

The Maximum Christian and the Way of the Cross

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of understanding the true nature of the church, the power of grace, and the necessity of forgiveness and commitment in the Christian life.

Duration: 1:07:41

Scripture: Psalm 127:3-5, Malachi 1:11, Matthew 16:24, John 17:10, Acts 17:30, Ephesians 3:10

Topics: "Surrender To God", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of surrendering fully to God, letting go of past ignorance and selfish interests, and committing to live 100% for Christ. It highlights the need to build a church that is a witness not only to people but also to the rulers and authorities in the spiritual realm. The message encourages forgiveness, training children to be spiritual warriors, and daily reading of the Bible to deepen understanding and faith.

Transcript

I'd like you to turn with me to Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 16. We often use the word church, and that means different things to different people. For most people, it indicates a building.

A building is a church, but do you know that in the New Testament, or in the whole Bible, no building is ever called a church? And then people refer to a denomination like the Methodist Church or the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Church. In the Bible, there is no such thing as a group, a denomination being called a church. We have to get out of our mind unbiblical words, because if we use unbiblical words, we will get into an unbiblical way of thinking.

So we need to come to Scripture and see what the Bible calls the church. Then we have a proper concept about church. It's like every other word, for example, grace.

Grace is one of the most misunderstood words in Christendom today. Most people's understanding of grace is that under law, God was very strict, and God sort of changed after Jesus came, and grace is as if God says, now it doesn't matter if you sin, because Christ has died, you can be forgiven. But that's the opposite of what grace means.

Grace means under the law, you couldn't overcome sin. Now I give you power to overcome sin. Grace is power.

And once you understand that, you get delivered from sin's power. One of the devil's great aims is to keep us ignorant of the truth. Jesus said, when you know the truth, the truth will make you free.

I remember as a young Christian, I was born in an Orthodox family. I hadn't read the Bible when I got converted at the age of 19 and a half. And I was very confused by all that I saw in Christendom, so many different denominations, and every one of them held the Bible and said, we've got the truth, everyone.

So I finally came to get some understanding on that by seeing one verse, John 8, 32, which says, you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free from sin. That's the context. So when I saw that that is the mark of a church having the truth, that if I listen to it, it will free me from sin in my life, and I was a slave to sin, just like every other human being.

A slave in five areas, actions, sins of deed, words, anger, lies, sins of thought, dirty thoughts, sins of attitude, unloving attitudes to people, and sins of motive. That means doing good things with the wrong motive. These are the five areas of sin, word, deed, word, thought, attitude, and motive.

I was a sinner in all of those. And when I read that, if you know the truth, the truth will set you free, I said, I wonder, I can find out which is the true church then. The church that has the truth is not just somebody who holds the Bible, because the Pharisees held the Bible too, the Old Testament.

But they were completely different from Jesus, who also quoted the Old Testament. So, I see that there are churches which are like the Pharisees today, and the churches that are following Christ. And the way to find the difference is by seeing which church will help me to be free from sin in all these areas.

So, there are many groups that call themselves churches today. Matthew 16 and verse 18 is the first time in the whole Bible that the word church occurs. The first time.

The first time that Jesus used it. And He said, on this rock, you know the rock is what Simon Peter just confessed. Simon Peter had said, you are the Christ, verse 16, the Son of the Living God.

And Jesus said, that's right, on that rock, which you just confessed, Christ the Son of the Living God, revealed to you by my Father, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it. So, I learned something that the real church that Jesus builds, hell and the powers of darkness cannot overpower it. And this is what Jesus came on earth to build.

He did not come to build a bunch of holy individuals who have no connection with each other. But holy individuals who come into fellowship with each other. In the Old Testament, they were not built together.

Another picture that the Bible uses is the church as a building. It is a holy temple to the Lord. And those of you who are from India know that in India we don't build houses with wood.

Because they get eaten up with termites. In India, houses are built with bricks. Every house is built with bricks.

And we can think of each brick as an individual believer. And those bricks are cemented together and joined together, and then it's constructed as a building. That's a building.

You see, a pile of bricks is just a congregation. But when they are built together, it's a building. That's a church in picture language.

But if you want your independence, you will not want to be built together with others, with one brick on top of you, one underneath, one to the left and one to the right, and cemented together as if you're stuck together and you can't escape. But that's where there's safety. See, really, the way they build church buildings in India is a truck will come with 10,000 bricks and unload it by the side of the road, and then the masons take those bricks and cement it together and build the building.

Now, if that is not done, and those 10,000 bricks are lying on the road, an amazing miracle takes place in India. They begin to reduce in number day by day. And in a few days, they will all disappear.

Because a couple of streets down, somebody else's building is his house too. And that's what happens when you're an individual believer, not linked with others. Satan can just pick you up one by one.

That's exactly the reason why many people make decisions and determine, and then they fall away. You're not built together with other people of like mind. I cannot be built together with anybody I like.

You know, that's how I said we join up with people of our own community or our own intellectual level. God wants to unite us not on the basis of intellect or community or language, but on the basis of spiritual hunger and desire. I want to be united with people who are going the same direction.

Not those who want to go to heaven when they die. It's one of the prayers I prayed many years ago when we started our work in India. I said, Lord, in India there are 1,200 million people.

All of them want to go to heaven. Have you ever met a man who doesn't want to go to heaven? I've never met one in any religion. All of them want to go to heaven when they die.

