

Are You Wasting Your Life? - John Piper

by From the Pulpit & Classic Sermons

John Piper challenges listeners to consider the value of their lives in light of eternity and to live in a way that honors Christ above all else.

Duration: 42:27

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:39, Philippians 1:21, James 4:13

Topics: "Radio"

Description

In this sermon, John Piper reflects on the brevity of life and the importance of not wasting it. He emphasizes the tragedy of retirement, which he sees as a societal push for people to waste the rest of their lives. Piper prays for a life of significance and meaning, where every death counts for God's glory. He shares a powerful story told by his father about an old man who felt he had wasted his life, inspiring Piper to commit to not wasting his own. The sermon concludes with the message that life is meant to display the supreme value of Jesus, and this is achieved by treasuring Him above all else and being willing to risk and sacrifice for Him.

Transcript

Welcome to From the Pulpit and Classic Sermon. Each week we bring you a different message from some of history's greatest speakers in the Christian faith and powerful sermons from modern preachers too. This week we have John Piper with his message, Are You Wasting Your Life? Father, my heart's desire tonight is that in part because of what we do here now together there would be no wasted lives in this room and in the hearing of my voice and there would be no wasted deaths.

I pray that you would bring a significance and a power and a meaning to the lives in this room and I pray that you would use that significance and power and meaning to make every death count for your glory. Whether it happens quickly or whether it happens 50 or 60 years from now. I pray, Lord, that if we're not able to trade in our pain or shame or suffering in this life we would not postpone the joy but rather find it in the pain, in the shame, in the suffering.

So come now and help me to make your word plain. Grip, I pray, these young people and don't let them waste their lives. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

So here we are gathered on the 29th of December 2003 and the body count as we meet from the earthquake in Bam, Iran is at about 25,000. That's a lot of human lives snuffed out at 528 in the morning.

And you feel the personal weight of it when you read about a father digging through the blocks of his house looking for a daughter and a wife and uncovering a dead hand and passing out for grief.

Or when you read about a little baby being found alive in the grip of a dead mother puts a face on it. And what makes this event here at the end of 2003 feel so apocalyptic for some of us is not the magnitude of it, though it's ten times bigger than 9-11, but how many other events were packed together with it, right? Thirteen people buried in a mudslide in California. Six buried under an avalanche in Utah.

One hundred and eleven dead in a plane crash in Benin. One hundred and ninety-eight dead in poison from gas in China. All packed together in a few days at the end of the year.

And it just takes your breath away and makes us ask what would Jesus want us to learn from this about not wasting our lives? And I think if we go to Jesus and ask Him that, He has something ready to say to us and it's found in Luke 13. You don't need to go there. This is not my main text.

I just want to read you what Jesus, I think, would say. Do you remember the situation? Some people came to Jesus and told Him about this atrocity in which Pilate had killed people while they were offering their sacrifices and he had taken their blood and mingled it with the blood of their sacrifices just to mock them. And they came to Jesus and said, What about that? Give an accounting of the Almighty here.

And here's what Jesus said. Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Or those 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Now, don't make a mistake here.

Jesus could weep with those who wept. Jesus had compassion almost everywhere He turned. But He knows, and you know, that after a season of extraordinary wracking grief in calamity, it begins to ease up and the questions come.

And when they come to Jesus with these questions, He does not settle for sentimentality. Trying to make everybody feel good. Trying to get God off the hook.

That is not the way Jesus responds. Jesus says, are you astonished at the magnitude of this calamity in Galilee or at the magnitude of the calamity of the falling tower in Siloam? I will tell you what to be astonished at. Be astonished you weren't under the tower.

Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Means, everybody in this room deserves to die and perish tonight. That's the way Jesus answered this inquiry about whether God could give an accounting of the deaths of the tower and Pilate's atrocity.

So, when you compare that earthquake to us tonight, I think Jesus would say, unless you repent, the thing you should be astonished about is that this hotel hasn't come down on all of us. Our wonderment shouldn't be that 25,000 people perished in a moment, but that we have not yet been snuffed out. That's what should amaze us, Jesus says.

So, I conclude from this event and this sets the stage for my message that your life is in God's hands. Your life hangs by a slender thread of sovereign grace tonight. You belong to God.

He made you. You exist for Him. God made life.

He knows what life is for. And He has a right to take it and a right to give it whenever He pleases. Do you remember Job? First chapter? All ten of his children in an Iran-like calamity because the house fell on all ten of them and killed them.

