

Our Destination Is Christlikeness

by Zac Poonen

The Christian life is a journey to become like Christ, and our ultimate destination is to conform to His image.

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Scripture: John 8:1

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Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of becoming like Christ, focusing on key lessons from Jesus' interactions in John 8. It highlights the need to wait on God for wisdom in difficult situations, to show mercy and not condemnation, and to offer forgiveness and a fresh start to those who have sinned. The message centers on the two-fold gospel: 'I do not condemn you' and 'Go and sin no more.' It also stresses the significance of pursuing holiness with humility, avoiding pride and judgment towards others.

Transcript

I'm always amazed how Jesus could speak to 5,000 people without a mic. We're all weaklings. He was a strong man.

The Christian life is a journey, and we need to see it like that. It's not something that we just enter in and that's it. Jesus spoke about a narrow gate that leads to a narrow way that finally ends in life.

Narrow is the way that leads to life. So, unfortunately, many people, even those who are born again, think of that one event when they received Christ into their life as the beginning and the end of their Christian life. Then you just sit back.

It's not true. The Christian life is a journey. And when you are born again, it's like you get married.

Marriage is a journey. The day you get married is the beginning. And it's a long journey.

And if you want it to be a profitable journey, you've got to know which direction you're going. It's like when you get into a car to drive, you've got a destination in mind. You may program it into your GPS and then it keeps telling you where to turn, where you're headed for.

If we look at the Christian life like that, the most important thing is to know what our destination is. If you get into a car without any destination, you're just going to wander around and probably end up where you started after many years. That's exactly what I've found with many, many Christians.

So in my own life, I was born again when I was 19 and a half. That's 58 years ago. But for many years, nobody told me in all the churches I went to what my destination was.

All I was told was read the Bible, pray, and witness to others, come to church every Sunday. And that's what I did, and that's what most Christians do. And my life was defeated without a sense of having accomplished anything God wanted me to do.

And I could have gone on like that. I would have ended my life in frustration and woken up in eternity with tremendous regret. So it's very, very important, my dear brothers and sisters, to know what your destination is.

And that's one of the greatest things I discovered in my life from Scripture, which has set my course. It's exactly like if you come to a new town or city, and you've got to get somewhere, and you've got a GPS with you, you set the destination. And you don't think that you know more than that GPS you follow because you're in a strange city.

You don't know where the roads are, where your destination is. But if you follow that, you've had numerous experiences where you landed up at the right place. We must look at the Bible like that.

But we've got to see our destination first. And if you were to ask most people, most Christians, what is your destination, they would say heaven. That's not what the Bible says.

It's very interesting. Heaven is not a destination. Heaven is a geographical place where Christ, God, and the saints of God are.

But that's not our destination because the Bible has given us a spiritual destination, not a physical one. And I want to show you that if the word destination is used there, that's why we can speak about it in Romans 8. Romans 8, 28 is a very well-known verse where it says God causes everything to work together for good. To those who love God and who are called according to His purpose.

So many people don't take the latter part of that verse. They just say God's going to make everything work for my good. Hang on.

It's not for everybody. And if you get a check in the mail, you've got to first see if it's in your name. If it's not in your name, what's the use even if it's a large amount? God causes everything to work together for good.

But for whom? See if the check is in your name. For those who love God. And Jesus said you can't love God and love money.

That's one example. You can't love God and love the world. If any man loved the world, 1 John 2, 15-17, the love of the Father is not in him.

But those who love God, that means those who love God more than they love money, those who love God more than they love this world, and those who are called according to His purpose. So now we do understand what His purpose is. It's not to go to heaven.

And all you have to do is go to the next verse. Because the next verse begins with the word for. For means because.

It's connected to verse 28. And most Christians who know Romans 8, 28 do not know verse 29. And that's why they get it all wrong.

You know, you don't have to be a great scholar to understand the Bible. Just follow some simple principles. One of them is never take a verse all by itself.

Remember, Romans was a letter. And if you get a letter from your dad or your mom, you don't go to the middle of page 3 and take one sentence and try and understand that. We never do that with letters we get.

We always read a sentence in its context. An old paragraph. Why don't we read the Bible like that? It's good to memorize verses, but never take a verse by itself.

See the context. I'll give you a crazy example. Do you know there's a verse in the Bible which says there is no God? Have you seen it? The full verse is the fool has said in his heart there is no God.

It's in the Psalms. But if you take just that one passage, that's a crazy example of how you take a section without seeing the whole thing. The fool has said in his heart there is no God.

Okay. All things work together for good. For whom? For those who love God and who are called according to His purpose.

What is His purpose? Okay, let's read the whole passage. Those, verse 29, those whom He foreknew, He also predestined. There you get the word destination.

Which I said we put in our GPS, a destination. Predestined means the destination is determined beforehand. That's right, just like your GPS.

You enter the destination before you start your journey. So God has made a destination for us. It's not certain that we'll all reach there.

It depends on whether you want to reach there. It depends on whether you see your destination. So those whom He foreknew.

Foreknew just means that God knows the end from the beginning. He's the Alpha and the Omega. So He knew before the worlds were created who all among all His creation among human beings, among the race of Adam, who all would respond to the call of Christ and repent of their sin and receive Him as their Savior and Lord.

God knew that long before. I mean, you may have accepted Christ at a particular time. God knew that, you know when? Before you were born, before your parents were born, before He created Heaven and the Earth.

It says in Ephesians 1, 4, we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. So that means before Genesis 1, verse 1, God knew. That's all foreknowledge means that.

