

Coming to God as Repentant Sinners

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a right attitude towards God, recognizing that He owes us nothing, and coming to Him with a repentant heart.

Duration: 47:03

Scripture: Luke 15:11

Topics: "Repentance And Faith", "Gods Extravagant Love"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance, faith, and recognizing God's extravagant love in the story of the prodigal son. It highlights the dangers of feeling entitled, the need to submit to God's authority, and the significance of true confession without justification. The speaker warns against hypocrisy, the lure of worldly influences, and the importance of maintaining purity and focus on God despite others' choices.

Transcript

So, we were looking at restored relationships and we saw from Luke 15 how the relationship of the sheep is restored to the shepherd and not only... and not only with the shepherd but also with the flock. We want to look at the story of the prodigal son now. I mentioned how here you can have an attitude like that of the son where you feel that God owes you something.

I think a lot of believers feel that way. God owes me something. I'll tell you what you deserve and what I deserve.

Hell. That's what God owes us. Because sometimes we have a complaint.

Have you ever had a complaint against God? Lord, I prayed and you didn't give it to me. That's what I mean by feeling God owes us something. One of the things we have to learn is that God owes us nothing.

We owe God a lot but God owes us nothing. And if you start your Christian life recognizing that God owes you nothing, you'll be a very happy Christian. That's what I found.

But if you're like most Christians who feel that God owes you something and he should do this for you and he should do that for you and whenever you call he should be there to answer you like you read the story of Aladdin and the magic lamp. Every time you rub the lamp the genie would appear and say, what do you want me to do for you? I tell you a lot of Christians treat God like that. They don't have any reverence

because they don't know who God is.

They treat him like some genie you rub a lamp and he should appear and say, what do you want? And they're never happy Christians because their fundamental problem is they feel God owes them something. That was the problem with this boy. He felt, hey, my father owes me something.

Let me get what I want from him. So he goes to his father and says, give me Luke 15, 12. Give me the chair that belongs to me.

And if you come with this attitude to God, give me. A lot of Christians never seem to get rid of that attitude. And one result of that attitude is when they join a church, they feel that church also owes them something.

I'm a part of this church, so you should help me when I'm in need. You should come and take care of me if I have a financial need. It's all this give me, give me, give me, give me attitude towards God, towards the church.

I can prophesy you'll be a miserable Christian all your life because it is more blessed to give than to receive. It's one of the great truths of the Christian life. You have to learn that if you come to God thinking like the prodigal son, give me, the first words, father, give me, you're doomed to a miserable Christian life.

You'll end up with the pigs one day or the other. That's what we need to learn. We've got to come to God saying, God, you owe me nothing.

If you give something, I'm thankful, I don't deserve it. You'll have a very happy Christian life. You'll never go to the pigs, that's for sure.

And these are little truths that we can learn if you learn it early in life. Why do we come to give ourselves to Christ? We're not doing him a great favor by giving ourselves to Christ. Some Christians think that because preachers give people that impression.

So I want to ask you, on what basis, if you have come to Christ, on what basis did you come to Christ? Is the foundation a good foundation? If it's not a good foundation, one day the building will collapse. If the foundation is, well, I came to Christ and gave myself to him, now he should do good for me for the rest of my life. Then it's a wrong foundation.

Because preachers have said, preached like this, oh, Jesus is waiting outside the door of your heart, when are you going to open to him and give your heart to him? It's like a beggar knocking at the gate, you know, begging for some food. That's the impression people give, preachers. And Jesus is outside, when are you going to let him in? Come on, let him in.

Ask him to come in. Plead and push. So the great Maharaja walks up and says, okay, I'll give, I'll let Jesus inside my heart.

You think he's going to be a happy Christian? He's not even become a Christian. Because he is the king who has opened the door and let the beggar Jesus come into his heart. I want to ask you whether any of you have come to Christ like that? If so, you've got a wrong foundation.

I would seriously question whether you're even born again. Because I tell you a lot of people who come to CFC, they were really born again after they came to CFC. They got some third-rate, good-for-nothing conversion experience in some other church.

They never knew what salvation really was, because they never knew what sin really was. They treated Jesus like a beggar instead of almighty king. We have to be the beggars who come to Jesus, who is the king.