And Job gets the word. And here's what it says happened. He tore his robe, saved his head, fell on the ground and worshipped and said, The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Or as he said 12 chapters later, In His hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. Do you remember Hannah? She wanted a baby so bad and she was barren for years.

And then God heard her prayer and she conceived and bore Samuel. And when she offered up Samuel, she sang a song. Listen to one of the lines in Hannah's song.

1 Samuel 2.6 The Lord kills and the Lord brings to life. The Lord brings down to sheol and raises up. She had read her Bible well or learned it well from tradition.

Deuteronomy 32.39 See, now that I, even I, am He and there is no God beside me, I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal and there is none who can deliver out of my hand. If any of you lives through the night, or if I do, it will be sheer grace. Jesus' brother, James, was tremendously gripped by this truth.

I think James would have looked out across America and seen almost nothing but pride and arrogance because of what he said in chapter 4. Come now, you who say today or tomorrow we will go up to such a town and trade a while and make profit. What? You don't know your life. You are but a vapor.

You ought rather to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do such and such. But as it is, you boast and all such boasting is evil. Which means, if the Lord lives, if the Lord wills, John Piper will finish this message and not keel over.

And if the Lord wills, you will not fall out of your chair dead tonight. And if He wills the opposite, you will, and He will have done you no wrong because your life is in His hands. He made you, He owned you, the Lord gives, the Lord takes, and He never does anyone wrong.

Whether He takes them at one month, one year, one decade, or one hundred years, you belong to God and He may do with you as He pleases. You are His. And therefore He knows what life is for.

And the only way not to waste a life is to key off of the Almighty, to know what He would have you be. Jesus has something to say about it because He's really jealous that you don't waste your life tonight. Really jealous.

You're all students. Most of you are students. And therefore, most of your life is in front of you.

For most of you. Not all of you. Some of you have already lived most of your life.

But for most of you, it feels like it could go on a long time. And Jesus is very jealous that you not waste it. If He were here, I think He would say, a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Life is not about accumulation. It's not about getting stuff. I think that's what Jesus would say to you right off the bat in America.

And then He would tell a parable. A land of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops.

And he said, I'll do this. I'll tear down my barns, build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for you for years.

Relax. Eat. Drink.

Be merry. And God said to him, fool, I tell you, I don't ever want to hear that word addressed to me from God. Fool.

This night, your soul is required of you. And the things you prepared, whose will they be? So it is with everyone who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. Oh, how jealous Jesus is tonight that you do not waste your lives.

You have a gift. And it is called life. And it's not about accumulating things.

This night, your soul may be required of you. And then whose will all those toys be? No sane person on his deathbed ever comforted his heart with his possessions that his life was well spent. So hear Jesus.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would seek to save his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it and not waste it.

It is possible to waste your life. Few things make me tremble more at age 58 than wasting my life. You'll read about this in the book if you read it.

I grew up in a Christian home and this was hanging over the sink in the kitchen from the time I was a tiny little child. And every morning I would get up and run into the kitchen and there it would be. Only one life which will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. Which communicated to me over the years as a child, you can waste your life. You can really waste it.

It was built into my heart as a little child. Don't waste it. My dad told the story.

One of the most moving I can remember as a little kid hearing my father preach as an evangelist. And my father's eyes could really blaze in preaching. He always began the sermon with a joke.

But it wasn't very long before his eyes were blazing and he was telling stories that would make you cringe. And one of them was a revival meeting in which at the end of the meeting an old man that everybody had been praying for for decades evidently walked to the front. I think age something like 78.

And just wept and wept and wept as my father sat beside him on the pew. And all he could say was, When I heard my dad tell that story and I heard it numerous times. And I remember that plaque.

I felt with every fiber of my being, I will not waste it. You get one crack and there's no replay. And you can throw it away or the opposite.

I'm 58 almost. A couple of weeks. And the river of my life is really flowing fast over the precipice of my days.

And I don't have any idea how long the Lord may give me. And my zeal not to waste my life is as alive today as it's ever been, perhaps more so because it feels so short before I stand before the Judge, King Jesus, and give an account of my life. What a tragedy in America.

This is one of the biggest tragedies in our culture. That billions of dollars are invested every year to get people my age to waste the rest of our lives. Billions of dollars invested to persuade us and lure us, at any cost it seems, to waste the rest of our lives.

It's called retirement. And in sum, it goes like this. You've worked for it.

