

# A Clear Conscience

by Zac Poonen

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*Keeping a clear conscience is essential for spiritual growth and honoring God, and involves making restitution for past wrongs and living a life of integrity.*

**Duration:** 56:07

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:28, Matthew 6:33, Luke 19:9, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, 2 Timothy 4:13, 1 Peter 3:4

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Restitution"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of setting one's past life right before entering the house of God. He encourages listeners to make restitution for any wrongs they have committed, specifically in regards to stolen money. The speaker also urges individuals to respond to God's call and make necessary changes in their lives, such as apologizing to others, returning money, and changing their goals and ambitions. The sermon emphasizes the significance of maintaining a clear conscience and making restitution, as it leads to spiritual growth and rewards from God.

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## Transcript

We'd like to continue from where we left off in our last study. We were looking at Paul saying that he kept his conscience clear before God and before men, just like the two arms of the cross. We have a responsibility in the vertical direction towards God and horizontally towards all our fellow human beings.

Every sin we commit is a sin against God, everything, because it violates the law of purity and of love that God created us to live by. When we sin against a fellow human being, we sin horizontally and vertically. We have to confess it to God and to men.

But if we have sinned only against God, then we confess only to God. For example, if I've had a dirty thought, I don't have to confess that to you, or to a priest, or to anyone. I confess it only to God, because it was a sin only in the vertical direction.

Sin must be confessed in the circle in which it was committed. If I have a bad thought, there's only one person in that circle, that's God. So I confess only to God.

If I lost my temper at somebody, there are two people in that circle. God. God is in every circle, plus that person.

If I sinned against two people, then I have to confess to two people. If I sinned against the whole church, then I must get up and confess in the church meeting. This is a principle that we must bear in mind.

It's not enough to confess our sin to God. You remember when Zacchaeus, the Lord met with Zacchaeus on the Jericho Road. We read about it in Luke chapter 19.

And the Lord told Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today. And he hurried and came down. And as they went to the house, just in front of Zacchaeus' house, before the Lord could enter his house, it says in verse 8 of Luke 19, Zacchaeus stopped.

He stopped in front of his house, and if I were to paraphrase his words, what he said was, Lord, you're a holy person, but this house of mine has been built with unrighteous money, money that's not lawfully mine. So before you enter this house, I want to tell you a few things that I've decided to set my past life right. There are lots of people I've stolen money from.

All the people whom I know, I will go to their homes and return four times, verse 8, what I stole from them. Four times because he must have stolen it. He may have stolen it ten years earlier.

And ten years, money multiplies four times with interest. So he decided to return four times what he had stolen, which is righteous. You know, if I stole money ten years ago, I can't return the same amount today.

I have to allow for interest and inflation and everything else. And Zacchaeus was a sharp man. And he recognised that it was unrighteous to return just the same amount he stole.

He returned four times. And then, like is usual in such cases, there were a whole lot of people whose addresses he didn't know. He didn't know where they were, who they were, all these people he cheated in past years.

But he recognised that just because he didn't know their address or where they lived, he could not conveniently keep that money, saying, well, I don't know where these people are. He knew that before God, he could not keep any money with him which he had unrighteously earned. So he did two things.

Those whom he knew where they were, he went and returned that. He said, I promise to return that money four times. And all the other money which he had stolen from, stolen means cheated, as a tax collector, he had taken more from people.

And he didn't know where they were. But he said, I can't keep that money. And that totaled about half his fortune.

He said, I'll give it to the poor. Because money essentially belongs to God. And when I don't know the person to whom I should return it, I should give that money to God, either in the church offering or to poor people, either of the two.

And Zacchaeus decided to give it to the poor. So his conscience was settled, even though it would probably take him another four or five years to return all this money. But as soon as he took that decision, he was right before God.

It's a wonderful example here for us. Immediately Jesus said, today salvation has come to this house because he also is a son of Abraham. Why did Jesus call him a son of Abraham? I don't know whether you're familiar with Genesis 14, where Abraham came back after saving the king of Sodom, who had been

captured by some other kings.

He defeated those kings, delivered the king of And in those days, if you won a battle, all the property that you won in that battle was yours, legally. That was part of the benefits of winning a battle. But Abraham told the king of Sodom, I will not even take a shoelace from all the things you have here.

