

(Church Leadership) 14. the Way of the Cross

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of overcoming Satan through enduring in love and taking up the cross, highlighting the examples of Job, Paul, and Jesus.

Duration: 58:46

Scripture: Genesis 6:9, Job 1, Job 40:1-5, Isaiah 52:14, Isaiah 53:2-3, Isaiah 53:7, Isaiah 53:9

Topics: "The Cross", "Christian Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of following Jesus and taking up the cross. He highlights how Jesus faced constant hostility and was willing to shed his blood rather than sin. The speaker criticizes preachers who prioritize charisma and financial gain over the way of the cross. He shares his own experience of finding the right type of fish by focusing on following Jesus rather than using worldly methods. The sermon encourages listeners to imitate Jesus' selflessness and truthfulness in their own lives.

Transcript

Yesterday I mentioned that in the entire Old Testament, there is never one case of a person who fought the devil. They all fought with human beings. And that's one distinctive thing about the New Covenant, that now our conflict is with Satan.

And the first time that Jesus mentioned the church, is in Matthew 16, where he said, I will build my church, verse 18. The gates of hell will never overpower it. Why does God allow Satan to attack his people and his church? We probably understand only a little.

But certainly one reason is so that we can become strong. See, it's like this. You can never learn how to love your enemies unless you have enemies.

I mean human enemies, I mean. You can never know how to fulfill the word to bless those who curse you unless somebody curses you. You can't do good to those who hate you unless there is somebody who hates you.

So, when I love an enemy, something happens in me. I overcome something. I overcome a natural desire in the flesh.

If I did not have that opportunity to face an enemy or somebody who hated me, I would live without something being overcome. It's like a bit of education that I will miss out on. So, God allows Satan to exist so that we can be overcomers.

You know, in the book of Revelation speaks so many times of overcoming. Overcomer, overcomer, overcomer, chapter 2 and 3. And then in 21 it says, he who overcomes will inherit all things. But what are we to overcome? What are we to overcome? That is mentioned in Revelation 12, right in the middle, that we overcame Satan.

Jesus said in John 16, 33, I have overcome the world. And so, God allows the gates of hell, the powers of Satan to attack the church. They even attacked Jesus.

Not only with temptation, but physically when he was crucified. And the foundation of the church, the leader of the church was killed. How did he overcome? He overcame because he endured in love until the end.

So, I want to say to you, that's the way to overcome. If you can endure in love to God and love to human beings who hate you and harm you, then you are an overcomer. And we must believe that God wants us to be overcomers and he will help us to be overcomers.

And if we don't overcome, then we have no message to preach to the rest of the world. And we certainly don't have a message to preach to the rest of Christendom. Because we are living like them.

Defeated. But actually worse than them because we are preaching victory and defeated. That's what made the Pharisees worse than the Sadducees.

Because the Pharisees preached such a high standard. The Herodians, they didn't preach a high standard. So, you never find Jesus, he warned the disciples about the leaven of the Herodians, but he never spent his time criticizing them.

I don't believe Jesus wastes his time rebuking worldly Christians because they are gone. Because everybody knows that they are way astray. And the good thing about them is they don't preach any victory.

They don't pretend that they are overcomers. But Jesus attacked the Pharisees because they are the ones who pretended that they were very righteous. The Bible speaks about overcoming the world.

It speaks about overcoming evil with good in Romans 12. So, God will allow many circumstances to come into our life just like he allowed many circumstances to come into the life of Jesus. So that we can be overcomers.

That is God's will. God's will is that every one of us should be overcomers. Because that is how we are going to build the church.

You know, when all these churches had failed in Revelation 2 and 3, what did the Lord say to them? He didn't say, you fellows need more gifts of the Holy Spirit. Nowadays, we think that if you have more gifts of the Holy Spirit, we can do His work. I certainly believe all of us need more gifts of the Holy Spirit than we have right now.

And certainly, I would encourage you to seek for the gift of prophecy. Because the Bible says we should seek for it. A humble dependence on God and saying, Lord, unless you give me the gift of prophecy, I

cannot fulfil your purpose for my life.

