

Sin Is Very Serious

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of the heart over external appearances, highlighting how God looks at the heart while man looks at the outward appearance. It delves into the seriousness of sin, comparing it to diseases like cancer and AIDS, stressing the need to take sin seriously and seek the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome it. The speaker urges listeners to prioritize pleasing God over pleasing men, focusing on inner transformation and genuine obedience to Christ.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:7, Matthew 12:36, Galatians 1:10, Romans 8:13, Hebrews 1:9, Genesis 3:4, Romans 6:23, Matthew 23:25, Matthew 23:3, Luke 8:44, John 8:44

Topics: "Inner Transformation", "The Heart of God"

Description

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Transcript

In an earlier session today, I was saying how the quality of a tree depends on what is in the root. So it's the same way in our life. Everything that comes out of our mouth does not begin in the tongue.

And people get angry or tell lies. See, we use the tongue to commit so many sins. Telling lies, speaking proudly about ourselves, getting angry and gossiping, speaking evil about others.

So many sins with the tongue. And if somebody says, you must control your tongue, you can't do it. Because the problem is not in the tongue.

The problem is in the heart. Very important to understand. No, you know, you can do... like some people do yoga to control their tongue.

They discipline themselves, I am not going to speak. There are some monks who sometimes take a vow that I won't speak to anybody for one month. Only thing, that sin did not come out.

But it is still in the heart. So that is not a salvation. So even if you control your tongue every day, that you never tell a lie, you never speak evil of others and you don't get angry, it does not mean you have

overcome.

Because all those things may be still in your heart. Just keeping your mouth shut, that's all. So if you don't deal with the root of the problem, just dealing with the external manifestation does not bring salvation.

See, like many sicknesses, they are inside the body. But outwardly it comes in a sore in your hand. But the problem is not in the skin.

It is inside the body. So if you just put some ointment there, that thing will go. But next week it will come on the other hand.

Then you put some ointment there. Then it will come on your leg. Because the root of the problem is never solved.

So in the olden days, doctors would only put it there on the hand or somewhere on the outside. Then doctors discovered a thing called antibiotic tablets. You take that tablet inside, hold something on your hand and the problem is solved.

Now an uneducated person cannot understand that. How you can put a tablet into your stomach and the problem in my hand goes away. An educated person knows it is hitting the root of that disease which is coming out in the hand.

So Jesus did not come just to make us look nice on the outside. That is what in the world they teach, you must behave properly. From childhood we teach our children, say thank you.

Somebody gives you a gift, you say go and say thank you to aunty. You hurt your brother, go and say sorry. The child may not feel sorry at all, but he has to say sorry.

We train our children from the beginning to just behave properly. And grown ups are also like that. We have to behave properly so that we have a nice testimony before people.

So Jesus calls that hypocrisy. Hypocrisy means you pretend to be something but inside you are something different. Hypocrisy means you pretend to be something but inside you are something different.

Hypocrites are not found in the world. They are the same inside and outside. They are bad on the inside and bad on the outside also.

And the better the church, the more holy we have to behave ourselves. So the Christian faith is full of hypocrites. Now this is not new.

When Jesus was on earth, the most religious people in the world were the Jews. There were no Christians or Muslims when Jesus came to the earth. There were some other religions, but where Jesus was, it was the Jews.

Among the Jews there were different type of people. The Bible speaks of three groups of people among the Jews. One are called the Herodians.

They were linked up with the King Herod. They were very worldly people. They did not pretend to be holy.

Herod would watch some girl dancing half naked and all that. They were all Herodians, worldly people. They did not care much for the Bible or anything.

Then there was a second group called the Sadducees. They studied the Bible. But they said we don't believe everything in the Bible.

Their Bible was only Old Testament those days. They said we can't believe everything. We can't believe in all angels and all that.

No such thing as angels. And when you die, that is the end. There is no resurrection and all that.

But they believed the Old Testament. So you know these people were not considered really serious Jews. One was worldly and the other did not believe in any miracles or any such things.

Then there was a third group called the Pharisees. They believed every word in the Old Testament. They believed in the miracles.

They kept all the rituals of the law. And every Saturday they would go to worship God. And among these three groups, do you know who Jesus condemned the most? The Pharisees.

He said you will all go to hell. He didn't say that to the Sadducees and Herodians. I mean they may also have been going to hell.

But the Pharisees he condemned because they pretended to be so holy. The other groups did not pretend to be so holy. You read the Gospels, you never find Jesus condemning the Herodians or condemning the Sadducees.

