

(Biographies) John Bunyan

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of living on God, especially in times of suffering, and the dangers of trusting in self, using John Bunyan's life as an example.

Duration: 1:33:15

Scripture: Judges 16:30, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:32, Romans 8:35, 2 Corinthians 1:9, 1 Timothy 6:17, Hebrews 13:8

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Faith Trust"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a family who recently joined their church. The family had faced difficulties in their previous church but had learned about the sovereignty of God during their time at the new church. Shortly after joining, they received news that their son had a serious health issue. Despite the challenges they faced, the husband continued preaching, relying on the sovereignty of God. The speaker also references a scene from 'The Pilgrim's Progress' where the protagonist realizes he has a key called promise that can unlock any lock in Doubting Castle. The sermon emphasizes the need to trust in God's sovereignty even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.desiringgod.org In 1672, 50 miles northwest of London in Bedford, John Bunyan was released from 12 years of imprisonment. Near the end of that imprisonment, he wrote an add-on to his spiritual autobiography called Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, which he had written sometime earlier.

And in that add-on, he said something from which I take the title of this message. He quoted 2 Corinthians 1.9, which says we had this sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. And then he wrote this.

This scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass the sentence of death upon everything that can be properly called a thing of life. Even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyment and all as dead to me and myself as dead to them. And the second was to live upon God that is invisible.

And there's the phrase that I chose as the title for the message. To live upon God that is invisible. He discovered that if he's to suffer rightly, he must live no longer upon wife or children or health, but upon God.

He must live upon God. And how good it would be if we could learn to live upon God before we have no choice but to live only upon God. For the day will come when this mortal nature will fail.

And the doctor will say there is nothing more we can do. And at that time, you may be old enough to have outlived your wife and children. And have nothing to live upon but God.

And so it would be good, it would be good to learn this. I think he spent his life learning it from his early married life until he died when he was 60 years old in 1688. So I come to Bunyan with some predispositions about suffering.

What has gripped me most about Bunyan in the six or eight months that I've been reading is his suffering. And how he suffered and how he responded to his sufferings. And I want to know how to learn from it.

What did it do to him? What might do to us? And I'll clue you in that I come to him with significant experiences looking at the world and looking at the word. And therefore I'm reading Bunyan through certain glasses. And I'll tell you what they are right up front so you'll know that whatever distortions are there you can be alerted to them.

But I come right now in my 53rd year with this particular church and these particular sufferings and this world I come with these kinds of things on my mind. The church in Indonesia with its church burnings. Sudan with its systematic starvation of Christians and the enslavement of many and the beatings.

China with its repression of religious freedom and lengthy imprisonments and harassment. India with mob violence resulting two weeks ago in Graham Staines being killed along with his two boys. David Barrett's report in this month's Missionary Bulletin, International Bulletin of Missionary Research estimating 164,000 Christian martyrdoms this year.

10,000 people dead in the wake of Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua and Honduras where one of my boys will be heading in a few weeks. 1,000 people killed in the earthquake in Armenia. Hundreds being slaughtered in Kosovo and Bosnia before that.

16,000 people dying of or being newly infected with AIDS, the HIV virus, every day. 2.3 million died in 97, 460,000 of them children. 8.4 million children orphaned by AIDS and probably doubling in the next two or three years.

Not to mention the suffering of my own church, tuberculosis, lupus, kidney failure, heart disease, blindness. And not to mention the emotional and relational pangs for which 100 people in this church would gladly endure a clean amputation of their right arm if they could be fixed. So I come to Bunyan with suffering on my mind, not to mention the Word.

Through many tribulations you must enter the kingdom of God. I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Many are the afflictions of the righteous.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. If they called the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they call you? To mention a few. And so when I hear him say, to suffer a right you must learn to live upon God who is invisible, I want to know what that means.

And I want to experience that so that when my season of suffering is intensified to the point of losing all and dying, I will not lose my joy. Like Habakkuk, one of our wedding texts, says in chapter 3 verse 17,

Though the fig tree blossom not, though there be no fruit on the vines, though there be no lambs in the stall and no cattle in the field, yet will I rejoice in God my Savior. You've got to live on God if that's going to come true.

The reason that's so important to me is not simply because I'm scared when I think about dying. Dying, the process of dying is scary to me. But I believe God gets most glory in the world when we maintain our stability of faith and our joy of faith when we have nothing to maintain that faith anymore but God alone.

Then he really gets glory. My little comment about signs and wonders would be, God can and does do them and gets glory, but not half so much as when, according to John 19 or 21, we die well. The world will be happy when it gets well.

It doesn't take any spiritual reality to rejoice when you get well. And if you want to tack on God did it, the world will say, fine, you can say God did it. We say science did it, but you love it, I love it, and we know where your treasure is.

But they can't say that in the dying hour when you're rejoicing. They just can't say it anymore. John Bunyan was born in Elstow, about a mile south of Bedford, November 30th, 1628.

Same year that William Laud became the Bishop of London. Now that's significant. And the reason it's significant is because you can't understand the sufferings of John Bunyan if you don't understand the political and religious situation that brought it about, or a lot of it about.

William Laud, Bishop Laud, teamed up with Charles I to resist the parliamentary pressures to gain freedom for the Puritans. So that they wouldn't have to bow to the Book of Common Prayer or experience Episcopal ordination. And so there began to be a very dangerous cleavage between monarchy, Charles I, and his religious lackey, William Laud, and the Parliament, with Oliver Cromwell coming onto the scene and being elected to the Parliament in 1640.

1640, I think it was. A civil war broke out between these two groups. People loyal to the King, people loyal to Parliament.

The one wanting religious freedom for people like the Puritans, and not just them, and the other saying that the Church of England should be the state church and there shouldn't be non-conformity with any freedom. Well, Oliver Cromwell was a great leader, and there was a triumph, and Laud was beheaded in 1645. And you need to hear that with the kind of trembling as though you heard that President Clinton was beheaded this afternoon.

