

The Lord Tests the Righteous

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes that God tests the righteous to reveal their true hearts and warns against valuing human opinions over divine truth.

Duration: 1:01:07

Scripture: Jeremiah 36:6-32, John 6:66, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Testing"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of losing his sermon transcript and how he believes God allowed it to happen because the words were not strong enough. He then references the story of Jeremiah and how God instructed him to rewrite the scroll with even stronger words of judgment. The speaker also mentions another incident where Jesus' disciples were offended by his teachings and many of them withdrew. He compares this to the sifting of wheat and emphasizes the importance of repentance and the need for strong words of judgment in preaching the word of God.

Transcript

I want to turn to a verse in Jeremiah, two verses in Jeremiah, chapter 20 and verse 12. Jeremiah 20 and verse 12. Jeremiah says, Yet, O Lord of hosts, Thou who dost test the righteous, Who sees the mind and the heart.

The Living Bible says, Lord Almighty, Who knows those who are righteous and examines the deepest thoughts of their hearts and minds. He was talking about himself. He was saying, Lord, these people are trying to trouble me and attack me.

They are making all types of charges against me. See, anyone who is in the Lord's service, like Jeremiah, particularly if you are a prophet, you can be pretty sure that a lot of people will attack him because the devil wants to knock down such people. But Jeremiah would say to the Lord, Lord, you have examined my heart.

You know my deepest longings, desires, and you know, and therefore I can commit my cause to you. Now a lot of us think that the Lord does not test the righteous, that he tests only other people. He does not test other people.

There is no verse in the Bible which says that God tests the wicked. He tests the righteous. So if you are an unconverted person, God does not bother testing you because you are not one of his children.

You have got to be born again first. But once you are born again, then he begins to test us and examine the deepest desires and longings in our heart. The other verse is Jeremiah 17, where the Lord himself says in verse 10, Jeremiah 17 and verse 10, I the Lord search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each one according to his ways.

So the Lord searches the heart and tests our minds to give to everyone according to his ways. The living Bible reads like this, the Lord searches all hearts and examines the deepest motives so that he can give to each person his right reward according to his deeds, how he has lived. So from these verses we see that what man thinks about us really does not matter.

Because like we read in 1 Samuel 16, 7, the Lord, man looks on the outward appearance and God looks at the heart. And like you have heard me often say, the outward appearance is people know about 1% of you. God knows the other 99%.

And God does not bother about that 1%. He knows the 99% plus the 1%. So the opinion of man, like you've often heard me say, is only fit for the garbage bin.

If 10,000 people think you're a devil, they may be wrong. You could be a saint. A lot of people call Jesus the devil.

10,000 people can call you a prophet. A lot of false prophets in many religions in the world who are called prophets by millions. They don't become prophets.

Millions of people call some people prophets. They are not prophets. So the opinion of men, when you look at all the false religions and the devotion with which people follow them, the cults and the devotion with which people follow them, you can see the devotion with which people follow their leaders and almost worship their leaders.

You can see that the opinion of men is wrong. Totally wrong. And then when you see the opinion a lot of people had about Jesus when he was on earth, how they felt he was fit only for crucifixion, you see again clearly how the opinion of men is totally wrong.

Now in spite of all that, you will find in your heart, if you are not careful, if you have not cleansed yourself from this completely, that you value the opinion of men. And the great danger of valuing the opinion of men is that you will almost certainly, almost 100%, you will be a hypocrite. The only way to be completely free from being a hypocrite is to recognize what you have heard me say for 28 years, that the opinions of men are fit for the garbage bin.

Everything that anybody says about you, throw it in the garbage bin. Unless the man is a really godly man, then his opinion may be worth something, because he may be telling you the truth about yourself. And such a man won't flatter you.

Flatterers are all enemies of yours. He who, it says, let the righteous smite me, it will be like oil upon my head, the Swami says, that is what a true servant of God will do. You see, when we are confronted with something, our reaction to that is a pretty good test of what is in our heart.

I want to show you a couple of examples in the Old Testament. In 1 Kings, you read about a king called Ahab. And one day, he wanted to go to battle along with 1 Kings chapter 20, along with, sorry, chapter 22, 1 Kings 22.

He wanted to go to battle along with Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah. Ahab was king of Israel. And before they went into the battle, Jehoshaphat said in verse 7, Isn't there a prophet of the Lord, with whom we may inquire? Because there were a lot of false prophets who had earlier come and said, Yah, Yah.

In verse 6, 400 false prophets came together and they all said to him, Yah, go up, the Lord is going to give Him into your hand. And Jehoshaphat listened to all these 400 preaching one by one by one and one by one. And Jehoshaphat said, Hey, I don't sense that any of these people have got the word of the Lord.

