

The Apostles Whom Jesus Chose

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, prayer, and God's grace in choosing and using imperfect individuals for His purposes.

Duration: 1:21:04

Scripture: Mark 3:17

Topics: "Divine Transformation", "Spiritual Deception"

Description

This sermon focuses on how Jesus chose imperfect individuals as his apostles, highlighting their past failures and shortcomings. It emphasizes that the Scriptures are meant for our encouragement, not discouragement, and that even those who seem like failures can be transformed by God. The sermon also warns against missing out on God's plans due to clever deceit or hidden sins, using Judas Iscariot as an example.

Transcript

It's possible that some of us, or probably many of us, are discouraged and give up hope because we seem to be in constant failure and defeat in our lives, or because of the memory of past failure, which seems to keep coming up to us. And we can't ever forget the type of life we lived before we were converted, and in many cases, even after we are converted, the way we have failed and dishonored the Lord in many areas. So the scripture has been written for our encouragement, not discouragement.

There's not a single verse written to discourage us. And I thought we could just look at the type of people whom Jesus chose to be his apostles. And we know from the Gospels something about some of these people and what they were like.

And Jesus knew that when he called them. He was not ignorant. We read in Luke 6 that he prayed a whole night, Luke 6, 12, and then chose the disciples.

See, even Jesus, whose mind was so perfect and sinless, he didn't look around and say, OK, I think these are the good ones. He had some opinions, I'm sure, about who were the 12 he wanted to choose. But you see his humility in the fact that he did not lean upon his own reason, even though, unlike us, his reason was perfect and sinless.

That's a great example for us, that a person who was sinless and perfect still did not lean upon his own reason when taking a major decision, but waited a whole night in prayer, and then decided, maybe I should show you that passage. That's in Luke chapter 6. We read verse 12. It was at this time that he went off into the mountain and spent the whole night in prayer.

And then when day came, he called his 12 disciples. He had many disciples. And he chose 12 from among them and named them apostles.

So the point is that he spent a whole night in prayer to be sure that those whom he had thought of were also God's choice. And there we see something of his humility. I see so many believers taking major decisions merely based on what they think is right.

Now, it may be right. But if you're humble, you'll wait on the Lord. And the more important the decision, the longer you will wait on the Lord.

I mean, if it is just, we read of another place where Jesus prayed just for a couple of hours, and that's in Luke chapter 4, because he just needed to know, shall I stay here or go to the next place? And then after a few hours of prayer in the morning, we read in Luke 4, verse 42 and 43, that he said, no, I have to go somewhere else. That was not a major decision. It was important.

He prayed about everything. But when it came to something that had long-term consequences, because these are the 12 people who are going to establish the church, which is going to last for 2,000 years. So please remember this, that the more important the decision you have to take, the longer you must wait upon God.

I'm amazed how so many young people decide on marriage nowadays. Just like that, they see a pretty girl, and they say, yeah, she's a believer. She's part of CFC, so I'll marry her.

Or he's a handsome guy, and he seems to have a good job, so I'll marry him. I can predict that it's going to be a very shaky marriage. They won't divorce, because divorce is uncommon in India.

But it's not the type of marriage that honors God, where it may be the right person, but the fact that you go into it without waiting on the Lord shows that you don't care much for God's opinion. You go to your opinion, you ask one or two brothers, and that's it. Jesus was not like that.

And if you had to walk like Jesus, here's something you can learn. And when you wait on the Lord, you don't make a mistake. And I'll tell you.

And Jesus did not make a mistake, and I'll show you that even in his choice of Judas Iscariot. So when it came in the morning, he was also not bothered about who's going to be offended. You mean, here are 100 disciples, and Jesus says, OK, Peter, you come here, and Andrew, I'm going to pick 12 disciples.

And everybody's waiting, wondering whether their name will be called. And at the end of the 12, their names are not called. And then some of them may be wondering, when they know what some of these guys were like, how in the world did he choose this person? How in the world did he choose that person, and not me? Sometimes when elders are chosen in a church, there are people who long to be elders who sit there and think, why was I not chosen? Why that person? Or when people want to be invited to speak in a conference, they wonder, why wasn't I chosen? Why that person? See, these are little moments when we can discover what high thoughts we have about ourselves.

And if we judge ourselves, we can become spiritual. Then God will give us grace. It's wonderful to live in this world expecting nothing, expecting nothing from man, but expecting everything from God and believing that what God wants me to have, no man can ever stop me from having.

You know, when I was young, I remember, because God gave me a gift to preach when I was 23, believe it or not. I sought God for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. I sought God for the gift of prophecy, and he gave it to me.

But that is a sovereign choice. I don't say it was anything special. But there were many other people in the church I used to attend those days who were very jealous of my ministry.

And they would never, never let me speak. Because they discovered that a lot of people were more interested in listening to me than to them. So the best way was to keep me silent.

I said, fine. God knows when I should speak. And he gave me opportunities here and there.

I would go in the streets and preach. That's where I actually learned to preach. There, I didn't need anybody's permission.

But what I've learned through the years is that so many people in my life have tried to suppress me in so many ways. Even in building CFC through the years, if you know the history of it, very few people know of it. It's so many people have tried to oppose us and crush us and do so many things to destroy us.

They have never succeeded. Because we did not depend on man. We say, Lord, if this is your work, prosper it.

If it's not your work, I'll be the first to close it down. I'm not interested in doing anything on earth which is not the will of God because it won't last forever. Why in the world should we waste our time doing something that's not gonna last forever? I would never want to be a part of a church which is not going to be approved by God, never.

I don't wanna get out as soon as possible. I don't care who's offended. That's what I did in many places.

So it's wonderful to recognize, Lord, my reason seems to say this is the right thing to do, but I don't want to depend on my own understanding. It says, trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding and he will direct you in all your paths.

That's in Proverbs chapter three, verse five and six. Jesus obeyed that. So he looked at his 100 disciples and felt these are the 12 I have in mind, but I wanna be sure.

And he didn't just pray. Father, just show me, are these the 12, the other names I have? Yeah, thank you, Lord. I believe you'll guide me.

No, he spent a whole night. Have you ever thought a full night? Let's say he went to started praying at 10 o'clock and finished at six in the morning or even five in the morning. Seven hours, what would you do if you went to the Lord and spent seven hours? I don't know whether you were sitting or kneeling, that doesn't matter, but seven hours before God, what would you talk to him? What would you talk to the Lord even if you spent one hour with him? Have you ever tried it? I think Jesus was listening more than talking.

Like I've often said, to me, prayer is more listening than talking. And I've often used the example, I'll repeat it again. If you are speaking to a younger person, you talk more than you listen.

Because he's younger, he needs your advice. If you're talking to a much more godly person, I hope you will listen more than you talk because he's got more to tell you than you can tell him. So imagine if you're talking to Almighty God himself.

