

Knowing God as Kind and Compassionate

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the true meaning of eternal life as knowing God and Jesus Christ, highlighting the importance of seeking to know Jesus better throughout our lives. It discusses the parable in Luke 19 about using our lives wisely for God's kingdom, regardless of the length of our lives or the resources we have been given. The sermon also delves into the wrong understanding of God that can hinder our effectiveness in serving Him, focusing on the need to see God's kindness, mercy, and compassion as the essence of His glory.

Scripture: John 17:3, Luke 19:12, Psalms 103:14, Luke 4:18, Exodus 33:18

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Knowing God"

Description

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Transcript

We know that verse in John 17 3 where Jesus said eternal life is to know God. For many years in my life I thought if I had eternal life it means I'll live forever. That is not eternal life because people who go to hell also live forever.

So remember this, living forever is not eternal life. In the Bible eternity means that which had no beginning and has no end. So eternal life is a life which had no beginning and has no end.

That is only the life of God, not us. God gives it to us but it says in John 17 3 eternal life is to know God and to know Jesus Christ. So towards the end of Paul's life his passion was I want to know Jesus better and it's a it's a lifetime pursuit to know him better and if we are lazy we can end our life just like we began with very little knowledge of the Lord.

So the reason God has given us the scriptures is so that we can know God better and better and I think a lot of problems arise in our life because we don't know God we don't know his real nature and we don't fulfill God's purpose for our life because we don't know his nature. That word came strongly to my heart the other day when I was reading Luke chapter 19. In Luke 19 Jesus told a parable.

Jesus is always speaking parables and this parable has reference to the way we use our life. God has given us one life and all of us are equal there and I'll tell you something the length of our life is not important. Some people wish they'd live a hundred years.

Jesus lived only thirty three and a half years which is younger than many people sitting here and out of those 33 and a half years he had only three and a half years of ministry and yet he did a greater work than other people have done in thousands of years. So it's not how long we live it's not how widely we travel. Jesus did not travel anywhere outside Israel and Israel is such a small state it is a very small part even of California.

Jesus traveled I think maybe from here to Los Angeles that's about all in his whole life. People who like to travel the world and so many things Jesus didn't have all that interest he wanted to finish God's will for his life and it's very easy to accept Christ and then say okay I'm gonna live as I like but no passion to finish the plan God has for our life. So here's a parable in relation to that.

Luke 19 verse 12. The people who thought the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately he said no it's going to take time but in between now and the time when the kingdom of God appears here's a parable a noble man went to a distant country there's a picture of Christ to receive a kingdom then return and he called ten of his slaves and that's a picture of you and me. Slaves are those who obey a hundred percent and he gave each of them one Mina.

Nobody got more. In another parable he gave some five some to someone that refers to the gifts of the Spirit. Some people have five some people have two some people have one that's a parable in Matthew 25 that's not to be confused with this parable.

In this parable everybody had equal. What is it we are all equal in? Every one of us has only 24 hours a day. Nobody gets 25 nobody gets 23.

One Mina each. Everybody's equal. All of us have got the same number of lusts in our flesh.

Nobody's got more nobody's got less. We all came from Adam. These are two very important areas where we are completely equal.

So there's no need to think that person has got more or less. He's got 24 hours you got 24 hours. If you have lust in his flesh that person's got desires in his flesh too.

Everybody is given one Mina each. Teaching us never to compare ourselves with others. God has given all of us exactly the same in the important area.

Money is not an important area and there God's given us different things. Length of life is not important. God gives different people different lengths of life.

Moses 120. Jesus 33. Stephen I don't know 28.

James the Apostle perhaps 30. John 95. It doesn't make a difference.

One Mina each exactly. Now one of these people it says when he came back he asked everybody let me know in verse 15. He all of you come and tell me how did you spend this Mina? What did you accomplish with it? What did you accomplish with this one life? And again I told you it's got nothing to do with how long you live.

You may think that guy who's lived for 60 years will do more than I can only live for 20 years. Jesus did in three and a half years more than others have done in a thousand years. It's a question of whether we have done the will of God.

What have you done? One man said with one Mina I did business and I made 10 Minas. Verse 16. He said well done you have authority over ten cities.

