

Transformation

by Zac Poonen

The Christian life is about becoming like Jesus Christ through the process of transformation, which involves cleansing ourselves from sin and unrighteousness, and renewing our mind to think like Christ.

Duration: 25:27

Scripture: Matthew 7:13

Topics: "Sanctification", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding our true destination as Christians, which is to become like Jesus Christ, rather than just aiming for heaven. It highlights the process of sanctification, where we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to transform our minds and character to reflect Christ's likeness. The sermon stresses the need to cleanse ourselves, both from sin and things that hinder our spiritual growth, by renewing our minds and aligning our values with those of Jesus.

Transcript

In the well-known Sermon on the Mount, which we read in Matthew 5-7, Jesus concluded with these words in Matthew 7, he spoke in verse 15 about the gate that led to life being small and the way that led to life being narrow. A gate is something you enter in a moment and the way is something that we have to walk right through our life. But at the end of the way is our destination.

And we considered in our last study about God having predestined us not to go to heaven but to become like Jesus Christ. Predestination means a destination determined beforehand. It's like when you get into a train, your ticket shows you your destination.

You get into an aircraft, a plane, you have a destination marked on your ticket. And the train or the plane may make many stops on the way and some of those places may be interesting places along the way. But you still don't get off because you have a destination you want to reach.

And anyone who gets onto a train or a plane would be very eager to reach his destination very soon. We can see that in the impatience there is in passengers when a train is delayed or a plane is delayed. Why is that? Everybody wants to get to their destination as soon as possible.

And if everybody could afford traveling by plane, everybody would travel by plane because you get to your destination much quicker. But I find among Christians, it's very rare to find people who are very eager to

get to their destination of becoming like Christ quickly. That possibly indicates that they don't know what their destination is, which is true of many Christians.

If you ask most Christians, I would say 99% of them would probably tell you that their destination is heaven. And yet there's not a verse in scripture to make that statement. The destination determined by God is likeness to Christ.

Heaven is a byproduct of that. It's not a physical geographical place that God is interested in taking us to. But a transformed character, that's what he's taking us to.

And if we haven't seen this, we haven't seen the goal of the Christian life. We haven't seen the purpose, the full purpose with which Christ came to earth. He did not come, as many Christians think, to save us from hell and to take us to heaven, like many preachers preach.

He came to save us from sin. And all of Adam's nature describes sin. He came to make us holy, which is to make us like himself.

We saw that in an earlier study in the first promise in the New Testament. His name shall be called Jesus, because he will save his people not from hell, not from sickness, not from poverty, but from sin. And so when the Christian gospel is turned from that first promise in Matthew 12:1 into something which looks good, like salvation from hell, salvation from sickness, salvation from poverty, you could have many salvations.

Salvation from being illiterate, perhaps. Salvation from being ignorant, many things. But Jesus came to save us from sin and to make us like himself.

When we see that as our destination, our starting point was in sin. We come to Christ, enter through the narrow gate, which is to be born again, to become a new creature in Christ. You can't enter into the way without going through the gate.

Jesus said that he is the door. In John chapter 10 he said, if anyone tries to enter into the way, to climb over the wall and come inside, he says he's a thief. See in John chapter 10 he says in verse 9, I am the door, if anyone enters through me, he'll be saved.

But he will come in, go in and out, and find pasture. But if anyone tries to come some other way or tries to join the way without going through the door, he's going to be disqualified. You can't enter a marathon race somewhere along the way.

You've got to start it at the starting line. You can run along with the marathon runners on the road if you want, but when you reach the end you'll be disqualified. Because you never came to the starting line.

The Christian life has got a starting point. Like every race, it's called a race in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1 and 2. And that starting point is not being born into a Christian family, nor is it being baptized or christened in water. It is being born again like Jesus told Nicodemus who was a bishop.

Even a bishop needs to be born again. Unless you're born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God, Jesus told Bishop Nicodemus in John chapter 3. And so we see the new birth, becoming a new creature where Christ cuts us off from that Adamic tree and grafts us into himself. That is the new birth where we are grafted into Christ.

