

Purifying Ourselves to Meet Christ at His Return

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being prepared for Christ's return, highlighting the need for believers to abide in Christ and purify themselves to belong to the group with confidence when He appears. It stresses the continuous pursuit of purity and maintaining a blameless conscience before God and men. The message also warns against pride and the danger of stepping into ministries God has not called us to, urging believers to endure in their faith and always remain humble before God.

Scripture: 1 John 2:28, 1 John 3:2, Acts 24:15, Romans 6:14, Romans 7:24, 2 Chronicles 26:5, Matthew 24:13, Revelation 1:9

Topics: "Preparation for Christ's Return", "Pursuit of Purity and Humility"

Description

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Transcript

I just want to share a few thoughts from a few passages of scripture. First of all, 1 John chapter 2 and verse 28. You probably heard me say that when Christ comes again, many people think of the two groups of believers and unbelievers being separated in that day.

But this verse tells us there are going to be two groups among the believers. That means two groups among those of us who are listening to this message right now. Not us and the other group is all those people who are unconverted.

No, that's not what I'm speaking about here. Little children, when John writes like that, he's writing to believers. Because in chapter 2 in the beginning also he says, little children.

And here he says, little children, abide in Christ. So that when he appears, now listen to it personally. John is speaking to you through the Holy Spirit.

Little children, abide in Christ. So that when he appears, you'll belong to group one and not group two. Group one is those who have confidence when he comes.

Excited, Lord, we're ready. We've been waiting for this all along. And another group who shrinks away in shame.

These are not unbelievers. Lord, we're not ready. The things we didn't settle.

We kept postponing it, postponing it, postponing it, and all of a sudden you came. That's very dangerous to postpone something which the Lord tells you to do. Don't ever delay it.

Don't say there's plenty of time. It goes on there in chapter 3 to say, if we have this hope of the second coming, verse 3, we will purify ourselves and keep on purifying ourselves until we reach Jesus' standard of purity. It's the one who's doing that.

We don't reach it till he comes. It says in verse 2 that, chapter 3, verse 2, that we'll be like him only when he comes. But the only ones who are going to be like him when he comes is those who are purifying themselves.

Because it says here, those who have this hope, which is the hope, chapter 3, verse 2, is the hope is that we will be like him. Many people, their only hope is he will come again. I'll see Jesus.

No. Here it's very clear. The hope is, his coming is, our seeing him is mentioned second.

We will be like him because we see him. And that is the hope mentioned here. The hope that, not that I will see him.

Well, every eye will see him. Unbelievers will see him. But they don't have a hope.

I have a hope because I will be like him. And I hope that is your hope. Not that Christ is coming back and deliver me from all my problems here on this earth.

Will deliver me from the wretchedness of my own flesh. Not from the things around me. We can be so taken up at this time with the pandemic.

And on top of that, the smoke in the air and so many other things. It's all external. What we need to pursue is to cleanse ourselves.

And if we have this hope, we'll purify ourselves. And in a sense, we will be careful about things outside, but that will not be our primary concern. You need to ask yourself, what is the thing you're pursuing? Now let's look at the Apostle Paul's own testimony.

He also speaks about the hope he has in Acts 24. Same hope, Acts 24. But he's comparing himself to the Jews who had taken him as a prisoner before this Governor Felix.

And he's standing before the Governor Felix and saying, these men, Acts 24 verse 15, I have a hope in me which these men, that is these Jews who are old covenant people, also cherish. That there will be two resurrections. They also believe there'll be two resurrections.

I also believe there'll be two resurrections. A resurrection of the righteous and a resurrection of the wicked. But the difference between me and them is this.

For them, it is just a fact, like the fact Christ will come again. And the dead will be raised and people, for them it's a fact. But he says, the difference with me is because there are going to be two resurrections and I want to be in the resurrection of the righteous, there's something I do.

I don't sit back and say, well, I accepted the Lord on the Damascus Road 30 years ago. I'm safe. I'm going to be taken up when he comes.

He doesn't say that. Because I want to be in the resurrection of the righteous. That is the meaning of in view of this.

In view of this means because I want to be in the resurrection of the righteous and not in the second resurrection of the wicked. I do my best. I don't sit back and say I accepted the Lord many years ago.

I do my best. I don't just keep my conscience clear. I do my very best.

People who are preparing for an examination that they really want to pass or prepare for a test, which will give them a prestigious job or prepare for an interview for a visa. Think of many of you who are immigrants, how you went for an interview for a visa, how you prepared yourself for everything because you wanted to get something. I do my best to maintain a blameless conscience before God and before men, not only before God.

If there's a single person I have hurt, I'm going to set it right. If there's a single person on earth who hurt me or my family, I'm going to ensure I have forgiven him 100% from my heart. And if I ever meet him, I'll tell him that.

I do my best to do it. I'm passionate about it. And the other important word here is 24 seven verse 16.

Always. That means I don't wait even a moment to set my conscience right. Because I want to be in the resurrection of the righteous.

I want to be those like we read in 1 John 2 who have confidence when he comes, not shrink away in shame. Oh Lord, I didn't settle that with that person or I didn't go and ask forgiveness from that person. I didn't repay that person's debt.

I didn't settle this matter. There's no such question because he was doing this 24 seven. Like an illustration I've used, if a thorn gets into your foot, you immediately remove it.

Your attitude towards thorns is 24 seven, remove it. Not even one second. The speck of dust goes into your eye, you remove it.

