

Leave to Believe

Gen 2²⁰⁻²⁴ / Matt 19²³⁻³⁰

Video of Sophie Pascoe – amazing swimmer despite having only one leg.

1. When I was first at primary school I went to a school with a pool for three months and then a new school opened up which was actually closer to my house so I swapped schools and went to the new school after Christmas. It was a great school. Everything was new and even the grounds were new and were huge compared to the school I'd started at. But the new school lacked one thing – a pool and so if we wanted to learn to swim we had to walk up to the old school, which we did, every week for a whole term.

This wasn't too much of an issue though it was largely up hill but the only trouble was that the school was not heated well and the water was quite cold and very few of us really wanted to get into the pool. The head teacher, however, devised a cunning plan to get us into the water. He made everyone go through a cold shower before we got into the pool. Let me tell you that once we went under that very cold water no one wanted to hang around the edge of the pool and when we were given the go ahead everyone jumped into the pool which, by that time, felt quite warm.

Of course the walk to the pool was pointless if we didn't get into the water and so the teachers found a way of making us keen to do that. You simply can't learn to swim standing on the edge of the water. To learn to swim we must get into the water but getting into the water means leaving the comfort, warmth and

security of the ground around the water. In other words **‘to splash you have to dash’** or, put another way **‘to swim you have to get in!’** In the very same way we can’t learn to be Christians watching from the outside.

Faith is an ‘in-the-water’ deal. You can get a little taste of it from the side of the pool but if you really want to learn about faith; if we really want to experience the beauty of the spiritual life and if we really want to connect with God... **we have to leave the side of the pool, leave the security of solid ground, and get into the water!**

Another way of putting it is that we have to **‘leave to believe!’**

2. I want to examine this principle today to help us get into what is being said here but this is only one of three principles of spiritual growth that come from a rather surprising passage in the OT. In Gen 2²⁴ we read these words...

‘²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.’

This describes then the **practice** of the formation of a stable relationship between a man and a woman and for the most part exegetes who examine this scripture interpret it in this way. But I want us to look at it in a slightly different way this morning because while it is clearly directed towards the establishment and health of the relationship between a man and a woman I believe it also contains principles which relate specifically to the kingdom of God and to our place in it.

Three movements are described in this one verse. They are, 1. To leave (a man or a woman when they commit to one another must **leave** their primary relationship with their parents to form another primary relationship). 2. To cleave (a man and a woman must then physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually give

themselves to one another) and 3. To weave (a man and a woman must work to bring their two individualities into a comprehensive unity – something which takes a significant time). Therefore a man shall **leave** his father and mother and **cleave** (the old King James word) meaning ‘to adhere to or to bind to) and finally they shall become one flesh – they shall **weave** their lives together.

Now just a little aside here in case you’re wondering. The word cleave in English is what’s called a homonym – that is it’s a word which has two completely different and opposite meanings. One meaning is to ‘split asunder’ or to ‘divide into two’ and this comes from the old English *cleofan*. The other meaning is ‘to bind together’ or ‘to unite’ and this comes from a completely different old English root *clifan* meaning strong. It just so happens that both meanings have come down to us in the very same word but for our purposes we are using the word to mean ‘to bind together strongly.’

So the three principles in relationship here are to leave, to cleave and to weave but I want to say that this can also be said to apply to our walk with Christ. Here also we are to leave, cleave and to weave and this morning I want to examine briefly the principle of ***leaving***.

3. **You have to leave to believe.** Jesus makes no bones about this. In our other reading from Matthew 19 today Jesus commends His disciples for leaving things to follow Him. They have left, **‘houses, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, children and fields,’** for His sake. And they will receive their reward. But there is more to leaving than just these things. Jesus speaks of leaving the comfort and security of a home and a warm bed to follow Him in Matthew 8 where He says **“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his**

head.” And in that same passage He talks about leaving behind family duties for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. ²¹Another of his disciples said to him, **“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”** ²²**But Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”**

In another oft quoted passage Jesus shows how important the principles of leaving is when He talks about not being able to serve both mammon and God at the same time.

²⁴**“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”** (Matt 6)

4. Paul also makes this principle clear in many of his letters. In his second letter to Timothy he writes... ²⁰**“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”** (2 Tim 2) In other words if we will **leave** behind the common things we will be made into vessels of honour.

Again in 1 Corinthians Paul talks about Christians as athletes who go into strict training to win their race and here again we can see this as a kind of **leaving** in that he talking about being prepared to **leave comfort** for the sake of becoming of use to the kingdom of God.

5. And this is not or should be a mystery to us because, in fact, this principle operates right throughout our lives. We have to leave the comforts of home in order to be educated. We have to leave the things we'd like to do like playing games and watching TV in order to pass exams and become useful to society in greater ways. We are used to making sacrifices for the sake of getting

important things done such as the sacrifice we make to bring children into the world. We have to leave behind our desire for rich food if we are going to have healthy bodies. We have to leave behind all the things we could do at night in order to get the right amount of sleep. We have to leave behind spending all our money on stuff we like in order to be able to afford to pay the people who keep our body and soul together. In short **so much of life is really about leaving something in order to be present somewhere else – somewhere much more important.**

6. The same is true of faith. **We have to leave to believe.** But what precisely do we leave?

G K Chesterton famously said these words about the Christian faith...

