

The Call to Magnificent Joy

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the need for a great awakening in America, focusing on the God-centered aspects of repentance and God's love. It highlights the importance of delighting in God above all else, experiencing a joyful God-centered sorrow in repentance, and understanding that God's love enables us to make much of Him with joy forever. The message calls for a transformation in how we view repentance and the love of God, urging a shift towards a God-centered perspective in all aspects of life.

Duration: 41:55

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:9, John 17:24, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Psalm 37:4, Matthew 6:33, Philippians 1:21, Romans 5:8, Colossians 3:2, 1 John 4:19, Galatians 2:20

Topics: "Great Awakening", "God-Centered Repentance"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray. Gracious Father in heaven, you know that I need you very much in these hours, and I ask for your help to speak the truth. Help me not to say anything that's false.

Help me not to say anything that is biblically unbalanced. Grant, O God, that your name would be exalted and that we would make much of your Son. Help me to be the aroma of Christ, and forbid that it would be the aroma of death to any, and make it the aroma of life, I pray.

I pray that you would manifest yourself in power as our treasure here. We love the cross, and we love Christ. And we long to see him more clearly, and love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly, day by day.

Father, I pray that you would meet needs in this room that nobody even knows are here. Marriage is about to be ripped apart, put them back together. Sons and daughters away from home, throwing it away.

Take them home again. Sickesses that nobody has heard about yet, except the one person who carries the cancer in their body. Come in power.

Churches about to be rent asunder. Pastors about to give up and throw it away and get another job. Lord, come and do an amazing work.

Let the ripple effect go out from this place for the sake of families and churches and the nations, this nation. So come now and help me speak the truth. Grant an anointing for the listening and the speaking such that the effect would be eternal.

For Christ's glory, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. One of the evidences that America is in need of a great awakening is that many of the people, including the people who still use the language of revival and awakening, have lost the radically God-centered sense that the language once had.

So what I want to do is take two very common elements of revival and try to restore, as much as I can, the radical God-centeredness to them that you find in the Bible and that you find in people like Jonathan Edwards 250 years ago. And the two that I have in mind are repentance and God's love for us. So you'll find people across the country saying what we need in America is repentance.

So let's call the nation to repent. And others will say what the nation needs is to know the love of God. These, of course, are not at odds necessarily, just two different focuses.

And my question is how will we ever experience repentance and the experience of the love of God if we do not recover the joyfully God-centered sorrow of repentance and if we do not recover the ego-devastating God-centeredness of God's love for us? Let me say that again because that's all I want to try to get across in these few minutes that we have together. I don't think we'll ever experience the great awakening of repentance if we don't recover the joyful God-centeredness of the sorrow of repentance. The joyful God-centeredness of the sorrow of repentance and if we don't recover the ego-devastating God-centeredness of the love of God for us.

Those are my two aims in our time together. Will we ever experience the gravity and the gladness of spiritual awakening if we gut repentance and the love of God of their God-centeredness, of the weight of glory that they once had, the massive weight of God's self-exaltation, if we remove all of that? Jonathan Edwards, I hope you know who he is, but just in case you don't, I learned more from Jonathan Edwards than anybody else outside the Bible. Jonathan Edwards is the most important dead teacher in my life.

This is the 300th anniversary of Jonathan Edwards' birth, October 5 of this year, and Jonathan Edwards, under God, was the most significant human instrument in the great awakening that swept across the colonies of this land in 1735 and 1736 and then again in 1741 and 1742 with the help of George Whitfield. God did an unbelievable work through these men and many other pastors like them. We call it the great awakening.

His home was Northampton, Massachusetts, and in Northampton there were about 600 adults and their large families at that season, and 300 of them in a space of three months during the great awakening were converted and virtually everybody in the town became an active member in the church. And that happened all over New England. My question is, what sort of vision of God did Jonathan Edwards have that God was pleased to use in that way? And to give you an idea, let me quote from the new biography by George Marsden.

I recommend it very highly. It will become the standard for the next hundred years, probably, and here's what he said about Edwards. He was not like John Locke, the philosopher, trying to build a philosophy

from the ground up, starting with human experience, nor was he like Descartes trying to deduce a universe by starting with the dictates of human reason.

Rather, he was developing his thought in rigorous Calvinist fashion from the top down, starting with an absolutely sovereign triune creator who was in control of all things. The universe was a universe of relationships, and the ultimate relationship was always relationship to the creator. Now, if we are ever going to see a biblical, God-centered, Christ-exalting, sin-defeating, justice-advancing, mission-mobilizing church renewing, awakening in America, we must recover this top-down, God-besotted, God-entranced vision of reality that Jonathan Edwards had.

