

The Marks of a Bad Tree

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of genuine inward holiness over outward appearances, highlighting the root of all sin as selfishness and the root of all holiness as love. It warns against hypocrisy and the danger of seeking the approval of men rather than God. The speaker urges a focus on the unseen, inner life that aligns with God's standards, emphasizing the need for a revival of true holiness in churches.

Scripture: Matthew 7:17, Matthew 23:25, Matthew 6:1, Luke 24:47, John 7:39, Hebrews 7:19, Hebrews 8:6, Psalm 1:2, Matthew 6:1

Topics: "Inward Holiness", "True Love vs. Hypocrisy"

Description

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Transcript

Thank you very much. Let's read a verse in Hebrews in chapter 7 and verse 19. There is a good habit that I want to encourage all of you to have during this new year.

And that is the habit of studying the Bible. I'm sure all of us read the Bible. There is a lot of difference between reading and studying.

The Bible says, blessed is the man who meditates on the law of the Lord day and night. He doesn't read it day and night, that's not possible, but he meditates day and night. That's a very good habit.

I have had it for more than 40 years and it has changed my life. I can really say that what it says in Psalm 1 is true, that the man who meditates on God day and night is blessed. And whatever he does will prosper, there will be no failure in his life, and he will be like a tree planted by the rivers that is always bringing forth fruit.

I don't read the word day and night, but I think about it many times during the day and even if I wake up at night. Do you want your life to be blessed? Do you want whatever you touch to prosper? Do you want to be like a tree that never is dry, always fresh 365 days of the year? Meditate on God's word day and night. This is the only book in the whole world written by God, and if you ask God to teach you, he will teach you.

It's very good to start when we are very young, because before you get married, start studying God's word. When you read the book of Hebrews, there is one word that comes 13 times in the book, that is the word better. You read that in Hebrews 7 verse 19, the law made nothing perfect, but on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope through which we draw near to God.

The law made nothing perfect, but on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope through which we draw near to God. In chapter 8 verse 6 it says, Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant, which is enacted in the same verse on better promises. So you see a better hope, a better covenant, a better promises.

That is what Hebrews is talking about, that everything in the new covenant is much better than the old covenant. If I tell you Jesus is better than Moses, we can all agree. Jesus is as much higher than Moses as heaven is above the earth.

All of us agree on that. But if I say next that the covenant which Moses brought and the covenant which Jesus brought, what Jesus brought is as high as heaven is above the earth compared to the old covenant, I don't know whether you believe that. But if I say next that the covenant which Moses brought and the covenant which Jesus brought, what Jesus brought is as high as heaven is above the earth compared to the old covenant, I don't know whether you believe that.

We all agree that heaven is better than the earth. I don't think anyone will disagree on that. Then why is it so many believers are seeking for earthly blessings instead of heavenly blessings? That proves they don't believe that heaven is better than earth.

If I believe that this school is better than that school, then I will put my children in that school. But if I say this is a better school, then I put my children in that school, then I don't really believe it. So if I say heaven is better than earth and then I seek earthly blessings, I don't believe it.

I'll tell you, it's absolutely true. One drop of heavenly blessing is much better than rivers of earthly blessings. The richest person in this room is the person who has got maximum heavenly blessing, not maximum money.

Because that brings a better hope. It's like college is better than school. The law was like taking people to school.

That was good. Grace leads us on to college. But many people don't want to go on to grace.

Just like even today, many people finish school and say, okay, I don't want anymore, that's enough. But who are the people who got good jobs here? Those who went to college. That is why I always encourage young people, go to college and study some more.

If your parents can't afford that, then God will bless you where you are. Or if God has not given you intelligence to study in college, then God will bless you where you are. But if you have the ability and your parents can afford it, it's good to go to college.

In the same way, spiritually, who are the ones who are pleasing God the most and doing the most for God? Those who have come under grace, who have moved out of law to grace. And don't be deceived by the number of people that go for some meeting. I don't think Jesus had many people who come to his meeting if he preached discipleship.

