

(Knowing God's Way) 14. Valuing the Church

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of valuing the church as Christ valued it, urging believers to express gratitude and sacrifice for their community.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 23:15, Luke 17:15, Luke 22:28, John 16:32, Ephesians 5:25

Topics: "Sacrifice for Others", "Value of the Church"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the immense value of the church, illustrating that just as Christ sacrificed Himself for the church, we too should be willing to give up our lives for our fellow believers. He challenges the congregation to reflect on their gratitude towards the church, which has provided spiritual nourishment and protection over the years. Poonen warns against taking the church for granted, urging believers to appreciate the community and support it offers, especially in raising children. He shares a poignant dream of a man who realized the importance of living selflessly for the church, highlighting that true discipleship involves valuing and serving the body of Christ. Ultimately, Poonen calls for a spirit of thankfulness and commitment to the church, reminding us that our earthly values do not carry weight in heaven.

Transcript

"Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph.5:25).

We will not give up our lives for anyone and everyone. But for certain people we will give up even our very lives.

For example, if your child is dying and needs your kidney, you would certainly donate your kidney, even if that involves a risk to your own life. You would gladly give up your life to save your child's. You would not however do that for a stranger - not even for your next-door neighbour. What we do for someone depends on the measure in which we value him.

In the above verse, we read that Christ loved the church - that is you and me - and gave up His life for us. He felt that we were so valuable that He was willing to give up not just His kidneys, but His whole life for us.

We all say that we want to follow Jesus. But how shall we follow Him? Shall we think only of going to heaven, to dwell with Him for eternal ages. Or shall we begin by following Him on earth in this area first of all - loving everyone in His church so much that we are willing to give up our very lives for them?

It is easy to love the brothers and sisters far away - in South America, and in Russia - because we never see them, and none of them ever try our patience!! But we cannot give up our lives for them, because we cannot see them.

Jesus did not sit in heaven and send us a message that He loved us all immensely. He came down to earth and showed us His love, by laying down His life for us. We too can show our love for the church not by words but by giving up our lives for those whom He has placed us with.

Are we willing to give up our honour, prestige, rights and expectations - everything - for the sake of the brothers and sisters with whom God has placed us in our local church? The Lord Jesus will be able to find fellowship and oneness of spirit with us, only if we are like that.

I read of a young man who was converted, but who was not wholehearted for the Lord. One day he had a dream in which he saw himself dying and entering heaven. There he saw the word "FORGIVEN" written across the record of his life. He rejoiced that he was forgiven and in heaven.

But in heaven he saw some believers with a special aura of glory about them. They were the martyrs, who had laid down their lives for the Lord on earth. They had given up everything for the Lord and for His church. They had sacrificed money, position, honour, and everything that the world valued.

This man saw their great glory in heaven and envied them. Then Jesus came to this man in his dream and told him that he would find himself totally out of tune with these glorious people he had just seen, because unlike them, he had lived only for himself on earth. He was broken hearted when he heard that and realized that he would have to live with the memory of his selfish way of life throughout eternity. He pleaded with the Lord to give him a second chance. But the Lord told him that there was no second chance after death.

Then he woke up - and he was thankful that he was alive and that all that he had seen had only been a dream. He determined thereafter to live the rest of his life wholly for the Lord and became a great man of God.

We cannot be transformed suddenly into wholehearted disciples of Jesus when we die, because God does not change anyone against his will. He will change us only if we are willing to cooperate with the workings of His Spirit in our hearts now. The Holy Spirit has come to make us partake of the divine nature more and more.

We must remember that what is valued greatly on earth has no value in heaven. If you lose something that the earth values, it won't really matter much in eternity. Equally, if you gain something that the earth values very highly, that won't give you any benefit in heaven either.

Let me say to all of you young people especially that your popularity with your friends will have no value at all in heaven.

It is good for you to study hard for your examinations. But your good marks will not add to your glory in eternity. If you are wholehearted and want to live for God, He will open the right door of employment for you, whatever your marks may have been and whatever your other disqualifications may be.

It is impossible to miss God's will, just because you were not good in Maths! But if you can forgive others, be good to those who are evil to you, and bless those who curse you, you can follow Jesus and build His

church. And you will find that all the material things necessary for your earthly life are added to you.

If you have valued the spiritual food that that you have received in the church through the years, then you will appreciate the church very highly. Consider how grateful you are to those who invite you for a single meal. How much more grateful you should be for the spiritual food that you have received constantly, year after year, in the church.