What do you think you should do, talk or listen? It's very clear, and yet I'll tell you most Christians, except perhaps some who have listened to me, ask yourself, don't you spend more time talking? Lord, I need this, I need this, I need that, even what you call praise, I'm telling him this, that, and the other, it's all good. But I wanna tell you, learn to listen. And I believe that when Jesus spent the whole night in prayer, he was listening.

You know, like Eli told Samuel, the little boy, he heard a voice at night, Samuel, Samuel, and Eli said, next time you hear his voice, hear that voice, say, speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. That's how it is. Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

I've sometimes woken up in the middle of the night, not because I heard a voice, just happened to wake up, like we wake up sometimes at night. I've said the same thing. Lord, speak, Lord, your servant is listening.

Is there something you wanna tell me? Sometimes people who don't know about the time difference between India and other countries call me at two or three o'clock in the morning, because it's daytime over there, wherever they are, not knowing the time difference, and I wake up, and they say, hello, brother Zach, praise the Lord, good to talk to you, how are you doing? And they don't realize it's three o'clock in the morning. And I tell you honestly, I do not get upset with them, because I believe in Romans 8, 28. Lord, perhaps you use this person to wake me up, because I have to hear something.

I've always said that, and that's changed. First of all, it delivered me from complaining, and delivered me from getting upset with that brother. I'm thankful for that brother.

Maybe God has to say something to me. And I say, Lord, tell me what it is. And almost invariably, I tell you, I have received something that blessed me.

It's a wonderful way to live, when you obey the word of God, which says you don't murmur, and you don't complain. You don't know what riches you get. You miss something, because you put the blame on that person, on the other person, and why did he do this, why didn't he think of that? You missed out on something, brother.

If that's happened in the past, I wanna say, you've been a loser. Just learn to believe in Romans 8, 28, covers everything, listen. So Jesus was listening, listening, listening, and by the morning, he was clear.

These are the names. And so it didn't matter if 88 other people got offended, because he chose 12. So when you take a decision, when you're weighted on the Lord, and you're sure, as far as you know, it doesn't bother you if people get offended with the decision you take.

No, because you're clear in your mind. I sought the Lord about it. I did not seek my own, and if somebody gets offended, just too bad.

Yeah, I've had to offend a lot of people sometimes when I choose who should be an elder, or choose who should speak in a conference. I don't care what other people think. It doesn't bother me.

I say, Lord, I don't have preferences. You show me, and I will do what you tell me to do, and if people get offended, let them work out their own salvation. I'm not bothered about it.

I'm not bothered what they think about me. I don't care whether they think I'm partial, or showing favoritism. It doesn't make any difference.

They've got to work out their own salvation if they judge me. And so Jesus was not bothered what the other 88 people thought if he chose 12. But look at the type of people he chose.

That's what I wanted to say to you, encourage those of you who feel that God chooses sort of perfect people who don't make mistakes. And Simon, whom he called Peter, and you know that Simon Peter committed what I believe is one of the greatest sins, denying Jesus Christ. Why do I say that's one of the greatest sins? Even from a human standpoint, supposing you have a person who has done a tremendous amount of good to you.

Think of someone you can think of who's done a tremendous, just one individual you can think of who's done a tremendous amount of good to you, sacrificed a lot to help you and guide you, and never took anything from you for himself. And one day somebody asks you, do you know him? And you don't want, for some reason, you don't want to know him to feel you're associated with that person. And you say, no, I don't know him.

I think it's a terrible sin. To be so ungrateful for someone who did so much for you. That's what Peter did.

But more than that, he was denying the Son of God. You know, he at one time said, you're the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus said, blessed are you, Simon, because flesh and blood didn't reveal to you.

My Father in heaven revealed to you that I'm the Son of God. You got that revelation, Peter, more than before anybody else. And that's the one who said, I don't know him.

And Jesus said, if anyone denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father in heaven. Those are his words. So he never said, if you murder somebody, I'll deny you.

He never said, if you commit adultery, I'll deny you. Those sins he didn't mention, or you tell lies, I'll deny you. But if you deny me, that's the one sin that will make me deny you before my Father.

Now, we don't think that Peter's sin was such a gross sin. Supposing you heard that that night, Peter went out and murdered three people. You say, boy, that's serious.

But this was worse. He denied the Son of God, whom God had given him revelation about. And that's the type of person whom Jesus chose, not only to be his apostle, but to be the chief among his apostles, to be the leader, to be the first person to speak on the day of Pentecost, and to be anointed with a 15-minute message to bring 3,000 people to Christ.

You know, a lot of people think that the only way to preach an anointed message is speak for one hour or something like that. Well, if you're teaching scripture, it's one thing, but preaching is different from teaching. And Peter was not teaching on the day of Pentecost.

He was preaching. And when you preach, if you're anointed, even 15 minutes can bring 3,000 people to Christ. It's a question of being anointed.

So that was the man God used to be the leader, one who had failed so badly. So that's the first person who encourages us to know that that's the type of, have you denied the Lord somewhere? Have you let him down badly? Have you murdered someone? The Lord picks the most unlikely people to have a great privilege and honor. I think of the same thing in relation to Mary Magdalene.

She was not an apostle, but she had a tremendous privilege of seeing the risen Lord, which is the beginning of the new creation. You know, imagine if you could be around when, if you had seen God making Adam. I mean, we're human beings, but supposing you were there when you saw God make Adam from the mud and make Eve.

Boy, what an honor that was to see the first human being being made. I would have loved to see it. I would love to see even a video of it, how the Lord did it, and to see it actually.

Well, this is something greater than that. That when Jesus rose up from the dead, he was beginning this new creation. And Jesus was the elder brother of this new creation.

And the first human being who saw him was Mary Magdalene. I mean, the closest I can link that with is seeing Adam being created. To see the resurrected Jesus, the beginning of the new creation, the first time that he called his brothers, my brothers, and I'm ascending to my father and your father to go and tell my brothers.

I've often thought about that many, many times, that if God had asked me, who do you think should see Jesus on the day of his resurrection? I would have definitely said Mary, his mother, because she suffered so much, you know, shame, ridicule right from the time she conceived Jesus. You know, what all she went through, seeing her own son being crucified. God said no.

What about one of the apostles who had been faithful? No. He picks one of the worst sinners, and that to a woman. You know, among the Jewish community, women were not appreciated.

And they only thought of men as the only ones whom God accepted. And Jesus went right against that culture and chose a woman. Your sisters would be encouraged by that.

He chose a woman, and a very sinful woman, more sinful than any sister sitting here. Many of you who think you're holy, that's not the reason God accepts you. God chose the one who had seven demons inside her.

Any of you had seven demons inside you? Seven demons, that means the devil, seven devils were inside this woman. And I don't know what the seven devils, we don't know what all the demons made her do. Probably she lived a very immoral life.