Am I going to gather all of them? No. I want to gather those who want to follow Jesus Christ on earth before they die. And that's a very small number, because Jesus said, Very few find the narrow way that leads to life, because there are restrictions there.

You can't live in sin and walk this narrow way. You can't have grudges against others and walk this narrow way. For example, Jesus said that if you haven't forgiven somebody, if you have a grudge against someone, maybe for some wrong that he did to you ten years ago, God will not forgive you.

It's clear-cut. In fact, in the Lord's Prayer, He taught us to pray, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, and so on, forgive us our sins as we forgive others. And then He went on in Matthew 6 to say, If you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive you.

Think of a person who considers himself a Christian. And he has got a tremendous grudge against somebody who did some real harm to him, maybe some years ago. There could be people sitting here like that.

You haven't forgiven somebody because he did some harm to you. And you die in that condition. Is the Word of God true, that if you don't forgive others, your Heavenly Father will not forgive you? I believe it.

I believe the words of Jesus. Heaven and earth will pass away, those words will not pass away. Then, after you die, is there a second chance that you get? Do you believe there's a second chance? I don't believe it.

Hebrews 9.27 says, It's appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment. So what if a person has been going to church for 25 years, and then he's got this tremendous grudge against somebody, and he dies? He has died unforgiven. Can he go to Heaven now, unforgiven? And all because he would not forgive somebody.

I believe it. I find very few preachers preaching this. I'm sure the devil doesn't want people to preach this, because he wants a lot of people in Hell.

And he knows that these people will all land up with him, so he says, why should they know the truth? I want to tell you the truth. I tell you the truth because I love you. I want to tell you exactly what Jesus said.

If you do not forgive others, you will not be forgiven. So these are the type of things that we need to get rid of, if we want to be built together in the church. It doesn't matter our intellectual level, social level, culture and all is unimportant, but spiritually, we believe the words of Jesus Christ.

And we take them seriously. And then the powers of darkness will not be able to overpower such a church. I want to say to you that in every place on the face of the earth, God wants a testimony for his name.

Not a large one, but a pure one. I will build my church, and the gates of Hell, the powers of darkness will not be able to overcome it. I want to say to you, wherever you're living, God wants to build a fellowship there of people who overcome Satan.

Satan wants to rule in every part of the earth, but God wants to build a testimony in your place, wherever you live, which overcomes Satan. When we started our work in Bangalore in India in 1975, just 41 years ago, there is a verse that the Lord drew our attention to, which is very relevant to what I'm saying just now, because we started building the church. We were all born again, but most of us were defeated by sin, even though we were saved.

So we began to seek for victory, and as we sought for victory, we not only began to seek for victory, the Lord brought a few of us together to become a fellowship. That's how the church started, over there in my home. And the Lord pointed us to the book of Malachi.

Now, the book of Malachi is important because it is the last message of God to the Jewish people before Jesus came. John the Baptist then prepared the way for Jesus. But Malachi, who was 300 years before Christ, was the last prophet.

And what God was saying through Malachi to the Jews is, I have been with you for these 1200 years from the days of Moses, now I'm fed up with you. I'm fed up with you because you haven't taken my word seriously. That's what he tells them.

Let me read to you Malachi chapter 1 and verse 6. A son honors his father and a servant honors his master. You say, I'm your father, but where's my honor? And if I'm a master, where's my respect? But you despise my name. And the priests say, how will we despise your name? Because you present defiled food on the altar.

You know that you have to bring a lamb or an ox or a goat as an offering, so what do you do? You look around in your flock and you find that lame sheep, it's a bit of a nuisance for you, let me give it as an offering. And you find that blind ox, so you can let me give that as an offering. Or here's a sick goat who's

about to die in any case, let me give it as an offering.

They were giving as an offering to God that which cost them nothing. They were giving the worst of that which, after they met all their needs with their sheep and ox and goat and all that, what was the useless ones? I think a lot of Christians give to God like that even today. But God was complaining about that.

Is that how you respect me? When you give, verse 8, the blind and the lame and the sick. You pick out from your flock that which is sick and lame and blind and you come and give it to me? And he says, if you have a governor in your state, here in verse 8 middle, will you give a gift like that to a governor? Will you give a gift to your governor of useless stuff like that? Will you give old food to a governor if you invite him home for a meal? Would he be pleased with you? And so he says, I wish, verse 10, that there was some priest among you who would shut the gates when people bring such offerings and say, God doesn't want this. He doesn't want all the sick and blind and why don't you give him the best? You know, that's what the Lord is saying even today.

How many of you give your best to God? Time, energy, money, everything. When I was converted, I was an officer in the Indian Navy and I had great ambitions in that profession. And Jesus came into my life and I got converted and I turned around and the Lord asked me, what's your goal in life now? I said, I want to please Jesus Christ.

I want to live the rest of my life pleasing Jesus Christ. I can remain in the Navy and be a witness for Christ but wherever you keep me, my goal now is not to become a big man in the world but to live for Christ, to live for eternity and not for time. And I'm very thankful that at a young age I began to see that our entire life on earth, even if you live a hundred years, is such a small portion of eternity.

And I said, I want to have an eternity without regret. I'm very thankful that I understood that when I was nearly 20 years old. I hope all of you understand that when Christ comes again and you stand before Him and your whole life is evaluated, will you have no regret, at least from a certain point onwards when you begin to take your Christian life seriously? I hope it will be true.