When he preached healing, not when he did healing, many thousands came. But when he preached discipleship, most of them went away. But he did not come to heal the sick, he came to make disciples.

And when he was on earth, he told his disciples, go and heal the sick. Cleanse the lepers, raise the dead. But he never told them to preach the gospel.

Because there was no gospel those days. Jesus had not died, there was no good news that Jesus rose from the dead. I want you to see what Jesus told them to do in Matthew 10.

What could they preach? They could not tell people your sins are forgiven. See very carefully what he told them to do. See very carefully what he told them to do.

Matthew 10 verse 5. He sent out his 12 disciples. And he said when you go preach like this. Verse 7. The kingdom of God is near.

It has not yet come. It is going to come. It came on the day of Pentecost.

Before that they could not say it has come. Today we can say it has come. You can have the power of the kingdom of God inside your heart now.

But they could not say that. They could not tell people how their sins could be forgiven. Their only message was, the kingdom of God is near, you fellows better repent.

Their only message was, the kingdom of God is near, you fellows better repent. And to confirm that message. Verse 8. Heal the sick.

Cleanse the lepers. Cast out demons. Freely you receive, freely give.

Don't acquire any gold or silver or copper for your money belts. Or don't take a bag for your journey. Because you will be supported wherever you go.

But when Jesus told his disciples to go and preach the gospel. After the resurrection. He never told them to go and preach that the kingdom of God is near.

He never told them to go and preach that the kingdom of God is near. He said in Luke 24.47. Repentance for forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed everywhere. Now we are not preaching that the kingdom of God is going to come, it says come.

So wait for the day of Pentecost, let that kingdom come and then go and preach. So wait for the day of Pentecost, let that kingdom come and then go and preach. When did the kingdom of God come to earth? On the day of Pentecost.

That is the day the kingdom of God came. From that time onwards we are preaching God's kingdom. Jesus said that in Mark's gospel.

And chapter 9. Verse 1. He told the people standing there. Some of you who are standing here will not die before you see the kingdom of God come with power. Some would die because they were old people.

But most of them would live till the day of Pentecost when the kingdom of God came with power. That's what he was saying there. Many of you living here will see that kingdom coming with power onto this earth.

That is what we have to proclaim. The kingdom of God with power. Power to overcome sin.

Power to bless those who curse us. You know it's like you try to press wood into the water, it won't sink, it just comes up. You keep pressing a wood into the water for 10 hours, when you take your hand up, it will come up again.

It's nature is like that. And a child of God who has entered into the kingdom of God with power is like that. You cannot push him down.

He cannot sink, he comes up. No, if 10,000 people sit on him, he will still come up. That is the power of God.

You see in an aeroplane, hundreds of people are sitting inside, the power takes it right up. The kingdom of God is like that. You cannot keep it down.

You cannot discourage a man who has come into God's kingdom with power. Because God is with him. Even if all people forsake him, it doesn't make a difference to him.

Because he has entered into the kingdom of God with power. I fear that many of us have only understood these things in theory. Understanding is so big.

Our experience of God's power is very little. It's like left leg being 3 feet long and the right leg is only 6 inches. How do you think I will be standing here if my one leg was 3 feet and the other was only 6 inches? Even if there is 1 inch difference, you can make out how a man is walking.

Our life must be equal to our knowledge. And for that we have to understand what Jesus has called us to proclaim. Today he did not call us to go and preach and heal the sick and cleanse the lepers and raise the dead.

That is what he preached to those people those days. He told them to preach. Today he said we have to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

And in Matthew 28 verse 19 He said go and make disciples in every nation. And then he said in Mark 16 In verse 15 go and preach the gospel. He never said anything about healing the sick.

But he said if you preach the gospel, if you make disciples, God will himself confirm it with various signs like he says in verse 17 onwards. Like he says in verse 17, God himself will confirm his word with miracles and signs. You don't have to worry about that.

God will take care of it. He will cast out demons through you. Those who believe in him will speak in new tongues.