And even though 1 Corinthians 14 says, to all believers, earnestly desire to prophesy at the end of chapter 12 and the beginning of chapter 14. Very, very important. But in between that, those two chapters, it says in chapter 13, I'll tell you the way, the more excellent way in which we should exercise these gifts.

And that is love. To be an overcomer, you have to endure in love until the end. He who endures to the end will be saved.

And when Satan attacks us, our life, our home or our church, that means 1st story, 2nd story, 3rd story, whichever floor he is attacking, we can be sure of one thing. Are we going to be absolutely convinced about this? If you are not convinced about this, you will not overcome. That's the promise of God in 1 Corinthians 10, 13, that he will never allow you to be tested beyond your ability.

I thank God as I look back over my life that God did not allow me to be tested in the first 10 years of my life with the things he allowed me to be tested in the next 10 years of my Christian life. He allowed me to be tested more and more and more and more as I grew older. And that, even if that verse was not in the Bible, I would have said, that's true.

See, Paul wrote it from his own experience. He says, listen, I have been a Christian 20 years and I have discovered that God has never allowed me to be tested beyond my ability. That's basically what he is writing in 1 Corinthians 10, 13.

So, it's like saying a teacher will not allow you to get a question paper in an examination which is beyond the class you are studying in. I have never heard of a teacher doing that. By mistake in some examination hall, if they opened the wrong cover and distributed the wrong question paper, immediately they will take it back if they have discovered it's the wrong paper.

They won't even allow them to do question number one. And if earthly teachers are so sensible, how can you ever say that any trial you face is beyond your ability to bear? God's word in every situation is, my grace is enough for you. See, 2 Corinthians 12.

You know, I would encourage all of you to study 2 Corinthians. You could title 2 Corinthians as ambassadors for Christ. And if you really want to know what it is to be a servant of God, read 2 Corinthians.

It's a wonderful book where Paul reveals the inner man that he was that made him a servant of God. And he had these fantastic experiences. So, he was in danger of being proud.

So, how does God humble him? It says in 2 Corinthians 12 verse 7, God allowed a messenger of Satan to torment him. Torment means to keep on troubling. Now, Paul never told us what the messenger of Satan was.

And when you read different Christian commentators commentating on this verse, people have said different things. Some people said, well, he had a very difficult wife. But I don't think that was true because Paul was not married.

But it could have been, they say, some person who was dead after Paul and wherever Paul went, harassed him and spread stories about him and got people wherever he went to trouble him. You may

face things like that. I have faced a little bit of that.

Or it could be a sickness which he prayed and prayed and he never got healed of. And I personally feel it was probably a sickness. But I don't know.

But the reason why it's not mentioned is so that it can apply to every messenger of Satan. Sickness is definitely a messenger of Satan. It's not a messenger of God.

The first book written in the Bible is the book of Job. Genesis was written by Moses many years after Job died. Anyway, I'm convinced that Job was the first book of the Bible written.

Because it's the only book among all the 66, which has no reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because he lived before that time. And so think of this, that when God decided, I'm going to write a book for man.

What does he write about? He writes about a man of God. Remember this. This is the first book God is writing for the human race.

And he's writing about a man of God. And he's writing about a man of God whom he can boast about to Satan. And he's writing about how in the heavens Satan is always accusing God's men.

Remember, first book of the Bible. And he's writing about a man of God who brought up his family in a very good way. Praying for his children regularly.

Bringing them up in God-fearing ways. A man of God who cared for the poor and did not make money his God. And a man of God who was a very rich man.

Many things that I'm just saying now will enable you to see how so many wrong concepts in Christianity. A lot of people think a man of God must be poor. If God chooses like that, it may be.

He chose like that for Jesus, Peter, Paul. Wealth is as important to being a man of God as intelligence. As unimportant.

Unimportant. As unimportant as the colour of your skin. As unimportant as your height.

Paul was 4 feet 11. You could be 6 foot 6. You can be a man of God. It makes no difference.

Height, colour, intelligence, wealth, nothing. It's something else that makes a man a man of God. I'll tell you, it's a hatred of sin.

It's a fervent love for God. And a compassion for people. This is what makes a man of God.

But if you are a religious minded person, you'll think some of these other things are important. So, okay, let's go back to the first book. Here is a story of a man of God.