It's a great thing when you can hear a man preaching from the Bible and you can sense that is not anointed. If you don't have that sense, you'll be like Ahab, king of Israel. He didn't have that sense.

He heard 400 preachers opening the Old Testament and preaching. Boy, that's the word of the Lord. I've seen a lot of believers like that whose discernment is pretty close to zero.

But Jehoshaphat, he was not such a godly man. If he were a godly man, he wouldn't have joined with Ahab. But he sensed that all these 400 preachers, they're holding the Old Testament okay, but I don't sense they're there from God.

They're just saying something to please me and please King Ahab. So he says in verse 7, Isn't there a prophet of the Lord here? Rather than all these fellows who came out of the Bible school with their degree certificates. Is there a prophet here? The king of Israel said, Yeah, there's one man I didn't call him because he hates me.

He never prophesies anything good about me. He's always correcting me and rebuking me for evil. His name is Micaiah.

Jehoshaphat said, Get him here. Bring him quickly. Let's hear him.

So they sat there and the messenger went to call this prophet Micaiah and said to him in verse 13, Listen, I want to tell you something. 400 preachers have come before you and they've all uniformly favored the king. Please let your word also be like the word of one of them.

Please say the same thing. Micaiah. Can you imagine a true prophet of God saying, OK, OK, I'll say the same thing.

He said, No, as the Lord lives only what the Lord tells me, I'll speak. If the Lord tells me, that's what I'm going to say. I don't care what all the others said.

Doesn't matter if 400 people said something. So what? They could all be wrong. And then the king said, Micaiah said, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramath Gilead? And he answered, It was sarcastic.

Oh, yeah, go, go, go. Sure, the Lord will give you. You heard that already, no? From 400 people.

And the king recognized. This guy is just being sarcastic. He said, Tell me, what is the truth in the name of the Lord? And then he told him, You're all going to be scattered.

There's an evil spirit enticing you. The evil spirit is in the mouth of these false prophets. In verse 22, I'll go out and be a deceiving spirit, that evil spirit said.

The Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these prophets. Verse 23, The Lord has proclaimed disaster among you. One of the false prophets slapped Micaiah on the cheek.

He said, How did the spirit of the Lord go from me to you? And the king of Israel said, Now listen, this is what I wanted to say. When the king of Israel heard something very pleasant from 400 people, he was so happy. Just like we're happy when somebody comes and flatters us and tells us all types of lies about us, which we know are false, but which we like to hear.

But when a true prophet came, the king of Israel got so angry, he said in verse 27, Put this man in prison and feed him sparingly until I return safely. And Micaiah said, If you return safely, then the Lord has not spoken by me. And they have never returned.

See, that's one reaction. When the Lord speaks to justify ourselves. You'll find that in yourself.

It's the mark of an unbroken man. That when a prophet speaks to him, he says, No, I'm not like that. I'm okay.

You're following in the footsteps of Ahab. These things are written for our instruction. Either you're following in the footsteps of Ahab, or that man is a prophet of Baal, a false prophet.

One of the two. Both can't be right. Both can't be right.

Either that man is a deceiving spirit has got into him, or you have got the spirit of Ahab. It's one of the two. I want to turn to another example.

In the book of Jeremiah we read, In chapter 36, it was towards the end of the kingdom of Judah. And there was a king there. Not a very good king.

His father was a good man, Josiah. But his son, chapter 36, verse 1, Jehoiachin, was not such a good person. Jeremiah, the Lord had told Jeremiah to write certain things which he had spoken to him.

Verse 2, Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you. The Lord sometimes tells His prophets not just to speak, but to write it down in a book. So, Jeremiah wrote down through Baruch, who he dictated to Baruch.

Verse 4, Whatever the Lord spoke to him, he wrote down. And Jeremiah said, Listen, I can't go into the house of the Lord. These fellows won't let me go there.

Verse 6, You go and take the scroll which you have written at my dictation and go and read it out to the people so that they know what God is saying. And so, when the people heard it, they asked Baruch, in verse 17, Tell us, where did you get all these words from? Was it Jeremiah's dictation? He said, yeah. He dictated these words and I wrote them down with ink in the book.

And you know, that was all prophesying judgment. It wasn't very pleasant things that these prophets... These prophets almost rarely spoke anything pleasant. There is always correction and rebuke.

And, so they knew that the king would get very angry. So they told Baruch, You and Jeremiah better go and hide somewhere so no one knows where you are because you don't know what the king will do when he hears these things. So they went to the king in the court.

