

The God Centered Can Build the Church

by Zac Poonen

To build a true church, we must see Christ in our hearts and take up the cross in our daily lives, seeking God's interests above our own.

Duration: 1:08:42

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Corinthians 4:10-12, Galatians 1:16, Ephesians 4:16

Topics: "Church Growth", "Sanctification"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of moving from a self-centered life to a God-centered life within the church. It highlights the need to die to self daily, allowing the life of Jesus to be manifested in our actions and interactions. The goal is to be part of the inner core of the church, willing to pay the price to align with God's interests and fulfill our individual roles in building the body of Christ.

Transcript

I want to show you something in Matthew chapter 16. Here, this is the first time Jesus used the word church. So we think of ourselves as a new covenant church.

We believe that we have understood what it means to be a church, not just a group of people meeting on Sundays. In Matthew 16 verse 18, he said to Peter, upon this rock, I'll build my church. And what was that rock? What Peter had just confessed in verse 16, you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

That was the rock. Peter had just said, others are saying that you're verse 14, Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, but we know you're the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus said, you're blessed because you've seen this truth.

My father's revealed to you. And that's the rock on which I'm going to build my church. Now we understand the rock is Jesus Christ, but more than that, think of this word reveal in verse 17.

My father has revealed this to you. Paul also said in Galatians one, that it pleased God to reveal his son to me. It's very important that we have built our life, not just on Jesus Christ we've heard about, but on Jesus Christ has been revealed to our heart by the Holy Spirit.

And there's a lot of difference in that. Turn with me to Galatians. I'll come back to Matthew 16, Galatians chapter one.

Paul saw Jesus on the road to Damascus, the one he had fought against. And he realized that he was wrong. But more than that, he says in Galatians 1, 16, it pleased God to reveal his son in me, in his spirit, in his heart.

He saw Jesus. That was more than seeing him outside. And that is how Peter also saw.

Blessed are you, Simon, Matthew 16, 17, my flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. In other words, you did not come to this understanding by any human argument or by someone convincing you in your mind that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. If you ask yourself, it's a very important question.

How do you know Jesus today? Is it because your parents told you? Many of us, that is it. Our parents told us about Jesus Christ. And so we are Christians.

They may not have come as a revelation in my heart who Jesus really is. Whereas Paul speaks about a revelation in his heart. He saw Jesus in his heart and that changed his whole life.

The same way with Peter. The father revealed Christ in his heart to him. And that's why these apostles were so dedicated.

And you find so many Christians today are not. I mean, I find even in CFC churches, a lot of Christians are not really dedicated and committed because they haven't seen Christ in their heart. They've seen a Christ who they intellectually understand, yeah, old covenant, new covenant.

We know about victory over sin. It's all doctrines. And we can weigh the doctrines and say, yeah, this is better and this is better than this.

And so this church is better than this. So we finally end up at NCCL. What does it mean? I mean, if you founded a better church than others, it doesn't mean Christ has been revealed in your heart.

You can see that in the fact that a lot of people don't grow spiritually, even though they stick in the same church, they're loyal. They don't seem to grow when Christ is revealed in our heart. One proof of it is we become increasingly like Christ year by year.

And we see more and more of our unlikeness to Christ and judge ourselves and cleanse ourselves. And it's very, very easy to esteem and value others. But it's so easy for us to deceive ourselves in this area.

And to come into a delusion that I'm spiritual, and I'm not really spiritual. It's scary, I'll tell you. Imagine one day if you stand before the Lord when Jesus comes again.

And the Lord shows you all you understood in NCCL was just a doctrine. You agreed with the doctrine and you felt the doctrines are better than some of the doctrines of the other churches. And some of the people here were better than people in the other churches.

And that's why we joined this church. And you never saw Christ in your heart. You never saw what Jesus really was.

You never saw how Jesus really lived. And that's why in your private life, your life is not governed by the same principles that govern Jesus' life. That's what it means to see Jesus revealed in our heart.

It's a wonderful thing when the Holy Spirit's revealed to us Jesus in our heart, where we have seen Him, the principles by which He lived, and why He lived like that, and what made Him live like that, what made Him make the choices He made in His life. Then Christ has been revealed in my heart and I'll see that that's the choice I want to make in my life too. I don't know whether all of you believe that the most wonderful life that has ever lived on this earth was the one Jesus lived.

And that's the way you want to live. It's not the way you want to bring up your children. It's the way you want your children to live.

It's very easy for us to not see that clearly. So on this rock of Christ revealed in my heart, I will build my church. And I believe that it's only those who have seen Christ revealed in their heart who really come together and form the church.

And I've seen in every CFC church, there's a church within the church. The external church is what other people see. Everybody who comes to the meeting and sits there and they agree with the doctrine.

They're not rebellious against the elders. They sing the songs and they look like wonderful brothers. But it's not the principles that Jesus lived by that governs their daily life.

They conform to the outward form. But in the middle of this group called a church or CFC or NCCF, there are some who like Peter and Paul have seen Jesus in their heart. And I've seen how he lived and why he lived like that and are gripped by that.

And it doesn't matter one bit what other people think about them. In their daily life, they are seeking to live by those principles every single day from morning to night. And that's not a strain.

The life of Jesus was not a strain. It was the most relaxed, restful life that any human being ever lived. Life is a strain for those are hypocrites.

Because I always got to put up a front when I'm with other believers who are part of the church. I have to show that I'm also spiritual. That's a tremendous strain to live like that.