I cannot imagine a woman with seven demons living a moral life. She was probably very immoral. And Jesus chooses, we can say, a prostitute, a demon-possessed prostitute.

He says, that's the one I'm gonna choose, to be the first, because she repented, turned completely around, was cleansed in the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross three days earlier, and was clean. And she was no longer a prostitute. She was as pure as the angels in heaven.

She was like a saint. She was like a person who had never sinned from the time she was born. And here was a woman who had never sinned from the time she was born, who was the first person to see the resurrected Jesus.

That you would agree to, right? If there was a woman who had never sinned from the time she was born, you say, yeah, yeah, that one, I agree, should see Jesus. That's what Mary Magdalene was. That's what I see there in the resurrection day, the mighty power of the blood of Jesus Christ that didn't make her any different from Mary or anybody else, and made her even more glorious because of her past was so bad.

It's a wonderful thing to see that, the type of people whom God chooses. So some of you who have the idea that God chose you because you were better than your relatives or better than somebody else, you got it completely wrong. And maybe that's why you've not grown spiritually as much as you have, because you look back over your past life and say, well, I didn't live such a bad life like others.

That's why you are so immature and you haven't grown spiritually. That's why you're constantly defeated by sin because you've got pretty high thoughts about yourself. You're not as bad as some of these other folks sitting here, right? You'll never grow spiritually, I can predict that because you haven't understood this wonderful truth, whom God chooses.

Okay, let's move on. We don't know much about Andrews. Matthew, Luke chapter six, we read about Peter 14.

We don't read much about Andrew, so I can't say much about him, but I don't think he was any better. And then we read about James and John, Luke 6, 14. What were they like? You know, Jesus, do you know what Jesus called them? Sons of thunder.

You read that in Mark three, verse 17. Just like Jesus gave Simon a name called Peter. Peter, Petra means a small stone.

You're a small stone that's gonna be built on me, the rock, Jesus said. But James and John, he knew something of their personalities and he said about them, James three, sorry, Mark 3, 17. James, the son of Zebedee, John, the brother of James, to whom Jesus gave the name Boanerges, which means sons of thunder.

That was just like Simon, Peter. It was James Boanerges and John Boanerges. Most of you don't know that name, but that was their name, just like Simon, Peter, meaning sons of thunder.

Why did Jesus give that name? Because they were the type of people who thunderously criticized others and were vehement against them. John became so different towards the end of his life. But you see one example of this in Luke chapter nine.

We read in Luke chapter nine and verse 49. John answered and said, master, we saw someone, and I believe when he say we, he's including his brother James, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, but we wanted to stop him because he's not in our group. Here's a brother who looks at somebody doing something different from us in some other church.

And say, you can't do that, because that's not the way we do it in CFC. You know what Jesus says? Don't stop him. He's not against us.

And if he's not against you, he's for you. And if you don't have the gift of casting out demons, forget it. He's casting out demons, let him go ahead and do it.

And don't judge him. Maybe he's doing it for his own honor or something. It's none of my business.

We don't do it for our own honor. When we cast out demons, we do it for the glory of God. But here's a lesson Jesus taught us, that don't hinder him just because he doesn't join your group.

That's what he said. He does not come along with us. What James and John were saying is, we believe in discipleship.

This guy only believes in casting out demons. Okay, he's casting out demons, leave him alone. He doesn't have the light on discipleship.

Let him do it. I'm not saying, what the Lord told James, don't join him and don't hinder him. So that's what I do.

I look at a lot of Christians around us who do so many things. They don't emphasize discipleship. They're only emphasizing evangelism or something else.

So long as it's not deception. That's what I'm against. Deceptive, saying somebody's healed when he's not healed, and all this type of thing, or seeking honor, all those things we hate.

But if they're doing something, and according to their light, they're trying to serve the Lord, okay, God bless them. I won't join you, but I won't hinder you. I will not fight with you, I will not go around.

The only thing I would expose and criticize is where you're making money from poor people in the name of Christ. Such people have to be driven out, like Jesus took a whip. But Jesus didn't take a whip and chase these fellas.

The only people he chased out with a whip were those who were making money in the name of God. Until the end of my life, I will do that. Because Jesus did it.

It's the only time he took a whip. I mean, he corrected a lot of people, but he took a whip only once. That's because he saw how when money comes into the matter, you have to be very, very strict.

And that's why in CFC, we are very strict in this area of money, more than any other area. But when it comes to somebody doing something we don't agree with, okay, fine, or he doesn't preach discipleship, the word for me is don't take a whip and don't even hinder him. Let him do it.

Don't waste your time fighting with him or arguing with him. You mind your own business, you make disciples. So that's where John was.

John and James were people who were sons of thunder. How dare somebody disagree with us? We fight against them and say, you gotta be like us. No.

And if you're like that, okay, God can change you. The Lord accepts people who are sons of thunder. Then we read about another person in Luke chapter three, now chapter six, and that's Philip.

See, Philip, only one or two things we read about Philip, and I just wanna mention them. Philip was the one whom Jesus spoke to when they needed to feed the 5,000 in John chapter six. We read there was a

big crowd and they were all hungry.

And we read in John six and verse five, Jesus lifted up his eyes and he saw a great multitude. And it says in verse nine, Jesus knew what he was going to do. He already knew what he was gonna do.

I'm gonna feed these people supernaturally. But knowing what he had to do, he tested Philip, verse five. He said to Philip, why did he pick out Philip? I don't know.

But he asked Philip, where shall we buy bread that we can feed these people? And Jesus knew what he was gonna do. Do you ask a question to somebody when you already know what you're gonna do? Jesus used to do things like that just to test people. And Philip was being tested.

He was saying this to test him. Sometimes the Lord says some things to us to test us. Okay, you're in this tough situation.

What are you gonna do? You're in this very awkward situation right now. What are you gonna do? And you say, who do I know? No, whom can I telephone to help me? The Lord is testing you to see what you're gonna do. Whom can I go and borrow some money from? He's testing you to see what you're gonna do.

But if you trust him, he'll do a miracle for you. But you go to man, you miss the miracle. It often happens.

I believe there are many, many believers who have missed miracles in their life because in their time of difficulty, they didn't turn to God. The first thought that came to them is, now which man will help me out? There are some fine brothers in CFC. To which of them can I go? I'm not saying we shouldn't ask one another for help.

By all means. There are so many practical things on earth where we can help one another. But our trust must always be in the Lord.

And if someone doesn't turn around to help us, we should have no complaint. It's the Lord, my trust is in the Lord. It doesn't matter if somebody's unable to help me or, it's fine, my trust is in the Lord.

So he tested him and Philip said, we need 200 denary. 200 denary is about seven months wages for a laboring man. Seven months salary.