And when we give our life to Christ, it's like, supposing you were to go to somebody's house, from whose house you stole one lakh rupees, you're a thief. How will you go back returning that one lakh which you've stolen? You won't go back like a king. Here is the one lakh I'm coming back to give you.

You'll go with brokenness, with your head bowed, ashamed of yourself, that you kept that money with you for so long and you're very thankful when that man does not take you to the police for stealing, but accepts what you have given, because you have not given what is yours. You've given back to him what was his all along, which you stole and kept with you for 20 years. And after 20 years, you go and return that 10 lakhs, which you should have returned long ago.

That's how I preach the gospel. That's why we get some thorough conversions, if you respond to that gospel. And that is, you were created by God for his pleasure, not for your own.

And when you wandered away, he again came and paid the price, which he need not have done to purchase you back. So you belong doubly to him. You've stolen from God a life that rightfully belongs to him.

Come back as a repentant thief and say, Lord, I owe my life to you. I'm sorry that I stole it, lived for myself. I give back to you.

I don't deserve anything from you but punishment. I'm very thankful that you don't punish me. You know, if you come with that attitude and remain with that attitude, you'll be a very happy Christian, you'll be a very useful Christian, and you will not come to the church expecting everybody to serve you.

I've seen so many people in CFC, who expect everybody else to serve them. Why is that? Because they came to God like that. They are the most shallow Christians.

I don't even know whether they are converted. Because they've come to God like that, they treat human beings like that. I'll tell you honestly, I'm a very happy Christian.

It's the honest truth, every day. Because I don't expect God to treat me like a king. I don't think God owes me anything.

And I don't think anybody in the church owes me anything. I don't believe that people in the church even owe me respect. I've seen people who get so upset because somebody didn't respect them.

Now, who in the world are you that somebody should respect you? What fantastic high thoughts you have about yourself that somebody five years younger than you should respect you? I don't expect respect even from somebody fifty years younger than me. I owe so much to God that I expect nothing from him or from man. I'm deeply grateful that God has accepted me, forgiven me, and deeply grateful that he has given me a place in the church.

And that's the attitude I'll have till Jesus comes. I find a lot of people who come to CFC are not like that. In the beginning they are like that.

They are so grateful that they've got a last seat in the last row, allowed to come to the church, allowed to be a member of CFC, but just wait a little while and they begin to think they are somebody. They never grow. They never, never grow because their attitude changes.

So, this attitude of the prodigal son, give me, is always very dangerous. Don't come to God with the attitude of give me. Come to God to give to him what rightfully belongs to him.

That's the right way to be born again. I want to ask all of you young people, have you come to Jesus like that? Lord, I deserve hell. How many of you are convinced in your mind that you deserve hell for your sins? Are you grateful to God that he did not hold your sin against you, that he doesn't expose your sin before all the other young people here? Are you grateful to God for that? Then come with gratitude and say, Lord, you owe me nothing, but I owe you everything and I want to live all my life recognizing that I owe you everything and I expect nothing from you.

I'll tell you, those of you who have come newly to the church, it's easy for you, but those of you who've been some years in the church, if you find your Christian life not satisfactory, here is the reason. If you find you're not making progress in your Christian life, you know, you can come to a certain level and get people to respect you. You're now a senior brother or sister and people respect you.

Senior means two, three years older than somebody else or you've been here long enough and you can stagnate there. I don't want to stagnate for one single day in my life. Paul said, my inner man is being renewed every day.

I want it like that. I don't want to ever compare myself with others and say, well, I'm better than them. It doesn't make any difference.

I'll tell you what I want to compare myself with. Am I better than I was yesterday? That's the only comparison I ever want to make and I advise you that is the comparison you should make. Not are you better than all the other brothers and sisters here.

That counts for zero. Are you a better person today than you were yesterday, than you were last month, than you were last year? If you want to compare, that's what you should compare yourself with and stick to that and I tell you, if you stick to what I tell you, you will make fantastic progress in your life till the day Jesus comes. I'm so sorry that so many brothers and sisters who could be mighty instruments in God's hands are not because of these wrong attitudes.