They are yours, you can take it. Here was another son of Abraham, Zacchaeus, who said, I will not even take a shoelace from anyone that is not righteously mine. His conscience was clear.

And Jesus gave him a certificate. This is another son of Abraham. Salvation has come to this house.

Now today, preachers tell people, salvation has come even before the man has decided to make restitution. That's wrong. Notice when Jesus said salvation had come.

Not when he had made that restitution, that may take another five years, but when he decided to make that restitution, but not before he decided. It was not enough for Zacchaeus to confess his sin to God. It was also necessary for him to settle with all the people whom he had wronged.

This is a principle that we must bear in mind. And very often, we don't experience the fullness of salvation because of something way back in the past, which we have not settled. I remember when I was converted, I told you about the one letter of apology I had to write.

The other thing God spoke to me was about taxes that I had cheated the government in, in my unconverted days. And I sat down and totaled it up. And it came to about four months' salary of mine as a naval officer.

And I didn't have that much money, but I decided that I was going to save it and return it to the government. Duties and taxes I was owing, which nobody had caught me for, and there was no possibility of my being caught. It was just my conscience that bothered me, that it was wrong.

The Bible says we must pay duty and tax exactly like governments demand it. It's part of our Christian testimony. Jesus said, Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.

I've often asked people this question. Supposing you want to give an offering to God, and you have to pay your taxes to the government, which do you do first? God first or government first? Most people say God first. I said no.

Jesus said, First render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and then give to God what is God's. Have you seen that verse in Matthew's Gospel chapter, if you're not familiar with it? What did he say? The way to life is narrow and few there be that find it. The way to destruction is broad, but it's worth it in the end.

Matthew 22, 21. He said to them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Who is first? Caesar.

The reason being, God does not want Caesar's money. God does not want Mr. X's money or Y's money. God doesn't want Zacchaeus to put in the offering box what he's stolen from X, Y, and Z. Or from Caesar.

Jesus said, Render to Caesar what is Caesar's. What they were asking was this, Is it lawful to pay tax? We think Caesar is a bit unrighteous to demand all this high percentage of taxes. What do you think, Jesus? Jesus said, Give to Caesar what is Caesar's.

Give to God what is God's. You know, we can justify our disobedience in 101 ways, but I've discovered through the years that if you honor God, he honors you. I remember once when I was traveling back to India from abroad, and those were days when the customs duty in India was very high, more than 100% of the value of the goods, etc.

And the Lord said to me, Don't be like these other Indian people who, when they go back, hide all their things under their clothes and here and there. Put it on top, so that the customs people can see it as soon as they open the suitcase. And the Lord said, If you have to pay duty, pay duty.

And then the Lord said to me, I have no shortage of money. I can give you money. I have a shortage of righteous people.

Don't add to that shortage by being unrighteous yourself. Do you know that the Lord has got no shortage of money? He's got a shortage of righteous people on earth. And I'm absolutely convinced that many, a child of God, who could have had God's word on their mouth, do not have God's word on their mouth because there's unrighteousness in their life.

Their conscience is not clear. You know, I started preaching nearly 40 years ago. I sought God for the anointing of the Holy Spirit then.

I started preaching as a very young man. And one of the things I have prayed throughout the years, because I've seen so many people around me fall away, lose the anointing, run after money, etc. I said, Lord, there's one thing I don't want to lose in my life.

I don't want to lose the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I don't care if I lose my health. I don't care if I lose money, popularity, reputation, everything I can lose.

But I don't want to lose the anointing of the Holy Spirit. My brothers and sisters, do you value God's anointing and grace upon your life? If you do, I'll give you one simple bit of advice. Keep your conscience clear.

It's a very simple bit of advice. I'm not telling you never fall. We'll all fall.

When you fall, confess it. Acknowledge it. Don't put the blame on somebody else.

Go to that person and ask forgiveness. Humble yourself. God gives His grace to the humble.

Why don't so many people get God's grace? It must be because they're not humble. They appear humble, but God doesn't think they are humble. So Zacchaeus, can you imagine? Just picture this in your mind.

Zacchaeus going to somebody's house whom he's cheated five years ago, and going with the money and knocking at the door. People inside scared, has this fellow come to collect more taxes or what? And he says, I've come to apologize. And they can't believe their ears.