Now enjoy it. Twenty years, perhaps, of play, leisure, ease, while the world, uncared for medically, uneducated, filthy water, poverty stricken, unevangelized, sinks under the weight of healthy 65-year-old people playing bridge and shuffleboard and collecting shells and fishing and golfing their way into the presence of King Jesus. And you know what? You're going to join them unless, at this stage in your life, you make some very radical decisions, very radical commitments, very radical choices about where your treasure is.

Do not assume you won't be sucked in because every stage of your life in this Disneyland called America, there are powerful forces angling to get you to waste your lives. It will take a massive work of grace to rescue you from the clutches of this culture. For many of you are totally enslaved.

And I pray on the way to being set free. So now, the question is, what is the unwasted life? You're all worked up about us not wasting our lives. Tell us what the unwasted life looks like.

Tell us the pathway so that it will be written over our lives at the end, this life was not wasted. What would that be? And now, if you have a Bible, I do invite you to turn. If you don't, that's okay.

I'll read the text for you. But we're going to go to Philippians 1 for the answer. This text means almost more to me than any other when it comes to asking the question, how can I not waste my life? Whether it's age 18, 28, 38, 58, 88, this text is the answer.

I preached on this text almost 24 years ago now when I candidated for the pastorate of Bethlehem, which is just a little ways away. So it has a very special, powerful place in my memory, in my life, and I wanted to have a place like that for you. Philippians 1. We'll just read a couple of verses here.

20 and 21. And you will hear, I hope, Paul's passion, which is the opposite of the unwasted life. Philippians 1.20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored.

Or you could use the word magnified. Shown to be magnificent. Christ will be magnified, honored, shown to be magnificent in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul's all-consuming passion is to so live and so die that Christ would look great. The unwasted life is the life that puts Christ on display as supremely valuable. I'll say it again.

The unwasted life is the life that in everything you do, in life and death, puts Christ on display as supremely valuable. You have life given by God for this one main reason. Make Christ look great.

That's why you exist. My expectation and hope is that Christ will be shown to be great in my body, whether by life or by death. And so there are two parts.

Life and death. Let's just take one at a time. How in Paul's mind and in Paul's life is Christ honored, magnified, shown to be great in his life? The answer is given in chapter 3, verse 7. Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I might gain Christ. How does Paul make Christ look great? Answer, by experiencing Christ as such a treasure that everything else in his life is as nothing by comparison.

I count everything, money, as loss. Food as loss. Looks as loss.

Friends as loss. Family as loss. Job and success as loss.

Graduation as loss. In comparison with the treasure that Christ has become for me. How do you make Christ look great in your life and thus not waste it? Money is given to you so that you might use money in a way that shows money is not your treasure.

Christ is. Food is given to you so that you might eat it in such a way that it will be plain food is not your treasure. Christ is.

Friends, family are given to you so that you might live with them in such a way that it will be plain to the world they are not your treasure. Christ is. Computers, toys, houses, lands, cars are given to you so that you might use them in such a way that it will be plain to the world these are not your treasure.

Christ is. You talk about lifestyle implications. Wartime living.

The way we display the supreme worth of Jesus is by treasuring Him above all things and then making choices which make the joy we have in His supreme worth manifest. Get it. Get it.

And if He is not that for you tonight if He is not that treasure for you pray all night if you have to that your heart would be so changed that you would now treasure Jesus above everything in your life. That's the way Paul says He magnifies Jesus in life. Now what about death? My eager expectation and hope is that Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death.

How do you magnify Christ in death? Remember that little incident at the end of Jesus' earthly pilgrimage where a disciple was following Him and the other disciple said, What about Him? And Jesus said, It's none of your business about Him. The day will come when you stretch forth your hands and people will lead you where you don't want to go. And John inserts the interpretation by this he showed by what manner of death he was to glorify God.

Peter was probably crucified upside down and it was planned as a way of glorifying God. Takes your breath away what God may have in store for some of you if you really want your life not to be wasted. The answer to the question How can my life and my now death magnify the worth of Christ is given in verse 21.

For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. How is dying gain for Paul? The answer is given in verse 23. My desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better.

That's gain. So, the way you show the infinite value of Jesus for the world to see in your dying is to experience your dying as gain. Because it means more of Christ.

But do you see what that implies about the proportion of affection you have for Christ compared to everything you leave behind? Namely, everything. If death is to be gain Christ must be more precious to you than everything you leave behind. And when a person dies like that the world looks on and says this Christ must be valuable.

