

(A Heavenly Church) 6. Contentment

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of contentment in the New Testament, and how it allows us to live within the boundaries that God has drawn for us.

Duration: 1:04:06

Scripture: Genesis 12:2, Matthew 6:33, Luke 17:15-19, Acts 1:8, Romans 1:21, Philippians 2:13, Hebrews 2:12

Topics: "Financial Stewardship", "Contentment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a father in heaven who provides for our needs. He encourages the audience to be faithful and righteous with money, as this is a testimony of our trust in God. The speaker paraphrases Luke 16:11, stating that if we are faithful with money, God will entrust us with true riches. He also highlights the need to be content in all circumstances, whether we have little or much, and warns against comparing ourselves to others.

Transcript

The difference between Old Testament faith and New Testament faith. Old Testament faith was mainly for material things, victory over earthly enemies, earthly blessings. And in the New Testament, our faith is the faith of Jesus, who lived a life of purity and service to others.

Here's another difference. In Psalm 106, we read about the time when the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea, and how the Lord saved them from the Egyptians. It says in verse 9 of Psalm 106, the Lord rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up.

And thus he saved them, verse 10, from the hand of the one who hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies, not one of them was left. Then, wherever you see in scripture the word then, take note of that.

Then they had faith in his words. Then they sang his praise. In the Old Testament, they could sing the praise of God, generally speaking, only after they saw the enemies buried.

Then they sang his praise. Then they believed his words. But in the New Testament, we give thanks even when the enemies are there.

It doesn't make a difference. We give thanks even when the circumstances appear not to have changed. That's faith.

Because we believe that despite what we see around us, God is still on the throne. He controls the universe. Jesus Christ has got all authority in heaven and earth.

I believe that a person who lives by New Testament faith will never be depressed. Will never be discouraged. He'll never be defeated.

He will always have a song of praise in his heart. He will rejoice in the Lord always. It's not that he will not be tempted.

It's not that he won't have difficult circumstances. But he will not go under the circumstances. He will be over them.

And I know from my own life, how even after being a Christian for many years, I was discouraged, depressed, and bad moods, and anger, and everything. But when I saw what the Lord had done on Calvary, how he had defeated Satan on the cross, and Satan was completely defeated. That when I saw that one word, if I submit to God totally in my life, everything in my life, if it's submitted to God, if I resist the devil, he will flee from me.

As I said, many Christians read a scripture out of its context. James 4, 7 does not say, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. It says, first submit to God completely, then resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

And that's the reason the devil doesn't flee from many believers, because they haven't submitted to God completely. They haven't given their whole life to God. They haven't given all their money to God.

They haven't given all their time, energy, everything to God. Then they try to resist the devil, and the devil sits right on top of their head, runs their home. He laughs at their attempts to resist him.

But if you submit to God totally, and resist the devil, he will flee. One word, and he will flee. And because we know that Satan was defeated on the cross, because we know that Jesus Christ has got all authority in heaven and earth, many a time when I see circumstances around me that are not favorable, and things that should, in previous times in my life, should have depressed me, I confess certain eternal truths.

Well, Lord, you're still on the throne. That hasn't changed. The devil is still defeated.

My sins are all forgiven. And so many eternal truths as I confess them, I find there's no room to be discouraged. There's no room to be depressed, because these temporary things will disappear.

So, we can sing our praise to God, unlike Old Testament people, not after we see circumstances change in our favor, but before they change. Because we know that God is on our side against the devil. Always, always, no matter what happens.

And that's why the Bible says, a life of godliness, by itself, cannot bring gain in our life, unless it's accompanied by contentment. 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 6 says, godliness is a very good thing. But if you have a very godly life, that means you're living in purity, you're trying your best to stay away from sin, trying your best to stay in the spirit of Christian love to everybody, you still will not make spiritual profit in your spiritual growth.

There wouldn't be spiritual growth, or you won't have spiritual gain and profit in your life, unless you have an attitude of contentment. Acceptance of the circumstances God has arranged for you. See, God has drawn a boundary around all of us.

A boundary in many areas. Our income, for example, our monthly income is a circle God has drawn around us. For some people, it's a big circle.

For some people, it's a small circle. For some people, it's a small circle that becomes bigger after a while, and then God may make it smaller again. It's up to Him.

But if you can believe that God is the one who draws that circle, you won't look at another person and envy him. You won't look at another person who earns less and despise him. And you will never complain about your circumstances.

You will trust God. God is the one who has drawn that circle of my monthly income around me. And He wants me to stay within that circle and be content.

And if we live there, I tell you, you will never get into debt in your whole life. I mean, I'm saying that from my own experience. I've known times when we were very poor, my wife and I. But all my life, I'm nearly 70 years old now, I've never been in debt for a single day of my life.

Not because I had plenty, but I learned to live within the circle I had. If I couldn't buy a new shirt, I never bought it. If I couldn't buy some gadget which I thought was absolutely necessary for the home, I wouldn't buy it.

Despite what the advertisements say, you can't live without this. Whenever I see such advertisements, I say, how did man live for 5,000 years without this? You know, today people say, you can't live without a cell phone. People live for thousands of years without cell phones, you know.