They come to God expecting things from him instead of acknowledging that they deserve nothing and they come thinking they are better than others and all these type of things and the devil's put all types of wrong ideas into their head and destroys them. Consider my brothers and sisters, do you think that your life could have been more effective for God today if you had been a little more wholehearted in having these attitudes that I'm just talking about in past years? I know some of you are a blessing to others but think you could have been ten times more. I'm not asking you to condemn yourself.

I'm saying have the right attitude and all these parables, we can learn those things. First of all, he came with this attitude of give me and secondly, he was not willing to submit to the authority that God had placed over him, his father. He thought that he knew better than his father and there's something in all of us which we have got from the devil to rebel against authority.

We don't like authority but yet from the beginning God has placed man under authority. Right from childhood, think of the number of years a child has to remain under the authority of parents. It's not like the animals.

I mean those dogs and cats move away from their parents within a few months or weeks. They're on their own but God has placed man to be under his parents for how many 18, 20, 25 years you stay at home. What is God trying to say? You need to learn to be under authority if you want it to go well with you and the same thing in the church.

Why has God placed authority in the government and why has God placed authority in the church? It's for our protection. The Bible says honor your father and mother and it'll go well with you that you may live long on the earth. It's one of the first things I taught my children.

Honor your father and mother. Why? Because I want it to go well with you. All your life I want it to go well with you.

I will never accept your dishonoring me or your mother. I was very strict on that one thing because I believe the Bible and I want to say to all of you, if you want it to go well with you, learn to respect authority. This young son, he didn't care.

He thought he knew more than his father and I've seen that attitude sometimes in young people. It may be true that you know more than your father intellectually, in your profession. Most young people today are more educated than their parents but when it comes to divine wisdom, you may be cleverer than the elders in your church in your profession but that doesn't mean you know you got more divine wisdom.

And I found through the years in CFC that the brothers who find it very difficult to submit to the CFC elders are the ones who are a little more educated and a little wealthy. They find it difficult. Why is that? Do you think there's a connection between wealth and education that brings a spirit of arrogance? Now if I were preaching to the young people in some poor village in Tamil Nadu, I don't have to speak all these things because they don't have the advantage of wealth and education.

So it's a little easier. But these are dangerous things. They're very useful but dangerous things like electricity.

Electricity is a very useful thing but if you don't follow the laws of electricity, you'll kill yourself. So wealth and education are very useful but there are certain laws. If you don't follow them, you destroy yourself.

So this young man thought he's very smart and clever and he knows better than his father and he decided to grow up on his own and I see the great love of God in the attitude of his father. If you want to go, go. See that's one of the things that Jesus had towards people who came to him and they wouldn't follow him.

For example, the rich young ruler. Jesus said, you know you love your money too much. You got to give it all up before you follow me.

He said, no I can't give it up. Okay. Lord said goodbye.

Somebody else said he wanted to bury his father. Somebody else said I've got to say goodbye to my parents. Somebody else said this eating, this eating to your flesh and blood and all is too tough for us.

Never did Jesus say, no, no, no, let's think about it again. Not even once. Not even once did he go to them and say, listen, think about it.

Think what's going to happen to you. He said, go. I've always had that attitude.

Somebody wants to leave. I say, leave. Go right ahead.

That's the attitude Jesus had because the person thinks too much of himself. He thinks he knows better than me. Okay, go.

Go where you like. I know what will happen to you in a few years. You will be with the pigs.

I can say that for certain. The father knew that, but he allowed him to go. So just because God allows us to go in a certain way and we do well in our profession and we make a lot of money, doesn't mean that we are not heading towards the pigs.

You can do very well in your profession and make a lot of money and still end up with the pigs spiritually. And the father never went after him. You have to come to your senses yourself.

And it says he finally came to his senses. That's the word in 17, Luke 15, 17. He came to his senses and decided to come back to his father's house.

You know that you have come to your senses when you say, I think I better go and submit to authority. That's my salvation. Then you have come to your senses.

Until that day, you have not really come to your senses. So unless we understand these things in the beginning, what does repentance mean for this boy? He had to come to his senses and say, it's better for me to submit to authority. My father was right.

I see now that it was foolish of me to go this way, but I'll come back. In both these cases, there was a coming back to the fold, to the house, the sheep that came back and the son came back. And the sheep, of course, could not say anything because it cannot speak.

