (John 1:1-5). He is “the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.” We learn much as we slow down and consider the figures or symbols of light and darkness in the gospel of John. We learn the problem is that we have chaotic darkness within us. We love this darkness; we love this sin or unbelief or independence from God. We love to get our way. We inherited this through the Fall (see Genesis 3.) Graciously, Jesus speaks to us and calls us to the Light, to Himself, throughout this story where He promises to send His Spirit as our helper. This story doesn’t end at the cross, at death, or ever. He recorded this story and has preserved it for us. Every word of the gospel of John shines for us as we look in to see more and more, as we read each word, sentence, paragraph, and chapter. Truly, truly:

Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

— Ecclesiastes 11:7.

Perhaps it is no surprise for the reader, when the setting of the morning of the resurrection is described as the “dark hours of the morning.” Mary Magdalene searches for the body of her dear Jesus in a dark setting. As she looks and sees and invites others into this search, we see the revelation of the living Son of God dawn in the disciples’ hearts and minds. They wonderfully see and believe that Jesus has risen. I wonder and imagine if they do this as the literal sun is rising in the sky. Darkness (figure for the grave, sin, Satan) is literally and figuratively overcome—once and for all. “The Light did shine in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” This is the good news of the story.

Considering this setting of my story within this story, this world of dark and light, chaos and order, this atmosphere and mood of the world in which I abide teaches much. Within me there is still darkness. I often love the darkness. I walk about in the “darkness of the morning.” I fight for my own way and think I know best, but God is gracious to shed light into my mind and heart. He has told me I am not as wise as He is. I do not know the beginning from the end. My thoughts and ways are nowhere—*infinitely nowhere*—near as high and holy and excellent as our good, good Father’s. God has given me the story of dark and light, of chaos and order, to read and remember, and He has given me a liturgy of life, an evening and morning to experience.

May I connect the two?

Day-by-day I rise.

Do I rise and reach for the light--the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the person and work of Christ? (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Do I remember the setting of my story, the context, the world in which I live? (Genesis 1:1-3)

Do I set my feet on this ground and walk in the light as He is in the light? (1 John 1:7)

Do I scrub out my mouth which flows from my heart and begin preaching the truth that He who did not spare His own son but freely gave Him up for us all, how will He not with Him graciously give me all things? (Romans 8:32)

Day-by-day, help us to rise, O Lord.

Sermon Notes

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Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. What are some spiritual disciplines you can add to your daily schedule to help remind you of truth?

2. What does the resurrection tell us about God's purposes?

Go

1. How would you explain the significance of the resurrection to a non-believer?

2. What are modern stumbling blocks to believing the resurrection?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when God did something amazing in your life—when your weeping turned into joy.

2. Peter and John go to the tomb but find it empty. How do you think they felt at the time?

3. After rising from the dead, Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene. Why do you think He chose to appear to her first?

4. Jesus is alive! Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important to the Christian faith? (See 1 Corinthians 15 for help.) When has Jesus' resurrection particularly been of encouragement to you?

5. Jesus has the power to rise from the dead (and raise others too)! What is a miracle you're longing to see Jesus do for you? Spend some time as a group in prayer for these things.

Additional Reading

From *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself* by John Piper¹

Until the gospel events of Good Friday and Easter and the gospel promises of justification and eternal life lead you to behold and embrace God himself as your highest joy, you have not embraced the gospel of God. ...

The best news of the Christian gospel is that the supremely glorious Creator of the universe has acted in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection to remove every obstacle between us and himself so that we may find everlasting joy in seeing and savoring his infinite beauty.

The saving love of God is His doing whatever must be done, at great cost to Himself, and for the least deserving, so that He might enthrall them with what will make them supremely happy forever, namely, himself. Therefore, the gospel of God and the love of God are expressed finally and fully in God's gift of Himself for our everlasting pleasure. "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

¹*God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself*, pp. 37, 147, by John Piper, Crossway Books, 2005.

