

Wit's End

by Lewis Gregory

The Christian life is easy, and it's all about allowing Christ to be Himself in us and freeing us to be ourselves in Him.

Duration: 28:52

Scripture: Matthew 14:22

Topics: "Giving Up"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his own experience of feeling out of control in life. He emphasizes that human efforts to gain control only reinforce the fact that we are ultimately out of control. The speaker then shares a personal story of how he was asked to sing a solo at a large gathering, despite feeling inadequate. As he sang, the presence of the Lord came upon the audience, leading to powerful experiences of conviction and healing. The speaker also draws a parallel to the story of Peter walking on water, highlighting the importance of taking risks and stepping out in faith.

Transcript

Writing the letter to us, about ourselves, and it's really the letter that would say this to all who've tried and failed. Which of course includes how many? All of us. On numerous occasions.

Too many to remember, and most of which we don't want to remember. Alright, let's pray. Lord, I thank you that as we have tried and as we have failed, it's not the end, but it can be the beginning.

And Lord, no matter how it's felt in the past, or how we've perceived you in the past, I pray this day you would open our eyes to behold the wondrous truth from your word, that you are a loving Heavenly Father, and that you are for us, and never ever against us. And we praise you that as the resurrection of the life Lord Jesus, you would now raise us up, restore us, renew us, and make us whole in Jesus' name. Amen.

You know, there's an account of a similar experience to what Dave has told us, and it's found in Psalm 107. In Psalm 107, the psalmist portrays the drama of trying and failing. But he does it by telling us a story about fishermen, and about a time when they went out on the sea to fish, and were overwhelmed because the storm was so severe.

So Psalm 107, in verse 23, says, They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commands and raises the stormy

wind, which lifts up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths.

Their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. They're at their wit's end.

And being at your wit's end is not a bad place, but it's a good place, it's a necessary place. Now tragically, we all too often, too many times, come to wit's end, but it doesn't end there. Unfortunately, we just take another lap around Mount Sinai like the Israelites had to do.

They went seven times around, and they never really got the message, so they kept trying harder. As Dave indicated, the tendency is we come back, we beat ourselves up with what's called self-condemnation, because you see, the accuser of the brethren, that old serpent, the devil, has come again to put us down. And once he comes to put you down, immediately the thought is, uh-oh, I really am a bad person, I've got to do something about this.

And so we redouble our efforts, we try harder, and we think we need, if we could just do more, whatever more might mean to you. And so we've all tried to do so many things, so much harder, so much better, only again to what? To try and fail. And so in the end, we assume, so often, there's something wrong with me.

In the final analysis, we come to conclude, well, I must be a reject. And so many times, there are those of us who have actually kind of dropped out of the Christian scene, because we've concluded, God rejected me, I gave it my best shot, I couldn't do it, there's no sense going any farther, I'll just forget it, and I'll move on. Except we're still miserable, we're still empty, still dissatisfied.

And he says here, their soul is melted because of trouble. Now, there's two things I want to say about wit's end. There is the wit's end to end all.

And that's the first wit's end we've really got to come to. And there are the everyday wit's end, where we come to life situations, and we just find ourselves in a momentary impasse. Both wit's end ultimately come to the same conclusion, and that is, while I am hopeless, and while I am helpless, the Lord God enables me, empowers me, to do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

So suddenly there is this realization that being at wit's end really puts me in the right place for the Lord Jesus, who lives in me, to do what He came to do in the first place, which was to live His life through me. In other words, just to be my life, just to be Himself in me. As Dave pointed out, me trying to do for Him was never the plan.

The whole purpose and plan of the law, for example, was to give us a standard that showed us it's humanly impossible. So don't beat yourself up because you've tried and failed, except the fact that you're a failure at living life. Not a failure, but a failure at living life.

That's all, because it was never a life that we were designed to live. Never, ever. Not from the day one of the garden, when they first fell that first time.

It was always about human flaw, human weakness, so that we then, as the containers, would contain the divine life of God in Christ. And now we have the inner strength to enable us to go and do and be everything God intended us to be, and enjoy it. And enjoy it.

You know, He gave us all things freely to enjoy. But how many truly enjoy life? Life becomes a drudgery, life becomes a duty, we find ourselves just kind of grinning and bearing it. This is not the life Christ died for.