But when the son came back, he had to acknowledge. He said, I have sinned. Verse 21.

I'm not worthy to be called your son. See, that's a mark of true repentance. A recognition, an acknowledgement of our sin.

First of all, I have sinned. And with no explanation. I want to ask you, when you confess your sin to God or to man, do you give an explanation? Like Adam, when he sinned, he said, yeah, Lord, I'll tell you what happened.

My wife gave me the fruit and you gave me this wife. There's a lot of explanation. God said, Adam, you're not fit for paradise.

Get out of here. You'll never be fit for paradise when you make explanations for your sin. There are people who confess sin like that to man also.

I've had people come to me, Brother Zak, I'm sorry I did this, but I'll tell you the reason why I did this, this, this, this, this, this, this, this. I know that's not a confession. He's not really convicted yet.

He's got so many explanations as to why he did it. In other words, he's not really sure whether he did anything wrong. You know, when you confess your sin to anyone, even to a man, you know, and I've heard people come and say, Brother, if I have hurt you, that means I don't believe I've hurt you, but if you're stupid enough to think I've hurt you, okay, I'm willing to confess my sin.

You're actually insulting the person you're going to confess. Real confession. There is no if or because.

It is just, I have sinned. Verse 21, against God and against you. I'm not worthy to be accepted.

I'll tell you something. If you have repented like that, you've got a solid foundation for your life. If you have not repented like that, you better do it now.

Don't have any excuse for your sin. Don't try to justify yourself. Jesus said about the Pharisees, you turn to the next chapter, chapter 16, verse 15, the opposite.

You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of man. Luke 16, 15. That's the other attitude.

You know, it is because of this and because of that. I want to tell you something. Self-justification is the clearest way that you recognize yourself to be a Pharisee.

And I find that very few Christians have got rid of self-justification from their life. Even after years and years of being believers, when they acknowledge their sin to others, they always have an explanation. It's because of this.

It's because of that. I say there's no hope for that person. There's no hope for that person because he's still a Pharisee.

When he stops being a Pharisee and becomes like the prodigal son and says, I have sinned, full stop. I've sinned against God. I've sinned against you, full stop.

Any explanation? No explanation. Like the thief on the cross who said, I'm guilty. I don't blame my parents for bringing me up badly.

I don't blame the bad company that made me a murderer and the thief. I am guilty. Jesus said, oh, come to paradise straight away.

Today you'll be with me in paradise. Why? No justification, no explanation. Do you want to walk with Jesus in paradise? Do you want your life on earth to be like a paradise every day? Stop justifying yourself.

Learn these simple principles of the Christian life, which you probably will never hear in any other church because people are too afraid of offending young people in other churches. I am willing to offend every single young person and older person in CFC because I don't seek their popularity. I seek their eternal good.

I want to tell you, learn these lessons. You know, people say, I want to sit at the foot of the cross. I say, I'll tell you which cross you should sit at the foot of, at the foot of the cross of that converted thief.

Before you go to the cross of Jesus, sit at the foot of that cross of that repentant thief and learn from him first how to confess sin. I'm guilty. Then come to the foot of the cross of Jesus and say, Lord, forgive me.

You have to learn something. You probably never heard of anybody going to the foot of the cross of the repentant thief. That's where you got to begin.

Repentance. I'm trying to give you a solid foundation for your life. You can build a skyscraper on it.

If you don't, if you're careless with this foundational principles that should remain with you all your life, it's not something you forget. You don't build the first floor on the foundation and the 15th floor somewhere else. No, the 25th floor, the 100th floor of that skyscraper is on the same foundation of repentance.

So we never move away from there. 99 righteous people who need no repentance are because they are repenting every day. They are building floors, but every floor is on the foundation of a true repentance.

The other thing I want you to see in this young man is he was absolutely convinced that no matter how much he had sinned, how much he had wasted his father's money and father's name, ruined his father's name, his father still loved him and would welcome him. That is called faith. So you need repentance and you need faith.

Faith is to believe just like this prodigal son, no matter how much you have messed up your life, no matter how many evils you have done, your father in heaven still loves you and will welcome you when you come back to him. You know there's a saying, give me a second chance, or they call God the God of the second chance. He's not the God of the second chance.

