

The Saints Must Walk Alone

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Summary

A.W.Tozer explores the idea that many great souls have been lonely, citing examples from the Old Testament. He argues that this loneliness may be necessary for saintliness, as God speaks more deeply and intimately to those who are alone with Him. Tozer emphasizes the significance of solitude for spiritual growth, highlighting biblical examples of figures like Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Jesus Christ who experienced aloneness in their ministries. He notes that solitude can bring healing and restoration, but also lead to loneliness and isolation.

Message

Now, I want to talk today on this topic: The Saint Must Walk Alone. And in this verse of Scripture, you will find two things mentioned that are, both of which were characteristic of Jesus. The phrase, the multitudes went right along with our Lord Jesus, because He ministered to the multitudes, because He did miracles and cast out their devils and gave sight to their blind and because He spoke simply to the plain people. He had around Him many who wanted to listen to Him, which the Bible calls the multitudes, we call today, crowds.

Now, that was characteristic of our Lord Jesus Christ. But strangely enough, and contradictory as it may seem--there alone--is also characteristic of Jesus, from the time that His parents thought He was with them and found He was not and went back to look for Him and found Him away from them talking to the doctors. On down through His ministry, He was there alone, describes Jesus, about as well as, He was surrounded by the multitudes. I suppose that He was the world's loneliest man though He was surrounded by these very crowds.

Now, what I want to develop today is that most of the world's great souls, if not all of them, have been lonely. Loneliness would seem to be the price that the saint must pay for His saintliness. And in order to back up that statement, I want to take you on a little trip through the Old Testament, starting back there with Enoch.

That pious soul, Enoch, who in the morning of the world, walked with God, or perhaps I should say, not in the morning of the world, but in the time of the strange darkness that settled upon the world shortly after the dawn of man's creation. Enoch walked with God. And while it does not say

so in so many words, the inference is very plain, that he walked apart from his contemporaries. That the path he took was a path quite alone and separated from those who lived at the time he lived. He walked to his God. If everybody had been walking with God, then why should the Bible have mentioned that he walked with God? The fact that it was mentioned at all would seem to indicate, and I think we can safely infer that it is implied there, that Enoch walked a path apart from his contemporaries.

And then there was Noah. And all the evidence shows that Noah was a lonely man, that while he had his family, and while he was surrounded, we would suppose by workmen. Well, the ark was a building, yet Noah stood so apart from the multitudes that God picked him out and he found grace in God's sight. And Noah must have been a man apart, a lonely man. Then come on down the years to the man, Abraham. Abraham had Sarah. He had Lot. He had his herdsman, and he had his servants. All that is very true. But I think it is very plain that his soul was like a star and dwelt apart, as words were said of Milton.

Apparently, God never spoke to the man Abraham in company. Now that's quite a significant thought that God never spoke to him in company. Apparently, there were those things which God wanted to say to the man Abraham which He could not say with anybody listening. And Abraham evidently had a habit of praying face down, lying in delighted ecstasy in the presence of the great God of his fathers and of the world. And there Abraham prayed and called on God, and he was calling on God face down. Now the innate dignity of the man Abraham, for had that he should have assumed that posture in the presence of others. He would certainly not have lain on his stomach in prayer if there were people around him. So, we suppose that Abraham must have been, very often at least, a lonely man.

I believe that there are things that God wants to say to us which He cannot say in the presence of other people, just as there are things you say to your family or to your wife which you cannot say with others around. I believe that God wants to speak to us, and that He speaks more deeply and intimately and wonderfully when he can get our ear all by ourselves.

Now there is a community of Christian worship, and it is taught throughout the Bible. The very word church means an assembly of persons call out. But notice that it has two meanings, called out and assemble. And the fact that the people that make up the church are called out, speaks of loneliness. But the fact that they are called together, speaks also that there is in some measure an anodyne of medicine for that loneliness found in the fellowship of other Christians. But they are called out. And the man who is called out from his family as I was as a young fellow, called out when I was 17 years of age, to leave my family. And the worst part about it was, not called to leave them in body, but called to leave them in heart and live with Him and walk among them, and still be an alien to them.

And I know the language of the old man of God who said, I am become a stranger to my brethren and an alien to my mother's children. That while you're with them in presence, you are not with them in a heart, because your heart has been given to another, even the great God, and they don't understand it, and so you're called out. And there is the loneliness.

