

The Upward Call of the Spirit

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of purity in personal and church life, unity without strife, and the exaltation of God's name among the nations. It shares a testimony of starting with desperation, surrendering to God's work through the Holy Spirit, and the journey of building churches worldwide. The sermon encourages continuous surrender, pressing on towards Christ-likeness, preaching the way of the cross, and maintaining joy, peace, and unity in fellowship.

Scripture: Malachi 1:11, Matthew 16:24, Philipians 3:12, Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 3:15, Romans 16:20, Philipians 4:4

Topics: "Purity in Life", "Unity in Fellowship"

Description

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Transcript

So, first of all, I want to say that verse that is right in the hall or at the entrance is the word that the Lord gave us when we began 47 years ago. This is from Malachi chapter 1 and verse 11 where he said, from the rising of the sun, that is the east, to its setting, which is in the west, my name will be great among all the nations and in every place an offering will be offered to my name that is pure. That is the emphasis the Lord brought to us at that time, an offering that is pure and my name will be great among the nations.

So, the emphasis there was on purity and that purity referred to two things. One is purity of personal life, freedom from sin, and the other is purity in the church life, which means unity in the church without strife. So, those are the two things the Lord said he's going to do and notice that it says here, my name will be great among the nations.

And when we started in the beginning, it was only Ian and I. We were both in desperate need. It's very difficult to say that I think perhaps more than anybody sitting here. I know I was in great need because all my plans to serve the Lord were all being shattered in the early part of 1974 and by the end of 1974, I had hit rock bottom and said, Lord, I don't think I'm going anywhere.

I'll tell you honestly, this is what I said to the Lord. I said, Lord, I'll give up full-time work and go and sit in the back of some church and never preach again because what I'm preaching is not true in my life. I'm defeated inwardly, but I'm preaching some wonderful things.

I have a gift of preaching but no life to back it and I don't want to continue like that as a hypocrite. And I really meant it that I would quit the ministry and go and do some secular job and sit at the back of some church because at that rock bottom time that I think Ian was also somewhere there, rock bottom, that God met with both of us and filled us with the Holy Spirit in January 1975. And you know the first church was born through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

All those disciples were scared and sitting in locked rooms and then one day suddenly with a rushing sound from heaven, the Holy Spirit came and filled those 120 people and forged them into one and from there the word went out. Something like that happened to us, that the same inner reality, not the external wind or fire, but the inner reality, that's what happened. And God met with both of us and he forged them, not just filled us with the Spirit, the result was he forged a unity between him and me, between Ian and myself that has today lasted and God is our witness for 47 and a half years because we started in January 1975 and the church CFC was born in August 1975.

But God brought us together and filled us with the Holy Spirit in January 1975 and we were in that other Baptist church then and from that time till today I can testify that the work has progressed because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon us and secondly because God could find two people who, those of you who know Ian and me know we are completely different from each other in our personality and in our gift and all that. But it's something like Paul and Barnabas, if you study the character of Paul and Barnabas they were very different, but God said separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work I've called them and something like that God separated Ian and myself and it was not because we deserved anything we were most undeserving. I think in the whole of Bangalore we were perhaps the most defeated undeserving people that God filled with the Holy Spirit, teaching me one thing that God does not give the Holy Spirit to those who deserve the Holy Spirit.

God gives the Holy Spirit to those who are desperately in need. We did not deserve. It's not because we pray and fast, it's because we were in such desperate need and we acknowledged our need and we said Lord we want to glorify your name but we are hopelessly unable to do it.

I say that for the encouragement of those of you who are seeking how to live the Christian life and how to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Don't let the devil tell you that you don't deserve it yet or you've got to do this or that. No.

If you have come to rock bottom in your life and you say this I'm desperately in need Lord. I'm asking not because I deserve but because I'm such a needy person. I assure you God will meet with you because I can't think of any other qualification we had for God to meet with us except that we were in desperate need and then God you know we were in that other church and they threw us out for preaching the baptism in the Holy Spirit and when we were thrown out that first Sunday I told him what should we do this evening.

I said well we meet in our house. That was August 17th 1975. We did not plan that.

Circumstances forced us into a situation. We were thrown into that circumstance just like the early apostles. They did not plan to start a church.

They were scared and sitting behind locked doors but they were thrust into a situation and suddenly three thousand people were converted that first day and they were thrust into a situation where they had to shepherd them and lead them on and we've seen that through the years that God has thrust us into different situations. So many people came and went and came and went in the early days but gradually this word was fulfilled that from the east to the west God has produced a pure testimony in many many places. We never thought we would see anything more than the few of us who are sitting in our house praying together for many years.