Beheaded. Not shot. Beheaded.

You need to feel this because this is the atmosphere in which these Puritans are going to be ministering. People were beheaded. Kings.

The King, five years later, was beheaded. The King was beheaded. And then Cromwell reigned, and Presbyterianism reigned.

The Westminster Assembly was gathered earlier. It finished its work in 1646. And now we had the Confession and the Catechism, and it defined the Presbyterian life in England in those days and has to this day.

Great freedom was given. Jews were excluded from the island of England in 1290. And not a Jew was allowed to be in England.

And they were welcomed back under Cromwell in 1655 in particular. He died. 1658, he died.

So that little period there, the Commonwealth, 1645 roughly to 58, great freedom for the Puritans and other people in England. When he died, his brother Richard tried to do it, and he couldn't do it. He was not a leader.

Now you know what happens when you have weak leadership in a country. There's a lot of chaos. There begins to be instability, and what do people want when there's instability? At all costs, they want stability.

They'll take it with a king or a dictator or however they can take it. And so they welcome back Charles II, the son of Charles I, and it's called the Restoration. The Restoration of Monarchy, 1660, and that's the year Bunyan went to jail.

So there's a correlation there, because with the Restoration of Monarchy came the Restoration of Episcopalianism and the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which in August of that year put 2,000 Puritan pastors out of their churches who would not bow to Episcopal ordination or to the Book of Common Prayer. Now those were the days of John Bunyan's life. The 1660 and the next 18 years that he lived to the end of his life in 1688 were more or less dangerous.

Sometimes okay, sometimes threatened, but never anything like we have today. With such security to be taken for granted that you couldn't be assured that there wouldn't be a bloody assize like there was in 1685 where the sheriffs killed 300 Puritans. As a boy, he learned the trade of tinker.

He used the phrase brazier in his will. It means a metal worker, somebody who fixes plows and yokes and other metal instruments with forge and hammer. That was his trade.

He was poor. He had only a grade school education. He said, I simply learned to read and write.

He had absolutely no higher education and no theological education. His notable sufferings began as a teenager. He was 15 years old.

It's 1644. Remember the dates. Now here comes this tremendous national upheaval.

A civil war is ready to break out and he's 15 years old and his mother dies. And a month later, his 13 year old sister dies. And to make matters worse, his father remarries within a month.

He turns 16 and he's drafted for two years into Cromwell's army. So within a space of two or three months, he loses his mother as a 15 year old. He loses his sister as a 13 year old.

And he's swept away from his home as a 16 year old now. And he may or may not have seen active service. But we know one story where he was called upon to be a sentinel.

And a man said, I'd rather take your place, you take mine. And the man was killed with a musket ball through the head. And so he got at least that close to military activity.

This is a 16 year old boy who just lost his mother. He comes home. He is not a believer.

He writes about himself, I was the very ringleader of all the youth that kept me company in all manner of vice and ungodliness. He married. He was 20 years old or 21.

And we never learned the name of his first wife. It's a remarkable thing. She bore him four children.

And the first one was blind at birth. His name was Mary. So his marriage, which might have been a relief to him from the sufferings of the earlier teen years, proves to enter with tremendous burden.

And the burden, of course, in our day, we've had that happen in our church, is great. Then, picture what it might have been for a young woman who had all the burden of a household and a blind daughter, baby daughter, to care for. And then three more children follow back to back.

And then when he's thrown into prison, she's 10 years old. And he said it was like pulling skin from his bones to leave his daughter, blind daughter, alone with his wife with no means to care for them. So he made laces in prison and things like that.

But she brought with her to this marriage, this pagan man's life, two books. That was her entire bringing. One was called *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*.

And the other was called *The Practice of Piety*. And she told stories of her godly father. And he began to read these books.

And he began to be awakened. Mary, Elizabeth, John, Thomas were the names of his children. And in his first five years of marriage, he was profoundly converted.

Now, the process of the conversion was agonizing. And when you read *Grace Abounding*, get it if it's up there. It's a little short book, 120 pages.

It is very frustrating to read. There are no dates in it. You can't tell when anything is happening.

And you can't tell what he thinks is his conversion because it seems to happen several times. And then he experiences these extraordinary temptations. And then he thinks he's committed the unforgivable sin and drops into despair and depression for two years.

And then he begins to come out. But most of the biographers seem to make this the decisive moment. And they're probably right.

So let me read you the decisive moment. There were several good moments, but they seem to be followed by drifting away. And I don't know what he thought about those.

One day, he's about 25 years old here, I suppose. One day, as I was passing into the field, this sentence fell upon my soul. He's been soaking himself in the Scriptures and in these books, but feeling unconverted.

This sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And methought with all I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand.

There, I say, was my righteousness. So that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, He lacks my righteousness, for that was just before Him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my

righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself.

The same yesterday, today, and forever. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons.

My temptations fled away. So that from that time, those dreadful Scriptures of God, the ones he's referring to there are the texts about the unforgivable sin, and Esau, and crying out and not being able to get forgiven. Those terrible texts, those Scriptures, left off to trouble me.

Now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and the love of God. Now one of the influences, if that sounds familiar, who's that sound like? Another great person who had a conversion somewhat like that. Well, Wesley, I'm thinking of Luther.

Okay, sounds like a lot of people. The reason I mention Luther is because he attributes so much to Luther. Here's what he says.

The God in whose hands are all my days and ways did cast into my hand one day a book of Martin Luther's. It was his comment on Galatians. I found my condition in his experience so largely and profoundly handled as if his book had been written out of my heart.

I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon Galatians, accepting the Bible, before all other books that ever I have seen as most fit for a wounded conscience. That's an amazing tribute. And he's not the only one.

1655 now. The matter of his soul is settled. The church, nonconformist church in Bedford, pastored by John Gifford, asks him to do some exhorting in the fields.

