

A Struggling Believer

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Date: 08 November 2020

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[0 : 00] For those of you who were at Citigroup last Wednesday, you will have already read this passage. You would have read the passage that Rosie read and also the little bit in between, which was the courtroom scene with the Sanhedrin.

And I think it's interesting if you've done that then to listen today to the sermon. I hope it helps. I also hope you're not disappointed that I didn't preach on the areas that you hoped we would look at when you read it on Wednesday night and thought about it together.

But even if that's not the case, I pray you would get over your disappointment and that the Holy Spirit will nonetheless speak to each of us into our needs.

So I don't know the condition of your heart today. I barely know the condition of my own. Maybe you feel today very much like an unpromising believer or a failed believer.

Maybe you're struggling to grasp what it means to be a believer or as a Christian to carry on in your Christian faith. You may find these days very isolating, not just physically and socially, but also possibly spiritually missing out on a lot of the regular events and activities and lifestyles that keep you close to Jesus Christ.

[1 : 34] And maybe you don't. But however you feel today, I want you to hold on to Jesus Christ. And if you're not a Christian, I want you to consider Jesus Christ.

Primarily as we look at Him from a Christian's perspective, but if you're not a Christian, then I hope there's a sense of longing and anticipation comes from doing so.

I want you to hold on to Jesus Christ and to flourish as Christians. There is a great danger, I think, today that we just follow the current kind of thinking and attitudes of the day in which we live, which are very much woe to me and ones of great despair.

And I hope that you will find that you can, in Christ, flourish and grow and blossom as a Christian in these times.

Indeed we have to, because suffering will often be the means that Jesus uses to help us to see our faith better and often also to share our faith with others.

[2 : 48] Now I wonder sometimes whether you think from the pulpit here, I wish there was more. I wish the preachers, Thomas and John and Derek, said more about how we cope with today and how we address the pandemic and being a prophetic voice into the situation that we have.

I wrestle with that as well all the time about themes and subjects and how to apply God's Word in a relevant and powerful way for today. But I honestly believe from my heart that the most prophetic we can be as believers in this Christians is to reflect Jesus Christ and to allow the reality of Jesus Christ in our hearts and lives speak into how we respond and react to the situations we find ourselves in.

There's a whole lot of opinions out there. Everyone's got their pound of flesh to believe about what's happening and how to cope with it. But I think I believe that the right way for us as a Christian church is to focus on the person of Jesus Christ and make him relevant and see him as the answer to every situation we're in.

Not as kind of pie in the sky till you die, but stake in the plate while we wait, as it were, that he's relevant and meaningful and significant and important now that we don't just think fudge him away into a corner of our, a spiritual corner of our lives, but that he moves and molds and transforms how we respond and how we deal with the suffering of this time.

So I want, there are two main characters in this passage, Peter and Jesus, okay? And we're going to look at both of them and we obviously will leave out a lot of other things because of that.

[4 : 35] But I want you to listen to Peter today, okay? Listen to Peter in this passage of Matthew chapter 26.

In verse 40 and 41, Jesus says, Watch and pray so that you don't enter into temptation, because Peter and the other two disciples with him have come into the Garden of Gethsemane and they've fallen asleep when Jesus is praying.

And Peter saying, What's he saying? He said, I can't pray. Look Lord, I'm exhausted. It's been really tough being a follower of yours. There's so much expectation.

You're even expecting me now to be the one who watches with you while you pray and wrestle, and it's difficult and challenging for me to be that. I can't, I can't cope with being needed by you at this time.

It's all too much. The tension of these days, the insecurity, the traveling, the homelessness, the fact that our families are back home, money being tight, the dangers of the day, and I'm so tired, I just can't pray.

[5 : 40] And then in verse 52, Peter does what he can and brings a sword to cut off the ear of the servant, doesn't say it's Peter here, but it does in one of the other gospels, Luke's Gospel, and Jesus says to him, Luke, put your sword back in your place for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

And Peter says, Well, I don't understand. I don't understand. You know, I'm here to protect you, Jesus, but you're saying I've got it all wrong. I don't understand what's happening that I'm using the wrong weapons.

