

(Kitchener, on 2012) Repent First

by Zac Poonen

Repentance is essential for spiritual growth and maturity, as it involves turning around from the world's value system and valuing God's values.

Duration: 1:02:36

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:13, John 16:33

Topics: "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of learning the lesson from John 15:5, which states that without Jesus, we can do nothing. He compares this concept to branches on a tree, explaining that just as a branch cannot produce fruit without being connected to the tree, we are helpless and unable to fulfill our purpose without being connected to Jesus. The speaker encourages the audience to recognize their need for God's enabling and to understand that it is impossible to reach the standards set in Scripture without His help. He also urges them not to accept a life of struggle and strain in their relationship with God, but rather to seek a relationship of joy, happiness, and rest.

Transcript

In the days when Jesus was on earth, the people who appeared to be the holiest were people who were called Pharisees, who had a lot of external righteousness. But Jesus came and stripped that external righteousness from them and said that they were all doomed to go to hell. Because their inner life did not correspond to their external life.

You know, Jesus used pictures like trees and buildings. And you know the most important part of a tree is the roots. Because it's strong roots that can stand a storm.

Otherwise you see a tree ripped out of the ground. And the most important part of a building is the foundation. Now all of us know that when it comes to a tree or a building.

Or another illustration Jesus used was a cup. He told the Pharisees that you clean the outside of the cup, but the inside is dirty. That's another thing we all know.

We all know that even if the outside of a cup is dirty, when we want to drink something, it's the inside that should be clean. So in all these areas we realize the importance of the hidden part, the foundation, the roots or the inside of a cup. But when it comes to our personal life, there are very few people who

recognize that our inner life and attitude is what matters.

In fact it's the only thing that matters before God. And if our inner life is not right with God, then however much we may appear to be Christians or spiritual, it counts for nothing. We're only fooling other people.

And the person who has the biggest laugh is the devil. He says I fool these Christians completely. They don't even take seriously what Jesus himself taught.

They read the Bible, but they never apply it to themselves. So the foundation is very important if you want to press on to maturity. And here he speaks about a foundation of first of all of repentance.

You can't build a building, as I said, if the foundation is not solid. And if you have a crack on the third or fourth floor, usually the problem is not on the fourth floor, the problem is in the foundation. That it wasn't strong enough and the walls are beginning to crack.

So if you discover a problem about ten years after you become a Christian, the problem is probably not there. The problem is that when you started your Christian life, foundation, you didn't get a rock solid foundation of repentance. And through many years of ministry, I've discovered that this is the number one problem with most Christians.

They've not begun with a solid foundation of repentance. Most Christians that I've come across, even so-called born-again Christians, they see they've come to the Lord, but they've come to the Lord in a very shallow way. Somebody told them, you know, you'll go to hell if you don't accept Christ.

It's the only way of salvation. So why don't you say this prayer? Do you acknowledge you're a sinner? Yes. I mean, who in the world will not acknowledge they're sinners? You acknowledge you're a sinner, you want to give up your sins, and I think a lot of people in the world want to give up their sins.

So will you believe, God, Jesus, you died for my sins, come into my heart. You said that prayer and, OK, you're a child of God now, just believe it. The foundation is so shallow, and for a while, the enthusiasm that man has carries him along, but after a while, he finds things are not what he expected it to be.

Not much hasn't changed in his life or his family life. He still has a lot of problems, and he looks around and he sits in the midst of people who appear to have no problems, but who have as many problems themselves, and then he says, well, I must just continue the act and continue to sit in church. Some people just get fed up and give up and fall away, and I think they're the honest ones.

They say, this doesn't work. What is the reason? True Christianity always works. We've seen buildings last for years.

I mean, there are buildings that have been in existence for 300, 400, 500 years, because they had a good foundation. All the storms and wind and rain and weather didn't knock them down. And there are Christians who've lived solid Christian lives for years without any crack in the wall, who've just grown from one degree of glory to another.

So why is it so many fall away, and particularly in our day, I find so much of lukewarmness and shallowness, and the sins that are found in the world are found in Christendom. Once upon a time, there was a distinction. One was light and the other was darkness, but gradually they emerged and the darkness in the world has come right into the church.

The sins found in the world have come into the church, and I believe the reason is because a solid foundation of repentance was never laid. It takes time to lay a foundation, and that's why it's very important to make sure, or if you're not sure of it from your past life, it's good to make sure of it now before we can ever consider pressing on to maturity. I can use another illustration, that is, you know that Jesus speaks about becoming a child of God as being born again, or born of the Holy Spirit.

And he used the word birth, because spiritual birth is just like physical birth in many ways. In the Old Testament, you don't read of this expression of being born again, because of one reason, until Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit could not come and dwell inside anybody's heart. He could only operate from the outside on people, like in Samson and David, etc.

And a person could not be born again until the Holy Spirit could work inside a person's heart. And that couldn't happen until Christ had died and shed his blood for the forgiveness of the sins of all humanity. The Spirit of God cannot dwell in a heart where the sins are not forgiven.

