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by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the transformative message of John the Baptist, urging believers to shift their focus from earthly concerns to heavenly priorities and true spiritual growth.

Duration: 55:43

Scripture: Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 3:11, Matthew 11:11, Luke 1:74, Luke 1:76, John 3:30, Romans 8:15, 2 Corinthians 3:6, Galatians 5:1, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Second Coming", "Inward Righteousness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of preparing the way for Jesus Christ's second coming, drawing parallels to John the Baptist's ministry before Christ's first coming. It highlights the need to preach a message that delivers people from fear, encourages repentance from seeking earthly things to seeking heavenly things, and focuses on inward righteousness over outward legalism. The speaker challenges listeners to seek a ministry of righteousness that leads to freedom and love for God, rather than one of condemnation and guilt.

Transcript

In Luke's Gospel, we read about the birth of John the Baptist. Why is this given us in such great detail in chapter 1? And all the Gospels speak about the ministry of John the Baptist. There was a reason.

Why did Jesus say, this was the greatest prophet from the time of Adam? Jesus said that because John the Baptist had a special ministry which none of the other prophets had. And that was to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. Jesus was going to come and God sent a prophet to prepare the way for the people to receive Christ.

And did he succeed? He really succeeded. Here is one example of that. See John, in John's Gospel chapter 1, John was a man who preached a fiery message of repentance.

And most people wouldn't be interested in that. But there were a few people who were interested. Because John the Baptist preached, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Why did he preach that? Because for 1500 years, the message preached on earth was a kingdom of earth. That's how God preached to people under the law. That is, if you obey me, you'll get a land and you'll get health and you'll get money and you'll get so many earthly things.

And you'll overcome your enemies and you won't be in debt. All the earthly blessings that you can think of, many children, they'll be healthy, your farms will prosper. If you read from Exodus to Malachi, you'll never find one promise about heaven in the Old Testament.

Everything was over the earth. In the Old Testament, there is no promise that you will overcome Satan. You cannot overcome Satan.

Because that is in the heavenlies. No, you will overcome Philistines and Canaanites and all earthly people. And you won't have any heavenly riches, but you'll have plenty of earthly riches.

You won't have any spiritual children among the Indians and the Chinese and the Japanese, but you'll have plenty of earthly children among the Jews. Everything was earthly. 100% They were facing an earthly gospel.

And John the Baptist came and said, repent. You know what repent means? In Tamil, that's very clear. That means, turn your mind in another direction now.

You are facing the earthly things. Now, the kingdom of heaven is going to be preached from now on. How many of you are interested in that? No longer earthly blessings.

That's why the great men under the Old Testament like David and Solomon were very rich. Abraham was rich. Job was rich.

But the great people in this new message were like Jesus and Paul and Peter. They were very poor. And the Bible says, God has chosen the poor of the world rich in faith.

In James chapter 2. So here, now in this new kingdom, it is not rich in money, but rich in faith. Faith is like money. In the Old Testament, if you have plenty of money, you can buy so many things.

Earthly things. Now, if you have faith, you can get a lot of heavenly things. That is the gospel that is being corrupted by a lot of preachers today.

They are mixing these two. They say, if you have faith, you will have the same old earthly things they had in the Old Testament. That is never preached by Jesus or Paul or Peter.

And you listen to all these fellows preaching it today. They will take half the verses from the New Testament and half from the Old Testament. But John the Baptist was very radical.

He says, you got to turn your mind away from that completely. So that shows that anybody whose mind is still set on money and comfort and all that, can never, never, never understand fully the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. It is not a question of how much you earn.

Your mind, where is your mind set? See, a beggar earns nothing, but his mind is set on money. His mind is not set on heaven. So you can be a very poor person and be earthly minded.

Or you may earn a good salary and still be heavenly minded. But only you know. I will tell you something.

You can be married for 50 years and your wife may still not know whether you are earthly minded or heavenly minded. But what is your mind always thinking about? To think about the needs of your family, to get a better job, to provide for your family is very good. I always encourage people, get the best job you

can so that you can take care of your family.

Sure. But don't let your mind be set on earthly things. Use earthly things like a servant.

You can have a servant in your house. Money must be like that. You can have 10 servants in your house.

But don't let any of them take over the house. Don't let money take over your life. So that is what is happening to a lot of Christians today.

But if you want the pure gospel, then you got to listen to what John the Baptist said. Turn your mind around completely from that old gospel. From the kingdom of earth to now the kingdom of heaven is the heavenly things that are important now.

Not those earthly things. Just like I said earlier, the old methods of trying to preach people fear and guilt. You got to get rid of that.