And then the other side of the picture is when you're called together with persons of like mind, and for the time you're with them. There is some healing medicine for your sorrow, but you're lonely nevertheless. Abraham was and God gave Abraham the knowledge again that he was a man marked out, a man to receive divine grace, when Abraham was alone with his God.

Then there was Moses/ Something in the heart of the man Moses couldn't stand the court of Pharaoh. It was the Vanity Fair. It was the Mome Cove. It was the Chez Paree, the Broadway, the Hollywood of the time. And the man Moses was there, and there by the providence of God for the time. He saved his life and took him there. And he was brought up and educated for a great job.

And God used Egypt, but Egypt had no affinity for the man Moses and nor he for it. For Moses was a Jew and his people were Jews, and the covenant belonged to him. And Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were his ancestors, not the Egyptians. And the temple of God was to be, and the tabernacle was to be the center of his thought and life that was to come, not the pyramids and not the Sphinx and not the great buildings of Egypt.

There was a loneliness in the heart of the man Moses, even as a young man. There must have been, because he took long walks, and on one of those long walks, far out from any town, he saw an Egyptian and a Hebrew fighting together and came to the rescue of the Hebrew. And then of course, he had to leave Egypt and flee, and he did.

And for long years, he was alone in the desert. And it was in the loneliness of the nighttime when the birds were out. The day birds were going to rest, and the night birds were beginning to croak, that he saw all by himself that burning bush. If Moses had been at a party, if he'd had friends, if there had been people gathered around him or if he'd been running with a multitude, God never could have showed him the wonder of the burning bush. One of the most solemn and awful and glorious things that ever took place in Old Testament times was that burning bush experience. And Moses never would have seen it if it had not been that he was alone.

And then that scene on Sinai. He left the multitudes far below and took with him only one man, Joshua. And then left him a little behind as Jesus later did, leave his three close friends to pray. And Moses went on into the fire. And there he watched in fascinated awe, that Presence, partly revealed and partly concealed in the fire and in the cloud and came down with his face shining. But he came down because he had been alone. And he went to the multitude and could talk to them with authority, because he had been to the Source of Authority. He did not poll them to find out

what he should say. He went to the mountain to learn what he should say, and then told them what they should hear. And that is always the spirit of the true man of God, the prophet of God. He does not send out questionnaires to poll the multitude to find out what they want. He goes to God to find out what they need, and then gives it to them whether he talks to 10 or 5000.

Now, there was Elijah in later years, and all the prophets, these men were alone. Elijah was alone, as much alone on that mountain, more alone on that mountain, as if everybody else in the world had died. For there he was, surrounded by his enemies and with the prophets of Baal ready to slay him. And yet, there he stood a lonely man, absolutely alone in the midst of a crowd of hate-filled opposers. And God spoke to him there and later in the cave and later as he stood outside the cave and watched the mountains rock and saw the trees shake and go down under the roar of the whirlwind. God spoke in a still small voice to his heart and told him in the aloneness of his inner life that which he never could have said or told him if he had not been alone.

Well, carry on over to the New Testament, and there we find Jesus Christ our Lord, I repeat, probably the world's loneliest man. A little hymn says about him, 'Tis midnight, and on Olive's brow the star is dimmed that lately shone; 'tis midnight; in the garden now the suff'ring Savior prays alone. 'Tis midnight, and, from all removed, the Savior wrestles lone with fears: e'en the disciple that He loved heeds not his Master's grief and tears.

Now that was Jesus, not only in the garden, but very many other places. Forty days alone in the desert and on the mountain alone many times and on the shore alone after His resurrection, Jesus Christ died alone and rose alone. I repeat, there are some things too sacred for the eye of any but God to see. And when our Lord died, God pulled the curtain of the night down around the cross in order that He might die alone.

And when He rose again, He rose unseen by the eye of mortal man. I don't know whether angels saw Him rise, but I know men did not, as though God were saying, His birth and His death and His rising again are secret, and only My eye can look upon these awesome and awful and glorious scenes. So, God brought Him from the dead unseen by the eye of mortal man, though afterward, He was seen of James and Cephus and Paul and 500 brethren at once, and they told abroad what they had seen. But at the moment of His rising, only the eye of God saw. My dear people, there are experiences with God that you can only have by yourself.