That's my aim. My aim is to preach so that I can lead people to have a life without regret when they stand before Christ. So the Lord says, why don't you preach? I wish I could find one priest who would shut the gates and say, we don't want that type of sacrifice.

God will not accept it. And he says, as far as I'm concerned, I've rejected you Jewish people. I've tried with you for 1,200 years to be my witnesses but you become so exclusive, so narrow-minded, so legalistic.

You don't realize that I love all of God's people, all of the people in the world. You just think you're the only ones whom God has chosen. There are a lot of Christians like that who think we're the only ones God has chosen.

God detests such people. And he says, now I'm telling you what I'm going to do. He tells the Jewish people, you know what's going to happen? Verse 11, I'm setting you people aside.

Israel is no longer going to be my chosen nation but from the rising of the sun to its setting, all the way from the east to the west, all the way from Japan way across to the western side of the world, my name will be great among all the nations and in every place, not just in Jerusalem and Galilee and Nazareth and all, all across the world. He was prophesying about a day that was coming on every part of the world, in every country. There will be a pure offering, verse 11, the last part, offered to my name and my name will

be great.

Not a large offering but a pure offering. In every part of the world, I will have people who come and give me not the leftovers of their life but the very best. That's a pure offering.

You know the contrast here is, instead of giving their best sheep and the best ox and the best goat, they were giving the sick and the blind and the lame. He says, I reject it. But, a day is coming when unlike you Jewish people who are doing all this, in every part of the world, I'll have a people who will give me their very best, who will not offer to me the leftovers in their life.

You would not give a governor the leftovers. You will not invite your governor for a cup of coffee and drink the cup of coffee yourself and give him the dregs. No.

But that's exactly what many people are doing to God today. You examine your life, my brother, sister. Ask yourself whether you are better than these Jewish people who are giving the leftovers of their life.

Christianity, we can say believers are divided into, in many ways we can divide them Catholic, Protestant, etc. Pentecostal, non-Pentecostal. But here's another way to divide Christians.

Those who give the minimum to God, those who give the maximum to God. And this whole group sitting here can be divided in that way. And you know which category you belong to.

I'm not here to divide you. God knows. When your attitude is, OK, I have to give God something because he did so much for me.

And you think in your mind, what is the minimum I have to give to God in terms of time, energy, money, my life? And there are others who say, Lord, I've got only one life. What's the maximum I can do for you to show my gratitude to you for what you did for me on the cross? These are two completely different types of Christians. The first is like these people who offer the blind and the sick and the lame to God and they think that God is accepting them.

They don't realize that God is sick and tired of them. And then there's the other group who say, Lord, I'm not going to be calculating. Do you find yourself very calculating when you give to God? You belong to the first group, the minimum type.

Would you treat a loved one like that? I mean, if you really, for example, if you really love your wife and you want to get her a really good gift for her birthday and you go to the store and say, what's the cheapest thing around here? I'll know what type of relationship you have with your wife. You don't have to tell me anymore. And here's another guy who says, boy, I want to get something that really shows my appreciation for her.

Now, don't your wives go home and say, you heard what Brother Zach said today. I'm not here. I'm not preaching something there.

I'm just trying to show your relationship with Jesus Christ. Do you go to, do you think of, what is the minimum I have to give to the Lord that shows the quality of your relationship with Jesus Christ? Don't you see that? No wonder your Christian life is so shallow. But the Lord says, I'm going to have a pure offering in every place.

And that is the word the Lord spoke to us 41 years ago when we started the church in Bangalore in the south of India. The Lord said, you've got to be one of these places. Not the only place.

There are many, many places where God is gathering people together who want to give God, not the blind and the sick and the lame, not the dregs of their life, not the dregs, what's left over after they've lived for themselves, but the very best. That's a pure offering. It may not be a large offering because Jesus said, very few will come this way.

If any group of Christians, believers, is divided into the maximum and the minimum, the maximum will be a very small number. The minimum will be the large number. Because most Christians, born again Christians, are self-centered, selfish.

They always think of, I've got to take care of myself and my family and what's left over I give to God. That's exactly the reason why your Christian life is so shallow and unsatisfying. And that's why you don't experience some of the wonderful things that the apostles experienced.

That's why God cannot use you more than He does. And that's why you find very little fellowship, perhaps, even in your own locality. You know, Jesus once said, that if a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, John 12, 24, it'll bring forth much fruit.

You take a grain of wheat, and just one grain of wheat and sow it somewhere, it's going to produce many grains of wheat. You take those grains of wheat and sow them again, it's going to produce many more. And you come back after 25 years, can you imagine how much came out of that one grain of wheat? It started out as one, but there's now thousands.

That is God's law. Jesus is applying that to our own life. But if you are willing to die to your self-centered life where you always think, maximum is for me, minimum is for God, which is the life of most Christians, and die to that and say, Lord, everything is for you, you'll find fruit in your life.

But on the other hand, if you take that one grain of wheat and put it in a nice glass case in your window, in your shelf, come back after 25 years, it's one grain of wheat still. I often tell people, why is it you're alone? You mean to say in your entire city there's nobody who's seeking a God-fearing, wholehearted, maximum type of life? When I was a young man, a godly brother told me, the greatest work that you can do for God in Bangalore in India is to fall into the ground and die to yourself. From that much fruit will come.

If you're not willing to die to yourself, you will not see fruit. You can understand all the theory and even teach it to others, but you'll be alone. And I didn't want to be alone.