And then, we could picture that as coming through the gate. There is a long way that leads to our final destination of becoming totally like Christ. That long, narrow way is called the way of sanctification.

Becoming more and more like Christ. Being separated more and more and more and more from this Adamic nature which we carry around with us. The Bible describes it, calls it the flesh.

And that is just another word for our Adamic nature which makes us behave like all the other unbelievers in the world. But Christ came to deliver us from that, to save us from sin and to make us like himself. And the way he does it is through the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, he gave the people a law and said try and live according to this. And they could make it. They could keep some of the commandments, but not all of them.

And even if they did keep all the commandments, it was still only external. They couldn't do anything about the corrupt nature within their own hearts, no matter how much they tried. Paul, who was one of the finest of the people in Israel, God-fearing man, said, according to the righteousness in the law, he said he was absolutely blameless, he says in Philippians 3. That means according to the external requirements of the law, he had kept everything.

Just like the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10 who came to Jesus. When Jesus told him the commandments, he said, I've kept all of them from my youth. And Jesus didn't challenge that.

There were many God-fearing people in Jesus' time among the Jewish people who had kept all the commandments externally. They had kept the law according to the righteous requirement of the law. They were absolutely without blame.

But they did not have an atom of God's nature. It was external refinement. Jesus said, you have cleaned the outside of the cup, but the inside is dirty.

And you don't care about that. Christ came to clean the inside. When the inside is clean, the outside automatically takes care of itself.

It's like when the disease is hit at the root inside with an antibiotic, the external manifestation of that disease disappears, whatever that disease is, whether it's in the form of a fever or a sore or anything. When the root of it is hit with an antibiotic inside our system, the manifestation goes. So Jesus came with an axe to the root.

That's what John the Baptist said. He didn't come with a pair of scissors to snip off all the bad fruit that's coming from our lives. Many people's Christianity is just snipping off the bad fruit, looking nice before people, behaving in a nice, cultured, civilized way.

There's a lot of difference between true Christianity and civilization. Jesus didn't just come to make us nice people. He came to transform us and make us new creatures, completely new within.

Not just a refined, you know, there's a lot of difference between a refined, well-behaved dog and a little baby who may not be refined or cultured, who may mess up the floor. There's a world of difference. That baby has the potential to become a man.

The dog, no matter how much you refine it, will never be a human being. In the same way, this old creation, the old man that we are, that which we are in Adam, the way we are all born, any amount of

refinement, culture, improvement will never change that person into a son of God. It's like saying you can try as hard as you like, you can't make a dog into a human being.

You can make it behave very well, obey very well, but it will not become a human being. You can take a child of Adam and teach it everything under the sun, make him religious and everything, but he will not become a child of God. That has to be a supernatural work within, where God brings this person to experience a spiritual birth within.

That is called the narrow gate. Many people don't come through this gate. They try to get into the narrow way around the site.

They jump over the wall, like Jesus said in John chapter 10, and they will be disqualified at the end, because you cannot enter this way except through the gate. But once you come through the gate, the other mistake a lot of people, Christians, make is they all congregate at the gate. There's a big crowd of Christians, millions of them, crowding around the gate when they should be walking the way towards their destination.

And that is where we need to yield to the Holy Spirit every single day of our life. In 1 John chapter 3, the first episode of John, chapter 3 we read that when Christ comes, we will be like Him. We will reach our destination.

That's what it says in 1 John 3 verse 2. The last part it says, we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And then in the next verse, He says this is the hope of the Christian. Again, if you were to ask 99, ask Christians, what is your hope? 99% of them would reply, my hope is that Christ is coming again.

But that's only half of the hope. The other half is that when He comes again, we will become like Him. That's very important.

And in the next verse it says, everyone who has this hope, not the hope of Christ coming alone, Christ returning itself is a great hope, it's called the blessed hope, but beyond that, included in that, that when He appears, we will be like Him. If you have this hope, what you're going to do, it says in 1 John 3, 3, is during your entire earthly life, you'll be purifying yourself, 1 John 3, 3, just as God is pure. Now a lot of Christians, because they haven't read the Bible carefully, the only purification they know of is God cleansing them through the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Bible speaks about two types of cleansing. One is what God does, and the other is what we do ourselves. 1 John 1, verse 7 says, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

That's God's work. 1 John 1, 9 says, He is faithful to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That is God's work.