This is not the life He comes to live in us. No, He calls it abundant for a reason. It's a life that's full, full of Him.

It's a life of meaning, and purpose, and joy, and peace, and all the other beautiful things that He Himself is, when He's free to be Himself in us. So, look at what He says in Psalm 107. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man.

Now, sad to report, but I have been that person before. And it's a terrible place to be. I remember in the Navy, I was going to be cool like all the others.

See, I went in the Navy when I was 17, but I only went active when I was 18. And I found myself with all these guys who really could, quote, hold their liquor. And so, they would go out when we got off the ship after a long cruise out in the ocean.

They immediately wanted to hit the bars and party time. So, I went out there with them, but I couldn't hold my liquor. So, when I came back, I could barely make it back to the ship.

I'm like staggering around and had to have people help me. And when I got on the ship, I fell down the stairs, and to worry I didn't get killed, except, of course, the goodness and mercy of God, because He had something more in store. But, you know, I was staggering around because I had no sense of control about myself.

I was out of control. And what we have to come to grips with in life, as we're dealing with everyday life situations, and we keep hitting the wall, and we keep failing and falling, is just accept the fact. Humanly speaking, we are out of control.

And every effort we do to try to get in control, or to maintain control, further reinforces the fact we're out of control. It looks good, and some of us are very gifted at strong will, and a lot of clear minds and disciplined emotion. And we can keep it in for a long time.

But sooner or later, somewhere, somebody, what? The straw that what? Yeah, man. And so we have horses that eat straw, and I look at those horses, and I'm thinking, like, what is that, eat straw? But one straw, just that one last bit of weight, overloads our system, and we blow it. We blow it.

But God doesn't blow us up because of that. Because, you see, as a loving Heavenly Father, He's waiting for us to get to the place where we finally get, you know, in a boxing match, they tell the guy, when you're finally beat up, don't get up again. You're just going to get knocked down.

Just stay down for the count and accept it. You're done for. You've lost.

And we all have to accept the fact that when it comes to living life, we're losers. We just haven't done the job. The best among us, the most accomplished among us, is still a failure at living life.

I mean, studies have been done of some of the most wealthy, successful, prominent leaders in business. And yet many of them, in the end, become so depressed, they end up taking their own lives. Because the success in the eyes of this world is no success at all if it's not done in Christ and by Christ.

And so otherwise, it means nothing. It's just stuff. It's just one more thing we've got, one more notch on our belt, one more achievement or accomplishment, but it hasn't fulfilled us, hasn't satisfied us, can't gratify us, certainly can't glorify God.

You know, there's a similar story to this in the Gospel of Mark. And I'm sure your minds go there when you read this passage we just looked at. From the Gospel of Mark, Jesus takes the disciples on a boat ride.

I love to get out on the water on a boat. And so he took them on a boat ride, because it's beautiful out there, it's peaceful, it's quiet. But not this day.

Now I want you to think about the fact that Jesus led the disciples into a storm. We get all ruffled about the possibility that he might do something like that to us. But the storm is not to destroy us.

Oh yeah, it's going to tear the hide off of us. It's going to rip off of us that old fleshly dependency. It's got to break the shell of the outer man, so the inner man of Christ in us can be liberated.

And come forth. And be manifest as the source and strength of our life. But as long as we rely upon the arm of flesh, it's not going to happen.

So they're out there on the sea, and the storm comes up, and they are all overwhelmed. Now these are experienced seamen, and they know what to do. Just like the Psalm 107 account.

Those men know what to do. But they were at their wits end. Which means to say, they had done all they knew to do, done all they could do, saw no hope, and no way out.

They were stuck. They were at the end of the end. And it's at that place, the wits end to end all, when they finally give up.

Totally give up. And so we see the account here of how these men had to come to that place. And you know, notice they discover there in verse 38, Mark 4, and where was Jesus? He was in the back of the ship asleep, but He was in the boat.

They had forgotten about Him in the busy work of trying to do what they knew to do. And think about this. When they brought Him on, they took Him and brought Him on, and they said, Now Lord, you kind of sit back here out of the way, because we don't need you now.

This is our thing, man. We are experienced seamen. We know how to handle a ship.

This is what we do for a living. We're pros. Professionals.

Seamen. Or so they thought. You know, it's interesting, when they came around to Him, they discovered, hey wait a minute, Jesus is still here.