John 20:19-31

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.” — Proverbs 3:5-8

“And he said to them, Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” — Luke 24:38

Wounded Hands to Doubting World

Doubt is something we all experience. “I doubt it’ll be sunny tomorrow” one might say, or “I doubt the Atlanta Braves will win this game.” In every experience of doubt we are making a claim that two things have happened. First, we are claiming that we do not believe something will take place, and secondly, we are claiming that we have been given good reason to come to this conclusion. Doubt is not always a bad thing. In fact, when we doubt something we should indeed doubt, it can lead us to wisdom and a successful life. But if we doubt that which is true, we are setting ourselves up for disaster.

Being aware of how belief and doubt operate is essential when discussing God. The Lord has come to us with a long list of claims about how the world works, how we work, and what He plans to do with the future. God calls us to believe His claims not for His sake, but rather for our good. Belief and doubt lead to action, so when we doubt the words God has given to us, we will be led to a more foolish and painful life than what God desires for us.

We cannot pick and choose what we want to believe about God. Logistically speaking, if He’s perfect His claims will be consistent. Picking and choosing what we

want to believe will lead us to do ungodly actions. For example, when we state we believe God is good but God isn't all powerful, we are led to anxiousness because we believe God wants the best, but can't follow through.

By doubting God, we call Him a liar and we proclaim to the world that He is untrustworthy. When we doubt something to be true, and believe to have good reason for that belief, we will do things that act out that doubt. By the grace that God has given us, I want to encourage you to trust Him; not blindly, but by looking at the wounds of Jesus Christ. Ask if your doubt is present for a legitimate reason. Feel and believe all that Jesus has done for you, but trust Him to lead your life.

Sermon Notes

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. What are some truths in the Word you have a hard time believing?

2. In what ways are you tempted to doubt?

Go

1. What truths in the Bible are hard for people to believe?

2. What are some ways you would help a believer in the midst of doubt?

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you were really surprised.

2. The disciples were certainly surprised to have Jesus visit them. How did Jesus ease their fears (see Luke's account in chapter 24 for additional help)?

3. Once Jesus showed His hands and feet to the disciples, He commissioned them. How was this commission different from other gospel accounts in Matthew 28:18ff, Mark 16:14ff, and Luke 24:45ff?

4. Thomas doubted Jesus' appearance and demanded proof. When was a time you doubted the Lord and wanted proof? What happened?

5. Even though Jesus didn't have to, He still appeared to Thomas and did exactly what Thomas desired. What does this reveal about Jesus' character? How might this encourage you when you are struggling with doubt?

6. What is the promise at the end of this account? How might this promise provide strength and hope to you today?

Additional Reading

from *Lay Aside the Weight of Doubt* by Jon Bloom¹

In the race of faith that Jesus has called you to run (Hebrews 12:1), doubt is a weight you simply can't keep running with. You've got to drop it. Today.

But first, let me explain what I mean by doubt. Doubt is not synonymous with unbelief in the Bible — at least not complete unbelief. The Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus were full unbelievers (John 10:26). But the man who cried out “I believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24) was not a full unbeliever, but a doubter.

Peter gives us a picture of doubt when he walks on the water with Jesus and then begins to sink. Jesus says to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31).

So doubt is not the complete absence of faith. It's faith laden with weights of unbelief, which threaten to sink us. This is why Jesus responded to doubters like the man in Mark 9 or Peter in the water or Thomas after the resurrection (John 20:27) with firm but gentle rebukes calling them to stop disbelieving, while issuing blistering rebukes to the Jewish leaders (Matthew 23:33).

Going back to the metaphor of Hebrews 12:1, are you running with the weights of doubt?

I've just recently been laying aside sinful doubt-weights again. I have certain doubts that I have laid down repeatedly over the years and seem to have a tendency to easily pick back up. Sometimes I'm not even conscious I've done this till I recognize a certain kind of soul-fatigue being caused by doubt that certain promises of God are true in my case.

The longer we carry these doubt-weights the stronger their power over us becomes. We are often tempted to think that carrying the weights is a more “real” and intellectually respectable way to run. But carried long enough, they get heavier to

¹Bloom, Jon. “Lay Aside the Weight of Doubt.” *Desiring God*, 12 Apr. 2013, www.desiringgod.org/articles/lay-aside-the-weight-of-doubt.

the point that we wonder if the whole race is worth it or is, in fact, real after all.