Believe it or not, they did. So don't believe all these advertisements. They're just to fool you, to get you into debt, to create endless problems for you.

Say, Lord, I'm going to live by divine principles. I'm going to be content. Godliness accompanied with contentment is great gain.

You can imagine yourself being very spiritual. But if your attitude to money and material things is not right, I tell you in Jesus' name, you will never be spiritual. You'll be just a religious person.

And you will be a legalist, perhaps. And you'll be fairly proud of your religiosity. You'll be a Pharisee.

So, we need to learn what it is to be content. We need to learn what it is to thank God for whatever God has provided us with. Little or much, that's up to Him.

It's something we have to learn. It's not something that comes automatically. You see that with children.

What an education it is to try and teach our children to be content. Not to want the other people's things. Every child wants somebody else's toy.

You go to some house, they want this, they want that. And we're like that. But we have to learn to be content.

Philippians 4, Paul says, in verse 11, in the middle, I have learned to be content. The great apostle is saying this. I have learned something in my life.

I have learned to be content. In whatever circumstances I am. Whatever.

He says, I know how to get along with very little. And I also know how to live in prosperity. This is New Testament Christianity.

I have learned to live with little. And I have also learned to live with much. Now many Christians have not learned either.

They don't know how to live with little. They always have to borrow. Because they see there are certain things in life I have to, I need.

Brother, sister, you don't need them. If God hasn't given you the money to buy it, you don't buy it. If you don't have money to buy meat, you don't buy it.

I remember the days in India and all when, we liked fish but it was too expensive. We'd buy it once or twice a year. Why? Because we wanted to obey a command of God which says, Oh no man anything.

We could have had fish every week if we borrowed money. But it would be at the price of disobeying that word which says, Oh no man anything. And now it's a question of which do I like more, God's word or fish? What do you like? Obedience to God or something your body wants? This is the reason why so many people get into debt.

They don't respect God's word. I feared, Bible says, God looks at those who tremble at His word. Isaiah 66 verse 1 and 2. To this man will I look.

To the man who trembles at my word. And I said, Lord I want you to look at me with favor every day of my life. And the Lord said, tremble at my word.

I have trembled at the word which says, Oh no man anything. I tell people if you need a credit card, please make sure you never pay interest on it. Pay off your credit card bills every month so that the credit card company earns nothing from you.

Let them earn whatever they want from other foolish people in the land. But make sure they earn nothing from you. Now if you don't have the discipline to pay off your credit card every month, I would suggest you don't use it.

You're going to accumulate debt. You're going to be like the rest of the worldly people in this country. And you're going to be a dishonor to the name of Jesus Christ.

It's a serious thing to be in debt. I don't know whether you know, I discovered this once in the Old Testament that the word for debt in the Old Testament is the same as serpent's bite. It's the bite of the serpent.

And the Old Testament says, the debtor is a slave to the creditor. And the Bible says, you're bought with a price. Don't be the slaves of any man.

Do you want to be the slave of a man? If you're a slave of a man, you cannot be the slave of Jesus Christ. That's why it's serious to get into debt. It's a very serious thing.

It's because it's going outside the boundary. There's a verse in Ecclesiastes chapter 10, which talks about the serpent bite. The bite of the serpent is the same word for debt in the Hebrew language.

And it says here, Hebrews 10 and verse 8, A serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. Or, to use the language I was just using, you go outside the boundary that God has drawn for you, the serpent will bite you. And the serpent bites, that's the devil.

He bites so many people because they're going outside the boundary God's put for them. There's boundary in many areas. God's given you a boundary in terms of your ministry in a church.

Stay within that boundary. If God expands the boundary, that's fine. But when people covet, they want something which God's not given them.

Whether it's money or a ministry. You look at somebody's ministry, you say, boy, I would like to have a ministry like that. And I covet it.

And God's given you a small little circle, and you're not happy with that circle. And you try to push and push and push and go here and there, you will destroy yourself. I've seen enough young people destroying themselves like that.

Let God expand those boundaries. Let God expand those boundaries in his own time. He who goes outside the boundary, a serpent will bite him.

So we have to learn to be content with our circumstances, with money, with a gift, with the ministry and everything. We are never, never to compare ourselves with other people. You remember when the Lord told Peter that, you know, when you're old, somebody else is going to drag you and you're going to be crucified and etc.

Peter looked around at John and said, what about him? Is he going to have an easy life? Is only me going to have a tough life? You know what Jesus said? Mind your own business. You follow me. Don't worry about other people.

I tell you, many Christians need that word. Mind your own business. So what if I make that other brother a millionaire and make you live from hand to mouth? That's my business.

If I draw a big circle around another person and a very small circle around you, you know, it's a mark of spiritual illiteracy. My wife conducts free medical clinics for the poor people in the villages of South India. We go there very often.

And many of these people are very illiterate. They don't know anything about medicine. And so some of them will come to my wife and say, give me that same red tablet you gave that other poor woman.

