

(Pure Testimony) the Church as a Burning Bush

by Zac Poonen

The church is a body, not just a collection of individuals, and people must be built up into a local church to fulfill God's purpose.

Duration: 1:01:39

Scripture: Exodus 3:14, Psalm 37:4, Malachi 3:10, Matthew 6:33, Romans 13:8, Philippians 4:4, Jude 1:24

Topics: "Purity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the church and its role in evangelism. He defines evangelism as the act of making someone who is not a member of the body of Christ, a member of the body. The preacher challenges the use of certain theological concepts that are not found in the Bible and encourages a focus on building the church rather than material possessions. He highlights the attitude of Jesus and the apostles as the foundation of the church and emphasizes the significance of both the words of Jesus in the gospels and the epistles in understanding the truth.

Transcript

So the sum and substance of all that we've been saying in these days is that God is not looking for a large testimony on the earth, but a pure testimony. Not for a large city like Babylon, but a pure city like Jerusalem. And if that grips us, really grips us, we will see how terribly disappointed God is with the condition of most groups that call themselves churches because they have not kept the standards of purity.

And purity means basically not our idea of purity, but God's idea of purity. And God has shown us His standard in His word. When it says that the church is built, I ask people sometimes, do you know what is the foundation of the Christian life? That's Jesus Christ.

How the foundation can no man lay, 1 Corinthians chapter 3, than what is already laid, verse 10, Jesus Christ. But what about the foundation of the church? Yeah, in one sense Christ is the foundation of the church, but I want to show you a verse which sometimes many of you may not think of. Ephesians chapter 2, and verse 19 onwards.

You are no longer strangers, foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints of God's family. And you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Are you built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets? You say no, I am built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Do you believe that is inspired by the Holy Spirit in your Bible or it's a mistake? If it is a mistake, scratch it out. I don't believe it's a mistake. It's the Holy Spirit who said, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

And you say, where does Christ come in then? Christ Jesus being the cornerstone. You know what a cornerstone is? In the olden days when they constructed buildings, they didn't have all the fancy equipment that we have today. They would first lay a cornerstone.

And that cornerstone had to be perfectly 90 degrees in all three directions. This way, this way, and this way, this way, this way, this way. It had to be perfect.

It could not be 89 degrees or 91 degrees. Because everything was going to be aligned. You know, think of a building where in one corner you put a big cornerstone.

And then you align all the stones in that line there. All the stones in that line here. And all the stones vertically over here.

And all the stones vertically there. Boy, if there is a slight error in that cornerstone, the building will grow crooked. If there is only one degree error in the cornerstone, the whole building will go crooked.

And the building will not be rectangular or square. The cornerstone was the most important. Jesus was perfect.

In all directions, towards God, towards men, towards the devil. His attitude was absolutely perfect. Towards God, towards human beings, towards the devil.

We have three directions, three dimensions. Towards God, towards human beings, towards the devil. Jesus' attitude was perfect in all three areas.

He was a perfect cornerstone. The apostles, what they did, they were next to that. They were closest to the cornerstone.

And they aligned themselves to have the same attitude towards God, towards human beings, towards the devil. And on the foundation of those early apostles and prophets, the church was built. That is why the epistles are as important as the words of Jesus in the Gospels.

You know, many people say, I only care for the words of Jesus. But do you know, one of the last things that Jesus told his disciples before he went to the cross, the last supper was, I've got many more things to say to you. Have you read that verse in John's Gospel? I don't have time to show you all those references, but please look it up.

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now means you cannot understand them now. But when the spirit of truth has come, he will lead you into all the truth. And he will glorify me.

And he will take from me and give to you. It's all in John 14, 15, 16. Read it.

And you can't bear them now means you can't understand them now. It's like telling a kindergarten student, you know my little boy, my little girl, there are things in mathematics called trigonometry, geometry, calculus. The child is confused.

It's not just 2 plus 2 is 4 and 3 plus 3 is 6. That's okay in this class. There are so many wonderful things in mathematics, which can help you in your life. And the child will say, that's great.

When can I learn all that? You can't understand them now. As you grow, you will understand it. So Jesus was saying to them, you can't understand that now.

When the spirit has come, he will gradually lead you into all the truth. Now the question is, brothers and sisters, are you going to build a church with kindergarten knowledge? Then you have a bunch of kindergarten babies in your church. You have to go to see the further revelation that God gave through the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets that you read in the New Testament.

Jesus spoke very little about the church. But he said some important thing. One of the first things he said about the church was, I will build my church.

The first time the word church comes in the New Testament. And the word is a called out people. Church is a called out people.

We are not to make the nations into disciples, but we are to make disciples in the nations. You cannot make any nation in a disciple. No.

In the nations, you got to go and let the Lord lead you to people who want to become disciples. So, with those disciples, you can build a church. If you don't make them disciples, you will never build a church.

So, if we were to say, you know, we finally want to conclude with thinking about the church in this session. We talked a lot about our personal life. And that's very important.

The household of God is those who judge themselves first. 1 Peter 4, 17. And they don't judge others.

And then we spoke about the home life. Noah's home life. Abraham's home life.

The home life of elders. That has to be a certain standard. Now, this was not a law in the Old Testament.

In the Old Covenant, home life was not important. We read of Moses fighting with his wife. And his wife yelling at Moses about the matter of circumcising their child.

