

Jesus Is Precious Because He Gives Eternal Life

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes the preciousness of Jesus through His promise of eternal life and the transformative nature of true faith in Him.

Duration: 34:53

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 4:26, John 7:2, John 10:3, John 10:22-30

Topics: "Preciousness Of Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher describes a scene from the Bible where Jesus walks on water during a storm. The preacher emphasizes the strength and power of Jesus, who is not afraid even in the face of the storm. The sermon then transitions to a scene from the listener's own life, imagining their own death in a hospital. The preacher reassures the listener that Jesus will be there to save them, just as he saved Peter from sinking in the water. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the preciousness of Jesus because he gives eternal life.

Transcript

Let me direct your attention now to the text of the morning, John chapter 10, the Gospel of John, chapter 10, verses 22 to 30. The Gospel of John, chapter 10, and we'll read beginning at verse 22. It was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem.

It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. And so the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe.

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me, but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

No one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Since coming to Bethlehem in July 1980, I have averaged about one funeral per month. That's a lot of dying in a church. One of the things that I regret is that all of you can't share that experience with me.

I know that some of you would not live the way you do if once a month you had to spend three or four hours writing about the meaning of death for someone else. And if you had to think and pray what you would say to the family, and if you had once a month to stand beside that empty hole and that big pile of dirt so nicely covered with green rugs to try to make those last minutes of the decisive severing significant for the bereaved, it makes a big difference in a person's life. And I count it as a remarkable gift, this ministry of funerals.

And I wish people could share it, not because it's hard and I want to unload it, but because it's a gift and I would that everybody could benefit from it. And there are two reasons that it's a gift. It's a gift to me, first of all, because it keeps my mind and my heart awake to my own dying, and my wife's dying, and my son's dying, and all of your dying.

And it does not let me get deluded that there is any other destiny. Dying is a termination that causes lots of grief. It ends things we enjoy very much.

It severs from people we love very much. And for many people, it is a grand unknown, an awful blank. Perhaps utter annihilation and nothingness.

Perhaps eternal torment and hell. Perhaps they know not what. And since our minds cannot endure that kind of threat and uncertainty, we very naturally forget about our own dying and the dying of those we love.

Or more fundamentally, the right explanation would be we put it out of our minds. We avoid the thoughts of it and fill our minds with many, many other things. When the Bible says in Hebrews 2.15 that all men are held in bondage their whole life long through the fear of death, it doesn't mean that the psychological experience of human beings is perpetually one of fear.

We know that's not the case. I think, rather, it means that since death is indeed fearful, and since we, by nature, flee from what is fearful, therefore we are enslaved apart from Christ to perpetual flight and denial of death. A person may know periods of peace and rest in his life apart from Christ because for a season he has put the haunting thought of death off his trail, but he will wake up again and realize that he is a fugitive and must keep on running.

There is no true freedom that demands ignoring the inevitable. There is only slavery in a disguised form of thousands of pieces of fun and business. Therefore, I count the ministry of funerals a gift because it will not let me forget that that is my destiny and that of my wife and my sons and all of you.

And the second reason that I count it as a gift is because it drives me again and again and again back to the words of Jesus, and I stand with Peter at every funeral who said, Where shall we go? You only have the words of eternal life. And so I want to direct your attention to Jesus this morning, namely John 10, verses 22 to 30, and think with you about his promise of eternal life. It was wintertime in Jerusalem.

To be specific, it was the last week of December because the Feast of Dedication is celebrated from December 25th to the end of the month. The Feast of Dedication was a celebration of the rededication of the temple in 164 BC when Judas Maccabeus, that bold Jew of his day, had reclaimed the temple away from the desecrations of Antiochus Epiphanes and had reestablished the sacrificial system. And it was a great and joyful feast among the Jews.

And so as Jesus walked through the portico of Solomon, probably in a great spirit of expectancy, the crowd surround him and say, Now, if you are the Christ, stop holding us in suspense and tell us plainly. Now, you don't just walk up to anybody and say, Tell us, are you the Christ? There must have been something unusual about this person that they had seen. The Messiah, as I'm sure most of you know, was that long-expected king that the Israelites had hoped for who would reign over Israel, who would smash their enemies with a rod of iron, establish the kingdom as the center of the world, make peace and righteousness flourish.