And get people to have their minds set on the things above. So John the Baptist preached like this and few people responded to him. Those became his disciples.

You know, very few people. And you know what happened to those disciples? Now see John chapter 1. When they heard, it says here in verse 25, the next day John was standing with two of his disciples. And he saw Jesus walking by.

And he said, there is the Lamb of God. So what did these two disciples do? They said goodbye John. We are going with him now.

John didn't hold them. I didn't mean you should go after him. He was so happy.

It's a very beautiful word. The disciples heard John the Baptist speak and they followed Jesus. If the Lord does not come before I die, I say that is what I want written on my tombstone.

They heard him speak and they followed Jesus. They did not follow Zach Poonen. They followed Jesus.

You must desire that in your life. They heard him speak and they followed Jesus. They heard her speak and they followed Jesus.

You can be a sister. You may not preach in a pulpit. But don't you speak to other ladies? You speak to your neighbors.

You speak to so many people sisters, don't you? In fact some people say that the women speak more than the men. Some people say that the women speak more than the men. When people hear you speak they will follow Jesus.

Never forget this phrase. John 1.37 Make it the desire of your life. They heard him speak and they followed Jesus.

I pray that will happen every time I speak. Not only in a pulpit. But also in private conversation.

I speak to people. I speak to some young person. I hope he will hear me speak and follow Jesus better.

Because I hope he sees something of Jesus in my life so that he can follow Jesus. That should be your longing. That's my longing.

With all my heart that is my longing. They heard him speak and they followed Jesus. So that's how John the Baptist was so happy.

Some more of my disciples have gone there. Wonderful. Some more of my disciples have gone there.

Wonderful. I had 30-40 some time ago. Now I have only got about 15.

And after some days it's only 5. Where have they gone? They are all following Jesus now. But one of these 4-5 people who were left they were a bit concerned. So one of them came to John the Baptist.

In chapter 3 verse 26 He came to John and said Rabbi that man about whom you witnessed He is also baptizing and a lot of people are going to him now not to you. Our group is becoming smaller. His group is becoming bigger.

What did John say? Verse 27 A man can receive nothing unless it is given him from heaven. You heard me say I am not the Christ. I was sent before him.

I was sent before him. You are the witnesses. He is the bridegroom.

I am only a friend. Verse 29 I am only his friend. The bride may be talking to the friend of the bridegroom before the wedding starts.

The bride is talking to a friend of the bridegroom. The bride is talking to the friend of the bridegroom. The wedding has not started yet.

Here is the bride talking to the friend of the bridegroom. Then the bridegroom comes. What should the bride do? What should the bride do? You are the bridegroom.

What do you want the bride to do? When the groom comes, what should the bride do? My bridegroom has come. Goodbye. I am going.

But if the friend holds on to her, no, no, no, don't go. Come here. Then he is a crook.

He is a deceiver. Some preachers are like that. They don't want people to be connected to Jesus.

Some pastors are like that. Brother, you want to find the will of God? Come to me. I will find God's will.

You can't go directly to Jesus. What a deception. John the Baptist was not like that.

He said, I am only a friend of the bridegroom. The bride was talking to me. Now the bridegroom has come.

They are all going after him. Praise the Lord. The last part of verse 1, I am so excited.

My joy has become full. I was so excited. I was so excited, verse 29, when I heard the bridegroom's voice.

I was just talking to her so that she doesn't run after some other man. That's why I was talking to her till the bridegroom comes. Now I hear the bridegroom's voice.

I am so happy. Yeah, please go. Now I hear the bridegroom's voice.

Please go. They heard him speak and they followed Jesus. That is the best preacher, best elder brother in the whole world.

Do you want to be like that? When nobody follows you? You know you are not popular? It's okay if you are not popular. You connect everybody to Jesus. You don't want anybody to follow you.

People who are consulting you, now they have stopped consulting you. They have started going directly to Jesus. Are you excited? Definitely, that means they have grown up.

Do you desire that? Do you desire that for your flock and your churches? He said in verse 30, He must increase and I must decrease. I will tell you a little secret. If you want Jesus to increase in your church, you decide, I must decrease.

I will tell you one of the sad things I have seen in our churches. That there are elder brothers who don't want to decrease. They want to keep on increasing that everybody is only dependent on them.

So even after many years, they are still sitting there like Maharajas. All the slaves are sitting there. They never want anybody else to be a Maharaja because they are the only Maharaja.

This is the mark of an Old Testament congregation. This is not New Testament church. The Old Testament congregation is there as a mark of an Old Testament congregation.