Attacked by Satan. Attacked so severely, he destroyed his family and his business. And the story of a man of God who overcomes and comes through triumphant over that.

And the man of God who justified himself, justified himself till God had to shut him up. Teaching that a man of God can be proud. What I have said so often, the easiest thing in the world is for God to bless a man, but the most difficult thing is to keep him humble after he has blessed him.

That also you see in the first book of the Bible. He was blessed, that was easy. But to make him humble after he is blessed, boy, what a job God had to do that.

The first book of the Bible is about a man of God who had a very difficult wife, showing that a man of God may have a difficult wife. That also sometimes people have a wrong concept in Christianity. That a man of God must have a beautiful, very happy wife and have a wonderful marriage.

May or may not be true. Like I said, it's like intelligence, color of skin, height. These things don't make a man of God.

Good wife, bad wife, makes no difference. Man of God is quite different from all this. So, we got to get all these ideas out of our head.

And that's what we see, a man of God who went through severe trial. I mean, such as I have never heard in my entire life anybody going through that. And isn't it interesting that when God decided to write the Bible, he wrote about such a man first.

First chapter of the Bible, first book. I said, that teaches me something about what God wants to communicate to us. The last book is Revelation.

That speaks about overcoming too. And that speaks about also Satan attacking the saints and killing many of them, raising up the Antichrist and raising up forces to attack God's people. And many of God's saints are killed, but they overcome Satan.

So, we can say that this is what God is trying to communicate to us. That he wants men of God about whom he can boast to Satan about. And he wants to date churches that he can boast to Satan about.

So that, even homes that he can boast to Satan about. Not necessarily happy homes. But God can say to Satan, like he said, have you considered my servant Joe? Perfect and upright man.

I could amplify on that. Who has such a difficult wife. Satan, have you seen? He's got such a difficult wife.

You see how he lives there? You know, to some of us, if God boasts, Satan will say, yeah, he's got such a good wife. It's not a great thing that he's a holy man. Well, we thank God we've got good wives, many of us.

And God can boast about our relationship there too. But you know, like a torch shines more clearly in the darkness. Same torch, same amount of light.

But you put it in the sunlight, you hardly see it. But in the dark, it shines. So, in a home where there are many trials, the light of a man of God shines much brighter.

When you have a difficult situation in your church, the light shines brighter if you're a man of God. Or you're in a very difficult situation in your office. The torch will still shine.

See, a torch never says, oh, this is too dark, I can't shine here. So, whenever a man says, this office situation is so difficult, is it impossible to be a Christian here? Or my wife is so difficult, I can't be a Christian in my home. Or these people in my church are so impossible, it's impossible to be an elder to these fellows.

Then you're saying, Satan, you're right. You can't be an overcomer in some situations in this world. And that's where we let down God.

Remember the first book of the Bible, God is showing how he could boast about a man to Satan. And he's looking for such even today. And it also shows us that first book of the Bible that Satan is roaming around the whole world, examining, examining.

Like we saw in Genesis 1, God sees everything. Satan is also going around seeing with all his demons. To accuse.

Look at that. Look at that person. I'll tell you, darkness is the area given to Satan.

If you want to overcome Satan, make sure you never go into darkness. Here in 2 Corinthians 12, he says, this messenger of Satan tormented me. And he says, I pleaded with God, verse 8, three times, please, Lord, set me free from this.

He said, no, my grace is enough for you. This thing that makes you weak, in that I will manifest my power. Once he understood this great revelation, he says, I am perfectly content, verse 10, in weakness, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties, for Christ's sake.

Because what do these weaknesses do? Insults, distresses, etc. They make me weak. What happens when I become weak? Then I can lean upon Christ.

You know how we don't like to look weak before others. I thought about that myself. You see, supposing I have to take a cane and walk to the meeting.

Maybe a day will come like that one day, I don't know. But supposing I have to do it today. And everybody looks and says, oh, poor man, he's got to walk.

It's a bit humiliating. You know, we don't like to be weak. We like to stand as strong military people.

That's how Jacob was. But God gave him a dislocation of his hip that he had to have this cane and walk with this cane. And you know, in those days, people used to live up to 130, 150 years.

So, even if Jacob was 60, he was a young man. Imagine how humiliating it was for him to walk with a cane. Every time he gets up, anywhere, if he has to go to the next room, give me my cane.