It would be a great new age when the Messiah came. In fact, the Messiah was to complete the work that good old Judas Maccabeus had begun at the restoration of the temple, only this time all the overlords were to be wiped away and peace and glory established in the land for God's people. Jesus answers in verse 25 when they said, Tell us plainly.

He said, I did tell you. You don't believe me. The works which I do in my Father's name bear witness concerning me, but you don't believe.

Now, that little word plainly, verse 24, that the crowd had asked Jesus to tell them, tell us plainly, is the same word that we ran into two weeks ago in John chapter 7 where the brothers come to Jesus, remember, and say, Go up to Jerusalem and show yourself to the world. Nobody works in secret if he seeks to be known plainly. John says they said that because they did not believe.

They wanted, and this crowd wanted, a more open, forthright, public statement of Jesus' Messiahship. And Jesus complies only in part, in verse 26, just like he complied only in part in chapter 7. He said, I did tell you. He does not say, I did tell you plainly, openly.

For in fact, in the gospel of John, up until this point, he had only made one open, explicit claim to be the Messiah. And that was in chapter 4, verse 26, when he was all alone with the woman at the well. He had not declared openly and plainly that he was the Messiah.

And therefore, I think when he says here, I did tell you, he means what he says in the next phrase, the works that I do in my Father's name, these bear witness concerning my Messiahship. By and large, Jesus made no open and explicit and public claims to be the Messiah. It was all in a sort of indirect and veiled way.

Everything he said, everything he did, pointed to the fact that he was true and was the Messiah. But these crowds were unwilling to receive it. You could see it if you were willing.

You couldn't if you weren't. And so, like a double rap on the judge's bench, he says, you do not believe, verse 25. You do not believe, verse 26.

Jesus met with widespread unbelief in his own day, the very same way he does today. And the reasons for the unbelief are very much the same today as they were then. And notice what they are.

Not primarily a lack of clear and worthy testimony. I did tell you the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness concerning me. But rather, the hindrance to faith is a deeply rooted unwillingness to love what Jesus loves.

Do you remember John 5, verse 44 from two weeks ago? Jesus says to the Pharisees, how can you believe who seek glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from God? The chief

hindrance to faith in Jesus' understanding is not that his claims are obscure or unintelligible or insufficient, but that men love other things so much that they cannot bring themselves to agree with Jesus' claims because that would involve them in loving very different things. It is not primarily a problem of knowledge. It is a problem of pride that hinders people from faith.

Here's the way Paul put it. Paul, just like Jesus, traced unbelief back through ignorance into a heart that was hardened against the glory of God in the face of Christ. Ephesians 4, verse 18, they are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their heart.

You see the bottom line? Hardness of heart leads to the claim of ignorance and lack of understanding. There is a kind of spiritual deadness that grips the heart of unbelievers and the affections of some people are so completely enslaved to the things of this world that Jesus says if somebody should rise from the dead that they know, they would not repent because it is not a matter of lack of evidence or knowledge. It is a matter of love.

Now this means that in order for a person to come to believe on Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God and so have eternal life, something very deep has to happen. Some change, some recreation, some transformation of the heart and of the affections has to take place. Something has to emerge that wasn't there before, otherwise a person will never feel the slightest inclination to believe on Jesus Christ, no matter how high the truth mounts up.

And all of this is contained in verse 26. You do not believe because you are not of my sheep. Now listen very carefully.

The Lord does not say, you are not my sheep because you do not believe. Do you see that? He says, you do not believe because you are not of my sheep. Something has to happen to you before you can believe that grips you and opens you and makes you willing to follow the shepherd.

From the standpoint of eternity, there are two kinds of people. The sheep of Jesus and those who are not the sheep of Jesus. And though it is true that all the sheep of Jesus do come to believe on Jesus, it is not adequate to define the sheep of Jesus only in terms of faith.