And even that won't be enough to go and the stores are not open. And then Jesus fed him with five loaves and fed them with five loaves and two fishes. And the other place where you read about Philip is in John 14.

Where Jesus said, you know, in verse six, you can't come to the father except through me. And if you had known me, you would have known my father. That means if you have seen my life, you see what God is like.

That's what he was saying. Then Philip was the one who said, or said, show us the father. We want to know what the father's like.

And we've seen what you're like, but show us what the father's like. And Jesus said to him, Philip, have I been so long with you? And yet you have not known me, Philip. You've seen me.

You've seen the father. So we can see Philip was not a person who was very strong in faith. That's one thing we can see.

And he was not a crook. He was not a person who was wanting to bring fire down on the Samaritans. You know, like some of the disciples, they wanted to bring fire down on these Samaritans who did not receive Jesus.

That's the other thing I wanted to show you in Luke 9, 54, about James and John. It's not only that they tried to stop someone who was casting out demons. The other thing we saw there was when the Samaritans did not receive, Jesus came to Samaria, verse 52, and they did not receive him.

And James and John, verse 54, said, Lord, like Elijah brought fire down from heaven, let's bring down fire and consume these people. Sometimes there are believers like that who want God to smite those who are against us. Lord, these people don't stand with us.

Smite them, or you find some little delight in your heart when some calamity hits somebody who harmed you in some way. Then you're like James and John, sons of thunder. Yeah, they deserve that.

They opposed me, they deserve to be smitten with fire. Do you ever feel happy when something bad happens to someone who did harm to you? You're like James and John, absolutely. Sons of thunder, daughters of thunder.

There are daughters of thunder, too, by the way. Not just sons of thunder. You know, who wish something evil on others because they didn't accept us, or they didn't treat us right, or they harmed us in some way.

Jesus chose them, but he changed them. He didn't leave them like that, and he said to him in verse 55, you don't know what kind of spirit you are of. The Son of Man didn't come to destroy men's lives.

He came to save them. But you're trying to destroy them. So we've seen a little bit of some of these disciples.

Let's look at another one. Luke chapter six, going through this list. Then we read about, after Philip, Luke 6, 14, you read about Bartholomew.

Now we don't need to read much about Bartholomew, but there are many who say, possibly true, that that was the other name of Nathanael. So we know about Nathanael, and it's possibly true. I mean, the people have done research on this, I haven't.

There must be some reason why they say Nathanael's now their name was Bartholomew. So let's assume that's true, and let's see what type of person Nathanael was. You read about Nathanael in John chapter one.

He was the type of man who would open his mouth and give his opinion, even if it was a very bad opinion about people. This is what I think of that guy. Are you like that? Very quick to give a bad opinion.

I mean, very hesitant to say something good about somebody, but very quick to say something bad. This is for such people, Nathanael. Philip found Nathanael, verse 45.

Philip was one of the disciples of Jesus. Jesus met him, because Jesus met him in verse 45 and said, follow me. And Philip found Nathanael.

There's something good about Philip that he went and called Nathanael and said, we found the Messiah, the one who Moses spoke about, Jesus of Nazareth. And here's Nathanael. Immediate reaction.

Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? His immediate reaction. Can't be. What is the worst place you can think of? You know, in some cities, there's an area called a red light district of the area where all the prostitutes live.

And if you say somebody's living on that street, he's living on that street? What a terrible place to live in. That's what he thought about Nazareth. I don't know how he felt Nazareth had such a bad reputation that he said, Messiah can never come out of Nazareth.

Impossible. There are Christians like that who despise people of another race. Many Christians, I have met them.

They look down on someone who's from another community or another race or who's a scheduled caste or Dalits or not so intellectual or not so educated, not so cultured. You look down on somebody because they've got some bad habits because they're not so cultured and civilized like you. I met lots of wonderful believers like that who are completely uncultured, who don't know how to speak properly, who don't have good manners, who do all types of things which uncultured people do.

And you are this cultured person, very civilized, and you know how to say please and thank you. I have noticed this that when people they say, when you give them a gift, they say, speaking in tongues, it means thank you. In India, it means thank you.

When you give something to someone, the Indian language doesn't have words for thank you and sorry and this means thank you. And if they do something wrong and you point out and they say, that means sorry. So you got the interpretation of tongues now.

This is lack of culture, but don't despise them. It's because your parents brought you up properly that your culture is not, it's got nothing to do with spirituality. There are some very fine, uncultured spiritual people who dig their nose in public and do all types of things which you would never dream of doing.

But they may be 10 times more spiritual than you who are so civilized and cultured. I'm not saying you should be uncultured like them. I believe we should learn to say please and thank you and be cultured and not do anything that will offend others.

But don't think that is spirituality, that is civilization, it's culture and that's good so that we don't become rude or hurt others, but offend others, but it's not spirituality. And don't think that a person who doesn't have that culture you have is unspiritual, no. So Nathaniel is the type of guy who despises and the very next sentence, Jesus saw Luke, sorry, John 147, Nathaniel coming to him and say, and Jesus said, what would you say? Supposing you say you were born in some small village like Timbuktu or something.

Timbuktu, where in the world is that? Which unknown place did you come from? How would you react to that person? You would be immediately prejudiced. This guy despises the place I was born, what type of guy is he? But look what Jesus said. Jesus gave him one of the greatest commendations that he ever gave to a human being.

Can you believe that? You wanna be like Christ? Would you give a tremendous commendation to someone who despised you or despised the place you were born in? Look what Jesus says, there's a man

who is absolutely honest. He found something good there. He believes that Nazareth is a useless place and he says so.

He's honest. You don't have to agree with him. Jesus didn't agree with him that Nazareth is a useless place, but he says at least the guy's honest.

He's not converted, but he's honest. And one of the things I've discovered, which I've been trying to tell people more and more, is that it's honesty that the Lord expects from us first, not goodness. Honesty.

That's a great, it's a message that sets us free because people think we have to be good to come to the Lord. No, no, no, no, no, no. You have to be honest.

And Nathaniel was honest. And when I read these words, there's a man in whom there's no hypocrisy. I've said to myself, I said, Lord, if you can say that about me, I'd be thrilled.

There's a man in whom there's no hypocrisy. What you see is what you get. What he is before you is what he is in private also.

What a commendation. Lord, can you say about me every day, there's a man in whom there is no hypocrisy, zero hypocrisy. Don't you think that's a fantastic commendation? And Jesus gave it to a man who spoke such a rude thing about the place where he was born.

And the one good thing Jesus could see there, he was honest. I met people like this, atheists, and I witnessed to them. Yeah, who says there's a God? I don't get upset with them.

I said, fine. I say, listen, there are two possibilities, right? I tell them there is a God or there's no God. Okay, let's assume that one of these things is right.

