

# Jesus Came To Call Sinners To Repent

by Zac Poonen

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*This sermon delves into the concept of sin, focusing on the prevalent sin of hypocrisy that Jesus strongly spoke against during His time on earth. It distinguishes between different types of sinners, highlighting the accidental slip-ups like the lost sheep, deliberate rebellion like the prodigal son, and self-righteousness like the elder son. The importance of repentance and humility in recognizing our own shortcomings and constant need for God's mercy is emphasized, along with the significance of listening to God's word and serving from a pure heart.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 23:13, Luke 15:4, Luke 15:11, Philipians 2:3, Romans 7:18, John 7:37, Luke 5:32

**Topics:** "Hypocrisy", "Repentance and Humility"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Yeah, if we were to make a list of the sins that Jesus spoke against the most when he was on earth, I tried to make a list of that once. It was not the list in the Ten Commandments. He spoke maximum against hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is hardly ever mentioned in the Old Testament. The number one sin which Jesus spoke against is not even mentioned in the Ten Commandments, hardly ever mentioned in the Old Testament. And so, the Pharisees are hypocrites, and I would say every Christian who lives a double life, which means one life in front of believers in the church, and quite another way of living at home with his wife or husband, or in his office.

He has zero understanding of the Gospel. He has zero understanding of Christ. He's trying to live by the Old Covenant, and he doesn't even manage that, and will be lost.

So, when we talk about sinners, I find there are two types of sinners, and Jesus illustrated that in the parable we heard of the lost sheep. That's one type of sinner. A sheep does not say, I'm going to jump off the cliff.

No. It's absolutely sure that if that sheep was missing, it was accidental. It wasn't careful, and it accidentally slipped off the cliff.

No sheep looks at a cliff and says, I'm going to jump. It steers clear. But accidentally, they slip, just like any of us can slip and fall anywhere.

That's one type of sinner who accidentally slips, and those type of sinners Jesus goes after. He leaves the others and goes after those who accidentally slipped up or didn't know the way and went astray. But what about the other type of sinner, which is the prodigal son? We hear a lot, and I myself mentioned how the father welcomes the prodigal son when he comes back, which we need to see.

But think of how it was, the prodigal son, when he went away. What type of sinner was he? He did not accidentally go to the far country. No.

That's another type of sinner, quite different from the lost sheep, who deliberately schemed and planned for a number of years, how can I get the most out of God, my father, and take advantage of him? There are people like that. They're mostly Christians who know about God's free grace and whose attitude is just like the younger son. How can I take the maximum advantage of my father, get the most out of him, and enjoy myself? I hope you're not one like that, because I want to tell you something.

Jesus does not go after such people. The love of the father for that prodigal son is seen in the fact that he never went after him. He never sent him a food parcel.

Even if he heard he's eating with the pigs, the father would have said, let him eat with the pigs. Can you imagine God saying about you, let him eat with the pigs? That's what the father said. You ask him, hey, how about sending him some money, man, the guy's starving.

No, I will not send him one cent. He's suffering, let him suffer. Is that a loving father? That is the picture Jesus gave of God.

Yes, he runs when he comes back in repentance. But think of that period before that. He never sent a message to him.

It looks as if he ignored him completely. And I have actually seen that with people who have taken advantage of God's mercy and goodness and try to, as I say, play the fool with God. Yeah, God is so forgiving.

He's so good. My father is so good. What can I get from him? Can I get half the property from him, claim the promises and give me this, give me that, give me the other thing and get all we want and live as we like? Haven't you met believers like that who come to a good church and hear the truth, but all they can think of is, oh, God forgives, he forgives, he forgives, he forgives.

I want to say to you, my dear brother, sister, you could be not in the category of the lost sheep, but in the category of the prodigal son, whom the father ignored. And I'll tell you something else. If that son had never come back, he would have died in the far country.

It would have been another story. There are people like that. The father hears he's dead, he says, oh, well, he deserves it.