He's the God of the millionth chance. You can come back a million times and he'll always welcome you. See, it's so important for us to understand this.

Do you know that sometimes God allows his children to go away, sin, go to the level of the pigs because that's the only way they learn and a good father will recognize that and when they reach that level of the pigs, then they will turn if they will believe. Now supposing this young boy had heard in the far country that his father had died and his elder brother was now running the house. Do you think he would have come back? No.

He says, I know what my elder brother is like. He'll be lecturing me every day and keep me in the servant's quarters and keep on reminding me of my messed up life. I won't go back.

I think I'm better here with the pigs. The pigs are better company than my elder brother but he knew that his elder brother was not in the house. His father was still running the house.

Faith is to believe that I have a father in heaven who loves me so much, welcomes me, wants to and you know actually he underestimated the love of his father. He thought at least his father would give him a room in the servant's quarters and he so underestimated the father he discovered that his father loved him much more than that. His father ran to welcome him and say you're not going to go to servant's quarters.

You're going to come sit at my right hand. You're going to get my ring and I want to tell you from that story that we underestimate how much God loves us. God's love is extravagant.

In Luke chapter 22, we have a little story here of another prodigal son and that was Simon Peter. He was like a son of Jesus who was loved and cared and honored and given so much gifts. He went around preaching, healing the sick, even raising the dead.

Matthew chapter 10, tremendous privilege. He said I give you authority over satanic powers etc but he became proud just like that prodigal son and he thought yeah I will never let you down. He says in Luke 22, 34, 35 or 33, Lord I'm ready to go to prison and death with you.

He thought he was very strong just like a lot of young people. Other people may fall away but not me. I'm okay.

Do you feel like that? The Bible says let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall and when a person is in that condition, God allows him to fall. We can say God allowed Simon Peter to reach the level of the pigs just like the prodigal son. What is the level of the pigs? He denied Jesus Christ three times.

Some ordinary servant girl says don't you belong to Jesus? No, no, no, I don't even know him. This man to whom Jesus had given such authority and he says I don't even know Jesus Christ. Don't you think that's the level of the pigs spiritually? Of course and the Lord did not protect him from going there.

He didn't pray, oh father don't let Peter go to the level of the pigs. Don't let him ever deny me. No, he has to go there and if you want to know that love, it's the love of the prodigal son's father.

Yes, my son must go to the level of the pigs. That's the only way he'll learn and there's no other way to learn but the Lord said I'm not praying that you won't reach the level of the pigs, you will deny me. You will deny me three times, verse 34.

In other words, you will reach the level of the pigs Peter. You will be with the pigs but when you are with the pigs, when you have denied me three times, please remember your father still loves you. Come back.

That's what I'm praying for you. Verse 32, I'm praying that at that point your faith will not fail, that you will not give up faith that my father still loves me though I have let him down so badly. Dear brothers and sisters, we have all let the Lord down very badly.

I have but I've repented and I have believed that I have a father who loves me, who will welcome me, will put his ring on my hand and his robe on me and make me sit at him, sit with him at the table. That's where I'm sitting now but I don't have any illusion that I deserve to sit there, not at all. I deserve to be with the pigs but I'm sitting at the father's table.

I'll never in my life feel that I deserve to sit there, never, never, never. I hope you never feel like that. I'm warning you because after a while in the Christian life you can begin to think that you are somebody.

I've seen young people who grew up in CFC, heard everything for years and years and years and years and because they did not fall into gross sin, they began to think, I'm pretty good, I've overcome many things, I'm a humble person and when I look at them I can see pride all the way from head to foot but they don't see it themselves. Very sad condition to be in when a person's got leprosy from head to foot and he doesn't even realize he's a leper. It's there.

I've seen it in people who were in CFC and who are in CFC. That's why it doesn't go well with them. God doesn't give them grace.

You always think they're better than somebody else. Then God has to allow you to reach the level of the pigs but when you get there, believe that your father loves you. So, these are certain principles by which we can have a permanent restoration of relationship with Jesus Christ.

It's not that, yeah, my relationship is restored now, then I backslide again and then after some time I come back. It's not got to be like that. If it is like that, it's because you didn't take the proper treatment.