You say you have family prayer with your wife. All right, very good. But there are things God can't say to you in the presence of your wife. And there are things God can't say to you in the presence of the dearest and sweetest Christian brother or sister that you know. There are secret communications which God can only tell us when we're alone. It was the old Meister Eckhart who said that when God gets the temple all to Himself, He whispers what He is to the human heart. Brother McAfee sings a song about in thy secret inner chamber, thou wilt whisper what thou art.

God can tell me some things in the crowds, but He can only tell me what He is when my heart is alone.

Now, that's the price most people will not pay. And I suppose I might as well make the sermon short, but there's a long line of noble pilgrims. They didn't march abreast and certainly they didn't march as armies do, four to eight abreast. They marched alone, and the march was alone, and the gaps were wide between them. But you will find if you know church history and the biographies of the saints, you will know that there is a long parade of holy men and women who lived and loved and labored and worked and made the world a better place and won many, established hospitals and colleges, and built churches and orphan asylums, and left behind them a trail of goodness and mercy wherever they went. And yet they belong to the lonely parade. Their day didn't recognize them. Or if they did, they didn't know them well enough to know who they were.

Well, the conventional reaction to what I'm saying now, I suppose I will have to take note of, though I don't like ever to introduce such matters in a sermon, but there's a conventional reaction to this, and I hear it in the little chirpy songs. And I hear it in the little chirpy articles that I get. And in the little chirpy testimonies I hear from time to time. And it will all sound the same. And they're obviously conventional. They are not the true expression of what somebody feels, but the expression of how some people think they ought to feel. And so, their response to a sermon on the lonely soul, is to say, why I'm never lonely for Jesus is my Savior divine. And He said, I will never leave you, and how can I be lonely? How can I be lonely when I have Jesus only to be my companion and my constant friend. So, I'm never lonely.

Now, brother, I don't want to reflect on the sincerity of any man, but I'd just like to tentatively state here, that it's my conviction, that that's too neat to be sincere. That we're saying what we think ought to be said, rather than what we ever feel in our hearts. Because the people who are always chirping about the fact they're never lonely, mean that they have never let themselves get to a place where God could separate them from the crowd and talk to them alone. They have had to have companionship and the psychological lift of other people around them in order to keep out of the doldrums.

So, they deliberately forsook the cave and the mountain peak and the sands of the seashore and the holy places and have gone with the multitudes in order to be able to live with themselves. Then because they think it's proper, why they testify cheerfully, I'm not lonely, Jesus is with me, but what they feel is not the awful, awe-inspiring presence of God in the burning bush. It's the psychological, social help that they get from the people.

Well, the pain of loneliness results from the constitution of our nature, because God made us for each other whether we know it or like it or not. God made us for each other. And He meant that we should have fellowship with each other, that He meant that we should complement each other,

that each could complete the other and that He meant us to be a people together. But sin came in and made God's children, people apart.

The world isn't lonely, because the world runs together. They have invented all sorts of inventions in order to keep themselves from being lonely. If the public was not lonely and didn't have to run together to cure its loneliness, Bob Hope would be probably collecting garbage out here and driving one of the big yellow trucks. And these other entertainers who make more than the President of the United States, would be doing some honest job somewhere.

But because people must have each other in their sinful Vanity Fair, we give to our entertainers pay that we don't give to our educators nor to our leaders and politicians and statesmen who carry on their shoulders the weight of government. So, people are lonely, but they cure it by running together. But when a man gets converted, where can he run? He sees through all of that, and he knows why they're like that. And he therefore must be to some degree at least a lonely man. And his desire for human fellowship which God put in him and which is good and holy and right, that companionship, that desire for companionship, creates a pain within his own heart. Though he's got to walk alone, because there are so few in any given area that walk with God.

You people who work in offices, now, if you work in Deerfield or Moody, or Scripture Press or somewhere where they're Christians, that's another matter. But you people who work in offices or factories or shops or go to schools where there's nobody that knows your language, aren't you forced to be somewhat lonely? I think so. You try to get along with people the best you can, but always you speak a language they don't understand.