Can you imagine God saying that? He does. So we need to see these. Those are not the only two types of sinners.

There's another type of sinner mentioned in that story, and that's the elder son. He's another type of self-righteous person who looks down on others, who he doesn't go away to the far country. I mean, he's the other type of believer who sits in a church, and he's pretty confident that he's better than others.

He looks around, he says, I'm pretty good. I'm not as bad as all these other fellows sitting around here in NCCF. And he's quite satisfied with his own spiritual condition.

He thinks he's more spiritual. And if somebody slips up in something, he says, yeah, thank God I'm not like that. That's another type of sinner.

Also, you must see that's the third type of sinner mentioned in that story of the prodigal son's elder brother. And God is merciful to such people. And that's why he allows such people to come continually to the church to hear the truth, what you're hearing right now.

But there's no guarantee that you'll be in the kingdom. Because the end of the story is, as far as I know, that elder brother is outside the gate still. It's the younger brother who's inside the house.

So that's the other thing I see. The lost sheep is brought back into the fold. The rebellious child who took advantage of God's goodness and came to his senses, came back, comes into the father's house.

But the person who looks down on others and thinks he's better than the other believers in the church, who does not obey this command, it's a command, Philippians chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2 and verse 3. Do nothing, and I prefer to use the word zero. Zero is nothing. But nothing doesn't strike us as much as when I say do zero from conceit.

Do absolutely zero from an attitude of thinking I'm better than somebody else. Never say anything which originates from an attitude that I'm better than somebody else. But with humility of mind, and humility of mind has got many tests.

How do you know you've got humility of mind? Well, here's one test. Regard everyone else, are you listening, as more important than yourself. Not more spiritual than yourself, no.

That would be to believe a lie. You're not following Jesus then. Jesus didn't imagine, oh, Peter is more spiritual than me, or James is more spiritual than me, or Judas is more spiritual than me.

No, that's ridiculous. And I don't sit around imagining that somebody is more spiritual than me. There's no spirituality in that.

That's a false humility. Where a person pretends, oh, you're more spiritual, brother. Rubbish, you don't believe it.

Don't tell lies. Face up to the fact that you are more spiritual than somebody else. But you consider him as more important.

How do you consider him as more important? You treat him with respect. Even if he's illiterate, uneducated, and knows very little of the scripture. Maybe he's done a lot of things wrong to him, but he's sincere.

You treat him right. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. That is the way he showed that you are more important than me, not you're more spiritual than me.

You're not to consider people more spiritual than you. That would be believing a lie, and God never tells us to believe a lie. If you are more spiritual than the others, say that.

You know what Paul told the Corinthians? I'm spiritual. He said, you guys are all carnal. Was Paul humble? Absolutely.

But he was realistic. But he treated the Corinthians as more important by spending so much time writing that letter to them, and working with them, and writing another letter to them. He considered them important.

So we need to have a balanced understanding of this. The thing that Jesus denounced in the Pharisees was hypocrisy, and a lack of mercy towards people, and the two are connected because people are hypocrites usually think that they are better than others, and then that carries on to being merciless to people who don't hold the same view. So those are the two things that came up there in the verses that we read.

So when we see that, I want to balance some of the things we hear. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners. What about the righteous? If you see the context of that verse in Matthew 9, he's obviously referring to people who think they are righteous because he says in the Pharisees, Matthew 9, 11, saw this.

He said, why is your teacher eating with sinners? And Jesus was speaking to them. They were not righteous. They thought they were righteous.

So he was being sarcastic. Was Jesus ever sarcastic? Absolutely. He spoke about swallowing a camel once, straining out a mosquito, and here he's being sarcastic.

He's saying, listen, fellas, you're all righteous. I didn't come for you. Wasn't he being sarcastic? Absolutely.

And he said in verse 12, those who are healthy don't need a doctor. You guys are healthy, right? You don't need me. It's those who are sick who need me.

And the most sick person is the person who doesn't know he's sick. The person who knows he's sick, there's great hope for him. In other words, the person who knows there's so much of corruption in my flesh, I'm not better than that person.