I mean, it's like a dog. You train a dog to always say, meow, meow, meow, behave like a cat. It's a tremendous strain.

I sometimes really feel some Christians I meet are like that. They are trying to conform and say the right words. They remind me of a dog being taught to say, meow, meow, meow.

And it's a strain. And sometime when they're off their guard, they begin to bark, just like anybody else, because they're dogs. That's not Christianity.

That's hypocrisy. And that's what made the Pharisees the biggest enemies of Jesus Christ. And I don't think anybody here will think you're an enemy of Jesus Christ if I've asked you to say, no, certainly not.

But do you know that if there's hypocrisy in your life, you belong to the group of people who are the biggest enemies of Jesus Christ on earth. Hypocrisy, you know, where you are pretending to be something you really are not in your daily life, pretending to live by certain principles, which you're not really living by in the choices you make in your daily life. That's hypocrisy.

And it's a strain. It's exactly like a dog trying to say, meow, meow, meow. And you may have a good reputation before others as a member of this church, but Jesus sees you very differently, very differently because of unreality.

It's the thing that he condemned more than anything else. In fact, just before he spoke about this church, see what he said in verse six. Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

And they understood verse 12 that he was not telling to bear a leaven of bread, verse 12, but the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees who were always emphasizing the outward form, the outward form. And in the midst of this, there were people like Peter who saw Jesus in their heart, not because they were clever, not because, I mean, if you had gone to Peter and asked him to explain his doctrinal statement, he was not a clever guy. Some of us can explain these doctrines better than he could, but he had seen Jesus.

And you can see the difference when you fellowship with someone who has seen Jesus. They are gripped by that. And others who are just in agreement with the doctrine and who come along because they want to be accepted or have a good testimony before men.

And if you have seen Jesus on that rock, Jesus will build that church and that church will never shake. All the powers of spiritual darkness will not be able to shake that church, will not be able to shake such a life, not in time or in eternity. And you get two people like that, husband and wife, who are built on that rock, that will be a home that will never shake, time or eternity.

And that's the type of home in which we want to bring up our children. Home is gripped by the values of Jesus. Powers of darkness will never prevail against such a church.

And this is the first time he spoke about the church. And it's also the first time that Jesus began to speak about the cross. It says, from that time, verse 21, Jesus began to show the disciples how he must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed and raised.

It's significant that the very first time he spoke about the church, he also spoke about the cross. And not only the cross he was going to, it's the first time he began to speak to his disciples also and saying, if you want to come after me, verse 24, you've got to take up your cross and follow me. So notice there the close relationship between Jesus speaking about the church for the very first time and speaking about taking up the cross.

There's a close connection between the two. And as I see it, you cannot build a true church except with people who have really understood what it means to take up the cross in their daily life. Every single day from morning to night, they are gripped by the message of the cross, of the daily cross in their life.

And that can happen only if we see that that's how Jesus lived. To have the revelation of Jesus Christ means to see that he lived by this principle. He lived every day taking up the cross.

And we are gripped by that and say, Lord, that's the way I want to live because that's the best life that anybody ever lived on this earth. It wasn't just a form, it was reality deep within. So this is not a small thing.

Because when Jesus spoke about the cross, you know, humanly speaking, we don't like the cross. It's not something that is attractive to the flesh. What is attractive to the flesh is a gospel that tells you, you can be healthy and wealthy.

Period. Everybody likes that. I mean, every non-Christian will like that.

Everybody in the world will receive Christ if that were the gospel. Surely, if that were the gospel, every single human being in the world would accept Christ. Because every single human being in the world wants health and wealth.

I've never met a beggar or a rich man who doesn't want health and wealth. Why is it the world rejects Christ? Because that's not the message Christ brought. And yet so many are preaching it as if that was the message Christ has brought.

To me, that is the clearest proof that the health and wealth gospel is a fake. Because if it were true, the whole world should accept it because everybody wants health and wealth. But what is the message Jesus brought? That you have to die to yourself every day and take up your cross every day.

That's what nobody wants. That's what proves to me that that's the real gospel. And that's why they killed him.

So, when Peter heard this in verse 22, that Jesus is going to suffer, he said, no, that's never going to happen. That was the natural reaction of the Adamic nature. That's not going to happen to you.

It's not going to happen to me. We're going to be prosperous and healthy, not this business of, you know, verse 21, suffering many things and being rejected and killed and all that. No, no, no.

The reaction of Peter is the reaction of every child of Adam to the message of the cross. I don't want this. And now listen to what Jesus said to Peter.

As far as we know in the gospels, there are only twice that Jesus used the word, get behind me, Satan. One was when Satan came to Jesus and told him, worship me and I'll give you everything in the world. And Matthew four, and Jesus said, get behind me, Satan.

And the other time was when Peter came and basically said the same thing. In other words, don't go to the cross. And Jesus said, get behind me, Satan.

So do you see a link between these two? I think there is. I see it like this, that if I don't take up the cross, the only other alternative is to worship Satan. I don't know whether you see it as seriously as that, but it is.

I want to say to every one of you in any area in your life where you don't take up the cross, whether you know it or not, you're worshipping Satan. And Jesus is saying, get behind me, Satan. Because he told him the reason in the last part of verse 23, you are not setting your mind on God's interests.

You're setting your mind on man's interests, verse 23. To worship Satan is to set your mind on man's interests, not God's interests. That's what made Eve eat of that tree which God had forbidden.