Isn't this the same man who cheated us five years ago? And he comes and gives them four times what he took from them. More interest than they would have earned in the bank. And they are amazed.

Zacchaeus, how did this happen? He says, I met Jesus. It's quite likely some of those other people got converted too, as Zacchaeus went house to house giving his testimony. And that's what happens when we make restitution.

People don't forget. We had a brother in one of our churches. He had got a job on the basis of a degree certificate.

Which degree course he did because he did a pre-university course in which he got a degree, which he passed. But that pre-university course, he had cheated in one examination. And therefore, he did not deserve to do the degree course and did not deserve to get the degree certificate and did not deserve to get this job.

Then he got converted. And he decided to make restitution. He took that degree certificate and went back to the college, to the registrar of the university to tell him that I didn't deserve this degree certificate.

And he was going to give it back, which meant he would lose his job. Because his job was dependent on his degree certificate too. And he went and told that man, I cheated in an examination, I don't know, eight, nine years ago, in one subject.

So I don't deserve this certificate. Of course, that man had never come across anyone come back like this in his life. This was a strange experience for him.

So, he went completely prepared to lose his degree certificate, to lose his job that day, because he wanted a clear conscience. He meant business with God. But that registrar was merciful to him.

He says, you've played fair with us, I'll play fair with you. You can keep the certificate, we forgive you. God honors those who honor him.

But I know, I've seen through the years how that brother has developed spiritually. Amazing. One of the finest brothers I know in India.

And I can see the reason for it is that in little things, he sought to maintain a very clear conscience. He's not a very gifted person. But I believe his reward will be great in heaven, even though he's not a great preacher, because he's kept his conscience clear.

It's so very important to make restitution. Don't let the devil hold you back from that. Because then, it'll be blotted out from the videotape.

You know, there are whole sections in our videotape of our memory, which we are ashamed of. All of us, you and me. How to erase them from the videotape? Thank God, God's willing to erase certain sections.

If we confess our sins, that's the good news. That there are whole sections of your life which will not be played back on the day of judgment. You will not be embarrassed.

You will not be ashamed, because the blood of Christ will blot it out. But there's a condition. The condition is, you must admit that it was your fault.

Confess your sin. Go like Zacchaeus to those people you cheated and return that thing you took wrongfully. I remember when I had to return this money, I think I took a whole year to save that four-month salary I scrounged and scrimped and finally saved that money and emptied my bank account and gave it back, and my heart was full of the joy of the Lord.

The bank account was empty, but my heart was full. And I never regretted, because if I hadn't done it, I'd have been dragging a chain on my leg for 41 years, and it would have slowed me down tremendously in

my spiritual growth. I think a lot of Christians, their Christian growth has slowed down tremendously.

They're trying to run a marathon race with a chain on their legs. You could have run much faster. You'd have been way ahead of where you are today.

If you had settled those things some years ago. But it's not too late. You can settle it still.

The day of judgment hasn't come, thank God. Settle it, because anything that's not settled on earth will have to be settled at the judgment seat of Christ. There's no escaping.

We might as well settle it now. You lose a little bit of money perhaps, a little bit of your pride, which is good for you, and what you gain is God's favor and God's grace. He gives his grace to the humble.

So I would encourage you to do that, and don't let the devil try to change your mind on that. Now I'll tell you what's going to happen. Right now, there are some of you sitting here who are absolutely convinced that God wants you to do something about it.

Tomorrow the devil will come to you and say, well, think about it a little more. Don't be in such a hurry. And you say, yeah, that's a good idea.

I need to think about it a little more. I don't want to do anything hastily. And by next week, you've forgotten it altogether.

That's exactly what the devil wants. So be careful that the birds of the air, which are all here, don't come and take away the seed which God is trying to sow in your heart. You will not regret it.

My brother, sister, I do not regret it. I stand here as a testimony to the fact that God has given me a hundred times more back than what I gave up. A hundred times.

He is no debtor. The silver and the gold are his. And if you honor him, he will honor you in ways you cannot imagine.

He will give you income that you never anticipated, from sources that you never expected, because you honored him. He will prevent losses that other people have from coming into your life. I believe that.