And those whom He foreknew. That means way back in eternity. To me, it's a great comfort to know that, that I'm not just an accident on this Earth.

Way back in eternity, God knew me. He knew my name. He knew in which country I'd be born, where I'd be born, when I'd be born, and He knew that at some particular time in my life, I would respond to the call

of Christ and repent and receive Him.

And if you're born again, God knew that about you. It's a wonderful, it's a great comfort to know that. I'm not just drifting around on this Earth with just a social security number.

God knows who I am by name. And He knew all about me. In fact, I believe that He planned our life so that we would come to that place where we would see our need and repent and receive Christ, so that we can't take any credit for it.

I can't take any credit for repenting and receiving Christ. God showed me my need and gave me the grace to receive Him. That's the right way to approach our salvation.

So He foreknew us, but those whom He foreknew, that's you and me, if you're born again. He also prepared a destination for us, and that destination is that we might be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. That's the destination.

It's not heaven. It's a spiritual destination, not a physical one. And that destination is that I might become like Jesus Christ.

Now, I preached this for more than 40 years. In fact, it's my favorite message because it changed my life, and I know it's something which I have to work towards. I've worked towards it for more than 40 years now, and there's still a ways to go.

I haven't reached my destination, but I'm aware of it every day. Since I got gripped to this, it's like if you're in a car and you've got your GPS set for your destination, you're going to follow that. You don't stop in the middle of the way, and I don't want to stop.

I want to get to my destination as soon as possible. I don't know if you feel that way. If you see your destination, my calling is to become totally like Jesus Christ in the way I think, in the way I speak, in the way I act towards people, friends, enemies, anybody, in my attitudes towards others, my attitude towards God, in the motive with which I do things or say things, all these things, especially the hidden part.

You know, it's the hidden part that determines, that's valuable, that God sees as giving value to what we do or say. It's like a skyscraper. Its strength is not in the superstructure.

It's in the foundation. If the foundation is weak, the whole hundred-story skyscraper is weak. It'll collapse.

If the foundation is strong, the building stays even through earthquakes. So it's that hidden part of a building that makes it strong. Sometimes when there's a tornado, you see trees uprooted, and other trees remain.

Why is it? It's not because of what you see above the ground level. It's because of what is underneath. The roots of the tree determine how strong it is in a time of tornado.

So whether it's the foundation or the roots of a tree, the important thing is the hidden part, and that's exactly the same in the Christian life. It's not what people see of us, because all human beings are good actors. We can pretend to be spiritual.

We can pretend to be holy. It has no value before God. It's the hidden part.

Jesus told the Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup, but the inside is all full of garbage and rubbish. Clean up the inside first, and the outside will automatically be clean. So it's conformity to Christ from within, not just on the outside.

From within that manifests itself outside. This is God's ultimate destination. If it comes from within, we know it's genuine.

If it's only on the outside, it's like painted gold. Painted gold can fool people, but it's not real gold. You put it in the fire, and all that painting disappears.

So it's from within. Remember this. Now this is not possible in the Old Covenant.

In the Old Testament, people could not become like Christ. They could start out well like David. You know that David wrote some wonderful psalms before he was 30 years old.

He became king when he was 30, and you read at the top of some of the psalms, this is when he was running away from Saul. It's before he was 30. Can you imagine a man writing scripture before he's 30? 28 years old and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

And yet the same man, when he was 52 years old, goes and sleeps with somebody else's wife, makes her pregnant, and then kills her husband. Is this the man who wrote scripture 24 years ago? Yeah. And he did not repent of it for nine months.

It's only nine months later when a prophet comes and tells him that he wrote Psalm 51. Now you'd never think that such a man is a man of God. That's King David.

And why was it like that? Because he didn't have the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. He could not become like Christ. Now if a man behaved like that today, you'd say, that guy's not a Christian.

You don't go sleeping with somebody else's wife and make her pregnant and kill her husband and marry her. I wouldn't even ever call such a person a Christian. This is the difference between Old Covenant and New Covenant.

God permitted a lot of things in the Old Covenant. It's perfectly all right if a six-month-old child is dirtying his diaper many times a day. That's not serious.

But if he's grown up and he's 10 years old and he's still doing that, something is serious. See, that's an example of the Old Testament, God treated them like babies. Today we're adults.

You've got to see that. That's why I want to say to you, don't ever, ever, ever go to the Old Testament to find comfort for your sin. A lot of people do that.

I've heard preachers who fall into adultery and then say, well, David was a man after God's own heart. He also fell into adultery. I have no respect for such a man.

First of all, the guy doesn't have a clue that we are living in a New Covenant age. He's living in B.C., before Christ. Never go to the Old Testament to find comfort for your sin.

Never say that Moses got angry and hit the rock when God told him to speak to it. So it's okay if Moses got angry, it's okay if I got angry. A lot of difference between where we are today and where Moses was then.

He did not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. I mean, the way I would illustrate that is if two employees of a company are told to travel a long distance with a huge amount of cash to deliver at the other office of the company, say, in New York or somewhere from here, and one person is sent with a thousand dollars in cash, another person is sent with a million dollars in cash, when they reach the other end, there's going to be a lot of difference in what they've got to be accountable for. One person has to deliver one thousand dollars, the other person's got to deliver a million dollars.

Not the same. And the company at the other end is going to expect a lot more from the one who is given one million dollars. That's what Jesus also said, to whom more is given, more will be required.

So in the new covenant, God does not expect us to live according to the standards of the old covenant. So there are many saints, even, you know, Elijah was so depressed at one time that he said, Lord, take away my life. Don't go there for comfort when you get discouraged.