If that's you, don't fool around with them any more. Drop them!

But how does one lay aside doubt-weights?

The first thing we do is repent. Doubt must be dealt with like lust or any other unbelief that infects our faith. Jesus's word to us is "repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Don't be content to just tell Jesus how you're struggling. Repent! Call doubt what it is: a distrust of God. Repentance has amazing power to break the spell of a sin weight.

The second thing we do (which Jesus says in the verse above) is believe. Remember what Jesus said to Thomas? "Do not disbelieve, but believe" (John 20:27).

Believing is a simpler thing than we often want to make it. I've just re-realized this truth. After tolerating certain lingering doubts for a while, putting them in the category of struggling against sin, I let go of them (i.e. laid them aside). And I was surprised (again) by how simple it was. It was not a rigorous intellectual exercise. It was simply obeying Proverbs 3:5-6.

John 21:1-14

*I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I
in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can
do nothing.* — John 15:5

Depending on God

Scripture does not detail Peter's reasons for going fishing, but we know Peter was a skilled fisherman. He and his fellow disciples were proficient in the trade and probably expected to find success. But that night they caught nothing (John 21). Then Jesus called from the shore and told the disciples to do something strange—draw up their nets. The disciples obeyed and their nets filled up with fish. John turned to Peter and exclaimed, “It is the Lord!” (v7)

This passage highlights the need for dependence on Jesus. Professional fishermen could not catch a single fish after toiling all night, but with obedience to Jesus' command, they were abundantly successful.

How humbling! It seems easier to embrace dependency on Jesus when I know I do not have what it takes to succeed. It is much more difficult to believe what He says in John 15:5—“Apart from me you can do nothing”—when I feel capable, like I can do something for myself. This unsuccessful fishing trip makes the words of John 15:5 cut even deeper, because we see that apart from Jesus, we cannot do even the things we think we can do for ourselves. Thank God that, even in our insufficient helplessness, He calls from the shore (v6), enables us to obey, reveals Himself (v7), and invites us into fellowship with Him! (v12)

John 21:1-14 echoes Luke 5:1-11; in both cases the disciples labored all night and caught no fish. In both cases Jesus commanded them to do a strange thing, the disciples obeyed, and the nets were filled with an abundance of fish. Jesus told the disciples they would be fishers of men, and the disciples left everything--boats, nets,

and fish--to follow Him. (Luke 5:10-11) If professional fishermen needed to depend on Jesus to catch fish, how much more do we need to depend on Him to be fishers of men?

Jesus' call to follow Him as fishers of men is consistent with the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

— Matt 28:19

He ends this command with the greatest assurance:

And behold, I am with you to the end of the age.

We can fully depend on and lean into Christ who is faithful, trustworthy, and with us to the end!

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. What areas in your life do you tend to rely on yourself instead of on God?

2. What are assurances or promises in Scripture that encourage you to depend on God?

Go

1. Jesus commanded His disciples to lower their nets in a manner that professional fishermen may consider foolish. What are some commands of Jesus that your non-believing friends and family may consider foolish?

2. How does being God-dependent influence the way you interact with family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors?

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a fun fishing story? Share it with the group.

2. Talk about this fishing story in John 21 as a group. What sticks out to you about the situation, the miracle, the disciples' response, etc.?

3. When Peter realizes it is Jesus, he throws himself into the sea and swims to shore. What does this reveal about Peter's heart for Jesus?

4. When was a time you "threw yourself onto Jesus"? What was the situation?

5. Jesus enjoys breakfast and conversation with the disciples. How would you long to commune with the Lord today? Spend some time praying for another as a group.

Additional Reading

From *A Prayer for Turning from Self-reliance to Dependence on God* by Scotty Smith

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. 2 Cor. 1:8-11(NIV)

Dear heavenly Father, there are some lessons in this life of grace I seem to have a hard time remembering, or at least accepting. My limits and insufficiency are certainly two of them. The magnetic pull of the “cult of competency” is always lurking. Forgive me for not wanting to need the gospel, your Spirit, and community as much as you say I do.