God's interest was, don't touch it. Man's interest was, eat it. It doesn't matter, God has forbidden it.

And the Lord told Peter the same thing. You are setting your mind on man's interests, not God's interests. And if you're like that, verse 23 in the middle says, you're a stumbling block to me.

Jesus is very strong. He was not mild in the way he rebuked. It's interesting that even though it says in John 6, the last verse, that Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot, he said, one of you is a devil.

And he was referring to Judas Iscariot. But he never looked at Judas Iscariot and called him Satan. You know what he called him in the Garden of Gethsemane? Do you remember? Friend.

He called Judas Iscariot friend. And he called Peter Satan. Those whom I love, I rebuke.

If you have never heard the Lord rebuke you, I doubt whether you've ever heard him in your life. If you only heard the Lord speak words of comfort and encouragement and all the time, it's not the Lord. It's just your own self trying to encourage yourself.

Jesus said in Revelation 3.19, as many as I love, I rebuke and I discipline. That's what he did to Peter. Get behind me, Satan.

He was his closest co-worker. This is the man who was going to be the leader of the apostles on the day of Pentecost. And he had to be cleansed from all seeking of his own interest if he was going to be the leader of the church.

And he had to get the strongest rebuke. And if God has got great purposes for you, he'll really rebuke you strongly. If he doesn't have great purposes for you, he'll just leave you on the side because he sees you're not really interested.

Jesus knew that Peter was passionate. He loved him. He was willing to do anything.

When he said, I will never deny you, he meant it. He didn't know how weak he was, but his heart was right. He wasn't aware of his own weakness, but he was absolutely devoted to the Lord.

And Jesus knew that. He needed to be, his self-confidence needed to be shattered a bit and broken. That's why God allowed him to deny him three times.

But his heart was right. Now, some of us, we may never deny the Lord like that, but our heart may not be devoted like Peter's. Your mind is set on man's interests.

Verse 23. What is the mark of a man who does not pick up the cross? His mind is set on man's interests, not God's interests. And such a man, he can sit in any church, but he'll never build a church.

That's for sure. He'll be a passenger. And I find lots of people in many of our churches are passengers.

They sit there. They don't want to go to any other church. It's the best church.

It's got the best doctrine. It's got good preaching, and it's got good brothers and sisters who care for one another. And it seems to be closest to the Bible, but they're not really delivered from seeking their own interests.

And we wonder, is it possible? Is it possible to live on this earth seeking God's interests? Don't I need to seek my own as well? No. If you seek God's kingdom first, every single thing that you need in your life will be added to you. You may not accomplish all that you want to.

You may not make as much money as you want to, but you'll fulfill God's will on earth. And when you stand before the Lord in the final day, you'll have no regret that you live the best possible life any human being could ever live. That's the way I want to live.

He'll never let you starve. That I can guarantee. He'll never make you a homeless person.

Your children will not be homeless. Your grandchildren will not be homeless. Isn't that enough? And at the end of it all, to stand before the Lord and really having accomplished what God sent you onto this earth for.

Those are the people who are passionate about, Lord, I want to see if I'm fulfilling your interests in my life. The man, let me repeat this, the man who does not take up the cross is the one whose mind is basically on his own interests. Occasionally he thinks about God's interests, but he doesn't feel it's a life where I must always see God's interests.

It's not possible. That's how Jesus lived, but I can't live like that. That means they have not seen in their heart that the way Jesus lived was the best way that any human being could ever live.

And remember this, Jesus was not a full-time worker all his life. He was a full-time worker only for 10% of his life, three and a half years. He was an ordinary secular worker like all of you are for 90% of his life.

He was a carpenter who earned his own living. He had four brothers and two sisters he had to provide for his family. But I'm fully convinced that while he was a carpenter, while he was working in a secular job all those years, his mind was set on God's interests.

He would never do anything that would violate God's principles and he was always thinking, how can God be glorified in my life? Not how can I make the most money or how can I advance the most, no. How can God be glorified? I'll do my work faithfully, but my aim will be to glorify God, not to advance myself. And you can train your children to advance themselves in the world.

I guarantee you'll regret one day. You will weep in sorrow over the way your children have become because you have promoted them, promoted them to become great in the world. But if you teach them to see God's interests first, God will take care of them in their earthly needs, but you won't have any regret at the end of your life.

I can only tell you I'm not, I'm not going to tell you, I'm not going to I preach this in many, many places and I find that about 10% of people listen to it. Not 10% of Christians, 10% of people in CFC churches take it seriously. So, I don't believe all of you will take it seriously.

I'm telling you the truth. Percentage-wise, what I've seen in other places, if you happen to be one of those who really say, Lord, this is the way I want to live, it'll go really well with you. For example, supposing I tell you that from today onwards, you must never gossip for the rest of your life.

Would you accept it? Never speak against another person for the rest of your life. You say, how can I do that? I have to sometimes. Okay, look back over your past life.

Is today the first time you're ever hearing about gossiping and backbiting? No, you've heard it hundreds of times. But look back on your past life since the first time you heard it in the last 10-15 years. Has it stopped you from doing it? No.

How is it it has not stopped you from doing it? You still keep on doing it. You don't keep a guard over your mouth. You don't check yourself.

It shows that most of the things we hear, we don't take seriously. The life of Jesus has not gripped us. We haven't got an inner revelation in our heart that this is how Jesus lived.

