

(The Full Gospel) 6. Married to Christ

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the importance of truth and faith in overcoming spiritual bondage and being married to Christ.

Scripture: 1 John 2:6

Topics: "Faith In Jesus", "Spiritual Freedom"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the importance of knowing the truth to break free from bondage. He emphasizes that feelings of condemnation arise from a lack of understanding the truth. Poonen encourages believers to persevere in their walk with Jesus, acknowledging that stumbling is part of the journey but getting up and continuing to run is crucial. He highlights the need to have faith in Jesus, who is like a solid bridge, rather than in our own abilities, and stresses the simplicity of faith in trusting Jesus to set us free from all bondage.

Transcript

"If you abide in My word, you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Every bondage in our lives comes because in some measure we do not know the truth. This may be either because we have not heard the truth at all or because we have not paid careful attention to it. It could also be possible that we have heard the truth, but understood it wrongly. All feelings of condemnation too are the result of not knowing the truth.

Many young people especially are hesitant to become disciples of Jesus, because they feel they will not be able to hold out (endure) until the end. And so they think that if they make a public confession of being a disciple of Jesus, and then slip up and fall in some way, perhaps by losing their temper, or by lusting, they will be mocked by others and then regret that they ever confessed the Lord publicly at all. Thus the devil keeps them unconverted forever.

But no believer is perfect. No-one on earth can claim that he is walking at all times as Jesus walked. "He who abides in Christ must walk as Jesus walked" (1 John 2:6). That is certainly our goal. But yet we all stumble now and then as we press on toward that goal. James, the chief elder in the church at Jerusalem, admitted that he too stumbled occasionally ("WE ALL stumble" - James 3:2).

But what should we do when we slip up or stumble? Get up and continue to run.

No-one quits school, just because he failed once in a Chemistry test. No. He will attend special classes and seek to pass in the next test.

When we fail, let us be honest about it and confess our failure to God and mourn about it. God is not populating heaven with perfect people but with honest people.

In my own life, the promise of Jesus in John 6:37 ("He who comes to me I will certainly not cast out") has been like an anchor for 36 years now. For many years prior to that, I had been tossed about, wondering whether Jesus had accepted me or not. I must have asked the Lord to come into my heart a hundred times in my teenage years. But I always wondered whether He had actually come into my heart or not. One day in simple faith in this promise of the Lord, and without any special feelings at all, I said to the Lord, "Lord I believe You have accepted me." My assurance has been unshaken since that day.

But that promise applies not only when we come to the Lord the first time. It applies as long as we live on this earth. I find that I need this verse today, just as much as I did when I was first born again.

Maybe you did not get time to read your Bible this morning. Or perhaps you failed in some other way. Don't you think you need to come to Jesus again? Do you think He will reject you? Never. Come to the Lord and He will not only accept you but also lead you to a higher degree of glory than you have experienced thus far.

But we must not forget that we receive from the Lord "according to the measure of our FAITH". Faith puts all of us at the same level. If the Lord had said that we would receive according to the measure of our knowledge, or our wealth, or our goodness, then intelligent and wealthy people would have had an advantage over the others. Those who are naturally good in a human way would also have had an advantage over those who have a naturally difficult temperament. That's why God has made faith the way, because that puts us all at the same level.

Let me illustrate what having faith really means. Consider two bridges across a river - one a rickety wooden bridge made of weak sticks and the other a strong concrete bridge supported by many pillars placed into the river-bed? Why is it that you can walk with confidence over the concrete bridge but would be afraid to step on the rickety wooden bridge? It has nothing to do with your ability to believe. It has only to do with the type of bridge you are walking on.

In the same way, our faith is to be in Jesus Christ who is like a solid concrete bridge), and not in our own ability to believe. Even if we are weak, we can walk across, because we have faith in the bridge and not in our abilities. The trouble with many of us is that our faith is very often founded on our own faith - and our faith is as unreliable as a rickety wooden bridge!

Such faith would be equivalent to working up a strong mental feeling of confidence in ourselves and then trying to cross the river on the rickety bridge. Half way across the bridge, the bridge would collapse and we would drown. That is what happens when we have faith in our own faith. But what difficulty is there in having faith in the strong, concrete bridge. It does not matter how turbulent the water in the river is. We can still cross the river over that strong bridge, without any fear.

Or consider another example. When you walk on a road that goes under a railway track, do you ever worry that the bridge might collapse and the train might fall on you and crush you to death? Do you have to be a great man of faith to go under such a rail-bridge? No. Hundreds of people walk underneath it daily.

Their faith is not in themselves, but in the strength of that bridge.

Faith is as simple a matter as that. When your faith is in Jesus Christ, you don't look at your own faith - YOU LOOK AT JESUS.