And behold, a great preacher is discovered. Seventeen years was to pass before he would be licensed and become the actual official pastor of this church. And he gets out of prison in 1672.

But he became a very powerful preacher. And stories are told to the effect that hundreds would come from around to hear him from the villages. And when he went to London, if one day's notice were given, seven o'clock the next morning before work, 1,200 people could gather.

John Owen, the great intellect of the Puritans, lived in London at this time, would hear him every chance he got. And when the King Charles asked Owen, Why do you go to hear a tinker preach when you have all this learning? His answer was, I would willingly exchange my learning for the tinker's power of touching the men's hearts. So you know this man had a tremendous gift for preaching.

Ten years into his marriage, this unnamed woman, his wife, died. He's 30 years old, and he has four children under ten. One of them blind.

Within a year, he marries Elizabeth. Elizabeth was a great woman also. The year after that, he's arrested.

She's pregnant. She has four children she inherited. One of them's blind.

She's pregnant. He gets arrested, and she miscarries and loses the baby. I have crossed out in my manuscript, but I just feel like I can't pass over this great instance in Elizabeth's life.

I just must pay tribute to the women in Bunyan's life, though they had a hard time of it, and he may not have treated them entirely all the way he should. But she goes to London to appeal. Now this is a village

woman.

This woman with no education goes to the higher-ups of London, and they put her off and say, wait until the court comes to Bedford. So she waits six months or so, and the court comes to Bedford. So you've got three judges.

She's going to go before these major judges because they've put her husband in jail. And who knows what might happen to her? And she has four children and a recent miscarriage to contend with. Would he stop preaching, they ask.

My Lord, he dares not leave off preaching as long as he can speak. What's the need of talking? There is need, my Lord, for I have four small children that cannot help themselves, of which one is blind, and we have nothing to live upon but charity of other people. Matthew Hale, with pity, asks if she really has four children, being so young.

My Lord, I am but mother-in-law to them, having not been married to him yet two full years. Indeed, I was with child when my husband was first apprehended. But being young and unaccustomed to such things, I, being smade at the news, fell into labor and so continued for eight days and then was delivered.

But my child died. Hale, moved with pity, yet the other judges hardened themselves. He's a mere tinker, Elizabeth.

Yes, and because he's a tinker and a poor man, he's despised and cannot have justice. One Mr. Chester is enraged and says he will just preach and do as he wishes. He preaches nothing but the word of God, she says.

Mr. Twisdon, in a rage, he runneth up and down and doeth harm. No, my Lord, it is not so. God hath owned him and doth much good by him.

The angry man, his doctrine is the doctrine of the devil. She, my Lord, when the righteous judge shall appear, it will be known that his doctrine is not of the devil. Well, we'll break it off there.

You get a flavor for Elizabeth. Otherwise, she would not have been able to last the 12 years that she did without him. Twelve years in prison, voluntarily, because all he had to say was, I will no longer preach.

And he could have gotten out. He was asked, will you recant? Will you forswear? Will you renounce? His answer, if nothing will do unless I make my conscience a continual butchery and slaughter shop, unless, putting out my own eyes, I commit me to the blind to be led, as I doubt not is desired by some. I have determined the Almighty God being my help and shield, yet to suffer if frail life might continue so long, even till the moss shall grow on my eyebrows, rather than thus to violate my faith and principles.

So you see some of the stuff he's made of as well. It was a torment for his family, and he often agonized over whether he was doing right by them. He said, the partying with my wife and poor children hath often been to me, they could visit him from time to time, have often been to me like the pulling of the flesh from my bones.

Oh, the thoughts of the hardship I thought my blind Mary might go under would break my heart to pieces. And yet he stayed. Twelve years later, 1672, he's released under the Declaration of Religious Indulgence.

He's immediately licensed. He's been functioning pastorally for this church because they joined him in prison a lot, being arrested as well as visiting. And so he was functioning as pastor in some ways, but he was licensed immediately.

He bought and refurbished a barn for a church, and that's where he ministered for the next 16 years until he died in London in 1688. The census figures seem to suggest that there may have been 120 nonconformists in Bedford in 1676. So perhaps he has a church of 120 people, plus people who may have come from around the surrounding villages.

And God was merciful to him during those 16 years, because even though blood was being shed by many Puritans in those years, he escaped imprisonment and indeed God spared him from ministry until August of 1688. He traveled up to London under two purposes. One, to settle a dispute between a man in his church and his father, where there was a lack of reconciliation.

And he succeeded at that reconciliation. And two, was for a preaching assignment. But it rained so hard as he is returning for one of the districts around London that he was soaked to the bone and got a fever.

And on August 31st, 1688, at the age of 60, he died away from his wife and children, and probably they didn't even have enough advance notice to know that he was dying. Let me try to sum up the sufferings now that I've been recounting. An almost simultaneous death of his mother and his sister.

The remarriage of his father. The military draft at age 16. A first child born to a happy marriage, blind.

Depression and darkness for about four or five years in his marriage as he struggles for the assurance of his salvation or his conversion. The death of his first wife, leaving him four children, one of them blind, when he's 30 years old. Twelve-year imprisonment, starting a year after that, after he remarried to Elizabeth, with much difficulty during those twelve years for them and him.

And then after the release, constant stress of the uncertainty of the political climate. One more imprisonment, I failed to mention, for a winter and a spring in 1675, and then a final sickness and death at age 60, far too early for him, alone, probably, away from his family. Not to mention ministry, marriage, parenting, controversy, criticism, sickness, and the ordinary things that everybody endures.

So my question is, what did he make of this? What did it make of him, and what might it make of us? And the way I want to handle this is by giving you five statements that I'll try to unpack of the effect of Bunyan's suffering on him. Number one, these are the effects that I see in Bunyan's life of his suffering that we should appropriate for ourselves, and I'll try to help us do that. Number one, Bunyan's suffering confirmed him in his calling as a writer, especially for the afflicted church.