Verse 20, The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll. Let me read it. Jehudi read it to the king.

Verse 21, And the king was sitting with a fire burning in front of him in a fireplace. And whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king cut it with a scribe's knife and threw that, it's the word of God, you know, threw it in the fire as if that's going to stop God's judgment. And then he listened to some more and he threw it into the fire.

Listened to some more, threw it in the fire. Finally there was nothing left. And then, what did God do? Verse 27, You see, that doesn't make a difference to God's judgment.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah after the king had burned the whole scroll which Jeremiah had dictated and Baruch had written down very carefully. The Lord said, Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were on the first scroll. And then it says, Verse 32, I want to read in the Living Bible, Then Jeremiah took another scroll and dictated again to Baruch all that he had written before.

And listen to this, Only this time the Lord added a lot more. So, if you don't get it the first time, the second time there will be a lot more of words of judgment. I remember when I was writing the first book I ever wrote on a computer.

I didn't know anything about computers those days. It was way back in 88, I think it was. It's called Good Foundation.

And I was writing this first chapter on repentance and then something happened. The computer hung. I couldn't save anything.

I couldn't do anything and I didn't know what to do. And I lost it all. And there was this brother here, that old brother Andos, from Norway.

I asked him, I said, brother, can you do something about this? I showed him this. He said, it's lost. It was like this, you know.

The whole scroll. Gone. I said, Lord, what is this? I got so mad at the devil.

Not at the computer. The devil. And I said, ok.

I'm going to write a much stronger chapter on repentance than I think the last one was a bit too gentle. So I understood this. The Lord added a lot more.

I can see that God allowed that to happen because he felt that the words were not strong enough. So, the first time, the Lord allowed the king to throw these things in the fire, but then he added a lot more. What did they do to Jeremiah when Jeremiah said all this? It says here, another king, they put Jeremiah, chapter 38, verse 6, they took Jeremiah from his cell in the prison and lowered him by ropes into an empty well in the prison yard and there was no water in it but a thick layer of mire and Jeremiah sank down into it.

That's what he got for speaking the truth. That's how they treated these Old Testament prophets. Every one of them.

You never hear of a prophet who was respected. They all, because they spoke the truth, they didn't want anybody's money, they didn't want anybody's honor. And the rich people, I think the poor people, accepted the prophets.

But the rich people, the clever people, the people who are well-to-do, who lived in grand houses and palaces, they are the ones who opposed the prophets and it's been like that throughout the centuries, even in Christendom. It's the rich people, the highly educated people, the well-to-do people, they are the ones who always opposed the prophets. And the poor people, the simple people, they accept them and are blessed by them and that's why it says God has chosen the poor of the world, rich in faith.

And when the poor become rich, they lose their salvation. It happens often. It's happened throughout the ages.

So, that doesn't solve the problem by putting Jeremiah into this pit. There was an Ethiopian man there who came and pulled Jeremiah out, we read in the next few verses. Because God wouldn't let his prophet die like that.

But the judgment still came. Jeremiah preached for more than 40 years and they didn't listen to him. See, our reaction to what the Lord says to us, He may speak to us directly through His word or He may speak to us through a prophet.

But in one of the Psalms, I don't remember which one it was, it is, it says that when there are no prophets, yeah, here it is, Psalm 74, one mark of God having rejected His people. There are a number of marks of God having rejected His people. And it says in Psalm 74, O God, why hast thou rejected us forever? And one mark of it is, verse 9, we don't see any signs.

There is no longer any prophet. That means God is not answering prayers in supernatural ways, number one. And number two, there is no prophet.

Those are indications that God is no longer there. You know, we read that in the Gospels, you know, the two of the disciples of Jesus who let Him down very badly, one denied Him and one betrayed Him. But the interesting thing is that Jesus warned both of them beforehand.

And the Lord often does that. The meaning of prophecy in the Old Testament was that the Lord would say this is what's going to happen. We read in the second book of Kings, I don't have time to turn there yet, where the enemy of Israel, king of Syria, would sit in his camp with his generals and say, where shall we attack Israel and they'd say, let's go and attack here.

And Elisha, who was living in Israel, the Lord would tell him, okay, the king of Syria is going to attack over here. And Elisha would send a word to the king of Israel, the Lord told me the king of Israel is going to attack here, so send your army there. So every time the king of Syria went with his army, he always found Israel's army is already there to attack him.

So he called his generals together and said, hey, there's a spy in our midst. Somebody is going and telling these things we're discussing here. One of you is going and sneaking these things to the enemy.