Can you pray like this? God, I don't believe you exist there, but in case you're there, just reveal yourself to me. And very often they say, don't you think God will be insulted if I speak like that? Not at all. He'd be delighted that you who, you're not sure whether he exists.

You know, I tell you, God loves honest people. He really loves honest people. That's what I see here.

And if you turn to John chapter three and show how Jesus made that clear. In John chapter three, this is how we come into the light. John three, verse 20, it says, everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light.

The reason why people don't come to the light is because they have done evil. So what do you think should be the opposite of that? Now, without looking further, please look at me and tell me what should be the opposite of that? Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light. The opposite of that should be everyone who does good, because good is the opposite of evil, comes to the light, but that is not what Jesus said.

Jesus said the opposite of it was being honest. See the next verse. But he who is honest comes to the light.

Practice the truth, that means honest. So this is the contrast. He who does evil will not come to the light, but he who is honest comes to the light.

That gives great hope for me, because if Jesus had said, he who does good comes to the light, then there's no hope for me, because who is good except God, and no matter how good I do, there'll be still some evil left in me. But honest, oh, that I can be, Lord. Can you be honest like Nathaniel? Sure, no problem.

Because honesty, you don't have to grow. Even a prostitute or a murderer can say, I'm a murderer, he's honest. He can come to the light.

Who's the one who cannot come to the light? The one who's pretending, who's a hypocrite. And the word hypocrite in the Greek means actor. The one who's acting.

If there's one thing, I'll tell you, my dear brothers and sisters, this is one of the greatest sins among Christians. I would say it's almost the number one sin that Christians commit. What do you think is the number one sin that Christians commit around the world? It's not murder.

You'll never find a church where the vast majority of people are murderers. You'll never find a church where the vast majority are adulterers. But you will find many churches where the vast majority are hypocrites, actors.

Churches, the world is full of, every church, CFC's got hypocrites. You think there are no actors sitting here? Of course there are. I can see through some of them, but there are many more.

You know, people who put up a front with pious language or when they come to me, they'll flatter me and say a lot of nice things about me. I'm not fooled by all that, just for your information. You know, flatterers are usually hypocrites and people who put up a front to impress.

You know, it could be the way, I think a lot of song leaders are hypocrites because they, you know, look in a certain way and move in a certain way and use a tone of voice and singing and all to impress, not to worship God, but to impress. People will say, see how good I am. What a good person I am.

I'm not saying we shouldn't sing well, but it's a motive that matters. And very often, there's a lot of hypocrisy in preachers, singers, and the more you stand in front, the more danger you are of being a hypocrite because you're trying to give an impression. But yet you can be, Jesus was the greatest preacher of all and there's no hypocrisy in him.

And when you come to church, that itself is giving people the impression that you're a holy person. And if you come to CFC, boy, you get a reputation that you're going to CFC, is it? Wow, you got, you created an impression already and it may not be true of the way you live. It may not be the true of the way you live with your wife or husband at home, but you've got this reputation.

I go to CFC and you've got to be aware of this. So it's the one who is honest who can come to the light. And if you don't come to the light, you're not gonna grow.

And that teaches me, that shows me the reason why many believers in our midst have not grown spiritually. You haven't dropped out of school, but you're in the same class year after year after year. I really believe there are a number of you sitting here who are in the same class year after year.

You haven't dropped out of school, but you're sitting in the same class. How would you like if your son hasn't dropped out of school but he's still sitting in the same class year after year and he's 25 years old

and he's still sitting there in third standard? Would you be happy about it? Do you think God's happy about it? You wouldn't be happy if your child sits in a class for even for one more year. Do you ever think of it like that? How does God see you? Are you making progress every year? That's not a big thing to ask.

You know, you don't need to get 100% to go to the next standard. Very often, all you need is 40%. 40% in every subject to get promoted.

And if you don't make progress spiritually, it means you're not even getting 40%. That's a sad thing. What is the reason? Hypocrisy.

You can't come into the light. He who is honest will come to the light. He who is evil hates the light.

Remember that. Even a man like Nathaniel, who despised the place where Jesus came from, was free from hypocrisy. Why can't you and I be? See, there are a lot of people who accuse us in CFC saying, oh, you guys think you're all perfect and good.

I say, no, no, no, no, we're not good. We're honest, that's all. We're not a bunch of good people.

We're a bunch of honest people. We acknowledge where we slipped up. We say we slipped up.

If you got angry with your wife or husband, you say, yeah, I'm sorry. I got angry with my husband, but I apologized immediately and said it right. I don't leave it like that.

We move on. We don't keep living in that rut all the time. We progressively get better and better, like we haven't, on that pulpit there, let us press on to perfection, which is the clearest testimony that we are not perfect.

We're saying we haven't reached the top of the mountain. We are climbing. It's an honest acknowledgement that we are imperfect.

But we are truthful. So we never claim that we are better than other churches or that we are good and others are bad, but I say we are a bunch of honest people. We try to be a bunch of honest people.

We want to be honest with one another. We want to be honest with God and not pretend and try to give an impression. I believe if you're honest that our fellowship can be built.

I've always said to people, if you will be just yourself and don't pretend to be spiritual, you can have wonderful fellowship with me. Just be yourself. But when you pretend to be spiritual and pretend to speak all spiritual language, our fellowship is gonna be very superficial.

As far as I'm concerned, it'll be high and by. Because I'm not interested in that. That's not fellowship.

Fellowship is if you're honest. Fellowship is in the light. We have fellowship in the light.

Outside the light is darkness. And to come into the light, you don't have to be good. You have to be 100% honest.

You're a thief, you say you're a thief. You told a lie, you say you told a lie. If you got angry and you're at fault, you say, yeah, I'm at fault.

I got angry, I got upset. But I don't want to remain like that. So that's Nathaniel.

Something wonderful we learned that the type of people whom Jesus chose. Let's look further in Luke chapter six. The next one we read about in Luke 6.15 is Matthew.

Now Matthew is a tax collector. Now tax collectors were the biggest crooks in Jesus' time. In fact, whenever they wanted to speak about a sinner, they'd call him a tax collector.

The worst possible sin, you know when Jesus compared a self-righteous man with a sinner, he said a pharisee and a tax collector. When Jesus went to the home of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, people said, how does he go to the home of a sinner? They didn't say tax collector. The tax collectors were sinners because they were cheating people.

They were robbing people. In fact, it was known that they would always collect more tax than was due and they would pocket the rest themselves. They would say, the Roman government said, this is the new law.

Those poor guys don't know the law and they swipe the poor people's money. It's something like, I mean, the closest I can compare today is preachers. Preachers who preach on, television preachers.

Today, the equivalent of tax collectors is television preachers who swindle people of their money. So it's something like that. You know, fool people and tell them that God will bless you and he'll do wonderful things for you if you give me money.