For six years we met in our house just as few people despised by most people in Bangalore and wondering what was going to be next but after God kept us there for about seven years He suddenly began to open doors in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, different places and little by little small churches began to be planted and now God has raised up CFC churches in 14 countries. I've never counted the total number of churches because I don't do that. I don't want to count and it's easier to count the countries than to count the number of churches and churches being born every now and then.

Even in the last few months a couple of new churches have been born so I can't keep counting that but I know there are at least a hundred of those committed to CFC around the world and this verse here from the rising of the sun Malachi 1:11 through its setting my name will be great among the nations and we are seeing that a pure offering people are emphasizing purity. Purity from sin and purity from money. There are very few churches that are pure from the lust for money.

In all of our churches we never take an offering. We have 150 elders in all these churches not one of them is paid. Ian and I were never paid all these years.

We never took any money from the church. God has taken care of us and blessed us. We don't take any credit for it and the other word is an offering that is pure.

From the beginning we said we will not lower the standard but the people people got offended and left and people have been leaving us all the time getting offended because of our stand on purity and we're not disturbed if they want to go they can go. So we praise the Lord for what he has done and as we look towards the future there is a word that the Lord laid on my heart today in relation to the future and I believe we can claim it. It is in Revelation chapter 3. It says here in Revelation 3 and verse 8. I know your deeds.

Behold I have set before you an open door which no one can shut because you have a little power. You've kept my word and you have not denied my name. That's not a promise to me the promise to CFC and churches.

I have set before you an open door to preach the truth the whole counsel of God without compromising anything in it, without lowering the standard and without seeking to please any man. If people get offended they are welcome to get offended and leave. The Lord has set before us an open door and he says no one can shut it.

People have tried to shut it through the years. People took us to court. People did all types of things.

They tried to take over our building and nothing God you can't fight with God. I say you just can't fight with God. The only thing we had to be careful is not that God is on our side.

No that we are on God's side. We don't ask God to come on our side. We say Lord where are you? I want to come and stand with you.

Many people say I want God to be on my side. I'll tell you I want to be on God's side. I want to see where God is moving and I want to just get behind him and say Lord I want to be there.

That's what we seek to do in CFC. He has set before us an open door and like it says here we will not deny his name which means we will not lower the standard that we have preached right from the beginning and that standard is total discipleship. Go and make disciples of all nations and which means teach them to love Jesus more than they love their parents, more than they love their wife, children, brothers, sisters and their own life and taking up the cross every single day denying themselves the condition of discipleship and possessing nothing.

You may have many things. You may be a millionaire but you don't possess any of it or keeping the palm open. Say Lord it's all yours.

What do you want to take away from us? You can take but we will not hold on tightly to anything on this earth. Not possessing but having. Many people don't understand that difference.

We don't want to you know like possession. I hold on tight. The world is full of people who hold on like you know when a little baby is born.

It's born with a closed fist. You put your finger there, he'll grab it even a little baby. That's how human beings are.

From the beginning grab, grab, grab and now the Lord says open your palm. He's not asking you to throw away your possessions but open the palm. Let it be mine.

The house is in your name. The car is in your name. The bank account is in your name and you may have a lot of money but you don't hold it like that.

It's an open palm. Belongs to God. Those are the conditions of discipleship.

We preach right at the beginning and we continue to preach it. That is the offering that is pure that we read in Malachi chapter 1 and it says here that's the meaning of you have kept my word here in Revelation 3 and verse 8. Kept my word means we have not changed God's word. Many churches have modified it.

They don't preach certain parts of God's word. They leave out certain parts of God's word. You know I have felt that the New Testament presentation of the gospel is like a picture of Jesus Christ's face and we want to proclaim the whole Christ, the beautiful face of Jesus Christ as seen in the New Testament but I find that many churches they preach one part, another part, another part and so it's the whole face of Christ is not there.

It's disfigured. One eye is missing. One ear is missing.

That's the way the gospel is being preached and we've decided that we're going to present the whole face of Christ. In other words everything the New Testament preaches teaches we're going to preach. The whole counsel of God.

We will not compromise on that. If people get offended and leave they can leave. We don't claim to be perfect.

I remember years ago when we were in Kerala one brother came to me and said brother Zach I'm fed up with the Pentecostal church and I want to join your church. I said please don't come. Don't come here because you're fed up with any church because we are not perfect.