Thank you for the gift of Paul’s story. Thank you for an apostle of grace who boasted in his weaknesses that Jesus might be the hero. Thank you for the model of a lover of God who was utterly dependent on the God he loved. I want to follow Paul as he followed Jesus.

So, Father, as this day begins, I forsake the illusion of my competency and cast myself on you, the God who raises the dead— beginning with Jesus. I’m not facing deadly perils, but I am facing people I love that I cannot fix, injustices in the world that I cannot right, old lingering wounds that I cannot heal, stubborn addicts that I cannot rescue, an aging process that I cannot reverse, cold marriages that I cannot thaw, and my own heart that I cannot change.

Grant me grace to accept my limits and faith to trust you more; and a greater willingness to let friends enter my struggles and carry my burdens. I know you to be the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; I want to know you that way much, much more. So I pray, in Jesus’ kind and grace-full name. Amen

¹Smith, Scotty. “A Prayer for Turning from Self-Reliance to Dependence on God.” *The Gospel Coalition (TGC)*, The Gospel Coalition, 8 Jan. 2015, www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/scotty-smith/a-prayer-for-turning-from-self-reliance-to-dependence-on-god/.

John 21:15-19

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." — Luke 7:41-43

Loving the Lambs

This passage emphatically shows us the depths of Christ's love, both for Peter and the church. On the night of Christ's betrayal, Peter, who had previously boasted "I would lay down my life for you" (John 13:37), denied even knowing Jesus. He publicly denied Jesus three times. In this narrative, we are a fly on the wall listening to what's likely to be one of their first major interactions after the resurrection. Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?...Do you love me?...Do you love me?" Peter, offended at being asked multiple times, answers "Yes...Yes...Yes." His three affirmations of love for Jesus remind us of His three denials of Jesus a few weeks prior. Commentators commonly refer to this exchange as the reinstatement of Peter because we see Jesus forgiving Peter and inviting his companionship once more.

Jesus then charges Peter with the task of feeding and taking care of the church. Much attention has been paid to the fact that the passage uses two different Greek verbs for "love," but, as DA Carson points out, this is probably more due to narrative style than it is to deep, hidden theologies of love within the Gospel (Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 676-677). The more important point is that Jesus plans for and cares about the birth of the church. Prior to His death (John 17), Jesus prays for the church. And here, after His death and resurrection, Jesus plans for the church. He charges Peter with shepherding the church— a task that he faithfully carries out until his martyrdom about 40 years later.

In this one interaction, Jesus loved Peter by reinstating him. And by reinstating Peter, Jesus loved the church.

Sermon Notes

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Why did Peter need to become reinstated?

2. What does this interaction help us see about the character of God?

Go

1. What does this passage teach us about forgiveness and restoration?

2. What comfort do we draw from this interaction?

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you experienced a relationship being restored. What were the circumstances? How did you feel?

2. Jesus seems to give Peter a “re-do” in this conversation after his denial. Talk about the similarities. What does the “re-do” reveal about Jesus?

3. After Peter says that he loves Jesus, Jesus tells Peter to feed His sheep. How does this show love? How might you show your love for Jesus in this way?

4. Jesus then tells Peter how he will die. Why do you think Jesus does this? How do you think Peter’s death would glorify God (v. 19)?

5. Sometimes following Jesus requires great sacrifice. What way do you believe Jesus is calling you to sacrifice to follow Him today?

Additional Reading

From *Commentary on John 21* by John Calvin¹

The Evangelist now relates in what manner Peter was restored to that rank of honor from which he had fallen. That treacherous denial, which has been formerly described, had, undoubtedly, rendered him unworthy of the apostleship; for how could he be capable of instructing others in the faith, who had basely revolted from it? He had been made an Apostle, but it was along with Judas, and from the time when he had abandoned his post, he had likewise been deprived of the honor of apostle-ship. Now, therefore, the liberty, as well as the authority, of teaching is restored to him, both of which he had lost through his own fault. And that the disgrace of his apostacy might not stand in his way, Christ blots out and destroys the remembrance of it. Such a restoration was necessary, both for Peter and for his hearers; for Peter, that he might the more boldly execute his office, being assured of the calling with which Christ had again invested him; for his hearers, that the stain which attached to his person might not be the occasion of despising the Gospel. To us also, in the present day, it is of very great importance, that Peter comes forth to us as a new man, from whom the disgrace that might have lessened his authority has been removed.