Now I'm confused by that. I'm confused by what you say. I want to fight for you. I want to fight for your cause, but you're telling me that I don't get it. What's going on? I don't understand. And if we go on to verse 70, when he's in the courtyard, when Jesus has been arrested, he says that, I don't know what you mean when he's asked about knowing Jesus.

He says, I don't know what you mean. And again, he denied it with an oath. And he's saying, Luke, I'm afraid. I'm afraid to be known as your follower here, Jesus.

I wish that wee girl would just button up and stop asking me. I'm afraid of the suffering that might lie ahead. I'm afraid of being hated. I'm afraid of being seen as a loser. I'm afraid that it's all going to end very badly.

[7 : 06] Peter says that I'm afraid. In verse 75, Peter remembered the saying of Jesus. He went out and wept bitterly.

Peter says, I'm broken. I'm broken, Jesus. I'm gutted. Again, it's in Luke's gospel. It's not here. Luke's gospel, we're told that it was the Luke.

Jesus looked over at Peter at this point, and that's really what convicted him of his denial, that Luke, Jesus. I've let you down. I've denied you. I'm a failure.

You've been my friend and my Savior, and I've abandoned you. When it really counted, I abandoned you, and I'm broken by that. And so we have a picture of Peter as we listen to him, as we move beyond the kind of the surface of the text and recognize the reality of a person who is in this situation with his Savior.

We see him being one who can't pray, who doesn't understand, who's afraid and who's broken. And I'm asking in your life, as I ask in my own life, can we associate with Peter?

[8 : 12] Now, I know that the circumstances are different. I know we're not physically in the presence of Jesus, and he's not walking with us physically as it was for Peter, and the actual, obviously, the cultural and the actual situation is very different.

But do you find in these areas that you have the same battles and struggles with prayer? Are you struggling as a Christian with prayer? You're overwhelmed by the need to pray, and yet maybe you're coming today to church and you haven't prayed for weeks.

Maybe there's just stony silence between yourself and heaven. There's no communication. And you're just like Peter saying, I just am unable to pray.

Or you're struggling with Christ's perspective and his teaching. I just don't understand. It's so counterintuitive. It's asking me to do things so differently from my natural inclination and the way I have of the world in terms of arguing and talking and our attitude to other people and what we think of our enemies.

And I'm just raging with everyone, and I want God to judge people because of what's happening. And yet Christ is asking me to be different. I don't understand that.

[9 : 29] Or you're afraid. Which of us of Christians don't go through great fear related to our faith? I'm afraid of losing my job just now.

You know, be related to my faith particularly. But I'm afraid of losing respect. I'm afraid of suffering, of being victimized. Or you're broken.

Because you've denied Christ. You've turned away from Christ. You've walked from Him. You've stayed silent when you should have spoken. You've spoken maybe when you should have stayed silent.

You've lied. You've let Him down. We've lied. We've let Him down. I associate myself with all of these comments. I'm not looking at you differently from myself whatsoever.

There's a brokenness. Brokenness in our faith and a feeling there's no way back for us. Well, what I want to do today and having listened to Peter is also to listen to Christ.

[10:28] It's very important today that we listen to Christ. Whoever we are, it may be that you're not a Christian. It may be you're going, doing great as a Christian. I'm not presuming you're not.

But whatever we are spiritually, it's important always in, as we go to God's Word, to listen to Christ. And in doing so, I'm going to go a little bit beyond this chapter.

I'm cheating a little bit. I'm moving because the gospels are for. Remember that they give us different accounts of the same events and they add to these events.

So what is it that we might not be seeing? What was it that Peter was not seeing? What was he missing? And what are we sometimes missing in our Christian lives? Well, in Luke chapter 22 verse 31, we have these words and it's very significant to this passage to what's happening here.