Because Jesus teaches very plainly in this text that one must be a sheep in order to believe. Verse 26. Being his sheep is why one does believe.

And not being his sheep is why one does not believe. And therefore there is more to being a sheep than belief. People are sheep not because of their action, but because of God's action.

God chooses them. He works in them a transformation of heart. He takes out the heart of stone and puts in the heart of flesh.

He breaks their pride. He makes them contrite and lowly and open to God-exalting, human-abasing truth, which otherwise they would spit out of their mouths when they hear it. And it's no accident, is it then, that such people are called sheep.

Bah, bah, bah. Ignorant, dumb sheep. Not wise in themselves.

They need someone so desperately to save them and guide them and prod them and herd them all together and show them where to eat. And when that transformation occurs, then they believe. They hear the voice of their shepherd and they follow him.

Then Jesus appears to them as precious as their only hope for salvation. I've asked the question as I was thinking about this. It's a question that gets bantered about in seminary classrooms.

Why ought you to say such a thing to a group, a congregation, in which there may well be unbelievers? I know full well to my grief that there may be people here who will go out and flippantly say, Well, I guess he didn't make me a sheep because I'm not going to follow Jesus. I know that people who would say that would have taken any doctrine and used it to justify their own hard and unrepentant heart. The reason that I say this is because Jesus said it to a crowd of unbelievers.

You do not believe because you are not of my sheep. It was to unbelievers that Jesus taught the glorious doctrine of prevenient grace. Grace that comes before faith, works in the heart of dead sinners to bring them alive and send them to faith and eternal life.

It was to unbelievers that he taught that glorious truth. Evidently, then, the doctrine ought not just to be preserved for us saints so that it guard us from taking any credit for our salvation. It is useful for unbelievers because this doctrine is suited better than any doctrine to show the desperation they are in.

You are helpless, utterly helpless, without the grace of God at work in your heart to bring you to faith. And it ought to be a frightening thing for a person who is an unbeliever to hear that he is an unbeliever because he does not belong to the sheep of Jesus. And perhaps, perhaps this very word, right this very moment will be the means that God uses to quicken and bring alive a dead heart and make him a believing sheep.

Now, you'll be able to know whether you are a sheep by how you respond to what Jesus says next, verse 27. This is the test, right now. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

There are two outstanding evidences that can verify to your conscience that you belong to the fold or not. My sheep hear my voice, and my sheep follow me. If you feel yourself eagerly attending to the word of Jesus, which is being spoken this very minute, and if you feel the resolve rising in your heart to go after that Jesus, you're a sheep.

And if you don't pray earnestly that he not abandon you in your hardness of heart outside the fold. Jesus said in John 8, 47, He who is born of God hears the words of God. For this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.

Which is exactly the same thing as saying, you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. Only those who are born of God hear the words of Jesus, believe on them, and follow after him. Do not look for signs of ecstasy.

Do not look for changes in your external circumstances. Look to Jesus. And if you feel yourself drawn to hear and to follow, you're in.

Do not look within saying, am I a sheep, am I a sheep? Look to Jesus and the test happens. And now begins the alluring promises. The thing that you will attend to and be drawn on by if you are a sheep.

My sheep hear my voice and I know them. Promise number one. I know them.

What is this knowledge that Jesus says he has of a sheep? Chapter 10 verse 3 gives a very close parallel to verse 27. The sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out.

So when it says in verse 27, I know my sheep, it means at least he knows them by name. That is, he knows them individually and he knows them intimately. They are not anonymous, lost in the flock.

And then verse 14 gives one other insight into what this knowledge is. I am the good shepherd and I know my own and my own know me. Even as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

There is a real sense in which there is a correlation between Jesus' knowledge of the Father and his knowledge of his sheep. And I think that means something like this. When Jesus looks at the Father, he sees the reflection of himself.

And when Jesus looks at his sheep, there is something of himself that he sees there. There is a kind of stamp upon them. He can sniff it out.

He is there in their face. There is a brand on these sheep that he can recognize that bears his seal. He is like a husband standing in an airport waiting as all the people disembark, waiting for his wife who has been away for many weeks.