And somebody who had heard about what is happening said, no king, it's not any of us, there's a prophet there, that's the problem. There's a prophet of God there who's in touch with God and whatever you discuss here, he hears it from God and he tells the king and that's how. So that's why even these foreign

kings used to get mad at these prophets.

They used to send soldiers to capture Elijah once. Of course, the soldiers all died. So, prophecy was like that, you know, think of that, Elisha is telling the king, hey, the enemy is going to come here, be careful.

Israel's got a large border, but if you know where the enemy is going to come, you can be ready. Now the same thing, when the Bible speaks about prophecy in the church, if you're humble enough, you listen to the prophetic word in the church, it always prepares you to say, telling you, Satan is going to attack here, be careful. Of course, you may not listen to it.

That's another thing. God didn't, Elisha didn't tell the king of Israel, therefore you must send your army there. No.

He only said, the enemy is going to attack here. What do you do about it? That's up to you. And that's how prophecy is.

In the New Testament, a prophet never tells a person what to do. Never. The Agabus once got up and said, there's going to be a famine over here in a few months or a year or so.

Full stop. He didn't tell them what to do. They themselves decided, oh, famine, then we better take collection and send some money to those poor believers there.

Another time he told Paul, if you go to Jerusalem, they're going to bind you. Full stop. He didn't tell him whether to go or not to go.

That's up to you. Paul said, well, that's okay. Getting bound is not a serious thing.

God's told me to go. And he went. And the Lord confirmed it and said, right.

You've come to the right place, Paul. But the prophet always says something's going to happen. And if you are humble enough to listen, it's a warning to protect you from what's going to happen.

In the last 28 years, I cannot think of a single brother who's left our churches anywhere whom I did not warn. At least a few weeks or months before that. I couldn't stop them from falling away.

But every one of them, I warned them. Because I sensed something is wrong. I didn't know what it was.

God never showed me. I remember one brother who fell away from here years ago. One meeting, after the meeting, I was walking down the road here and I put my arm around him and I said, brother, something's wrong with you.

I don't know what it is. Something's wrong. Oh, he said, oh, I'm okay.

Just a few months before he fell away. I want to say to you, my brothers and sisters, listen to the warnings of Scripture. Jesus spoke to Peter.

He told him, before the cock crows twice, you know that, you don't have to listen to all the Gospels. Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times. What is Peter's attitude? Even when Jesus said it.

Oh no, not me. Everybody else may do that, but not me. That cocksure attitude is to such people the word of God says, let him who thinks he stands, 1 Corinthians 10, 12, take heed, lest he fall.

You know, in 1 Corinthians 10, that's verse 12, but the first verses before verse 12 is talking about the Israelites who came out of Egypt who were so self-confident. Yeah, yeah, we're going into Canaan's land. They never got into Canaan's land.

600,000 people out of them two got into Canaan's land because they were humble and listened to Moses, listened to God. And the other 600,000 did not. They never got in.

They were pretty sure when they left Egypt, that they'd get in. Like a lot of us are pretty cocksure, aren't we? That we are okay, we're spiritual, there's nothing wrong with us. That's exactly how those 600,000 people were.

They were too arrogant to listen to what Moses told them. Their attitude was, who's Moses? We're also in touch with God. Okay, fine.

But see what is the end result and it says there in verse 12 at the end of that example Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. If Peter had been humble, said, Lord, is that really true? I'm going to deny you three times before tomorrow morning. Oh God, please help me.

I don't want to deny you. And if he had lived in fear, he said, oh, if I'm going to deny him, I better not go anywhere near people who may provoke me to deny him. He wouldn't have gone near those places.

If the Lord says to you, you got a weakness in the area of pornography, you won't go near those bookshops or look at magazines and all which can tempt you. You say, oh no, I'm pretty strong. That's how Peter was.

You know what happened. The Lord told many times, you know, He said, He gave warnings like in the end of John chapter 6. He said, haven't I chosen you twelve? But one of you is a devil. And the chap among the twelve, none of the twelve knew it except the person concerned.

That was Judas Iscariot. He knew, Jesus is talking about me. Did Jesus talk about certain people without mentioning their names? Of course He did.

You know, in a crowd of twelve people, He'd say, I won't say the name He said, but one of you is a devil. The Lord can say that today. One of you is like this.

And you can get offended with the preacher. Say, He's referring to me. Of course, Jesus is referring to Judas Iscariot.

But He didn't humiliate him. He did. Finally, He said, this is the man at the last supper.

But for a long time, He gave him an opportunity to set it right by saying, one of you is a devil. I'll be betrayed. There were little indications He gave, He gave, He gave, He gave.

And Judas Iscariot always thought, I can get away with it because He'll never point to me. And then at the last supper, He pointed to him. Say, you're the man.