Greater were. Another man said with the same one Mina I made five Minas. Good.

Not as good as the other person. You remember the story of the different types of ground in which the seed was sown? For many years I used to think it was only four types of ground you know. One the birds came and ate it.

The other was rocky ground. And the third was where the thorns grew up and choked it. And the fourth was good ground.

But I discovered when I read more carefully. Many things you change your mind when you read the Bible more carefully. There were three types of bad ground and three types of good ground.

If you read carefully. There was the one with the birds ate up the seed. The other is a rocky and the other was thorny.

And the three types of good ground, all good, produced thirty fold, sixty fold, hundred fold. There were three different types of results from the same seed. But all were good.

All believers. But some produced thirty percent. Somebody sixty percent.

Some a hundred percent. Here also one Mina each. But one fellow produces ten.

Another fellow produces five. Another produce. And this is the important thing which I want you to see.

One man he produced zero. That means he did not accomplish anything for God in his life. And I'm not talking about traveling the world or preaching or.

That's another gift. No, that depends on how much God gives you. This is talking about your life, not your gift, not your preaching ability, not how much you do with your money, none of those things, but your life.

And he came and said, Master, verse 20, here's your Mina. I kept it in a handkerchief because I. Listen to this. Here you see the reason why people accomplish nothing with their lives.

And if you understand this, I believe you understood one of the most important things in the Christian life as to how I can do something with my life for God. Here is the reason why this guy accomplished nothing. He had a wrong understanding of his master.

He said, I was afraid of you. Why do people not do something with their life? They are afraid of God in a wrong way. They're afraid God will punish them.

They're afraid God is angry with them. You know, that's a favorite tactic of the devil. Make you feel that God is always angry with you.

Uh-huh. You'll be like the person with one Mina. You'll accomplish absolutely nothing even if you live a hundred years.

This is the most important thing to learn here. Why did this man accomplish nothing with his life? Because of a wrong understanding of his master. Why do some Christians, even though they live 50 years as believers, accomplish nothing because of a wrong understanding of God as a strict, hard taskmaster? Like the Egyptians who whipped the Israelites to make bricks when they were slaves in Egypt.

So I was afraid of you because I, because you are an exacting man. And the word exacting there means very strict and demanding way. You know, you haven't sown any, sown anything but you want to reap.

That means you don't give me enough resources to do something and you expect a result from me. A wrong understanding of God, of God's, as if God is a very strict, unmerciful, demanding tyrant. One who's always looking at you angrily.

If you want to waste your life, my brother, sister, just picture God as one who's always angry with you. Always unhappy. Every morning unhappy with you.

That's the way you'll waste your life. A wrong picture of God. I know you were a very demanding man.

You expect results without giving the resources to me to accomplish those results. And he said, really? The Lord said, okay, I'll judge you by your own words, you worthless slave. You thought I was an exacting man.

Okay, then why didn't you at least put my money in the bank? You didn't have to do business because you don't want to take any risk. You know, there are Christians who are willing to take risks for God. I'm not talking about taking a risk for your life.

We must be careful with our life. But a person who's not willing to take a risk for Jesus Christ will never accomplish anything. Oh, I have to be very careful.

If I stand up for Christ in my office, I may lose my job. Uh-huh. Always be very careful.

Don't let anybody know that you're an out and out disciple of Jesus Christ, because your boss may not be very happy. Yeah, very cautious. Don't take any risks.

You know, anyone who does business, how could a man produce 10 minas with one mina? Not by putting in a bank. No bank will give you 10 minas for one mina. Your mina may become 1.1 after many years, but not 10.

For somebody to multiply his money like that, he's got to take a risk in business. So Jesus said, okay, if you were scared to take a risk, why didn't you just put in the bank? So the point is this. I see that the people who have accomplished anything for God on this earth are the people who are willing to take a risk for the Lord.

You read the stories of the missionaries. I read many stories of missionary biographies. I want to encourage all of you to get your children to read missionary biographies.

That's more important than just Bible study, because it challenged me. He said, Lord, these people took such risks for you. They're willing to lose their life, but they accomplished something.