Honor him. Keep your conscience clear. It's worth it.

And that whole section of that videotape will be blotted out. And when it's played back in the Day of Judgment, and you're waiting for that terrible thing to come, and it's not there. It's not there.

That whole section, nothing's going to be shown there. And then all the good parts are going to be left behind, by the way. All the good things you did will all be there.

And then comes to that other time in your life when you did something terrible, and you're all tense, and that's also blank. Can you imagine how happy you'll be that day? Because you confessed your sin. You took sin seriously.

You acknowledged. You didn't put the blame on anybody else. You acknowledged, Lord, there, there, there, those different times in my life, it was my fault.

I acknowledge it. Forgive me. And to the best of my ability.

You know, some things we did wrong in our life, there's no way of repaying it. We've got to just forget it. There are certain people we have harmed physically.

We don't know where they are. There's nothing we can do about it. So I'm not saying that we should be paranoid about trying to set everything right in my life.

Nobody can set everything that they did wrong right in their life. I settled only two things, because those are the only two things God reminded me of. So what I'm trying to tell you is, none of us will be able to settle all the wrong things we did in our life, but think of anything particularly that God reminds you of, and those are the things that you probably need to settle.

It may be only one or two out of a thousand wrong things you did. Because God is not an unreasonable Father. He understands there are hundreds of wrong things we've done in our life, there's no way we can ever settle it at all.

He accepts us, He forgives us, but He tests us to see whether we are taking advantage of His mercy, or whether we are willing to humble ourselves and set right what we can. You know, I was so keen that I should not have any unrighteous money with me. Any money which was not lawfully earned.

I mean, even to the extent where if I was ignorant of some law by which I owed the government some money which I was ignorant of, I say, Lord, even that I don't want. I don't want to take the excuse of ignorance. I want you to do something so that even what I've ignorantly got from the government will go back to the government in some way, because I don't want a single cent in my bank account which is not righteously, lawfully earned.

Because I know the blessing of God can come upon only money which I've lawfully earned. What I unlawfully earn, there's a curse on it. A curse that can descend on my children.

That's a sad thing. People fight and quarrel about property when the family property is being divided and they cheat their relatives and take some more property. They brought a curse upon themselves and upon their children because it's unrighteous money.

I mean, this is in India. I suppose in other parts of the world, I think of this example in the Old Testament. I want you to turn for a moment to 2 Kings 5. In 2 Kings 5, we read about that very godly man, Elisha, who had just healed Naaman of his leprosy.

In 2 Kings 5, Naaman was so grateful that he came back with a whole lot of money and clothes and everything else. And verse 16, urged Elisha to take it all. But Elisha was a man of God.

He said, I don't want your money. God's servants never take money from those who do not love the Lord. Naaman was a heathen.

Elisha would not take a cent from him. He would bless him, heal him, but not take any money from him. I think Elisha would rather, would any day have taken money from a poor Jewish widow than from a heathen general of a Syrian army.

That's why he sent him away. He said, I don't want your money. It's not wrong for a servant of God to receive gifts from those who love the Lord, but it is wrong for him to receive from those who do not love the Lord.

So the Bible says, even the early apostles did not take any money from non-Christians. So Elisha sent him back and said, I don't want any of your money. Naaman urged him, verse 16, he said no.

But Elisha had an assistant called Gehazi. He was a bit of a crook. And he said, my master is a fool.

We didn't even send out a report about our work and here was this man giving us this money freely. We didn't ask for it. The chap is offering it to us freely and after all he got some benefit from our God.

Why can't he pay up for it? And Gehazi said, okay, if my master is a fool, I'm not going to be a fool. I'll go after him. And Gehazi, verse 21, pursued after Naaman, told him a false story, said, you know, we're building a Bible school here and we've got some students coming from different places.

Can you please help us? You know, the usual type of reports Christians send to different places about asking for money. Well, that's exactly what Gehazi did. You read about it in verse 22.

That's exactly what he said. Sons of the prophets means Bible school students. And he said, we need some money for them.

And Naaman said, sure, take all this. And he took it and he went and hid it in his house, verse 24. And then he came and stood before Elisha as if nothing had happened.