So, that's something that I see here, the revealed Christ and seeing that there was a Jesus lived on earth, never seeking his own interests, always seeking God's interest when he was a carpenter, or when he was at home, or anytime, or when he was serving the Father full time in those three and a half years, always, always seeking God's interests. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul says to Timothy, one of the dangers of the last days, 2 Timothy 3 verse 1, in the last days, difficult times will come. The Living Bible paraphrases that as, it'll be difficult to be a Christian in the last days.

And we immediately think of persecution or opposition. And that's why it's going to be difficult to be a Christian. That's not what he's talking about.

I mean, there's always been persecution, not just in the last days. Paul was living in a time of this tremendous persecution. Why doesn't he say, right now, it's difficult to be a Christian? Why does he say in the last days, it's going to be difficult to be a Christian? Because if you think of the whole world, there's not as much persecution in the world of Christians today, as there was in the first century, where the entire Roman world for 300 years, when Paul was living, they were persecuting Christians left, right and center.

These are the days when they had to hide in the jungles and in the caves and all that. They couldn't meet so easily. And yet he says, in the last days, it'll be difficult to be a Christian.

So it's not persecution he's talking about at all. See what he says. Why will it be difficult to be a Christian? Because in the last days, verse five, people will hold to a form of godliness.

And if you believe that here in this church, we have the purest doctrine, compared to all other churches, I believe it. That's not arrogance. It's not pride.

It's just fact that I don't know of many churches that preach the new covenant and that preach victory over sin and the preach about building the body of Christ. If you know such churches, let me know. I'd like to meet church people preach consistently about overcoming sin, about taking up the cross, and about the new covenant and about building the body of Christ and following Jesus literally.

I hardly find and I've covered most churches and I find it's not there. So truth wise, we probably have more than others. But it says here they can have a hold to a form of godliness but not have the inner power.

And I believe that is the greatest danger we face. I don't think we are in danger of worldliness. We are in danger of hypocrisy, of claiming to have a very high standard, but not living by that standard in our daily life.

And in that sense, a lot of people in other churches may not be such hypocrites. They may be worldly, much more worldly than we are, but they may not be hypocrites because they're not pretending to be holy. See a hypocrite is a person who's pretending to be holy.

But you know in a lot of churches people just don't pretend to be holy. They say we're sinners, we're defeated, we're born again, but we sin. They're not hypocrites, they're worldly.

But here it speaks about those who hold to a form of godliness but have denied the power of godliness. That's why it's going to be difficult to be a Christian in the last days because men will have this form, I think the form of godliness means the sheep's clothing, the right doctrine, the absolutely accurate doctrine of godliness. That's the form of godliness, the correct proportion of everything.

The form, the correct form is like an architect's drawing of a building, exactly right, beautiful in every way. You know how when they plan a multi-story apartments, the artist and the architect will draw a picture of this is what it's going to look like with all the trees and cars and this beautiful building. The actual building may not be anything like it.

That's the form of godliness for all the doctrine and everything is right. But along with this doctrine of godliness, verse 2, they will love themselves, they'll love money, they'll be boastful, they'll be arrogant, their children will be disobedient to parents, they won't know how to say thank you, they won't be grateful, and they can be unloving, irreconcilable, and malicious gossips. That means if I talk about the new covenant and I gossip in my life, I have a form of godliness.

I speak evil about others behind their back and try to tear them down, it's a form of godliness. Now when I read this, I can think this doesn't even apply to me, probably it does. Without self-control, brutal, see all anger is due to lack of self-control.

I hope you realize that. The Bible says, we put a bit into the mouth of the horses. A man who rides a horse, James chapter 3, when he wants to stop, he pulls the bit and the horse stops.

But here's a man who, and it says controlling the tongue is something like that, but here's a person who cannot control this horse. It's a wild horse, just runs away without self-control. And Jesus was never like that, never.

You could never provoke him to be angry concerning himself, whether you call him the devil, prince of devils, slap him, spit on him, whatever you did, ignore him. So many things you see, the only thing that made him angry was when people were making money in the name of religion in the temple. Boy, that really made him furious and he took a whip and chased them out and that should make us angry too when we see people making money from poor people in the name of Christ.

But otherwise, when it concerned himself, he was never angry, never, never, never. He had complete self-control. But here it speaks about people who, without self-control, but they have a form of godliness.

They're speaking about, oh, we want to follow Jesus and we want to take up the cross and we want to live like him and we've got a new covenant and we're part of the body of Christ. It's all the right language, without self-control. Some of these things may not be fully true of us, but some could be lovers of pleasure, verse 4, more than lovers of God.

You know, any Christian who finds more excitement in watching a movie, which gives him a lot of entertainment and pleasure, that, I'm not saying is wrong, some movies are okay, it's okay, but finds more pleasure in that than in getting to know God through the Bible. I'd say he's a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. There are so many people who know so little of the Bible and they still have so much time to waste on television.

Now, if you know the Bible well, fine, okay. So many who don't know the Bible well, think about children. Are you training them to get to know God? Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, but they hold a form of godliness.

They're not like those godless people and say, we have no time for church. No, they go to church and they go to a church that preaches godliness. But all these things in their private life, I look at it like this.

Their attitude to Christianity is, what is the minimum I have to do to be considered a good member of a new covenant church? What's the minimum? What's the minimum number of meetings I have to go to to keep my testimony good and make sure that everybody thinks I'm a good, wholehearted brother, a wholehearted sister? That's a completely wrong attitude. It shows I'm a hypocrite. If I'm truly wanting the power of godliness, it doesn't matter to me one bit what other people think about me.