And always they're thrilled about something that leaves you bored. And always you're concerned with something that they don't even understand. And there must be that loneliness and there is, the saint must walk alone. For loneliness is the price the saint must pay for his saintliness. But the man that knows God and knows himself, certainly is not going to find very many people that understand him.

Now, you'll find a lot of companionship in religious circles without a doubt. There isn't a place anywhere, I suppose, between here and the the Bahamas, where there hasn't been least 1512 get togethers and rib roasts and ham consumptions over the last week, and all done in the name of the Lord. I was to one last night.

So, we do that and it's all right, and I have no objection. But I am saying, my brethren, that there is beyond that thing, further in than that will take you, further on in behind the scenes than your kind fellowship that we have together, and I love it and don't think I don't, and I do. But I'm talking about the beyond, the going on in. I'm talking about going on in past where the commonalities, the

simple expressions and the chit chat and the shop talk and the friendly banter is all left behind you and there you are.

The old world looks like an ash pile to you and heaven shines there and you look up and talk about it, and they claim you're absent minded. Or they claim you're anti-social or unsocial, or that you're arrogant, that you are holier than thou. But my brethren, the man who knows himself can have the fellowship that comes, I suppose to a certain degree with religious activities. But as a man goes on with God, the hopes and the longings and the disappointments and the aspirations and the radiance that comes from the heart of Christ, all these things will not be understood. And a man will have to walk by himself. But I'm not complaining about it.

And I don't want you to. For I know that this very loneliness throws us back upon God. God has to do this to bring us back on Himself. We would never, never seek Him if it were not that we see through the emptiness of man's social fellowships. And to a large degree we see through the emptiness of man's religious fellowships, and we don't want to die like that. I don't want to have to die in a crowd. Or if I do die in a crowd, I don't want to have to have the crowd in order to die in comfort.

I don't want to have to have anybody in order to die in comfort. I know how they do when you die, they surround your bed if you're lucky enough to last long enough for them to get there, and some weep and some hope and some stand around. And we die in a crowd usually, at least a few people around. But God help the man that has to have help when he is dying. God help the man that has to be surrounded and cheered up and his hand held, and his brow patted in order to keep him from terror in the hour of his demise. God pity that man.

For just as you were born alone, you will die alone. And though you were surrounded by friends and helpers and doctors and nurses, and your mother was there and all the rest, you were born alone. And when you die, you will die alone. So, we'd better get used to a loneliness that isn't a loneliness. Saint Paul said it back here in this last great book that he wrote. He's said at my first answer, that is before Nero, his first trial, not his second, the second condemned Him. But the first trial, at my first answer, no man stood with me. But all men forsook me and I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Now here he was, he had just testified a few chapters on before that he had finished his course. He had kept the faith. He fought a good fight. He had won a crown. And now henceforth it was laid up for him the treasures of righteousness in the world to come.

That was the happy spiritual Paul, but the hungry-hearted human Paul, couldn't even in his old age, and when he knew it was his last thing he would ever write, he couldn't help but say, I can't get over thinking about it, in that my first answer, no man stood with me. I had taught them to believe in Jesus. I had brought them out of darkness and showed them the Light. I had preached

the gospel to them. I had hazarded my life for them. I'd gone hungry for them. I'd been poor and ragged for them. And I stitched tents way into the night that I might be free to preach to them.

But when I was before Nero, no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. But he said cheerfully enough, notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me. He was lonely, but he wasn't alone. He was lonely because he wanted his friends around him there. But he was not alone, because the Lord stood with him and strengthened. So the lonely man is not alone. He's just lonely. The lonely Christian is not one who is alone. A hermit could be alone and not feel lonely. But the Christian's loneliness springs from his inability to find very many people who speak his spiritual language or have ever been where he's been.

And then, his loneliness throws him back upon God. David said, when my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. Now, being forsaken by your father and mother is about as neat and as vivid a way of saying that you're by yourself as it's possible; when they lead you to the door and turn you out, why, you're alone. But David said, when they do for Christ's sake, then the Lord takes me up.

Now, the lonely soul ought not to be surprised, because he is a rather odd individual. He lives a strange life, this lonely Christian, man or woman, lives strange life. The things that make some people laugh; he doesn't think are funny. And the things that some people will give their soul for he considers absolute refuse. And the desire for gain that some people have, he's strangely unmoved by it.