He hasn't gone anywhere. See, it looks like He's gone. So when He feels far away, it's not that He left you.

If you've ever received Him into you, as Dave clearly pointed out, you've been joined to Him. You're in a union with Christ, and that's an inseparable bond. So He's in you, it's just we lose sight of Him.

We become oblivious to Him, or indifferent to Him, or we're so busy doing our thing that we neglect to realize His presence, but He's there, available to us, waiting on us to just give up, so He can take over. And so in that moment, as the disciples are there, they discover Him, and the beauty of the Lord is, He

never comes to put us down, but always to pick us up. Putting down is the job of the old serpent, the devil.

That's called condemnation. And again, as I mentioned, that's the work of the accuser of the brethren. To accuse means to find fault with you and put you down.

But Jesus comes by His Spirit to convince, which simply means convince. To say, hey, you are down. Think about Peter, when he was called to step out of the boat.

Here they are. Then another storm, and Peter is in the boat with the others, and they're trying to keep body and soul together and survive, because they think they're going to drown and die again. And Jesus comes walking on the water.

All familiar with the story. We focus on the fact that Peter went under. Well, the first thing I say about Peter is, hey, good for you.

You walked on water. Anybody else here done that one? Pretty rare to find somebody that's done that. Very rare.

But he did walk on water. Now here's the beauty of really what happened there. When he went down and went under, what did Jesus do? Did He say, okay, forget it, loser, and leave? Did He say, well, one more failure, no hope with him, on to someone bigger and better? No, He didn't do any of that.

And yet sometimes that's what we think. We think that's how He feels toward us. We begin to feel like He's so far away that surely He couldn't care about us, because we've blown it so bad.

How could there ever be hope for us? But what did Jesus do? He reached down. He picked him up. He put him back together again.

Got him out of that drowning condition. Didn't hold him under. Didn't put His hand on him and hold him under and say, serves you right.

He just brought him up, got him a hold, and they ended up at their destination. Took him where he was supposed to be. How beautiful.

What a loving Heavenly Father we have. He never ever puts us down, but always picks us up. So understand that conviction simply means convinced to show us our need, to make us aware that we have fallen, we have failed.

But He's here to pick us up and put us together again. And so these men were floundering. And it says there in Psalm 107 that when they cried out in the midst of their distress, they cried to the Lord and He brought them out of their distress.

To cry out to the Lord is not like, Lord help me momentarily. That's not a real cry of desperation. You see, being at your wit's end means you're desperate.

And you're not going to try anywhere else or do anything else. See, when I was after being Christian 10 years, I finally came to wit's end. I thought I'd been there before because I'd been to other crisis situations and I would try, I'd fail, and I'd find some way to get through it, and then I'd move on.

And things looked like they were better. And I looked like I really was getting it good. In fact, I had so many attaboys that were always coming around, patting me on the back, saying how good I was doing.

I thought, man, I really must be doing good. And I'd look at the other people around and I looked better than them. And so I thought, well, gee, this must be as good as it gets.

And so I thought, I'm okay. Until, of course, I looked at the true standard of Christ and saw what a beautiful life He had. And then I'd try to imitate Him, you know.

Except there is no substitute for the real thing. No way. No way.

I love peanut butter. Imitation peanut butter will not get the job done. I love ketchup.

You know, in the Philippines, they mix banana with their ketchup. It sounds bad, believe me. And it kind of tastes bad, too.

Sorry for my Philippine friends that might hear this message. But it's just not the real thing. And mayonnaise, the artificial mayonnaise, no way.

It's bad. It tastes bad. Once you've tasted the real thing, you know the difference.

And we've tasted of Christ. And that's why there's something that stirs in us every time we try and fail that makes us more tenacious to try harder. But really, all we're wanting is to get back to that sweet taste of His life in us and the beautiful sense of the presence of a loving Heavenly Father.

And yet, it eludes us. And so these, it says that at the moment they cried out to Him, what happens at that point, and what happened with me was, after trying for so long and so hard, and yet outwardly looking better but inwardly feeling worse. And it's like the more I read the Word of God, the more I became acutely aware that I was a failure at living life.