I've often said to the Lord Jesus, I said, Lord, my flesh came from Adam. The flesh of the worst terrorist in the world. It's not any different from mine.

He came from Adam too. All these dictators who are murdering people in other countries, where did their flesh come from? Do you believe that guy's flesh is the same as yours? I believe it. He came from Adam and I came from Adam.

In my flesh dwells nothing good. That's a tremendous revelation. And I wish every believer would get it.

Paul got it in Romans 7. There's nothing good in my flesh. All have sinned. Every single person.

The circumstances of life prevented me from being a dictator like Hitler or one of the modern ones. That's the only thing. If I had the same opportunities and the same temptations, and I did not have the mercy of God, I would have been like that.

Do you recognize that? So if you believe that, apply it to different people you see in your church or perhaps to your own wife or husband. When you see something terribly wrong in your wife, which you see clearly, or in your husband, what should you say to yourself? Has she got a different flesh from mine? Has he got a different flesh from mine? No. It's upbringing and circumstances that have made the difference.

It's the upbringing of that terrorist who grew up with terrorist parents that made him a terrorist. Fortunately, I didn't have terrorist parents. Otherwise, his flesh is the same as mine.

Put me in the place of that person. If I was born as a baby to that terrorist family, I wouldn't be what I am today. So we need to recognize in humility that the flesh is the same.

That will save us from being hypocrites. It will save us from being unmerciful to others. So Jesus said, I didn't come for you guys because you think you're healthy.

Were they healthy? He says to them, to the Pharisees, as it were, you are healthy, so you don't need me, right? The Pharisees said, right, we don't need you. But the more sick we are, the more we long for God. And I want to say to you, my dear brothers and sisters, that as long as you are on this earth, whichever church you go to, the most spiritual church in the world, however spiritual you think you are, there is some sickness still in you.

That means something unlike Christ in your way you speak, in the way you behave to your marriage partner, the way you behave in your office, the way you behave in your car when somebody cuts you or does something to irritate you on the road. There's something in you which is totally un-Christlike. And as long as you're humble enough to acknowledge it, you're not a Pharisee.

Otherwise, you're one of those who think you're healthy. And the Lord will say, I didn't come for you healthy people. I never want the Lord to say to me, you think you're healthy, you don't need me.

I say, Lord, I need you desperately. I'm sick. There's nothing good in my flesh.

So when am I going to be healthy? I will not be perfectly healthy until Christ comes again. That day I shall be perfectly healthy, when there's not even one speck of the flesh in me. There are things that you do not know in me.

There are things I do not know in you. A lot of it in my case I find is unconscious. When I think of the things I've discovered in my own flesh, which five, ten years ago I wouldn't even have considered sin, and which most Christians don't even consider as sin.

I mentioned this before, expecting people to be grateful to me, expecting people to say thank you to me. Do you know that's a sin? I see it as a sin. I didn't think of it as a sin long ago, to expect someone to say thank you when you've done something to them for some length of time.

But the Lord showed me that if you have done it to the least of these brothers, you've done it to me, the Lord said. So if you want thanks, get it from me, not from that brother. Have you done good to somebody? And you sit waiting, why isn't he grateful? You feel your wife is ungrateful, your husband is ungrateful for

all the things that you do, serve, serve, serve, serve, serve, and you fail in gratitude.

The Lord says expect your gratitude from me. I will thank you in the final day. In as much as you've done it to the least of these people, whatever you've done to your wife, the Lord says you've done to me, whatever you've done to your husband, you've done to me.

Don't expect thanks from that person or to a brother. Have you sacrificed much for the church? The Lord says I will reward you in the final day. Don't expect any gratitude from anyone.

That's a sin I discovered in myself when I was wondering why people were ungrateful. So, you know, I'm just giving you an example how we can see things which we thought were okay, we thought we were spiritual, and I can give you a number of examples like that, but I'm not going to do that because you've got to discover it yourself in your flesh. God has to show you, and I'll tell you the way to see it is by looking at Jesus.