And finally, his wife yielded. You know, Moses was an Israelite. He should have circumcised his child.

And the child grew up and he never circumcised because his father-in-law never believed in circumcision. His wife never believed in circumcision. Because she was not a daughter of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And he, like many husbands, yielded to his wife in the matter of home matters. Even if it meant disobedience to God. But now he was growing as the leader of God's people.

And it says in Exodus 4, God tried to kill him. Imagine the one man on earth who was the only one who was ready to fulfill God's purpose. And God tries to kill him.

Do you believe that God is so strict that he will even kill the only man on the earth who is going to fulfill his purpose? Yes. I don't know what you learned from that. I learned from that, that God will never compromise his principles even if he loses a good man.

For me, the application is this. Here is a wonderful, gifted, godly elder brother of a church. Extremely valuable to me.

But he compromises. I say, brother, step down. Don't ever speak in that church.

People may say, brother Zach, you are losing such a good brother. You are willing to lose him. God was ready to kill Moses.

For a small matter like circumcision, yes. You know what Moses did? He sent his wife home. You will be a pain in the neck for me if I go to Israel and you are always fighting with me.

Home life was not important in the Old Testament. Moses could be the leader irrespective of how his relationship with his wife was or how his children grew up. But when you come to the New Covenant, it's different.

A man must build his home before he can build a church. So the burning bush is first of all our personal life and our walk with God. Secondly, it's our home.

Our home must be like a burning bush. Then, the church. And that's where we finally end.

Because that's how the book of Revelation ends. I saw the church coming lying down from heaven like the holy city Jerusalem like a bride adorned for her husband. That's how the book of Revelation ends.

God's ultimate goal is not saving souls. This whole business of believers going around saving souls, I challenge anyone to find out such a verse in the New Testament. The apostles did not go around saving souls.

They went around building churches. Just by the way, for those who don't read the Bible carefully, there is a verse in the Old Testament called he who wins souls is wise. It has got nothing to do with bringing people to salvation.

People quote that verse. We've got the bad habit, many Christians, of reading a verse completely out of context just because it suits some particular theology I've already framed in my mind. There is no such thing as saving souls in the New Testament.

It's building the church. There's a lot about building the church. Jesus said, he didn't say I'm going to save souls, he said I'll build my church.

But today, evangelist goes and saves souls. You ask this evangelist, he's there for three days, he stays in some five-star hotel, comes and saves souls, gets everybody to sign a decision card, and he disappears back to America or wherever he comes from. And then you come back one month later and say where are these souls? I don't know, that's other people's job.

What type of mother are you? What type of mother are you giving birth to babies and throwing them on the road and saying let somebody take care of them? Even the dogs and the cats do better than that. They take care of their children until they're able to feed themselves. You don't find little kittens and dogs dead

on the street because their mothers neglected them.

No. But a lot of Christian evangelists do. There was no evangelist like that in the New Testament.

The greatest evangelist of all, when he brought people to Christ, he built them into a local church. God, Christ, he doesn't say Christ gave himself for individuals, he gave Christ love the church and gave himself for it. God so loved the world, gave his son, but Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.

His goal is to build a church and an evangelist has a very important part in it. To bring people into the church and make them part of the local church like the body. I often think of the picture of the hand as like an evangelist.

What is evangelism? In one sentence evangelism is to make someone who is not a member of the body a member of the body of Christ. Simple definition of evangelism. A man who is not a member of Christ's body, make him a member of Christ's body.

Not get somebody to go to heaven. Those things are never found in the New Testament. So much of phraseology that Christians use, I challenge them.

Show it to me in the Bible. No, it's not there. Where did it come from? It came from some wretched Bible school you went to.

Get to the Bible brother. There's no such thing as saving souls and getting people to heaven. Building the church, that's what the Bible is full of.

Ephesians is full of it. So what does the evangelist do? Take the human body as an example. Here is a hand, evangelist, going and taking that potato, which is an unbeliever, not a member of my body.

I want to make that potato a member of my body. So the hand goes out, this is the evangelist, takes that unbeliever, that potato, puts it into the mouth. That's evangelism.

Does it become a member of my body by getting into my mouth? The evangelist goes and brings one more potato. Puts it in the mouth. This is what's happening.

I've got a hundred potatoes in my mouth and after some time the whole thing becomes rotten and I spit it out. This is exactly what's happening in Christendom. You know what's got to happen? Once it gets into the mouth, it's got to be chewed.

All its pride has to be broken down, it's got to be made small, it's got to be made like mashed potatoes. And then it comes into the stomach and the prophetic ministry takes over. Pour acids on it.

Acids on a new believer. Yeah, that's right. He's a proud person.

All that pride has to be broken down. And if some potato says, no I don't want to be mashed, I want to remain as a whole potato, then you'll be eliminated. God has put an elimination process also.

Either one way or the other way you vomit it out or the other way you eliminate it. But you can't remain a special potato, you've got to be mashed. And once you become mashed, that's prophetic ministry.

But if a potato submits to it, accepts this grinding in the teeth and the mashing and the acids poured on it finally, with all the impurities eliminated, lo and behold, after a few weeks, it's no longer a potato. It has

become flesh and blood in my body. It has become a member of my body.