Now the biggest distortion that I have made of Bunyan's life so far is that I have not even mentioned his writings. Now everybody knows that he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the most widely distributed book in the history of the world outside the Bible, written by a man with no formal education.

It's been translated into 200 languages and is especially popular in the third world, and reading the history of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was mind-boggling. I'd love to tell you some stories about 13th century, I mean 18th century China and the impact. It almost became the first little red book in China, but different course of events changed all of that.

But what people don't know is that he wrote 57 other books. When you read the list in Christopher Hill's index, there are 58 books. Books on controversy like *The Quakers and Justification and Baptism*, collections of poems, books for children, children's literature, allegory like *The Holy War* and *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*.

And practical doctrinal expositions. Most of them are simply practical doctrinal expositions that would profit your own soul based on sermons that he had written. So he was a writer from beginning to end.

He wrote four books before he went into jail. So from age 25 to 27 to 32 roughly. And he had five books that he wrote the year he died.

And everything else was in between. And he was always writing in prison and always writing at home. He was a writer through and through with no theological degrees, no formal education.

He knew no Greek and Hebrew at all. And yet his sufferings permeated and gave the aroma to all of his writings. George Whitefield said this of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, It smells of the prison.

It was written when the author was confined in Bedford jail and ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross the spirit of Christ and of glory then rests upon them. And I just ask you brothers, have you not tasted that? Has there not been an intensity? Has there not been a sweetness? Has there not been a depth? Has there not been an authenticity walking into the pulpit after the winter seasons? Whether your own or another's. I would generalize here and say that one of the main reasons that the Puritans are still being read today is that the fragrance of heaven and the fragrance of hell are on them.

Because they were written in a century from 1560 to 1660 which was permeated by persecution and suffering and life was simply hard in the 17th century when it was good. Whereas in America and in the West today we are chipper. Church is chipper.

TV is chipper. Books are chipper. We're a chipper people.

Which means there's not much to be read today worth reading. Because the smell of hell and heaven isn't on it. When you're walking along the precipice like the Puritans walked almost every day of their lives the precipice where there's no 911.

You gotta get your own water. There's no vaccinations. There's no OBGYN.

And you're always walking along the edge and the precipice of eternity. There's a smell about your preaching. Which is almost missing today entirely.

Thank God for books where we can bathe our brains with something other than chipper theology. Bunyan's writings were an extension of his pastoral ministry to his flock. That's the way he viewed them.

And he lived under constant harassment and danger and that fit him to minister well to others. Which leads me now to my second observation. Bunyan's sufferings deepened his love for his flock and gave his pastoral labor the fragrance of eternity.

It deepened his love for his flock and gave him the fragrance of eternity. Bunyan and his writings are filled with affection for his people. He loved his little flock.

He wrote a book called *Christian Behavior* in 1663. Compute. He's in jail.

Three years he's been in jail. And here's the way he closed the book, writing it for his little flock. Thus have I in a few words written to you before I die.

He fully expected this was not going to turn out well. So you got to get this straight. Don't overdo it and don't underdo it.

He wasn't tortured in jail. He could do his little hand work and help support his family and he could have visitors. But don't underdo it either.

People were being beheaded in England in those days. Kings had the right to do as they pleased in those days. There wasn't a lot of recourse.

So you never knew when the door might swing open. One of you went to England. I forget who this belongs to.

But this says Bedford Jail, 1670. It's a peephole on the door in a cell that may have been John Bunyan's. This is the actual thing.

1670, he had two more years to serve. So if you want to touch this, I'll leave it up here. And I thank whoever it was who lent this to us, just one of you, for doing it.

But this looks authentic to me. And you can look through it. There's no magnification, so you can see both ways on this one.

We get to do it the other way. I'll put this here and you can look at it. But if you steal it, God will judge you.

Now, what made me think of that? I lost my place here. He's writing this to his people. Oh, I said don't overstate the suffering and don't understate it because they could come visit him.

And it could be that they put their finger right on that and looked in. But he wrote to them, Before I die, a word to provoke you to faith and holiness, because I desire that you may have the life that is laid up for all them that believe in the Lord Jesus and love one another when I am deceased. Though then I shall rest from my labors and be in paradise, as through grace I am comfortably assured, yet it is not there but here I must do you good.

And so he writes these books for his people. Halfway through his imprisonment, he writes, I did often say before the Lord that if to be hanged up presently, before their eyes would be means to awake them and confirm them in the truth, I would gladly consent to it. Bunyan gloried in the privilege of being a pastor.

He loved the ministry. It flowed from his sufferings. He was jealous.

He was jealous for his people to prosper. Now, loving your people is very much a product of suffering, I think. In America, we don't suffer much.

We are fun-loving folk. But you know, you can be as fun-loving and as happy-go-lucky and chipper as you want, but as soon as somebody tells you you've got cancer, or as soon as you find out your child is blind, you turn away from the chipper pastors to somebody who is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. So I know there's a tremendous pressure on you in many seminars to grow churches by helping people feel chipper and good.

And I think perhaps your church may grow more slowly if you're a serious person. And I don't want you to be a somber or glum person. But your people have got to know, you know, what it feels like if they're going to come tell you what it feels like.

There's got to be something they're detecting in you that you've suffered. Otherwise, they're going to go to somebody else because the pain is too great to be dealt with lightly. And as soon as you share with somebody a marital problem or a kid problem or a health problem, you can tell within seconds if they are connecting at any deep level here.

And if they're not, the quickest thing you want to do is just say, excuse me, excuse me, I need somebody who understands. And so your suffering is so important to them. You won't love your people as you ought unless you suffer with Jesus.

He said, my heart has been so wrapped up in the glory of this excellent work that I counted myself more blessed and honored of God by this than if I had made me emperor of the Christian world or the Lord of all the glory of the earth without it. He loved being a pastor to his people and his suffering endeared him to them. Third observation.