Simon, Simon, Jesus says, Behold Satan demanded to have you that he might shift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

[11:28] And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. Do you see that? Jesus Christ is the shepherd and he has, before these events happened to Peter, which Peter forgot he was being prayed for by Jesus Christ, immediate, with specific reference to what he was going to go through at this time.

He's the shepherd and we remember elsewhere that he says, No one will pluck any of my children out of my hands. Jesus knows that behind what we experience every day is a spiritual battle.

He knows that. And he says to Peter, Look, I know your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak. He says that he knows the battle that every single believer that we all go through.

And he wants us to learn from the failure and the mistakes and the brokenness to recognize his hand in these things so that we can learn from them and go and strengthen others.

It's one of the great reasons that we can see that nothing, while we don't deliberately fall into denial or failure and excuse that, but we can see Jesus Christ using it because he holds on to us.

[12:34] So you come today to church as a believer and you haven't come in your own strength. You have come and you believe because Jesus Christ has prayed for you and is holding you. And there is a reason for what you're going through.

Good, bad or indifferent, there's a reason. And we look in every experience in life and say, what, we don't say how, how miserable is, how much does he not love me?

But we say, what is Christ teaching me through this? And how can I then go from this and strengthen others in their faith? So we remember these praying for Peter.

We also know that Jesus is saying, Look, I'm reaching out for you, Peter, in this. Now, we see that in various ways. As I said, we didn't read it, but in Luke's Gospel, he says that in 21 that he looked towards Peter, just as Peter did his third denial.

And it was obviously a piercing look. And then in Matthew 16, we've got these glorious words where the angel says, go and tell at the resurrection, go and tell the disciples and Peter.

[13:47] Isn't that interesting? He just specifically highlights the need for Peter to hear this great good news. I think I've said this before here, but my original, my first boss as a minister, Kenny McDonald up in Roskeine, when he was a student, he had one sermon that he preached all over the country when he was a student in different places.

And it was that text and Peter. That personal interest that the living God has in us. Do you think Jesus doesn't care for you?

You think he's disinterested? And we have these glorious words, go and tell this failed disciple and Peter. You know, tell him. We call him by name here.

Remind him. And of course, Jesus says, Peter, I will restore you. It's in that original text that we read in terms of Jesus' prayer, but also in the famous restoration of Peter at the beach when he asks Peter, three times, do you love me?

Do you love me? Do you love me in the same way that three times Peter denied him? Searching questions, but also empowering him to feed Jesus' sheep with the unbroken promise of his company.

[15:04] In the Great Commission, I am with you always. So there's that recognition that whatever we're going through as believers today, that we have the promises and the person of Jesus Christ saying, look, I'm praying for you.

I'm reaching out for you. Is this the first time maybe you're watching online for many months as a, I hope we would turn maybe a backslidden Christian?

Or maybe you're here today and you really dragged your feet to come and you weren't really keen to come, but you thought you ought to come. Well, I believe Jesus is saying if you're really far away from him, you're saying, look, I'm reaching out to you today, even in the conviction that I've brought you here.

And he says, look, I will restore you. You're mine. I will. And the suffering and the difficulty and the battles and the struggles that you're going through, there are many things that you will take from that and you'll be molded and strengthened and mature.

You know, I'm breaking you in order to restore you. You know, that horrible reality that surgeons sometimes have to do is they have to re-break a leg or an arm because it's sitting in the wrong way.

[16:17] That must be a really terrible thing for a surgeon to do. I can't imagine the thought of taking a hammer to someone and re-breaking a limb. But it's in order to reset it for full and glorious healing.

And that is similar to this, our great surgeon, the Lord Jesus Christ. So we listen to him. And I think also we learn from Jesus Christ and continue to learn from him, which is the backup to his words, don't we?

His... what he has done backs up what he says. So we recognize that he is one who has a perfect prayer in this passage in Gethsemane.

We get a marvelous insight into what we would have called importation at prayer, something, prayer that doesn't give up and prayer that is absolutely from the heart.