So, this is the way God builds the church. If you keep on even stuffing the stomach with potatoes, you'll vomit it out. And you'll vomit it out.

Yeah, it has to be built into the body. Or to use an illustration, the Bible uses an illustration of a building. In India we build with bricks.

And this building is built with say 10,000 bricks. Now you know how the lorries and the trucks bring the bricks and dump it there? One brick, 100 bricks, 10,000 bricks. Now 10,000 bricks is not a building.

That's like saving souls. We got all the bricks here, needed. We want those trucks to bring the bricks, otherwise we can't build a house.

But if you leave those bricks there, I'll tell you what will happen in India. In a week it will become 9,900. Another week it will become 9,800.

And then it will become 9,700. After a few weeks there's nothing left there. That's exactly what happens with a lot of evangelists.

They have to be built and there's labor there. But people say, no, no, no, we've got to get more bricks, more bricks, more bricks. What's the use of piling all these bricks if you don't even build one house? How many of you will be happy with a contractor? You give him a contract to build a house and he just piles up 100,000 bricks and says there's your house.

You say, how can I live inside this 100,000 bricks piled up here? We are so careful about earthly things, but we don't care about God's house. We need to have the spirit of David who said, is it Psalm 132 or something? I said, I will not give sleep to my eyes till I find a place to build God's house. I tell you, we need a passion like that.

Brothers and sisters who say, Lord, I want your house to be built. You know, when the little church started in our home with seven or eight people 35 years ago, it was a burden that I had carried like a mother in mine to be in the womb for 10 years. From 1965 to 1975, I carried a burden in my heart.

Lord, I want to see a local church built like a body. I want to see a church built according to the way we see it in the Acts of the Apostles, not these pyramid structures with some CEO or Pope on top or general superintendent elected by others. No, the way they did it in the Acts of the Apostles.

I want to see an evangelist in our church who brings people to Christ but build them up into the body of Christ. Yeah. People say, Brother Zach is against evangelism.

No. One of the finest personal evangelists I have met in this whole country and in the whole world is in one of our churches. I challenge you to find a better man than him.

Unfortunately, he's not here right now because he's being beaten up by non-Christians somewhere because he's bringing people to Christ. We're not against evangelism because it doesn't build a house. That's it.

We believe 100% in using the bricks. I don't have the ability, I don't have the trucks to go and build the bricks but I thank God for other brothers who go and build the bricks, who bring the bricks and then we

have to work together. The mason doesn't go and bring the bricks, he builds it.

There's no competition there. The mason is not against the truck driver who brings the bricks. And the truck driver can't build the house.

And we have amazing examples that we've seen in the last 30 years particularly in Tamil Nadu and all over where one brother could bring the bricks in but he didn't know how to build the house. And another brother couldn't bring the bricks in but he knew how to build the house. And we have some wonderful examples now.

So this is God's purpose. Local churches everywhere. The ultimate burning bush that God wants is a body, that functions as a body.

We're working together. You're stealing our sheep. Well you try and steal a brick from this building.

Try it. Come sleekily at night and try and steal one of these bricks. You won't be able to do it.

But if you have a pile of 10,000 bricks you can steal as many bricks as you want. I have never in my life said that anybody has stolen one of my flock. You can't steal them if they are built into a house.

And when a man says somebody stole my sheep that means you never built a house. You had a pile of bricks then they deserve to be stolen and built somewhere. I remember one place they asked me Brother Zack have you come here to steal the sheep? No I said most of the ones we get are goats.

First of all in any case they are not sheep at all. We have to convert them to sheep after they come into our church. Because they never taught about repentance and sin and all that.

Then we make them part of a flock. If you want to use that illustration. Or if you want to use another illustration.

Maybe they are born again but they are like children in kindergarten. You go to a village and there are 100 kindergarten schools. Only kindergarten.

No other school. Not even primary. No 1st standard, 2nd standard.

There is a 3 year old sitting in the kindergarten and there is a 55 year old man also sitting in the kindergarten. Still trying to learn ABC, CAT, BAT. And so we go to that village and say listen we would like to start a school here for 1st standard and 2nd standard and 3rd standard.

People want to go a little higher than kindergarten. No, no, no, no, no. You are stealing our students.

This 55 year old student has been so happy to sit here in the kindergarten forever. I know but that is because there is nothing better for him here. He would be very happy if he goes to 1st standard and studies some multiplication and division.

It will help him in his life. Are we competing with somebody? No. We are just trying to lead people higher.

And we don't even charge any school fees for them. Isn't that the best part of it? All the teaching is free. We even give them food free.

What more do you want? What are we trying to get for ourselves? We only want them to be educated for the glory of God. So whichever example you take, building a house, building a family, we have children, we don't throw them on the street. Do you know how long, all of you, many of you are fathers and mothers.

How long does it take to make a child stand on his own legs? In India it is about 25 years. I don't know if it is 20 years, but in India it is about 25 years before a child can stand on its own feet and go on on his own. Till then the father and mother have to take care of them in many ways, in their little, many ways, less and less and then later educate them and spend money on them and so many things.

Finally it stands on its own feet. What do you do? You say, no, no, we want more children. We just want to have children, children and put them on the street.