The one to whom I dip this bread and I give it. But Jesus waited a long time before He identified the person. God waits a long time.

But He warned him. And He also didn't take the warning. He said, oh, it's okay, it's not so serious.

And He went and hanged Himself. Now, what was the ultimate provocation that made Judas Iscariot betray Jesus? And how is it that Judas, both let down the Lord, both were pretty self-confident. But how is it one, Peter, became the exact opposite of Judas Iscariot? How Jesus said, one is a son of perdition, it was better for that man if he was not even born.

You know Jesus said that about Judas Iscariot? When you hear these words, well, so and so did not speak in a Christ-like way. What is your understanding of Christ-like? I think we all have a fixed idea of Christ-like. Christ does not say things like, oh, it's better for you if you were not even born.

That's not Christ-like. That is Christ-like, those are His exact words. See, many of us have got a one-sided opinion of Jesus.

And this one-sided opinion of Jesus leads us astray. We have a gospel, many people sitting here have a gospel, have a worship another Jesus. A Jesus who never said things like this.

A Jesus who never took a whip and chased the money changers out of the temple. Christ-like, do you mean something completely, it's a worldly understanding of Christ-like. He said about Judas, it's better for that man if he had not even been born.

Imagine if somebody turned to you and it said it's better for you if you were not even born. This fellow is not Christ-like. He may be the most Christ-like person on earth.

If he is a prophet of God. Your understanding of Christ-likeness, my brother, may be 100% wrong. Those words could have been Judas' salvation.

And some words that you hear, may have been your salvation. If you had taken it in humility. How is it that Peter ended up as the leader of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and the other one who was also with them from the beginning, ended up in the bottom most level of hell.

He wasn't like that always. We read in Luke chapter 6, Luke chapter 6, and verse, it says, Jesus spent a whole night in prayer. Verse 12.

I don't know how many nights Jesus spent in prayer. The Bible only says about one. He didn't spend every night in prayer.

He slept most nights. He was a human being. But sometimes, I don't know, maybe only once, he spent a whole night in prayer.

The Bible says he spent a whole night in prayer only once. He prayed often. But he spent a whole night in prayer once.

And that was because, the next morning, he had to take the most important decision he was ever going to take in his life. What's the most important decision a man takes in his life, other than accepting Christ? Getting married? Or a woman? Well, Jesus was now going to choose twelve people to be his first bride. To be the ones who were going to take his message to the rest of the world.

He was going to spend, I don't know how much time had already passed, maybe one year, he was going to spend another two and a half years with these folks. And then send them out to the world. He had to be very sure.

There were thousands who were following him. There were seventy people whom he sent out once. But he was thinking now, how to select twelve out of these? I've got to be very careful.

Then in the morning, he called his disciples, verse thirteen, and he chose twelve. That means the whole crowd of them were there, maybe seventy of them. And he said, OK, you.

You, Peter, come. And you, Andrew. And James.

And John. Two pairs of brothers. We think that if he's taken one from a family, that's enough.

Let's take somebody from another family. The thing is, Jesus didn't follow human rules. As far as we know, James and John were probably his own cousins.

He didn't even bother about that, what people thought about that. He would select those whom he felt was the most godly. He didn't care what people thought about it.

And Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas. And Thomas, by the way, was a twin. And the other twin was hanging around there.

He didn't get selected. Twin brothers. One is chosen.

The other is, I don't know. God knew everyone. Jesus knew everyone.

James, the son of Alphaeus and Simon. And Judas, the son of James. Let me paraphrase it.

Who was a good man, but who became a traitor. You know the meaning of became. He was not always a traitor.

You know, when a good man becomes a bad man, you say, he became a bad man. Otherwise, he was always a bad man. He wasn't always a bad man.

He became a traitor over a period of time. When he didn't get his way. When he didn't get what he wanted.

When he didn't get the honor. And the respect. And the appreciation.

Maybe the position that he wanted. Maybe when he saw Jesus calling Peter, James and John all the time. And not Judas.

He got a bit jealous. He said, I should be among that crowd. Always Jesus calling the same three.

I don't know what it was. Very often it's jealousy. You be careful of that.

The first murder that was committed in the world was because of jealousy. Cain was jealous of God choosing Abel. It's very easy to be jealous when you see God blessing somebody materially.

Or blessing his family materially. Or spiritually. Or somebody's children are better than yours.

Or better behaved than yours. Or something. Jealousy.

Jealousy. You can be jealous of somebody who's given up responsibility in the church. When you feel like Judas, Hey, I'm the one who deserves it.