And so finally, after blowing it again, and, you know, one of the ways that I would blow it is because I was a perfectionist, obviously sounds like it, doesn't it? And so as a perfectionist, I would not only want the best for me, but I want the best for my wife. And so the one I love the most, I would often hurt the worst. Or I'd hold it in for a period of time, and then pretty soon I'd tell her what for.

You know, this is not good enough, that needs to be done better, or, you know, something like that. So I would dump my frustration that I had on myself on somebody else. They became my target.

Because if I could, you know, if you can put somebody else down, you just naturally feel bigger and better. You don't have to move an inch. Just find something wrong with everybody else around you, and you'll rise to the top as the champion.

And you haven't done a thing, except being the number one loser that doesn't have sense enough to admit it, you know, like I was. Until finally that day, when in the midst of my frustration, and having, you know, we had this crazy argument, I don't even know over what. And so I stopped down the stairs.

We had this little bitty, little teeny house. And we had our mattress and box springs on the floor upstairs. And I went downstairs to sleep on our new couch, one of two pieces of new furniture that we owned.

But, you know, there's no substitute to sleeping next to your nice, soft, warm wife. And so I'm lying down there on this couch thinking, hey, wait a minute, what have I just done? I'm the one that walked away from this beautiful person who actually was willing to marry me. Can you believe it? No, I couldn't believe it.

And now I've just blown it, and told her off, and walked away downstairs to sleep on this cold couch by myself. You know? And so I'm thinking, how stupid can I be? And so then the next day, when she was gone to work, and I came home, because I was going to college at the time, I just crashed on the floor before the Lord. And for two and a half hours, I laid there and had this long heart-to-heart talk with Him.

Except, you know how it is, unfortunately, we spend most of the time talking and not nearly enough time listening. So I talked and talked and talked until I was talked out. And so I'm just lying there on the floor saying, Lord, I can't do this anymore.

And I refuse to try anymore. I can't live this Christian life. And I can't make you Lord.

See, there was a mindset in my era that, about Jesus as Lord, but you've got to make Him Lord. So I was trying to make Him Lord. But as I lay there that day on my face, crying before the Lord and saying, Lord, I'm just tired of this.

I can't go on like this anymore. And if you don't raise me up, and if you don't restore me, there's no hope for me. And then I finally got quiet.

I'm just laying there. I'm totally out. I'm like truly at my wits end.

I'm out of gas, out of steam, out of energy, out of words, out of everything. And I was just lying there. And as I was lying there on the floor, in the stillness of that room, the still small voice, and the thought came, Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 40, 16. Just be still and know I am Lord. And then the thought came, You can't make me Lord.

That's who I am. Who are you to think you can make me anything? We are the sheep of His pasture. Psalm 103.

It's He that made us, not we ourselves. So I can't make Him, and I can't make myself, but He can and has in Christ. He's made me the best that I can be.

And I've been trying to prove on God. And He's saying, That won't work. Impossible.

And so finally, I really and truly at wits end, ultimate end, I give up. I give up. And that's where He wants us to come to, in the ultimate wits end.

And then when we're at that place, and when we come to these daily times of an impasse, and a frustration, and not knowing what to do, we can just acknowledge Him in all of our ways, and He'll do what? Direct our paths. How easy is that? It is easy. The Christian life is easy.

It is absolutely easy. That's why Jesus said, My burden is easy, and my load is light. He's saying, Hey, it really is easy, if you let me do it.

If you just let Him be Himself in you. The simplicity of the Christian life is this. Allow Christ to be Himself in you, and He'll free you to be yourself in Him.

That's the beauty of life. It's called rest. The rest into your soul.

Yeah, physically, mentally, emotionally, you might still feel stuff going on around you, but inwardly, you'll be at perfect peace, and inward joy, so that you can rejoice in all things, and you can be content in every circumstance, even if you don't like it, don't understand it, or even agree with it. But just to rest in Him will carry you through every single situation of your life. But you've got to come to that ultimate wit's end, to the wit's end that ends all.

Then, you begin to live, no longer striving to be like Him, no longer struggling to survive, being more than a conqueror, enjoying the victory that's already yours in Christ. You know, we sing that song, I Stand in Awe of You, and it's a beautiful song. It goes back, but it's got an anointing.

There's a presence of God about that song. I went to Indonesia, and I ministered there, then I went to the Philippines, but I ended up in Africa. And while I was in Africa, there was a church there that was a pastor named Mamadou Karambiri.