Jesus Christ is most glorified in you in your dying when you are most satisfied in Him in your dying. That's what verse 21 teaches. So, in summary, here are the essentials of the unwasted life.

Number one, life and death are given to you. They are gifts. Life is a gift.

Death is a gift. And they are given to you in order that you might use them to display the supreme worth of Jesus Christ. That's the pathway of the unwasted life.

And therefore, you must cultivate a supreme valuing, treasuring of Jesus Christ above all things. I count everything as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus. If you're not there tonight, labor in prayer and in meditation and in wrestling with God that you might get there so that with all authenticity you might be able to say I count everything as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus.

And then thirdly, this treasuring of Him which displays His worth is most clearly seen by what you are willing gladly to risk and sacrifice for the surpassing value of more of Jesus. Let me say that one again. In fact, I'll say all three of them again just by way of summary.

First, you have life in order that you might display the supreme value of Jesus. The way you display the supreme value of Jesus is by treasuring Him, being satisfied in Him above all other things in life. And thirdly, that treasuring and display becomes most vivid by how much you are willing to risk or sacrifice if He calls in order to have more of Him.

Listen to the radical way Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 12. You remember the situation? He's got a thorn in the flesh. We don't know what it is.

It's causing him pain. He says, Christ, please, take it away. Three times.

And Christ says, No. And then Paul says, verse 9, He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness.

There's more of Christ. Do you see that? My power. Do you want more of Christ? Christ's grace.

Christ's power. Christ's fellowship. Do you want more and more and more because He is your treasure? Paul did.

And therefore he said, Christ says, My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in your weakness. And then Paul responds, Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly.

Don't miss that amazing counterintuitive word. I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me for the sake of Christ then. I'm content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, calamities.

For when I'm weak, then am I strong. Magnifying Christ by being satisfied in Him in pain and calamity and suffering and insults and weakness was the passion of Paul's life. His passion was not the American dream of escaping insult, calamity, pain, suffering.

His passion was any life and any death that enables me to know you better, see you more, and magnify your greatness more. Bring it on, Jesus. All I want in my life and death is to enjoy you more and make your worth more vivid for the world to see.

So, I ask you tonight, are you going to throw away your life? Are you going to buy into the American dream, minimize suffering, maximize comfort, maximize ease, maximize security, build bigger barns, work for the bread that perishes, lay up treasures on earth, covet the praise of man, and be happy for 80 years and perish? Is that the way you're going to waste your life? Or, are you going to see Christ crucified and risen and reigning and bearing your sins as the infinite treasure in your life that He really is? And then make life choices that display to the world His value. Have you ever wondered why 1 Peter 3.15 isn't coming true for most of us? Where it says, always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you when somebody asks you. Anybody asked you recently? You know why? It looks like our hope is in the same thing they're hoping in.

The church in America is not where it ought to be. We are going to have to make life choices for this globe, this wracked with pain, lost, perishing, suffering, hungry, uneducated, without water, without medical care globe. We're going to have to make some choices about how to be invested that will cause the world to say, hmm, why are you going there? What are you hoping in if you leave all this? Then maybe 1 Peter 3.15 would come true for us.

I believe with all my heart that if God raises up a generation like that who doesn't waste their lives, the great commission will come to pass. Because if you are not the generation, if this generation does not embrace suffering, does not embrace pain, does not embrace shame for the surpassing value and joy of knowing Jesus, you will simply be passed over and God will get His work done another way, perhaps by the new Christendom, as Philip Jenkins calls it, in the south and in the east. So, I call you to embrace Christ and embrace suffering and embrace the reward of knowing Him.

If your passion is to display Christ, if your passion is to treasure Christ above all things, if your passion is to take risks and sacrifice whatever it takes in order to display His worth, then the Middle East that you're committed to, East Asia that you're committed to, Sao Paulo, Brazil that you're committed to, then Toulouse, France that you're committed to, then these commitments will be filled and thousands of people will see the supreme value of Jesus Christ in your life and they will believe and written over their life and your life and I pray my life will be the words, this life was not wasted. This life gladly displayed the supreme worth of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Oh God, no words of mine, but only the power of the Holy Spirit can raise up a generation in which 200,000 young people will say, I'm going. I'm laying it down. I will count Jesus Christ as precious above all things.

I will risk my life. I will indeed, if you call, sacrifice my life in order to display among the unreached peoples of the world the sweet beauty and infinitely satisfying glory of Jesus Christ. You've been listening to From the Pulpit in Classic Sermon Series.

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