And my wife will say, her sickness is different. What do you mean give you the same red tablet that I gave her? But sometimes Christians are like that. Give me that person's ministry.

Or make my boundary like as big as his. Or give me that, give me this. Dear brothers and sisters, that's a mark of being illiterate spiritually.

God knows exactly, a doctor knows exactly which medicine to give each person. And God knows exactly what's right for us. And I've discovered through the years, as I've respected the boundaries God has drawn around me, not only in terms of money, but in terms of ministry.

I remember the days when we started our church. You know, I had been traveling before. Before 1975, I traveled a lot in ministry.

I was invited to many, many countries around the world. But I was unhappy with the shallowness of Christianity I saw everywhere. And I said, Lord, I don't want to go around like a spiritual consultant going around giving lectures and making money.

I want to be a father. I want to build a home, a family. I want, this is what the church is meant to be.

And so a day came in my life when I gave up every invitation for ministry. I gave it all away. And I said, I'm going to sit at home with five or six people and start building the church the way Jesus wanted to.

And it was a very, very small circle at that time. And I said, Lord, that's fine. I don't have any more lust to preach to those thousands because I know it accomplished hardly anything.

I want to build something lasting. And today as I look back over 33 years, I'm so glad I took that decision to go to the New Testament and see what God wanted. And as I see God little by little increase that circle.

I don't believe that God wants us to remain the same size. If you are alone and you're always the same size, consider the possibility that you may not be in the will of God. I will bless you and you shall be a blessing to the families of the earth.

You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the outermost parts of the earth. So don't be satisfied with just blessing one or two people. If you're satisfied, that's all you'll have.

God will expand those. In the beginning, we are content. But if we fall into the ground and die, as I said, it'll grow.

But we have to always be content and thankful. I believe thankfulness is a very, very important requirement and virtue that we all need to develop. You know the story of the ten lepers who came to Jesus.

All raised their voices in Luke chapter 17, I think it is, and asked for healing. But when they were healed, only one man came and raised his voice. And that's the important thing.

He didn't just quietly come and whisper in Jesus' ear. Thank you, Lord, for healing me. With the same loud voice, Luke 17, the same loud voice with which he asked for healing.

We read in Luke 17, 15, with the same loud voice, in the presence of everybody, he said, thank you, Lord. I find, you know, and Jesus appreciated that. When he says he glorified God with a loud voice, Luke 17, 15, he fell on his face at his feet, fell on his face at his feet, and Jesus said, is there nobody other than this one man who has come back to give glory to God? I'm surprised when I see Christians for whom the Lord has done so much in their life.

If I were to ask you privately, you think the Lord's done something for you, you say yes. I want to ask you, how many of you give thanks with a loud voice in the midst of the church? Can you learn something from this Samaritan? Is it really the Samaritan came back to give glory to God? It's a sad thing. I see so many.

It's not just nine people who are unthankful today. 99% of Christians who will ask for prayer and will never raise their voice and say, thank you, Lord, for what you've done for me. Thank you for saving my soul.

One of the things that happened when God filled me with the spirit was it made me raise my voice to thank God. I was not ashamed. Why are we ashamed to raise our voice when God has done so much for us? Let me encourage all of you, whatever your, you know, we all have a culture and we got to break out of that culture and become scriptural.

In heaven, they praise God with such a loud voice that it's like thunder, like mighty waters falling. Has heaven come down, really, into your soul? And I believe we will raise our voice and thank him. In the church, Jesus is the song leader in our church.

We have to thank him. We have to develop the habit of thanking him openly, the fruit of our lips. See Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 15.

Hebrews 13 and verse 15 says, Through Christ then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name. Lips. You say, I thank God in my heart.

Good. But here it says, there must be fruit from your lips. That's New Testament.

That give thanks to his name. And that's the point we see in the story of that Samaritan who came back to give thanks. I want you to turn to Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 12.

It says about Jesus in verse 11. He who sanctifies, that is Jesus Christ, and those who are sanctified are all from one father. That's a wonderful thing in the New Testament.

The one who sanctifies me, the Lord Jesus Christ, and I, we now have one father. And because we have one father, he's not ashamed to call us brethren. And what does he do with his brethren? He says, there are two things that Jesus does in the midst of the church.

One, I will proclaim thy name, the name of the father, to my brethren. And, in the midst of the church, I will sing your praise. This is Jesus speaking.

The song leader in a true church is Jesus Christ. In the midst of the church, Jesus says, I will sing your praise, father. And the best song leader is the one who recognizes that Jesus is there leading the singing of the church in praise to God.

And if we can help people to recognize Jesus in the midst, singing praise to God, that's wonderful. The other thing Jesus does is proclaim the father. There are two things I want to do in the church.

I want to follow Jesus. I want to proclaim the name of the father. I want to proclaim the father in the church.

And I want to sing the praise of the father in the church to good areas where we can follow Jesus. I want you to follow him wholeheartedly. And when it says sacrifice of praise, maybe, you know, you're opening your mouth and raising your voice with that awkwardness you feel will be the sacrifice you have to make.