I want to see what the Lord sees in my daily life, whether I'm really seeking to live by the principle of godliness in every area of my life. So, to put it in a very simple way, Adam's life is centered around himself. Everything revolves around himself.

How will this benefit me? This other thing that's come up now, will it benefit me? Will it benefit my family? Will that be good for my children? A lot of people who go to a church are thinking, ah, this is a good place for my children. This will benefit my children. This is good for me.

Everything is centered around themselves. Whereas Jesus' life was not centered like that. Jesus' life was, how will this benefit God and his purpose? If I do this, how will it affect God and his purpose? There are two centers.

One is self, and the other is God. And in a very simple way, to pick up the cross means I finished with self as a center, and I'm making God as a center. That's what Peter, the Lord told Peter, get behind me, Satan, because you're centered in yourself.

You're interested in man's interests. You're not interested in God's interest. Is that such a big crime to be centered in our own interests? Well, it's not a crime for people in the world, but if you claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, it certainly is the biggest crime.

See, Jesus didn't say that to the Pharisees. That's okay. You live as you like.

But Peter, you claim to be my disciple. You claim to want to enter into the new covenant, and you're still interested in yourself? Not possible. That's the devil.

Get behind me, Satan. Why get behind me, Satan? Because your life is centered in yourself. You're always thinking of, how is that going to help me? Now, you may say that's impossible for anybody to live, saying, how will it be centered in God? Does anybody live like that? Did Jesus live like that? I believe Paul lived like that.

I mean, if Paul was thinking of, how will it benefit me? I'll tell you what he would have done. His father was a rich businessman in Tarsus. He'd have gone back and said, I'll be a part of the church in Tarsus and live a sort of a comfortable life there and, you know, serve the Lord, go regularly to meetings every Sunday, sing the songs, and maybe learn some musical instrument and play there also, get some honor for that also, and be a Christian and be a part of a new covenant church in Tarsus.

What's wrong with that? He wouldn't be committing adultery or telling lies. But he'd have ended his life without fulfilling God's purpose for his life. I'm not saying that you have to go to the jungles of Africa to fulfill God's purpose of life.

My point is, do you really, are you really convinced that the only way you can stand before the Lord without any regret, if you say, Lord, I want your interest to be the center of my life, and I'll tell you something, he'll take very good care of your interests if you put his interest first. If you say, Lord, I want to seek your

interest in your kingdom uppermost in my life, do you think God will make you suffer? Impossible. He always has our best at heart.

Look at Jesus' life, the most fulfilling, the most perfect life that has ever lived. And that's why I ask you, do you believe that that was the most perfect life anybody lived? Do you believe that Jesus was sent to earth, not like other believers say, just to die for the sins of the world? No. He was sent to earth to show us how man should live.

That's why he lived for the 33 years and then to die for the sins of the world. So we don't believe as other Christians that Jesus just came to die for the sins of the world. Then the statement that he made so often saying, follow me, follow me, follow me.

I say, Lord, I can't die for the sins of the world. How can I follow you? If that's the only thing you came for, to die for the sins of the world, you tell me, follow you. I can't follow you.

How can I die for the sins of the world? But why could he say, follow me, follow me? Because of the way he lived for 33 years. And that is the Christ we need to see revealed in us. A Christ who never sought his own interests.

Let me show you a few verses. John 6, 38, first of all, these are not new things, but I find that there's a great need to emphasize this again and again and again, because we live in a world and a Christianity of tremendous amount of self-deception. John 6, 38, Jesus said, I came from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

He always wanted to do the will of his father, whatever it was. Because he knew that was the best. Now, if I were to ask you, do you believe that God's will for your life is the best? Every one of you will say yes.

Do you believe that God's will for your life, every single day of your life is the best? Yes, I believe that. Well, then you would choose it. And very often that clashes with our will in some point.

And that's why Jesus denied his own will and did the will of his father. He says, I come from heaven only for one reason. This is the one verse, which I call the one line autobiography.

Autobiography is where a person writes about his own life. The one line autobiography that Jesus wrote about his own life on earth, his entire life on earth, he could sum up in one sentence. I never did my own will, but I did the father's will.

That is his autobiography of his own life. And that is the most wonderful life that this world has ever seen. We acknowledge that, but do you see the root of it? He never did his own will.

Okay, the other thing, the other passage is Romans 15 and verse four, where it tells us about this life of Jesus. Romans 15 and verse four, sorry, verse three, not verse four, Romans 15 verse three, Christ did not please himself. So in John 6, 38 and Romans 15, three, I see the way Jesus lived on earth.

He never sought to please himself. He only sought to please the father. And in pleasing the father, if it made him happy, well and good, but if it didn't make him happy, that's also fine.

He was not against his own happiness or against what is good for him. But if doing the will of the father made him happy or sad made no difference. I want to do the will of the father, but I will never seek my own will.

And I never seek to please myself. This is what it means to take up the cross. I just want to make it clear.

And when Jesus spoke about building the church and taking up the cross together, he was saying that you really can't build the church unless you see these things together. And you see that we need to see Christ revealed within us means the way Jesus lived on this earth as the way God wants us to live, to get a revelation on that, to read the gospels, for example, and to see why did he do things like this? Why did he do it like that? Why did he make this choice? And why did he make that choice? Then I see how Jesus lived on earth. See 2 Corinthians in chapter 3, where it says, when we look in the mirror, which is the word of God, verse 18, we see the glory of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus. And I'll tell you it really happens. If you want to see the glory of Jesus, ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit.