I wanted to have fellowship. But consider, that may be the reason why some of you are lonely and don't have fellowship. In a pure offering, God is bringing together not great numbers of people, but a few people who are really on fire for God, not in terms of activity.

A lot of people think to be on fire for God means to go and visit the hospitals and prisons and out on the streets preaching. I did all that, but I never built fellowship of these maximum type of Christians. I've been doing that type of evangelism, but they didn't produce disciples.

They didn't produce people who were all willing to fall into the ground and die. They didn't produce families where people could live in love with one another, bear with one another. So I realized that something is missing.

So when you turn back to Matthew 16, I want you to see something there. Jesus said, I will build my church. We are talking about building fellowship in the body of Christ.

And he said here, the bars of darkness will not overcome it. And then notice, this is the first time Jesus spoke about the church. And it also says here, the first time He spoke about the church was also the first time He spoke about His death on the cross.

See verse 21, from that time, Jesus began to show His disciples how He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and die on the cross. So the first time He spoke about the church was also the first time that He spoke about the cross. And it was also the first time that He taught His disciples that they have to take up their cross as well.

These three went together. The first time He spoke about the church was the first time He spoke about His own going to the cross and dying. And the first time that He told them that if you want to follow Me, you have to die to yourself too.

See that in verse 24. He said, if anyone wants to come after Me, you've got to deny yourself and take up your cross, not the cross of Jesus. We don't have to carry the cross of Jesus.

He carried His cross. Your cross. If anyone wants to follow Me, he must take up his cross and follow Me.

And that means he must die to himself. See the cross in those days was an instrument of death. And Jesus was using that as an expression of dying to self and living for God.

And then you notice here, now when you keep these three things in mind, the first time Jesus spoke about the cross, He spoke about His own death on the cross and then speak of our dying with Christ on the cross. Like Paul said, I'm crucified with Christ. But when He said this, listen to this, Peter, whom He had just commended a couple of minutes earlier saying, Wow, Peter, you got revelation from heaven.

You know, He said, Did you say, I am the Christ, the Son of the living God? Peter, verse 17, My Father in heaven revealed this to you. But see how quickly Peter became blind. He began to rebuke Jesus saying, Oh God, Oh Lord, you will not go to the cross.

This will never happen to you, verse 22. Now that looks like an act of love that Peter was showing to Jesus saying, I will not allow anybody to crucify you. But look what Jesus turned around in Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan.

Do you see how suddenly Peter became different? See the contrast between verse 17, Blessed are you, Simon, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you by my Father in heaven. And one minute later or two minutes later, Get behind me, Satan. How can a person who gets revelation from heaven two minutes later be the mouthpiece of Satan? Can that happen? It happened here.

It can happen with your life. That you can, the Lord can pronounce you blessed because you got revelation from heaven and two minutes later say, Hey, you're the mouthpiece of Satan. It happens.

And we need to understand why. Listen. You are the voice of Satan because any voice that tells you to avoid the way of the cross is the voice of the devil.

That's what I learned from there. If you tell Jesus not to go to the cross, that's the voice of the devil. And the same devil will tell you not to go to the cross.

The reason for all tension and strife and the reason why we don't come together and become one is because we avoid the way of the cross. And what does it mean to avoid the way of the cross? Jesus explains it in verse 23. You are a stumbling block to me.

You know, every believer who avoids the way of the cross is a stumbling block to Jesus Christ. And the reason is you are not setting your mind on God's interests but your own interests. I told you there's maximum and minimum.

A man whose mind is set on his own interests will say, well, I've got to take care of myself and my family and minimum to God. His mind is not set on God's interests. Jesus did not come to earth and say, well, what's the most comfortable life I can live on earth and still do a little bit for my father? Such a person, his mind is set on his own interests and I think a lot of Christians live like that.

What is the best way to take care of myself and my family in every possible way and do a little bit for God to ease my conscience? Your mind is not set on God's interests and that's the reason why we don't experience the fullness of the Christian life and we think we are wise. We are absolutely foolish. Do you think that if you put God first in your life in every area and you give Him the maximum that you can, He's going to let you down? Impossible.

The law of God is those who honor me I will honor. If you seek the kingdom of God first and His righteousness, everything that you need on earth will be added to you. Whether it's physical health or financial needs, everything will be added.

The best retirement benefits are for those who seek God's kingdom first and His righteousness. Believe it or not. Because God has promised to take care of all their needs.

And I want to say to all of you, if you really believe those words of Jesus Christ, you'll want to be a living testimony to it. This is the passion that came to my life when I got converted. I said, I live in a country, Lord, which is basically a poor country.

India is basically very poor. 98% non-Christian. 2% Christian, 1% is Catholic, which is very awful.

Most of it is non-Christian. In a country like this with a tremendous amount of corruption and poverty, can we prove that those who seek God's kingdom first and His righteousness will find everything added to them in their earthly life? They may not become millionaires. There's no need to be a millionaire to live on this earth.

But they'll have enough for themselves and their children, not just financially and materially in an earthly way, but that their children will also grow up in the fear of God and recognize that if you put God first, everything will be taken care of. I, you know, I have four sons. They're all following the Lord today.

They're married, God-fearing wives. And they've got children whom they're seeking to bring up in God's ways. But when our children were small, my desire was not to make them highly educated and very wealthy.

I wanted to give them an education from one reason, that they will not become beggars or parasites on others. They must earn their own living. And it's good to give them a good education so they earn their own living.