And he watches every person that comes out of that little tunnel. And when she appears, he knows her. He sees her.

He recognizes the mark of his wife and she is the one that he embraces and no other. He knows her by name. And I can scarcely overemphasize the privilege of saying Jesus knows me by name.

Personally, individually, intimately, lovingly, he knows me by name. And that promise includes eternal life because he is never going to stop knowing me like that. Verses 28 to 30.

I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.

I and the Father are one. For those who hear and follow the shepherd, the grand reward is this. The life that we have begun with him of peace and joy and purposefulness in this world will never, never, never end to all eternity.

I don't know if you're like me, but I have gone through periods in my life where that thought has not been attractive to me. So I pondered last night a word that I could say to such people. If the prospect of trillions and trillions and trillions of years threatens you with boredom, remember this.

Though it is not fully comprehensible to our little minds, an infinite God is infinitely inexhaustible in his love and wisdom and power which we can spend a whole eternity discovering and probing into and growing and enjoying and applying to daily life on the new earth in the age to come. We will never sit down like Alexander the Great and weep that there are no more worlds to conquer because Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit are inexhaustible. Our joyous quest to attain the heights of God's wisdom will never, never be ended.

When, after a million years, you pull yourself in a moment of exhilaration over the peak of some glorious divine truth, you are going to be utterly astonished that it is not the top, it is but the foothills and there are stretches before you as far as you can see, mountains and forests and heights and light unimaginable in

this life to keep you busy on your quest for joy forever and ever and ever. And, oh, to be there and not in hell. Because when Jesus says in verse 28, I give them eternal life, they shall not perish, he very bluntly is saying there are two eternal destinies.

One is eternal life to which all of those who follow me and hear my word go and the other is eternal punishment to whom everyone goes who has rejected my word and gone his own way rather than following me. Listen to the way Jesus said it in Matthew 25, 31. When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne and all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the one from the other like a shepherd separates the sheep and the goats.

And these will go away into eternal punishment and the righteous will go away into eternal life. Matthew 25, 46. And when the terrible truth of hell glows clearly in your imagination, then the last promise will become all the more precious which Jesus makes here.

No one will snatch them out of my hand. The Father who gave them to me is greater than all and no one can snatch them out of his hand. I and the Father are one.

Those who hear the word of Jesus and follow him are gripped by the hand of the Son and the hand of the Father. And this is one hand because the Father and the Son are one and it is the strongest force in all the universe. No one can take us out of that hand.

And now I want to close with a scene. A scene from your life. And I ask you to close your eyes in a spirit of prayer and use your imagination.

It's not an unreasonable scene. It is a very likely scene. It happens every month at Bethlehem.

It is the hour of your dying and you are in the hospital and it is the middle of the night. Your best beloved has fallen asleep from exhaustion on the chair beside you. Long ago you had heard the voice of the Lord and you obeyed him in faith and followed him.

But now a storm begins to rage as Satan throws all his final force against your faith. You feel the reality of eternity like you have never felt it before. The wind of doubt and the waves of fear lash about your soul.

And then by the grace of God you are given a scene from the Bible. But this time it is your scene. And you are in a boat on a storm-tossed sea.

And before you, approaching on the water, is Jesus. And on his face there is no fear. And his hair and his cloak are flying in the wind.

And he stops just a short way off and stands with his unbelievably strong hands relaxed in the folds of his cloak at his side in sovereign peace. And from the boat, with one last heart-rending glance at your beloved asleep in the chair, you say, Christ bid me come. And he says, Come.

And you begin to walk on the water. And then in that final instant you are utterly overwhelmed with what is happening. I am dying.

I am dying! And this water is so deep and it is dark and it is cold and it is filled with hideous creatures. And for fear you begin to sink. But the promise of Jesus never fails.

And with a mighty hand he seizes your arm and pulls you to himself. And the storm ceases. And there is a great calm.

And it is over. And you feel like you never dreamed you could have felt that Jesus is precious. Because he gives eternal life.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/22/SID22475.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/jesus-is-precious-because-he-gives-eternal-life/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net