When God filled me with the Holy Spirit in an amazing way 42 years ago, I wasn't very sure whether it was an emotional experience or a really a spiritual experience, because I've seen so many people by that time were only fooled with an emotional experience of making a lot of noise and things like that. I wanted to be sure it was from God. And one of the things I said was, Lord, if this is from you, the New Testament will become a new book to me from today onwards.

The one who wrote is the Holy Spirit. So if I'm really filled with the Holy Spirit, I will see things in the New Testament that I never seen till today, even though I've been a Christian for 16 years, and I'd read the Bible for 16 years. By that time, I said, Lord, I will now see things in the New Testament that I had never seen before.

And I did. Before that, I knew it intellectually. But when the Spirit of God filled me, and I came to the New Testament, I began to see things in it, which are revelation in my heart.

That's why it's so important to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You cannot understand Scripture. I mean, you can understand, theoretically.

That's why I always just tell people in our own church back home, remember, brothers and sisters, you may trust me fully and say, oh, Brother Zach is trustworthy. So whatever he says is true, I'll believe it. Okay, that's good.

But it's still secondhand. You got an information and accurate information about God and about Jesus secondhand from me. You need to take that and say, Lord, convert this to firsthand.

Make it real to me, make it, give me a revelation on this, which I heard from him, so that it's revealed in my heart. I see it. And when you see it, you won't need exhortations like what I'm giving now.

The Holy Spirit will show you Jesus all the time. And you'll be able to exhort and encourage others to live this life because you've been gripped by yourself that this is the only worthwhile way to live on this earth before we leave this earth. And this is the only worthwhile way we want to bring up our children.

And it says here, the Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus and then changes us into that same likeness from glory to glory. So it is God's will that as we see this truth of being moved from a self-centered life to a God-centered life, this is, it's not going to happen overnight. But from glory to glory to glory to glory to glory, I'll find our life increasingly moving from a self-centered life to a God-centered life day by day by day by day, till one day we become like Jesus fully.

That is the Christian's path. It's not just coming to church and learning more doctrines and being able to explain different books in the Old Testament more accurately. All that is good.

You know, you can study Babylon to Jerusalem and understand everything. But you know what Jerusalem is? It's the body of Jesus Christ. Babylon is the body of Adam.

It's like moving from the body of Adam to the body of Christ. Why is the church called the body of Christ? Because it is supposed to manifest exactly what Jesus manifested in his body for 33 years on earth. That's the meaning of being called the body of Christ.

It's not just a nice expression. The first body of Christ on earth was not the church. The first body on Christ was a physical body that was despised and rejected, but did God's will perfectly.

That's the body of Christ. And now the church is given that same name because we're supposed to be that on earth now, despised, rejected, misunderstood, ridiculed, but living a life centered in God, never seeking to please ourselves. Do you want to be a part of that church? Then that principle must grip you.

You must be gripped. That's the best way to live on this earth. I've been gripped by it.

God is my witness. And I'm not perfect, but I can say that I'm moving in that direction, self-centeredness to God-centeredness. And my goal is to be totally God-centered one day.

But what you need to ask yourself is whether you're moving in that direction. Look what Paul said about his own experience. He said in 2 Corinthians 4 and 16 about this transformation he refers to himself.

He said in verse 18, chapter 3, 18, we are changed from one degree of glory to another. And then he says in chapter 4, verse 16, that our inner man, the last part, is being renewed day by day. What does that mean, being renewed day by day? That means every day Paul moved a little away from self-centeredness, a little more towards God-centeredness.

Not once a year, every day. He was progressing every day. How did he progress every day? That's also he tells us in the 10th verse.

Because he always carried in his body the dying of Jesus. That's a secret. That means he always, what is the dying of Jesus? The dying of Jesus is the dying to his own will.

He came to earth with the self-will and he denied it, denied it, denied it. That's called the dying of Jesus. So that the life of Jesus, which is a completely God-centered life, could be manifested in his body.

He says, I'm always carrying it in my body. He didn't have to. He accepted Christ.

Isn't that enough? No, it isn't. For Paul, it was not enough. For most Christians, it's enough.

I've accepted Christ. I'm on my way to heaven, or maybe a little more. I've joined a good new covenant church.

No, Paul was not happy with any of that. I've understood the truth. He had understood the truth, but he was not happy with that.

He says, always, 24-7, I live by one principle. This is why his life was so useful. And I've been tremendously challenged by Paul's life, you know, where he could say to people, follow me, come and

examine every area of my life.

He says, I'm not perfect, but I'm going in the right direction. And every day, I'm moving closer to that goal. It's not enough to say I'm not perfect.

We all say I'm not perfect. The guy who is unconverted says he's not perfect. So how are we different from him? That we are moving towards a goal to become like Christ.

And that means we all agree we want to be like Christ. That's our goal, to become like Christ completely. What does it mean in practical terms? That's why we need a revelation of Christ in our heart.

It means to be completely centered in God and to be completely free from centered in self, in practical terms. So if you don't spell it out in practical terms, we live in a world of delusion. You talk about being like Christ and Christ-likeness, and we think it is just behaving nicely and acting humbly.

No, no, no, no, no, no. That's all the form of godliness. You say thank you and sorry and please and apologize for your mistakes.

And these are all actions. We can go through all these actions and be first class hypocrites. It's if in the motivation in our life deep down, if you're not moving away from a self-centered to a more God-centered way of thinking and a God-centered, what is going to, my thinking is not what's going to glorify God most of my life.