But 1 John 3, 3 is speaking about us cleansing ourselves. You read that also in 2 Corinthians 7, in verse 1, where we are told that having such wonderful promises, brethren, beloved, from all filthiness, or defilement, of flesh and spirit. Cleanse ourselves.

The same thing we read in 2 Timothy, in chapter 2, in verse 21, if a man cleanses himself, he will be a vessel unto honor. So in these verses that I just quoted, you find these two types of cleansing. One what God does, and one what we've got to do ourselves.

God can be trusted to do His part if we fulfill the conditions. If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, forgive our sin, blot it out, and never to remember it anymore, according to Hebrews 8 and verse 12. And to justify us by the blood of Christ, Romans 5 and verse 9, that means declare us righteous.

God will do that. But what does this cleansing ourselves mean? This is the narrow way. This is the way of sanctification.

This is the way of transformation into the likeness of Christ, and it is progressive. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a crisis. It's like, again, like entering through a gate, but it must be something which must be renewed all the time.

We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit continuously. Ephesians 5 and verse 18 speaks to those who are already baptized in the Holy Spirit and says, be being filled with the Spirit or be being immersed in the Holy Spirit. Baptism just means immersion.

You stand under the waterfall of the Spirit falling from heaven. I'm drenched, baptized in the Spirit, and I need to live under that waterfall continuously to experience this fullness of the Spirit, and as my own capacity in my heart increases to experience more and more of the fullness of the Spirit in my life, thereby being conformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. I cannot change myself into the likeness of Christ.

It's the Holy Spirit's job to make me like Christ. But I need to cooperate with Him by cleansing myself. That means when the Holy Spirit points out something in me which is displeasing to Christ, I get rid of it.

He's not going to get rid of it. For example, if you're watching a television program which has got some impurity in it, some immorality, some scene which is defiling your mind, the Holy Spirit's not going to use the remote to change the channel. No.

He wants you to do that. He will tell you this is not something that Christ would watch, but if you want to see that dirty movie, that's up to you. But you're not going to walk the narrow way and become like Christ if you continue watching that.

You have to use the remote to change the channel. That's just one example. You could be on the Internet on a computer, and you could be tempted to go to a site which is sexually provocative.

The Holy Spirit won't stop you from clicking the mouse to go there. He will tell you you shouldn't go there. He'll prompt you in your spirit, but you have to cleanse yourself.

You have to refuse to do that. You have to say, Lord, I'm going to get rid of that habit from my life. The Holy Spirit, when he sees you do that, and he sees that you want it, you see, what he's testing you in all these situations is to see whether you really want to be like Christ or not.

And when he sees that you're really serious about wanting to be like Christ, he will transform you. Let's understand this clearly. Let me repeat it.

You cannot conform yourself into the likeness of Christ. You cannot produce the divine nature. No matter you try for a million years, you cannot produce even a little bit of the divine nature.

The divine nature is something God has to give you, impart to you, communicate to you, but you've got to remove the blockage in the channel which prevents him from communicating that nature to you. You've got to get rid of that which is hindering you, hindering God, from giving you his nature. So that is the meaning of cleansing ourselves.

I get rid of from my life that which the Holy Spirit tells me to get rid of. Not what people say. That's why I say I don't tell people to get rid of this and get rid of that.

I will only suggest to them, hey, this is harmful for you. And there are certain things which a person may take time to see. I, for example, may not wear any jewelry or ornaments in my, myself, my wife and I don't wear it, but I will not tell another person to do that because they may not have light on it.

These are things which a person may have a conviction of. I don't want to do this. You know, Paul once said in 1 Corinthians 6 that even among all the lawful things that there are, 1 Corinthians 6 verse 12, he still wouldn't do all of them.

You see, a really spiritual man does not only get rid of sinful things. He also gets rid of certain things that are lawful because they are a hindrance to his goal. In another chapter, chapter 9, Paul says about an athlete that a lot of lawful things an athlete can eat, but if he eats all of them, he'll never win the prize.