Or consider this matter in another way. Supposing there was someone who looked after you children, protected them from danger, cared for them when they were sick, encouraged them when they were discouraged, and helped them with their studies so that they got good marks. And suppose this person did all this not just for a day or two but for a number of years. Wouldn't you be grateful to him?

Are you at least equally grateful to the church for protecting your children. One reason why many believers have not grown spiritually is because they have not been grateful for what they have received in the church. The ones who have fallen away from the church are those who have been thoroughly ungrateful for all that they have received so freely for so many years in the church.

In Luke 17:15, we read of ten lepers who were healed. But only one of them returned to the Lord to thank Him and to glorify God. When they were in need, they had all raised their voices asking for mercy. But after they were healed, nine were thoroughly ungrateful for the benefit they received. Only one raised his voice in thanksgiving.

There must have been thousands of others too who were healed in Palestine who never bothered to thank the Lord.

But this Samaritan man returned and thanked the Lord. He might have told the Lord something like this, "Lord what a different life my life is going to be in future, now that You have touched me. I can go inside the city. I can go back to my family. You have brought joy into my life. I don't want to take any of these blessings for granted. I owe everything to You and I am deeply thankful for all of Your blessings on my life".

Jesus appreciated the man for this spirit of gratitude that he manifested.

Then Jesus gave him something more. He told him that his faith had saved him. That cleansed leper got something more than just healing from the Lord. He had already received healing. But because he was grateful, he got salvation as well. I am certain that I will meet this Samaritan in heaven. But I am not sure whether I will meet any of the other nine there. When you come back to thank the Lord you get something more than what the others get.

The Lord is in the midst of His church, which is His body on earth. We show our appreciation for the Lord now by valuing His body.

If you don't appreciate and value the church, it is you who will be the loser, not the church. God has mightily blessed those who have valued the church and who have been thankful for what they have received from the church.

Think of how much we need to be thankful for the church having preserved our children from the world. I can testify to this personally. From the time my oldest son was 6 years old, all my four sons have grown up in the midst of the young brothers in the church. I don't have words to express my thankfulness to God for

that privilege. Those young brothers were not perfect. They had many weaknesses. But in spite of all that, my sons were all helped by them, because those brothers were sincere. Parents alone cannot do the job. We need the brothers and sisters in the church to help us in bringing up our children.

Unfortunately, many people value their home church only when they leave it. David once longed for a drink of water from the well in his hometown of Bethlehem. That had a special taste unlike the water in any other place (2 Sam.23:15). In the same way, many long for the meetings of the church only when they have been transferred away or have to go far away to some distant land. But you don't have to wait until you go away from home before you learn to value and appreciate your brothers and sisters. You can do that right now.

Why is it that you find it difficult to value the brothers and sisters in your local church? Maybe you say that you see many faults in them.

When people have a problem with their eyes, sometimes they see spots in front of their eyes all the time. It can be the same spiritually too. In the eyes of some people, every brother's and sister's face is spotted. If that is so with you, the problem may not be with those other brothers and sisters. The problem may be with your own eyes. You see spots in others, because those spots are in your own eyes. Your vision will never become clear until Jesus heals your eyes.

Jesus valued the loyalty of His disciples very highly. Once He told His disciples that even though all of them were going to forsake Him, yet He would not be alone, because His Father was going to be with Him (Jn.16:32). He did not need those disciples. Yet He told them in Luke 22:28 that He was thankful that they had stood by Him. He was the Lord of glory. He did not need anybody to stand by Him. But even though He did not need their support, He appreciated their loyalty. He was saying to them, as it were, "You have come out of this old Jewish system and given up the old wineskin. You have seen the difference between the spirit of the Bride and the spirit of the harlot and you have come out and stood by Me, willing to pay any price."

I hope the Lord will be able to say to us too in the final day that we stood by Him and were not ashamed of Him, that we loved the church He placed us in, and gave ourselves for it, and were not critical of the church like many others.

Brothers and sisters, let us appreciate the tremendous protection that we and our children have had in the church.

You young people will never realise how much the church has protected you from accident, danger and sin. Only when you stand before the Lord will you realise how the strict standards in the church kept you from going astray into the world and destroying yourself.

In that day, you will see how something you heard in the church many years earlier protected you from danger much later. The Lord will also show you in that day how many dangers your children were saved and protected from, because of what they heard in the church.

Yet, in spite of these and many other blessings, how little all of us have appreciated and valued the church.

Do you want to progress to the point where you become a blessing to others? Then first of all, learn to be thankful to the Lord for what He has done for you and for the church He has given you. Don't take the

church for granted.

Many of us are like children who realise the real worth of their parents only after their parents are dead. May the Lord teach us to be thankful for one another in the church now, before it is too late.

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