I mean, the tax collectors were more straightforward. They said, the Roman government wants this. But Matthew was like that.

Imagine the amount of money he had collected crookedly through the years. Anybody here like that? Who has cheated a lot of people through the years because you're a businessman or any other way you cheated people. You know, you can be an apostle.

Believe that? That you who cheated people and swindled people for so many years can even be an apostle if you repent and honestly come to the Lord. Jesus looked at Matthew and said, follow me. And I think there was something in Matthew.

Leave alone going to Zacchaeus' house who's a tax collector. Imagine calling a tax collector to be an apostle. That's even more surprising.

And Jesus saw something. Jesus had an amazing ability to see into people. It's a gift God gives.

I believe that those who are in spiritual leadership, we don't have the same degree of insight that Jesus has, but God gives us light to see through people. And Jesus could look into Matthew's heart and see that yeah, outwardly he looks like a crook, but I can see into his heart there's a desire to be free from this and to be an honest person. And so while he was sitting at his collecting taxes, cheating people, Jesus said, come, follow me.

And he got up immediately. What does it prove? He says it, we're saying, Lord, thank you. I'm sick and tired of this cheating people.

Thank you for calling me. I want to follow you. And I'm sure he did more than or as much as what Zacchaeus did.

I'm sure he gave back four times all that he stole. It's not written, but I believe it. And Matthew wrote that gospel.

So naturally he won't write that about himself, but I gave back all that, but I'm sure he did. And he wrote that wonderful gospel, 28 chapters, the longest of all the gospels. Yeah, so I see there that there's a type of person whom Jesus chose and made into an apostle and put it down as the first gospel in the New Testament.

And yet the guy was a crook, an absolute crook who was cheating people. So there's hope for such people. That's what I'm trying to say.

The type of people whom Jesus chose to be his disciples. And the other is Thomas in Matthew 6, Luke 6, 15. Thomas, you know this.

You know the story of Thomas. He was the reasoned guy. He says, I won't believe you fellas.

Until I see, I will not believe. That's what Thomas said when you read in John 21, John 20 rather, when Jesus came to see his disciples after the resurrection, we read, he appeared before them after his resurrection. And the doors were shut, John 20, verse 19.

Jesus came and stood with them. But, 24, John 20, 24, Thomas was not there that day. And the other disciples came to Thomas and said, in verse 25, we have seen the Lord.

And Thomas said, I don't believe you guys, whatever you may say. Now, there's nothing wrong in that. If God tells you something and you say, I don't believe it, that's serious.

But if another brother tells you something and you say, I don't believe it, there's nothing wrong in it. I don't say that Thomas was evil, because why should I believe what somebody else says? He may have, today, for example, I've heard people come and say, I saw a vision of Jesus. I say, I don't believe you.

I tell them straight away. Or somebody says, I saw one angel. Somebody else says, I saw two angels.

I say, do you know that the devil comes as an angel of light? Tell me you saw two demons. I don't believe. A lot of things that people say today, I don't believe.

There's some people who say, I went to heaven and stayed there for a few days and came back. I say, I don't believe that. I've heard people say, respected people say, I went to heaven and I spoke to Moses and David and Paul.

I say, I don't believe you. Have you heard? These are respected preachers who say they went to heaven and spoke to different saints of the past. I say, you can believe them if you want.

I say, I don't believe you. I'm like Thomas. Thomas is the one who came to India, by the way.

So he's produced a few people like himself here in India, who want to be absolutely sure, who don't want to question, who want to question everything. I've been saved from so much of deception, just because I question everything. So in one sense, it's a good quality to question everything.

Don't just swallow everything you see and hear. Do you know how many testimonies I've heard about people being raised from the dead? Some healer went somewhere and somewhere else. I'm like Thomas.

I say, I don't believe. I have to see it. And then also I have to see that the guy didn't just go into a coma.

And do you know the number of deceivers who go around preaching about, I believe God can raise the dead, sure. But when somebody says that, I say, I want to believe it's true. I'll give you one example.

In 1969 or around that time, they claimed that there was a great revival in Indonesia. And some of it was true. But there were fantastic stories of water being turned into wine and the stories that many people were raised from the dead.

In 1973, I went to Indonesia and I wanted to find out a little bit about this. And I discovered one thing, that in that language, there was, in the villages the way people used it, if a person was in a coma, it was the same word for being dead. So supposing you hear that somebody was in a coma and he got up after a couple of days, is that a great miracle? I mean, that's happening all the time in hospitals.

But you translate that into English, somebody was raised from the dead after two days. That's how people were deceived. So when you investigate some of these things, I always investigate, and I discovered it was not true.

I'm not saying, I'm sure God has raised people from the dead, but a lot of reports that I hear, I don't believe all of them. So there's something good about that. And one would think that someone who's always questioning, is that right, is that wrong? How do you say that's right? You can tend to despise such a person, but Jesus doesn't.

In fact, that person is more likely finally to come to the truth than the person who blindly swallows everything he hears. So if you're one of those type of people who question, how can you say that? I mean, I don't believe that, is it really true? Don't feel that Jesus will reject you. No.

Because when finally, Thomas, Jesus appeared to Thomas, the very fact that Jesus didn't, ah, if you don't believe these disciples, forget about you, Thomas, you can go and hang yourself. Jesus didn't say that. He made a special appearance just for the sake of Thomas.

Isn't that great? Eight days later, when Thomas was there, Jesus came, and he said specifically to Thomas now, verse 27, okay, you're the one who doubts me. Put your finger and see my hands, and put it in to my side, see, see the nail prints. And Thomas said something, listen to this, which no other disciple ever said in the Gospels.

My Lord, and my God. I don't see a single disciple expressing to Jesus, you are my God. That's a wonderful confession.

People who doubt the deity of Christ. Thomas is the one who said, my Lord, and my God, and fell down before him, and Jesus never said, no, no, no, no, no, don't call me that. He accepted it.

You know, there are people who doubt the deity of Christ. If he was a created being, if he was an angel, would he ever accept someone calling him God? He said, my Lord, and my God. So I see something wonderful.

And that came because he's known even today as Doubting Thomas. Imagine being known for 20 centuries as a doubter, but the Lord loved him. So these are the type of people whom Jesus chose.

And then let's move on to Luke chapter six. You read about another person whom Jesus chose, and that is James, the son of Alphaeus. Now this is not the other James, the brother of John who was more famous.

Here was a person about whom nothing is written. I don't read a single thing about him. Somewhat like Andrew, a little bit is written about Andrew that he at least found someone, but nothing is written about James, the son of Alphaeus.

I don't know what he did. And that also teaches us something. Supposing you're one of those brothers in CFC, your name is never mentioned anywhere.

You're doing a lot of work in secret. There are brothers like that in the church, by the way, who go and, I know people who've gone and cleaned the toilets in secret, and nobody knew about it. Yeah, that used to happen in the old building till I discovered many months later that, oh, this brother was going and doing that every morning before this service started, and he would disappear before anybody came there.