How many there are who insult God by fearing that the devil might harm them in one way or another? Therefore they never accomplish what God wants them to for fear paralyses them. They could be compared to a man standing forever beside that concrete bridge, fearing that he might fall into the river. Thousands cross the bridge fearlessly, with no more faith than he has. But since he does not look at the bridge, but at his own faith, he is paralysed. And so he never reaches the other side.

Do you see now why faith is so important - and so simple? The Lord is asking you now, "Will you trust Me? If you do, I can set you free from every bondage"

The Christian life is essentially very, very simple. Many of us have misunderstood what God expects of us. We know we can come to Jesus freely, initially. But after we are saved, we feel somehow that the Lord expects us to be perfect before we come to Him now. But He still assures us saying, "If anyone comes to me I will certainly not cast him out."

Remember that - wherever you go. Whatever the difficulty or problem that you may be facing anywhere, tell the Lord. "Lord I believe You will never cast me out. I come to You." Trust Him and see the miracles that God will do for you.

To those who have been hesitant for a long time to make a real commitment to the Lord, because of the fear that you may not endure until the end, I say: Tell the Lord that you want to be His disciple. You may fail. But if you fail, get up and continue to run. If you fail in a test, do it a second time. If you fail again, do it a third time - or the twentieth time - or even the ten-thousandth time. But don't let the devil make you quit school. Be determined to pass. I assure you that you will pass.

Jesus taught us to forgive others 490 times in a single day (See Matthew 18:21, 22 along with Luke 17:4). Do you think He would forgive us also that many times in a single day? It would be impossible for Jesus to ask us to forgive others 490 times every day and not forgive us that many times Himself. Then let us trust Him totally.

Two Types of Bondage

Let us look at the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead and see TWO types of bondage that most believers are in.

First of all, Lazarus was in bondage to death. He was so dead that a terrible stench was coming out of his body. This was so bad that they did not even want to open the grave (verse 39). But Jesus set him free from that bondage.

Secondly, after Lazarus came out of the grave, He was in the bondage of his grave-clothes. But Jesus set him free from that bondage too.

So we see three stages in Lazarus' deliverance:

First stage: Dead and stinking

Second stage: Alive but bound with grave clothes

Third stage: Totally free

All of us are in one of these three stages today.

As you read further, don't hesitate to roll the stone away and to acknowledge your true condition before God. You don't have to confess your sins to men. But be honest before God.

Because they exposed the stench that day at Bethany, we read in the next chapter that "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." (John 12:3)

That is a wonderful picture of what the Lord can do in our lives too. Even when things are so bad that we want to cover them up, the Lord can change things. It did not take long there in Bethany. And it need not take long in your life either.

Then Lazarus could invite others to come and see that the Lord had done for him. No-one in that home could take the credit for that. The Lord had done it all.

We read in John 11:3 that when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed for two more days at the same time.

What was Jesus waiting for?

He was waiting for Lazarus to stop struggling. He was waiting for the time when Lazarus would not be able to lift even his little finger. He was waiting for total death to enter in.

That is God's way and we find this principle in all of God's dealings with men, throughout the Bible - from Genesis to Revelation.

The world says, "God helps those who help themselves". But that isn't true, just like a lot of other worldly proverbs are not true. The truth is, "God helps those who CANNOT help themselves."

It was when Lazarus was thoroughly helpless and dead that Jesus came. When we reach the place where we feel our case is absolutely hopeless, it is then that the Lord steps in to help us.

Have you come to the place where you feel that it is impossible for you to live according to the standard of life proclaimed in the Bible? If so, you are very close to deliverance.

Many misunderstand what we actually teach, because they have not heard us first hand. Some imagine that our primary message is related to things like not having a TV set in the home, not wearing ornaments, sisters not being employed outside the home etc. But they are totally mistaken. Such things are so unimportant, as far as I am concerned, that they are not even found at the bottom of my list of God's standards for holy living. God's standard is the life of Jesus - and that is an inward matter and has nothing to do with any of the things just mentioned.

Why is your life not progressing then towards perfection? The answer is: Because you are still struggling.

Jesus is waiting for you to stop your struggling and to die.

A Tale of Three Marriages

In Romans 6 & 7, the Holy Spirit shows us how the Lord sets us free today in the same way as He set Lazarus free. Here are the three stages for us:

First stage: Dead and unable to do anything

Second stage: Born again but bound by the grave clothes of the Law

Third stage: Totally free

When we were born into the world, we were all born married - married to what the Bible calls "the old man"!!

"The old man" is different from "the flesh".

The flesh consists of many lusts. They could be likened to a gang of robbers that come to rob our house. They don't live inside our house (our heart). They come from outside.

We are not married to the flesh, but to the old man.