Isn't it a very small sacrifice? The awkwardness you feel about raising your voice in public. You're not used to it. Your culture has always taught you when you praise God, you must sit as if you're in a funeral and quietly sit there.

That may be your culture, but you don't see it in scripture. I'll tell you in heaven, nobody's sitting there as if there's a funeral. I often think that many Christians are living on the day when we're all gloomy and he was a good man, you know, and he died.

We talk about his death and oh, how he suffered. He died for our sins and we're all sitting gloomy. That's Saturday.

But on Sunday, it was different. So are you living in Saturday or Sunday? You understand what I mean. Has Jesus risen or not? I often think, has he won the victory or not? Has he defeated Satan or not? You know, I see here in America, maybe the Super Bowl or some baseball game or something.

In India, it's cricket. When the team wins, boy, you should see the stadium erupt. That was not as great a victory as the victory that Jesus won on the cross.

Where do you see a church erupt in thanksgiving and praise to God? Lord, what a victory you won on the cross. Oh, we sit there. Yes.

Yes, our team won the Super Bowl. That's right. I don't believe that person's team won it the way he's saying it.

I don't believe your Jesus overcame the devil the way you're saying it. I heard of an actor who told a preacher once. He said, the difference between us actors and you preachers is this.

We actors can make something which is not at all true. We act in such a way that people believe it's really true. But you preachers talk about something that's really true, and people don't believe it's true.

He said, that's the difference between you preachers and we actors. It's sad. That's how Christendom is today, unfortunately.

But it shouldn't be like that, brothers. I was naturally a very shy, reserved person. And I grew up in a... After I was born again, I grew up in a family where we sat exactly like those disciples when Jesus was buried.

Every Sunday, we would talk about the Lord's death and how he died, how he died, and we all looked so miserable. And everybody's waiting for the resurrection. It never took place this Sunday or next Sunday or any other Sunday.

But, boy, when God filled me with the Holy Spirit, everything changed, I'll tell you. Sometimes, that's not me normally. But I said, Lord, you've done such a great work in me.

I'm so thankful. I'm not ashamed to acknowledge it. This Samaritan, he didn't care what people thought about him.

He said, Lord, I was a leper, doomed. I couldn't go inside the town. And here I am.

You've done such a work in me. Why should I be ashamed to publicly acknowledge you? Hasn't he done a greater work in you, my brother, sister? Why don't you stand in the corner of your bedroom? Sing his praise in the midst of the church. And if you haven't learned to do it, start learning now.

Say, Lord, you know, one of the things we did in our church, we had a whole lot of people like that. We wanted to encourage people to raise their voice and praise the Lord. So to help them, we said, okay, after we had a time of singing, we said, let's all praise the Lord together.

So then you don't have to be conscious that only people are listening to your voice. Okay, we're all going to raise, praise the Lord together. And in the beginning, it was just like it's here.

Two people will praise and others will still be quiet. Even though we invite everybody to open their mouth. But little by little, we worked at it.

You know, we worked at it. It's like learning swimming. You work at it and work at it and work at it and one day you're swimming.

So we worked it and worked at it. And now we find, boy, with the volume of praise and people raising their hands, shouting and praising, I want to encourage you. If you can't learn to praise God on your own, praise God together in the church.

We need to encourage the children. Open your mouth and say thank you to Jesus for what he's done for you. You know, this lack of thankfulness is the reason, is the first step towards backsliding.

I don't know whether you know that. I'm not thankful. I'm expressing my discontent with the way God has dealt with me.

Romans chapter 1. Romans chapter 1, verse 18 to 32 is a description of the way man slid all the way down to the bottom. And it says, God gave them up, God gave them up, God gave them up. Many times, three times it says, God gave them up.

And where does it begin? Romans chapter 1 and verse 21. The first step to this backsliding with ends in murder and all types of wickedness in verse 29. Where does it begin? It begins here in verse 21.

Even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks. They did not develop the habit of thankfulness to God. For all that he had done for them.

And what is the result? They didn't give thanks, so they became foolish. They became fools, verse 22. Gradually they went down, and verse 24, God gave them up.

In other words, they became backsliders. Where did it all begin? They didn't give thanks. And like I said, New Testament faith is manifested.

They believed his words, they sang his praise. If I believe his words, I will sing his praise. When I don't believe his words, I don't sing his praise.

It's absolutely true. When you don't sing his praise, whatever you may say, you don't believe his words. Psalm 106, verse 12 is very clear.

They believed his words, they sang his praise. And I've seen wherever I believe his word, I will always sing his praise. I've seen that they went down, and down, and down.

I want you to turn to Philippians chapter 2, and I'll show you something similar there. Like I said, I love to show you scripture, so that you become familiar with scripture. So that your faith does not rest on my logical presentation, or my clever preaching, or even my illustrations.

Faith does not come by illustrations. Faith comes by the word of God. There's nothing as powerful as God's word.

So if you can have your faith as God Almighty has written through the Holy Spirit in scripture, your faith will be strong. Look what it says in Philippians 2. We saw yesterday that God works inside us. And wherever in the Bible you read about inside us, you can be pretty sure it's always referring to the Holy Spirit.