We run the race looking at Jesus. What is the meaning of running the race? Let me explain. The race is discovering, you know, each step we take is discovering some new area in my corrupt flesh, which I conquer.

That's one step in the race. Then I discover another area in my corrupt flesh, which I conquer. That's the race.

And I shouldn't be slowly slouching along that race. I must be running. I must say, Lord, I want to discover more.

And Jesus is our example. He never had any sin in His flesh, but He was tempted like us in all points, and He overcame. And I see His faithfulness in always the great secret of Jesus' life, was He was always listening to His Father.

So there's one thing I would say, develop the habit of listening. You remember Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening, and Martha was busy serving. The natural tendency in us is always to serve.

Do something in the church, this, that, and the other, and find some satisfaction that I have served the church. I've done something for the church. Brother, sister, forget it.

What have you done for the church? You've been Martha slogging away, perspiring in the kitchen, and the Lord says, that's not what I want. I want you to learn from Mary, who listened to my word every day. I'm not saying you shouldn't do anything.

I'm not saying you shouldn't serve the Lord or serve His people, but that is second, that is inferior to listening. So if you're not listening to the Lord, and you're preaching and doing so many things of service, taking care of the Sunday school, and so many other things, I want to say you're a Martha, and the Lord will rebuke you, saying you're worried about too many things. You're not listening to me.

How do I know I'm listening? For myself, it is I get light on my flesh, and then I'm able to serve in a better way. My service becomes purer, because it's coming from a purer source. It's like I can use an illustration.

If our service is like water, Jesus spoke about rivers of living water, and if there's pollution in that water that's coming out of, say, the faucet from the tap or faucet, whatever you call it, the water coming out is polluted. What's the use of getting such a lot of water? You're serving, serving, serving, serving, serving

such a lot of water, but it's all polluted. Isn't it better that you clean up the tank a bit or the source of that water so that at least you get a few trickles of water, but it is pure? People can drink it.

So that's how I see it, that it doesn't matter if I don't serve so much. If I cleanse myself and the little bit that comes out of me is pure, the Lord can do much more with that. I remember in the early days when I quit my job and I wanted to serve, I thought I must go here, go there, go there.

I accomplished very little. But when I said, Lord, I want to be like Mary more and listen, ultimately I found a lot more was accomplished in a much shorter time. So repentance is the great need always.

What is the great need of the prodigal son? Repentance. What is the great need of the elder son? Repentance. To see how self-righteous I am, how I look down on somebody.

What is the need of the sheep if it had common sense? I shouldn't be so careless. I should look where I'm going. I shouldn't even be accidentally tripping and falling over the cliff.

In every one of those types of sinners, I find the great need is for a spirit of repentance and to see where am I slipping up and let me not look down on anybody else. Let me show you this verse. Yeah, I want to show you this verse before I go on.

Matthew 9, 13 said, I did not come to call the righteous but sinners. There's a great value in comparing Scripture with Scripture. If you compare that verse with the same verse in Luke 5, it's the same verse, but Luke 5 has got a little more, which is very important.

Luke 5, 32. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners. Not period.

That's how it is in Matthew 9. I came to call sinners to repentance. That's the full sentence. And if you read Matthew 9, 13 in the King James Version, he came to call the sinners to repentance.

He did not come to call sinners. He came to call sinners to repentance. That's what he meant.

He said, you guys think you're healthy. You're not interested in giving up your sin. Why should I come for you? So who does the Lord come for, even in this church? Those who have a sense of need in their life, who feel there's some sickness in me I need to get rid of.

The way I behave towards my wife is still not Christ-like. I'm sick. The way I behave towards your husband is not Christ-like, not totally Christ-like, so I'm sick.

The way I'm bringing up my children is not Christ-like. I'm not patient enough. There's a little sickness.

Good news. The Lord has come for you, brother and sister. Amen.

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