He did what Peter failed to do. You know what Peter turned away from Jesus, turned away from his Father in heaven and didn't pray. Jesus gives the example of in turmoil and in suffering and in struggling, he turns to his Father in prayer and he cries out to the Father.

[17:31] It's a prayer we can't get to the bottom of. It's a prayer beyond prayer. It's a prayer of deep, deep mystery. His soul was overwhelmed even to the point of death.

He needed the disciples alongside him in the loneliness of what he felt and he knew he was coming to drink the cup of God's wrath, which we can't begin to understand the depth of that suffering.

Three times he asked, please take this away. If it's your will, take it this away. If it can't be taken away, if it's your will. And he goes back a third time and prays, wrestling, longing, repeated prayers for help and for strength to do what he had to do.

And the key to that prayer is your will be done, isn't it? Through all his praying to understand and grasp God's will. Hebrews 5 verse 7 to 10 says something very interesting about that.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death. And he was heard because of his reverence.

[18:40] He prayed to be saved from death and he was heard. No, he wasn't. We think, don't we? He wasn't heard. Yes, he was heard, but the answer was no.

The answer was at that point, it can't be taken from you. You need to drink this cup. Because Jesus, although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God, a high priest.

So we find that his perfect prayer is a prayer that was offered and it was answered, but it was answered in the negative on our behalf as he prayed, your will be done.

Great mystery. But also we find and recognize as we learn from him, not only his perfect prayer, but his perfect obedience. In verse 46, it's a great verse.

It says, rise, let us be going. See my betrayer is at hand. Prayer enables him and strengthens him to rise in obedience to go to what lies ahead.

[19:50] He obeys from that prayer all the way to the grave, all the way to hell and the grave. The previous section where Thomas preached from and read, it speaks about striking the shepherd and

all the sheep will scatter.

And that was an Old Testament prophecy. And twice in the passage we read in verse 54 and then in verse 56, Jesus says, but these things have taken place that the Scripture and the prophets might be fulfilled.

He knows, he's the Messiah who is fulfilling the mind and the will of God, his own mind and will in perfect unison, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And his task, his work is to go to the cross on our behalf, which we will remember shortly. And we didn't read, we left out that middle section, but we also find here his perfect perspective, not just his perfect prayer and his perfect obedience, but his perfect perspective in verse 64 where he's in the trial at the Sanhedrin.

And he says in effect what triggers the cry of blasphemy in verse 64, Jesus said to him, you know, are you the son of God?

[21 : 10] I hear you, the living God, the high priest says, tell me if you're the Christ the son of God, Jesus says to him, you have said so. I tell you from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

He's the King of glory. We will all see him one day, might not seem like it now. But at this moment, at this moment here, he's ushering in his kingdom.

Remember Matthew? Matthew's about the kingdom of heaven, that's what he speaks about right through the gospel. And he is coming here to usher in his kingdom and one day he'll return to take you home.

He'll take you home. He'll either raise your dry and dusty rotten physical body from the grave to be reunited with your soul to meet with him on that day, or if he comes today, then we will go with him and he is coming for us.

And that perspective is his, and it's a great reminder to us, particularly in the circumstances he finds himself in, that he is able so confidently to say, I know what I'm doing, I know where I'm going, and I know I'm returning, and he's returning for us and for us people throughout time.

[22 : 27] So can we just move on very quickly to learn also from Peter? Because this is important, we talked about his failure and his brokenness and his lack of prayer, but what can we learn?

What was key to Peter's life? How could he still claim to be a believer? How is he different from Judas, who is also in this chapter, who then goes and hangs himself because he is so full of remorse for what he's done?

And it's what he's done that much worse than what Peter's done. Well, not really in the scheme of things. But what was the key? The key is Peter's heart, isn't it?

That Peter knew Jesus Christ, he had a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ. He entrusted his hope and his faith and his salvation to Jesus Christ.

He didn't just know about him. So the key to everything in our lives today as Christians is knowing and living that relationship with Jesus. People ask you, what's a Christian?