But there is one chapter, Matthew 23, full of condemning the Pharisees. And then he said at the end you will all go to hell. Who are these people? Who read and studied the Bible.

Who had full faith that this is the word of God. And their outer life was good. They did not kill people or commit adultery or any such thing.

They are a perfect picture of many church going Christians today. See many people think the Pharisees had only bad qualities. No, they had two very good qualities.

And Jesus gave them that certificate. Here are the two things Jesus said Pharisees have. See in Matthew 23, Jesus said to his disciples, the Pharisees and scribes are sitting on the chair of Moses.

And listen to this verse 3, Matthew 23, 3. Everything that they tell you to do, you must do. How can Jesus say such a thing unless everything they say is correct? If there were a few things wrong in what they were teaching, then Jesus would have said, most of the things you can do, but some things you can't do. But he says, everything they tell you to do, do.

Today there are about 1000 denominations in Christianity. All the way from Roman Catholic to Pentecostal, so many denominations. There are so many different groups.

Will Jesus say about all these groups, everything they say to you, you can do? For example, some of them teach you must pray to Mary. Jesus won't say, everything they teach you, do it. And there are some other people who say, you must baptize babies.

Jesus will not say, everything they tell you to do, do. Jesus will not say, everything they tell you to do, do. He will say, most of the things are okay.

But there are some Christian churches, where all their doctrines are correct. They don't tell you to pray to Mary. They don't baptize babies.

They believe in the Bible. They come every Sunday to the service. And so many things in the Bible they teach.

Fantasies were like that. About such a church, Jesus will say, everything they tell you to do, you can do. But he said inversely, don't do according to their actions.

Because they say things but don't do them. That is the condition of most Christian churches, whose doctrines are all correct. But in their life, they don't live according to that.

Inner life. Now one more certificate Jesus gave for the Pharisees in Matthew 23. See in verse 25.

First certificate is, everything they teach is correct. Second certificate is, verse 25. You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but the inside is full of robbery and self-indulgence.

That means he was saying, your outer life is very clean, but your inner life is all dirty. Forget the inner life. But isn't this a good certificate that your outer life is good? You are not committing adultery.

You are not stealing. You are not going around harming others. Isn't that a good testimony? So, two good testimonies the Pharisees had from this Jesus certificate.

One, everything you teach is correct. Your external life is very good. That is the testimony Jesus will give to many many Christian churches and Christians today.

You are not in some dead denomination that is preaching all false teachings. You preach about being born again. You preach about water baptism.

You even preach about holiness. And your external life is good. You don't kill anybody.

You don't commit adultery. You don't steal. But the inside of your life is all filthy.

So, what is the Lord saying to many Christians today? Your doctrine is all correct. Your external life is very impressive and clean. But your inside is all dirty.

See, it says here, your external cup, outside of the cup is clean. But inside is full of self-indulgence. Inside, you only think of yourself.

Whatever lust will satisfy you, you think about that in your mind. But you don't let other people see it because outside you are a very holy person. What is going to be the eternal destiny of such people? Whose doctrine is all correct and whose external life is very good, then even Jesus can certify it.

Their inner life is dirty. What is the eternal fate of such people? Verse 33. How can you escape going to hell? How many Christians believe that? How many Christians whose doctrine is all correct and whose external life is very good, but internal life is filthy.

How many such Christians believe that Jesus will send them to hell? I'll tell you, the devil does not want you to read such chapters. You know what the devil keeps telling people? You are all right, nothing will happen to you. Let me show you something that Jesus said about Satan in Luke chapter 8. John 8, Jesus said these words.

He told Pharisees, these same type of Pharisees, He told them, verse John 8, verse 44. See, you read in verse 13, he is speaking to the Pharisees. Pharisees and Jesus were having a conversation.

And the whole chapter he is talking to the Pharisees. And what does he tell the Pharisees? Verse 44. Your father is the devil.

To whom is he saying it? To people whose doctrines are all correct, whose external life is good, but whose internal life is dirty. He says, your father is the devil. And naturally you will do what your father wants you to do.

And see what he tells about the devil. The last part of that verse. When the devil speaks a lie, he is speaking from his own nature.

Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Have you read that verse? Every lie in the world, Satan is the father. But you know the father cannot produce a child without a mother.

Satan is seeking for mothers. In you and me, he is trying to get a mother. He will produce the lie, but he wants you to be the mother, so you say it with your tongue.

So, do you know that in your life, every lie that you ever spoke from your childhood, all the lies you told your mother and father when you were small, all the lies you told in your office, all the lies you told your friends, the devil was the father of all those children, all those lies. And you were the mother. These are people, the Pharisees he is saying that.