If that's not the thing that drives me and motivates me, I'm not really moving towards Christ-likeness. You know, I've often thought that a lot of the preaching in the church can become like a self-improvement program. We come here and we learn to behave better, talk better, bring up our children better.

It's a self-improvement program and a home improvement program. But that's not the gospel. We can do all that.

That's a form of godliness. And your life can look better. Your wife can say, hey, you're behaving better now.

And you're content. You may not be God-centered at all. There's a lot of good people on earth who behave very nicely and very courteous, but they're not centered in God.

And if I'm not centered in God, if I'm not moving in that direction more and more and more, I'm not becoming like Christ. I'm just becoming a good human being, a better human being than some other human beings around me. That's not Christianity.

That's a human self-improvement program. And we've got to not deceive ourselves. I don't want to be in a church which just helps me to be a better human being.

I want to be a church that challenges me to be more centered in God and God's interest. What is God interested in on this earth? And my mind must be more and more thinking of that. And I'll tell you this, for some people, God's interest is only to wrest people with the gospel and somehow save them from hell, take them to heaven.

It's not true. God's interest is that there should be a witness on earth for him like a light, pure light, a little bit, but which is pure, not a corrupt light, but a pure light, even if it is small. Jesus was one person, a

complete minority on earth, but he was a powerful witness for God on this earth.

First body of Christ was not big in terms of numbers, one person. So it's not a question of size or numbers. It's a question of whether a light really is fulfilling God's purpose on earth.

It doesn't matter what other people think about us. Can God approve of me and saying, you are fulfilling my purpose on earth? Every one of you, I wish you would really seek God about this and asking this question, Lord, the way I'm living and the way I'm bringing up my family, the way I'm bringing up my children, is it really fulfilling your purpose for my life on earth? I mean, is my life centered more and more on your interests? Do you believe that that is the best life you can live? Do you believe that the best life you can ever live on this earth is one where you never seek your own interest in one single thing, always seek God's interests? A lot of people don't believe that. And I'd say they're not really repentant.

They haven't really been converted. It's sort of a half conversion. The person who's really repented and turned around is one who says, Lord, I believe that a life centered in you is the best possible life I can live on this earth.

You can advance in your profession, you can earn any amount of money or earn very little money. The amount of money you earn has got nothing to do with whether you're God-centered or not. It's like the color of your skin, whether your skin is black or brown or white or yellow or red, makes absolutely no difference.

And your income or how much you earn, this much or this much or this much. I mean, in a country like India, there's such a wide range of income, much more than here. But I found people who want to live the God-centered life in all levels of income, it's got nothing to do with the size of house or income, it's got nothing to do with these things.

It's got to do with an attitude of mine. Lord, my mind is set on glorifying you on the earth, and wherever I know this is your will, I'm going to choose it. The areas I'm not doing it is where I'm ignorant.

The only place where we should not be doing God's will is where I'm ignorant of what God's will is. But in those areas, I need to have a passion to find God's will. I remember when I was in the Navy, and a senior officer, the captain of the ship once asked me something, and I didn't know the answer.

So I said, I don't know, sir. And he said, Lieutenant, never again say I don't know, sir. Always reply, I'll find out, sir.

There's a lot of difference between saying I don't know, sir. That's an irresponsible way. I don't know, I'm not interested in knowing either.

But I'll find out means I don't know right now, but next time you ask me, I'll know the answer. That really, you know, I've never forgotten it. That guy was a heathen, non-Christian, but he taught me something which I've never forgotten.

It's my attitude to the Bible. Somebody asked me a question, and I don't know. By tomorrow, I'll know.

Do you have that attitude? To know the scriptures, to know God's will that somebody asked you something, you didn't know the answer. You say, within 24 hours, I'll know the answer. If you have that passion, not just to know the Bible, but to know what is God's mind about certain things, because through

the years, many people have asked me different things.

Sometimes I didn't know the answer immediately. I say, okay, I've got to find out that. I've got to find out what is God's mind about this situation.

What is God's mind about divorced people? It's such an important question in our time. What is God's mind about many, many things? And the more I'm centered in God, I want to be centered in God. I want to find out wherever I'm ignorant.

So this is the way our Christian life is to live, is to be lived. And then I believe if each of us, and it's very important that each of us does it. I like this verse in Ephesians 4, a little expression in Ephesians 4, which I hope you will bear in mind.

It says in Ephesians 4, verse 16, it's a great verse, Ephesians 4, 16. The whole body being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part. You are an individual part.

Of the body of Christ that Jesus Christ is building here. I really believe Christ is building the body here. I have no doubt about it.

So my challenge is not whether the body of Christ is building here. My challenge is whether each of you are doing your part. That's my question.

That's my burden this morning. It's not because I doubt what God is doing here. But I do doubt whether every one of you is doing your part.

It says here, the proper working of each individual part is like this body. God has made this human body in such a way that if one little part inside me doesn't work properly, affects the whole body. Imagine if just your liver doesn't function properly, or your kidney doesn't function properly.

That's a small little thing, a kidney, but it can affect your whole body. Some little thing in your bloodstream and knocks you down with fever and you can't go to work. What's it a small little thing which you've got to see under a microscope, and it's floating around in your bloodstream, and it knocks you out.

So you see how the picture of a body where each part is important. And we want to build a church where we build a body there. And that's why I said you can't stop.