And that could not be possible until Christ died on the cross and ascended and appeared before the Father. And so, new birth, as I said, is just like physical birth. And you know how God has planned that for a physical birth, the baby must be in the mother's womb for a number of months, during which time it is prepared to be born.

Nine months, usually, before it's prepared to be born. Now, sometimes we read of children who are born when they're seven months in the womb. I've come across cases where they're six months in the womb.

But what happens to these children that come out of the womb early? Sometimes all their organs are not formed properly, they can't breathe properly, they have problems in their life, and as soon as they're born they have to be kept in an incubator with ventilation. Sometimes they have to stay there for months because they're not ready to be born. And so, think of a doctor who is crazy to have statistics that he delivered so many babies, and he's going to get pregnant mothers to deliver their babies long before they have finished their full term.

They're going to have a lot of babies that are not ready to live. That is the condition, that's what's happened to many, many evangelists who, in their craze for statistics to try and claim that I brought so many people to Christ, ask people to say these words and assume that they're born again and become children of God when they're not ready to be born at all. And they're exactly like premature babies.

And sometimes these premature babies, in their whole life they never seem to come to a normal life. Because the doctor did not allow that child to be in the womb full term. And I think a lot of evangelists have committed that crime of telling a person that he's a child of God when he's not ready to be a child of God because he's never repented.

He has to really take seriously this matter of turning from sin in his life if he wants to be a child of God. And I want to ask all of you sitting here, many of you who say that you are born again and become a child of God, and you've had a new birth, I want to ask you whether you really repented. You know the first person who paved the way for Christ to come and preach was John the Baptist.

He was called a forerunner. And he went in front of Christ to prepare the way in Israel for them to receive Christ. And what was his message? His message was repentance.

So what we learn from that is there is a message of repentance that has to pave the way before Christ can enter, whether it's Israel or our life. It's that message of John the Baptist of repentance that paves the way for Christ to enter into our life. And if we avoid that, bypass it, we're going to be like those premature babies, to use that illustration, or a tree that doesn't have proper roots that will easily be pulled out, or a building without a proper foundation.

And the reason why so many Christians have problem after another in their life, in their family life, in their finances, in so many things, so many believers are in constant debt, never seem to get out of it, umpteen problems, is because they have not had a proper repentance. Now I want to distinguish between trials, which Christ went through trials, and Paul went through trials, and God allows us all to go through trials. But there's a lot of difference between trials and persecutions and sufferings, which Christians have always faced throughout the centuries, and problems that Christians bring upon themselves.

I mean, if a man is a slave to internet pornography, that's not a trial. That's a sin. And if people are fighting with each other in a marriage, that's not a trial, that's a sin.

And the same way, if a person's living in constant financial problems and debt, that's not a trial, that's because the person's not understood how to seek God's kingdom first, because the Bible says that if we seek God's kingdom first and His righteousness, all these other things will be added to us. We may not become millionaires, but we'll have our needs met. And God does not expect His children to live in debt, I'll tell you that.

So I'm just mentioning this, that there are so many problems that Christians have, which they need not have, if they have a proper repentance. If the foundation is strong, the building will not shake in the midst of a storm. The tree will not be uprooted, even when there's a violent storm.

However great the temptation will stand. So it's very important that we have a Christian life that helps us to be overcomers. And for that, the beginning is repentance.

And repentance means a turning about from our old value system, let's put it like that. See, when we grow up as children of Adam, we all have one value system. And turning around from that value system is to have a value system in our mind, which is the exact opposite of the world's.

In fact, it is the value system of Jesus Christ. The values He had, what He thought was important and what He thought was not important. So repentance means turning around from the world's understanding of what is important and what's not important, around to Christ's understanding of what is important and what is not important.

For example, the world thinks money is one of the most important things in the world. And Jesus Christ used money. In fact, He even had a treasurer who kept a lot of money because they needed money to live in the world.

But He never felt that money was the most important thing in the world. He used it. People gave Him gifts and He took it.

But He didn't live for that. He valued people more than money. Oh, that's so obvious.

He valued people so much. In the world, they don't value people. You know how a lot of businesses exploit people to make money? They love money.

They use people for their own benefit. Jesus never used people. He used money.

God has given us money to use and people to love and care for. It's the opposite in the world. They use people for their own benefit and profit and love money.

Now, repentance means I've turned around from that and I say, Lord, I want to have your value system. The value system of heaven. Then I become a heavenly minded person and that's what it means to be born again.

And if a person is not willing to repent, that's just one area I mentioned. I could mention a lot more. You know, a lot of people think that repentance is just giving up some bad habits.

Some bad sins. That's true. Sins that are ruining our life, etc.

But also, values that the world has. For example, in the world they think that the approval of men means a tremendous lot. I mean, even children, when they go to school, they want to be accepted.

They want everybody to accept them. No child likes to be left out and be lonely when everybody else are friends. They like to be accepted and that temptation is what leads a lot of young people to do a lot of wrong things.

That's how so many young men who don't have the courage to stand for their convictions go into drugs. And that's how a lot of young girls lose their virginity. Because everybody says, hey, we are all doing it, why aren't you doing it? They lose, they want that acceptance so much that they are willing to do wrong things in order to be accepted by their friends in school and college.