It's all a question, who is your example? Here it says, we are called to be conformed to the image of not Moses or David or Elijah, not even John the Baptist, who was a great man, but Jesus Christ. Once you see that, you'll never ever find comfort in the fact that great men of God in the Old Testament failed. I mention this because there are a lot of people who are doing just that, and that's the way the devil prevents them from making progress in their Christian life.

There is only one example that God has given us today, and that's Jesus Christ. We can learn certain things from certain incidents in the lives of many people. For example, Joseph.

You can learn a lot from the way he stood up against the temptation to commit fornication, sexual sin, as a young man in a strange country away from his parents. You can learn something from there, but he's not my final example. I can learn from little incidents in the lives of David or Moses, different ones, I can learn things, but ultimately, my example is Jesus Christ.

That's why Jesus said, follow me. He's the first person in the Bible who said, follow me. Nobody else said that.

Nobody else could say it. That's why I don't follow Elijah or Moses. The first person whom God, through the Holy Spirit, inspired to say, follow me, was Jesus Christ, but he's not the only one.

In 1 Corinthians, in chapter 11, if you don't know this verse, 1 Corinthians, in chapter 11, we read in the first verse, Paul, who is a human being like us, says, be followers of me, but he doesn't stop there. Jesus said, follow me, period. Paul says, follow me as I follow Christ.

So he's following Christ, and he says, if you want to follow Christ, you can follow me. It's like someone climbing, say, a huge mountain, say the highest mountain in the world, and Jesus has gone ahead, right ahead, gone right up to the top, and Paul sees the footsteps of Jesus in the snow and puts his feet in those steps, and as Paul goes along those steps, he's got his steps behind, and what Paul is saying is, look for my footsteps. Because I place my feet in the footsteps of Christ, and if you follow me, as I follow Christ, you'll get where I'm going.

And that is the calling of every Christian, to, once we start following Christ, to be an example to other people who come behind us. For example, if you're married, family, your children, first of all, you should be able to say to your children, father and mother, follow our example as we are following Christ. Now, when we begin, our married life is not perfect, but if we are willing to set right the areas in our life where we see

we are imperfect, we can press on to perfection.

The Bible speaks about pressing on to perfection so that gradually, over a period of time, by the time your children are 18 years old or 20 years old and they leave home, they have seen in your life an example of how to live as a Christian. What to live for. How to speak to one another.

What are the goals one should have. You should be able to see that in parents. It's no use just giving our children food and clothing and education and what they call the best in life.

And some of you have migrated to the United States to have a higher standard of life or better standards for your children. Great. But if it's only earthly, you're a failure.

You should be able to say to your children, if you're a Christian, by the time they leave your home, I'm not saying from day one, but by the time they leave your home, they should have seen in you as parents an example that they can keep before them all their life. Say, follow me as I follow Christ. And that's the calling of everyone who gets up and preaches.

Not being perfect, as I said. Paul himself was not perfect. We read in one instance, towards the end of his life, in Acts chapter 21.

Sorry, Acts chapter 23. This is Paul pretty close to 55, 60 years old. He's been a Christian for a number of years, maybe 25, 30 years.

We read of a time when he was standing before a judge, the high priest. And he made an amazing statement in Acts 23.1. Brethren, I've lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God till this day. And the high priest Ananias told those standing beside Paul to strike him on the mouth.

And they did that. And Paul reacts to that, saying, God will strike you, you whitewashed wall. You're sitting according to the law, in violation of the law, you order me to be struck? The bystander said, you revile God's high priest? And he said, what he virtually said is, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have spoken.

So you see, there are men who spoke about victory over sin. Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you're not under law, but under grace. And at the age of 60, losing his temper, but immediately setting it right.

So Paul wasn't saying, I'm perfect. When Jesus was slapped on the face, he did not react like this, saying, God will smite you, you whitewashed wall. Paul did.

And you know, it's one of the wonderful things you see about, Paul made a number of mistakes. He circumcised Timothy, which he should not have done. He shaved his head to conform to a Jewish practice to try and win others, which you read of also in Acts 21, 24 onwards.

But have you thought of this wonderful thing? Do you know who wrote the book of Acts of the Apostles? Luke. Luke was Paul's closest companion in his travels. And I can imagine him, Paul, he's telling Paul, Paul, I'm going to write about our travels.

But most of the Acts of the Apostles is about Paul. And I've thought of it like this. If I were to write the biography of a godly man whom I respect, I wouldn't like to point out all his faults and all the mistakes he made.

I'd like to leave that out. You know, a lot of, I've read a lot of Christian biographies. And most of them don't tell me the mistakes that man made.

And that's why most Christian biographies discourage me. I think this guy's perfect. From day one, he never made a mistake.

And I'm not like that. But I've come across a few honest biographies. They encourage me more.

And that's why Biblical biographies are the best. Because they don't hide anything. So I can imagine Paul telling Luke, listen, if you want to write about me, you want to write about all the blunders and mistakes I've made, okay? Otherwise, I will not allow you to write about our travels.

There I see the humility and honesty of the Apostle Paul. I wonder whether you've seen that when you read Acts of the Apostles. He was a godly man.

Perhaps the godliest man in his time. But he slipped up now and then. But he didn't lie down for long.

You know, if you slip on the road, you don't lie down there. You get up immediately. That's what I see about Paul.

And that's what encourages us. The question is not whether you live such a perfect life without ever slipping up, but did you get up as soon as you slipped? Or did you wait? Did you waste time waiting? Paul didn't. So when we talk about becoming like Christ, I want to be realistic.