And Elisha said, where did you go? He said, I didn't go anywhere. He said, I saw everything. God showed me everything.

I saw you going there after Gehazi. God gave Elisha long distance vision and he saw there. He's collecting the money.

He said, I saw everything, Gehazi. Don't fool me. And now, you thought you got only Naaman's money? You also got his leprosy along with it, verse 27.

And the sad part is, that leprosy is going to cling to you and to your children. This is what I said earlier. You get money unrighteously from somewhere and it's going to bring a curse on your children.

And Gehazi became a leper. And I can imagine Gehazi one day, his little five year old boy comes to him and says, Daddy, I've got a little white spot on my hand. What do you think it is? Gehazi says, let me see it.

Do you have any sensation there? No, Daddy, I don't feel anything. How do you think I got it, Daddy? What's he going to say? Son, it's because I stole money. Don't bring a curse on your children.

It's better to be poor and righteous and upright and have the blessing of God upon our lives, upon our families, than to pass on to our children an inheritance unrighteously earned. It's not worth it. It's not worth it.

So many children of God's people, believers, have gone astray from the Lord because their parents have put money above God. Are you like that? Well, it's not too late. Thank God many of us, our children are still small.

We have still an opportunity to set right. I want to urge you, put God first in your home. Teach your children the value of keeping their conscience clear.

It's better to be poor and righteous. Teach them not to cheat in their examinations in school. To be upright and honest even if they fail in an examination is better.

I used to tell that to my children regularly. I said, I don't care if you fail, but I don't want you ever to cheat in an examination. Never.

How are they going to learn if we don't teach them to keep a good conscience? Do you want them to have things on their videotapes which they are ashamed of in the final day? We've got to help our children to understand the ways of the Lord. Many parents today are not teaching their children all this. We can tell the children the stories of Joseph and David and Goliath and Daniel and the Lion's Den and all that, and you don't teach them the more important things like not telling lies and being upright.

That's more important than just knowing the Bible stories. So this matter of keeping our conscience clear is so very vital. And then we and our children will have a joy in the final day of seeing our videotape cleansed, erased in certain areas because we have confessed those sins.

The blood of Jesus has blotted it out. Praise God for that. Now that's not the only problem we have.

I want to say a little more about the conscience before we go on. Our conscience, we can say, fulfills the same function in our spirit. The conscience is part of our spirit.

And the conscience fulfills the same function in our spirit that pain fulfills in our body. Now how many of you believe that pain is one of the greatest blessings in the human body? It is. In case you didn't know, I'll convince you about it.

You know, people who have leprosy, if they lose sensation in their feet, leprosy takes away that sensation. They don't feel anything. They can trample on a nail and a nail can go into their feet and they won't know anything about it.

And they can go to bed with a nail inside their feet that's getting infected and they walk, go for a walk tomorrow and come back and still haven't taken the nail out of their foot and it gets infected and finally they lose their feet. Not because of leprosy. The leprosy only removes the sensation.

But because of the infection that came because they did not know that a nail had got in. They can put their hand on a hot stove and keep it there. They don't feel a thing.

And their hand gets burnt, destroyed. How is it with us? You can't put your hand on a hot stove even for a few seconds. You can't get a thorn in your foot without it disturbing you.

Do you know that that's what saves your foot? That's what saves you from losing your hand and losing your feet? Pain is one of the greatest blessings in the human body. When you have a stomach ache, it's telling you something is wrong. If it continues despite you're taking some medicine, it means you must go to the doctor and get a check up and he'll probably show you there's something wrong and you can get some treatment for it and be healed by it, healed from it.

But how did you detect it? Pain. Think if you didn't have pain. All of us would have died long ago if we didn't feel pain.

When you've lost the feeling, sensation, it's leprosy. It's already begun. It's a very serious sickness.

Now apply this to our conscience, to our spirit. Conscience is the thing that pricks you when you've done something wrong. Have you ever seen a three-year-old telling a lie? Did you eat that cake I told you not to eat? And he says, no mommy, I didn't eat it.

Did you not eat it? And the way he looks at himself, you know he's telling a lie. He's not too smart at telling a lie. But wait till he becomes twenty years old.

He'll tell you a lie with a straight face and you won't even know that he's telling a lie. How did that happen? At three, his conscience was sensitive. By the time he's twenty, he's told so many lies that he can tell you a lie with a straight face.