And that's how a lot of them commit sin. So you see, that's the world's value system. Whereas when you look at Christ, he couldn't care less whether anybody accepted him or not.

He wanted to please his father. And if that made him lonely, it didn't matter. That's a completely different value system.

In fact, that's what gives a man, that's what marks out a young man or a young woman of courage. The one who is willing to be different. So you see, I'm just giving you a couple of examples and many areas like that where what the world considers very valuable, Christ did not.

And there are a lot of other things, to take the other side, which the world does not consider important. Like humility. Who in the world cares for humility? Nobody is pursuing humility in the world.

But Jesus said you got to learn humility from him. It's one of the most important things in the Christian life. I would say it's the most important.

In the world, that's not more important. In the world, you know, to be arrogant and to show off, that's the thing that a lot of people in the world want. But Christ said it's the opposite.

So repentance means turning around from that value system and pursuing the things that, for example, holiness, total purity. For example, purity in our thought life. How many people do you think in the world are even interested in it? The answer is zero.

Nobody in the world is interested in a pure thought life. They are interested in having a good testimony before men. But to have purity of thoughts, nobody in the world is interested in that.

You say, why should I bother about that? That's not going to give me any gain in the world. But I must give a good impression before people. I mustn't do things that will, you know, spoil my testimony externally.

But in Christ, when Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, he says it's the inside of the cup that's important. What's your thought life like? So you see, repentance means a complete turning around from that old value system that I grew up with from childhood. Saying, Lord, I want a completely new value system.

I want to say, my brothers and sisters, that is the first step to building this building called maturity or perfection. Let's lay that foundation of repentance. And then we can move on to building a house, and you can press on to maturity.

So in other words, God becomes more important, and the world becomes a place which we can use. We can use many good things that God has given us. We can use money, we can use food, we can use all the good gifts God gives us, but we don't become slaves to them.

In other words, I'm not saying we shouldn't use money or material things, but they must be under our feet. They must not be the master, but they must be the slave. There's a lot of difference between money becoming your master and money becoming your slave.

I say money is a very useful servant, but a terrible master. So that's one area where we really got to be careful. If you're not really seeking to be free from it, I'm not saying that we have to change before he accepts us.

Repentance means a willingness to change. It means I've turned around. It doesn't mean I've reached the goal.

It doesn't mean that I've become perfect, but it means I've turned around and I'm pressing on to perfection. You see, if maturity is over here and willingness is over there, I can't press on to maturity if I'm moving in the wrong direction. I have to turn around and say, maturity is to be like Christ.

And he's looking in this direction and the whole race of Adam is looking in the other direction. So if I want to press on to maturity, I must be looking in the same direction as Jesus Christ is. And that's why I say these things.

So in other words, God becomes my goal. And to become like Christ becomes the greatest thing I desire on this earth. And I really believe that this is where many people have failed because they have not seen God's goal for their life.

So let me show you this verse in Romans chapter 8 and verse 29. There's a word here which Christian theologians like to argue about. It's called predestined.

Romans 8 and 29 says that those whom God foreknew, he predestined. Predestined means he determined beforehand. Whom did he choose like that? Those whom he foreknew.

He knew in advance who all would respond to the gospel. And those he predestined. And the predestination was not to go to heaven like some people think.

But it was to become like his son Jesus Christ. So many people have an argument about predestination. Predestined to heaven or hell.

I say neither. God doesn't determine that anybody's going to heaven or hell. But he does predestine you to become like Jesus Christ.

That is our destination. And the word predestination just means the destination is determined beforehand. It's like when you buy an air ticket to go from one place to another.

You're going from here to New York. The destination is already determined on your ticket. It's written on your ticket.

New York. That's predestination. So if you go to the airport, there may be 50 planes, 50 or 20 of 50 planes there.

And you won't get into any of them. You look for the gate where the plane is going to New York. That's your destination.

And that's the gate you go to. And that's what predestination means. I say my destination is not heaven.

My destination is to become like Jesus Christ. And so pressing on to maturity means becoming more and more and more closer to that destination God has planned for me. That's another mistake that a lot of people have made because they've been taught that Jesus saved us so that we go to heaven when we die.

And so their destination becomes heaven. And they don't care too much about whether their life is growing into likeness of Christ. But they think, oh, I'm going to heaven.

There'll be no more sorrow. There'll be no more sickness. And they live a pretty miserable, defeated life on earth with a lot of sins.

And waiting for the day when they'll reach heaven. I'll tell you, some of them will never reach heaven. Because they've been fooled by the devil for wrong destinations, like getting into the wrong plane.

Supposing I've got New York written on my ticket. And I get into a plane that's going to Seattle or something. But what'll happen? Every hour I'm going further and further away from New York.

That's what's happened to a lot of Christians. They haven't understood their destination properly. They think destination is heaven.

Now, I'll tell you, I mean, I've read the Bible for 50 years. There is no place in the Bible which says we are predestined to go to heaven, by the way. And if you doubt it, go and look up a concordance and you'll discover that.

That is a fiction invented by preachers. That we are predestined to go to heaven. We are predestined to become like Jesus Christ.