But, I said, if I don't teach them to seek God's kingdom first, I've not given them a good inheritance. I want to teach them to seek God's kingdom first in their lives. From childhood.

That God is first in everything. That you don't tell lies. You never fight with people who fight with you.

You forgive them. You care for the weak and the despised in your school. I used to tell them, when you go to school, think of how Jesus went to school.

If Jesus went to school, who do you think He made friends with? You think He made friends with all the rich, classy children in His class? Or do you think He'd look around for the weak ones and those who were despised by others? Maybe that lame boy or the boy who's got a stutter or a stammer. Don't you think Jesus would make friends with that person? I said, you go and do the same thing. You'll be friends with some people.

If you're good at math, go and help another kid who's not good at math. That's what Jesus would have done. That's your way of seeking God's kingdom first at your level in school.

Follow Jesus there. You don't have to wait until you're 30 years old to follow Jesus. You can follow Jesus when you're 10 years old.

Because I say, Lord, I want my children from earliest age to seek God's kingdom first. That's the greatest inheritance I can give them as they grow up. Otherwise, I can give them all the food and clothing and education and cars when they're 18 years old and they can go astray.

And that's what's happening to a lot of Christians. You go to most Christians today and say, how is it going with your children? They're all astray, gone astray. I'll tell you why.

You didn't teach them to seek God's kingdom from the time they were 3 years old. You didn't teach them to obey their parents. So it's very, very important.

Now, we can't do anything about the past. I'm not asking, saying this to condemn anybody. But I want you to pray that God will forgive you for not teaching your children to seek God's kingdom first.

And I tell you, it's more and more difficult in a very wealthy society where all the symbols of wealth are around us and all the other so-called Christians. And we say, oh, I don't want my children to miss out on that. What are they missing out on? If they miss out on the kingdom of God, they missed out on the main thing.

So it's very, very important that we don't set our mind on our interests. You put God's interest first and I tell you, from 57 years of my experience, He will never let you down. Your family will not suffer if you put God's interest first.

It is impossible I've seen that in the poorest families in the villages of India where they put God first and it's gone well with them and their families. Maybe they don't earn as much as you, but it's gone well with them and you'll see in eternity, in eternity, when Christ comes, you'll see many of them are far ahead of you because they put God first. I've never believed, for example, in typing.

It's an Old Testament law. Give 10% to God, 90% is yours. Where did Jesus teach that? Where did Jesus teach that once you give 10% to God, your responsibility is over? No! What would you think of a wife who says 10% of my life is yours to her husband? 90% is mine or somebody else's.

That's not going to be a good marriage and that's exactly the reason why many Christians don't have a satisfactory experience with Christ. If you give yourself to God, I don't mean that giving 100% to God you put all your money in the offering box or empty out your bank account. That's not the meaning.

That's a misunderstanding. What it means is that everything I am and that I have, I recognize as belonging to God. My life, my time, my energy, my money, it basically belongs to God and I want to use it all in a way that will glorify Him.

And God may allow you to use that money to build a house for yourself, a comfortable house or buy a car or two cars, whatever it is, there's nothing wrong. But you don't ever think it is mine. Lord, it's yours.

I want to live on this earth as a steward using things but the house may be on my name but it's not mine, it's God's. That attitude towards everything in my life, my ambitions, my plans, I'll make a mess of my life if I make my own plans. What does it mean to put God's interests first? Now this is all connected to building the church.

I'm not talking about going to heaven. I'm talking about building the church before we go to heaven. Noah was not just interested in going to heaven.

He wanted to build the ark. He wanted to do something that God wanted him to do. And if you're a serious Christian you want to build a church before you leave this earth.

You may not be a great preacher or a prophet or anything, it doesn't matter but you can do something and the way to do it is, remember what the Lord told Peter, you are setting your mind on your own interests. And if you're like that, you are the voice of Satan and you're a stumbling block. See what it says here.

Look at the whole verse in its context, Matthew 16, 23. Get behind me, Satan. And what is the voice of Satan? You are setting your mind on your own interests and not God's.

Now there are very few Christians who realize that when they set their mind on their own interests they are actually cooperating with Satan, hindering the work of the church. I realized that very early and I'm very thankful. And I hope you will realize it at least now.

And I tell you this, believe me, God will not make you lose out. Impossible. Many people think God is a spoiled sport, He takes away everything that's... If I surrender to God completely He'll make my life a mess and completely the opposite.

Are you willing to choose everything that God chooses for you? If you have a choice between two openings for a job, would you say, Lord, show me the one you want for me? Or do you get the feeling God will tell you take the one with the lower salary? Because God is a spoiled sport. Are you willing to let God choose for you whom you should marry? Yes, God will tell you to go and marry that ugly girl. You got a wrong idea of God, completely wrong idea of God.

He's a loving father, He's a better father than the best father on the earth. But He wants what's good for you. He wants what's good for you in the long run.

And He may say, He may see dangers along that way of the job with the larger salary and dangers marrying that very pretty girl who's got a very stubborn nature and He may save you from that. That's another thing. And we are foolish.

It's wonderful to put God as the one in charge of my life. To say, Lord, I want your plan for my life in every area whom I marry, what job I take, where I live. Please direct me according to your plan.

And God says, I'll do that. Will you put my interest first in your life? I was tremendously challenged once by the words of Jesus at the end of His life. Jesus is our example.