It's not that we'll never slip up. But if you're really following Jesus, the Holy Spirit will immediately convict you, and you get up. You say, I want to press on.

I want to press on. There are many people who run the marathon race who slipped and fell and still came first. The Bible says, run so that you may win.

And many who won were people who fell down along the race. So since we see this is our goal, let's turn back to Romans 8, verse 29. All things work together for good to those who have this purpose in their life.

I want to be like Christ. So what is the good towards which God is making all our circumstances work, making us more Christ-like? So if you apply for a job and you thought you would get it, and you don't get it, all things work together for good does not mean that you'll get a job with a better salary. Or somebody you wanted to marry, she says no.

All things work together for good does not mean you're going to get a prettier girl. May not be so. But you'll get a better girl.

Even if she's not prettier. And it means that God will work to make you like Christ. That's the goal.

Not something earthly. Very often people quote Romans 8, 28 as if it's some earthly blessing that all things work together for good means I'll get something better in terms of Earth's values. No.

See, that's another big difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was entirely earthly. The blessings are all earthly.

You'll get a lot more money, you'll be healthy, and you'll have many children. You read Deuteronomy 28. Basically three things.

Plenty of money, plenty of good health, plenty of children. Of course most people preach only the first two nowadays. That it's plenty of money and plenty of health to leave out the children part.

But that's how the Old Covenant was. But in the New Covenant it's plenty of spiritual wealth, plenty of spiritual health, and plenty of spiritual children. It's the same.

The only thing it's spiritual now. And if you haven't seen that, believe it or not, you're in the Old Covenant. If you think of God is here to make you wealthier, healthier, or even have many children, you've got it wrong.

God's here to make you spiritually wealthy, healthy, and make you have spiritual children. Sure. That is God's will.

That is the fundamental difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. What was earthly and material is now heavenly and spiritual. And for that it must begin inwardly first.

So here we read, God wants us to be conformed to the image of Christ not just outwardly, but inwardly first in thoughts, attitudes, motives. If it doesn't begin there, I'm a hypocrite. If my outside, I'm behaving like Christ, and inside I have all types of wrong attitudes and thoughts towards people, I'm no better than the Pharisees.

Jesus would say to me, you clean the outside of the cup, but the inside is full of garbage. So that's why we have to begin on the inside, and I believe that's the way God finds out whether we fear him more than we fear man. You know, God's given us one area of our life which is completely private.

That's our thoughts. Even if you've been married for 20, 30 years, your wife cannot know your thoughts. It's a completely private area, and even the devil doesn't know it.

It's an area where, you know, if I think something, the devil doesn't know my thoughts. He can see my actions and words. He's not God.

Only God knows my thoughts. We read that in 1 Corinthians 2. Only God knows my thoughts and my spirit. So the reason why God's given us this completely private area in our life, which is our thoughts and our attitudes and motives, is because that is how he determines whether we want to please him or whether we are satisfied with the approval of men.

To get the approval of men, you only have to have a good life on the outside. Even in a church, most people, they have a good life on the outside. They're satisfied with the approval that other people in the church have of them, their pastor or other fellow believers.

But having got that, if a person says, Lord, I'm not satisfied with that, it means nothing. I don't place any value on it. Like I often say, the opinions of men are fit for the trash can.

Throw it there. Whatever they think of you, a thousand people think, call you a prophet, you don't become a prophet. A thousand people call you the devil, you don't become the devil.

Their opinions of men are fit for the trash can. And I want to say to you, those of you who are serious about the Christian life, if you are going to meditate on the approval of other people in this church, you will never grow spiritually. I can predict that.

You will stagnate. You have to deliberately throw that away, whether they think good or bad, and say, Lord, it's my inner life that determines whether I'm pleasing to you or not. And I have to fight that battle because we have a tremendous temptation to seek to impress people.

The world is full of people who are trying to impress others. And Christendom is full of such people. And if people say something nice about us, I sit back, I'm happy.

What does God think about it? That's the only thing that matters. So, when he says about conform to the image of his son, it's inward first. And then it goes on to say, the purpose is that thereby, Jesus Christ can become the eldest brother among many brothers and sisters, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

You know, when God sent his son into the world, he was called the only begotten. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. When I had only one son in my life, I could say he was my only begotten.

But once I had a second son, he was no longer only begotten, he was the firstborn. So there was a time when Jesus' title switched from only begotten to firstborn. I don't know whether you noticed it.

God sent his son into the world, he was his only begotten. But on the day that Jesus rose from the dead, he became the firstborn. Because he told Mary Magdalene, you read that in John 20, go and tell my brothers that I'm risen from the dead.

That's the first place where he actually referred to his disciples as brothers. He did earlier say, those who hear the word of God and do it are my brothers. But here he specifically referred to those disciples as his brothers.

He said tell them I go to my father and your father. You know before the day of his resurrection, he never used that title. He would always say my father or sometimes he'd say your father.

But never combining the two saying my father and your father. The first time Jesus used that expression was after his resurrection. And the first time he could look at his disciples and say you're my brothers.

Because even the three days earlier at the last supper, you know what he told them? He says till now I've called you my servants, John 15. And now I call you my friends. I call you my servants, now I call you my friends.

But I still don't call you my brothers. But in John 20, the day of his resurrection, he said go and tell my brothers. It's an amazing thing to discover that.

You know that's why when we call each other brother, sister, you know what you're calling that person? Younger brother, younger sister of Jesus Christ. That's the only title I like. That's why I tell people don't call me by such lowdown titles like pastor or reverend or right reverend.