You know, you go to a doctor and the doctor says, you should take this treatment, take these tablets every day, take this diet and you come back to the doctor after three months and say, doctor, all those symptoms are still there, I'm sick and he asks you, did you take the treatment I prescribed? You say, well, no, I thought I don't need to take it so seriously. Well, no wonder. That's exactly how it is.

I want to say to you, one of the high thoughts we can have when we hear the truths in the church is, oh, that's not going to happen to me, I'm okay, my condition is not so serious like other people. I think they're just being extreme in that teaching. Okay, just wait and see.

God will allow you to reach the level of the pigs and it can happen without other people in the church knowing it. That's also happened to some people in CFC. Spiritually, they descended to the level of the pigs, but outwardly they were in the church testifying on Wednesdays.

Hypocrites of the first order, don't be like that. It's very dangerous. It's very dangerous to be a hypocrite in a church that is on fire for God.

It's not so serious if you're a hypocrite in a church full of hypocrites. Ananias and Sapphira, because they were in a church on fire for God, for a small thing like not being honest about how much of their money they were giving to God, just a small thing like that, they were struck dead. If they had been in the church in Corinth, they would not have been struck dead.

They would have probably been elders in that church. Sapphira would have been a senior sister and Ananias would have been an elder brother because though they were hypocrites, they were better than the others. I know backsliders in CFC who are fit to be elders in some other churches.

So, I always say it's a very dangerous thing. It's a very blessed thing to be in CFC and it's a very dangerous thing to be in CFC. It depends on what our attitude response is to the Word of God that we hear.

We want young people who are serious about their Christian life, who are radical in repentance, turning around wholeheartedly, who are not going to descend to the level of other young people around them, not going to judge them, not criticize them, not compare themselves with them, just leave them alone and say, I'm not going to be like them. When you find some brother or sister in CFC beginning to watch dirty movies or descending to low levels in what they write on their Facebook page or wasting so many hours on Facebook with no time to read the Bible, what are you going to do? Are you going to be like them? Are you going to judge them? I'll tell you what you should do. Leave them alone.

Let them go to the pigs. You keep yourself pure. If they will listen to you, warn them.

If they don't listen to you, what can you do? By all means, try to save them. But if they don't listen to you, don't let them drag you down into the level of the pigs. Stay clear.

I always say it's like a tug of war. If you are pulling the person towards God, hang on to that rope. But if you find he's dragging you down, like I've seen some people who are dragged down, good brothers, who are dragged down by others, they didn't have the sense to give up the rope and say, hey, goodbye, I don't have time to meet with you.

I don't have the strength to pull you into God's kingdom and therefore I find you're pulling me the other direction. If you're strong enough to pull them into God's kingdom, go after them. But if you find that you don't have that strength, drop the rope and run for your life.

See, these are the little things that we need to learn and when we come back to the father, look at the welcome he got. We must realize that God is more eager for us to come back than we are eager to come to him. See, one of the definitions of faith that I have often mentioned is, God is more eager to receive you than you are to go back to him.

God is more eager to bless you than you are to be blessed. God is more eager to forgive you than you are to receive forgiveness. God is more eager to fill you with his Holy Spirit than you are eager to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's faith. Unbelief is, listen to unbelief, unbelief is, I am eager to be filled with the Holy Spirit. God doesn't appear to be so eager.

You'll never be filled. Why? Because of unbelief. What is the unbelief? You believe that you are more eager than God is to be filled with the Spirit.

No wonder you're not filled with the Holy Spirit. You may not even be forgiven. Faith is to believe that everything God has promised, not things he has not promised.

I'm not saying like all these false gospels being preached nowadays, ask God for a new house or a bigger car, no. But what God has promised in scripture, he is more eager to give you than you are eager to receive it. That is the message of the prodigal son.

And when you have that type of faith, you come to God and you are welcomed and you live in blessed fellowship, sitting at the father's table every day. Dear brothers, sisters, it's for you. I'm not speaking to somebody else in this room.

I'm speaking to you. Take it personally. Say, Lord, that is your message for me today.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray that everyone here will be aware of your tremendous love, the eagerness you have to give us the best of heaven for everyone here, in spite of the fact that we have gone to the pigs. You still welcome us even though we are stinking.

You come to embrace us. Thank you, Father. I pray everyone here will realize such love in Jesus name.

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