Then we are worse than the dogs and the cats and everybody imprisons them today. People are not being built into a family, the house is not being built, the flock is not being put together, but people say, Oh, Jesus said, if a man had a hundred sheep and one sheep is lost, he goes after that one sheep and brings him back. Then I say, hang on, hang on, read the Bible slowly.

Let me read to you the rest of that verse in Luke 15. So I say to you, Luke 15, 7, there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, not who signed a decision card, not who raised his hand in a meeting, who repents. Which gospel meeting have you heard about repentance? Tell me, there is a number of gospel meetings.

All I hear is God loves you, brother come to Jesus, some fellow emotionally sings a song, just as I am, and without one plea the fellows all get moved. They don't repent, they don't know what repentance is, they don't know what sin is. They accept Christ.

Do they become disciples? There is no joy in heaven over a man who signs a decision card. There is no joy in heaven over a man who comes up to the front in an altar call, over one sinner who repents, who turns from sin. He cannot turn from sin unless he is told what sin is, and he is told to repent.

Than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. Do you want Jesus' definition of a church? Listen to this, Jesus' definition of a church, here it is, 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. Get me 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

That's the church of Jesus Christ. That's in Jesus' own words. Bring that lost fellow into such a group.

But if you've got 99 people who are fighting and quarreling and backbiting and lusting after women and doing internet pornography, I say brother, please don't bring that lost sheep here. You'll pick up these bad habits. He's safer out there in the wilderness if you get 99 people okay.

Then we will bring him into a safe flock. I don't want to bring him into a diseased flock and get all types of diseases like some of these government hospitals you get admitted there, you get diseases that you never had when you went in. A lot of our churches are like that.

I don't want it. A lot of our churches, we have a pretty good standard, but many other churches. It's very interesting that all these people who accuse us of false doctrine can never accuse us of a bad life.

What they say is these people, their doctrine is wrong, but their life is good. That's as crazy as saying to a farmer, you've got a good crop, but your seed was bad. Seed is like doctrine.

When people analyze our doctrine, it's like putting a seed under a microscope. I say don't put it under a microscope, sow it, and 10 years later you'll see whether it's good seed or bad. And all the people who have accused us are like them.

These people, their life is good, but their doctrine is bad. The crop is good, the harvest is good, but the seed is very bad. What about you? Our seed is perfect, only the harvest is bad, that's all.

Dear brothers, do you see the deception going on in Christendom? What is the proof of a good doctrine? A good life. People are righteous. Secondly, they need no repentance.

You mean to say there are people who need no repentance? I'll raise my hand. I need no repentance. Because I've already repented about something even today.

Every day I'm repenting. That's why I don't need repentance. How can I say that a person is never hungry? Because he's eating every day, he's not hungry.

He goes by day after day without being hungry because he's eating every day. That's the meaning of he doesn't need repentance because he's repenting every day. He's the guy who does not repent, who needs repentance.

Such a fellow is not fit to be in our church. I want to say to all of you in Jesus' name, you have no business being in our church if you don't repent every day. Go and find some other dead third-rate church and go and live there and dishonor God's name as much as you like.

But don't come to a church that's seeking to glorify God and live here without repentance every day. If there's something wrong, that's okay, you're forgiven. But repent! Say, Lord, help me.

Maybe you'll fall again. But repent! Maybe you'll fall a tenth time. Repent! Maybe you'll fall a hundred times in the same area.

But repent! You can be with us forever. And who needs to repent the most? The elders. Because they are judged by a higher standard.

I teach you, I will be judged by the highest standard of all. I realize that. And I fear it.

I know that if there's one day that goes by in my life without my seeing something unchrist-like in me, it's like the day when you're stinking with perspiration and dirt and you didn't take a shower that day. You didn't take a bath. Oh, we are so careful when we stink with sweat and perspiration.

I want to have a shower. But there are many important things to do that can wait. I've got to get my bath first.

You know, I really believe after many years of observing Christians, that the reason why there are not more wholehearted people, listen to this, is they love their body more than their soul. I'm absolutely convinced about it. They love their body more than their soul.

They hate sickness more than sin. They are more afraid of sickness than of sin. They take so much care of their body when they are sick.

So little care about sin. No wonder we don't have so many wholehearted people. And God is searching for those who will say, how many of you will value your soul more than your body? How many of you will hate sin more than you hate sickness? You want to build my house? Turn to Isaiah 66.

I believe many of us want to build God's house. And every one of you can build it even if you don't have the gift of preaching like me. You can build God's house.

Yesterday I was asking the elder brothers when I was speaking to them. Can you tell me some of the important parts of the human body? Of course they said important parts, heart, liver, kidney, eyes, ears and all. I said, it's all right.

I said, you know, if I were to ask you to mention the important parts of the body, you'll say that also. Will any of you mention the little finger? Maybe about hundredth down the list you'll come to the little finger. But even then, you may not mention the nails.

The nails are the most insignificant part of our human body. But when you feel scratchy somewhere, your heart and liver and kidney and eyes and ears cannot help you. Even your little finger cannot help you.

It's these teeny weeny nails that really bless you. And you feel so relieved. Some people feel so much, they ask other people, will you scratch my back? And after they scratch it, shall I stop? No, no, no.

Scratch some more. You know what that ministry is? It's called in the New Testament the ministry of encouragement. Encouragement.