The New Testament church is not a mark of an Old Testament congregation. Moses sat there like a big Maharaja. Was that the body of Christ? No, it was not.

He was a good man, but he did not build a church. He did a good Old Testament job. We have good brothers in our churches today exactly like Moses building an Old Testament congregation.

Why? They don't have the spirit of John the Baptist saying I must decrease. I must become smaller and smaller as each year goes by in the church so that other people come up and up and up. They don't have the spirit of John the Baptist.

That's why Jesus said in the history of the world there has never been a greater prophet than John the Baptist. That is what every father should desire for his children. That they have a connection with Christ now not following Christ because they see me.

There was something that John's father, John the Baptist's father said in Luke chapter 1. What he prophesied when this John the Baptist was going to be named and after he was birthed. It says here in Luke 1.67 his father was filled with the Holy Spirit. And then he prophesied.

So when you are filled with the Holy Spirit and you prophesy you can be pretty sure that is from God. And he says here concerning John the Baptist because John the Baptist was going to be the forerunner for Jesus Christ. And so he says Praise the Lord verse 68 who has visited us and accomplished redemption.

He has raised up verse 69 a horn of salvation that is Jesus. And concerning this Jesus all the prophets verse 70 prophesied in the old time. Many prophets have prophesied What did they prophesy? From all our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Who is the one who hates you the most? Who? Satan. Total salvation from him. They could not get that in the old testament.

They could only get salvation from the Philistines and the Canaanites. But now from the hand of everybody who hates us and after we are delivered verse 74 from the hand of all these enemies verse 74 we can now serve God without fear. That was the goal.

Till now 1500 years we have served with fear. For so many years we have served with fear and slavery. If I don't pay my tithe I will get a curse.

If I go around with these ornaments I will be punished. Because Isaiah said that. And if I don't obey God I will get boils and itch and all that from which I cannot be healed.

I am living in fear all the time but I am obeying. It's like children who are afraid of a very strict father. Beats them so hard for a small disobedience.

So in the evening when the father comes from work and they knock at the door they can recognize the father's knock. Loud knock. Daddy has come.

They started trembling. Daddy says come. Do this.

Like the military do it immediately. Is that the type of obedience God wants? No. He is also a father.

To deliver us from all fear so that we serve him without fear. Dear elder brothers are you getting the people in your church to serve God without fear? Are you getting the people in your church to serve God without fear? Remember what we said in the beginning there is no fear in love. Or everybody is obedient like those trembling children in this father's house.

Do you want a church like that? Everybody trembles out of fear of you and does what is right. And when you are not there they just live ungodly lives. That's not the church.

That's an Old Testament congregation. In the New Testament church there is no fear. Perfect love has cast out fear.

And if you say but brother Zach our church will become unworldly if we don't have fear. Then it really proves you are an Old Testament congregation. How to find out whether these animals are pigs or cats? Now they look clean because we have tied them with so many ropes.

Release them. No brother if you release them they will all become dirty in 5 minutes they will become dirty. Then they are definitely pigs only.

You have produced a church full of pigs they look clean because you have made so many rules in that church. I can give you a simple rule for keeping 100 pigs clean forever. Tie them all with ropes.

Keep them inside one room don't let them escape from that room. You will have perfect clean pigs forever. Just spray some perfume on them everyday they will smell nice also everyday.

Everybody will come and say what a nice church you have everybody is so clean and smells nice. Brother you have got a wonderful church. You really want to find out? Get rid of all those rules.

Open the doors. Take out the ropes. Free them.

Then let us see. After 1 or 2 months how nice they smell how they behave how they dress everything has become worldly That proves that for 20 years you built an old covenant congregation as soon as you

released them they became pigs. They were already pigs but they became manifest as pigs.

Now I will tell you another thing. Supposing you spent even 1 or 2 years converting these pigs into cats. What is the difference between a pig and a cat? A cat has got an inward desire to be clean all the time. Just like a pig has got an inward desire to be dirty all the time.

Great passion to be dirty the cat has got a great passion to be clean. See that's how pigs are they see some filthy stuff there let me go and eat that. That's how pigs are.

Some internet pornography let me go and get that. Some dirty movie advertised, no believer is watching I must go and see that. That is a pig.

That is a pig. It has got an inward desire to be dirty. But in the church he is held with ropes and all he looks clean.

But a cat if it sees some dirty water there or some rubbish it doesn't go near the garbage bin. See dogs and pigs and all will go to the garbage bin. A cat is always trying to keep itself clean.

I have sometimes seen a cat licking itself, licking itself, licking itself. I look carefully is there any dirt there? No dirt at all. Why is it always licking itself? Because it has a tremendous passion to be totally pure.