Call me brother. That's what I am. The younger brother of Jesus Christ.

Can you get a higher title than that? Younger sister of Jesus Christ. It's a tremendous honor. When someone calls you brother, sister, remember they're calling you younger brother of Jesus Christ.

Younger sister of Jesus Christ. That's what we read in Romans 8, 29. Part of God's purpose that I might become like him more and more.

And you know just like you've seen the family resemblance in children. You say hey that's from that family because I see he's just like his older brother. He looks like his older brother or older sister.

That's what he's saying. That this inner resemblance to Christ identifies me as part of the family. He's the eldest brother and I'm the youngest, younger one.

It's wonderful to recognize that. And that's the reason why God sent the Holy Spirit to this earth. There's a lot of confusion in the world today concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

I was confused about it too for many years. But as I studied the scripture, I got all my answers from scripture and I found that any spiritual problem, there is an answer in scripture if you search for it. If you're too lazy to search for it, you won't find it.

There are many valuable things on the surface of the earth like apples and mangoes and fruit. But if you really want the most more expensive things like gold and diamonds and all, you've got to really dig deep. It's like that with the Bible.

There are a lot of things you can understand just by reading it superficially. Many, many things. But if you really want to understand the valuable things in scripture, you have to dig deep.

You have to spend hours meditating on it. We have time if we want to. If you don't waste your time on useless movies and useless TV programs, there is plenty of time to study the scriptures.

It's a choice we make. I would rather watch this TV program than study the Bible. God sees that choice.

It's okay. You reap what you sow. But when God sees a person who really wants to know, for example, he sees that, Lord, I believe there is only one book in the whole universe among all the billions of books that God wrote for man.

That's the Bible. And I want to know that. That's what I decided as soon as I was born again.

And I don't regret it. It changed the whole direction of my life and helped me to live a useful life instead of just making money or becoming somebody famous. To accomplish something that will last for all eternity and not only myself but to be able to lead other people into something that's going to last for eternity.

What greater work can you do than that? So I want to encourage you to study the scriptures. So as I studied the scriptures, I came to one verse which really explained to me more than any other verse in the whole Bible what the primary and main ministry of the Holy Spirit is. I want to share it with you.

2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 18. 2 Corinthians 3.18 And this is a connection to what we just read about our destination. Romans 8.29 Our destination is to become like Christ, to be one of his younger brothers.

2 Corinthians 3.18 says there's no veil on our face. He's using a picture of the law in the Old Testament. It's like a veil.

The Old Testament law. Hidden underneath that was God's truth. But it's like if I put a handkerchief on top of the Bible and try to read it.

Maybe I can get a word here and there if the handkerchief is thin. But I can't read it. And so the law was like a veil.

God was behind it, but they couldn't see God. They couldn't see what Jesus was like. Now the law has been removed and grace has come.

The veil has been removed and we see in a mirror, in a mirror, James 1.23-25 says the mirror is God's word. So we can read it like this. The veil of the law has been removed and now we can see in God's word the glory of the Lord Jesus.

So what do I read God's word for? Not to prepare a message. Not just to have Bible knowledge. You can study the Bible with various reasons.

You can study the Bible because you want a reputation for being a scholar or for something clever to share on a Sunday morning. I'm not saying you shouldn't prepare to share. We should so we don't waste people's time.

But that's not the primary purpose with which God has given us. The primary purpose with which God has given us His word is so that we can see the glory of Jesus Christ in it. And the Holy Spirit shows us the glory of the Lord.

And when we see the glory of the Lord what happens is you remember in the Old Testament Isaiah chapter 6 when he saw the glory of the Lord immediately he saw his own sin. Till then Isaiah never saw it. It's very interesting to read Isaiah chapter 5 and chapter 6. In chapter 5 he was saying woe unto this people and woe unto that people and woe unto the other group these fellows who are drunkards and these people who are running after money and all that.

Woe unto all of them. And then he sees the glory of the Lord in chapter 6 and says oh boy woe unto me. That's always what happens when you see the glory of the Lord.

You stop seeing the faults of other people to see your own. That's one way to know whether you've seen the glory of the Lord or not. If you're still busy seeing all the faults in other people you've got to move on to Isaiah chapter 6. You're in the chapter 5. And see the glory of the Lord and then you see yourself.

That's what happens when the Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus in Scripture. We see how far short we are from that. But we don't get discouraged because the next part of it it says the Holy Spirit changes us into that same likeness from one degree of glory to another.

This is the wonderful ministry of the Holy Spirit. The whole purpose of the Holy Spirit coming and dwelling in our hearts is so that now when I read the Bible it's not as if there's a sheet over it. No, the sheet is removed.

I can read it. I can see the glory of Jesus. And I don't get discouraged when I see my own need.

The Holy Spirit says, don't worry, I'm going to make you like that. That's wonderful. It's just been exciting for me to read the Scriptures and see the glory of Jesus in page after page after page sometimes in the most unlikely places.

And the Holy Spirit says, I'll make you like that. Can you get a more encouraging message than that? It's fantastic. I mean, if you believe the most wonderful life that any man ever lived on this earth was the life Jesus lived.

He wasn't the wealthiest. He didn't get a lot of earthly honors and degrees. But that was the most wonderful life that any human being ever lived on this earth.

And if you've seen that, you'll want to be like that. You'll want to live like that. You'll want to speak the way Jesus spoke.

You want to think the thought Jesus thought. You want to spend your time the way Jesus spent his time. And you say that's impossible.

Yes, without the Holy Spirit, I completely agree, impossible. But this is the impossible thing the Holy Spirit's come to do in us. He's come to make us like Christ inwardly so that our thoughts become thoughts of Christ.