We all say we want to follow Him. Here's one area where we can follow Him. You want to hear it? John 17, 10.

This is the opposite of what we read just now in Matthew 16. You set your mind on your own interest. Here's the opposite of that, the way Jesus lived on earth.

In John 17, at the end of His life, when He had finished His course, He said to His Father in verse 4, I have accomplished all that you wanted me to do on this earth, and I have glorified you. And here's this beautiful expression. Father, John 17, 10.

Remember this verse all your life. All that is mine is yours. This is not the minimum Christian.

This is the maximum Christian. All that is mine is yours. And as a result, all that is yours is mine.

The one who says, Lord, 10% of mine is yours. God will say to him, well, 10% of mine is yours. Do you realize why you are so poor spiritually? Do you realize why you are so defeated in your life by sin after sin after sin? Do you realize why you cannot obey a simple command like rejoice in the Lord always 24-7? You know, for years and years and years and years in my life as a born-again Christian, I could not obey that command.

I would rejoice sometimes, or most of the time, but always Is there such a verse in the Bible? Do you think the Bible has suggestions or commandments? There's no suggestion in the Bible. Everything is a commandment and I could not keep it. But the sad thing was even though I couldn't keep it for many years as a born-again Christian, it didn't bother me because I never found anybody else around me who was rejoicing always.

I said, well, I suppose it just means, well, try and do it or most of the time. Or think of another that's Philippians 4-4. There's another verse in Philippians 2-14 which says, do everything without murmuring and complaining.

Can you honestly say that that's how you do everything in your life? Everything without murmuring or complaining about anything. Whether things go wrong or things go right, I will not murmur or complain. I believe in a sovereign God who controls everything.

It's a wonderful way to live. I tell you, just a few commands like this. In everything give thanks.

On Thessalonians 5-17 5-17 and 18. Rejoice always. Do all things without murmuring or complaining.

With just these two or three commands your home can be a heaven on this earth. Why is it the devil doesn't want us there? He keeps telling us it's not possible, it's not possible, it's not possible. It's not possible because you don't say to God everything that's mine is yours.

If you said to God Lord everything that's mine is yours, God will say everything that's mine is yours too. A lot of people are seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit without giving all of themselves to God. It does not

happen.

You can pray and fast and do as much as you like, you will not have a genuine experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit if you don't say God you can have everything in my life. And God is not a spoilsport. He's not here to mess up your life.

He's here to make the maximum of the potential there is in your life. That when you come to the end of your life you'll have a satisfaction over the way you live this earthly life. And you would have built this church.

You'd be cooperating with Jesus in the most important work that God is doing on this earth today is building your church in every place and think of your places included in Malachi 1.11 a pure offering. I had that burden. I said Lord you said in Malachi 1.11 from the east to west in every place there'll be a pure offering that glorifies me of a group of people who do not give the blind and the lame and the sick but who give their very best to God.

I want to be in that number and I want to meet with other people who are of the same spirit. I want to fellowship with them. And I want to say I found such people not only in where I lived little but for first six seven years it was just in one place and then God began to bring us in touch with other people.

Because we prayed and said Lord is there anybody here who wants to give their maximum to God please bring us in touch with them. You don't want to meet people who want to go to heaven when they die. I'm not just an evangelist trying to lead people to heaven.

I want to be a disciple maker. Jesus said go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Then you have a church which is not full of strife and conflict and back biting and quarreling but a church where people love one another.

And Jesus said all men will know you are my disciples. Not when you love them but when you love one another. Many people misunderstand that John 13 34 and 35 all men will know you are my disciples when you love them.

That's not that verse is not in the Bible by the way. But that's how we live. We show you Christianity by loving people.

Well that's good. But Jesus said if you want to quote Jesus' words exactly all men will know you are my disciples when you love one another. When you are together and become one with each other people say hey that's the church of Jesus Christ.

I want to tell you another thing. The church is not only meant to be a testimony to people in the world. You know Jesus said you are the light of the world.

You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. But the word world if you read the New Testament frequently refers not only to this physical earth and the people here. It refers to another system.

You know the Bible says love not the world for all that is in the world is not of the father. That is he's not talking about people. The world is used in the New Testament to refer to two things to people.

God so loved the world. That's the people. But then there is another use of the word world called the world system controlled by the devil.

The devil controls the political world. The judicial world and that's why you find all types of orders coming from the Supreme Court and from political leaders which are completely contrary to God's law and order. You know why? Because they are under the control of the prince of this world.

They haven't given their all to Jesus Christ. So their minds are being controlled whether it's judges of courts or political leaders or businessmen or Hollywood or media. They're all being controlled by the prince of this world.

That is the other world that New Testament speaks of and it says love not this world for all that is in this world is not of the father. So we have to steer clear of that. And we have to stand against it.

We are living in this world but we are not of this world. And the Holy Spirit has come to make us a witness to this world. You are the light of the world means you are a light to the devil.

And I'll show you that in scripture. Ephesians chapter 3. It says in Ephesians 3 and verse 10. In order that the manifold means the many-sided wisdom of God can be made known through the church.

That's your local church of a few people who have given everything to Jesus in your locality. You're one of them and you're meeting with a few others who really surrendered everything to Christ and you're meeting with them. That's the church in your locality.

Through the church God is manifesting his wisdom to whom? Not just to the other people in your locality. That's very important. But to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies.