They will lay hands on the sick and they will recover. Those are signs. He did not give them as commands.

He didn't say go and speak in tongues. He didn't say go and heal the sick. That was in Matthew chapter 10.

People don't read the Bible carefully. What it says in Mark 16 is You preach the gospel. You make disciples.

And when people believe, These signs will happen to those who believe. They will speak in tongues. They will lay hands on the sick.

They will recover etc. We are living in a day when most people do not read the Bible exactly and therefore they have so much confusion in their life. Today, most people have so much confusion in their life because they don't read the Bible properly.

The fundamental problem in Christianity today is I have been a believer for 45 years and I have been keeping a close eye on how Christianity is today. I will tell you the fundamental problem. And therefore they don't understand what holiness is.

If you don't know what darkness is, you don't know what light is. If you don't know what black is, you don't know what white is. It's like a blind man.

How can you explain colors to a blind man? There is absolutely no way to explain colors to a blind man. I'll tell you something, if you really want to make progress in your Christian life, I wish somebody had told me this when I was converted 45 years ago. For 16 years, I wandered around trying to find out the secret of a victorious life.

And then I found it. God showed me what was the root of all sin. And that is what changed my life.

God showed me what is the root of all holiness. And that is what changed my life. And all of you who are serious, let me explain it like this.

All sin comes from the root of selfishness. Every sin you commit is because you are selfish. Because you think of yourself.

And let me tell you. All holiness, all genuine holiness comes from the root of love. All holiness that you have without love, it's not the real thing.

It's only a counterfeit. Real holiness comes from the root of love. A fervent love for Jesus Christ.

And a heart full of love for other people. That's why Jesus said when somebody asked him, what is the great commandment? He didn't say the great commandment is thou shall be holy because I am holy says the Lord. It is an important commandment.

But that's not what Jesus said. He said the great commandment is love God with all your heart. That means in your whole heart there must be no place for love for anybody else except God.

Then he said you must love other people as you love yourself. But you say if I have got all my heart with love for God, where is that space to love other people? That is a stupid question. Foolish question.

When you love God with all your heart, you will automatically without knowing it love other people. It's like as I said yesterday when the water tank is full, it overflows. You don't have to tell the water tank now you must overflow.

That's what happens when your heart is filled with the love of God, it just overflows in love for other people. You know you hear in the meeting that you must love others. And you try and it is so difficult.

It's like a water tank has only got one inch of water in it and you are telling the water overflow, overflow, overflow. How can it overflow? It's only one inch of water. And we take little dipper of water and give it to others and we think that is love.

That's not love. Love is when it overflows. All holiness comes from there.

This dipper method of giving love is a, you get exhausted. And by the time you come to the bottom of the tank there is a lot of mud and all types of things there. That is a very difficult way of loving other people.

A lot of people create problems for others also when they are trying to pour this water to others. But when you overflow, you don't have to put a dipper, nothing, it just goes on going on and on and on. Jesus said that is life filled with the Holy Spirit.

But that is not possible in the Old Testament. Because the Holy Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not glorified. See John chapter 7, here is a description of Old Testament.

John 7, 39. This is a description of the entire Old Testament period. Even when the disciples were with Jesus on earth it was like this.

Before the day of Pentecost it was like this. The Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. When Jesus was glorified, the Holy Spirit was given.

And that changed the world completely. You know in the world they divide the calendar according to before Christ was born and after Christ was born. That is why they say 2005.

I think there may be some mistake in their calculation but they say it is 2005 years from the birth of Christ. But for me, I don't go by that. For me, I see the whole history of humanity divided into two periods.

One is before the Holy Spirit was given and one is after the Holy Spirit was given. Before the Holy Spirit was given life was all under the law. Man was totally selfish and he could not do anything about it.

But once the Holy Spirit is given, now it can fill my heart with the love of God. And I have found also in the experience of believers, there are two periods like this. In your experience.

In my experience. If I were to tell you my experience is like that. Before the Spirit was given and after the Spirit was given.