It's a picture of a believer who is always judging himself. He is already so holy but he is still judging himself. Oh there is some small speck of dust there, let me clean it away.

Now if you have converted your hundred pigs into hundred cats then you can take away the ropes, open the doors, let them go for a walk. Okay cats, go away, come back after one month. And they all come back after one month absolutely clean.

Brother, you have really built a New Testament church. Now you ask yourself, what type of churches are we building? Pigs which are clean, held with ropes and locked inside rooms with doors and rules and regulations. Or people whose lives are changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Who had a baptism not only of water but of the Holy Spirit. One is a baptism of water the other is a baptism of fire. That's what John the Baptist said.

He said I can only put you in the water, your outside will be clean. And outside you will look clean but you may still be a pig. There is another who is coming after me, he will baptize you in fire.

You know when they, in this Kolar gold fields and all, when they dig the gold out from under the ground, 10,000 feet under the ground, they pull it out. You know first of all it is mixed with so much mud and dirt and so many things, this gold. So they first put it in the water to get rid of all the dirt and the outside looks clean.

You scrub it with soap and water it is still clean. But it's not pure gold. Because even though the outside dirt and all is gone, it's mixed with some other metals and all.

So they put it in the fire. And when it's put in the fire, all those internal other metals and all melt off. And you finally get the pure gold.

So first there is the washing with water and then the cleansing by fire. So if you have only been baptized in water, that only proves that you have a clean conscience that your outside is okay. But if you allow the Holy Spirit to baptize you in fire, it will change your nature inside.

See many people think that, how do you know whether in the church they believe in the fullness of the Holy Spirit? Because we are walking through a town and attending so many church services. 20 church services. And one church, everybody sings very quietly.

Just like it's a funeral. You go to another church. Oh, they are jumping and shouting and bringing the music.

They even bounce on their knees. I've seen people do that. I don't know how they do it, but they do it.

Must be many years of practice. Shouting and yelling. Then you go to another church and it's all quiet.

And you know, most people would say this. That these churches which make a lot of noise, those are the churches that are filled with the Holy Spirit. How do you know that? Do you know how the people live there? There was one man who came to the Bangalore church and he said to me, you don't have Holy Spirit here.

I said, how do you know that? Have you come and lived in our homes to see whether we are living holy or not? Do you know anything about how I handle money to see whether I am holy or not? No, no, no. There is not enough noise here. I said, that is the difference.

My trinity is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Your trinity is Father, Son and noisy spirit. Father and Son, we are the same.

But spirit, mine is Holy Spirit, yours is noisy spirit. Your spirit gives you noise, my spirit gives me holiness. Now you go to your Bible and see which is the trinity in the Bible.

Is it noisy spirit or Holy Spirit there? Is it noisy spirit or Holy Spirit? That is the difference. Don't be deceived by all this. Making noise is good.

I believe in making a joyful noise to the Lord. I don't believe in speaking softly. We must raise our voice and praise the Lord.

But you don't have to be filled with the Holy Spirit to do that. You can get drunk with alcohol and do that also. I am not asking you to do that.

I am not asking you to do that. But let's say somebody else gets drunk somewhere and he comes here. Maybe he was here once before, years ago, so he is backslidden now.

So he knows all the songs because he was here for some years. So he is gone now. He is backslidden.

He gets drunk. A conference is going on. Let me come for the conference.

He staggers and comes to the meeting. He will shout louder than all of you. I tell you and sing those songs.

You will think he has repented. He has come back. You will think he has come back.

No, no, no. He is only drunk. It is not the Holy Spirit.

It is some other spirit. The Holy Spirit will make you holy. It is a fire.

It burns all the impurity. It delivers you from that slavery of serving out of fear and guilt. It delivers you from that So what did Zechariah say here? Luke 1, 74 Luke 1, 74 To deliver us from all our enemies and that we can serve him without fear.

How often? All our days. All our days without fear. That is why Jesus has come.

Do you preach that? Have you heard it? That Jesus wants you to live all your days without any fear. Have you heard it? And so my child, John the Baptist, verse 76 You are going to be the prophet who is going to prepare the ways of the Lord before he comes. Now I want to tell you something.

Why the ministry of John the Baptist is important for us. Because he was very close to the first coming of Christ. We are very close to the second coming of Christ.

And like he prepared the way for Christ's first coming, we have to prepare the way for Christ's second coming now. So anybody who preaches the word of God in our churches must make John the Baptist his example. To deliver people from fear.

To decrease so that Christ can increase. To preach in such a way that they follow Jesus. To preach repent from seeking the earthly things and seek heavenly things.