And Jesus said here, Satan has been a liar from the beginning. So, let us see in the beginning, what is the first lie that Satan said. Very important to see it.

In Genesis chapter 3, we are told the first lie written in the Bible. At least, not the Bible is saying it, but the Bible is saying what Satan said. There is no lie in the Bible, but the Bible describes the lie that Satan said.

That is the first lie mentioned in the Bible. And what is that lie? Listen carefully. In Genesis 3, he came through the serpent to Eve and said, has God told you that you cannot eat from some tree here? The woman said, yes, this tree of knowledge is good and evil.

If I eat from it, God said, I will die. And the serpent said, verse 4, you will definitely not die. What did God say? In chapter 2 verse 17, if you eat from that, you will surely die.

Not just you will die, but you will surely die. And the devil's answer is, you surely will not die. So, the first lie in the Bible is Satan saying that God's word is not true.

You will not go to hell. When I quoted this verse to you from Matthew 23, the Pharisees whose doctrine is right, whose external life is righteous said, you will go to hell. I am sure the devil told some of you even now, no, no, no, you will not go to hell.

That is what he has been saying for the last 6000 years. The devil said, God Jesus said, he is a liar from the beginning. And today you heard what was the first lie that he said.

If you disobey God, you will not be punished. Eve said, God has told us not to eat from this tree. Because God said, you will die.

And the devil says, don't worry. It is not so serious. God loves you.

He won't punish you like that. You can take it. You can disobey God, you will not die.

And Eve foolishly believed the devil instead of believing God. And following in Eve's footsteps are millions of Christians who don't believe what the Bible says, but who believe what the devil says. The Bible says in Romans 6.23 This is what God says.

In Romans 6.23, the wages of sin is death. Sin makes a payment. Payment is eternal death in hell.

The same thing God told Adam and Eve. If you disobey, you will surely die. The wages of sin is death.

But the devil says, no, no, no, nothing will happen. Now the question is, do you believe what God says or what the devil says? But you may say, I have accepted Christ and now I cannot die. Because this verse says, the gift of God is eternal life.

But to whom does he give it? It's a gift. But it's not for everybody. So let's look at what the Bible says for believers.

Let's turn to Romans chapter 8. Now this is written for born again believers. How do we know? Because in Romans 8.12 it says, brethren, let me tell you something. Who is Paul writing this calling brethren? He is not talking to the idol worshipping people in Rome.

He is talking to the believers in Rome. To Romans 1.7, to all those who are beloved of God in Rome called as saints. It's to the believers in Rome he is writing.

Not to unbelievers. And he calls them in Romans 8.12 brethren. And what is he telling these Roman believers who are born again? Romans 8.13, if you believers live according to the flesh, you will definitely die.

That means spiritually die. What does the devil say? Oh no, no, no. You will surely not die.

Because you accepted the Lord 20 years ago. Now you have a choice. Do you believe what the Holy Spirit says here or what the devil says? Your attitude to sin is what God looks at.

Jesus hated sin. You know it says that in Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 9. It's written about Jesus in Hebrews 1.9. You have loved righteousness and hated sin. And if this Jesus is living in your heart, he will make you love righteousness and hate sin.

He will always be saying to you in your conscience, love righteousness, hate sin. When the devil tempts you to do something wrong, the spirit of Christ inside you will say, hate that, don't do that. He won't force you, but he will speak to you.

And all of you who are believers know that. Can you think back to some time in your life when you were tempted to do something wrong and your conscience said, no, don't do that, that is a sin? You were going to sign some false statement and your conscience said, you can't sign that. Or in some situation to escape some problem you told a lie.

And as you were about to say it, your conscience said, no, don't say that, that's a lie. But you told your conscience, keep quiet, I'm going to do it. And you told a lie.

Now what will happen is, if you keep on doing that, the voice of conscience will become softer, softer, softer. And after some time, it will stop speaking altogether. Because you have killed it.

That is worse than cutting off your hand or pulling out your eyes. The most valuable thing you have inside your body is your conscience. People are so afraid, I must not get high blood pressure, I must not get diabetes, all these things are dangerous for my body.

But much worse than that is to kill your conscience. You can have diabetes and blood pressure and cancer and still go to heaven. But you won't go to heaven if you kill your conscience.

You can be the healthiest person, you kill your conscience, you go to hell. You can be the healthiest person, you kill your conscience, you go to hell. I'm trying to show you verses which you may not know well or other people have not shown you.