Before being filled with the Spirit and after being filled with the Spirit. The problem with some believers is even after they are filled with the Spirit, they are still living like people before the fullness of the Spirit. It is like people who got a tractor, they bought a tractor but they are still ploughing with the bullock cart.

They polish the tractor every morning but ploughing is with the bullock cart. That is how many Christians are. You know some wonderful songs we sing.

It is like polishing the tractor Sunday morning. We are ploughing with the bullock cart. That is a better way.

That is what Hebrew says better, better, better, better. The tractor is better than the bullock cart. So I want to show you a verse in Matthew chapter 7. Here Jesus spoke about two trees.

We can look at these two trees in two different ways. Matthew 7. He said in verse 17. Every good tree bears good fruit but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

Here is an amazing statement. Next verse. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit.

A bad tree cannot produce good fruit. It is a picture of the life of Adam and the life of Jesus Christ. The life of Adam is the bad tree.

We have all got it. We got it from our parents. The life of Jesus Christ is the good tree.

The life of Jesus Christ can never, never, never, never produce bad fruit. Do you believe that? I think all of us will say we believe that. Let me see whether you believe the second statement.

Listen carefully. The life of Adam can never produce good fruit. Do you believe that? You say no brother.

There are some good things in my life. And I have seen some unconverted people. There are some good things in their life.

It is because you believe that you do not come to life in the Holy Spirit. It is because you believe in the back of your mind there is some goodness in the life of Adam. In the life of Jesus you know there is nothing bad.

That you will believe. Verse 18. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit.

But the second part is what many Christians do not believe. But the second part is what many Christians do not believe. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit.

What looks like good to you is not good in God's eyes. Because God's standard is different from yours. We are deceived by a lot of things which look good in the life of Adam.

We are deceived by a lot of things which look good in the life of Adam. You think that some of the good things you have from Adam are good in God's eyes. They are not.

That is why you admire some. You say so and so is a good person. He is a non-Christian but he is a good person.

God has to accept him. But you are not the judge. God is the judge.

You said a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. I believe Jesus. I don't believe my own brain.

You know how King Saul lost the kingdom in the Old Testament. God told him to kill all the Amalekite animals. But he said the good sheep are not so bad.

We can offer them to God. So Amalek is a picture of the flesh. God says it must all be killed.

Like King Saul we separate the good from the bad. The bad sheep of the flesh will kill all that. But the good sheep of the flesh we can offer to God.

Because of that Saul lost the kingdom. Because of that you can lose the kingdom. You need to understand that selfishness is at the root of all sin.

Do you know that you can do a very good thing with a selfish reason underneath? A man can preach a wonderful sermon, a good thing. But the root may be I want to get some money. I want to get some honor.

So you listen to the sermon and say what a fantastic sermon. But God sees the root and says it's bad. But God sees the root and says it's bad.

You know when this tsunami problem came in all the coastal part of Tamil Nadu. I read in the paper so many people, all atheists, Hindus all taking trucks of rice and food and everything. So much of relief, blankets and all types of things.

I say what good people. These are not Christians. So much money they are giving.

Then I read in one paper. Then these people who are taking all this, they also take photographers to take the photographs so that everybody sees what they are doing. Video cameras so that they can play it somewhere else.

Video cameras so that they can show it somewhere else. And this is in the newspaper. I read it in the newspaper.

And it said there some of these people are more interested in their photograph being taken than in relieving these poor people who are suffering. Even the Christians. Jesus said when you do good, don't tell anybody about it.

It's good to help these tsunami relief people. What they are doing is good. But I say some of it is not good in God's eyes.

That's all I'm saying. If I did some good to them, nobody will know about it. Then I know God will accept it.

If I did some good to them, I will never take a photograph. That is why when we preach the gospel here, we don't send photographs to America. What we are doing here.

So much of good is bad at the root. Jesus said that. People give money.

But they want other people to see it. That's what he said in Matthew chapter 6. He said don't sound a trumpet when you are giving money to the poor. Today he will say don't get all the newspaper reporters when you are giving money to the relief.