Those are the evil rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. The Bible speaks about the evil rulers and authorities in the heavenlies in Ephesians 6. It says we battle against them. To them God is showing through your church his wisdom.

Now the first book in the Bible is not Genesis. It's Job. Genesis was written by Moses about 1500 years before Christ.

Job was written 2000 years before Christ. Job lived 500 years before Moses and that was the first book of the Bible. The Bible is not kept in that order in which it was written because Job is a poetical book.

It's put along with the books of poetry, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, etc. But he lived 500 years before Christ. So think of this.

When God wanted to write a book for man, the first book that he wrote was not about the creation of the heaven and the earth or even about the creation of man or even about the fall of man. God said that can wait 500 years. Moses will come up 500 years later.

I'll get him to write Genesis. But I'm writing a book now for man, the first book he wrote, the book of Job. You know what the subject is? A man who stood for God and was a witness for God to Satan.

He wasn't primarily a witness to people around. God said to Satan, have you seen Job? I can imagine Satan going to God and saying, God there are so many people who take your name on earth. They're a bunch of hypocrites.

They're just religious hypocrites. God says, yes, but have you seen Job? He's different. And Satan tries to tear him down saying, no, no, no, he's different because of this.

No, he says, you can test him. You can take him through any trial. He will stand true to me.

He's given his all to me. He's not seeking his own. He wants to honor me.

You can test him out. And Satan tests him out and Job comes through like gold in the fire. Glorifying God, worshiping him and he becomes a witness to Satan.

Remember, this is the first book that God wrote in the Bible. A man who is a witness to the devil for God. And this is what we read in Ephesians 3.10. A church that is a witness to the devil when the devil says, God, have you had a look at your church on earth these days? The hypocrites and the humbugs, they look at all types of things.

Look at the sexual evil there is and all types of perversions there is in the sexual area, even in churches. And God says, yes, but have you seen that little church over there? Only 25 people in that church, but have you seen that? That's different. Here is a church.

It's not a mega church of 30,000 people. It's just 25 people, but it's a witness for Christ. The 30,000 member church is not a witness to the devil because the devil sees most of them are living in compromise or sitting there.

Many of them are divorced. They don't love one another. They haven't forgiven people.

And the devil sees through all that. People are impressed by the size of that congregation. But the devil says, look at those hypocrites sitting there.

They glory in the fact that they're a mega church. But the Lord says, yes, this is all true, but look at this one here. Look at this church over here.

Look at this group of people who really love one another and who live for the things of eternity, who have given everything to me and not 10%. I don't know whether you've seen it. I've seen it so clearly.

That's the only thing I've been living for for many years now. And I know that when Christ comes again, and I finish my earthly course, I'll be able to look back over my life, not having wasted my life on worthless religious pursuits. I hope you will have that satisfaction when Christ comes again.

Remember this, my brothers and sisters. When Jesus comes back, we are going to look back over the way we lived on this earth. And you're either going to have a satisfaction over the way you lived or regret.

And that depends on the type of decisions you make today. Think of the tremendous satisfaction people like Peter and Paul have over their life. It's not because they were perfect.

Peter denied Jesus three times. You haven't done that. But Peter repented so thoroughly that he made such good use of his life thereafter.

Paul messed up 30 years of his life going the wrong direction, persecuting Christians and all that. Yet, okay, he messed up the first 30 years of his life. But the remaining 37 years of his life, he made such good use of it that at the end of when he was 67 years old and about to die, he said, I've finished my course.

I have great satisfaction as I look back over my life. And you say, how can a man have great satisfaction when he looks back over 67 years of his life and sees that the first 30 years of his life was an absolute

mess? He did the wrong things. You know, God is so gracious.

He allows for times of ignorance. That's a great verse. I wanted to show you that to comfort those who feel discouraged over failures in their past life.

All of us have failed many years in our life. I have. And you have.

Here is a great verse that has encouraged me and it will encourage you. Remember it all your life. Acts 17 and verse 30.

This is especially for those who have messed up major years of their life. God overlooks the times of ignorance. But now he commands us to repent.

So your life is divided into two parts. One part is times of ignorance. When you did not know how important it was to live for Jesus Christ 100 percent.

And for some of you, that day may be coming only today. The truth that we have to live 100 percent for Christ. Okay.

Then your past is the times of ignorance and God says I overlook it. But from today, will you live for me? That is the question that came to Paul on the road to Damascus. When the light hit him from heaven.

So what are you going to do from today onwards? Forget the past. And I believe the Lord is saying that to some of you sitting here, perhaps to many of you. Don't get discouraged over past failure up until today.

Are you willing? I will overlook it. Your times of ignorance, you never knew, not that you were ignorant that Christ died for you. You were not ignorant of that.

But I think it is really true that many of you were ignorant of how serious it is to take life seriously and live 100 percent for Christ. And how you must give everything to Him. You were ignorant.

Okay, God says I will overlook the times of ignorance but now He tells you to repent means turn around, take your life seriously from today. And I believe that when Christ comes again, you will have great joy. Make sure you forgive everybody first.

It is one of the first things to do. Ask God to forgive your past in exactly the same way you are forgiving every person who ever hurt you in your whole life. Because I want to tell you something.

Nobody has hurt you as much as you hurt God by your sinful life. There are whole things in your life, evil things that you did, nobody knows about, God knows, but He overlooks it. He says I have forgiven.

