

A Service of Sorrow (World Trade Center Response)

by John Piper

Pastor John Piper preaches on the hope that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, even in the midst of suffering.

Duration: 33:06

Scripture: Romans 8:35

Topics: "Gods Love", "Eternal Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the foundation of hope for believers, which is the unbreakable love of God in Christ Jesus. He highlights that nothing can separate us from this love, not even death or suffering. The preacher also emphasizes the importance of obedience to the gospel of God and warns of the judgment that will begin with the household of God. He encourages the congregation to trust their souls to the faithful Creator and reminds them that their hope is based on the fact that God did not spare His own Son but delivered Him for us all.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org. The scripture text this morning is Romans 8, 35-39. Romans 8, 35-39.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, For thy sake we are being put to death all day long, we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Father in heaven, again now, as always, I ask for your help so that I will speak the word of truth according to your scriptures in a faithful way, in a humble way, in a spiritually compelling way, in a loving way, in a God-exalting way, in a Christ-centered way. And I pray for those who hear that their hearts would be supple in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and that you would make us tender to your truth, and that you would help unbelievers in our room here who are very welcome to be here, see freely and embrace joyfully Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

I pray for saints, imperfect Christians set apart by God to be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus, to be made strong and hopeful. And so come, Father, and provide all the help that we need in these moments as we worship you over your word. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. So Tuesday night we focused on sorrow, and Wednesday night we focused on self-humbling, and this morning we focus on steady hope in our Savior and King, Jesus Christ. So how shall I strengthen your hope? Shall I try to strengthen it politically by saying we're all going to come together in a great bipartisan show of unity to demonstrate that the American way is unassailable and indissoluble? Or shall I try to strengthen your hope militarily and say there's no nation on the earth as militarily powerful as America and no foreign force will be able to jeopardize our security? Or shall I try to strengthen your hope financially and say fear not, when the markets open tomorrow morning it will be stable and none of your investments will be in peril? Or shall I try to strengthen your hope psychologically and direct you to one of the websites entitled Self-Care and Self-Help Following Disasters, where you can read, quote, individuals with strong coping skills maintain a view of self as competent and avoid regretting past decisions? Or shall I try to strengthen your hope geographically? You live in the Midwest.

You don't live in New York and Los Angeles. Nobody knows we're even here. Or shall I try to strengthen your hope eschatologically and tell you you're not even going to be here when the fireball blazes in your town? Now, those six questions are easy for me to answer.

The answer is no. I will not try to strengthen your hope in any of those ways. And there's a real simple reason why.

They're all false. They're not true. American political system is not imperishable.

The American military cannot protect us from every destructive force. The financial future is not certain. You may lose all your investment.

The Midwest is not safe from the next kind of terrorist attack, which may be more pervasive and more deadly. The psychological efforts to feel competent and avoid regret are not healing. They're fatal.

And an eschatological scenario that promises you escape from suffering under the providence of God did not work for the Christians in the World Trade Center on Tuesday. And it won't work for you. So, I will not contradict my calling as a minister of the gospel and try to strengthen your hope in any of those ways.

Instead, I will strengthen your hope this morning, first of all, by making you feel more vulnerable than you already do. For two reasons. Number one, you are more vulnerable than you think you are.

The next kind of attack, the next phase of terrorism, probably won't be a replay of Tuesday in Los Angeles or Atlanta or Chicago. More than likely, it would be an act of chemical warfare, which unleashes perhaps a deadly gas or poisons the water supply. And the death toll won't be 5,000, it'll be 500,000 or 5 million.

That's very easy to conceive of. I mean, if my little brain can come up with two perfectly workable ways, then those who hate could come up with probably more insidious ones. So, my first reason for first making you feel more vulnerable than you already do is because you are more vulnerable than you think you are.

There's a second reason. The second reason is biblical. The Bible portrays the sufferings of Christians.

And here, I'm going to put in a parenthesis, because I don't know who's in this room, and I hope lots of people, I hope lots of unbelievers are here, sort of checking us out, see what we say. I say Christians, and I want it to be said loud and clear that is not synonymous with America. I listened to Kenny pray a few minutes ago, and I just wondered whether every time he said we and our and so on, some ears in the room were hearing American instead of followers of Jesus.