If we don't, we may have very large churches and very exciting conferences, and it will not last. So let's take these two revival realities, repentance and the love of God for us, and try to restore to them some of what has been gutted out of them in the last 200 man-centered years in America. Let's take repentance first.

I said Americans can scarcely begin to understand repentance. Americans can scarcely grasp the concept of the joyfully, God-centered sorrow of repentance. Now, when I say the word repentance, I mean the full-orbed experience both emotionally of sorrow and intellectually of the change of mind, metanoia.

I have both of those in mind, and I see both in 2 Corinthians 7. Let me read you the key verse. This is 2 Corinthians 7, 8, 9. Paul had written to the church in Corinth a very painful letter calling them to repent from attitudes and actions that they should forsake. And he said, I see that the letter grieved you, though only for a while.

I rejoice not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. Now, I take the grief and the repenting as all one thing. I don't think there is a repenting that is true without sorrow for what you're repenting of.

If you blow sin off and say, Oh, yeah, I was supposed to turn around and just do the opposite, you're not repenting. Your heart's exactly the same. You just managed some willpower.

That is not repentance. This grieving unto repentance is the whole reality and is absolutely essential. Now, Edwards, Jonathan Edwards, when he got a hold of this biblical idea, he did what he always does.

He thought from the top down, and he penetrated to the core of it. And I want to read you a mind-blowing sentence. At least it was for me.

And remember this. He wrote this in 1723. Now, do the math.

He was born in a year that makes this his 300th birthday. I wonder how fast you can compute how old he was when he preached the sermon. Twenty.

Many of you are 20. Listen to what he wrote in a sermon when he was 20. There is repentance of sin.

Though it be a deep sorrow for sin that God requires as necessary to salvation, yet the very nature of it necessarily implies delight. Repentance of sin is a sorrow arising from the sight of God's excellency and mercy. But the apprehension of excellency or mercy must necessarily and unavoidably beget pleasure in the mind of the beholder.

This is impossible, tis impossible, that anyone should see anything that appears to him excellent and not behold it with pleasure. And it is impossible to be affected with the mercy and love of God and his willingness to be merciful to us and love us and not be affected with pleasure at the thoughts of it. But this is the very affection that begets true repentance.

How much so ever of a paradox it may seem, it is true that repentance is a sweet sorrow, so that the more of this sorrow, the more pleasure. End of quote. Now, let me try to paraphrase that for you.

It is astonishing and it is true. If we are to bring people in America to the sorrow of repentance, we must first awaken in them a delight in the excellency of God. Otherwise, the sorrow is not a sorrow of not embracing the excellent God.

It is a strange thing that in order for us to have a nation on its face weeping, we must have a nation awakened spiritually to the all satisfying beauty of God, so that the tears will honor the beauty. You know, don't you, that there is a way to weep over something that gives it no honor whatsoever. I'm a pastor and I sit with many weeping people.

I never assume tears signify something good. A prisoner standing before a bench having committed grievous crimes, hearing the verdict, guilty and being sentenced to 20 years of the loss of his life, might begin to weep and have the tears roll down his cheeks. Why? It might be broken heartedness that he has seen the beauty of righteousness and justice and is grieved that he has not lived in accordance with the sweetness of a society that is governed with justice.

That might be why he's crying. Or it might be that he is weeping over the loss of 20 years to do more unrighteousness. Tears mean nothing in and of themselves, which is why we have to get to the bottom of the sorrow called repentance.

We have to bore in, like Edwards did, to the bottom of it. And the bottom of it was, until you see God as an all satisfying God whom you have not treasured, you have not delighted in, sex has been better, money has been better, pride and esteem and the praise of man has been better, rising in your career has been better, and then suddenly he is seen as the all satisfying treasure of your life and then the tears signify his worth. Before that, they may mean nothing more than the bad feelings that come with guilt and every unbeliever cries over bad feelings.

And therefore, I say there is a joyful God-centeredness to the sorrow of repentance. Let me tell you a little story and give you a quote. Jonathan Edwards' daughter Jerusha was 17 in 1746 and David Brainerd, the missionary to the Indians who contracted tuberculosis and was coughing up blood in the last eight years of his ministry, pressed on for God because there was no cure.

All you could do is endure and he did endure and he saw awakenings among the Indians in Cross Weeks. And finally he could labor no longer and he went to Jonathan Edwards' house to die. At 29, got any 29-year-olds in the house ready to die? He went to Jonathan Edwards' house, he laid himself down there and Jerusha took care of him, fell in love with him, nurtured him until he died.