The "old man" however is a terrible husband. He ill treats us and beats us up every day. And in addition, each time the gang of robbers come (the lusts in the flesh) to the house, the old man opens the door and invites them in to beat us up and to molest us. Here is a husband who not only beats up his wife himself, but allows even others to come in and molest her.

Which woman would ever want to be married to such a man? Any wife would only be too happy to be free of such a husband.

But how can she ever get rid of him? She may want to be married to Christ. But the law says that as long as her first husband is alive, she cannot marry another man. If while "the old man" is living, she wants to be married to Christ as well, she would "become an adulteress" (Romans 7:3) This is how Babylon the harlot (adulteress) is built - through "believers" who live with their old husband, the "old man".

In such a situation, we are as helpless to deliver ourselves as the Israelites in Egypt were. We can only cry out to God. The Israelites cried out to God in Egypt and God heard their cry and liberated them. God can liberate us too.

There is only one way by which God can deliver us from this marriage to the old man, and that is by killing him.

And that is what God did on the cross.

In Romans 6:6 we read "our old man was crucified with Christ."

This is what we testify to in baptism (Romans 6:4). Jesus not only took our sins upon Himself when He died on the cross. He put our "old man" to death on that cross too. That leaves us free now to marry Christ.

This is the good news of the gospel - that God has killed your old man and now invites you to be married to Christ.

One would think that all our problems would now be solved. But they are not. Most believers (in fact over 99% of them), after being freed from their marriage to the old man, then go and marry "The Law", imagining that they are marrying Christ!!

This is what the first part of Romans 7 deals with.

The Law is different from the old man, in that he is a good, morally upright husband. This is why we mistake him for Christ.

But the Law is a very demanding husband. He expects perfection in every area.

He demands that the wife must keep the home absolutely spick and span. Books and clothes and shoes must all be kept in their proper places. There must not be a speck of dust found anywhere in the house. The food must be ready on time - breakfast at 8.00 a.m. and not one minute late. Lunch must be ready at 1.00 p.m. and not at 1.01 p.m. The food must have the perfect proportion of salt and spices. etc., etc.

At the same time, he will not lift one finger to help you with your work. He will not give you a hand in the kitchen or anywhere else. When he walks into the house, everything must be ready - and perfect.

This husband (the Law) never beats you or hurts you. Neither can you find any fault with any of his demands - for they are all righteous. Such is God's Law.

But how many women would like to be married to such a man??

Consider the fate of a woman married to such a man. She cannot divorce him. at the same time she cannot marry Christ, for a woman cannot have two husbands. And the worst part of the bad news of being married to "the Law" is that unlike "the old man", this husband is perfectly healthy. He looks as if he will never die in ten thousand years.

God cannot kill "the Law", for it is absolutely perfect. "The old man" was wicked and so could be killed righteously. But not "the Law", for he has never done anything wrong.

Is there a solution then to this new problem?

Yes, praise God, there is, for there is nothing impossible with God.

What does the Lord do?

He kills the wife!!

Since the Law cannot die, Romans 7:4 says, "YOU (the wife) were made to die to the Law".

That is God's way of liberating us from this second marriage.

We were placed "in Christ" when He died on the cross, and we died with Him.

If it is difficult for you to understand how you could possibly have existed "in Christ" 2000 years ago, then look at Hebrews 7:9, 10. There the Holy Spirit tells us that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek, because Levi was "in Abraham" when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. The Holy Spirit's argument runs like this: Since Levi was Jacob's son, a little bit of Levi was "in Jacob", and since Jacob was Isaac's son, a little bit of Levi must have been "in Isaac" too. And since Isaac was Abraham's son, a little bit of Levi was definitely

"in Abraham" too!

In the same way, long before you and I were born, we existed in the mind of God. We were there in the beginning in God's mind and God put us all in Christ, so that He could have mercy on all of us. And so, when Jesus died years ago, on the cross, we died with Him.

All marriages are only "until death do us part". So, once we are dead, the marriage is annulled and finished. We are thus freed from this husband who demanded perfection, but who never helped us in any way to attain it. What a wonderful way God has made for us to escape out of this marriage.

Romans 7:4 (KJV) tells us that we are made to die to the Law in order that we might now "be married to Christ who was raised from the dead."

The Lord has now raised us up from the dead, so that we might be married to Christ - at last! What a glorious message the gospel is!!

Think of the folly of people who still want to be married either to the old man or to the Law.

Now what are Jesus' standards like? Are they lower than those of the Law? Does He permit us to keep our house (our heart) unclean and dirty? No. In fact, His standards are much higher.

If the Law said that we were not to commit murder, Jesus says that we must not even be angry. If the Law said that we were not to commit adultery, Jesus says that we must not even lust in our hearts.