Our speech becomes like the speech of Christ. If you're interested, your attitudes to people become the attitude of Christ, even to your enemies. It'll be very easy for you to look at someone who's done terrible evil to you and say, Father, forgive him.

He doesn't know what he's done. It won't be a struggle. It'll be easy.

Believe me, it will be. Without the Holy Spirit, impossible. Imagine trying to run all these lights without electricity.

Very difficult. But with electricity, easy. Just put on a switch and it's all on.

Something like that, the power of the Holy Spirit. So it's been a great encouragement to me to see that this, in the midst of all the confusion concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the world today, where people talk about this gift and that gift as the main thing. No, the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to show me the glory of Jesus in Scripture and to make me like that.

One without the other, I'd be discouraged. So praise the Lord for that. Never lose sight of it.

This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Does that mean that He's only going to make me like Christ in character? No. In character plus ministry.

Jesus lived a pure, godly, loving life for 33 1/2 years. But in those 33 1/2 years, He had 3 1/2 years of powerful ministry, of blessing people, showing them God's way, leading them into God's paths. And that ministry, which was accomplished in the physical body of Christ, is now to be accomplished in the spiritual body of Christ, which is you and I. Before the day of Pentecost, Jesus had only one body.

That's His physical body with which He came to earth and which He still has in heaven. But on the day of Pentecost, He got another body, which is called the body of Christ. The spiritual body, 120 people there were baptized into the Holy Spirit and it's like 120 pieces of iron put into the furnace and all becoming one.

That's what happened through the power of the Holy Spirit. And through the centuries, 20 centuries, God has had this witness, groups of people, not just individual Christians roaming around the earth, but groups of people who come together in the power of the Holy Spirit and together reflecting Christ. That's why we

believe in local churches.

That's why I believe in local churches like this where we are a family, not just a congregation that comes to listen to a message and go home, but where we are committed to one another as a family. And very often people ask me this question, which church should I join? I said, I think you should join a church which has the same destination that God has for His people. I mean, if I get into a bus, there are so many buses going, not so many here.

In India, where there's not so much private transport, a lot of public transport. All the time we see buses on the road with different numbers going to different places. If I go to a bus station, I want to catch a bus, first of all, determining whether it's going to my destination.

I don't take the prettiest bus there or the biggest one. I take the one that's going to my destination. I say, hey, I don't care if it's a small bus.

I want to get to my destination. It's not the comfort in the bus that I'm thinking of. That's a short period.

But is it going to take me to my destination? So I say, the church you must join is a church that's going to lead you to the destination. I mean, if you don't care about your destination, then get into any bus. And you just wander around and waste your life.

I don't want to do that. I've got a destination to go to. And so I want to be a part of a church that's helping me to get to that destination.

Where the preaching of the word is directing me to that destination. Helps me to get there quicker. Not goes wandering down all the side streets here and there.

But going straight towards my destination. That's the way I decided to decide. I say, I want to be a part of a church which is helping me to go to my destination.

That destination is to become like Jesus Christ in my life and my ministry. It's not just life. You know, some people say, hey, you guys are just sitting and trying to purify yourself all the time.

Become like Christ. Yes. You don't do anything for others.

I say, we do a lot for others. I mean, in our own ministry in India in the last 40 years, we've helped numerous poor people financially who are in need. That's part of the ministry of Christ.

Delivered numerous demon-possessed people from demons. That's part of the ministry of Christ. Prayed for the sick.

Some are healed and some are not healed. Just like that in the early days, Paul prayed for Timothy. He was not healed of his stomachache, stomach problems.

Paul himself was not healed of his thorn in the flesh. But many others were healed, miraculously. Healing is not as universal as forgiveness of sins.

But it's one of the ministries. So we believe that becoming like Christ is not just in character, but also that God equips us with gifts to serve others, to bless them, and to lead them to this likeness to Christ. So this is also described in 1 John chapter 3. If you turn to 1 John chapter 3. In 1 John chapter 3 we read in verse

2, At present we are the children of God.

That we already are because Christ has come into our heart. The Holy Spirit has witnessed to us that we are God's children. But it has not yet appeared what we're going to be like.

What are we going to be like? That hasn't come to fruition. When Christ appears, we will be like Him. We would have reached our destination.

So there is a day coming when Christ will come in the air and we'd have reached our destination, which is not heaven, but to become like Christ. And then it says, how do I know whether I have this hope in me or not? Every Christian will say, I've got the hope of the second coming of Christ. Hang on.

It says here, if you really have this hope, here is the proof that it's not just empty words. Anybody can say empty words. 1 John 3.3 You will purify yourself just as He is pure.

1 John 3.3 That is the proof that you have the hope of the second coming of Christ, that you'll be like Him when He comes. Not just empty words, but you will be purifying yourself until you reach His standard of purity. Have you reached His standard of purity? No, I haven't.

So believe me when I say this, I seek to cleanse myself every single day because I haven't reached my destination. I'm on the way. And as God shows me areas of my life, usually my inner life, which are not Christ-like, attitudes, thoughts, motives.

See, when we come to Christ and we pursue this path that I've been just describing, initially our external life gets tidied up. We give up bad habits and things that spoil our testimony externally. But we don't stop there because we see so many areas in our inner life which are not Christ-like and we, like the Bible says, we work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

And I haven't got there yet, but I thank God that as I look at my life today, I see areas in my inner life where I'm better than I was a year ago. I hope you can see that. Then you know you're on the right path.