And he will take us to heaven, but that's besides the point. But my ultimate goal is to become like Christ, not to go to heaven. I will go to heaven as a by-product.

But becoming like Christ becomes the goal. So, how do I know whether I'm on the right plane? To use that illustration. Every hour, every year, will find me a little more like Christ.

Every year will find me closer in likeness to him. In the way I conduct myself. In my attitudes to people.

In my attitudes to material things. In my conduct, in my speech. In my thought life, which I alone will know.

But that's a good way to check. In these modern aircraft now, particularly on international flights, they have a little map that shows you where your plane is going. I remember when traveling from India, I could see.

We started in Bangalore and you could see the plane moving on that screen. You know, you look up every couple of hours and you see, yeah, you're getting closer to our destination. I'm in the right plane, all right.

And I'm reaching where I want to go. Now, if I saw on that screen it moving in some other direction, I say, hey, what happened? I'm not on the right plane at all. I better get off at the first stop.

Somehow I got into the wrong plane. So, every year it's good for us to check whether we become a little more like Christ. Then we know we're going towards the destination God planned for us.

Now, if that's not happening in your life, and you're behaving exactly like you behaved ten years ago, your plane probably hasn't even taken off. You're just sitting in the airport the whole time. You should be getting off and finding a plane that is taking you off and going in the right direction.

Yeah, I'm amazed that Christians would be so careful when it comes to getting onto a flight to make sure they got on the right one, seem to be so careless about their eternal destination. It's amazing. We're not really serious about pressing on to maturity.

That's the thing. Well, it's a sort of a side issue for us. For a lot of people, their relationship with God is not the major thing in their life.

They got a lot of more important things to do in life. But, yeah, my relationship with God is perhaps number 20 on my priority list. Well, you'll never get to know God if God is number 20 on your priority list.

You'll get to know him only if he is number one. Let me show you this verse in Jeremiah chapter 29. This is the reason why so many people do not find God's best.

If you want God's best, you know, just like in the world, we like to have the best of health. If we need to be treated for a sickness, we like to get the best of treatment in a hospital. We get our children educated, we want to give them the best education.

Spiritually, why not seek for the best? And if you want the best, here's what the Bible says in Jeremiah 29 and verse 13. Jeremiah 29, 13 says, You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. Think of that as a law.

As a law of God. Never forget it. Jeremiah 29, 13.

Many of us have sought God, but we have to confess that we have not found him as other people have found him. Why is it you find some Christians who seem to have such a tremendous, wonderful relationship with God, who seem to have found him as a friend, and someone who stands by them through thick and thin, and who provides for them and takes care of them, and you find that somehow or the other

it's not the same in your life. Here's the law.

You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. The reason why that guy found God and found his life with God so rich and satisfying, is because he sought him with all his heart. And you didn't.

And, you know, it's like if you use the laws of God, you can get the benefit from them. In many scientific things there are laws, and people make use of those laws and get a lot of benefit from it. Law of gravity, for example.

People use that law in various ways to get a benefit from it for ourselves. Here's another law. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

It's a law of God. And the others won't find him, or they'll have a very unsatisfactory experience of God. Most Christians have an unsatisfactory experience of God, because they're not seeking God with all their heart.

They think if I seek God with all my heart, he'll mess up my life and I won't be happy. You'll be more happy when you seek God with all your heart, because he's not here to come to mess up your life. One of the great things Jesus taught was that God was a loving father.

Do you think a good, loving father would ever be interested in messing up his child's life or making his child unhappy in any way? There are a lot of evil fathers in the world, I'm not talking about them. But think of a really good, the best father the world has ever seen. Do you think he'd ever be interested in messing up his child's life? Not at all.

He'd sacrifice everything. Think of a mother. Do you think they'd ever be interested in messing up their child's life? They do.

They'd sacrifice so much so that their child can have it good. And it can go well with them. I want to tell you, you've got to multiply that by a million if you want to know the goodness of God's heart.

He's really eager to give us the very best. God is a loving father. Why is it that many people don't experience it? Because they think that if I surrender everything to God, He'll tell me to do all types of difficult, impossible things.

It's not true. That's a lie of the devil to prevent you from having a really happy, satisfying life. I want to tell you this, my dear brothers and sisters.

God doesn't want you to live a defeated life. He doesn't want you to live having bad moods and discouragement and gloom. That's normal for all people.

Maybe it's normal for people who don't know God, but it's not normal. Do you think Jesus lived with bad moods? Do you think you'd ever walk up to Jesus and find Him in a bad mood one day? Impossible. But do people find you in bad moods sometimes? Well, if you're not a Christian, that's understandable.

But if you're a Christian, I'll tell you God's standard is you should never be in a bad mood. I'll tell you that. I never knew that life myself for many years.

I realized that something God has provided for me, which I had not experienced. And that was a life filled with God's Holy Spirit, where His power would keep me above all the discouragement and gloom and anger and bitterness that was my inheritance from Adam. I want to tell you that that's a life I want to encourage you to live and have.

But it depends on how completely you surrender yourself to God. I find that there are some Christians who their whole attitude to Christianity is, what is the minimum I have to do in order to go to heaven? What is the minimum I have to do to be a member of good standing in this church? I'll do that. Is there a minimum fee that I have to pay to be a member? I'll pay that.