Jesus spoke about the eye as our conscience. Immediately remove it. And this is something we must pursue.

In Romans chapter 6, 14. I just want to just quickly go through this. Romans 6, 14 is a verse we've often seen in the church.

Sin shall not rule over you because you're under grace. And I think all of us have understood the theory of it. And I believe many of us are experiencing a little bit of the reality of little by little experiencing grace to overcome habits that enslaved us for long.

You know, many habits that are dirty, that hurt others. And we're experiencing grace to overcome it, praise the Lord. But having gone past Romans 6, 14, this is the next stage.

Paul says in Romans 7, Oh, wretched man that I am, verse 24, who will set me free from this body of death? Because he says, even though I've overcome conscious sin and with my mind, verse 25, I'm serving the law of God. I don't serve anything else with my conscious mind and life, but 100% the will of God. But I have a flesh, he says, which is unconsciously serving the law of sin.

We must always remember this brothers, sisters, that no matter how wholehearted you are and how spiritual you think you are, you have a flesh which is serving the law of sin. You must ask God to give you light on it all the time. And like Kamal just said, that flesh can be dirty like clay or beautiful like gold.

The entire statue of Nebuchadnezzar, he told us. If you listen to Kamal, the whole thing is the flesh. The things that look attractive and the things that look dirty, the whole thing has to be destroyed and smashed to pieces because in my flesh dwells nothing good.

I know that in my flesh, Romans 7, verse 18, there is nothing good. There's nothing good in my flesh. And so I'm determined to get rid of it.

And so do I have to condemn myself because of this? No. Romans 7, 25 and Romans 8, one must be read together. It's unfortunate.

There's a chapter division there. Here I am sincerely to the best of my knowledge, keeping my conscience clear 24 seven, serving the law of God. The law of God is the law of love, which also we heard about today.

That is where love is the motive. That is the law of God. And I'm not aware of anything in my conscience, but yet I acknowledge constantly, Lord, there is another law in my members, which I'm not aware of, which probably other people see very clearly.

If they're more mature than me, they'll see it. If they're less mature than me, I don't see it. So if I always move around with people who are less mature than me, I'll never see it.

But if there are people who are more mature than me, they're kind enough, they'll tell me that with my flesh, I serve the law of sin, but I'm not condemned. I'm not condemned because I'm carrying around with me all the time. There's a wretched flesh in which there was nothing good and which probably is doing things that I'm not even aware of and probably unconsciously hurting others, but not consciously.

I think a lot of husbands and wives hurt each other unconsciously. I don't think they love each other. They don't want to hurt one another, but they do because of this law of the flesh.

And that's what we need to cleanse ourselves from. We have this hope. We purify ourselves until we reach Jesus' standard of purity.

That's 1 John 3. You know, of late, I've been reading my old Bible. The Bible I started using 60 years ago, in which I've written a lot of the pages and pieces are covered with my own notes. And I decided to read that every morning.

And in that Bible, I'd written a verse, cut out this verse and stuck it in there. It is from 2 Chronicles in chapter 26. And I was reminded about it.

It's speaking about Uzziah, the king. Uzziah, the king, 2 Chronicles 26, verse 5. In the last part, it says, 2 Chronicles 26, 5, as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him. I kept it there.

I stuck it in that Bible, a little cut out, and I stuck it in my Bible, that verse, to remind myself whenever I opened it. There was a man, as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him. This is 60 years ago.

And I said, Lord, I want to go that way. I want to be seeking the Lord. I never want to stop seeking the Lord, because I know that as long as I seek you, you will prosper me spiritually.

And then the sad thing about Uzziah, it says further down in verse 16. That's a scary verse for every one of us. But when he became strong, that means God had supported him and blessed him in so many ways, like he has done with us.

His heart became proud, and he was not aware of it. And he acted corruptly. And he was unfaithful.

What did he do? He entered into a ministry, which God had not called him to. He was a king. He thought, because I'm a king, I can do everything.

And he went into the temple to burn incense. Only the priests were supposed to do it. No king in the Old Testament was permitted to be a priest, because the king-priest was reserved for Jesus Christ.

He was going to be the first king and priest after the order of Melchizedek. But this guy entered in, and thank God for those valiant priests who opposed this king and said, you've got no right to burn incense. You may be the king, but you can't do this.

This is outside your boundary. Uzziah was angry. But as he became angry, the leprosy came up on his forehead.

And it says here, he was a leper until he died. And he was cut off from the house of the Lord. And you read that further down, up to verse 21.

God has blessed you and NCCF in many ways. Your life was better than what it was some years ago, better than the lives of many other Christians. NCCF was a good church to belong to.

As long as it's not the Lord, God prospers them. But if you read the history of Christianity, many great movements started so well, many good brothers started out so well, but they did not endure to the end. They did not endure to the end, loving God.

Jesus said, he who endures to the end will be saved. I want to encourage you, brothers and sisters, don't be ever satisfied with how far the Lord has led you, how much you have progressed, how much you think you have become like Christ. Yes, I use the word think.

How much you think you have become Christ-like. Keep your face in the dust before God always. That's my advice, which I give in India to all my fellow elders.

Every time I meet them, I tell them, brothers, keep your face in the dust, like John on the day up in the island of Patmos, and the Lord will lay his hand upon you, as he laid upon John, and it'll go well with you. Amen.

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