Four months later, she died, having caught the disease from him. It's a beautiful love story, but mainly a beautiful love story about both of their love for Jesus. The funeral sermon Edwards preached a week later for his 17-year-old daughter and he turned it to revival for young people.

And he said things that I never thought any 18th century pastor ever said. This is the kind of thing you read in George Marston's biography. He said, you won't believe this, he said, my daughter died a week ago.

She was in this church two weeks ago, there was never a sign. She has died in order that you might stop fondling women's breasts, that you might stop bundling. Do you know what bundling was? It was sleeping together without taking your clothes off.

Jonathan Edwards dealt with the real world. He took his daughter's death and he said, come on young people, she did not die in vain. This is a call to get ready to meet the king and to treasure him now, because if you don't treasure him now, you will lose him forever.

Now the reason I'm mentioning this little story is because Brainerd's life was then told by Edwards. 500 pages long, he recorded Brainerd's life. And in that life, which I commend all of you to read, there are quotes from Brainerd's sermons.

And Brainerd's sermons and his experience with the awakening among the Indians illustrated the point about the joy of God-centered sorrow in repentance. Let me read you one example. November 30th, 1745, he was preaching on Luke 16.

He wrote this in his journal, David Brainerd. The word made powerful impressions upon many in the assembly, especially while I discoursed of the blessedness of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. This I could perceive affected them with much more sorrow than when I spoke of the man's misery and torments in hell, the rich man's misery and torments in hell.

And thus it has usually been with them. They have always been much more affected with the comforting than the dreadful truths of God's Word. That which has distressed many of them under convictions is that they found they lacked and could not obtain the happiness of the godly.

Now what that means is, Brainerd was discovering in his preaching what Edwards wrote in that sermon 20 years earlier, namely, in order to experience authentic repentance, people must be awakened to the beauty and the delightfulness and the all-satisfying preciousness of the excellency of God. And he would lay out these excellencies and these beauties and this mercy and the tears would flow more than when he preached and threatened them with hell. Because they have to come to see the true, beautiful, excellent, just and merciful God and delight in that and then weep that they don't have it and then through the weeping embrace it and receive it.

So on repentance, to call America to this, in a way that glorifies God and exalts Christ, we must treasure Christ and cherish Christ and value Christ and delight in Christ as our supreme and central pleasure above all other things. And then we must preach and pray and labor and strive to waken the world to delight in Christ above all things so that their hearts would be broken that they haven't been delighting in Him and have been dishonoring His worth because they never even saw how beautiful He was. Second and lastly, the love of God.

I said it will be very hard to bring America or the nations, if we turn to the global dimension tomorrow, it will be very hard to bring America and the nations to experience the love of God as it ought to be when we do not see how ego-devastating is the God-centeredness of the love of God. Let me try to explain. It's a tragedy in America today, it has been for 40 years, a tragedy that so much evangelism, so much counseling, so much preaching, so many books speak of the love of God in such a way that we actually

encourage and aid and abet people to feel joyfully loved by God when in fact all they are experiencing is God-supported vanity.

We have defined the love of God in such a way that it comes in and serves ego-centrism. And if God will serve my ego, I will really feel loved. And I will feel so warm and I will sing worship songs to Him.

And go to church on Sunday as long as He's the servant of my esteem. Oh, how broad is this tragedy. Many of you are in victim situation and you need to be delivered, and I hope God will do it as I speak.

Because you and millions of Americans probably cannot even begin to define what it means to be loved by God any other way than to be made much of by God. Most Americans can't even conceive of an emotion called being loved that is anything other than being made much of. It's the way we love our children, we make much of them.

It's the way you love a student who's struggling in school, you make much of him. It's the way you love a kid on dope, you make much of him. Everything is healed by making much of us.

America is just one big, great, mutual admiration society because it brings healing as the ego rises. And we like what we see in the mirror because God has fixed it. Or that's not the definition of love in the Bible.

God's love for you in the Bible is not making much of you. It is God sending His Son and dying and then sending His Spirit in order to enable you to joyfully make much of Him. God's love for you is not His making much of you.

It is enabling you to have the all-satisfying, eternally glorious and happy experience of making much of Him forever. That is what the love of God is. Now, I don't know if you have a Bible with you, but if you have a Bible, I want you to go to John chapter 17 with me.

John 17 is the last prayer that Jesus prayed in the garden there, the high priestly prayer. It's a loving prayer, and it ends on a note that will make no sense whatsoever to you if you are in the grip of needing God to put you at the bottom of your happiness. If you have to be the final ground, that is, if being made much of is the final ground of your happiness.

And God is precious, provided He keeps doing that for me. You won't be able to make any sense out of verse 24. John 17, 24.