To deliver them from this outward righteousness to bring them to inward righteousness. He couldn't do that fully because the Holy Spirit had not come. But if you want to be a preacher in the new covenant and you are a combination of John the Baptist and Paul, you are the best preacher of all.

See in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 it says here that God has made us first six servants of a new covenant. Not of the letter but of the spirit. What is the meaning of not of the letter but of the spirit? Who is a servant of the letter? The people who go to every verse and say we got to do that.

Every little word they look just like the Pharisees. You cannot do any work on the Sabbath day. Jesus you made that fellow carry a cot on the Sabbath day.

You are not following the law. You made those people pluck some grain on the Sabbath day. They are always quoting verses.

See this verse, you are not obeying. See this half a sentence here, you are not obeying it. These are servants of the letter.

They don't read that scripture to find what is the spirit in that verse. What did God mean when he said don't work on the Sabbath day? What is the spirit? If we don't understand the spirit of it we will even criticize Jesus Christ like the Pharisees. The same thing today.

There are people who go to the New Testament, they take some letter here, some word, see it says here, they have no understanding of the spirit of that verse. And we have such Pharisees in our churches. The result is people are not living out of love but out of fear.

And so people are not ready for the coming of the Lord. I want to challenge all of you, all of you brothers and sisters, if you have an elder brother who is leading you to fear, submit to him in all matters of the church but don't listen to what he preaches. Don't criticize him, don't judge him, let God judge him one day but don't follow him.

And don't get into condemnation listening to his preaching of the law. Because that preaching is called in verse 9 the ministry of condemnation. The ministry that condemns you, that makes you feel guilty, guilty, guilty.

Whereas the New Testament ministry is called the ministry of righteousness verse 9, inside. An inside righteousness. So when you listen to a message, do you become holy inside or do you feel condemned? Do you find a liberty inside to please the Lord, to love the Lord? Or do you find a heaviness in the condemnation and feel bonded? You have to be very careful because if you listen to these messages that make you feel guilty and condemned you will never enter the new covenant yourself.

So you have to be liberated not only from the devil, you have to be liberated not only from sin, you have to be liberated from the preaching of people who bring you into condemnation. Love them, don't judge them. And if that is the church you go to, keep going there but don't listen to them.

Read the Bible and listen to Jesus. We have to say such things but that is what is happening. Because God's people have to become free.

Jesus told the leaders of his day you won't go into the kingdom yourself and you don't let other people also enter the kingdom. You sit with your rules and regulations you got the keys but you won't open the door for anybody. You produce a number of pigs tie them with rules and regulations and say they are all clean.

I want to say to all of you brothers and sisters say Lord during this conference I want to be delivered from all fear I never again want to serve you with fear. I am not a slave I am a son. I am a daughter.

You are my father. You are not my managing director or master. You are my daddy.

And I want to be your son and your daughter who lives out of love for you. And Lord from now on I will only listen to messages that deepen my love for you. I will not listen to messages that bring me condemnation or that bring me guilt or that bring me fear.

If you are an elder brother you can also take some decisions. Lord I repent of all the wrong preaching in my past life where I brought people under condemnation where I made them feel guilty I put fear into their hearts Lord I never want to do that again. I want to speak words of encouragement.

I want to lift up their spirits so that they love you with all their hearts. I want to produce people who are like cats and not like pigs who got an inward desire to be clean not those who look clean on the outside Lord please help me that from now on when people hear me speak they will follow Jesus. Till now I have been so insecure I am always afraid will somebody in the assembly turn against me So I gather my little political group to support me I provided the church into my political party and those who are against me Lord I am sorry I brought politics into the church From now on I don't want anybody to support me You support me that is enough I don't want anybody in the church to support me I want them to love you That's all And if they push me down I will be delighted because they will love you more Because my goal in life is to decrease and become zero Lord I repent that in my church I have been wanting to become bigger and bigger and become more a necessity to people And I have become so big that Jesus himself has been

pushed out of the church It has happened Some of our elders are so big that Jesus himself has been pushed out Now we need a new type of church Now we need a new type of church where we have elder brothers who want to become smaller and smaller so that Jesus can come back and become big There is a great need of repentance among all of us Elder brothers, ordinary brothers sisters, everybody We have to say Lord Jesus Take your rightful place in our midst Forgive us for driving you out You are going to come back now You are going to come back with greater glory And the glory of this latter house the church will be greater than what we have seen in the past Let's pray Heavenly Father Apply these words to our hearts Bring us into the glory of the new covenant everyone In Jesus name Amen

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