So I'm not against people helping. Let them help. Even with bad motive, let them help.

It's ok. Those poor people are blessed. Praise the Lord.

You know I heard that America decided to give so many million dollars for relief. Then so many people criticized. What you are such a rich country, you are giving so little.

So they felt bad and they increased it. For what? To impress people that we are a very generous nation. It's good.

So many people are being helped. But God says there is no reward in heaven for all this. If you want a reward from God for what you do, make sure nobody knows the good that you did.

That is God's way. That is the good tree. But who understands that? Even most believers don't understand.

They look and say what a lot of good these unbelievers are doing. I agree. From a human standpoint it's very good because those poor people get some money.

I don't stop it. I say please more people get your photographers and give them some money. But don't think that has got value before God.

Not at all. So I am just giving you an example how good things can be rejected by God as has no value in heaven. You can pray and it will have no value in heaven.

Because you are praying to impress somebody or to tell some people. For more than 30 years people have asked me, Brother Jack, how do you pray and what is the secret of your prayer life? How do you study the bible? I have never told anybody. Do any of you know anything about it? Have I ever fasted in my life? Do any of you know? You are not going to know that from me.

Because then there is no value in heaven. Everything we do before God must be in secret. That is why the new covenant is better.

The new covenant is a hidden life, a secret life. Jesus said, what the father sees in secret, he will reward openly, other people will see the fruit. See Matthew chapter 6. The last part of verse 4, your father who sees in secret will repay you.

The last part of verse 6, your father who sees in secret will repay you. The last part of verse 18, your father who sees in secret will repay you. Why did the Lord say it three times? The father must see something in secret.

And the repayment will be public. What does the father see in secret in your life? It is like a tree. Do you know what is the most important part of a tree? It is not the branches.

It is the roots which you cannot see. Are the roots good roots that are collecting water from somewhere? And if it gets that water, those roots will make everything in the tree green. Do you know what is the most important part of your life? The roots.

Which is the most important part of this building? Underneath which you cannot see. If that foundation is not strong, I would not like to stand here. My dear brothers and sisters, the most important part of the tree is the root.

What comes from selfishness can never be good even if it is tsunami relief in God's eyes. In man's eyes, so many things are good. Even a crooked businessman who cheats people and makes money, they appreciate him.

They will praise crooked politicians. The world has got a different sense. But in God's eyes, always he sees what root is this coming from.

Let me tell you the other side. If you do something out of love, even if you make a mistake, and men criticize you, God says, very good. Hasn't that happened to us many times? We do something out of love for other people, but they misunderstand us.

And they speak evil of us. Never mind. Maybe you made a mistake.

But God sees the root. And he says, well done. That is the thing that encourages us.

And if you understand this, that is why Jesus said, in Matthew chapter 7, a good tree cannot produce bad fruit. Verse 18, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. So we got to make the tree good.

Not just make the fruit. That's what he said in another gospel. Make the tree good.

Make sure the tree is good. Don't just try to give people the impression that the tree is good. That is why the number one sin that Jesus condemned on earth was not murder or adultery, but hypocrisy.

That is why the number one sin that Jesus condemned on earth was not murder or adultery, but hypocrisy. Do you know what hypocrisy is? I am going to draw a picture for you. There is a bad mango tree in front of my house.

All dried up, black, useless mangoes come from it. All useless. Nobody can eat it.

But supposing I want to fool everybody who comes to my house. I go to the market and buy a lot of very beautiful, ripe Alfonso mangoes or something like that. And I get some nice green string and tie it up very cleverly all over this tree.

And people come to my house. Oh, brother Zach, how you got such a good mango tree here? And people come to my house. how you got such a good mango tree here? how you got such a good mango tree here? Yes, brother, I prayed.

God's blessing came to this tree and it is hanging like a mango tree. I poured water and put fertilizer. All lies.

This is hypocrisy. But I have to be very careful. Because when these mangoes begin to dry I have to go and buy some more mangoes and tie it up there.