What am I doing? Always so careful with my life. I don't want to get hurt anywhere. I don't want to take a risk anywhere.

That's the way to waste your life. You'll be like this man. He was so scared to take any risk.

They don't want to be publicly known that I belong to Jesus Christ, because there can be shame, ridicule, there may be loss. There are many young people in jobs who lose their job because they stand up for Christ, because they stand up for righteousness. Students in school and college who are mocked at and laughed at because they stand up for Christ, and so they keep quiet.

That's this man, afraid to take a risk for Christ. Don't be like that. And the devil, as I said, enhances that wrong image of God by saying he's angry with you.

Those other people felt, well, I'm not doing this for myself. I want to take a risk for my master's sake to get some profit for his business. And they accomplish something.

Say, Lord, I don't want to live my life for myself. I'm willing to take some risk for Christ. Others won't understand it.

They're always very cautious about what they do. Dear brothers and sisters, it's good to be cautious in every area of your life, but when you're living for Christ, don't try to be cautious. You'll be like this one man.

You'll finally stand before God with having accomplished nothing with your life, even though you went to 10,000 meetings and attended church every Sunday. Your accomplishment in your life was pretty close to zero because you were not willing to stand up for Christ and take a risk, to be known as an out-and-out disciple of Jesus Christ. Or if you have a wrong picture of God, God is a very hard, demanding person.

I want to show you the verse that Jesus preached in his first sermon in his hometown of Nazareth in Luke chapter 4. We read that Luke 4.16, he came to Nazareth, which was his hometown, and he entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath. He'd been doing that probably from the age of 12, as was his custom, Luke 4.16. But this is the first time he was asked to speak, and they gave him the Scriptures, and he moved the scroll to Isaiah chapter 61, and he opened the book and found it is written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.

We stop there. See, one thing I like about the NASB translation is that whenever there is an Old Testament quotation in the New Testament, it's put in capital letters. Then immediately I know, hey, this is a Old Testament, and what I do is I always go back to the Old Testament and compare it, and I've learned some amazing truths just by that simple process.

You could do a Bible study like this. Take your NASB and start with Matthew chapter 1, and look for all the capital letters, and if you got a Bible with a marginal reference, or if you have a concordance, you can find out that Old Testament verse, and if you're serious about knowing the Bible, compare the two, and you'll discover some amazing truths. Here is an amazing truth in this passage, which some of you may have never seen, unless you've heard me speak about it before.

Jesus did not quote the whole passage. He stopped at a certain point, and you need to know why. This is a quotation from Isaiah 61.

So if you turn back to Isaiah 61, where did he stop here? He stopped, remember where he stopped in Luke 4, 19, to proclaim the favorable of the year of the Lord, full stop. In the Old Testament it was not a full stop. It was not a period.

Luke's, sorry, Isaiah 61, verse 1, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, etc., etc., the same thing. And verse 2, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. That's where Jesus stopped.

But here it says, and the day of vengeance of our God. He did not say that, because the day of vengeance and judgment had not yet come. It was going to come 2,000 years later.

That's why he stopped at to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. That means the next 2,000 years is the favorable year of the Lord, but then the day of vengeance will come. But the thing I want you to notice here is, let me read it like this.

Jesus came to proclaim, verse 2, 365 days of favor and one day of vengeance. You see the proportion? You want to see the heart of God? 365 days of grace and favor and one day of judgment. That is the proportion with which a strict, holy God looks upon His people.

365 days of goodness, favor, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, everything in your life, one out of 365 with judgment and strictness. That's the proportion. So if you were to look at God's face, it is 365 divided by 366 is, I think, more than 99%.

99% of the way God looks at me is with favor. I must never forget that. 99% of the way God looks at you is with favor.

And that is what that man with one mina forgot. He concentrated on that 1.25% or something, one quarter of a percent. And that's what the devil would like you to concentrate on.

And very often the devil thinks it is 365 days of judgment and one day of favor. He reverses it. The devil's always there to give an inverted picture of God.

And that's the way many preachers are also. An inverted picture of God is not just grace and truth. It's not just this kindness and the severity of God.