He can become a bank robber, a white collar thief, all types of things. So gradually, through the years, the sensitivity of the conscience gets eroded. Have you ever compared the sole of your feet with the sole of a baby's foot? It's quite a difference, I'll tell you.

Ours is hard. A baby's foot is so sensitive, if you touch it with a pin, you pull it back. Have you tried putting a pin into the sole of your feet? You don't even feel it, till it penetrates to a certain distance.

It's become hard. And that's what's happening to our conscience. Same way you had tender feet when you were a baby, it's become so hard.

That's what's happening to our conscience. And the good news of the gospel is, you can become a child once again. Unless you're converted and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The good news of the gospel is that this hardened conscience, like the hardened soles of my foot, can become sensitive like a baby's foot once again. That is part of the good news of the gospel, that this pain that I was not feeling, I can feel it once again. Do you know that's one of the best news that a leper can ever hear? That this patch where you're feeling no sensation, you can feel sensation once more.

That the sole of your foot, where you could get a nail inside and not even feel it, can be healed. Now, in people of leprosy, it doesn't happen. If it's gone, it's gone.

But the miracle of the gospel is, it can happen. That sensitivity which is gone can come back. You know what the bible says about Naaman in 2nd Kings 5? His flesh became like that of a little child.

Imagine this man, his leprosy disappeared like that and he began to feel pain. He was so delighted that he could feel pain once more in his body. And that's the message of the gospel, that you can feel, you can sense once more, you can be sensitive to little things wrong.

A little word that was spoken rudely, it bothers you now. Thank God. Think of the years when it never bothered you.

You could keep saying it and go to bed at night peacefully. You could lust after a woman with your eyes and sleep peacefully at night. But now you can't sleep peacefully at night.

You can't sleep peacefully at night because it bothers you the way you lusted with your eyes. Thank God the leprosy is getting healed. You lost your temper at your wife during the day and you just toss around in bed till you wake her up and say, I'm sorry, please forgive me.

Praise God. Something's happening. Salvation has come to this house.

That is the message of the gospel. Keep your conscience sensitive. I believe that as we grow in the Christian life, I was born again 42 years ago.

I'll tell you my testimony. There are things I see today as sin, which I did not see as sin 3 or 4 years ago. Now I see it as sin.

Your conscience becomes more and more sensitive. This is how we progress towards Christ-likeness. We become more and more aware of un-Christ-likeness in different areas of our life.

Now if you're not serious about progressing towards Christ-likeness, of course you'll never become more sensitive. It's like people who join school and they study up to the 4th grade and say, that's enough for me. But a lot of other people are not going to be satisfied until they get a Ph.D. We're not satisfied 4th grade or 10th grade or A-level or a degree course or post-graduate.

They say, we want to go to Ph.D. and there are some people who go for post-doctoral studies. That's how I want it in the Christian life. I want to go on to the ultimate possible for a human being on this earth to be as Christ-like as possible in our speech, in our thoughts, in our words, in our attitudes.

That depends on how serious you are about your Christian spiritual growth and education. But the way to that growth is through our conscience becoming more and more sensitive to sin. You know there are a lot of things which we don't often recognize as sin.

There are obvious sins which even the worldly people consider as sin like murder, adultery, theft, telling lies. These are obvious sins. But there are other things which the Lord has to show us as we grow spiritually.

I remember once many years ago visiting a home of a very good sister in one of our churches. We sat in her home for one hour and she spoke for about 54 minutes and her husband spoke for about 2 minutes and I spoke for about 4 minutes. She didn't talk anything sinful.

She talked about her testimony and about this scripture and the other scripture and what God spoke to her. She just dominated the conversation, that's all. Now, was there anything sinful about what she said? Well, no.

Was there anything un-Christ-like? I think yes, certainly. You're not supposed to dominate a conversation like that, anybody. And I went to that same home years later and it was different.

She had developed a meek and a quiet spirit. I didn't tell her a word. It was the Holy Spirit.

I was so delighted when I saw that. So, you see, there are things which the Holy Spirit tells us which nobody else can tell us about. Not obvious sins, but little un-Christ-likenesses.