And I fear that, because I know it's true, especially in the Muslim world, that America and Christian are almost synonymous. That's a real sad misunderstanding. That I would just like to plead with everyone not to make that mistake.

I personally am a Christian first, and American way second. Probably third, fourth, fifth. I can think of some other things I am before that.

And if America goes down, Christianity survives, big time. They're not the same. But here's the point I'm making, close that parenthesis.

In the Bible, the sufferings held out to the people of God as something Christians will walk through is far more extensive than anything that happened on Tuesday. For example, in 1 Peter 4, 12 following, it says, Beloved Christians, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that comes upon you as though something strange were happening to you. But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or a troublesome meddler. But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in that name.

Now watch what comes next. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Therefore, as those who suffer according to God's will, entrust your souls, Bethlehem.

To a faithful creator. The assurances of God that the church, the apple of His eye, the followers of His Son will walk through fire on the way to glory, are very great and vastly more extensive than anything we experienced on Tuesday. So for those two reasons, I begin my foundation laying for hope this morning by making you feel more vulnerable than you already do.

I'm not into unfounded hope. I'm not into good feelings. I'm not into glossing things over.

I'm into real hope, solid hope, biblical hope, in pain, not from pain. So now, what is our hope? And what is the foundation of it? Let me sum it up, then we'll go to the text and see it from God's word, not my word. Our hope is this, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, not death and not suffering.

That's our hope. The foundation of it, two things, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on our behalf, and secondly, the sovereignty of God. Christ died, 33 AD, under Pontius Pilate, in order, the Bible says, to bear our sins.

And become our curse. And endure God's condemnation so that it wouldn't have to fall upon those who are in Him. And secure for us an everlasting joy in the presence of an all-satisfying, glorious God of justice and grace.

That's the foundation of our hope. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on our behalf, sinners though we be. And secondly, the foundation of our hope is the sovereignty of God over all events and all persons.

Guaranteeing that what Christ bought for us by His death will certainly become our inheritance. Now let's go to the text and see where I get that. What is our hope in this text? Our hope is not an easy, comfortable, secure life on this earth.

Our hope is that the love of God will so work as to enable us to enjoy the glory of God through death into eternity with ever-increasing joy forever. Now I think it would be more helpful to you if you were to look at me right now, instead of looking at your Bibles. You heard it read, and I just want to say it to you as an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

I want to say it to you. What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, we are being killed all day long. We are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.

No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is the Christian hope. Not to escape a hijacked plane, and not to be found in a burning building. And you know what? Jesus would want me to say right now, I know He would, to everybody in this room, of every ethnic variety, of every descent, and of every religion.

That hope can be yours, freely, for faith. Because Jesus bought it, and you can't. You can't earn it, you can't work for it, you can't measure up to it, you can't be American, or Arab, or any other ethnic entity.

Those things will not count with Jesus. Being American doesn't advance you one centimeter towards God. Being any other ethnic variety doesn't hold you back one centimeter from God.

Belief in King Jesus as your treasured Savior, and your all-surpassingly valuable King, is what wins that hope for you. That's the hope. Now let's go to foundation number one.

We've seen it already, I'll pass over it briefly. The hope is, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. What's the foundation for it? Verse 32.

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? You see the logic of heaven in that verse? He didn't spare His own Son, therefore He won't fail to give us everything we need in order to enjoy Him forever and ever and ever. The basis of our hope is that God gave Jesus on our behalf. I deserve to be in the building that collapses, and I deserve to be in the plane that crashes, and worse, I deserve to be in hell.

It is sheer mercy that I was not there and am here. They were no worse than I am. And the only way I will escape hell, and I probably will not escape the plane or the building, is because Christ was sent by the Father to be the mediator between me and a holy God, so that His righteousness, not mine, would count for me, and His death, not my condemnation, would count for me.

And by faith in Him, the Father welcomes me into His presence. That's my only hope. That's my only hope, and sheer only hope.

The last foundation I would mention, or the last part of the foundation, is the sovereignty of God. Now, you may have noticed, I sort of paraphrased verse 32 in a way that might have puzzled you. The verse says, He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things? And I said, How shall He not with Him give us everything we need in order to enjoy Him forever? Now, why did I do that? Is that a legitimate way to say it? The reason I did is because of verse 35.