“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.” In other words, we should never assume that the freedom of grace implies that we should not need an effort to live by it. Grace is given freely – it is the free gift of God. But we are expected then to live in and by grace and this will require every ounce of will and courage we can muster.

To leave anything requires at least mental effort and anyone here who’s tried to give up smoking or drinking or over-eating will know just how difficult that it. **Every Christian finds him or herself in this position when we come to Christ. We will all be called to leave something in order that our belief might grow and if you haven’t heard that call yet let me assure you it is coming.** So what do we leave. I could answer this in many ways but let’s go to some obvious answers in order simply to be clear.

7. The Christian faith will call us all, in some way, to leave behind these three things... **pride, power and possessions.**

8. Chesterton again says this... **“The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man.”** There is perhaps no greater expression of human pride than the need and the drive to know all things. It is no coincidence that the tree we illicitly partook of in the Garden was the tree of **knowledge**. Nothing so evokes the pride of the human heart as the drive we have to know things and perhaps the clearest expression of this comes in the form of the press known as the ‘tabloids’ – those glossy magazines and newspapers which focus mostly on gossip and embarrassing pictures of people we like to call celebrities. The very idea and notion that some things can and indeed will remain a mystery to us is somehow confronting and almost offensive to us for it seems then that there are worlds not open to us and that, perhaps, we have been barred from and this, of course, raises the notion that there is a power greater than us in the universe.
9. However, my friends, you only have to get married to come to a profound understanding that even the person you love most dearly and have committed yourself to most significantly with be forever, **in some part**, a mystery and if this be the case then we are confronted with a life in which mystery is all around us. God has built mystery into the very fabric of Creation and coming to terms with faith means leaving behind the notion that we can or even have the potential to understand everything. **There is no place for pride in the life of faith.**
10. Secondly, we must leave behind our notions of power. Yes we are all powerful in some way. That God gives us all a place on this earth implies a kind of power-to-be that is inherent in every person. But we all know that power can be hoarded; can be gathered and wielded to the advancement of both individuals, corporates and nations and we all understand how dangerous

power is. As the saying goes **‘Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’** Faith calls us to one power only – God’s and to leave all other power. The power of Christ does not reside in the power we can exert in our own right. Again let me quote Chesterton here...

“It has been often said, very truly, that religion is the thing that makes the ordinary man feel extraordinary; it is an equally important truth that religion is the thing that makes the extraordinary man feel ordinary.”

It is one thing to be raised up by Christ from the place of deepest darkness and depression. We will accept this anytime I suspect. It is quite another to have our proudest thoughts exposed and our deepest arrogance dashed by the claims of Christ. Are we prepared for this? Are we prepared in the name and through the voice of our loved ones, our wife perhaps or our husband, to hear the most damning truth about our stinky attitudes or our shocking presumptions? Are we prepared to have our dearest conceptions of others or of the world challenged to the very heart? How will we greet this? How will we be when we are toppled from our prideful perch? **Can we be ordinary?!**

God will call us to leave behind power at almost every turn and though we may find it useful at times the only power that will aid faith is God’s power. **All earthly power is useless in the kingdom of God except where it is made completely subject to the Spirit of Christ.**

11. Finally, possessions. We are called to leave behind possessions in the kingdom of God. Possessions are, at heart, an illusion. We may think we own things. The truth is the more we own the more we are owned by them. Yes, we cannot help but own some things. I don’t think God minds this but be very careful here. Unless we hold on to what we own with an incredible lightness

of touch we will find these things controlling our life before we know it. 18% of Luke's Gospel is devoted to advice about money and wealth. Jesus spent a lot of resource teaching about possessions and how dangerous they were. More than this the evil of worrying about possessions occupied a considerable percentage of that teaching. **Yet the key here is not to focus on the possessions themselves but on what they continually promise and yet cannot give.** My fervent belief is that wealth is actually a substitution – it's a thing we seek and get in order to make ourselves feel the one thing that is worth feeling – **that we are loved and lovable.**

12. The people I know who are truly loved don't give a hoot about money. They enjoy life and they give freely because deep down they have all they need – **they are loved and lovable.** Again we are called by faith to **leave so that we might believe... to leave wealth so that we might believe we are truly loved by God.** Let me finish with this wonderful quote from Mother Theresa...
13. **"I try to give to the poor people for love what the rich could get for money. No, I wouldn't touch a leper for a thousand pounds; yet I willingly cure him for the love of God."**
14. Where is our focus today? Is it on what we know? Is it on what influence we can wield? Is it on what we own. **God calls us to leave that we might believe.** What is God calling you to leave today? Whatever it is, it's worth it because the love of God is truly what we want and what we need.