You when you're fed up with your own defeated life and want to live a God glorifying life then come to us because we are a bunch of people we're not perfect but we are a bunch of people who are fed up with our own defeated life and we want victory in every area and we will discover new areas and new areas like the children of Israel kept on conquering the land of Canaan more and more and more and more. We have determined that we are going to conquer more of all the areas we've been defeated in in our life. We're not fed up with others.

We're fed up with our own self. We say oh wretched man that I am not all wretched man that he is or she is or wretched man that I am like Paul said in Romans 7:24. Who shall deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ.

That's our testimony. So I said when you come to that place when you're fed up with your own defeated life and you want a life of total victory then come and join us. Not because you're fed up with some church or fed up with some other teaching or something else.

No that's what we preach even today. We don't want people to join us who are fed up with some other church. We want every brother and sister who joins CFC to be someone who's fed up with his own defeated life.

Not fed up with his wife or fed up with her husband. We don't want such people. We want those who are fed up with their own defeated life and who want an overcoming life in every area and who are who openly confess we have not yet become like Jesus Christ.

After 47 years of preaching this gospel and of seeking to live according to it I testify today I have not yet become like Jesus Christ. But that is my passion today much more than it was 47 years ago. I want to be more like Christ every day.

I judge my God is my witness. I seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit every day. I seek to judge myself every day.

I said brother, sister if you are like that fed up with your own defeated life acknowledging there are many areas you've still not seen in your own life where you're not like Christ and you want to be like him, welcome. CFC has an open door for you because such people will have wonderful fellowship with each other. It's those who are fed up with others who can't have fellowship.

When you're fed up with your wife and find fault with her you won't be one with her. But my own home life I can tell you today my home life is like a foretaste of heaven on earth. That's the honest truth.

I say that before God because we are both judging ourselves not each other. We're saying Lord I have not become like Christ fully. I want to be and little by little God shows us areas which we were ignorant of.

New areas of Canaan. Canaan's land where the giants are still there. We conquer that and we get one more part of Canaan in our possession and then we say no there are still giants in the north.

We've got to go there and take possession of that land alone. What a wonderful life it is. Exciting and the Lord says I've said before you an open door that no one can shut.

Thank God for that promise and I want to share that with all of you. God is setting before you my brothers and sisters an open door that nobody can shut. Enter it and possess it and don't deny the name of Jesus.

Keep the whole word of God. You will not regret it when Christ comes again. Always live before the Lord's face and say Lord I want to have no regret when you come and I stand before your face.

That's what we want to think of as we complete 47 years. We're not going to pat ourselves on the back and say oh we've come so far or we've got so many churches. It means nothing to us.

We don't glory in numbers. We continue to look unto Jesus and run the race leaving aside every burden. So in that connection I also want to turn to Philippians chapter 3 another passage that the Lord has laid on my heart for this time.

Philippians in chapter 3. Here it says a beautiful passage to remember you know when we look at what we have. Yeah we have obtained quite a bit. There's no doubt about it.

We can't pretend that the Lord has done nothing in us. The Lord has done a work in all of us but we still say in Philippians 3 verse 12 we have not yet obtained everything that we should be having. That's like saying I have not yet become 100% like Christ.

My goal is 100% like Christ and I have not yet obtained it. That is our confession. That is why in the front of our pulpit we have those words.

Let us press on to perfection which means we are not yet perfect but we are pressing on to perfection. So that's what we say here. Let this be our confession as we look into the future.

We have not yet obtained total likeness to Christ. We have not yet become perfect. Full stop.

No but we press on. We press on to lay hold of that for which we were laid hold of by Christ. Not only personally as I've often said the church is a three-story building.

I want to be perfect in my personal life number one. I want to be perfect in my family life number two and I want to be perfect in the church life number three. Fellowship with others in one body.

All three areas. We want to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of us. What did Christ lay hold of us for? First of all to make us completely like Christ 100% in every area.

Five areas I can say. In my actions I must be Christ-like. In my words the way I speak with grace always I must be Christ-like.

Third in my thought life which nobody can see only God can see. I want to be Christ-like and in my attitudes to other people number four. Christ-like in my inner attitudes that nobody can see to everybody Christ-like and fifthly in the motive with which I do anything it must be Christ-like the glory of God nothing for self.

So let me repeat in my actions in my words my thoughts and in my attitudes inner attitudes and motives. Now actions and words people can see the other three are all hidden and we pursue Christ-likeness in all

these areas to lay hold of that which we were laid hold of by Christ. We were laid hold by Christ to be perfect in all these areas and we constantly get light on ourselves and he goes on to say in verse 13 Philipians 3 13.

I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet. We all confess that after 47 years of preaching the truth and seeking to live according to this truth we confess both Ian and I confess I know he confesses the same thing we have not yet become fully like Christ. We haven't fully laid hold of that for which Christ laid hold of us.