Scratch my back. You can't do it? If somebody asks you to scratch his back, can you do it? Oh brother, I don't have a gift of scratching people's backs. What do you mean you don't have a gift of scratching people's backs? It's the easiest thing in the world to do.

He's not even asking you to cook a meal or something. Just scratch my back. And even if some number of your nails are missing, you can still scratch with three nails, you know.

The gift of encouraging others, one of the most important functions in the body of Christ, and every one of us can have it. In the past, we have been experts at criticizing others, right? Experts at finding fault. Experts at finding little specks.

We go around with our magnifying glasses and say, Ah, I saw a speck there. I saw a speck there. Let's destroy those magnifying glasses now.

And say, Lord, I've spent a lifetime criticizing, finding fault with people. Can I now spend the rest of my life just encouraging? Encouraging. I've many times told my fellow elders, many of them, I'm sorry to say, don't listen to me, but I've told them, brothers, I think you have spent enough years criticizing.

Let's encourage them. Leave it to the prophets to do the rebuking and correcting. There are very few prophets.

They will do that part. But most of us are not prophets. And your calling is not to rebuke, correct.

One or two prophets will do that. God gives them a calling and gives them the ability to do that with grace. But if you try to imitate a prophet, you'll be a false prophet.

I believe the great need is for many brothers to encourage. Encourage and challenge. Say, you can do it.

The Lord rejoices over you with shouts of joy and singing. Did you fail for the thousandth time? Never mind, brother. Try again.

You will make it. Maybe after 10,000 tries, you'll do it. I love the story I heard about this great inventor who lived over 100 years ago called Thomas Edison.

He was an American inventor. He was not a very bright boy in school. They chucked him out of school because he wasn't very clever.

But he invented hundreds of inventions. One of them is the light bulb. And he experimented with various things to find what material will keep burning for hours and hours and hours and hours.

He was trying different materials. They all died out in a few minutes. Finally, he found a thing called tungsten.

And he found it burns after about thousand experiments. He got the right thing. And somebody told him, Hey, listen.

You found it after one thousand experiments. What if you had chosen tungsten the very first time? Then he said, I would not have discovered truths about the other 999 wrong ways of doing it. What a good way to do it.

I tell you, I spent 16 years wandering around in Babylon. And I got a guided tour through every nook and cranny of Babylon. I know it thoroughly.

Was it a wasted time? No, I got a thorough education in Babylon. And it has helped me to see that there is nothing good there. So today when somebody tells me, Ah, brother, there is something good there.

I am not deceived. Other people can go and see. I have seen it all.

I know that there is only one way to build a church. Listen to Isaiah 66. Verse 1. This is the Lord's word to you.

Heaven is my throne. The whole earth is only a place where I put my feet. Where is the house, the church, that you are going to build for me? Where is this church that you think you are going to build? A place that I can rest.

You know what? The church is to be a place where God can rest. God can rest means He is very happy. He feels at home there.

Where can you build a church where God Almighty can come and say, I am happy here. My hand has made all these things. But, let me paraphrase.

I will use this type of person to build my house. First qualification, humble and contrite of spirit. Not Bible school.

Not Bible school. Not college educated. Humble and contrite of spirit.

Anybody, you want to build a church, God can use you. Number one qualification. Humble and contrite of spirit, broken.

You know what contrite of spirit means? I think the best illustration is when we break bread. Many times I think of this when we break bread and I take a piece of that bread and it's not like rock. As soon as I touch it, it comes off.

You know, particularly the bread like we sometimes use a bun or bread. Just touch it and it comes off that little bit. And when I've done that I say, Lord, that's how I want to be.

That's how I want to be. As soon as you touch me, I'm broken. Are you like that? As soon as God touches you, that's what brokenness means.

Broken, contrite spirit. God doesn't have to struggle. It's not like breaking some tough, old piece of meat.

Cut it, cut it, cut it with a knife it doesn't cut. He doesn't want people like that. Broken, humble, number one qualification.

You want to build God's house? Number two, who trembles at my word. Who reads, particularly something in the New Testament, they want to build a new covenant church and they read in the Acts of the Apostles how they did it and he trembles at it. Oh God, I better do it that way.

Not the way all these modern churches try to do it. That's the reason why there's so much confusion. Let me tell you an Old Testament story.

I don't have time to go to all those passages. There was a time in the history of Israel, you read in 1 Samuel chapter 4 onwards, when Israel was thoroughly defeated, even though they praised God with such a loud voice that the earth began to shake. That's why I don't believe in a lot of loud praise if it doesn't come from a holy heart.

They praised God so loudly when the earth began to shake and then they were more defeated after that. And the Philistines took away the ark. But when they took away the ark, their idols fell down before that ark.

They got all types of sicknesses in their body and they decided we better not keep the ark here, we'll send it back. How to send it back? So one of their magicians said put it on a cart and let some newly born cobs take it. Now newly born cobs will run to their mother.

If they don't run to their mother but run towards Israel, then you know this is really God. So they got some newly born cobs, tied it to this bullock cart and they didn't return to their mother. They went that way and said this is really God, thank God this ark has gone away.

The Israelites saw this. David, who came along many years later as the king, about 40 years later, heard that the Philistines, it was a story carried on through the years, the Philistines sent the ark back in a bullock cart. So when God, when David wanted to transport the ark to Jerusalem which he had captured, he said hey, make these poor Levites carry it on their shoulder like God said in Leviticus.