[23 : 27] What do you say? What do I say? The key is it's someone who has a relationship with God the Father through Jesus, a living relationship. That's what a Christian is.

Whatever else we might say, that is the key. And he was his Savior clearly. And Matthew 16, verse 16 earlier, tells us that Peter makes that marvelous declaration and he's saying, I mean Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

An amazing revelation Peter had, he was his friend, his companion and he trusted Jesus. Search your heart and I search mine.

That answer matters. Not that you know just about Jesus, but do you know Him? Do you have a person, you know what a personal relationship with someone is?

It means you open your heart to them and they've opened their heart to you. It's the only way you can know someone, the only way. And he opens our heart to us as we come to Him by faith.

[24 : 33] Have you opened your heart to Him? Are you in that, is it an honest relationship? That's the key to our faith. He knew Him as Savior. He knew that He had no one else to turn.

John 6, verse 68, Simon Peter answered him, Lord to whom shall we go? You've got the words of eternal life. It's magnificent, isn't it? He had the words of eternal life and Jesus in the high priestly prayer says, you know, the whole key to salvation is to know God and His Son.

And that is the key to eternal life. So you had no one else to turn and you say, well, is that right? But yeah, that is right.

In the garden, he didn't pray but he was still with Jesus. When Jesus was in trial, he was in the courtyard. He still went back to Jesus.

When Jesus looked at him at that point of denial, that was the look of a friend that he knew. That's why it hurt so much. He ran to the tomb, didn't he? He might have just thought Jesus was dead but he still went there.

[25 : 38] And when Jesus was on the beach, what did he do? He saw Jesus and he jumped out of the boat to meet with Him. Why? Because he had no one else to turn. He might have been only hanging on by a thread. He might have made mistakes but he had no one else to go.

Is that what you, is that your relationship in mind? And it was a relationship. He knew and came to know as he grew and matured in the faith.

It was a relationship we had with Christ that was like no other. There was times when he was flummoxed, when he failed, but he always followed, even from a distance.

And then he went on and flourished. In Acts 3, 19 and 20, he preaches that great sermon, great sermon with gusto and enthusiasm and flourish.

Repent, therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out. That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, that He may send the Christ appointed to you.

[26 : 35] He knew that in His own experience and His own heart. And that is the reality for us. It's a relationship where we will be flummoxed, where we will fail, but where we must follow.

Even sometimes if it's from a distance, because He will take us back and we will flourish. It's the key to knowing who you are.

And it's the key to knowing what it means to be a Christian. It is having that open relationship with Jesus Christ, where He has revealed Himself as Savior and you're learning about Him all the time, but you must be open to come to Him in need for forgiveness and for eternal life.

So what I want you to do today, all of us at the Lord's table, is just to think a little bit about who we're listening to and who we're learning from.

We can learn from Peter, but we learn and listen to Jesus Christ far more. You alone has eternal life. To whom else can you go? Are you struggling?

[27 : 42] Where are you going to go? Where are we going to go? Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. And that is a great philosophy and a great mentality to have.

Come to Him as a person. If you're not a Christian, can I say come to Him. Come to Jesus Christ. Speak to Him as a person. I know you can't see Him.

I know it's different from other relationships, but speak to Him as you would speak to a friend and ask Him to reveal Himself as a person to you. But in doing so, you need to be honest and open your heart to Him.

And you need to say and show that you recognize your need for Him. It's a relationship. It's knowing God that is key. And sin is what estranges us from Him.

Remember that. It's not God. It's not circumstances. It's not what's happening in our lives at any level. It's sin that estranges us from Him and breaks us and kills us and separates us.

[28 : 43] Stop blaming everything else, especially God, who in Christ has shown the depth of His love and commitment and start developing that relationship with Him again.

And know in all our brokenness and our failure and our struggles and our lack of prayer, He's the great forgiving and redeeming and renewing God. And I hope you'll remember that as you participate in the Lord's Supper.

Amen.