What is the minimum I have to do? Read the Bible for 10 minutes every day? Sure. What is the minimum? Always minimum, minimum, minimum, everything. Can you imagine? Can you think of a marriage where a husband and wife are always thinking, what is the minimum I have to do to preserve this marriage from divorce? Okay, they don't get divorced, but do you think they're going to have a happy marriage? Where each is thinking, what is the minimum I have to do? The wife says, what is the minimum I have to cook to keep my husband happy? And the husband says, what is the minimum I have to do to keep my wife happy? That's not going to be a very happy marriage.

And that's not going to be a very happy Christian life either. That's exactly the reason. But you need to ask yourself whether you have that attitude.

What is the minimum I have to give to God? What is the minimum amount of time or energy or money or service or anything I have to God? And I tick off, yeah, I've done the minimum. I've got to spend my time for other things. And that's one type of Christian.

Then there's another type of Christian whose attitude is completely different. You say, Lord Jesus, when you came to earth, you gave everything up for me? For such a worthless sinner like me? Lord, I'm grateful. And I'm not going to show my gratitude just by five minutes of prayer and saying thank you once in a while and going to church on Sundays.

I'm going to express my gratitude to you by seeing what is the maximum I can do for you on this earth to show my gratitude for your having done everything for me when you came. Can you think of these two types of Christians? The minimum type and the maximum type? There's going to be a world of difference in the way these Christians live their life. One will be a supremely happy, useful, effective Christian overcoming every trial and temptation and living victoriously.

And you think when somebody testifies like that, that he's just bluffing, he's telling a tale. He is not. You may not have experienced it because your whole attitude is a minimum attitude.

But I'll tell you honestly, there are not many, but I have met a few. And I've seen that and I've begun to taste a little bit of that in my own life. That if your attitude changes from what is the minimum I have to do for God, even today, and say, Lord, I want to change my whole attitude to see what is the maximum you can get out of my one earthly life before I leave this earth, you'll find a tremendous difference in your life and you'll begin to experience some of these wonderful promises that God has for us in the New Testament.

This is the reason why many people never seem to progress. And they're always wondering, why am I not a little more mature? When Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, he was very honest with them. I like a

preacher who doesn't try to flatter people.

Paul was not a flatterer. He spoke the truth and he didn't care if people got offended with him and a lot of people did get offended with him. Some people got so offended with him, they didn't want to listen to him anymore.

But he was going to speak the truth. And he told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3, and verse 1. 1 Corinthians 3, verse 1. Look what he says. He says, Dear brethren, you are my brethren in Christ, that I have to acknowledge, dear brothers, I'm not saying you're unconverted, you're brothers, but I could not speak to you as to spiritual people.

You're worldly. You're mere infants and babies in Christ. Now is that a very pleasant way to speak to people? Supposing the apostle Paul stood here and said those words to you, Brothers and sisters, I cannot speak to all of you as spiritual people, because you're a bunch of babies.

You're worldly. Your mindset is worldly. You sit here and sing the songs and act as though you're wonderful Christians, but you're pretty worldly.

You're babes. You should have grown up. You should have become mature by now.

But you're babies. And in the next verse, 1 Corinthians 3, verse 2, he says, I just gave you milk to drink, not solid food. You know, you don't put solid food in the mouth of a three-month-old baby.

It'll choke. So I just give you milk, and not solid food, because you were not ready for it. And you're still not ready after so many years.

Now, wouldn't you be concerned if you had a baby five years old, and still could only drink milk, couldn't eat any solid food? You'd be concerned if that baby was one year old in that condition. That's exactly the spiritual picture here. Here are people who are not growing up to maturity.

They're babies still. And the reason is this. They had this minimum attitude.

What is the minimum I have to do to get into God's kingdom? What is the minimum I have to do to go to heaven? What is the minimum I have to do to please God here on this earth? And if we keep that attitude, we'll be like those Corinthian Christians. You know, I'll tell you, if you look at 1 Corinthians, there were some terrible sins that went on. You wouldn't even think it was a church.

He says in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, that there is such immorality among you. Verse 1. 1 Corinthians 5, verse 1. There's such immorality among you people in a church, a kind that does not even occur among the pagans. A man living with his father's second wife.

He says, think of that first part. I mean, forget the actual sin, but such immorality among you that is not even found among the pagans. Or some other type of sin, which is not even found among the pagans.

A Christian church is supposed to be like a light in the midst of the world. And when the same type of sins are found in Christians, that are found in the non-Christians around them, then you can be pretty sure that that's not what God intended the church to be. And I believe, like I said at the beginning, the reason is because we have ignored the foundation.

We have ignored repentance. And I want to say one more thing about repentance. Repentance is a turning away, as I said, from the mentality of Adam, to the mentality of Christ.

And basically that's what turning around repentance means. I don't achieve full likeness of Christ. It may take a hundred years or more before I become completely like him.

I'll be transformed fully only when Christ comes. But the Bible speaks of the Christian life like a race where I'm running, I should be running in the right direction. When I was unconverted, I was running in another direction.