Such a long journey of so many miles, they'll get exhausted. The Philistine way is better. Put it on a bullock cart.

So he imitated the Philistines, you read in 2 Samuel, chapter 6, 7, or 8, somewhere there, and they went along in the bullock cart. But the problem with bullock carts is sometimes the oxen stumble. And the ark began to shake and there was a man called Uzzah, who was not a Levite.

He had no business to be around there. He did not tremble at the word which said nobody but the Levites, the sons of Kohath or something, must touch this ark. Ah, he says, my intention is good.

I know I'm not a Levite, but my intention is good. I'll steady the ark. God doesn't care about your intentions.

You don't tremble at your word. Uzzah died on the spot. David stopped.

Please put the ark in somebody's house here. God is a holy God. These worldly methods of transporting the ark won't work.

Even if they had to walk a hundred miles, they walked hundreds of miles in the wilderness carrying it on their shoulders. The next time when he moved it, he said, call the Levites the proper tribe and say you carry the ark. He learned it the hard way.

But today's church has not learned it the hard way. They still follow the methods of the world, like Coca-Cola wants to get every person on the face of the earth to get at least one sip of Coca-Cola. He said we will adopt the same methods as the Coca-Cola company to spread the gospel everywhere.

Do you know this? That if Jesus wanted to feed the 5,000 men plus women and children, probably 10,000 people in the quickest way, he should not have given the job just to 12 disciples. Supposing there were 12,000 people there, say 5,000 men, 5,000 women and 2,000 children. 12 people feeding 12,000 people.

Do you know one person has to distribute to 1,000 people? How long will that take? You try one person going and giving food to 1,000 people, see how many hours it will take. A much more efficient way that clever people have suggested to Jesus is, Lord, let's get some volunteers. Get 1,000 volunteers.

Each person has to give only to 12 people. It will be finished in no time. And Jesus says, No.

I don't want any volunteers doing my work. I want disciples. It will take longer.

Let it take longer. I want wholehearted people. Time is not the important thing.

Has today's Christendom learned that lesson? No. There are American organizations that have come to India who want to reach every home with the gospel. How to reach every home in India with the gospel? India's population has only got about two percent Christians.

Never mind. Let's hire people of all religions and pay them money. They'll do anything for money.

Give them the tracts and tell them, Make sure you cover every home in the region. And all types of Hindus and Muslims and atheists are going around giving the gospel. What for? For money.

And then they can report to their headquarters back there because those headquarters staffers also got to be paid and show results. We covered every home in India. Was that Jesus' method? Or finally, before he went up to heaven, and he's got these twelve disciples, he's going to all the world and preach the gospel to every creature and somebody clever fellow could have said, Lord, let's hire an advertising agency.

They'll do it much better than these guys. Why does this fisherman know how to reach the whole world? He said, I don't know all your clever methods. I will fill them with the Holy Spirit.

You see, we've got all these, what does Coca-Cola do? Use an advertising agency, spread the gospel with this, that and the other. What type of church is being built ultimately through that? With these clever CEOs who get their fat salaries? The top pastors and apostles who collect all their money? Is that the way to do God's work? Show it to me in the Bible. Now, we have followed in India the old-fashioned methods built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets because we have trembled at God's word.

We don't just say this is the Bible and then do what we like. We say this is the Bible and we tremble at God's word. And we don't say this is only for the first century or this is for this.

No, no, no. We believe that the Bible, the New Testament is given for all time. And we didn't know thirty-five years ago whether it would work.

Today we can say it has worked. Many of our village churches, no Hindu school will allow us to use their school building to have a meeting. The government school will not allow us to use their auditorium.

The brothers are so poor, their houses are so small, you cannot have a house church if it becomes more than five or six people. I go to the house of an elder brother, his whole house is one room. And he says, he stays there with four children.

How in the world can he have a house church there? He doesn't have a telephone. How can you, what do you do? You need to build a meeting hall. All these guys in many countries who say, ah, the thing is house churches.

Brother, you guys have never lived in the villages of India. You spin your theories in some rich country where people have got big houses and drive around in cars and have got telephones. Come to one of my villages and show me how to do it.

You guys who preach the prosperity gospel, you go to all these rich churches where they can give you ten thousand dollars for one meeting. Come to one of my village churches and show me how to make them rich. They need it more than those people.

Is the sick who need a physician? No, it's all deception. But the old fashioned methods still work. I wanted to prove in my life in a poor country like India, underdeveloped, poor, where the lights go off when we don't expect it to go off, et cetera, et cetera, that we shall seek the kingdom of God first and his righteousness and all the people and all our earthly needs will be added without our ever sending a report or photograph of our work or asking anybody for money or even giving a hint.

Numerous countries I go to, people ask me, Brother Zak, do you have any needs in India? I say, no, we have no needs, I say. God has met all our needs. Oh, that's okay, then we'll support somebody else.

Yes, please go and support somebody else. We are okay. I have always said that consistently.

I have gone as a representative of this church and I want to say to you, I have been introduced in some churches. Here at last is a preacher from India who never asked for money. We ask for prayer.

If we ask for prayer, it's not a hint for money. It's not like saying, dear brother, will you please pray that one church in the village will be able to put up a roof over their church building. What a sneaky way of asking

for money.