And there are people doing here things in this building whom nobody knows about. There's nothing written about it. But I think James, the son of Alphaeus, represents such people to me, wonderful brothers.

There's no report written about anything that they did. They're quite happy. They're not disturbed that my name was not mentioned.

Hey, listen, I cleaned that toilet number four there. Don't forget. No, they're not bothered about that.

Did you do, are you one of those like that who did something for the Lord, and you're disturbed till today that nobody mentioned your name? Think of James, the son of Alphaeus. I wish we had many, many more James, the sons of daughters of Alphaeus here who are quite willing to be unknown, not a single sentence written about them anywhere. But one day when the Lord comes, it'll be revealed fully what they did, because they know God no honor here.

These are the type of people whom Jesus chose, and I praise God for such people. And then we read about Simon the Zealot. Now, zealots were, today we would call them Naxalites, people who are radical terrorists.

Simon the terrorist, that's a more accurate. There was a group of people in Israel. Israel was under the domination of Rome.

Rome ruled the world, that part of the world in those days. And they, Roman soldiers, treated people very cruelly. And there were these so-called Naxalite type of terrorists, a group called zealots, who were against Rome.

And Simon was part of that party. Would you select a terrorist to be a disciple? Supposing some terrorist came here, say, I want to be a part of CFC. I think we'd keep him under suspension for a long time before we baptize him.

Jesus prayed all night and selected a terrorist. At least a person from, not a terrorist, but it's from that party. That means even terrorists can be converted.

That's what we see here, not only be converted, but become apostles. So whatever your background, you see such a wide difference of background among these apostles, that's what I'm trying to say. And Jesus

chose such people because he saw something in them which is good.

So remember this, my brothers and sisters, that God, if God sees something in you, a spark, the Bible says he will not break the bruised reed. I mean, a reed that's almost about to break, he won't break it, he'll repair it. And the candle that's dying out, in modern language, the smoking flax, he will not quench.

The candle that's dying out, he won't say, ah, forget it, there's nothing much left there. He'll blow it up and make that burn some more. That's how Jesus is, you know? And if he sees some little good in you, even if you are a terrorist, there's hope for you.

It's a wonderful thing. And the other thing I see here is that, you know, do you know who the Zealots were against? They were against the tax collectors because those are the representatives of Rome. And I think if Simon the Zealot had met Matthew in any other place, it would have been dangerous.

But in the presence of Jesus, he brought this tax collector who represented the Roman government, and Simon the Zealot was determined to destroy the followers of the Romans, who they called, you're traitors to Israel. You guys working for the Roman government. He brought them together and made them work together.

Has God brought you with somebody in the church into fellowship with somebody who is the exact opposite of you? Wonderful, that's the person you need fellowship with. The exact opposite of you. Don't say, I like to meet people who are always like me.

I'm sort of a feminine, shy type of guy. I like to meet with a feminine, shy type of, no, no, no. You need to meet with a terrorist.

Let's try some, have some fellowship with him. It will balance you out. You know, people who are the exact opposite of you.

That's how God brings people together in marriage. You are opposites. Then we see of another person who is completely unknown.

Judas, the son of James. He's like James, the son of Alphaeus. Not a word written about him, as far as I know in all of scripture.

Another guy, not a word written about him. A second brother about whom nothing is written. What a wonderful thing to be like that.

That Jesus chose people who are quite happy that nothing would be written about them in all of the scriptures. Imagine you've been here in CFC 25 years and no one mentioned your name even once. Wow, what a reward you'll have when Christ comes again.

25 years and nobody even mentioned your name once? And yet you did so many things behind the scenes. You offered money in the box. You did so many things and nobody mentioned your name.

You're a blessed person indeed. And then the last one, Judas Iscariot. Isn't it interesting that Jesus chose even him? And the very interesting thing you read about in Judas Iscariot in verse 16 is he became a traitor.

Now if somebody says so-and-so became a leper, does it mean he was always a leper? On the contrary, he was not a leper. He became a traitor. It means he was not a traitor when Jesus chose him.

Jesus did not choose a person saying, hey, scripture says somebody's got to betray me, so I've got to select somebody who'll betray me. I can't even imagine Jesus doing something like that. Never.

He didn't select a man just to send him to hell? Because finally Jesus said about him, it's better for you, you were not even born. That's what he said about Judas Iscariot. But what I want you to see there is Judas Iscariot was a very God-fearing person when he was chosen.

I personally believe he was the one chosen to write the epistles which Paul finally wrote. Because I think he was the cleverest of all the, I mean, if there was one person who was a postgraduate, it must have been Judas Iscariot. He was such a smart guy.

And I'll tell you why he was such a smart guy. If you can live with 3 1/2 years with somebody and you're an absolute crook and they don't discover that you're a crook, you've got to be pretty smart. Don't you think so? Supposing some of your sisters live together and one of you is a real crook and you live 3 1/2 years together with that sister and nobody discovers you're a crook, you've got to be smart.

A few brothers staying together and you're a crook, cheating, stealing, robbing their money, and 3 1/2 years they never think you're the, they always think somebody else robbed my money. But you're the one. You've got to be really smart.

That's what Judas Iscariot was because when Jesus said, one of you will betray me, they didn't all look at Judas Iscariot. Yeah, he's the one. No, not at all.

Even when Jesus said, here, I'm dipping this bread and giving it to Judas. He's the one, go and do what you want to do. They thought he's going to buy something from the market.

Boy, he was really a polished crook. He was a very clever person and he could have written the letters that Paul wrote but he missed the bus. He missed it completely.

And that's a warning to us finally. You can miss what God has for you because you're so smart with your hypocrisy that you fooled even Brother Zach for so many years in CFC. Whatever you accomplished by fooling me, you sat here for 20 years and you fooled me that you were spiritual.

I often think of these checkpoints, where you come and they lift up these military places where there's a checkpoint. Okay, I lift the bar and say, okay, your truck can go but there's another checkpoint further up where Jesus is sitting. You'll never go past that.

He'll send you back. So don't glory in the fact that Brother Zach or one of the elders have good opinion about you. It means absolutely nothing.

You can still become a traitor. We've seen people who are in CFC who are wholehearted, who became traitors, who became against CFC, fought against, left. They didn't just quietly leave and there are some people who quietly leave and go and join some other church, fine.

Now these are people who leave and then turn against. They bite the hand that fed them for many years. Have you heard that expression, biting the hand that fed you for so many years? There are people who do that.

Judas was like that. I hope none of you will ever become like that. If you want to leave CFC, just quietly leave and go somewhere else, do what you like.

But if you fight against God's people, I'll tell you, it's better for you that you are not born. Don't fight against God's people. If you want to leave, you don't agree with something, just quietly leave and go and do something else, go and join whatever church you like.