You know, to live for the world and the pleasures of the world and the wealth of the world and the honor of the world. It's usually these three things that people run after. The pleasures of the world, the wealth of the world and the honor of the world.

And a time has come when I turn around from that and say, Lord, now those are not the things I'm going to live for. Now I'm going to seek the kingdom of God, God's rule in my life, likeness to Christ. And then I keep earthly things and all that in their proper place to be used and not to rule my life.

And I say, what is the maximum I can do for God in this one earthly life? And this is the reason why God has given us his Holy Spirit, you know. God has not called us, he puts a standard before us. And when we acknowledge, when we seize in us a tremendous desire to live that life, that's the first thing, if you've got that.

The next thing he'll show you is how impossible it is to live that life in your own ability. Maybe you've discovered that too. Some of you have sincerely perhaps tried to live according to some of the standards in the Bible and you've discovered it's not possible.

Now when you discover a standard in the Bible, it's not possible, what do you do? Do you give up on it? Or do you say, hey, there must be something here, a secret I've not discovered. You know, it's like a computer program. And you find you're not able to use that program, but there are hundreds of others who are using that program and accomplishing a lot through that computer program.

And you say, hey, it's not that there's something wrong with the program, there's something in it I've missed. Something here which I haven't understood, that's why I'm not able to use this program, this wonderful program that can do amazing things for me on the computer, which other people tell me are the amazing things they can do with this program, and I don't seem to be able to do it. There must be something I've missed, some secret here, which I don't want to know.

And if you're eager to discover it, you'd make every effort to find out what is this thing which I've missed out on, which will enable me to get the benefit of this program, which a lot of other people seem to get from. You know, computers have made our lives so much easier. And if you can use some of these programs, they save you a lot of time and a lot of effort.

It's like that in the Christian life, when you see some people having such a wonderful walk with God, and you say, why is it not true in my life? There must be a reason. So when you see a standard in scripture, the next thing you need to learn is, God wants us to learn that it is impossible to reach that standard without his enabling. And if you want a little exercise in that, I would encourage you to read just three chapters when you get time.

The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6 and 7. It won't take you more than half an hour to read them. Less than that, much less. Fifteen minutes perhaps.

But instead of reading through it fast, if you go through it slowly, take a little time, take a few days over it. One of the things you'll discover, if you're absolutely honest in reading just those three chapters, Matthew 5, 6 and 7, you will discover how impossible it is to live up to the standard Jesus described there. I'll tell you some of the things he mentions there.

This is the life of maturity. Matthew 5, 6 and 7 is a description of the life of maturity that God expects from all his children. Not babes, but mature Christians.

Mature Christians are those who overcome anger, who can live without losing their temper. It's one of the first things he mentioned in Matthew 5, 21. And he goes on to speak about, mature Christians are those who don't use their eyes to lust after women, either on the computer, or in pictures or movies, or in real life.

I'm just telling you briefly some of the things mentioned in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Mature Christians are those who, when they say yes, they mean yes. There's no duplicity in their talk. They don't tell lies.

They speak the truth. Their no means no, and their yes means yes. When they make a sacrifice for the Lord, whether it's a sacrifice of giving money, or prayer, or fasting, they do their best to make sure that nobody knows about it.

It's a mark of a mature Christian. They try to hide the good they do and the sacrifices they have made for the Lord. They don't just love their friends.

They love their enemies. If somebody curses them, they bless them in return. This is mature Christians.

Immature Christians will treat other people the way they are treated. But mature Christians are different. If somebody spitefully persecutes them, they pray for them.

These are some of the things mentioned in Matthew 5, and they don't condemn others. They always have hope that maybe God will change after a little while. I disagree with him, but I'm not going to condemn him.

Mature Christians disagree with a lot of people, but they don't condemn anybody. They may be free to express their disagreement, but they don't condemn people. There's a lot of difference between the two.

We're not people who are diplomats trying to appear as though they agree with everybody. In fact, quite frankly, I disagree with a lot of Christians too. I'm not here to condemn them.

God is their judge. I'm not their judge. So a lot of these things mentioned like that in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, and at the end of that three chapters, the one thing Jesus doesn't tell us, this is the most important thing, is how shall I live this life? As I read through Matthew 5, 6, and 7, I said, this is all wonderful, but how do I live this life? Have you ever wondered about that? That's what I wondered about when I read that chapter.

I said, Lord, this is a wonderful life, I'd like to live it, but you haven't told me how to do it. And the reason is that God puts that out there like a challenge to see how many people will read it and say, well, that's impossible. You know, the devil immediately comes and whispers, impossible, you can't live that life.

And then God is just waiting to see how many of his children will believe the devil rather than believe his word. And I'll tell you quite honestly, for many years I believed the devil. It's impossible to live that life, and I think a lot of you sitting here, as you've heard me speak about it, you say it's impossible to live this life.

Well, you believe the devil's lie too. Is it possible to live a life free from anger and lust and deception and telling lies and seeking man's honor and impurity and humility, the values mentioned there? You say it's impossible. Well, it's impossible humanly speaking.