Anywhere. All the time. Give me my cane.

Give me my cane. And God was teaching him, you got to learn to lean on me like that. And then you will be an Israel, a prince of God.

And that's why it says in Hebrews. It's amazing. You know, in Hebrews 11, we read about all these fantastic things people did.

Some of the most fantastic things we have never even heard of outside the Bible. Enoch going up to heaven straight without dying, verse 5. Noah, only family saved in the whole world through the flood. Abraham getting a son at the age of 100.

Moses splitting the Red Sea. Jericho, walls of Jericho pulled down by Joshua. Lion's mouth shut by Daniel.

Samson tearing lions to pieces. David killing Goliath. In the midst of all that, it says here about Jacob in verse 21.

What is the great thing he did? He leaned on his cane. Say, Lord, what's this? In the midst of splitting Red Seas and pulling down walls, one fellow is leaning on his cane. That was the greatest miracle in Hebrews 11.

When you can make a proud man broken, so that if he wants to go to the next room, he has to say, give me my cane. I'll tell you this, brothers. All your anointing, power of the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Holy Spirit, praise and worship, modern type of praise and worship, all your outreach, evangelism, everything, will never allow God to accomplish what he wants till you are broken.

You'll never become a prince of God till you are broken. I have met some wonderfully gifted brothers, anointed. I look at them and I say, not only in our churches and other places too, I see only one thing missing.

Poor man, he's not broken yet. What a regret he'll have in eternity when he discovers what God wanted to do in him in his earthly life. That's why when it says at the end of this Hebrews 11, we have something better.

By faith, Jesus. What did he do? Which red sea did he split? He rent the veil. He didn't split the red sea, he split the veil.

He didn't pull down walls, he pulled down the strongholds of Satan. That's what better thing God has provided for him. Moses made a way through the red sea, Jesus made a way through the flesh.

That's the better thing. So, I mean, think of the fantastic things that Jesus did like walking on the water and feeding 5000 on 5 loaves, raising the dead, 3 of them at least, and thousands of blind eyes and lepers healed. Can't you put all that here in Hebrews 12? By faith, Jesus did this, this, this, this, this, this, this, this, this, this.

That's what they boast about in today's healers. Is that the better thing? The better thing is he endured the cross. He despised the shame.

He endured hostility from sinners, verse 3. And verse 4, he resisted sin to the point of shedding his blood. That means he said, I would rather die than sin. So, what is the better thing? Where we have to follow Jesus running this race? All those fantastic miracles which none of these Old Testament people did are not mentioned.

If it had been mentioned here, then I would be seeking to walk on water. I would be seeking to open the eyes of every blind man I see on the earth. I would be seeking to heal every leper I see on the earth.

But all those things that Jesus did are not written here. You know, it's like if you tell a person now, brother, you know this great person, man of God. I mean, in 50, 60 years, he did so many wonderful things for God.

Can you tell me the two or three most important things in his life? What will they say about you? What will they say about these healers? He conducted meetings where 100,000 people came. Jesus also had crowds. Okay, we say to the writer of Hebrews, what is the Holy Spirit inspiring you to write about the

greatest things that Jesus accomplished in his life? Oh, he says, I can tell you that straight away.

He took up the cross. He didn't care for the shame of people. He faced hostility from all types of people around him constantly.

And above all, his attitude to sin was, I would rather shed my blood and die rather than sin. Those are the four most important things that comes to me. What about all these other miracles he did? Yeah, yeah, yeah, but that's not so important.

Have you seen it like that? What do you think God is after? Why does he say, let's run the race, fixing our eyes on this Jesus who went through like this? Now I want to ask you something. How many churches and preachers do you hear preaching these four things? You got to take up the cross. You must not care for the shame of people making fun of you.

And you may face hostility from all types of ungodly people all through your life. And you must be willing to die rather than commit the smallest sin. I have heard hundreds of preachers in my life.

I hardly hear anybody preaching that. And even some of the people who did preach it have stopped preaching it. That's sad.

People who preached it have stopped preaching it. So, that's why God has raised up a church to preach these things. And that's why we have been preaching these things for thirty years.