¹John Calvin. *Commentary on John 21*. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/john/21.htm>

John 21:20-25

If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.
— John 12:26

Follow Me

The Gospel of John ends where the earthly ministry of Jesus began, with the call to “Follow Me” (v. 22). The essence of Christianity is following Christ. The totality of salvation can be described as believers being shaped into the image and likeness of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:29, Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10). To follow Christ sums this up, because to follow Christ is to be like Him—to live lives conformed to His image. In Matt. 4:19, to follow Christ means to become a “fisher of men” (i.e., become a disciple-maker). In Lk. 9:57-62, to follow Christ means to renounce one’s former life and commit oneself to the Kingdom of God. In Matt. 16:24-26, to follow Christ means to suffer with Him and to give up living one’s life for this present world. In Christ’s day, to follow Him literally meant to leave homes and family in order to walk with Him wherever He went, and even today in His physical absence, to follow Him means to obey the Spirit as He calls individuals to certain vocations and ministries. The call of Christ is to pursue other-worldly living: to free men by catching them, to live for the Kingdom of God while residing in the kingdoms of this world, to pursue life by dying.

With that consideration in mind, one might think that “following Christ” is only for the spiritually elite, for those who never fall into complacency and cowardice, for those who never struggle with disobedience or compromise. It is a great encouragement, then, to find the risen Lord giving this familiar call to follow Him to a man whom He had called in similar fashion years before but who since then had denied Him on three occasions. As the Good Shepherd, Christ calls His flock to follow Him wherever He goes (10:27), but when they inevitably stumble and stray, He corrects them with gentleness and guides them back to His path.

In this context, Peter was once again demonstrating spiritual immaturity, becoming

more concerned with the fate of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, than with his own spiritual calling (vv. 20-21). But once again, the Lord lovingly corrects him, essentially saying to him, “What does it matter to you what I have in store for him? If I want to keep him alive until I come, what is that to you? You are only responsible for your own spiritual progress— you follow Me.” Apparently, the Lord’s words didn’t stop a rumor from going out among the early Christians that John would never die— a rumor which John is quick to squelch in v. 23 (tradition tells us that John did in fact die at the end of the first century). But the emphasis of Jesus is still clear: His followers must be more concerned about their own spiritual progress than how well they compare with others. While believers must always be quick to minister to the needs of others (Gal. 6:2), their particular responsibility is to be concerned with their own growth in Christlikeness and how faithful they are being to following Christ (Gal. 6:5). When there are times of complacency and faithlessness, and it is time to fulfill this duty, there is grace and forgiveness— and the Good Shepherd is always there to call His own back to Himself. “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavily-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

[illegible]

Treasure

1. Read through the passage two or three times.
2. Write down 10 observations about the text. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why/how?

Grow

1. Where do you see yourself most lacking in obeying Christ's call to follow Him?

2. In what ways do you find yourself, like Peter, comparing yourself to the lives of others rather than looking only at your own spiritual progress?

Go

1. In what ways would obeying Christ's call to follow Him have an impact upon your family, your workplace, your school, your neighborhood, etc.?

2. Are there specific ways you feel the Spirit calling you to leave certain comforts in order to follow Christ?

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever heard your child say, "But what about them?" Share what happened.

2. Peter has a "but what about him" moment. Why do you think Peter wanted to know about John's future?

3. In what way(s) have you compared your life with others? How does it help or hinder your walk with the Lord?

4. John tells us that there are many things Jesus did that he did not record. What is something He has done for you?

Additional Reading

from *Take My Life and Let It Be* by Frances R. Havergal¹

Take my life and let it be

Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Take my moments and my days,

Let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move

At the impulse of Thy love.

Take my feet and let them be

Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing,

Always, only, for my King.

Take my lips and let them be

Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,

Not a mite would I withhold.

Take my intellect and use

Every pow'r as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine,

It shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart, it is Thine own,

It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour

At Thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself and I will be

Ever, only, all for Thee.

¹*Take My Life and Let It Be* Frances R. Havergal, 1874