So there's where God immediately sees some people are just going to believe the devil's lies, impossible. Others will say, is it possible that Jesus Christ, whom I respect so much, would ever put before me a standard that he knew that I could never attain to? I say, no, that's not possible. I cannot imagine that my loving Savior would ever put before me a standard that he knows I can never attain to, as if he were teasing me.

You know how sometimes evil men tease little children by saying, hey, come here, I'll give you this pen. And as they come near, they take it away, take it away, and they get some delight out of teasing little children like that. You think Jesus liked that? Come to the standard, come to the standard.

As we try to approach it, we never get it. He's not an evil person. If he offers us something, he wants to give it to us.

We can be sure of that. But there's a lesson we have to learn. And that lesson is one of the most important lessons that Jesus tried to teach his disciples.

In John 15, verse 5, the last part of that verse, without me, you can do nothing. I believe John 15, verse 5, the last part of that, apart from me, you can do nothing, was the most important lesson that Jesus tried to teach his disciples. And I want to say to you, my brothers and sisters, that is the most important lesson you need to learn.

You see there that he was speaking about in John 15, verse 5, about being like branches in a tree. And you know how a branch can produce nothing apart from the tree. It may be a first class branch, but you cut it off, no fruit.

So he said in the same way that the branch is helpless, and in fact, the branch does not have a responsibility to produce fruit. I like that. I meditated on that verse.

That we are like branches in a tree. And I say, Lord, I'm like a branch in a tree. A branch has no responsibility to produce fruit.

You know that? But it still produces all those luscious apples and fruit. When you ask that branch, how in the world do you produce such good apples? He said, I don't do anything, I just stay in the tree. And the tree sends its sap through me, and lo and behold, these apples come.

I don't know how. It's like that. I say, that's wonderful.

Is the Christian life really supposed to be such a restful life? Think of a branch in a tree. It's not struggling. It's not straining like a lot of Christians are.

It's a life of rest. The Bible says in Hebrews 4, there's a rest for God's people. There's a life of rest that God wants us to have, which many Christians have not attained to.

They missed it. But this branch rests, but it surrendered completely. Every part of that branch is opened up for the sap to flow in.

And the sap that flows in from the tree into the branch is what produces the fruit. Do you know what that sap is, my brothers and sisters, in the Christian life? It's the power of the Holy Spirit. It's the power of the Holy Spirit flowing in from Christ into us.

And if you look at that branch, it's effortless. It's not straining to get the sap inside. No.

There's something we have missed in the Christian life. It's not meant to be a life of strain and struggle. There's battle with Satan.

Yes, that's another thing altogether. When I confront Satan, it's battle. We wrestle with principalities and powers, sure.

But we don't wrestle with God. No. We are at rest in God.

We're not like Jacob in the Old Testament, wrestling with God. No. The New Testament Christian is at rest in God.

He's wrestling with principalities and powers. Overcoming Satan, that's his calling. But in God, he's like a branch in a tree at rest in a loving Father who wants to give me everything in my life.

And the branch opens up every little part of it so that the sap can flow without any hindrance. That's all it does. And this is what it means to live a spirit-filled life.

To open up every area of our life completely to God so that he can allow his spirit to penetrate every area of our life. You know, so many people struggle to have the power of the Holy Spirit. It's not a life of struggle.

And once upon a time, I thought it was that. But it's not like that. I've discovered the spirit-filled life is a life of rest.

And he's so eager to flood our life just like the tree is rushing to push the sap into the branch. Or like sunlight, you know. There's sunlight outside, but when the blinds are drawn, it's dark.

But if you open one blind, just one, immediately the sunlight comes in. And you open another blind, more comes in. You open another blind, you open all the blinds, just pours in.

The sunlight's just waiting to come in. You don't have to plead with it, hey, come on, come on. Do you know that the Holy Spirit's like that? Many people pray and wonder why the Holy Spirit's not entering the light.

Well, you close the blinds. If you keep the blinds closed and say, oh, let sunlight come in, come in, it'll never come. You just got to open the blinds.

The Christian life is a life of rest. Believe me, I'm not trying to sell something. I'm not a salesman.

I'm just telling you the truth. I'm giving you my testimony. You can take it or leave it.

But I'll tell you that Christian life is a life of rest. Growth to maturity. It's not a constant struggle.

I fight against the devil. There's no doubt about it. I go to crucify my flesh.

There's no doubt about it. But my relationship with God, if it's a struggle and a strain, it's because there's sin in your life. Otherwise, there's no struggle or strain in our relationship with God.

I mean, if you have a, supposing you tell me that, Brother Zach, I've got a strained relationship with me and my earthly father. You see, that's not normal. Something's wrong between you and your dad.

The normal relationship should be a father and a son should be so happy with each other. They could be able to pray together and talk together and joke together and God together. That's a good relationship.

We have a strained relationship, a struggle all the time to have something wrong between you and your father. And if you've got that type of relationship with God, that's not the way God wants you to have it with any of his children. And don't let the devil make you accept that.

Don't let the devil let you accept that life of struggle and strain in your relationship with God. Your relationship with your heavenly father must be one of perfect joy, happiness and rest. Even though in the world, Jesus said you shall have tribulation.