I'm smarter than that fellow. It's true. Judas was smarter than Peter, James or John.

I believe Judas was the only one who if you'd sent the twelve disciples to Bible school, I think only Judas Iscariot would have graduated. The others would have all failed in Bible school. Judas Iscariot graduated.

He was a clever chap. He was a smart chap. Why do I say that? Because he was three and a half years with these people and they still didn't know who was the traitor.

You've got to be smart to live and move with people for three and a half years and they still don't know you're a crook. You've got to be really sharp. And he was.

These people lived together, slept together, moved together and three and a half years he covered himself up so well. Who can do that? A dumb fellow can't do that. Only a real sharp.

He was sharp. He'd have topped any Bible school and got first prize. Peter would have been somewhere down last.

That's God's way. And Judas was jealous. Other people are being given positions and I'm being ignored and I'm the great smart clever fellow here and I'm being ignored every time.

It disturbed him. My dear brothers and sisters, if the elders don't have confidence in you, there's a very good reason. Don't get jealous of it.

Don't get angry. Just humble yourself and say something's wrong with you. Not something's wrong with the discernment of those elders.

It's exactly what Judas Iscariot felt. That's how he became a son of perdition and you be careful that you don't become a son or daughter of perdition yourself. Humble yourselves.

Always the way of salvation. God gives grace to the humble. Always to the humble.

Remember that. As we humble ourselves before God, God gives us grace. That's God's way.

And Judas Iscariot could not do that. And that was the difference between him and Peter. One single difference.

Peter could have been a son of perdition and gone with Judas Iscariot to hell for denying Jesus. He humbled himself. The Lord tested Judas.

The Lord tested Peter. Peter passed Judas' faith. How did he test them? Let me show you.

You know, we're talking about Christ-like. I want you to turn to Matthew 16. We talk about Christ-like speech.

What is Christ-like speech? Jesus turned to Simon Peter when Simon Peter said, verse 16, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven. Can you imagine the size of Peter's head after he heard that? I think it was pretty big.

His shoulders came out. He looked around at all the other eleven. Me, you know.

Blessed. Above everyone. I got revelation from heaven, brother.

Jesus Himself said it. Okay. Then Jesus said, next sentence, from that time, verse 21, He began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem.

And He must be killed. And Peter, the fellow who got revelation from heaven whose head has become twice his size, now feels that he can even correct the Lord, you know. That happens sometimes.

When God blesses you. I told you the other day, the most dangerous place you can ever be in is the place where God blesses you. Or somebody says something good about you, which is true.

And then your head becomes swollen up. And he thought he could now rebuke the Lord Himself. You know, there are people who feel that they can correct all the elders in the world who have never done anything for God themselves.

But they are first class rebukers and correcters of others. He said, God forbid it, Lord. You don't know what you are talking about.

This is not going to happen to you. And he turned and said to Peter, with everybody listening, Get behind me, Satan! How good God is to put a pin or a thorn into this balloon that's getting bigger and bigger and bigger. You know what happens when a balloon gets bigger and bigger? It's filled with helium.

It just goes up and up and up and up. You go out of sight. Jesus put a little thorn into it and brought it right down to earth.

Satan! That was good. He suddenly became so small. And Jesus said it publicly.

Some people say we should not correct anybody publicly. Jesus always corrected people publicly. Even the seven elders in Revelation chapter 2 and 3. Jesus said, Read the letters publicly.

While the elders are sitting there, read out the letter. You have got a name that you are alive, but you are dead. That's how God is.

Human beings are not like that. Human beings have got their wisdom, but God's God is wisdom. Even elders, the Bible says, 1 Timothy 5, Rebuke them publicly before the whole church if they do something wrong.

Diplomats and people who are false prophets don't do that. True prophets always do that. See, a lot of us, even though we read the Bible, I want to say to you, my dear brothers and sisters, we have not understood God's ways at all.

We have got wrong understandings of God's ways, wrong understandings of Christ like, wrong understandings of humility. We have got wrong understandings of a whole lot of things because of one reason. When we come to the Bible, we don't come with humility saying, God, get rid of my way of thinking and give me your way of thinking.

You want to be Christ-like? Really? When you come to read the Bible, ask God to get rid of your human way of thinking and say, Lord, make me really like the real Jesus of Scripture, lest I spend my time worshipping another Jesus and become like that other Jesus. So, we read here, that, you know, this is around the middle time of Jesus' ministry on earth. Now, sometimes you got to compare Scripture with

Scripture.

Around the middle time, that means sometime after one and a half years of Jesus' ministry, He told them about the cross. That's the time He called Peter Satan. Now, you know, some people say, Jesus spoke strongly to the Pharisees.