That means you're getting light on areas of your inner life which are not Christ-like because you see something in Jesus. The Holy Spirit shows you and you say, hey, I'm not like that, but I want to be like that. You purify yourself as He is pure until the day He comes.

This is the mark of a person who's walking that narrow way that leads to eternal life. So I'm thankful that I'm in a church where every Sunday we are urged to press on to this goal. So when you read the Gospels, there are many places where you see the attitude Jesus had.

I just want to show you one of those examples before we close. Return to John's Gospel, Chapter 8. You know, in a small passage like this, we can see many examples of the Holy Spirit showing us what Jesus was like. We read here, first of all, that Jesus had finished preaching a powerful message in John, Chapter 7. That's the place where He raised His voice, John 7, 37, and said, If anyone is thirsty, come to me, and from His innermost being rivers of living water will flow, where He spoke about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now this was in Jerusalem. Jesus' home was in Capernaum, which is 70 miles away at least, or more, 70 to 100 miles, and He walked all the way down to Jerusalem where the temple was and He preached this message. And this is something that struck me.

In John 7, 53, the last verse, it says, Everyone went to his own home. The day was over. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

And I've often thought about that. You know, John 8, 1 is, these chapter divisions are made by man. Read it together.

Everyone went to his own home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. What I see there is something tragic. Nobody invited Jesus to come and stay with them.

Imagine a preacher who's come from out of town preaching the whole day, and then you don't find out where he's staying the night, that he has to sleep out in the open. That's what, I mean, Jesus had no complaint that, Hey, nobody invited me to stay in his house. Fine, I'll go and sleep under the trees in the Mount of Olives.

I learned something from that, just from that little passage, that Jesus lived without any, making any demands on others. He didn't expect, because I've served you, you must serve me in some way. No.

I said, Lord, I want to be like that. It's just one example of how I can purify myself as he is pure. To make no demands on others, even if I poured out my life serving them, fine.

If they acted in an inconsiderate way, that's fine. No complaint. I'm not going to go sleep under the trees and complain and grumble.

That'll be terrible. I'm happy. It's okay if somebody didn't think of my need.

I remember, I'll give you one example. Many years ago, I had to go down to another part of India, another state of India, to take some meetings for the weekend of conference. And we traveled by train in India.

In those days, if you want to get a berth to sleep on in the train, you had to book your seat 60 days earlier. Now you have to book it 120 days earlier. Population is increasing.

So those days, it was 60 days earlier. So I wrote to that brother 60 days earlier. I said, hey, please book my return ticket on this day after the conference so I can come back, at least get some sleep on the way back.

Otherwise, we just get a place to sit. So when I got there for the weekend, I said, I hope you guys bought my ticket. He said, oh, brother, I'm sorry.

You forgot. I said, okay, let's go and see if there's any berth available now. There wasn't, but I got a seat.

So the meetings were over, and I got into the train, and I had just a seat. And on top of that was the berth, which was reserved for somebody else. So I said, I'm not going to sit here and complain about these people after such a wonderful weekend of meetings.

I'm just going to praise the Lord. Maybe the Lord wants me to just sit up and pray all night or something like that. I would refuse to complain.

I would give thanks in all things. So sitting next to me was an old nun, and as we began to talk, she said, can you do me a favor? I said, sure. She says, I've got a berth upstairs, but I'm too old to climb up there.

Can you please go up there so that I can use your place and lie down here? I said, sure. I'm always glad to help people. So I got this berth, which I didn't even pay for.

So I was lying down there and saying, what a fool I'd have been if I'd been sitting there complaining. But it's not always like that, you know. There are times when I had to sit on the floor of the train when I didn't get a berth, because God allows us to experience what other people in our country are experiencing.

But I'm just saying, whichever it is, whether you sit on the floor or sleep on the berth, no complaint. Jesus never had any complaints with other people who are inconsiderate. That's a little thing you learn from that, becoming like Christ.

The other thing I see there is, here was this woman, John chapter 8, they brought, caught in adultery, whom they brought to Jesus, and they said, in the law, verse 5, Moses commanded that such women who commit adultery must be stoned to death. Now Jesus knew that when he was up in heaven, he was the one who gave that law to Moses 1,500 years earlier. He knew that very well.

From heaven, he gave a law to Moses to warn people against adultery, fornication, to show them the seriousness of it. If a person's caught in adultery, you must stone her to death. He knew that.

I mean, they didn't know that this was the one who gave the law. They thought of him as just a man. But Jesus knew it very well.

And so Jesus, he waits a little. He's sort of scribbling on the ground, waiting. Father, what shall I say? It's so wonderful.

I learned something from there. Not to be quick to reply, but when someone asks me a difficult question, which is out to condemn somebody else, particularly if it's to condemn somebody else. If it is to help somebody, sure, we can act immediately.

But when it is to condemn somebody, I've got to wait like Jesus. Father, what shall I do here? And the Father gave him a word through the Holy Spirit. Tell the one who is without sin to throw the first stone.

Simple. So Jesus says, see, that's what Jesus was waiting for. They all thought he was just scribbling on the ground.

He was waiting to hear from his Father. And then he said, yeah, he was without sin, throw the first stone. So here's something else I learned about Jesus.

That when I'm in a difficult situation and I don't know what to say, let me not reply immediately. Let me pause a little, scribble or do something, but not be quick to reply. And then believe that the Father will give me a word at this time.

I want to be like Christ. Here's another example. And then I see that all of them, all those Pharisees went away one by one because nobody could dare to say, I'm without sin, because they knew that Jesus could see through people.