We don't say visitors can't come to this church. Anybody can come. Prostitutes, drug addicts, any Tom, Dick and Harry can come and sit in our Sunday meetings.

Sure. But in the midst of what other people see as the church, there's a church in between, in the middle, a core. That's the real church.

See, Jesus had many concentric circles around him. One was the multitude. And then in Luke chapter 10, you read of another group of 70, which is more important than the multitude, because he could send them out in 35 groups of two each.

They were a little better than the multitude. But in the middle of that, there was another group of 11. They were really close to him.

And then in the middle of that, there's another group of three who were really close. Those are the ones Jesus spent most of his time with. Jesus didn't have equal fellowship with all the 70.

And you know, people say, we must have equal fellowship with everybody in the church. There's a lot of garbage. Or that he didn't even have equal fellowship with all 11.

He had fellowship with three. Some people call that a clique. Yes, it is a clique.

But it's a spiritual clique inside the church. And it always happens. I've seen with different people I work with, I work with hundreds of people.

I don't have equal fellowship with all of them. I don't even visit all their homes. I have a small number.

And it's not partiality. Jesus wasn't partial when he hung around with three people more than others, or hung around with 11 more than others. It's because within that group, there was a church.

And within all the people who come to the church on Sunday morning, there's another thing which is a real church. And that's the thing which God is building. And what I want to encourage you is to be a part of that.

Don't be satisfied that I come here every Sunday morning, and I mark my attendance. I'm okay. It means nothing.

Seek to be a part of that inner core that's willing to pay the price to move from self-centeredness to God-centeredness in your daily life. And thus fulfill your part, the proper working of each individual part. See, I want to be a part of this body of Christ.

And it's not a question of how much you do, whether you clean the carpet, or bring the food, or do various things. Those are all external things anybody can do. You can be an unconverted man and do all that.

I'm talking about the spiritual body of Christ was built by a number of people. We don't know how it works, you know. But I'll show you something else in 2 Corinthians 4, where we saw about always bearing in our body the dying of Jesus.

Verse 10, so that the life of Jesus is manifested in our body. These are three very important verses, in case you never realized it. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 10 to 12.

You know, verse 6 speaks about our conversion. 2 Corinthians 4, 6, where light comes into our heart. And then verse 10 to 12 speaks about our spiritual growth.

First of all, always carrying in our body 24-7, the principle of not living centered in myself, but centered in God. So that this wonderful life of Jesus will be manifested in us. And then that is why, verse 11, the Lord is constantly delivering us over to death.

What does that mean? That means, if you're a serious Christian, if you're really a serious Christian, your Heavenly Father will arrange many circumstances in your daily life to deliver you over to death for Jesus' sake. That means He'll give you many opportunities in your home life every day to die to yourself. You find that to be true? Your Father loves you.

He's giving you opportunities every day in your home life, in your place of work, even when the traffic's busy on the road. Plenty of opportunity to die to yourself. You're being delivered over to death for Jesus'

sake.

And the purpose is not that you react in those situations just like all the children of Adam, and just come here on Sunday morning and sing hymns. No. But in all those situations, you're determined that the life of Jesus, verse 11, should be manifested in your mortal flesh.

That when Almighty God, your Father, delivered you over to a situation where you had to die to yourself, you chose it. The one thing God will not do is force you to go a certain way, because then you'll be a robot. He'll put you into a situation and say, choose now.

That's what He did to Adam and Eve. He put them in a situation and said, choose. You want to go my way or your way? That's it.

He always puts us in that. We are delivered over into situations in our daily life, and we have to choose whether we want to go the way of the dying of Jesus. And the purpose is so that the life of Jesus, verse 11, may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

It doesn't stop there. If you go this way, you will move on to the next level, verse 12, where as this death of Jesus works in you, you'll find the life of Jesus being transmitted through you to other people in the church, and other people coming into your life because you are allowing death to work in you. It's wonderful that God will give you revelation and God will make you such a blessing to other people, that life comes to other people because you are allowing death to work in you every day.

That's the only way I want to live. I want to make maximum use of my one life for Jesus. Lord, I want more and more of the life of Jesus to be manifested in me.

Then I have to die to myself, and the life of Jesus will. God will take care of that. He'll produce life in others through you, not just in passing on information to others.

The life of Jesus will come forth in others because you decided to let death work in you. So, let's come back to this one verse and I'll close with that. Matthew chapter 16, what Jesus said to Simon Peter.

Please remember this. It's in relation to building the church, the body of Christ. You are a stumbling block to me, Matthew 16, 23, because your mind is set on your own human interests, not on God's interests.

Now, a lot of people don't think they're a stumbling block. They may say, I'm sort of a weak believer. No, you're a stumbling block to me.

You're a hindrance to my work because you're sitting in the church and seeking your own. If you're out there in the world, you couldn't be a stumbling block to me. But you claim to be sitting in the new covenant church and you're seeking your own.

Then you're a stumbling block to God. I say, then you might as well go out in the world and live like everybody else. Why sit in a church claiming to be a new covenant person and seek to be a stumbling block? You're a stumbling block for seeking your own interests.

It's a very serious thing and I want to take it seriously in my life. I hope you'll take it seriously in yours. Let's bow in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we pray that you will help us to see these things in a way, not intellectually alone, but your Holy Spirit makes it real in our hearts so that we can live like this. Help us each one. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/5RqnQRCK258.mp4>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/the-god-centered-can-build-the-church/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

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

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

www.sermonindex.net