But don't fight against God's people because it'll go very badly with you and that's what we see in the case of Judas Iscariot. It's a very dangerous thing. And very often, I want to say this also, parents have got a lot to do.

But it's these young people very often who grow up and become rebellious. Parents have got a lot to do and parents have got a lot to do with this. Why is it that our young people who've grown up from childhood in CFC, not only CFC Bangalore, but CFC and many other churches, and have turned out to be such excellent godly men in their own churches, some of them in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, are elders in churches who grew up in CFC and who've grown up in Bangalore.

Wonderful examples. I can think of a number of them right now in my mind and I think, I know. I know their parents and I know, you don't know all of them, I know them.

I know their parents and I can see that parents have really brought them up in a godly way. Then I think of some other young people who've grown up, educated, clever, got good jobs, a lot of money, and turned against CFC. I blame the parents.

I'll tell you why. Very often the mother. They sat at home when the children were small and criticized CFC.

Oh, this thing is wrong with that elder and this thing is wrong with that person and this thing is wrong with that. Children grew up hearing this, hearing this, hearing this, hearing this. And the second thing is, they see a strong wife who is correcting her husband and rebelling against her husband at home.

If you're a wife who's always criticizing your husband, I can almost prophesy that your children will turn out rebellious. Because it's an infection. It's like getting the chicken pox.

Somebody in the house got it, so you got it. Somebody had tuberculosis in the house and kept breathing on you, you got the tuberculosis. And so, whenever I find a rebellious child, I ask the mother, where do you think this boy got it from? Is it from the attitude you had towards your husband? He got the infection of this rebellious, questioning, bossy attitude.

You know, there are some wives I know, there are some wives I know, even in CFC churches, who are the boss at home. God has not called them to be the head, but they are the head of the home. They despise their husbands because maybe they think their husbands are not as smart as I am.

And boy, you know who I feel sorry for? Maybe those wives will one day go to hell, I don't know. But those children, the sad thing is they'll drag their children into hell with them in that spirit of rebellion. I'm pretty sure that Judas Iscariot didn't have a good mother.

I don't know anything about her mother, but very often, because a mother spends a lot more time with the children than the father does. The father is also important. If you have a father who's a very strict father, then he can still do good.

But very often, it's the parents who end up producing a child like this, like a Judas Iscariot. Train up a child in the way he should go. When he's old, what does it say? He will not depart from it.

If it's the right way, he'll go that way. If it's the wrong way, he will not depart from the wrong way. That verse works both ways.

Whichever way you train up the child, when he's old, he will not depart from it. So ask yourself. I'm not talking about people who just left CFC.

I'm talking about people who are rebel against the church and who hate the church and who want to have nothing to do with the church. So why does that happen? I'm not asking you to condemn yourself. For everything, there's a solution.

Repentance, acknowledging your fault, saying, Lord, the fault is mine. Forgive me. There's forgiveness with God.

See, the Apostle Paul says this in 1 Timothy chapter one, verse 13, 1 Timothy 1.13. I was a blasphemer, I was a persecutor, I was a violent aggressor. And I think Message Bible or something says, I went on a witch hunt against Christians. You know, I don't know whether you know the English expression, witch hunt.

That means chasing after some people to try and really pin them down and destroy them. I was on a witch hunt against Christians. A violent aggressor.

Anybody here who's been a violent aggressor? You know a violent aggressor became the greatest apostle in the history of Christianity? Is that possible? That's what happened to Paul. Blasphemer. Anybody here who's been a blasphemer? Blaspheming the name of Jesus Christ.

A blasphemer became the greatest apostle. So there's hope for people who have lived in tremendous sin. One last thing.

Turn with me to the book of Leviticus. I don't know how many of you read Leviticus. There's some wonderful truths in Leviticus.

If you read the Through the Bible commentary, you'll see some wonderful truths in Leviticus. And here's one of them. In Leviticus 13, there is the test for leprosy.

And you know that leprosy is a picture of sin. And that's why you have two chapters, chapter 13 and 14 on leprosy in Leviticus. So even if you don't have time to read the other chapters, read these two.

It's very interesting. In the test for leprosy, verse nine, Leviticus 13, nine, when the infection of leprosy is in a man, he's brought to the priest, and the priest will look at him, and there's a white swelling in the skin. And it has turned the hair white.

There's raw flesh in the swelling. It is a chronic leprosy on the skin. And you must not just shut him up in the house.

He's unclean. That means he's to be put outside the city completely. Lepers were not allowed.

You don't shut him up inside the house in a room. He must be put outside the city. And if the leprosy bursts, breaks out further, and the leprosy covers all of the skin, who has the infection from head to foot, and the priest can see, and the priest looks, and it has covered his whole body.

What should he be then? He should be called the worst leper of all. No, you pronounce him clean. He's perfectly okay.

How's that? It's a message for the new covenant. If you say, Lord, there's nothing good in me. Rotten from top to bottom, there's hope for you.

You're clean. You can be cleansed. But if you say, not everything, there are a few good things in me, then you're a leper.

Please study Leviticus chapter 13. Because it says in verse 14, some little raw flesh appeared after a while. Then call him unclean again.

That means he came originally to the church saying, I'm good for nothing. I'm a useless sinner. But after a while, he felt, no, I'm not so bad.

I'm pretty good. He's a leper again. It's a very instructive passage, Leviticus 13.

Who said Leviticus is not a useful book? It's very relevant because that's what happens to some people who come to the church. And now Paul said towards the end of his life, in Romans 7, 18, there's nothing good in my flesh. And that's why he became such a godly man.

He didn't despise others saying, you've got more leprosy than me. I often say to the Lord, Lord, I've got the same flesh as the worst suicide bomber and the worst terrorist in the world. I say that to the Lord.

Because didn't they come from Adam? Did I come from some other tribe? No. They didn't have the, maybe they were brought up bad, unlike me, or they didn't have the opportunities I had. That's why they turned out like that and I turned out like this.

But I don't think I'm better than them. I believe from head to foot there is, it's leprosy through and through. Then the Lord says you're clean.

It's wonderful, it's an amazing truth. And that's the reason why some people never seem to come to the spiritual growth that they can come to. So I hope that as we studied what type of people Jesus chose, he never left them like that.

He transformed them completely. Matthew was not a crooked person anymore. Simon was not a terrorist anymore.

And James and John were not calling down fire on people. John became the apostle of love. See how they were all completely transformed.

What I'm trying to say is the type of people they were when Jesus chose them, you can be like that and God can transform you. So I hope there's a message of hope for you that nobody goes away discouraged. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I pray that you will give us all tremendous encouragement and hope. For us and for our children, they'll wholeheartedly follow you and have a glorious entrance into your kingdom. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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