And if anybody stood there, Jesus would have listed out his sins and it would have been more embarrassing. So they all quietly went away. And then there was only one man left without sin who was qualified to throw stones.

That was Jesus himself. Why didn't he do it? He said he was without sin, throw the stone. He could have picked up stones and stoned her and fulfilled the command he gave Moses 1500 years earlier, but he didn't do it.

We could say he violated the law if you go according to the letter, but Jesus acted according to the spirit of the law. And that's what I learned here. So often we can condemn people according to the letter of the law.

Here's what God's word says. You haven't done it. I see from here that the word he himself gave, he did not keep, but he kept the spirit of it.

God's not interested in stoning people who fall into adultery, kill them. Jesus didn't come with stones in his pockets. He has no stones in his pockets.

He won't pick up stones either. It was a command to make loose women take adultery seriously, not to kill repentant women. And here was a repentant woman and Jesus was not going to kill her, definitely not.

You know how the Pharisees sometimes thought Jesus violated the Sabbath. That's because they didn't understand the spirit of the Sabbath. And here it looked as if Jesus violated the law, but he kept the spirit of the law.

God sent his son not to condemn the world, but to save the world. And I learned something more here about becoming like Christ, that if my words are spoken, I quote a scripture, and the effect of that scripture is to condemn somebody, I haven't got the spirit of Christ, even though I've quoted scripture. Because God did not send his son to condemn the world, but to save the world.

So my ultimate aim in anything I say must be to save that person. You know these people who just go around giving tracts to people? Stand on the street and give tracts to a whole lot of people and say, okay, their blood is not on my hands now, they're going to hell. I don't think Jesus would ever do that.

I've given out tracts to a lot of people, but my aim is to bring them to salvation, not to condemn them and say, hey, I've given you a tract, now you're on your own. I don't think Jesus ever did it like that. The spirit of the law is to give people the word so that we can bring them to salvation.

So I see something there further. And then when the woman, when they all left, Jesus straightened up and said, we're the ones who condemn you. Nobody condemned you.

And he says, nobody condemned me. And here is what Jesus said. Two sentences in which we have the full gospel that we preach in this church.

One, I do not condemn you. And two, go and don't sin again. People ask me, Brother Zach, what do you preach in your church? And I say this.

Number one, we don't condemn you for all your past life. If you don't begin there, you don't have a foundation. The foundation, the first message we preach is not don't sin again.

No, no, no. That's the second message. And if you don't get the first message, you won't be able to keep the second one.

The first message is there is no condemnation for all your past life, no matter how wicked it is. It doesn't matter, sister, if you've been living in adultery every single day. Maybe you're a prostitute.

Jesus says, I don't condemn you. That's what we preach in this church. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from our entire past life so that he looks at us and says, I will not even remember your sins anymore.

That is the mighty power of the blood of Christ. You know, in the Old Testament, you read Psalm 32. Blessed is the man whose sin is covered.

There's a lot of difference between covering sin and cleansing sin. If you've written a whole lot of man's sins on a board, and you put a sheet over it and cover it, that's covering it. Nobody can see it, but if you lift up the sheet, it's there.

But if you take a wet sponge and wipe it all out, that's cleansing. Jesus doesn't cover our sin. That is Old Testament, Psalm 32.

Blessed is the man whose sin is covered because that's all the blood of bulls and goats could do. But if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to cleanse us. You take a wet sponge and wipe it out, and then who can recover the list of that sins on that board? It's gone.

He says, I will not remember your sins anymore. So there's really no difference between the man who has committed a few sins and a man who committed a million. When the board is wiped clean, both are equally clean.

Isn't that wonderful? That the wicked prostitute who lived such an evil life like Mary Magdalene is as holy as Jesus' mother Mary. Do you believe that? That's the power of forgiveness. That's the power of being free from condemnation.

That's the first message we preach in this church. That's the foundation. I do not condemn you, Jesus says, but we don't stop there.

We don't say, well, naturally I realize you're weak and you'll sin again. That's not what he told her. Neither did he tell her, try and reduce the frequency of your adulteries.

You know, maybe you'll fall only once a week. Try and fall into adultery once a month. None of that.

No. Sin no more. That's the second message we preach.

Right from this day onward, stop sinning. If you slip up, okay, you'll be forgiven, but your aim should be to stop sinning. This is the two-fold message that Jesus preached.

There you have the full gospel. So there are many things in a small passage like this. You know, I just read about 11 or 12 verses where the Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus.

Imagine going through the scripture like this and in every page say, Lord, show me your glory. Help me to be like that. Help me not to look down on others.

See, I feel that one last thing I can say is, in a church like ours which is pursuing perfection, becoming like Christ, one of the great dangers is looking down on other churches that do not preach all that they preach. May God save us from that. Let's not be like the Pharisees who say, Lord, I thank you that we're not like other churches.

We are preaching holiness. No. The branches that bear the most fruit in a tree are always the ones that bow down the most.

It's the branches with no fruit that stick up upright like this. The holier you are, the humbler, the humbler you will be. Humility is the mark of genuine holiness where we don't despise others.

We're thankful for the light God has given us, but we love others and value them and we don't consider ourselves superior to them. We consider ourselves as their servants for Jesus' sake. And if we pursue this path, I believe year by year God will be happy with us till one day we become like him.

Let's bow in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this wonderful goal that you have set before us. We're not living aimlessly.

We don't come to meetings aimlessly. We don't live our daily life aimlessly. There's a goal every single day of our life.

We are moving towards total Christ-likeness. And I pray you'll help us to keep that vision before us all the time. Thank you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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