Lot of hard work. A hypocrite has to work very hard. Always he has to give people the impression I am a very holy man.

He has to pray properly. Clap properly. Sing with lot of zeal.

Hallelujah, raise hands and all that. It's all these mangoes dried to the tree. It's not from within.

And everybody says, oh brother, that brother is such a spiritual brother. That sister is such a spiritual sister. Always first person to pray.

Everybody, the whole audience will be shaken by her prayer. Very few people know there's just a mango tied up there. It's all on the outside.

Go home and see how she talks to her husband. That is a real mango. It is all dry and black.

It's all a deception. This is what is happening today, all over Christendom. Jesus says, pull out this tree and cut it down, verse 19, and throw it into the fire.

Don't fool people. Let the Holy Fishness is what makes us live a life on the outside. When Jesus spoke about the Pharisees in Matthew 23, see some of the things that he told them.

Verse 14, in secret, you are troubling poor widows and turning them out of the houses, your houses, because they don't pay their rent in time. Nobody knows that. But then you come to the synagogue on the

Sabbath day, and you pray a long prayer.

Oh God, I love you so much. I'm such a poor man, but Lord, you are such a great holy God. Everybody thinks, oh, what a holy man.

They don't know that yesterday only he kicked out one poor widow from the house for not paying the rent. This is all this mango he's tying up in the tree to show other people on the meeting. And then Jesus said, verse 25, you clean the outside of the cup, but the inside is all full of robbery and self-indulgence.

See, outside, all those who are concentrating on the outer life, outer life, outer life, they have not understood the new covenant. The new covenant is an inner life. It's not an outer life.

Have you seen in some churches, the sisters have special saree for Sunday. White. You see the same sister when she goes to some relative's wedding, what dress she wears.

Some un-converted relative. Completely different. This is all to fool people on Sunday morning.

It's a deception. They'll take off their ornaments when they come here to the meeting and they wear it when they go to work. What is this? It is all on the outside.

And that is because those sisters know that in our church, the important thing is the outside. So they know how to do this action to impress their pastor or whatever it is. I'm such a holy sister.

And if we encourage that, our church will be just full of Pharisees. The outside is also clean. How they live at home.

How they speak at home. How they spend their money at home. All that nobody sees.

And it says they are self-indulgent. That means they keep on living for themselves. They indulge themselves.

Yeah, I have seen that much in different churches. I'm not talking about our churches. I have seen people.

They will look very simple and poor in the meeting. White cotton saree. No earrings, nothing.

They got 100 silk sarees in their house. What is this deception? Every one of those silk sarees cost more than this earring. But these people will see in the meeting.

So we better take it off. Those 100 sarees are inside my cupboard. Nobody will see it.

Hypocrite. Hypocrite. Bad tree putting all these mangoes on the branch.

God says you seek the honor of men, that's what you'll get. There are few who seek the honor of God. It's not only their sarees.

These people who are so careful about the outside appearance in the church. Do you know how many lakhs of rupees they spend in building their house? But that nobody knows the accounts. This is the deception that is going on in Christendom today.

Why? Because the leaders are all teaching people to keep the outside of the cup clean. When you come to the meeting, always look like a poor brother, poor sister and look very holy on the outside. Don't give

people the impression that you are spending too much money on your clothes.

Private what you have inside your cupboard which you go for your worldly weddings and all, nobody will see. Don't worry about that. How many lakhs you've got in your fixed deposit? Nobody worries about that.

Hypocrites. All hypocrites. Bad trees with these beautiful mangoes hung up there.

What a surprise we will get when Jesus comes and strips all this in the day of judgment. In that day you will discover many people whom you despised in the other denominations may be ten times better than you. And you who clean the outside of the cup, God will show what all was inside the cup.

Dear brothers and sisters, you know we need a revival in our churches. A revival of inward holiness where I do not live for myself. That is the will of God.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, help us to take your word more seriously. Help us to live for the things that are eternal.

And not to care for the honor of men. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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