So what shall we do as we look into the future to the from now till the time Christ comes back to take us one thing we do one thing we do we are not like other churches we are not counting what is the offering on Sunday morning we are not bothered if the offering box is empty one Sunday we won't even be bothered about it we don't even think about it one thing we do that is not to do miracles or such things not even to reach more places forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead we what shall we look back and see we have we don't get discouraged over past failures oh lord we've slipped up a few times forgive us thank you for cleansing us in the blood of Christ you said you will not remember our failures anymore praise the lord we also forget our past failures and press on I'm saying this for all of you but not only that what is more difficult than I'll tell you what is more difficult than forgetting our past failures forgetting our past successes the successes God has given you we have to forget it I want to forget every success God has given me in the past just like I forget every failure of my past I don't want to think about it forgetting everything that lies behind I want to say to you dear brothers and sisters in cfc 47 years let's forget the past let's not gloat over the past success or failure we have not done everything perfectly but the lord has done a tremendous work in these 47 years many lives many families many churches but we forget it all and we look forward to what lies ahead whether the lord gives us one year or 10 years or 20 years before he comes we look ahead and what do we do we press toward the mark we are not going to go sluggishly forward we are going to press toward the mark full speed full speed we're going to run this marathon race like we are doing a hundred meter sprint people don't run a marathon race like a hundred meters sprint but we're going to do that in the christian life the christian life is a long marathon race and we're going to sprint not just slowly chug along I press on toward the goal what is the the price of the upward call of god in christ jesus there is an upward call detaching us more and more from earthly things detaching us more and more from the love of money detaching us more from the full of earthly things to become more christ-like to become more heavenly minded that's what it says that's my brothers and sisters I pray that every one of you will say this I want to press on in the days to come individually and I want to press on in my family life for a higher level tomorrow next year and a higher level in our church life if you're finding it difficult to get along with some other brother in the church press on and it becomes your fellowship becomes good with that person you're finding it difficult in your married life press on until it becomes better between you and your wife and you and your husband you're constantly urging people to press on for the upward call of god and if you have this attitude then god says you're one of those whom I consider complete in your desire not perfect like christ but we are perfect in one sense you know earlier on he says in verse 12 I'm not perfect very clear I'm not yet become like christ but then in verse 15 he says let us walk perfect now how is that this is like a contradiction sometimes you see things like that in the bible look like a contradiction I'm not perfect but I am perfect that means in my total area I've not become like christ yet but in the area where I have light on myself I have got a clear conscience it's perfect in other words the whole circle is not completely white that means if you think of our life as a circle the whole circle is not white there are areas that are black which I can't even see but in the area where I have light on myself it is 100 white that means I have a clear conscience so perfect in this area where I have light but

many other areas where I don't have light not perfect that's what he's saying here I've not become perfect but in the area where I have light we are perfect so let us live according to that standard this is this is a wonderful thing that God has shown us and further let me go further from there in verse 18 weeping I tell you many people are enemies of the cross of Christ that means they don't preach the daily cross we never want to be like that we want to preach the way of the cross that we started preaching 47 years ago and keep on preaching the way of the cross many people are enemies of that way you tell me you go and listen to youtube all the thousands of messages there try and see how many people preach the daily cross almost no one go to another church and all you hear is give us your offering where is the way of the cross preached we want to keep on preaching the way of the cross and anyone who does not preach the way of the cross I would say according to verse 18 he's an enemy of the cross of Christ the other thing I want to point out here is that you must never forget verse 20 our citizenship is heaven from which we also wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ when Jesus stood before Pilate he said my kingdom is not of this world if my kingdom were of this world my servants will be fighting to prevent me from being captured we testify the same thing our testimony is not of this world we have had at least two instances one in Kerala and one in Tamil Nadu recently where someone who was with us for many years walked away with the church building which we had paid for and built he's taken it and gone did we go fighting with him no our citizenship is in heaven if he wants to take away something from us we do not wrestle with flesh and blood take it person who printed my books and made a lot of wouldn't wouldn't pay it back to cfc take it we leave their judgment with God we will not fight with flesh and blood that's how we started in the beginning when the Baptist church said get out of here he quietly left he had left I left he refused to fight with flesh and blood 47 years ago and today we say we would refuse to fight with flesh and blood we only fight with satan Ephesians 6 12 many years ago the Lord said to us if you want to fight with satan effectively make sure you never fight with human beings Ephesians 6 12 we do not fight with flesh and blood but with the evil principalities of hell that's why we want to have that authority over that when we say satan we bind you in Jesus name he is bound but if we are fighting with flesh and blood if you're fighting with your husband fighting with your wife satan will laugh at you when you try to bind him and his activity in your house or among your children I don't want satan ever to have any power over my children or anything in my house I want when I say satan get out in Jesus name he has to get out immediately but if I want to do that if I want to have that power I have to make a decision in my life I made that decision many years ago I will never fight with flesh and blood I will not do it because my kingdom is not in this world our citizenship was ready is in heaven and we are waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ and I want to say further if we go this way here's what our life will be like Philippians 4 verse 4 it's continuing it's all one section ignore the chapter division rejoicing in the Lord always if we go this way which I have just been describing starting in Philippians 3 12 and all the way to Philippians 3 21 we will have a life of constant joy I can testify to that my life has become one of continuous joy I accept the Lord always before me he's always before me and therefore my heart is full of joy therefore my heart will rejoice and further that's not all that itself would be wonderful to have a life full of joy but it also says when we follow this faith it will be a life verse 6 Philippians 4 6 which is free from all anxiety what a wonderful life that is fullness of joy freedom from anxiety I thank God for that I thank God for that life little by little that we've begun to experience it more and more and more and more it becomes more and more wonderful as time goes on and you would think oh this is a wonderful life no that's not all more the peace of God verse 7 which is beyond your understanding will guard your heart and your mind all the time what a wonderful life in a world where there is no peace you read in the newspaper some tension something's going to happen here something's going to happen there in the United States regularly every day people are being shot and killed all types of things a peace that passes all beyond our understanding and one last thing I want to say in Romans 16