Verse 35 makes very clear that the sovereignty of God does not guarantee our escape from suffering. It does not guarantee that we won't be hijacked, or that we won't be in the World Trade Center, or that we won't drink the poisoned water, or that we won't breathe the deadly gas. There is no guarantee in the Bible whatsoever that the people of God will escape those events.

It says, Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, or peril, or sword. They're sweeping words. They're meant to canvas the whole possibility of trouble.

Take the word peril and the word distress. They cover everything. Every kind of possible calamity Christians will walk through.

I don't want to give you an unfounded hope this morning. I want to give you a founded hope this morning. And I do not give you a hope that you will escape these things.

But nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing can separate us. Now you may ask, Why are you focusing on the sovereignty of God as the other part of the foundation? Where do you see that in this text? Does that just come from your theology? Or is that here somewhere? I don't see it.

Where is it? Show us. Look at verse 36. Just as it is written, For your sake we are being put to death all day long.

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. Now why? That's a quote from Psalm 44, 22. Why did Paul say that? I mean the text would flow just fine without that quotation.

That's gross. We're all counted as throat slit sheep. Why did he say that? For the same reason that I began this sermon saying I wanted to make you feel more vulnerable than you already are.

I learned it from Paul. I preach the way I preach because he writes the way he writes. He said it because it's true.

And Christians need to be shocked out of their expectations of comfort and security. As though God owes us anything in this land. He doesn't owe you anything.

He doesn't owe me anything. This is what Paul says we may expect. Sometimes it's small.

Sometimes it's this serious. But now here's where sovereignty comes from. I went back and I read Psalm 44 in its entirety in the Old Testament.

Where he quoted. Because I wanted to ask, okay, if you say your people are counted as sheep to be slaughtered and are being killed all day long. Is the portrayal of the text where you're getting this idea that

God has lost the reins of the universe.

That he's lost control. That he's standing either idly by or hand wringingly by and cannot change this or doesn't intend to. How are we to think about our sovereign God in relation to this event? And let me just read you verses 10 to 13 and verse 19 from which this quote comes.

Verse 10, Psalm 44. You God cause us to turn back from before our adversaries. You give us as sheep to be eaten and have scattered us among the nations.

You sell your people cheaply. You make us a reproach to our neighbors. A scoffing and a derision to those around us.

Verse 19. You have crushed us in a place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death. That's where I get it.

So when Paul says in verse 36, we are being counted as sheep to be slaughtered. He does not mean God has lost control of the world or of his people or of hijackers or of anything. And therefore by the way.

No, it's not by the way. It's right at the essence. Therefore, radio commentators and TV commentators and Christian spokesmen need to hear this.

Since he has not lost control of all things and all persons. Therefore, it is wrong to say. He has no holy purposes.

And he has no gracious plans. And he has no merciful intentions. And he has no bright designs in this dark and dreadful and God ordained suffering.

No. What he does mean is, what Paul is saying is. That the God whose sovereignty reigns over all things and all persons and all times and all places.

Will make death and life and angels and principalities. And things present and things to come and height and depth and powers. And every other thing in all creation serve the everlasting joy of those who trust in Christ.

That's what his sovereignty means. Everything is designed for the everlasting joy of broken hearted penitent people. Who freely receive what he has freely provided in Jesus.

If he must kill them to do it. He will kill them. We are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.

We are being killed all day long. Oh may God grant you in the coming days of trouble. Sweet sorrow.

And self humbling. And steady hope. In your suffering savior.

And your sovereign king. Jesus Christ. And cause your minds to be stayed on Jesus Christ.

And may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Our God is an everlasting rock. And I beckon you.

I summon you. I plead with all of you. Yield to the love, mercy, authority and sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

And now may the Lord who is able to keep you from falling. And present you without blemish. And with rejoicing before the throne of his glory.

The all wise God. Before all time. Now.

And forever. Bestow upon you a peace that passes understanding. And win for himself.

Great honor. Great majesty. And great glory.

In the sacrificial service of your sorrowing. Self humbled. And steady hope.

Life. And all the people said. Amen.

You're dismissed. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper. Pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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