Bunyan's suffering opened his understanding to the truth that the Christian life is hard and that following Jesus means having the face, the wind in your face. 1682, six years before he dies, he writes a book called *The Greatness of the Soul* based on Mark 8.36. What does it profit a man to gain the world and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Now Puritans were good at taking a sentence like that and writing a book about it. They wrote books about sentences like that.

And they're not throwing away words. So he writes a book about that verse. And in it, this is what he wants to get across.

He's quoting Jesus now. Follow me is not like following some other masters. The wind sits always on my face.

And the foaming rage of the sea of this world and the proud and lofty waves thereof do continually beat upon the sides of the bark or boat that myself, my cause and my followers are in. He therefore that will not run hazards and that is afraid to venture a drowning, let him not set foot into this vessel. That's his conception of following Jesus.

Two years later, he wrote a book on John 15 too. Every branch that bears fruit, my father prunes. And this was his point.

It is the will of God that they that go to heaven should go thither hardly or with difficulty. The righteous shall scarcely be saved. That is, they shall but yet with great difficulty that it may be the sweeter.

So his whole mindset seems out of step with 20th century American evangelicalism to me. The essence of Christianity is hard. The essence of Christianity is you got to fight like crazy, cut off hands, gouge out eyes, deny yourself in order to live upon God only.

Because we have, I mean, if it was hard in the 17th century to learn to live upon God only, think how hard it is to get into the kingdom of heaven today. It is hard for a rich man to get into the kingdom and everybody in this room is filthy rich. No exceptions.

I don't care if you didn't pay your rent last month. There are no exceptions. We are rich.

It is hard in America to go to heaven. How many coats are in your closet? Shoes. How many running pairs of shoes? Gloves for every occasion.

Every manner of possible electronic device to heat your food. Fast, slow, rough edges, soft edges. Plumbing is in your house.

Sewage carried away flawlessly. Pure drinking water. Refrigeration 9-1-1 at your beck and call.

I tell you, it is hard to go to heaven in America. Because who knows what you are leaning on until it is taken away. That is why 2 Corinthians 1-9 says, I was crushed to the point of death so that I might trust the one who raises the dead.

In other words, everything was taken but resurrection. And that is coming brothers. So I just plead with God now, get you ready.

He wrote and carried to the printer in his last year, the excellency of a broken heart. Isn't that a beautiful title? The excellency of a broken heart. And you know where it comes from.

It is based on Psalm 51. And in it, this is his thesis. Conversion is not the smooth, easy going process some men think it is.

It is wounding work, of course. This breaking of hearts. But without wounding, there is no saving.

Where there is grafting, there is a cutting. The scion must be let in with a wound. To stick it on the outside or to tie it on with string would be of no use.

Heart must be set to heart, back to back. Or there will be no sap from the root to the branch. And this I say, must be done with a wound.

If you wonder why there aren't more fruitless people. I mean, why there are so many fruitless saints, seeming saints. It may be because there was never a wound.

And the vine isn't in the branch. It's tied on and pasted on with a quick booklet or prayer or aisle walking. And so there's no sap flowing.

And they're trying to do what you're supposed to be doing. Read the Bible and pray and supposed to feel something in this worship service. And there's no life.

And it's scary. The churches are full of that kind of people all over America. And some pulpits have preachers like that.

Bunyan was passionate for these things. And he was patient with these things. Listen to this beautiful pastor, patient word.

And listen to his language. I wish I had time to talk about Bunyan's language. He and Spurgeon are almost without peer in their use of language.

And we need to learn from the misregard. But I have to leave some things out. But you get a flavor of it here in this beautiful word.

1678, a book called Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ. He was a wooer, a wooer of men. Coleridge was right.

The Calvinism of John Bunyan is the sweetest, most beautiful, most tasty religion in the world. He that comes to Christ cannot, it is true, always get on as fast as he would. Poor coming soul.

Thou art like the man that would ride full gallop, whose horse will hardly trot. Now the desire of his mind is not to be judged of by the slow pace of the dull jade he rides on. He's talking about his body here.

The dull jade he rides on. But by the hitching and the kicking and the spurring as he sits on his back. Thy flesh is like this dull jade.

It will not gallop after Christ. It will be backward, though thy soul and heaven lie at stake. We need to talk like that.

Let your speech be seasoned with salt that you may know how to answer every man. Work at your language. Get provocative language into your great old truths.

So that people either scratch their heads or scream or twinge or something. But don't go to sleep on you and call you boring. The worst damnation of a preacher.

Maybe not the worst, but pretty close. He was a very balanced person. One way to illustrate the balance in this issue is he wrote a book in... I didn't put the date down.

Doesn't matter. He wrote a book in one year called Saved by Grace. Ephesians 2.5 was the text.

And the very same year he followed it with a book called The Straight Gate. Based on Luke 13.24. Strive to enter at the straight gate. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able.

Can you point to anybody in your church that is seeking to enter the kingdom and not able? I just wonder if our gospel is a biblical gospel when there aren't a few people like that around. We are so scared of having people like that. We want to paste assurance on them so fast.

Because you can't have people struggling with assurance. You can't have people struggling for their soul and saying, I want to be saved, but I don't know grace in my life. I have no spiritual affections.

We say to people, you don't need to have any of those affections. We've got to get people like that fixed so fast that so much of the purity of experiences seems gone. There's no wrestling like these men wrestled with.

The way is hard, Jesus said, that leads to life. And those who find it are few. Bunyan taught that to his people.

Number four. This is my fourth result or function of suffering in his life. Bunyan's suffering strengthened his assurance that God is sovereign over all afflictions of his people and will bring them safely home.

Now, there have always been people who try to solve the problem of suffering by denying the sovereignty of God. That is the all ruling providence of God over Satan and over nature and over human hearts and deeds. But, you know, it is remarkable as I read church history and biography and look around the world today.