You never see that in the Old Testament, about God working inside somebody. He never worked inside anybody. God could not dwell inside anybody.

But now, it says in verse 13, He works inside us to desire and to have the desire and the ability to do His will. And what is one of the first things that He works inside us? Verse 14, to deliver us from all grumbling and complaining. Let's begin with that.

Begin with, say, Lord, work inside me to free me from all grumbling and complaining. Do you know that the Old Testament never had a commandment like that? It's a very good thing to be free from murmuring and complaining, but one of the Ten Commandments was not thou shall not grumble or complain. Why didn't God give that commandment in the Old Testament? Because He knew nobody could keep it.

Nobody could keep it. Thou shall not grumble or complain. Why? Because they didn't have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

And when you grumble and complain, what's He was arguing about? Does the Holy Spirit come when we are born again? And all these theological arguments. Brother, you're proving every day with your grumbling and complaining that you don't have the Spirit. Whatever theology you may have.

He did not give those commands in the New Testament. If you study the commands in the New Testament, which are not found in the Old Testament, very profitable field of Bible study. The commands in the New Testament give you a few of them.

Give thanks for everything. 1 Thessalonians 5.18 Give thanks in all things and situations. Ephesians 5.20 Give thanks for all human beings.

More difficult. 1 Timothy 2.1 Rejoice in the Lord always. Philippians 4.4 Be anxious for nothing.

Philippians 4.6 Do not be anxious. Matthew 6.31-34 All these verses. There was no such thing in the Old Testament.

Reason? They didn't have the Holy Spirit within them. How do you prove that you have the Holy Spirit within you? Not theologically. But actually.

By these commands being fulfilled in your life. By their fruit you shall know them. Not by their words.

The Kingdom of God is not in words. But in power. The tragedy today is so many people are trying to argue and prove that they have the Holy Spirit instead of demonstrating it by their life.

A bush that's on fire doesn't have to talk about fire. It's there. And if you're on fire people will see it.

That's the tragedy of today. I heard that story of the church building that caught fire. Literal fire I mean.

And all the neighbors came to pour water and put it out. And there was an atheist there. He also helped to put the water out and make fun of him.

Hey. First time we're seeing you in church. He says the first time I've seen the church on fire.

That's why they don't come. The bush is there but it's not burning. We're explaining why the bush is not on fire yet.

It's not an explanation that the world needs. The world needs to see that the Holy Spirit has dwelt within. I'll show you that here.

When you do all things without grumbling and complaining you prove that you are blameless and innocent children of God in the midst of a crooked generation shining as a burning bush in the world. Paraphrase. It's there.

That's the thing that shows I'm different. You know it's like when you travel in an airplane over dark uninhabited areas of a country and here and there you see a little light. There's a home with a little light there.

The rest is all dark. I think when God looks at the world he sees a world full of darkness. Darkness according to this verse because everybody is grumbling and complaining something is wrong here and something is wrong there.

Something is wrong with the food. The wife is not good enough. The husband is not good enough.

The boss is not good enough. The salary is not enough. This house is not good enough.

This car needs to be changed. Grumbling and complaining. Darkness all over the world.

In the midst here and there there's a spot of light. People who never grumble or complain. We're always giving thanks.

Lord I'm perfectly content with what you've done. You've done everything perfectly. My Jesus has done all things well.

We don't sing that only in heaven. We say that right now. Everything is right Lord.

You do everything for me and you keep me and maybe there are a few aches and pains I have which keep me humble and dependent upon you. Perhaps I need that as well. I'm not comparing myself with anybody else but I'll never grumble or complain.

I'm perfectly happy with the circle you've drawn around me. I don't have the ministry another brother has. I don't have the prominence that another brother has.

It doesn't matter. Maybe some of you sisters say I can't cook like that other person but the rules are simpler. That's all the gift God's given me but God's drawn a little circle around me and I want to be faithful in that circle.

We're not in competition with anybody. We're thankful that what God has given us and going to be zero complaining or defect or murmuring. I remember visiting an automobile factory in India once and I saw it was one of these Japanese car companies and there was this board on the wall we aim for zero defect.

I said boy that's a good thing for me to stick on my wall too. I aim for zero defect in my life. Zero sin.

I mean they probably would take years to achieve it and would come near to it never completely achieve it but it's a good goal to have. I aim for zero complaining in my life. Zero murmuring.

Always being thankful for everything for every circumstance because almighty God has said not only 1 Corinthians 10, 13 that he will not allow me to be tested beyond my ability but also Romans 8, 28 that he makes everything work for my good. Everything. Everything means everything.

Now if Romans 8, 28 had said God makes 90% of things work for our good then one Thessalonians 5, 18 would have read give thanks for 90% of things because this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Right. How can I give thanks for areas where God is not working? Do you know that when you grumble or complain about anything you are actually saying in that area the devil is taking control.

God is not running the universe right now for a few minutes. The devil is in control right now. Is that what you are testifying? That is what you are testifying when you murmur or complain.