But see this verse in 1 Samuel 16 verse 7. The last part of that verse. 1 Samuel 16 verse 7. God does not see as man sees. God does not see as man sees.

Man looks at the outward appearance. God looks at the heart. See this big difference.

Man looks on the outside, God looks at the heart. Man sees, is the outside of the cup clean? God sees, is the inside clean? That's what Jesus told the Pharisees. You clean the outside of the cup.

For what? To show people it's very clean. But the inside is all dirty. God is looking at the inside.

Now many of you, almost all of you sitting here, you call yourself Christians. Many of you go to churches that say you must be born again. And you are proud of the fact that you go to a good church, not some dead church.

And I'm sure many of you have got a good testimony before your fellow Christians. You are not a murderer or a thief or adulterer or anything like that. Because the outside of your cup is very clean.

But have you understood that God does not see that? He sees the heart. And I want to ask you honestly, what is God seeing inside your heart right now? What did He see inside your heart last week? Always remember this. Man looks on the outside.

God looks at the heart. And if you want the approval of men, then you have to be very clean on the outside. But if you want the approval of God, then you have to be careful about the inside.

You know, it's like two different subjects in an examination. Mathematics and Science. So, supposing the qualification for a job is, how much did you get in Mathematics? Science is not important, Mathematics.

Because they say, for this particular job, Mathematics is the important thing. So, you go there, your science certificate, you got 100%. They say, we don't want to see that.

What did you get in Mathematics? Zero. Sorry, you can't get the job. It's something like that.

Outer life, 100%. Everybody is happy with you. God says, what is inner life? Zero.

What did He tell the Pharisees? How can you escape hell like that? You know, my brothers and sisters, I want to tell you something. I believe what the Bible says in Matthew chapter 12. I believe I am a preacher of the word of God.

I have been preaching for 57 years. Even when I was in the Navy, I was preaching. And for 53 years in full time Christian work.

And I believe this word. That every word I speak, I will give an account to God in the day of judgment. Matthew 12 and verse 36.

I tell you, Jesus said, every careless word they speak, they will give an account in the day of judgment. I believe it. If I have spoken in a careless way in a meeting, one day the Lord will judge me.

Did you tell them the truth? Or did you say something that will make them happy? Words 37, by your words you will be justified, by your words you will be condemned. And the other word is Galatians chapter 1. This is such an important verse. Galatians 1 verse 10.

If I try to please men, I cannot be a servant of Christ. If I try to please men, I cannot be a servant of Christ. This is such an important word to me, that I got it painted in a wooden board.

And I put it in my sitting room for more than 25 years. Every day I would see it. It is in my front room.

If I seek to please men, I cannot be a servant of Christ. I would go from my house Sunday morning to the church and I would read, if you seek to please men today, you cannot be a servant of Christ. Every day I would see it.

Now I don't need it because it is written inside my head. If I seek to please men, I cannot be a servant of Christ. That means, if I try to tell you something that will make you happy, I don't speak the truth of God.

I am not a servant of Christ. I am a servant of men. I am serving you to get honour from you.

Or like some preachers to get money. I have never taken money for my preaching for more than 40 years. But I may want your honour.

If I seek money or honour from men, I cannot be a servant of Christ. So, I have to speak the truth. And the truth is, man looks on the outward appearance, God looks at the heart.

So, what I am trying to say is, my dear brothers and sisters, take sin seriously. A lot of people take sin very lightly nowadays. You know why? Because they are spiritually illiterate.

We say in India, in the villages, many women are illiterate. There is a difference between educated people and people who can't read or write. You know, you tell an educated person, doctor says, You will not be able to sleep that night.

I have got fourth stage cancer. Why are you disturbed? Because you are educated. You go to the village and tell some uneducated, illiterate woman, you have got fourth stage cancer.

She will sleep peacefully at night. What is the difference between you and her? She is not educated. You are educated.

Spiritually it is like that. Those who are spiritually educated take the word of God seriously. The soul that sins, it will die.

They are educated and they are really spiritually educated, they tremble at God's word. But many Christians are spiritually uneducated. You tell them the soul that sins will die.

They laugh, they didn't go to sleep peacefully. It is exactly like telling that illiterate woman, you have got fourth stage cancer. But whether she understands it or not, she will die.

And whether you understand it or not, you still go to hell. So, in the day of judgment, the Lord will ask me, You remember that evening in January 2020 where you spoke in Hubli? And I said, yes Lord, I remember that meeting. Did you tell them the truth? Did you tell them the truth about sin? Did you tell them that God looks at the heart and not at your outward testimony? Or did you just try to please people and say, oh brother Zach is a good preacher and go home? I tell you honestly, I believe God will ask me that.