It is remarkable to me how many of the people who cherish the full sovereignty of God over will and nature and demons and bodies, the fullest expression of the sovereign control of God, are the people who have suffered most. And thus, from an academic perspective, would have the hardest time rendering an account of theoretically how you can believe in such a thing. And they have found the most comfort in it.

And Bunyan was among that number. He wrote a book called *Seasonable Counsels, Advice to Sufferers*. It was based on one verse.

And the verse was 1 Peter 4, 19, which goes, Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful creator. And to watch him unpack every word in that is a thrilling thing. Let me give you a taste.

He said, it is not, he took the phrase especially, according to the will of God. Suffer according to the will of God. He said, it is not what enemies will, nor what they are resolved upon, but what God will and what God appoints that will be done.

No enemy can bring suffering upon a man when the will of God is otherwise. So no man can save himself out of their hands when God will deliver him up for his glory. We shall or shall not suffer even as it pleaseth him.

God has appointed, I'm still reading Spurgeon. I'm just putting the collage of text together here. God has appointed who will suffer.

Revelation 6, 11, a full number of the martyrs who are appointed must come in. God has appointed when they shall suffer. Acts 18, 9 to 10.

Paul, nobody's going to hurt you yet. John 7, 30. It was not his hour.

Therefore, he passes through the midst. The time will come. God will deliver his son over.

Till then, nobody can touch him. God determines where this or that saint and good man shall suffer. Luke 13, 33.

It cannot be but that a prophet shall perish outside Jerusalem. And on the Mount of Transfiguration, they discussed what kind of sufferings he would experience in Jerusalem. God has appointed what kind of sufferings this or that saint shall undergo.

Acts 9, 16. Go tell Paul how great things he must suffer for my name. And John 21, 19.

He says to Peter, I will show you or I have showed you by what death you would glorify God. God has determined that Peter would be crucified upside down. Our sufferings as to the nature of them are all written down in God's book, he says.

And though the writing may seem unknown characters to us, yet God understands them very well. It is appointed who of them should die of hunger, who is to die by the sword, who should go into captivity, and who should be eaten up by beasts. And that's almost a direct quote from Jeremiah 15, 2 and 3. Now what was his aim in talking like that to these saints who might well suffer in that horrible way? Let me assert a parenthesis here just to show you how I deal with this.

I wrestle with this emotionally almost daily because I read the newspaper. I opened the newspaper up last week right after the earthquake. First I heard the news.

100, 200, 500, 700, 1000 people. God, move your people. Move your people now.

Let's go. Show your compassion. Move.

I know you did it. Why you did it I don't know except at least you want this. That your church would move in power and compassion.

There, move them. Let's go. And then I opened the newspaper.

Now I confess to having a little touch of claustrophobia because when I was about 14, I went into the woods across the street from my house and with my friends dug a cave straight down on a bank like this. And then when we got down, so it was over our heads, we started in like this. Just digging like this.

And I can remember going down in the hole, lying on my stomach, crawling into the hole and scraping like this. And then reaching my way back, pulling the dirt out and putting it in a bucket and setting it up. Is that stupid? I have nightmares about that to this day.

I'm usually awake when I have them. And I opened the newspaper. You saw the picture perhaps.

Here's a collapsed building and the workers all over it. And they're pulling. And here's one little face of a man like this.

And he's just crushed underneath. And his eyes are just terror-stricken looking at the man. And I just trembled when I saw that picture.

I just trembled. If I were in that position and that were on me, and there were these big beams going, and at any minute you just might be severed or back on your face. You know what I think? God's doing that.

God's doing that. That's why there's a problem of suffering in the world. It's not statistics.

It's not statistics. It's a little girl in Texas falling into a 12-inch pipe. Remember that one? The whole nation watched for days.

And they bored a hole this way. They bored a hole this way. You're her dad.

And you stop. And her leg is trapped up like this. And she's, what, two? And for a while she's crying and crying and crying and crying and crying.

Mommy and Daddy, in your heart, he's being absolutely ripped to shreds. Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God. If you can't believe in the sovereignty of God at a moment like that, just give it up and quit the ministry.

And I admit, I mean, I can say this right now, but I admit if my little Talitha experiences that this afternoon, I will scream, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God, come, deliver, why not? And I will wrestle. And I pray God will help me believe because this is what the Bible teaches. I just read it this morning in my own personal devotions.

In Genesis 4, a lot of us are reading through the Bible this way. I mean, Exodus 4. 411, who is it that makes a man blind or seeing or deaf or dumb? Is it not I, the Lord? I mean, you just have to quit the Bible or believe in the sovereignty of God. You can't have it both ways.

I don't care what theologians at Bethel or anywhere else are saying. You can't have it both ways. You have to believe in the sovereignty of God.

He says, I have handled this in a few words, this issue of suffering, to show you that our sufferings are ordered and disposed by him and that you might always, when you come into trouble for his name, not stagger or be at a loss, but be stayed and composed and settled in your mind. So I just plead with you, get this fixed before you have to be in that crushed situation yourself. I've had some wonderful testimonies in this church.

Let me tell you one. This isn't in my manuscript, but it comes to my mind, and I'll risk it. I'd say four more pages here, which could take a half an hour, but I'll hurry.

A family came to our church. In fact, she may be here. I don't know.

You're welcome if you're here, and you wouldn't mind me telling this story. Started coming in May. Came to me last November or so.

Tears, standing right there after a sermon, saying, We had to leave our other church. We won't go into the details about the problems, but we have learned more about the sovereignty of God in these five months, or whatever it was, than we did in 20 years previous. That week I got a call from them that the doctor wanted their son to come quickly because something was very wrong with his blood.

Well, here we are two months later. He has leukemia. He just had a bone marrow transplant on the 12th of January, I believe it was, and he's, I hope, going to make it.