It's 365 days of kindness and one day of severity. There is kindness and there is severity of God, but it is not 50-50. That's what I'm trying to say.

And I hope what you hear today, you'll never forget for the rest of your life. Behold the kindness of God and the severity of God, the Bible says, 365 days of kindness and one day of severity or 99.75% kindness and 0.25% severity. See, once I see God like that, and I always every morning get up and say, well, I'm not perfect.

I won't be perfect till Jesus comes again. But until that day, God's working on me. And He's working on me with 99.75% of mercy, kindness, goodness, and yeah, 0.25% of strictness because He's a holy God.

But He remembers that we are dust. There's a great verse in Psalm 103. He never forgets that we are made of dust.

Never forget that verse. He remembers that you are dust. I love that.

Lord, you remember that I'm dust. All your life, all my life, I want to, I know that you remember I'm dust and you look at me with mercy. And when we look at the way the Lord looks at the criminals and crooks in the world, what do I read in the gospels? I never see Jesus condemning, oh, you murderers, you adulterers, you thieves, you wicked people, how will you escape the damnation of hell? I never hear him saying that.

I hear him saying that to the most religious people of his day, who went to what we would call church every Sunday, to their synagogue every Sabbath day, who knew the Bible better than anybody else. To them, he said, you serpents, how will you escape the damnation of hell? But I see him forgiving an adulterous woman. I see him forgiving a prostitute who came to wipe his feet.

I see him forgiving a murderer on the cross. I see him merciful all the time to those whom the world despised, blind people and criminals and lepers, and he cared for them. It's the religious people he was always hitting out at.

I want to ask you, my brother, sister, which category are you closer towards? You ask yourself today, are you closer towards the lepers and the prostitutes and the thieves, or are you closer towards religious people who know the Bible and who go regularly to church and sing the songs? Yeah, it's good to know we are in danger. More than those other people, we are in danger of knowing the scriptures and of being hard on other people who are not like us. You know, one thing is, there's a verse in the Psalms which says, those who worship idols become like them.

An idol is a hard, you know, unyielding, made of iron or metal or wood. And those who make idols, the Bible says, become like them. And what I learned from that is, you become like the God you worship.

If the God you worship is a very strict, demanding, hard, exacting God, with showing no mercy, if you make the slightest slip up, pulls you up, you will be like that towards your children. Your children, you'll be that type of father. Hard, demanding, exacting.

And you will be like that towards other believers. And you will be like that towards other Christians. Unmerciful, very demanding.

If somebody's not like you, hard on them. Not valuing what are the things which are important to God. I remember many years ago in my home church in Bangalore, I said this.

I said, there are some people who think that if someone comes in a white dress, a lady comes in a white sari, a white dress, and has no lipstick and no rouge or any of that, I don't know what all they put on their eyes and face and everything else. You say, what a holy person. But the person may be gossiping, backbiting at home and unsubmitive to her husband, but she comes in this holy look.

That's a Pharisee. I said, I would any day have in my church a sister who's got short hair, who wears jeans and who puts rouge and lipstick and mascara and every other thing and got some sleeveless blouses, but never backbites, never speaks evil of others and never gossips at home. And it's always kind and good and forgiving and merciful.

Give me a hundred sisters like that, rather than these others who look so holy and unmerciful and critical and judgmental of anybody who's not like that. Any day. People are afraid that, oh brother Zak, such a high standard of holiness, he preaches this.

Absolutely right. This is my understanding of God and that's why my life has been so happy. I do not worship a God who comes with 365 days of judgment and one day of mercy.

No. It's exactly the other way around. I say this, my brothers and sisters, because it is possible that you have that type of image of God and it'll make you like that.

It'll make you very judgmental on other people. And even if you don't go and say that to their face, inwardly you will judge them and inwardly you'll thank, you'll say, thank God I'm not like them. And that will destroy you.

You will end up with one mina on the final day. I want everybody here to get 10 minas in the final day. Even if you're messed up till today, at least from today, get a proper understanding of God and seek to be like Him.

Look at the life of Jesus and see how He was amazingly merciful to sinners. There are many stories like that Jesus said. He told a story of this prodigal son and elder son.