And Mamadou had been a Muslim who converted to Christ. And he had become a very prominent leader. Well, anyway, he came to my home, we had a long time to share and pray, and he discovered that it was Christ in him that was a source of strength.

He had learned a lot of things about life and ministry, and was very successful in his country. He had a thousand average attendants in his church. But that following year, after him discovering that it was Christ in him, and being one with Christ as his life, his church exploded.

And by the time I got there, there were now 2,000 average attendants. And the thing was packed over, and they had outside lean-to type things, and people were sitting outside, 500 on each side. And I was in the service, preparing before it began, and the Lord said, I want you to sing a song.

And I was listening to some Christian music on a cassette tape, the old time stuff. And I was listening to this song, I Stand in Awe of You. And there was such a presence that began to minister to me through that song.

And the Lord said, I want you to sing a solo. Now, I had never sung a solo ever. I had sung in choir a little bit when I was younger, but never ever had a... And the Lord said, I want you to sing the song.

So, you know, it's like, OK, Lord, but I need to be sure. So, I said, I'm going to preach, and when you show me at the right time, I'm going to do it. But you just tell me again.

I've heard you here, but I've got to hear you there. So, I brought the cassette in, I gave it to the guy in charge of the music, and I said, Now, if I give you the sign, you play the song. So, at the end, I was going along, and everything was looking good, and then suddenly I remembered, I'm supposed to sing the solo.

And I said, Huh. OK. Now, that's the wit's end.

It's not the end that ends all, but it's a place of impasse. I'm humanly not adapted to singing, and certainly not to a crowd of 2,000. So, the Lord said, Do it.

So, I gave the guy the sign, he put on the tape, and I began to sing, and I stumbled a broken way. But as I sang, the Lord's presence came in such an awesome way upon that group of people. And they had this large campus.

They had buildings with offices and classrooms and all kinds of things. And there were some people, the office manager was working in the office, and the Lord came on him so strong, he began to weep, because he could just hear from a distance because of the loud speakers, and he ended up coming in broken before the Lord. There were two women over there, one of whom had been blinded in one eye through an injury, and suddenly she was healed.

Nobody was talking about healing, but she got healed. There was a young man walking down the street, totally unconnected to the church, but began to be drawn in as I was singing, and came in, and didn't even know what was going on. Actually, he thought maybe there was a soccer game they were watching or something, because they had to have big screens going on both sides so they could see me.

And when he got there and heard what was being done, the Lord just came upon him, and he gave his life to Christ. Being at wit's end is always a good place, because it just reminds you that your flesh is weak, and so be it. But the Lord is the strength of your life, and you are strong in Him.

So, just rest. Just give up. Just let it go, and let Him be Himself in you.

Let's pray together. Praise you, Lord. Lord, Lord, Lord, Great are you, Lord, and greatly to be praised.

Lord, we have heard a glowing testimony from Dave about how you met him at the point of his need, and how, Lord, in your goodness and mercy, you didn't come to put him down, but to pick him up. And, Lord, you're not here to just prop us up, but you're here to put us back together and make us whole in spirit, soul, and body. And, Lord Jesus, our privilege is to just accept that we are mere humans, flawed, failed humans, who have tried and failed, and tried and failed, and must accept the fact that we are all failures at living life.

There is only one who lives the Christian life. It is the Christ life, and only Christ can live it. So, Lord Jesus, we concede that you and you alone can live this life.

In fact, you alone can live any kind of life. There is no life apart from you, that's for sure, and this Christian life is impossible without you. But praise you, Lord Jesus, that when you come into us, we are no longer without you, nor are we anymore apart from you.

But now, because we're one with you, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Not wishful thinking, but simple truth and reality. So, Lord Jesus, we take this moment to pause at whatever stage we're in to just acknowledge again that our spirit may be willing, but our flesh is weak, utterly powerless, and we say, I give up, Lord.

I give up, and I refuse to try anymore. Lord Jesus, take me, make me the person you want me to be. I give you my spirit, my soul, my body, mind, will, emotions, all I am, all I have.

Just take me, Lord, and make me what you want me to be, and I thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are in me, and you're one with me, and therefore, I am strong in you, and in the power of your might, and I can do all things because you are the source of my strength. Thank you, Lord, for this day of life and joy in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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