I will cleanse you in your blood of Jesus and I won't even remember it. Now you forgive others just like I have forgiven you. Will you say yes to the Lord today? Lord, right now when I am sitting here, I am going to forgive everyone who has ever harmed me.

I am going to take my life seriously from now on and I want to live 100% for you and I want to be one of that small remnant who are walking the narrow way that you can point out to the devil like Job and say have you seen that man? Have you seen that family? Have you seen that church? God can use you. Peter was not a great scholar, he was just a fisherman and in three years he was ready to be an apostle. How long does it take to be an apostle? Peter was a man who was a Jew who didn't know anything about the

new covenant and in three and a half years with Jesus he was an apostle.

It doesn't take long when God doesn't work in you. He filled him with the Holy Spirit and he was a completely different person. He can do that for you my brothers, don't let the devil fool you.

Don't think that making money and becoming big in this world is everything. You'll have tremendous regrets in eternity if you put God just in a small corner of your life and do the minimum for him. Lord, you are going to be number one in my life from now on.

Everything else is going to be in a corner. You think you'll suffer? You think your children will suffer? Not at all. I can tell you from 50, my wife and I have been married 48 years.

We have raised 4 children. We have no regrets. We've been through times of deep poverty in the early years because we decided to honor God and we're very faithful in the financial area.

We went through struggles. So what? We became better people as a result of it. I've seen that people who go through financial struggle come out as better people character-wise than people who have plenty of loads of money from day one.

I wish that our children would go through struggle financially, not that they have loads of money from day one. It's not really good for them. I think a lot of rich people spoil their children by giving them everything they want.

I couldn't give everything my children asked for because I didn't have it. And it did them good that they couldn't get all that they wanted. I feel sorry for those children who get everything they want because their parents are so wealthy.

Oh, you want this? You want that? I'll give it to you right away and see how they develop spiritually, the same way they are today. Yeah, nominally Christian, but are they on fire for God? Are they accomplishing something for God's kingdom? If not, do you want to raise up children who are just nominally Christian? Dear brothers and sisters, let's take our Christian life seriously and say, Lord, I want me and my whole family to be a witness for Christ. Okay, one last verse before we close for the session.

Please turn with me to the psalms. Something about children. All of us married people love to have children.

And it says in Psalm 127, Children are a gift of the Lord. Praise God. Every one of your children is a gift from the Lord.

Look at them not as something you produced, though God used you to produce that child physically, it's a gift from the Lord. And do what Abraham did with Isaac, Lord, and give this gift back to you to use for your kingdom. And your child, it says in verse 4, must be like an arrow in the hand of a warrior.

What is an arrow? An arrow is a weapon that you use to fight the enemy. It's equivalent to today's gun. In the olden days, it was an arrow.

It's a weapon that you pull the bow, the string of the bow, to fire your arrow at the enemy. Okay. You've got your child at home for maybe 18 years till they go to college.

All those 18 years, you must be pulling the string of your bow so that one day when you, 18 or 25 or however many years they stay at home, one day when you release your child from your home, he's going to go straight at the devil and finish him. That's the purpose of an arrow. Are you training your child to be an arrow? Or just to live a comfortable life on earth? Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth.

That means right from childhood, you've got to train them. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of such arrows. That means if you have one child or two child or four children or whatever number of children, every one of them is an arrow.

One day, they will not be ashamed when they see what their children have done to their enemies. It's not just you. You have to be a witness against God's enemy in the world is the devil.

And he wants to get your children. He wants to ruin your church and determine that you at least are going to count for God and do your part that there will be a pure offering for Christ in your locality. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I pray that you will apply these truths and everything that we hear today to our lives today. Thank you that you overlook our times of ignorance, but you're commanding us to repent. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Before I close, I want to say a word about this book through the Bible. This is more than a thousand pages. It's the result of my having studied the Bible for 50 years.

And it's a commentary of the whole Bible, every book of the Bible, and the purpose is like it says in the beginning, a message for today from every book of the Bible. I wrote it because I felt people thought, people think the Bible is a boring book. I wanted to show it's not.

I wanted to show that every one of the 66 books, they're all here, have got a message for today and are interesting. Even Leviticus and Habakkuk and Nahum and the ones that you don't read have got a message and they're interesting. That's the main thing and the message for us, which we are missing out on something.

When I was young, I looked for commentaries that would speak to my heart and most of the commentaries I picked up spoke to my head and I put them down. The result was I never read a full Bible commentary in my whole life because they were all intellectual. So I decided to write one for the heart, from practical experience and from practical life.

And I want to encourage you to read it. It's not very expensive. In fact, most of the cost of it is the shipping from India.

If you want it cheaper, come to India. You'll get it at less than half the price. But the other thing I want you to tell you is I don't get one cent of royalty from this book.

I'm not trying to promote anything. I've written 30 books. I don't get one cent of royalty from any of them.

I don't serve God for money. Any money that comes and goes back to the printing, another edition of this book, that's all. So you're not giving me anything from it.

And the other thing I've encouraged people is if you are, if you're a person who doesn't have much time, I want to encourage you to get a copy of this book and read three pages in a day. Is that too much? It won't

take you more than 15 minutes. Three pages of this every day.

And if you miss one day, never mind, read it the next day. In one year, you'd have read through the whole book. And you would have such a knowledge of the whole Bible, such as you have never had in your whole life so far.

Is it worth reading three pages a day? I encourage you to read it. God bless you.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/CfwCVOfBAel.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/the-maximum-christian-and-the-way-of-the-cross/>

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