It's wonderful. That man went and, that younger boy went and wasted 50% of his father's wealth. His father was a millionaire because he had so many servants in his home.

Imagine, okay, even if he had 1 million and the younger boy takes half a million dollars and goes and wastes it all and comes back. The father says, great. Have you repented my son? Well, have you come back at least? Father didn't even know at that time whether he had repented.

But you come back. I'm so happy you've come back. I know you made a mess of your life.

I know you made, wasted all my money. But come, let's celebrate. And the older brother who should have been merciful to this poor brother of his who's gone astray.

You know what he tells his father? This son of yours. He doesn't even call him this brother. This son of yours.

Look what he did and you welcome him. Pharisees cannot understand how God can be merciful to such a person. How can you ever rejoice over such a person who's messed up his life? And he, I call that story, the story of two brothers.

One was outside the house at the beginning of the story and the other, and the other one is the outside of the house at the end of the story. Have you noticed that? The self-righteous person is outside the kingdom on the, at the end of the story. And the wicked sinner is inside the house celebrating with the father.

And I'll tell you this, that's what, that's one of the type of surprises we're going to get when Christ comes back again. Many who we think don't deserve to be in the kingdom of God, you'll find them there. Jesus once said that to, he said, you Israelites, you say that Abraham is our father.

But I tell you, he said, there are many non-Israelites who will be sitting with Abraham in the kingdom and you people will be outside the kingdom. And I feel that that can be true of many Christians, even in CFC. If you are in great danger, you'll end up with one Mina in the final day.

And that's what I want to save you from. Be merciful to others. Don't judge them.

Don't join hands with the accuser of the brethren. If you see something wrong in a brother or sister, what should you do? If you love that person enough and you know the person well, go and tell the person. If you know them, if you don't know them well, just pray for them.

If you see somebody's child going astray and by God's grace, your children are doing well, please don't compare that person's child with yours. Please don't say what a useless father he is. That father and mother are already weeping for that child.

Don't make that problem more by criticizing them, speaking evil about them, telling everybody, see what that person's child is like. What you're indirectly saying is, see what my child is like. I'll tell you, you're the one who'll end up with one Mina.

And that person you despise may end up with 10 Minas. So be careful. We must be very, very careful that we do not judge.

Jesus said that. If God is being merciful to you, be thankful for that and use the resources you have. It's so very easy, so very easy to become a Pharisee.

And I'll tell you, the people who got all their doctrines wrong and who are worldly are not in danger of becoming Pharisees. They're in danger of becoming worldly. They can be lost that way also.

Many of us sitting here are not in danger of worldliness. We are in danger of Phariseeism. That Phariseeism can rob us of our life becoming useful to God.

Okay, let me show you another passage in Exodus chapter 33. I remember seeing this years ago and it really gripped my heart, Exodus chapter 33, where one day Moses prayed to God and said, Lord, Exodus 33, 18, I pray you show me your glory. And the Lord said to Moses, you want to see my glory? You want to see my glory? I, here it is, here's my glory.

I will make my goodness pass in front of you, not my holiness. I will make my goodness pass before you. And I'll proclaim the name of the Lord.

Not holy, holy, holy, but being gracious to whomever I choose to be gracious and to have compassion on whom I choose to have compassion. That's it. You want to see the glory of God? The glory of God is His goodness and His compassion and His graciousness.

There are three words there, goodness, graciousness, compassion. That's it. So when you say, Lord, I want the glory of God in my life, I hope you're meaning this.

Lord, make me good and gracious and compassionate to other people. Help people to see goodness and graciousness and compassion in me. I hope that's what you mean.

This is God's own definition of His glory. When Moses said, Oh, Lord, show me your glory. So sure, my goodness, my graciousness, my compassion.

Never forget this, my brothers, because the devil is determined to make us waste our life. And some of us can think because we're doing this and doing that and doing the other thing for the Lord and being taking various responsibilities in the church, you can think that, Oh, of course, I'm being very useful to the Lord. You may get a surprise in the day of judgment if you, along with all that, if you're judging others and you're not compassionate and you're not gracious and you're not good, all of that will be just a waste of time.

I don't want to be in that category. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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