But He called them only snakes. And He called Peter, what? Satan. Now, which do you think is worse? I mean, snake is bad, but what about Satan? So, remember this, that to His enemies, He said, you are hypocrites, you are snakes.

But to His closest co-worker, He says, you are Satan. He doesn't tell him, Peter, I think, you know, what you said just now was not very good. None of that type of stuff.

Jesus was not a diplomat or a false prophet. He said, get behind me, Satan. You are not interested in the things of God, verse 23.

You are a stumbling block to me. You are interested in the things of man. I tell you, that's Christ-like.

Just in case you wanted to know, to balance out your understanding of Christ-like, this is Christ-like. You are a stumbling block to me, Satan, get away from here. You are not interested in the things of God, you are interested in the things of man.

So, we get a balanced understanding of Christ-like. So, we see here that when the Lord rebuked like that, the Bible says in Revelation 3, you know that verse? Verse 19, I think. Those whom I love, I rebuke.

Now, this is the middle time of Jesus' ministry. Turn to John chapter 6, which is around the same time. The same thing that's written in John 6 happened approximately the same time as Matthew 16.

Probably a couple of days after Matthew 16, around the same time anyway. And Jesus spoke some very hard words here about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, which is about the cross, which is why I believe it is around the same time. Because it says in Matthew 16, that's the time He began to speak about the cross.

And this is where we read about the cross, in John chapter 6, about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, in verse 53. And some people said, verse 60, this is a difficult statement. Many of His disciples, not the Jews, notice that.

Many of His disciples, His disciples, He had hundreds of them. Many of them said, we can't accept this. This is not Christ-like.

Imagine telling Jesus, you are not Christ-like. You can be that stupid. Jesus was conscious that His disciples were grumbling.

He said, does this cause you to stumble? It's the spirit that gives life. And then it says, as a result of just these words, verse 66, not one or two, many of His disciples withdrew. You know how many were following Him? Turn to the beginning of the chapter, verse 2, a great multitude was following Him.

I always say, John chapter 6 is the great chapter, where you start with a great multitude and end with 11. You know, it's like Jesus, the great sifter. He tests the righteous.

The sifting. You know, it's like wheat that you get from the ration shop. Whenever we got wheat from the ration shop in our house, my wife always had to sift it.

Get all the stones out. But here, most of it were stones. Just a few grains of wheat.

That's all, 11 grains of wheat and all stones. That looked like wheat, but Jesus couldn't be fooled. He'd sift and sift and sift and sift and sift and sift and sift.

He's testing the righteous, testing the righteous. All these grains that look like, painted to look like wheat and all, He can't be fooled. It's gradually, they all go out and finally there were 12 left.

Great multitude, whittled down to 12. Many of His disciples left. And Jesus said to the 12, Well, you got to be sifted too, you fellas.

You want to go away? If you want to go away, go. I'm not going to hang on to any of you. We've always said that in this church.

Do you want to go away? Go. If you find a better place, go. We don't ask anybody to come here.

And Simon Peter answered, Lord, to whom shall we go? I say the only folks we ever want in this church are the people who say those words, Lord, where shall we go? These are the words of eternal life. That's what Peter said. You have the words of eternal life.

What words? Get behind me, Satan. You're a stumbling block to me. You're not interested in the things of God.

You're interested in the things of men. Peter says, Lord, these are the words of eternal life. Do you see his reaction to correction? I have met a few brothers like that in my life.

I'm sorry to say, only a few. Like Peter. Their reaction has been like that.

These are the words of eternal life. Who never get offended, who take seriously, word of correction. And I've seen how well it has gone with them.

Most of the others, some, after a long period of getting offended, they say, OK, which other church can we go to? OK, Lord, fine. We'll stay here. Prognosis is not too good for such people.

That means the doctor says, prognosis is a medical word, which means, if I were you, I wouldn't bet on it. That means, well, I'm not so sure how this patient will turn out. You know, it's sort of 50-50.

I don't know whether he'll die. That's the prognosis for people like that. But for people like Peter, who say, Lord, these are the words of eternal life, 100% chance of recovery, the doctor says.

Your attitude to correction. God is testing you. We read in Matthew chapter 26, about Judas Iscariot.

How he was tested also. Just like Peter was tested. His attitude to correction.

What will be your attitude, Peter, when I call you devil? You're a stumbling block. You're interested in human things. And now Judas, who was also tested, not with such strong words.

God does not test us beyond our ability. You can imagine how strong Peter was, if Jesus felt he could even test him by calling him Satan. He was in pretty high class, even though he was not filled with the Spirit yet.