No, I will not. I refuse to complain. My thankfulness manifests the truth that God is in control of the universe that Jesus Christ defeated Satan and he's got all authority in heaven and earth.

That's why they couldn't say that in the Old Testament. Satan was not defeated in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ had not risen and conquered Satan back in the Old Testament.

That's why Daniel had to struggle for three weeks in prayer before that archangel could fight through with the demon of Persia and come through as you read in the book of Daniel. That's Old Testament. There is no such thing today.

You don't need three weeks, one word and the devil will go. He's been defeated. Many people I find just don't seem to know the difference between the Old Covenant and Satan's being defeated.

They don't know that Jesus Christ is atoned completely for all our failures. There's no reason at all now to give thanks. For example, Paul said, I have learned to be content with little or much.

I've heard many Christians say, imagining themselves to be very spiritual. They say, this is my prayer. Proverbs chapter 30 verse 8. Lord, don't give me poverty or riches.

Is that a New Testament prayer? It's not. I'm sorry to say it's not. It's an Old Testament prayer.

He says, the reason is, if I get too much money, I will deny you. Say, who is the Lord? If I get too little, verse 9, I will steal. Are you like that? That if you get too little, you'll steal? If you get too much, you'll deny the Lord? I used to think that was a spiritual prayer.

But I have learned through the years that the New Testament prayer is what Paul says. I have learned in all things to be content. I have learned how to get along with almost nothing.

And I've also learned how to handle a whole lot of wealth which suddenly came to me. I'll tell you this. It's very, very few believers that I have met in my life who learned to handle more wealth than they need.

Very few. Most people are destroyed. Their spirituality is destroyed when they earn beyond what they need.

I've seen that. Numerous cases. And I've seen, you know, a few people also.

I mean, there are people who come close to God when they have very little. But even there, I find people who complain. But Paul said, I have learned to handle both.

And God tests us so that we become independent of our material circumstances by giving us sometimes very little and teaching us how to be thankful and sometimes giving us much and teaching us how to be generous. We need to learn both. We need to learn to be thankful when we have little.

We need to learn to be generous when we have much. But some people don't learn how to be thankful when they have little and they don't learn how to be generous when they have much. They never seem to learn what God's trying to teach them.

They think it was their own cleverness that got them so much money. Or they think the devil's doing something to deprive them and give them so little. It's God who's drawing a circle by which God's trying to give us a spiritual education.

It was a great day in my life when I discovered that the money that came my way was God trying to educate me in something. It wasn't for me to enjoy or complain about. I was getting a spiritual education through it.

Whereas the worldly people don't know that. Do you know it? Because Jesus once said in Luke 16 and 13 there are only two masters and the world thinks the two masters are God and the devil. Many Christians think the two masters are God and the devil.

No, Jesus said the two masters are God and mammon. Mammon as a symbol of sort of a God describing earthly wealth. And if there are these two gods I'm reminded of what Elijah said on Mount Carmel.

If Jehovah is God, serve him. If Baal is God, serve him. Do you know the Bible says that in the last days before the coming of the Lord God is going to send Elijah.

And when John the Baptist was being born the angel told Zacharias this son of yours is going to go in the spirit of Elijah. And then Jesus said in Matthew chapter 11 you Jews, if you accept him he is that Elijah with Malachi prophesied. And so there has to come another Elijah before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

And that Elijah is not going to be one person. He is going to be the body of Christ. In the Old Testament the prophets were individuals.

In the New Covenant it is the church which is the prophet of the Lord. A prophetic voice. That's why God needs local churches.

Some Elijah in one corner of the United States can't prophesy to someone God needs local churches where there is a voice like the voice of Elijah in your town, in your village. God needs a voice in many parts of India. Many voices.

The voice of Elijah the prophet coming out through a church. If Jehovah is God, serve him. If Christ is God, serve him.

If money is God, serve them. But you can't serve both. That's the voice of Elijah.

How much do you hear it nowadays? The devil has drowned people in materialism so they can't speak. He has drowned Christians in materialism. I remember 70-80 years ago I read about it when the Pentecostal movement started in southwest of India.

It was a mighty movement. People were genuinely filled with the Holy Spirit. People who were rooted in the word of God but didn't have the power of God were filled with the Holy Spirit and it was mighty power.

They were despised, they were persecuted. People would throw cow dung at them, tie them to trees and beat them. Other Christians, because they thought they were teaching some strange doctrine, they were genuinely filled with the mighty power of God and the devil saw this thing is going to rock India.

I better do something about it before this gets out of hand and destroys my kingdom. And the devil got his leaders to run after money to go here and there and they began to fight with each other and divide each other and the devil succeeded. And he succeeded all over the world.

Look at all these preachers today who go after money. He succeeded. Nobody in the world, no Christian in the world even dreams that they can serve God and Satan.

But they do think they can serve God and money. That's why money is a deceptive master. I've often said, you know, that there's gold in heaven.

Gold must be a good thing because it's in heaven too. But where is the gold in heaven? Under our feet. And the only people who are ready for heaven are the people who have learned to put gold under their feet right now.