verse 20 it says when you have this peace of God in your mind Romans 16 verse 20 the God of peace will crush satan under your feet your brothers and sisters we've got one enemy only one it's not your wife it's not your husband it's not your rebellious children it is the devil it's not some difficult brother or a difficult sister there's only one enemy we have it's the devil and he's going to be crushed under our feet if we have peace we live in peace with one another refuse to fight with human beings refuse to get into unrest over some earthly thing the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your heart and mind and the God of peace will crush satan under your feet so we look forward to a very glorious future in the days to come God has a wonderful plan for all of us and this peace that I've spoken of is also something that we must preserve in our fellowship among ourselves let me say one more word about that peace in Colossians in chapter 3 Colossians chapter 3 it says in verse 15 let this peace of Christ be the referee in your heart that's what my market of my Bible says that the peace of Christ be the referee in your heart anytime please listen my brothers and sisters as we move forward as a church anytime you lose peace in your heart God has blown a whistle a foul has been committed stop the game a foul has been committed go to that place where the foul was committed and set it right whether it's a soccer game or anything in the Christian life also the peace of Christ is a referee please let's remember that as we look to the future anything don't blame somebody else you said because of him I lost my peace no I will never say that because of some wrong attitude in myself I lost the peace not because your wife spoke to you in some way or did something wrong or your husband spoke to you in some way or did something wrong as long as you blame other people you will never come to the peace of God in your life I stopped blaming other people long ago I say Lord I judge myself that's all God is my witness that every single day of my life I judge myself and I seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit and it's changed my life completely and whenever I lose the peace in my heart I stop and say Lord why did you blow the whistle why did the referee blow the whistle and some small little thing sometimes it could be you are so blessed and you got a little proud of it for a few moments and I say oh Lord please forgive me I'm sorry I got a little fucked up for a few seconds few seconds I don't want to be fucked up I want to give the glory to God I lost my peace dear brothers and sisters never never touch the glory of God there's many things God will give us his love his power his goodness but he'll never give us his glory he says in Isaiah 42 verse 8 my glory I will not give to anybody never touch the glory of God that can happen particularly when you're suddenly blessed in some way or God has used you in some unusual way in some situation and for a brief moment you get fucked up or somebody comes and appreciates you and for a brief moment you get a little fucked up you say which is only a few seconds it's sin even for a few seconds it's sin Lord forgive me cleanse me you take such a sensitive attitude that a small little thing you heard the whistle blow in your heart the peace is gone go there and set that vow that was committed right I believe I believe I want to believe for all of you my dear brothers and sisters that we have a glorious future ahead of us as a church and as families remember the three stories a personal life family life church life in all three areas we want to have a glorious life in the days to come God bless you all thank you very much for wonderful fellowship that you all have given me for your patience in the way you have listened to me through all these years all the long sermons that I preached I'm very very grateful for your patience and long-suffering and for the wonderful fellowship and the above all the way you have prayed and supported us thank you so much God bless you all

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