And I will be able to say to him, Lord, I told them the truth. Then the Lord will say to me, well done. Now you have no responsibility.

If they did not listen to you, it is their responsibility. I can stand before God today and say, I don't want a single person sitting here to go to hell. Otherwise I will not come here.

Not only I don't want anybody to go to hell, I don't only want you to go to heaven, I want you to get a reward when you go to heaven. I can stand before God now and say, I want every one of you to get a reward from Jesus Christ when you go to heaven. I don't want you to go to heaven with empty hands, no reward.

I want all of you to get a reward. And if you want to get that reward, start with this simple ABC of the Christian life. Like the children when they go to kindergarten, they learn ABC.

Same way, here is the ABC of the Christian life. Are you ready to learn it? This is the ABC. Man looks on the outward appearance, God looks at your heart.

Don't try to study other doctrines before you learn ABC. This is the first thing you need to learn. Have you learnt it? Do you live everyday recognizing God looks at your heart and not what you are on the outside? Not the impression you are giving to others of how holy you are and how good Christian you are.

Sometimes even your wife knows what type of person you are. Not only God, your wife also knows. I heard a story once of a preacher who was preaching a very high standard of holiness.

His wife was sitting there and she said, John, don't forget I am sitting here and listening to you. I know you don't live like that. Your wife may not be so bold to say that.

She may be so loyal to you that she will keep quiet. But your wife knows how you live at home. God knows much more.

I tell you, sin is more serious than cancer. There is another disease nowadays called AIDS. Cancer, some people are cured.

AIDS, nobody is cured. AIDS is the worst disease. It is a sexual disease, worst disease of all.

It is one way of God saying sexual sin is a terrible sin. That's why I have made this worst disease a sexual sin. There is no cure for it.

But let me tell you, sin is worse than AIDS. I believe that. If God gives me a choice between sin and AIDS, I will say AIDS any day.

I can still go to heaven. There is a family that came to one of our CFC churches in a small town. They got AIDS in their unconverted days.

Before they were married also. And they were in some other religion. And they got this sickness.

And then they got married. Then they got converted. They accepted Christ.

And they came to our church. So, you know, they were really born again. They took baptism.

But AIDS is such a sickness that can even be transmitted by the spit in our mouth. So, we could not give them the breaking of bread and the cup in the main meeting. So, we would give it to them separately in the room for themselves.

Because if they touch it and somebody else touches it, it can cause problems. They finally died. But they went to heaven.

I will see them in heaven. AIDS cannot send you to hell if you are born again. But sin, even if you have no sickness, sin is what sends people to hell.

So, my brothers and sisters, please take the word of God seriously. There are many preachers preaching about many things. God has commissioned me to preach to his people to stop sinning.

And to pray to God, Lord, give me the power of your Holy Spirit, so that I will not sin. I want to tell you another thing. You cannot stop sinning with your own power.

That's why you must pray to God and say, Lord, give me the power of the Holy Spirit to stop sinning in my heart. And all of you should pray that prayer. Please do that when you go to bed tonight.

Say, Lord Jesus, I have heard something very serious today. And I want to obey you. Not just to go to heaven, but because you died to save me from this sin.

So, I want to hate it because it killed you on the cross. You should not avoid sin just to go to heaven. I am not avoiding sin because I want to go to heaven.

I avoid sin because it killed my Savior. And it hurts the Lord Jesus when he sees me sin. And I don't want to hurt him.

I don't care whether I go to heaven or hell, but I don't want to displease my Lord. I will tell you what I have told the Lord many times. Lord Jesus, I am willing to go to hell if you are there.

Because then my hell will become heaven. Because I am looking to be with you wherever you are. If you are in the desert, I will be in the desert.

I don't want to live in the comfort of the city if you are not there. I want to be where you are. So, I am not looking for heaven or hell.

In one sentence, I will say like this. My heaven is where Jesus is. Even now.

So, I am enjoying a little bit of heaven even now. Because the Lord Jesus is with me. My dear brothers and sisters, this is the real Christian life.

Decide, Lord, I never want to displease you. Anything that displeases you in my thoughts or words, please help me to overcome that. Because you loved me so much as to die for me.

How can I ever hurt you now? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray that every single person here will take seriously what they heard today. From today, their lives will be changed.

If they are already good people, let them become better people from today. Yes, Lord, every single person must find some change from today. Remind them when they sleep tonight, go to bed tonight about the things they heard.

Remind them again when they get up tomorrow morning. Lord, bless each person as they obey you. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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