The world puts gold on people's heads but a heavenly man has learned to keep it under the feet. He doesn't get rid of it. I'll tell you, money is a wonderful servant and it's a terrible master.

The question is, is money your servant or is money your master? Many, many believers, those who have little, money is their master. Those who have much, money is their master. It's not just those who have much.

A servant is always thinking how to please his master. And most of the time, your thoughts are revolving around money. You know who's your master.

If your thoughts are revolving around Christ and building his church, then you know that's your master. It's not a question of the impression you give in your weekly Bible studies or when you come on Sunday and you talk about all these spiritual things. That's not it.

What does your mind think about most of the time? You answer that to yourself. That is your God. Whether you know it or not, what your mind is thinking about most of the time, if it's your profession or your house or money, that is your God.

Or your ministry, that can be your God too. I know I've had to sacrifice everything on the altar before God. I say, Lord, I will never worship my ministry.

Never! I couldn't care less for my ministry. You alone will be my God. I want to be a worshiper of Christ.

So in this area of money, we show our faith in the principles of God's word and that our faith is in Christ by obeying God's word. I told you about the tremendous necessity to tremble at the command of God which says, Oh no man anything. I want to encourage you, brothers and sisters, I've met people in India who've been tremendously in debt in all of our churches.

They're not serious about paying back their debt. To me it's as bad as it's falling into adultery. Now he may be in debt, but if he's making serious efforts to pay back his debt, he's okay.

But if he's not making efforts seriously to pay back his debt, I say you're not fit to be an elder in God's church. No, we ask somebody else to lead the church. You may be the most gifted, but you better sit down and find out in your church who is in debt.

Encourage them to be free from it. Because God does not want his children to be slaves to some creditor. He's a jealous God who wants his children to be slaves only to him.

Who learn to live within their boundary. Who don't get bitten by the devil by going outside the boundary all the time. And, here's another command.

People have asked me this question. Supposing I owe money to somebody. Should I pay my tithes and then give that person his money? Pay back my debt? Isn't my obligation to God first and then to man? I say no.

Pay back your debt first and then give to God. And I'll give you scripture. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and then render to God what is God's.

I'll tell you why. Because if you give, for example, supposing a man tells me Brother Jack, I'm going to cheat on my income tax. I won't pay the government so much but I'll give it to God.

I say great brother, do that. Because your obligation to God is first. Is that the truth? That's a lie.

I say I don't want you to cheat on your income tax. Steal from the government and give to God. God won't accept it.

You're a thief. Give to the government what belongs to the government and even if you've got nothing to give to God, it doesn't matter. In the same way, Caesar could be another individual.

You owe him money. How can you give his money to God? God says give him his money. I don't want his money.

When you don't pay off your debts and you give to God, you are actually giving to God money that should have, that fellow would have been thankful if you had given him his, paid back his debt. But like you say, that's korban. You know, Jesus said about people who said I've given it to God, I can't give it to you.

And they think they're spiritual. They're Pharisees. And Jesus said to correct that wrong idea of I've given it to God, it's a sacrifice to God, I'm sorry, I can't clear your debt.

There are Christians who are like that. Give back what belongs to people. If you have taken something back, taken something from somebody wrongfully years ago, don't say God's blotted it out.

God's blotted out your crime, but you still owe that guy money. You cheated someone. You cheated a store or the railways or anybody.

Give it back. Any money that you keep with you that is not righteously earned will be a curse on you and your children forever. Every penny we have, every cent we have must be righteously earned.

Sometimes, ignorantly, you know, we could be, maybe we are ignorant sometimes of some taxes that are due and we haven't paid it. I remember, I said Lord, I don't even want to ignorantly not pay my taxes. And if there's anybody whom I owe something, something to the government which I haven't paid, which ignorantly, please do something so that it gets out of my pocket in some way.

You know what God did? I'll tell you, this actually happened. In India, the telephone company is run by the government. It's not private.

There's one telephone company in India. We were a socialist country. And one day, I made a long distance call to another country and there was some defect.

It was, you know, the telephone exchanges those days were all mechanical, not electronic. And something got stuck and when I put the phone down, it wouldn't disconnect. It was still connected to that call abroad and it wouldn't go off, wouldn't go off.

I had to go to somebody else's house and call up the exchange and say, hey, please disconnect my phone. And by the time the bill ran up, I said, Lord, maybe this is an answer to prayer that I owed the government some money somewhere which I didn't know. And maybe this is the way you made me pay it off.

Thank you. I have no complaints against the telephone company because God was in control of everything. I was determined that when I leave this earth, no human being, no company, no government is ever going to say that I owe them money.

When the rapture comes, I don't want companies to say to the Lord, Lord, you can't take him up. He owes me some money. How dare you take him up? Leave him here until he's paid back, paid me back and then you can take him wherever you like.

No, I want to be ready all the time. Many people say Christ is coming anytime. Are you ready? You're not ready if you owe people money.

I'll tell you that. Make every effort to pay it back. I remember a person wrote to me in India once saying, Brother Zack, how can I ever pay back money? I owe so much.