Even an uncultured person, a barbarian, when he's filled with the Holy Spirit, will become sensitive to sin. You know how an uncivilized person or a person who's not cultured would go to somebody else's house and if he sees a letter lying on the table and nobody's around, he'll pick up the letter and read it, even though it's not meant for him. He who is without sin, let him throw the first stone.

But if he's filled with the Holy Spirit, as he picks up that letter, the Spirit will say, that's not for you. Just drop it. Leave it there.

Don't read it. That's not your letter. See, this is the thing.

It's not civilization. It's not culture. It's the Holy Spirit making him sensitive because that man wants to be Christ-like.

It's just one example. That if you're serious about being Christ-like in your life, and that's the whole purpose of the Christian life. See, the Christian life is meant, first of all, to have our sins forgiven and then to grow into the likeness of Christ.

It's like going through school, going up to A-level and then through to college and higher, postgraduate degrees and so on. This is growth into Christ-likeness. And that growth comes through the Holy Spirit making us more and more sensitive to sin.

Don't ever make the mistake of thinking that because God is blessing you materially, he's happy with you. It's not true. Do you think the richest people in the world are the most Christ-like? Just look around and see.

Like somebody once said, if you want to know what God thinks about money, just see the type of people he gives it to. Look at the type of people who are making such a lot of money in the world. Are they the most godly? You know, one of the poorest people that ever walked on this earth was Jesus Christ.

He did not have a place to lay his head. And pretty close to him was the Apostle Paul. And at that same level was Peter and John.

Imagine, the man didn't even have money to give to a beggar at the temple gate in Jerusalem. These were some of the godliest men that Christendom has seen. They were not rich, but they were godly.

You know, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11, there were times when he didn't have enough money to buy food to eat. He fasted deliberately. And other times, he says, I was hungry, not fasting.

I wanted to eat, but I didn't have anything to eat. That's what he says. And he also says, he didn't have enough money to buy a blanket to cover himself.

I'm paraphrasing his words, in shiverings in the cold. He writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 from a Roman dungeon, which they used to call prisons those days. Please bring that cloak which I left behind there when you come, Timothy, because I'm shivering in the cold here.

He didn't have money to buy another one. These are some of God's greatest men. Don't think prosperity is a mark of God's blessing.

Not in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, it was, but not in the New Testament. In the New Testament, it's something far greater than prosperity.

It is Christlikeness. It's not even health. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, which is a physical ailment for which he prayed three times and didn't go.

But it didn't hinder him from doing God's work. I believe Jesus heals the sick and it's right for us to pray when we're sick. But I also believe that sometimes for some greater good, perhaps to keep us humble, the Lord may allow something to remain, as he did in Paul's case.

But I have discovered through the years that the greatest thing that God can do for us is to make us like Jesus Christ. You know, there's a great dispute in Christendom. Some of you who are not theologically minded may not know about words like Arminianism and Calvinism.

These are big, big words and thank God if you don't know what they mean. Because it's not important. They're not in the Bible, so you don't have to worry about it.

But it's a great dispute concerning whether God predetermines that certain people should go to heaven and certain people should go to hell. I personally think it's a lot of rubbish to think that God predetermines that somebody will go to heaven and somebody will go to hell. But I'll tell you, the predestination is a New Testament word.

But not predestined to go to heaven or to hell. That's the point. You know what predestination means? You know what destination means? That's where I've got to finally go.

Predestination means God has, before I was born, determined what my destination should be. And that destination, this is the important thing, is not heaven or hell. I want to give you a little surprise.

It's not heaven or hell. Let me show you Romans chapter 8. Do you know what the destination is for you? Many Christians don't know their destination. If I were to ask you, where are you going? What's your ultimate destination? I think most of you will say heaven.

I'll say that's not what the Bible says. We may go to heaven, but that's a sort of secondary thing. Do you know what your destination is? Here it is, Romans 8, verse 29.

Whom He foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Do you know what your destination is? Christlikeness. Christlikeness.

When He comes, we shall see Him and we shall be like Him. Also, do you know what the blessed hope is for me? Many people say the blessed hope is Jesus is coming back. I say that's half of it.

The other half of it, according to 1 John chapter 3, verse 2, is that I'll also be like Him when I see Him. That is my destination. My destination is to be like Jesus and with Him.