So here's a family, got introduced to the sovereignty of God in the most radical form, and are tested immediately with a 21-year-old son who now had to have his bone marrow killed and have his brother Matt's bone marrow replaced his, which is an exactly perfect match, 80%, not a very good chance. And Bonnie said to me, I would have gone insane without the sovereignty of God. I hear those stories a lot, which is one of the reasons I get worked up about these things.

They are pastorally precious to me and to millions of people. He warns against revenge. He warns against revenge of those.

Listen to what he says about the persecutors. Learn to pity and bewail the condition of the enemy. Never grudge them their present advantages.

Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious of the workers of iniquity. Fret not, though they spoil thy resting place. It is God that hath bidden them do it, to try thy faith and patience thereby.

Wish them no ill with what they get of thine. It is their wages for their work, and it will appear to them ere long that they have earned it dearly. So we must learn to live upon God who is invisible.

We need tribulation. We need suffering. He says, There is that of God to be seen in such a day as cannot be seen in another.

We are apt to overshoot in the days of calm and think ourselves far higher and more strong than we find we be when the trying day is upon us. We could not live without such turnings of the hand of God upon us. We should be overgrown with flesh if we had not our seasonable winters.

It is said that in some countries trees will grow but will bear no fruit because there is no winter there. Let me beg of thee, he says, that thou will not be offended either with God or with men if the cross is laid heavy upon thee. Not with God, for he doth nothing without cause, nor with men, for they are the servants of God to thee for good.

Take therefore what comes to thee from God by them thankfully. Last point, number five. Bunyan's sufferings deepened in him a confidence in the Bible as the word of God and a passion for Bible memory and Bible exposition as the key to perseverance.

I'm going to read that again. Bunyan's suffering deepened in him a confidence in the Bible as the word of God and a passion for Bible memory and Bible exposition as the key to perseverance. If you ask Bunyan, okay, if living on God who is invisible is the key to suffering rightly, what's the key to living on God that is invisible? He would answer, living on the word of God.

That's what he would answer. One of the greatest scenes, and you know which one I'm going to, in the Pilgrim's Progress is the scene of Christian in the dungeon of Doubting Castle with giant despair guarding and hopeful at his side making the long overdue discovery. And the thing I want you to listen to as I read it is, where's the key? Where's the key? Listen to the language carefully.

What a fool I've been to lie like this in a stinking dungeon when I could have just as well walked free in my chest pocket. I have a key called promise that will, I am thoroughly persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle. Then said hopeful, that's good news, my good brother.

Do immediately take it out of your chest pocket and try it. Then Christian took the key from his chest and began to try the lock of the dungeon door. And as he turned the key, the bolt unlocked and the door flew open with ease so that Christian and hopeful immediately came out.

Did you ever get that before? This is Bible memory, folks. This is laying up the Word of God in your chest that you might not sin and that you might get out of Doubting Castle when there's no Bible in your hand. It's too dark in the room.

Or they brought you to the hospital and you're waking up and there's no Bible in your hand. You go to your chest. Or if you don't, where do you go? How do you live? How do you survive without the Bible in your chest? Oh, Bunyan loved the Bible.

He loved the Bible. He said, I have never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now in prison. That's why he didn't begrudge God his suffering.

Those scriptures that I saw nothing in before were made in this place and state to shine upon me. Christ also was never more real and apparent than now. Here I have seen Him and felt Him indeed.

I have had sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place and my being with Jesus in another world. I have seen that here that I am persuaded. I shall never while in this world be able to express.

He loved the promises of God revealed to him in prison. He said, I tell thee friend, there are some promises that the Lord has helped me laid hold of that I would not have out of the Bible for as much gold and silver as can lie between York and London piled to the stars. You got one? Which one would you pick? I'd pick Romans 8.32. I would not trade Romans 8.32 for all the gold between here and Gaithersburg piled to the stars.

Would you? He who did not spare his only son, but gave him up for us all. How then shall he not? Let me stick in. Through tribulation and distress and persecution and peril and sword and famine and nakedness.

How shall he not through all those things give us all things with him? Would you trade that for anything? And if not, do you know how rich you are? And what a glorious calling we have to build such priceless commodities into our people. Who would want to be a stockbroker? When you can broker Romans 8.32, for which you wouldn't trade all the gold in Fort Knox. I think I should be done.

I'm out of time, but I have one last paragraph here. He so loved the Bible, he said, Let me die with the Philistines rather than deal corruptly with the blessed Word of God. I tell you brothers, doctrine and right interpretation matters.

I grieve at Christian leaders today who don't think it matters. Just can't get it. Let me close with this paragraph.

You go home to your people now. Go home to your people filled with love for people, filled with love for promises, ready to suffer. Filled with love for right doctrine.

And you woo your people. You don't beat your people. You woo your people.

You gotta out rejoice people. You gotta win them up into God where you're enjoying Him. You can't coerce them or lever them.

You gotta woo them and win them. And here's the way you say it. Bunyan wooing his people.

God hath strewed all the way from the gate of hell where thou wast to the gate of heaven, whither thou art going with flowers out of his own garden. He means promises. Flowers out of his own garden.

Behold how the promises, invitations, calls, and encouragements like lilies lie round about thee. And then he wouldn't be a Puritan if he didn't add, Take heed that thou not tread them under thy feet. That's not a chipper sentence.

That's a gloriously true sentence. You say to your people, take heed. Don't tread this promise under your feet through unbelief.

Believe it. Amen. Now, I will linger for maybe ten minutes to field your questions.

Yes, we all appreciate you very much. And I'm just so thankful for your ministry to me personally. When you talk about John Bunyan and you talk about the relationship between suffering and loving your people, and I don't want to miss out on the suffering that I need to go through in order to love the Word and love the people God has given me, but yet we do live in an affluent culture.