I'm a poor farmer working in a farm and I owe 30,000 rupees and I can never and 30,000 rupees is a lot of money those days for that poor man in that village. He said, how in the world can I ever pay it back? So I wrote to him. I said, can you pay back 10 rupees a month? If you can, I'm sure you can pay 10 rupees.

That's nothing. In one year, you'll pay back 120 rupees. In 250 years, you'd have cleared your debt.

Now, I know you're not going to live 250 years. You'd probably die in 20 years. But God will see your heart and He will reckon it to you as if you have cleared all your debt.

You won't be guilty because He sees you're doing and making an effort. That's the point. And I said, I'll give you a verse for it.

Because I always like to quote scripture so that their faith does not rest on my cleverness. 2nd Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 12. And that may be a help to some of you sitting here.

2nd Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 12. It says, if the willingness is present, God accepts you according to what you're able to do. And not what you're not able to do.

That's the meaning of that verse. If there's a readiness, a willingness to obey God, God accepts you according to what you're able to do. Not what you're supposed to do which you're not able to.

It's a great, it's a very liberating verse. To know that God is a good God. He doesn't torture me even about restitution.

There may be some people to whom you cannot make restitution. You don't even know where they are. Forget it.

There are some things you've done evil, there's no way of making restitution. Well, maybe you can apologize but you don't even know where the person is. Forget it.

Don't let the devil torture your mind which, hey, you didn't set that thing right with that person. You don't even know where he is. No, God accepts us.

He's a loving father. He doesn't torture our minds. Learn these lessons, dear brothers and sisters.

It's an expression of our faith. I tremble at God's word. I want to be faithful with money.

If God gives me more, I want to ask God what he wants me to do with it. I want to be generous to God's work so that his work can prosper. I want to be thankful.

See, for many years, I never preached about these things in our church. I believe that because there was so much abuse of the use of money in Christendom in India that we decided, now at church, none of our workers would ever receive any money as a salary or gift. I've never taken one cent in 35 years from our church.

And all our 70 co-workers never take any money from the church. We make tents, spiritually speaking, or metaphorically speaking, and support ourselves and serve the Lord. And we said we won't even take an offering because the Bible says you have to give secretly.

You can't give secretly when somebody is watching you putting your hand into the offering bag, putting something there, and you have to give joyfully, which you probably can't give joyfully when somebody sticks a bag in front of your face. And you can't give secretly, you can't give joyfully, you can't give voluntarily, you can't do anything. So we used to keep a box at the back and say those who want to give can give.

And we have done that for 33 years in 50 churches. And we have never been in debt till today in any of our churches. By the grace of God, we've seen that if you honor God, he honors us.

If you seek the kingdom of God first, all the other things are added to us. And we've seen that in the poorest villages in an underdeveloped country like India. You know, it's covetousness and materialism that make people feel these principles don't work.

If you learn to stay within our boundaries, every promise of God works in every country in every century. And we need to be living proofs at the end of our life that God cares for us. You know, I believe that people who observe our life very carefully and who know everything about our life, when they see us at the end of

our life, they should be able to say, boy, this man must have had a father in heaven.

That's the only way he survived. It didn't make a difference to him whether there was prosperity or recession. He seemed to be okay.

That's our testimony. Not because we were smart and not because we had a father in heaven. Is that your testimony? That should be our testimony.

That was my longing when I started serving God. That's been my longing in all our churches. We must be a testimony in India that we have a father in heaven who provides our need.

And so we stay within our boundaries, we're faithful, we're righteous with money, and then we're faithful with money, which is one step higher than being righteous. And I believe that as we are faithful, there's a wonderful promise. Let me close with this in Luke chapter 16.

It says in Luke 16 and verse 11, Jesus said this, if you're not faithful with money, who will entrust the true riches to you? And I want to paraphrase it. If you are faithful with money, God will entrust you with the true riches of revelation on his word. You will see things in the word which nobody else can see.

Because my spirit will give you revelation. You will have an anointing in your ministry that other people don't have. Those are the true riches.

And you will become more and more Christ-like in your life. Where does it all begin? If you're faithful with money. Why is it so many people don't get revelation on his word? Why is it so many people don't lose the anointing upon their life? Why do they lose it? Why is it so many people are not becoming more and more Christ-like? You pin it down to one thing at the bottom of it all.

They are not faithful with money. There's a lot of misery in their life. Can you spell me the first five letters of the word misery? Or miserable? Misery.

If you're like that, you deserve to be miserable. You deserve to be depressed. You deserve to be gloomy.

You deserve to have bad moods. When you water others, God will water you. It's true.

A generous man is blessed by God. The miser is miserable. He can have his Bible studies.

Anybody can have Bible studies. The devil himself will conduct Bible studies. But he will not have the joy of the Lord.

He will not be able to build the New Testament church. He will not be He will not have true riches because he's not being faithful. We express our faith in God by being faithful with what he gives us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to apply the truths of your word in our daily lives so that they will not remain theories. So that we can build, cooperate with you as you build your church on earth.

And be a voice like the voice of a in these days in different parts of the world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/a-heavenly-church-6-contentment/>

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