No. We have built many, many meeting halls in India. And none of our churches have been in debt ever.

We don't owe one cent to any bank in India. I'm not here to judge other people who do that. Brother, you do it the way you like.

We tremble at God's word which says, oh, no man, anything. Romans 13.8. If we borrow and borrow and borrow and build our huge church, which will take 25 years to repay, and people say, what are you going to preach in this church where you've got such a big mortgage? We are going to preach, oh, no man, anything. You're going to preach that, not having practiced it? We tremble at God's word.

You say, but it's tough. Man, you can build only small. It's small.

I remember when we were building, CFC building there. Those days, cement was not available in the market. You had to go to the government to get permission for 50 bags of cement.

And I'd go to the government office and the guy was waiting for a bribe. I'd ask him. He'd say, come next week.

I didn't know what he wanted. I thought he really wanted me to come next week. I came next week.

He'd say, come next week. After some time, somebody who's wiser to the ways of government offices told me, Brother Zach, what he says is give me some money. I said, well, I'm not going to give him any money.

If we never complete the building, we just have three pillars sticking up there in Wheeler Road. Let's have three pillars as a monument to righteousness on that street forever. But we're not going to build a church with unrighteousness and preach righteousness inside that church.

No. I tell you, these are small things. You see, people don't tremble at God's word.

We say the end is the important thing. Does it mean that the end justifies the means that whatever way we get there, it's okay if we cheat and lie. So long as we get there, it's okay.

Brother, then stop building the church. Go and do some business. The church, every step, every brick must be planted in righteousness.

But it's because we have a lust to build a grand building that everybody can admire, that you get into debt. We are not interested in that. The people inside the building is only a convenience for us to meet together.

That's all. The early church didn't have it. Unfortunately, in the circumstance in which we live, we need it.

Many of those villages, we don't have a hall like this. Nobody has a hall. They won't give it to us, even for a conference.

What shall we do if 1,500 people come together? We have to build a hall there. And we don't take a collection. We keep a box at the back.

In 35 years, in all our 50 churches, never once, never one Sunday, have we taken an offering. Never. We keep a box.

Those who want to give, can give. Because Jesus said, you must give secretly. How can you give secretly when you stick a bag under a fellow's face? The fellow feels uncomfortable and he can't give secretly and he's certainly not giving cheerfully.

And the Bible says, God loves a cheerful giver. You've made a bunch of people disobey God by giving uncheerfully and not secretly and say, we are serving God. We stopped it right from day one.

We will not take an offering. Let people give secretly and cheerfully when they want it. If they don't want to give, then don't give.

Let the rich give more and the poor take and give nothing. It's fine. God, and I'll tell you something, in 35 years, in a poor country with no social security, nothing, we have never been in debt one single day.

We're a living demonstration to this country that God is the same in the 20th century as in the 1st century. And the same thing we have found in our homes. Honor God and he'll honor you.

We decided we will not honor our children, we'll honor God. We decided we will not And if we have to live with less, we live with less. I practiced it first, my wife and I, in our own life.

We proved it in our own life before we tried it out on others. And we found it works. We find it works in the poorest villages.

Those who have really honored God, you go and ask some of the brothers sitting in Bangalore church today, who are so steeped in debt that they were going on the verge of suicide 30 years ago. See what's happened to them today. We have never preached the prosperity gospel.

We have never preached We have preached holiness. We have preached freedom from sin. And we have experienced in many, many, many lives that God takes care of our earthly needs.

He doesn't give us all that we want, but he gives us all that we need. Dear brothers and sisters, build a church as a testimony. You know, I think our churches should be testimonies to the different verses of scripture.

That's to me like Jesus was a testimony. He says the word proved to be true. What was the burning bush in Jesus case? The word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

To me, this is the church. I want to be like that. That every word in scripture must be made flesh in me.

Love your enemies. I want that word to become flesh in me. So that people see me as a man who loves all my enemies.

Forgive everyone. I want that word to become flesh in me. Be anxious for nothing.

I want that word to become flesh in me. In everything, give thanks. I want that word to become flesh in me.

Do all things without murmuring and grumbling. I want that word to become flesh in me. It takes time, but little by little by little, the bush begins to burn as the word of God, which is like a fire, becomes flesh.

And people begin to see. And at the end of our life, they should be able to say, there is no explanation for this man's life, except that God was with him. Emmanuel.

Dear brothers and sisters, the whole purpose of that birthday celebration was not to glorify me. If you thought it was that, you were wrong. It was to challenge you to believe that what God did for anyone, he can do for you.

That you can live like me without ever being in debt all your life. I've never been in debt for 70 years. When I didn't have anything, I didn't buy anything.

You ask my wife how we lived in the early days. She would turn the collars of my shirt when they got frayed, inverted, and those types of shirts we wear. I couldn't afford to buy a shirt.

I said, I'll never get into debt. No, we will never buy anything by borrowing, because we tremble at the word. You want to build God's house? Tremble at his word.

Every word. Love your brothers, forgive them. God is without partiality.

That is a verse I really said, Lord, I wanted to be flesh in my life. I will never be partial to brother Ian. I will never be partial to my children or my wife or to anybody.

God is a totally impartial God. And even if my closest co-worker, brother Ian, gets offended with me, it hasn't happened. But my attitude, what is if he gets offended with me, so be it.