To use the earlier illustration: Like the Law, Jesus wants the breakfast to be ready promptly at 8.00 a.m. too. But if the law would not condone one minute's delay, Jesus does not condone even one second's delay!!

Does this mean that we have jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, and are now married to an even greater perfectionist than the Law?

No. There is a world of difference between Jesus and the Law. Jesus' standards may be higher than those of the Law, but He comes along to help us in all our tasks. He says, "Let us do everything together. Let us clean the house together. Let us put the cloths and the shoes in their proper place together. Let us wash the clothes together.

But what if we are such total failures that we are not only unable to have breakfast ready by 8.00 a.m., but are unable to have it ready even by 4.00 p.m.? What will the Lord do then? He will still not reproach us. He will say, 'All right. Let us start from there and work on it so that you and I make breakfast ready by 3.45 p.m. tomorrow. Then we'll improve on it still further the next day, and so on. One day we will get close to 8.00 a.m. This is what it means to press on to perfection.

Today the Lord invites each of us saying, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden (either because you are married to the old man or because you are married to the Law). Take My yoke upon you (Be married to Me, and let us do everything together)." (Matthew 11:28-30).

But that's not all.

The best part of the good news is that when we do work together with the Lord, he does 99% of the works and asks us to do only 1%.

Consider some examples from the gospel of John.

In the first miracle that Jesus did at the wedding at Cana, when the wine ran out, Jesus did not suggest that all the wedding guests should spend the rest of the time in fasting and prayer. No. That would have been what many a Pharisee would have suggested. Many believers have the idea that Jesus is forever taking the joy out of people's lives. But just see what He did at Cana (John 2).

We read in John 2:6 that the six water pots together could hold about 150 gallons (or nearly 700 litres) of water. Now 700 litres is equal to about 3000 glasses. So even if there were about 300 guests at that wedding, this meant that Jesus made 10 extra glasses of wine for everyone there!! He certainly helped all the wedding guests to enjoy themselves. And He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

But notice how Jesus did the miracle. He could have made the wine from nothing. But that would not have been a work done in partnership with others, but a work done by Him alone. So He asked the servants to fill the water pots with water. And then He turned it into wine. He made the servants do the easy part (the 1% part), and then did the difficult part (the 99% part) Himself.

Again, when Jesus wanted to feed the 5000, he could have created the bread from nothing (John 6). But then he would have done it alone. So He told the little boy to give Him what he had - 5 loaves and 2 fish. Then the Lord fed the multitude. The boy did 1% and Jesus did 99%.

That boy might have gone home and told his mother that Jesus and he fed 10,000 people. He may even have reversed the order and said that "He and Jesus" fed 10,000 people! (That is how most believers are. Any time the Lord uses them somewhere, they cannot avoid advertising to others what THEY did for the Lord - the souls that THEY won to the Lord, as a result of THEIR preaching and witnessing).

When Jesus healed the blind man (John 9), again He asked the blind man to do the easy part - to go and wash his face in the pool of Siloam. Jesus did the difficult part of opening his blind eyes.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He told those around to do the easy part again - to roll away the stone. He then did the difficult part of raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

When the Lord came to His disciples who had toiled all night and caught no fish, He could have filled their boat with fish without their doing anything. But He didn't do it that way. He told them to do something (the easy part) - to cast their net into the sea. He then filled their net with fish (John 21).

The great secret of a happy marriage is "doing things together". That is certainly true of our marriage with Christ. When we are married to Christ, we can always do everything together, because He is always with us. We cant do everything together with our marriage partners, because the husband has to go away from the home to work each day. But with the Lord, there is no such problem. We can do everything together with Him all the time.

Who will not want to be married to such a wonderful husband!!

This is true Christianity, and this is the true gospel.

Are you willing then to put off the old man? Are you also willing to die to living by the Law? Are you willing to be married to Jesus alone.

You cannot remain single.

If you are an unbeliever you are married to the old man and one day you will be married to the devil for all eternity.

Or you could be a "believer", but living in a spiritual harlotry - committing adultery with the old man, yielding to your lusts and loving the world (See James 4:4).

Or you may be a believer married to the Law. One evidence of this could be your judging others by your own petty standards of right and wrong. Your life may be consisting of various rules and regulations such as "Do not handle. Do not taste. Do not touch" (Colossians 2:21), etc. And you criticize others because they do not follow these rules that you have made. You are in bondage yourself and you bring others into that bondage too.

Put off the old man and get rid of your legalistic religion.

Get married to Jesus and do everything together with Him.

Let the truth set you free today.

"If the Law began with such great glory, shall we not expect far greater glory when the Holy Spirit gives us life?" (2 Corinthians 3:7, 8 - TLB)

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