He's got to discipline himself in what he eats and what he doesn't eat. An athlete can lawfully sleep up till 8 o'clock in the morning, but if he sleeps 8, 9 o'clock in the morning every day and doesn't get up early morning to go for a run, he's unlikely to win the medal. So there are a lot of lawful things that an athlete gives up for the sake of getting a medal in the Olympic Games.

In the same way, when we speak about cleansing ourselves, it is not just from things that are sin. It's from things which don't help me to win the crown, to press on and become like Christ. It may be lawful, and I don't judge another person who does those things or uses those things, but I have decided not to do, not to use them or to give them up, because I want to reach my goal sooner.

So when the Holy Spirit sees that we are serious about this, he will give us more and more in our being the divine nature. And he does this by changing our way of thinking. We looked at this verse in Philippians 2, 5, let this mind be in you which is in Christ Jesus.

In Romans chapter 12, we read these words concerning the mind. It's very important to see the power of the mind, the function of the mind in the Christian life. Romans 12 and verse 2, it says, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

So transformation takes place by the renewing of our mind. Conformity to the world also takes place within our mind. We got to read that verse like this.

Don't think like the world thinks in your mind. Don't let the world squeeze you into its shape and mold. That's one paraphrase of that verse.

But allow the Holy Spirit to change your way of thinking so that you begin to think like Christ thinks. You look at people, things, circumstances, the way Christ looks at them. So we see here, this takes place in our mind first of all.

In other words, the Holy Spirit wants to change my way of thinking before he can change my character. That's why the mind is so important. We must allow the Holy Spirit freedom to change our way of thinking, to change our value system.

For example, in the world, money is considered perhaps the most important thing along with honor and position, power, popularity, pleasure, comfort. These are things which are considered very important and worth, to different degrees, worth giving up many things for in order to get these things. And most people spend their life in the pursuit of these things.

But Jesus Christ did not spend his life in the pursuit of money or pleasure or power or comfort or ease or any such thing. He spent his life in the pursuit of doing the will of his father. And in that pursuit, he had to give up some of these things, which in one place it says that he didn't even have time to eat food.

Now is there anything wrong in eating food? No, but he didn't have time for it because there was something more important, more pressing that he wanted to do, serve people in some way. I find that the serious Christian, the one who wants his mind to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, will have a different set of priorities to the worldly person or the worldly Christian who is trying to get the best of both worlds. Most Christians I've met are trying to get the best of both worlds.

And they've got their foot in two boats and they never get anywhere. One boat's going this direction, the other boat's going this direction and they've got their foot in both and they never get anywhere. Whereas Jesus Christ was completely set on doing the will of his Father.

And in Jesus' earthly life, we find that the Father showed us how he wants man to live. When God created Adam first, if you want to know how he wanted Adam to live, here's the answer. The way Jesus lived on the earth.

Not in the physical circumstances of the Garden of Eden or Nazareth or in your case it may be Chennai or Travandrum or Delhi, wherever, it doesn't matter. The physical location, circumstances are unimportant. It's not a question of whether you travel by a scooter or a car or you walk like Jesus did.

That's not the point. It's a question of a value system. What are the things that Jesus valued? If the Holy Spirit can make me get Jesus' value system, I'll become a spiritual man.

So that's the meaning of the renewing of our mind. Where my mind begins to think like Jesus, my values in my mind are the values Jesus had in his life. And therefore, I gradually become like him.

In the same way, worldliness is also in the mind. A lot of people among Christians think that worldliness is in the way you dress. A woman may be dressed very immodestly.

The worldliness is not in her dress. It's in her mind. It's that way of thinking she has in her mind which makes her dress in an immodest way.

You can change her dress, but you won't stop her from being worldly just like that. No. You can dress up a dog in a suit and a tie, but to make a woman compel her to dress modestly doesn't change her way of thinking.

Worldliness is in the mind just like sanctification begins in the mind. So it's very important for us to understand this. Then we will open our beings and open our minds especially to allow the Holy Spirit

through God's word as we read them to show us the nature of God and conform us to that likeness.

This should be your goal.

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