My old dad, he said about two of his sons. He said, I have two sons. He had three. I don't know why he didn't count the younger one. He was still at home a boy. But he said, I have two sons, one of them makes all he can and keeps all he gets. The other won't take anything and what you give him he gives away. And I've always rather cherished that as a rather disgusted but remarkable testimony to my brother and me. That my brother made all he could get and kept all he made. And I wouldn't take anything and when I got it I gave it away. I hope that's true in some measure yet, but it was when he uttered that testimony surely.

You're an odd person when you're like that, brother. There's no question about it. The Christian is an oddity because he talks to somebody he can't see and professes a loyalty to a kingdom that his eyes have never looked upon and seeks the praise and exultation of another and doesn't seek anything for himself. That makes the Christian an odd being. And of course, being odd, he's a speckled bird and being a speckled bird, he has shied away from by the rest.

But I'd like to add this before I close that the soul apart is not a holier than thou individual, satirized so bitterly by popular literature, because the soul apart, his very loneliness stirs him to

pity for others. And do you know who it has been that has built all the hospitals or the Christian hospitals? Do you know who it's been that's founded the missionary societies? Do you know who they have been that have gone to heathen lands and like our good Dr. Crowell and built a little tiny hospital there. Do you know who they've been? They've always been the souls that have been rejected, and their father and their mother forsook them, so to speak.

And the Lord found them and their very yearning after humankind. And the fellowship with a world that rejected them and that they couldn't fellowship because it was sinful; that very pain has very often driven them to poured out devotion and sacrifice. What was it that drove Livingstone way up into the heart of Africa? What was it that drove a sick and delicate Dr. Jaffrey all over the Far East? What was it that drove Simpson to walk up and down on the shores of the ocean out in New England and saying every pebble on the shore was a lost man to my praying heart?

What was it? What was it that caused men and women every place down the centuries to found the hospitals and to look after the old folks and take care of the children and have places for the insane to go where they could be cared for? Ah, it was always the separated man, the lonely soul, the soul that just couldn't find what he wanted in the world. It just didn't offer it. It wasn't there. This odd number, this strange fellow, because he couldn't laugh at their jokes. Why, they say he's a sourpuss. And because he wasn't interested in all of their silly chatter, they said that he was party killer and that he was dull and not interesting. But he walked with his God, and he left betrayal of luminous blessing behind him. And they're all over the world. No, no, not holier than thou, not the arrogant, proud souls that walked with his chin up and tramps the people he considers to be beneath him.

Jesus Christ, the loneliest man in all the world, put His hands on the head of babies and smiled and blessed them and talked to their mothers and cast out devils and healed the sick and chattered with the poor and went away, leaving the eyes of the poor shining.

The priests and the rabbi walked in their robes with their phylacteries dangling, and in their pride called the multitude, these, this multitude that's cursed, knowing not the law. But the lonely Jesus walked among them and was lonely while he healed them and blessed them and forgave them and turned their eyes upward and talked to them about the mansions above in the Father's house. So don't let anybody tell you that I'm preaching a withdrawn, monkish type of Christianity. I am not. I am saying that the very longing after human fellowship and the inability to find it much in the Earth makes men and women good workers and hard workers.

Well, because the lonely man is detached from the world, he's able to help it. And because others are attached to the world, they're unable to help it. The weakness of so many modern Christians is that they feel too much at home in the world. The simple little song people sing, that I don't feel at home in the world anymore, the modern can't sing except to smile and think it's cute, because they

do feel at home in the world. They avoid loneliness by adjusting and integrating and becoming a part of the very system they're sent to protest against. And the world recognizes them for what they are and accepts them. And that's the saddest thing that can be said about them. No, they're not lonely, but neither are they saints. And they profess a name that they don't know. They claim to follow a Savior that's so far out ahead of them, they cannot even see the shadow of His holy back as he walks away.

My brethren, seek God in the loneliness of your own soul and see what happens to you. See, if all the truth you know won't begin to glow. And the doctrines that have lain in your heart bedridden in the dormitory of your soul, Skullridge said, won't take fire and begin to burn with a strange, luminous fire. And heaven will open, and you'll see visions of God. Then like Moses and Ezra and the rest, you can come back to be a blessing to the very world you had to desert. But if you don't desert it, you can't help it. For the saint must walk alone.