Not heaven. I told the Lord years ago, I said, Lord, I'm ready to go to hell if you're there. If you're there, I'm ready to go anywhere.

Because heaven is, for me, where Jesus is. It's not a geographical place with streets of gold and gates of pearl and all that. I'm not looking for streets of gold and gates of pearl.

I'm looking for my Savior. I'm looking for Jesus. I think my home in Bangalore will be an empty home if my wife is not there.

If she's in a hut, I'd rather go and live with her in a hut. What is it that makes a home a home? The presence of your loved one. Not the grand walls and curtains.

I hope not. What's it that's going to make heaven heaven? Tell me. The presence of Jesus.

So, what's my destination? Jesus. To become like Him. That is what God predestined me for.

He predestined that wretched sinner Zak Poonen should become like Jesus Christ. Or put your name there. That's God's destination for you.

If you agree with God, say, Lord, I agree fully. I want to get there myself. And do you know how you're going to get there? By the Holy Spirit making you more and more sensitive in your conscience to little things.

You know why He's called Holy Spirit? Not noisy spirit? Or excitable spirit? Holy Spirit. A lot of people, when they get filled with the Holy Spirit, they think they should have noise or excitement. Okay, I'm not against those things.

But I say, first of all, holiness. What are you excited with? Holiness? To me, it's like this. If somebody comes to your home and out of great affection for you, brings to you a beautiful diamond.

Very expensive diamond as a gift for your birthday. And wrapped up in a beautiful, with blue shiny paper and nice ribbon and all that. And you open the ribbon and the paper and take out the diamond.

Now tell me, what will your little one year old child be excited with? With the shiny paper and the ribbon. Absolutely right. You're not excited with that.

You throw that in the trash then. You're excited with what is inside. The emotional experience is the shiny paper.

I'm not against it. But I don't care if I get a diamond even in rough brown paper. I'd be quite happy with it.

Even if it's in newspaper. The important thing is the thing inside. Did the Holy Spirit make you holy? If not, you open this beautiful blue shiny paper and the ribbon and you find it's empty inside.

What's the use of that? That's the type of experience some people have got. They got some emotional thrill and excitement. Say they were filled with the Holy Spirit, there's nothing inside.

There's no holiness. Understand what is your destination. God is destined that you should become like Jesus Christ.

And He sent the Holy Spirit to fill us so that we reach that destination. Do you want to reach that destination? Say yes to God and tell Him, Lord, that's where I want to get. I mean, you may give me so many thrills and frills along the way, but I want to reach my goal.

Let's pray. There are a number of things I'm sure God spoke into your heart this evening. And I want to invite you, my dear friends and brothers and sisters, don't let the birds of the air, the demons, take away from your heart what God has sown into your heart this evening.

Call upon the Lord when He is near. And if you heard His voice clearly this evening, then you can be pretty sure God is near you. Respond to that call and say, Lord, I want to respond to that specific thing that you told me about.

Maybe there's a phone call you need to make. Maybe there's a letter you need to write. Maybe there's somebody you need to go and apologize to.

Maybe there's some money you need to return. Maybe there's something that you need to set right. Maybe there needs to be a change of your goals in life, your ambition.

Maybe you need to stop watching that filthy program on television that you've been watching, which is polluting you, which is hindering you from reaching your destination of Christlikeness. Maybe it's the type of movies you're watching that will ensure that you never reach the goal. Be serious.

Say, Lord, I want to be a serious Christian from today. I don't care what it costs. Heavenly Father, I pray that you will raise up in this land of South Africa men and women who know God, who are pursuing the goal of Christlikeness, who've got a clear vision of their destination, and who want to get there, whatever the price they have to pay.

And I pray that you will raise up many such men and women in this land, men of all colors and shades, but who love Christ, who love Jesus, and whose life will be like a light in the midst of the darkness around them. I pray that you'll raise up churches like that, little fellowships of people who love one another fervently, who love you with all their hearts. And you will uphold the standards of your word in the midst of a corrupt and compromising Christendom.

Thank you, Father. Do it. And I pray that you will, even from the crowd of people who are here this evening, begin a work in many hearts that will lead to that goal finally.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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