So let me show you that last verse in closing. John chapter 16 and verse 33. John 16, 33.

These are the last words that Jesus spoke before he went to Gethsemane. The last words. He had spoken to them in chapter 14, 15 and 16 and he finally tells them, I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace or rest.

It's the same thing. In the world, of course, you'll have a lot of tribulation and trial. But don't worry.

I've overcome the world and when I'm living in you, the world won't be able to bother you. This is the Christian life. That I can have, in him I can have rest and he lives in me and I can overcome the world.

In the world, of course, there's going to be trials and tribulation, but it's not going to knock me down. Christ lives in me. I can be more than a conqueror no matter what happens as I live in this world.

So, I have tried to set before you a life which I believe that every single one of you can live. There's not one of you, I don't care how deep you have fallen or how much you have made a mess of your life or how much you have bungled up and spoiled so many opportunities you had in the past. Yeah, you know, Jesus came and picked up people who have made a tremendous mess of their life.

He gave comfort to a woman who was caught in adultery. You read in John chapter 8. Another woman belonged to a despised race. Do you belong to a despised race? It was called the race of the Samaritans.

The Jews despised them. Ah, the Samaritans. And among the Samaritans was a woman, you read in John 4, who was divorced five times.

I've never met anybody, any woman divorced five times, that's pretty much of a record. And on top of that, she was now sleeping around with a man who was not even her husband. You'd think that Jesus would never have time for such a person.

I mean, you and I are so holy, we'd never have time for such a person, right? But Jesus came for sinners. And he came for the worst of them. So he had time for them.

He had time for her. I like that passage. Jesus had time for a woman who was divorced five times and who was now sleeping around with a man who was not even her husband.

This is the Christ I worship and I love and I follow. One who has hope for the worst of the worst. And he, what did he do with her? He didn't just forgive her.

Of course Jesus didn't endorse all that. Don't misunderstand me. He never endorses sin.

But people have already made a mess of their life. Once he was telling them, oh you should not have married husband number one and husband number two. And she already knows that.

Once he was telling her all that. He comforted her and forgave her. And not only did that, he used her to bring a revival in Samaria.

That really amazes me. And you'd have thought he'd use one of his disciples to bring a revival in Samaria. And the Lord says, no, you guys go and have your lunch.

I've got to use somebody else here to bring a revival here. And he uses this woman. If you'd asked me, I'd be the last person in Samaria.

I would have chosen to bring a revival in that city. But you read the end of John chapter 4. The whole city came out to listen to Jesus because of one woman. Jesus chooses the most unlikely type of person to do his work.

So that no man gets the glory. He couldn't say, oh because of my eloquence or because I was so gifted. Or because of my pure life, God used me.

Rubbish. I was a sinner. But God's grace forgave me.

And used me. That's all we'd be able to say. That's what woman was to say.

Think of that thief on the cross. Everybody had given up hope for him. And if they did not know what happened in that last few moments before he died.

Everybody would have said, that guy's definitely gone to hell. If there's one guy who deserved to go to hell, it was that wicked fellow who killed so many people. Robbed so many people.

Thank God he's crucified. Boy, but you should have heard what happened in those last few minutes. He turned around and the Lord said, you're going to be in paradise tonight with me.

See how the Lord has, in his last moments on earth. He taught us a lesson. That he came for those who were hopeless.

And who had made a mess of their life. Can you think of anyone who's made a greater mess of his life than a murderer? Who's been crucified. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals by the Romans.

But the great thing was, this man acknowledged his guilt and said, I deserve this, Lord. I'm not a good man. I'm just a rotten criminal who deserves to go, to be crucified.

Not just a few years in prison, but crucifixion. That was the difference between him and the other thief. Who said, I don't deserve to be crucified.

Get me down from this cross. So we learned there that to get into God's kingdom, you have to be honest. And acknowledge that you don't deserve it.

The man who thinks he deserves to get into God's kingdom never gets there. But it's the person who acknowledges, Lord, I don't deserve, but you'll take me there by your grace. And who remains in humility and gratitude to give to him all that I have.

Because he picked up someone who didn't deserve anything like me. And I'm never going to be a minimum Christian because of that, but a maximum. So there's hope for everyone, brothers and sisters.

May God bless you. Let's pray. Let's bow our heads before God.

Heavenly Father, it's so difficult to express the greatness of your love for us. And the wonder of the Christian life. It's so much beyond all that our human words can express.

But I pray, Lord, that in whatever feeble way I've been able to communicate it, your Holy Spirit will take it home to many hearts here this afternoon, this evening. Many, many, many hearts who are needing exactly what they heard today. Who may be too ashamed to acknowledge what their inner life is like.

I pray that you give them hope and lift them up, Lord, in their hearts. Encourage them, everyone. Thank you, Father.

Do it. Do more than we ask or think. Let no one go away, Lord, condemned or discouraged from here.

But I hope that God can even do something for them. Change their life and even those of us who have made progress in our life. Deliver us from being satisfied with the progress we have made.

To press on to greater heights. We want to be ready for your return, Lord Jesus. Help us, we pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Thank you.

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