I would rather displease him than displease God. I will not displease God. I'm happy to displease everybody else.

Because of one reason, the word will not God is not partial. Elders. 1 Timothy 5. Elders, do everything without partiality.

Do nothing with partiality, Paul told Timothy. I said, Lord, I tremble at that word. How many of you tremble at that word? How many of you can say, I have never shown partiality to my children or to anybody in my church? Nobody is my special friend.

Do you tremble at that word which says do nothing with partiality? Do you tremble at that I believe any of us can be used to build God's house. God says, just tremble at my word. Be broken.

Be humble. Dear brothers and sisters, as we look into the future, let's be like that burning bush where the words, these words of scripture, I take it seriously and I say, Lord, it's not yet become flesh in me, but I want it to become flesh. And little by little, God sees you are serious about it and one by one by one, the words of scripture become flesh.

Do you think I got victory over anger overnight? No. I used to lose my temper at my wife. Are you surprised? You think I was not born in the same pit that every child of Adam was born in? But I determined to get out of that pit by the grace of God.

I believed that Jesus could give me grace, that sin will not have dominion over me. Today, it has gone. 100%.

I believe that I can rejoice in the Lord always. I wasn't like that. I was one of the most discouraged, depressed people.

Even after I got married, go and ask my wife. I used to sit like this most of the time. But it's gone.

It will never come back. I will never have a bad mood no matter who says what or who does what. Not because of me.

I said, Jesus can keep me from falling. Jude verse 24. It's one of the last promises in the New Testament before the book of Revelation.

Jesus can keep you from falling. I said, Lord, let that word be flesh in me. Let people see, not what I am, but let them see that I am so mighty.

He can keep me from falling. Let them not have a poor impression of Jesus. What type of Jesus do you have? He cannot even keep you from falling in anger.

That Hindu fellow who does yoga, he can control his anger. But you Christians talk about, oh, Jesus and all that. That fellow controls his anger with yoga and your Jesus cannot control your anger.

What type of Jesus is this? I don't want it. I say, Lord, that type of shame has been found in this country for many years, but it won't be like that in my life. That Buddha was free from the love of money.

Look at the way you Christian pastors and preachers love money. I'd rather follow Buddha than your Christian pastor. I say, I agree.

Don't follow that Christian pastor, but Jesus. But he says, I can't see Jesus. Right.

Who is to represent Jesus today? Is it just preaching great truths, getting advertising agencies to spread the gospel? No. The word must become flesh. You must be like a burning bush.

You must build a church like a burning bush of people who will volunteer and sacrifice and serve. You should see the way some of these brothers have served to make this conference and all the arrangements for everything that went on in the last one month. They're not paid for it.

Even the brothers who work in our office, we we are obligated to give them a salary, but they don't work hours. They work day and night, be long beyond what they're supposed to do because they love Jesus. I say, Lord, I don't know what to do.

You know, when I saw these things happening around me in Bangalore and the different churches, I felt like Simeon. Lord, now I can depart in peace for mine eyes have seen your salvation. Mine eyes have seen your church.

I don't mean I'm departing tomorrow or any such thing. What I mean is that I have seen something. God has given me the desire of my heart.

Delight yourself in the Lord. He'll give you the desire of your heart. I wanted to see a church in my lifetime, which is like a body.

I wanted to see elders who were shepherds after God's own heart. And I've seen them. I've seen them.

I've seen a number of number of them are sitting here. They don't look any different, but you should see the way they serve. I thank God for you, my dear brothers, my co-workers.

I thank God for precious brothers and sisters here who are not elders, who do so many things in secret. You'll get your reward when Christ comes. I thank God for brothers and sisters who pray for me faithfully.

If the devil has not been able to knock me down, part of the reason is many people pray for me. I thank God for all of them. Let's go forth into this land and be like a burning bush in many places.

Let's bow before God. So while our heads are bowed in prayer, there are many, many things God has spoken to us in these days. And you can be overwhelmed.

You don't have to remember everything that you've heard. The Holy Spirit will bring the appropriate thing to your mind at the right time. If you have a longing to honor God and glorify Him, that is enough.

Say to Him, Lord, I'm willing to pay any price. Send me the bill. Send me the bill.

I will pay the price. I want to see a New Testament church like a burning bush in the town in which I'm living, even if I've never seen it till today. I'm nobody, Lord, but I want to tremble at your word and I want to be humble and contrite.

And you said you will build your house through such people. I'm not saying it has to be done through me. Do it through anybody in my locality, but I'm willing to make my small contribution, physical contribution, spiritual contribution to that work of building local churches in India and other countries.

Say, Lord, I will honor you. Please honor me. Teach me to tremble at your word.

And let every word in the New Testament become flesh in me before I leave this earth. And let me tremble whenever some word has not yet become flesh, until it becomes flesh. Heavenly Father, I pray you will help us.

Thank you for all that you have spoken to us. We want to glorify you. We want to thank you.

It's your goodness. You've given us your word from heaven. You've opened prison doors, we believe.

You've opened blind eyes. Thank you. Help us to keep those eyes open.

Help us never to go back into those prisons we came out of, but to glorify you till the end of our lives. We pray in Jesus' name.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/19/SID19600.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/pure-testimony-the-church-as-a-burning-bush/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net