And we need to continue to preach it in the next generation. And it's very important that we emphasize these truths in the church, otherwise the next generation won't be gripped by it. Because this growing generation is influenced to so many other things and Christian television and the books and the meetings and all going on nowadays.

These are the things that are not emphasized here in nowadays. What's emphasized today? Really enjoyable emotional praise and worship. Nobody gets brokenness through that, I'll tell you that.

A thousand years of that will not break anybody. Miracles. Thousands of miracles don't break anybody.

Eloquent preaching, even that doesn't break people. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, who endured the cross, loved until the end, despised the shame. That's what it means to follow Jesus.

Jesus said, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. And I have seen that through the years. I don't have to fish for men.

If I follow this Jesus, my fishing hook will catch the right type of fish. You know, it's like these fishermen who go to fishing in the seas and the rivers. They don't want to catch these little fish you put into aquariums.

That's not what they're trying to catch. No, they ignore them. They say, oh, look at that fish.

Why don't you catch it? Ah, forget that. I'm catching the big ones. That's what we're doing.

We don't want to catch these little fellows who are just interested in praise and worship and making money and better car and better house. We're not interested in all those little fish. We want to get the big ones who are interested in being disciples of Jesus.

Oh, but they're so difficult to find, you tell these fishermen. Brother, you can spend your time picking up those hundred aquarium fish. I'm going to catch one of these.

At the end of the day, I caught one of them and you got a hundred of these aquarium fish. Have you read in the parable that Jesus spoke about the people who caught fish and brought it to the shore? What is the end of the story? You know? I'm sure you know. It's in Matthew 13.

What is the end of the story? They threw some of the fish away. Have you read that in Matthew chapter 13 and verse 48? They gathered the good ones and threw the other away. So, we don't want that.

But they brought it all in. People went and dragged every type of fish, it says. And I see that in Christendom today, fish of every kind are being gathered in this net.

There are so many preachers with their nets out. But I know what type of fish I want to catch. And to catch that type of fish, only Jesus can make me a fisher of such men.

And what technique shall we follow to catch them? You know, people study the methods of Coca-Cola company. How do they advertise Coca-Cola? How do the salesmen go out and sell Coca-Cola? Or some pharmaceutical company, how do they go around selling their medicines? Follow the same principles to preach the gospel. No, it's not that way.

Follow me. I will make you a fisher of the right type of man. Jesus caught eleven people.

But they turned the world upside down. I want to catch the right type of fish. And I can tell you numerous stories.

In my experience in the last thirty years, where I never went around looking for this fish, I concentrated on following Jesus. And of course, my fishing hook is over the boat all the time. I look at Jesus and go.

And all of a sudden, I find a tug on this fishing line. Hey, I fished it. And I pull it up.

It's a good fish. Then I go along for some more time, some other part of India or some other part of the world, or through the internet. And suddenly, there's a tug again.

I pull it in. Oh boy, it's a really good fish. And the wonderful thing I've seen is some of these fish become fishermen after some time.

That's a miracle that never happens in the world. And then we get more fish. Not many, but good ones.

Look at many of you sitting here. I remember a story. You probably heard me say this, of a lion and a rabbit having a talk with each other.

See, a rabbit gets children very quickly. I think, I don't know what their gestation period is, one month or something like that. And they get lots in one shot.

So, in one year, so many rabbits it produces. So, the little rabbit is sitting in front of the lion. He says, I got a hundred children last year.

How much did you get? The lion says, I got only one, but it was a lion. What do you want, a hundred rabbits or one lion? That's the thing. You want one disciple, wholehearted disciple of Jesus, or all these wishy-washy people who are only interested in superficial Christianity? A lot of people want to come to the

churches to have a good time.

Like people go to the drinking saloon to have a good time. They want to come here and have a good time. Good music.

Tell them nice stories. They go home, their problems are not solved. And the devil continues to reign.

I don't want to build a church like that. I don't want to catch fish like that. I've got only one life.

I cannot afford to waste it with all these trivial pursuits. Only one life and it will soon be past. Only what Christ does through me will last.

Not what I do for Christ. A lot of that will perish. But only what Christ does through me will last.

That which has come through my being broken and the mighty grace and anointing of God flowing through me, that will last. God spent thirty years crushing Jesus and then made the rivers flow through him. That's his way.