Because, you know, humility, you can notice, even when a person is converted, long before they are filled with the Holy Spirit, you can see a certain attitude. Because they've been so conscious of their sin. See, I believe the problem with many of us is, we have forgotten.

Listen to me, my brothers and sisters. Many of you have forgotten the gutter from which Jesus picked you up. You've forgotten it.

That's your problem. And that's why your head has become puffed up. I have never forgotten, even today, I recognize and remember the gutter from which Jesus picked me up.

And by the grace of God, I'll never forget it. I want to say to all of you, how many of you were picked up from clean, air-conditioned hospitals? We were picked up from the gutter of sin. Matthew 26, there was in Bethany, verse 6, in the home of Simon the leper, which I think was the same home as Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

A woman came to him with an alabaster vial for a costly perfume. I think that was Mary. She poured it on his head.

And the disciples said, why this waste? And if you read John chapter 12, the same story is written. You read there, that it was Judas Iscariot who said those words. Why this waste? Because this money could have been sold and given to the poor.

Verse 9, that's because Judas Iscariot kept the money bag for the poor and he kept stealing that money. So we know from John, comparing John 12 with this verse, it was Judas Iscariot who said it. Why this waste? And Jesus said to Judas Iscariot, and to all of them, why do you bother this woman? She's done a good deed.

You know when Judas says, Lord, why this waste of money? Imagine, 300 denary. 300 denary, by the way, one denary is a laboring man's wages for one day. So, if you want to understand in terms of your money, 300 days wages.

You exclude the holidays, that's one year's salary. One year's salary, that's the cost of that perfume. Pretty expensive perfume.

How many would pour one year's salary at Jesus' feet? I think Judas Iscariot was irresensible. Wasn't he? Lord, why waste this money? We could have used this one year's salary. This person's salary could be given to the poor.

And Jesus rebuked Judas Iscariot and said, No, you're wrong, Judas. There's nothing wrong in this woman, because she's the only one who's going to anoint my body for the burial before I've even died. And the people who don't do it now, they come to anoint my body after the burial, they won't get the opportunity.

You read that in John chapter 20 and Luke 24. They went to anoint the body of Jesus on the first day of the week, and they couldn't do it because he'd already risen. They could not anoint the body of Jesus with

perfume.

The only one who got that opportunity was the one who did it when they got a chance. Serve the Lord when you get a chance. You may not get that chance tomorrow or next week.

If you don't take it now, you may not get it later. She has prepared my body, verse 12, for the burial. So she did a very good thing, and not only that, whatever she has done will be preached in the whole world, and for 2,000 years what Mary did has been preached all over the world.

But Judas Iscariot got so angry with this gentle rebuke. It was nothing compared to the way Jesus rebuked Peter. This gentle correction.

He immediately left that place, verse 14, went to the chief priest and said, What are you willing to give me if I will betray him to you? You see his reaction to correction, to a small correction, he could not bear it. And think of that big, huge correction that Peter got, and he calls it the words of eternal life. And Judas got a small correction, and he went and betrayed Jesus.

You are also corrected. I want to say to you, your reaction to that correction, please listen, will send you along the way of Peter, or along the way of Judas Iscariot. Who decides that? You.

The Lord tests the righteous. One last thing, there was another king to whom a prophet came and spoke, something more serious than what Micaiah said to Ahab, or what Jeremiah said to the kings of his time. And you read of that, I don't have time to turn to that, in 2 Samuel chapter 12 about Nathan the prophet who came to David and said to him, You have sinned against God.

What did David do? Did he lock him up in a prison? And Nathan pointed to the king and said, You're the man. He wrote Psalm 51. You know what David says? I want to encourage all of you, I don't have time to expand on that.

Go home and meditate on Psalm 51. It will be your salvation. If you take heed to my words.

David, he doesn't get angry with the prophet. He probably gave him a big reward. He goes before God and says, Oh God, be gracious to me.

My sin, I know my transgression, my sin is always in front of me. I have sinned against you. I was brought forth in iniquity, there's sin in me from top to bottom.

Oh God, I'm a sinner. Please have mercy upon me. Please have mercy upon me.

A broken and a contrite heart, you will never despise. Please Lord, don't cast me away from your presence. Psalm 51, 11.

Don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. David was a man after God's own heart.

David made mistakes. Peter made mistakes. More serious mistakes than you and I have made.

More serious than you and I. David committed adultery, killed a husband, married his wife. Peter denied the Lord. But see where they ended up.

Why is it we have made much lesser mistakes and we're pretty proud? And why is it we are a million miles away from Peter and David? Listen to me. Because of your attitude to correction has not been right. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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