And I'm wondering, as I read your book, *Hungering for God*, and as I've read some other on fasting, I'm wondering if fasting and as I try to understand how much I have to mortify my own flesh to pray, is that the

suffering that I need to go through as a pastor in order to love my people and to love God as His Word? Or do you think there is something else? It is definitely part of it. I don't think it's the main part. I think voluntary suffering is so dangerous because it mainly will produce pride.

I believe in fasting with all my heart, but it is unbelievably dangerous discipline because it can produce as much vanity as it does brokenness. But, yes, you will discover your bondage to food in a big hurry if you do a three-day fast. And that's a very important discovery to make.

Or if you're hooked on television. Or if you're hooked on the newspaper. Or if you're hooked on coffee.

Or if you're hooked on sugar. Or if you're hooked on being a couch potato at night. Or whatever you happen to be.

Paul said, I will not be enslaved by anything. And Jesus said, cut off your hand if you are. Or gouge out your eye.

These men spoke. I run knowing that if one attains, and I pommel my body lest I myself be a castaway having preached the gospel to others. Where is that spirit? Yes, yes, voluntary suffering.

Pommeling your body. Getting to bed when you should. Getting up when you should.

Getting the exercise you should. And if somebody calls you on the phone, going, whether it's late or early. And systematically building fasting into your life.

Building study into your life. Getting discipline into your life. That's a piece of it.

But I say all of that is, to use Colossians 2, in one sense, useless for the mortification of the flesh. And in fact can become flesh through and through. So just a warning.

Yes, but. However, Paul says, those who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted. Period.

So if we're not being, we're probably not being godly. The, I think we have domesticated sebaia, godliness. I doubt that godliness means not going to the wrong movies.

Or not committing adultery. Or not stealing and killing. Mainly.

In other words, avoidance ethics. Avoidance ethics is probably not what Paul meant by those who desire to be godly will be persecuted. I think godliness is such a radical God orientation.

That you are freed from the things of this world for risk taking big time in love. So we all need to be asking, where am I taking any risk to love somebody? They can be small risks. Just like cold turkey evangelism.

David Livingston has that little sheet in your white folder. To say something about new efforts in cold turkey visitation. And what about making the hard phone calls.

The elder who's written you this nasty letter. And you just as soon write him another letter and never see him again. What about the phone call? What about the face to face contact? What about tonight? He's talking about little levels of self denial will result in big levels of trembling.

For us weak people. I just think radical godliness will get you in trouble. And then you won't have to ask the question you just asked anymore.

And neither will I. John, you said some hard things to us today. And I wonder when I think of reflecting on the victims. And God did it.

God did it. The hardest cases in my ministry when I emphasize things like that are talking to the victims of sexual abuse. And I'm just wondering what you'd say to them.

I don't have to say would say to them. They are real people. And we've talked to them.

What I say will depend on what they've heard. And where they are in that process and in their own theological development and where they've been here. And truth must be positioned, not changed, but positioned according to people's ability.

And so we must learn pastorally sensitive ways to express our confidence in the sovereignty of God. It can get down to something as simple as the choice of verbs. God did it.

Let's suppose they ask, where was God? That's the most common. Where was God in those years when my daddy was doing that to me? You could very callously and heartlessly say, right there helping your dad. Now there may be a really far out way that that would be an accurate statement.

But that would carry so much falsehood in that moment that it would be a very wrong thing to say. But you might say, God was in heaven and he was in control of the world. And he was then and is able today in his power over all things to turn everything for your good.

Now she might at that moment say, let me just re-say what you just said. You're saying God was in control at that moment. Is that what you're saying? I'm saying, I tried to say it carefully because it needs to be said carefully.

Because God is a careful God and God is a big God and God is complex. And God can weep while he is doing things over which he weeps. And I would say other things.

And then I would ask her perhaps, would you have it such that God was wringing his hands and couldn't do anything? Which means he can't today do anything perhaps to really help you. But I believe that God is so sovereign that today your life can be utterly redeemed. Utterly redeemed.

Venerable warts and all can be utterly redeemed. And all the dysfunction in your life and all the emotional terror can be utterly redeemed. And the reason I believe that is because I believe in the absolute sovereignty of God with your life right now.

Your heart is in his hands. He is a craftsman and can take your heart. And if I detected from her at that moment some sense of, oh that sounds hopeful, that sounds good.

I might say, and you know, if that's true, then the same God was in charge of the universe 20 years ago. Or 5 years ago or whenever. And then I would also say, probably depending on where she is and what her theology is, I would say, you know, I don't have all the answers.

And mystery abounds in the universe. And I'm not about to give an answer for why an earthquake landed on Armenia and didn't bring this church down on us today. I don't have an answer for that.

I don't know why we haven't been swallowed up right now. And they did. I don't have an answer for that.

Or why you experienced that and why God let your dad do that. And she said, oh you said let. You don't really believe let.

I'd say, I do believe let. Because I believe the way God exerts His causal agency is different in righteousness and sin. I think He ordains and superintends and governs it all.

And yet there's a more active agency. And then I might quote to her Lamentations 3.37 where it says, He does not, help me, say it. That is, He does not willingly afflict the children of men.

Now, I looked that up in the Hebrew. Willingly is the word melevo. Three Hebrew words, you know them? Tell me the meaning of the Hebrew word mean.

From, leiv, heart, o at the end. His, from His heart. He does not from His heart afflict the sons of men.

So I would say to her, you take a text like that. Now, this is in the midst of Lamentations where women are boiling and eating their children. And it's called the judgment of God.

And you say, right in the middle of Lamentations is a statement, God does not willingly afflict the children of men. And yet He afflicts them. What that means is, God is complex enough so that He has levels of emotion.

Afflicting them is not His favorite activity. But He does it. Doesn't do it from His heart.

You know what His heart is? His heart right now is your repentance. And the forgiveness of your dad. Let's deal with that first.

That gives you a flavor anyway. I think we'll save the other questions for tomorrow's panel. So thank you so much for being here.

Enjoy your afternoon. We'll be back in a minute. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, Pastor for Preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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