He spent twenty years breaking Jacob and made him into an Israel. He spent forty years crushing the mighty prince of Egypt, Moses. And then made him the greatest leader that Israel ever knew.

That's God's way. See this verse in Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53.

Most people don't understand it. There are so many wonderful things in this chapter that describe not only Jesus but a servant of God. It begins in 52.13. Behold my servant.

That's actually the beginning of Isaiah 53. Look carefully at my servant. Fix your eyes on this Jesus and see how he prospered.

See how he prospered. It was not with money. He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.

But not in the way the worldly people think, oh great preacher who is like a film star. This one is so different. He was so beaten up by others that on the cross, verse 14, his face did not even look like a human being.

Like the message Bible says, his face was so ruined and disfigured past recognition. Look carefully at this servant of mine. He doesn't look like a film star.

He doesn't have security guards around him to push away any crowds who want to come and touch him. He doesn't charge \$10,000 per meeting to come and speak. These are the type of preachers some of our people are admiring today.

Because they have charismatic gifts. Why are they being taken up with these people? I'll tell you. They have not looked carefully at God's servant.

Forty-two years ago, the Lord showed me the way of the cross. Three, four years after I was converted, when I was seeking for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, I thanked God that Jesus pointed me to the way of the cross and said, as long as you walk that way, you will have my power. The day you leave that way and think there is some other better way, my power will go from your life.

It's not only the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But the anointing of the Holy Spirit that leads you along the way of the cross, that's the way of power. And it's the second part that a lot of people today have missed.

Maybe they did have a genuine anointing of the Holy Spirit. But they haven't gone the way of the cross. So, the power is gone.

Look carefully at my servant. And Isaiah says, chapter 53 verse 1, Lord, who is going to believe this? I say the same thing today in India. Who is going to believe this? When they have got so many more entertaining things on Christian television, who is going to believe this? Who is going to understand that the way of suffering, the way of brokenness is the way of power? Who is going to see that this is where the arm of the Lord is revealed? Never mind them.

Ignore them. Follow Jesus, who it says in verse 2, grew up before his father. Like a root out of a parched ground and with no appearance that anybody would be attracted to him.

Despised and forsaken by men. Men hid their face from him. He was beaten, verse 7, and tortured, but he didn't say a word.

Look carefully. Follow him. And I like this translation of the last part of verse 8. The Message Bible says, He died without a thought for his own welfare.

Lord, make me like that. He died without a thought for his own welfare. How many leaders do you find like that? Who serve without a thought for their own welfare.

Whose passion is that the church will be built. Whose passion is that Christ will be glorified in India. In the last part of verse 9, he never hurt a soul.

And he never said one word that was not true. God, make me like that. That I'll never hurt a soul.

I'll never hurt a single person. I'll never say a word that's not true. Last part of verse 12, I'm reading from the Message Bible.

He looked death in the face and he did not flinch. And he didn't turn back. And he embraced the company of the lowest people.

And he took up the cause of all the black sheep. Lord, make me like that. The black sheep in families, Lord, make me take up their cause and lead them to Christ.

Lord, make me embrace the company of the lowest. The people whom other people don't want. Yeah, that's God's way.

And this lovely verse in verse 10. All along, God had this in mind to crush him with pain. Lord, is that the way you went? Are those your footsteps? Is this what it means when you are my forerunner? Why don't you get the right type of brothers and sisters? Why don't you come in contact with the right type of brothers and sisters? Why do you get all these wishy-washy half-hearted people? Here's the answer.

Follow me, Jesus said. I will make you fishers of the right type of men. You can't make yourself that.

He says, I will make you. He will make me. My job is not to look for the fish here and there.

I follow Jesus. And he just gets me the fish here and there. People say, we don't believe in evangelism.

We just do it another way. The way Jesus did it. Jesus didn't conduct mass crusades for evangelism.

He just went around life and he just came in touch with Zacchaeus here, a woman who had an adultery who needed to be saved. A Thomas, a Peter, a Matthew, different ones. He just went along his way following the father.

Let me exhort you brothers, follow Jesus. This real one. Let him break you and crush you.

And he will make us fishers of men. Let's pray.

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