Jesus prays before He goes to pay for it. Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world. Jesus' next-to-last prayer for you was that you would be able to see His glory.

Now, I want to know whether that's love or not, and it is. Heaven is not a hall of mirrors. They will all be gone.

Heaven is a place where Christ replaces mirrors. And if you do not find your full and lasting satisfaction in seeing Him, this prayer is cruel, and it is not cruel. It is meant to create people who see Christ now and are changed from one degree of glory to the next into His image that they might more and more and more enjoy Him forever and ever.

Edwards wrote another sentence which is tremendously important. But before I read it, let's go to 2 Corinthians for one more confirmation of this text or of this point. 2 Corinthians 12.

Let's read maybe starting at verse 7. 2 Corinthians 12. To keep me from being too elated, too puffed up, by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should be taken away from me.

But He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you. My power will be made perfect in weakness. You know what I think a typical evangelical, non-Christ-centered person would say in response to that word from Jesus? I don't care about your grace being made perfect in my life.

It hurts. Get my pain out of my life. What do you mean using me to make your grace shine? What do you mean using me to make your power look great? It hurts.

I think that's the way they'd talk. They may not say it like that, but they would feel that. I hear it all the time.

I hear it in my church. I hear it on radio. I hear it on television.

I read it in books. Give an account, God. I hurt.

Why was Paul able to say, Lord, please take it away. Please take it away. Please take it away.

No, no, no. And then hear these words. My power, Paul, is going to be made perfect in your pain.

And respond like this. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly. Unbelievable.

Unbelievable. I will boast all the more gladly in my pain. This thorn, because you have taught me now through this thorn, both I and others will be enabled to see more of you, love more of you, delight in more of you, make more of you in this world.

So bring it on, Father. Now tell me, where in America are people so utterly centered on God, so utterly in love with the supremacy of God in all things that they take on pain? Yes, it's all right to pray that you be delivered. He prayed three times, heal me, heal me, heal me.

And in this point, not always, but in this point, God said, I have other plans. My power is going to look good on you. Only if you love the power of God looking good on you can you embrace pain like that.

Only if your soul has been so inverted with a kind of Copernican revolution can you say, all right, this is a greater joy. This is a greater joy than being delivered of my cancer or my leukemia. To have the power of God and the grace of God reflecting off of me so that I can see it reflect and others can see it reflect and He can become our treasure, that's all.

That's all. I hope that the clapping means God help me. God help me.

God help me. Because there are very few people like that in this room. I'm hardly one of them.

This is not easy. This will cost you your life. We heard that this morning from Cornelius planting.

It will cost you your life to be revived, to lead a revival. And you can do that. Let me read you that quote that I said Edwards gave.

As I close. This is from his book Religious Affections, which is his most mature statement about his understanding of revival and how you discern a true work of grace in the soul. I recommend the book to all

of you.

Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections. Here's what he said. This is the difference between the joy of the hypocrite and the joy of the true saint.

The hypocrite rejoices in himself. Self is the first foundation of his joy. The true saint rejoices in God.

True saints have their minds in the first place inexpressibly pleased and delighted with the sweet ideas and the glorious and amiable nature of the things of God. And this is the spring of all their delights and the cream of all their pleasures. But this is a devastating sentence for America in the grip of the gospel of self-esteem.

But the dependence of the affections of hypocrites is in a contrary order. They first rejoice that they are made so much of by God and then on that ground He seems lovely to them. It's a tragedy that all over America people are being brought supposedly to Christ when that's what's happening.

I'll read it again. The dependence of the affections, the emotions of hypocrites is in a contrary order. They first rejoice that they are made so much of by God and then on that ground He seems lovely to them, which is why they can worship the way they do and not be saved.

Isn't it amazing? I mean, it's an appalling thing that you can be excited about God and not be a Christian. You can be excited about Jesus and not be a Christian if Jesus is exciting to you because one thing He does makes much of you. Because at the bottom of your joy then is you, where everyone in the universe and hell has their joy.

So, brothers and sisters, God will do a great thing among us. And the thing He will do is make you different. I pray that He will make you different.

How shall we call America to awaken when most of our categories, including repentance and the love of God, have been gutted and stripped of their God-centeredness? Answer, you will be different. You will be different. You will put God and God's God-centeredness back into repentance with a joyfully God-centered sorrow.

And you will put God's God-centeredness back into the love of God so that it's not making much of you but enabling you, by the price of the cross, to make much of Him with joy forever. Believe me, joy is at the root of both repentance and the love of God. I don't call you to a sad life.

I call you to a magnificently joyful life that will cost you your life. If we are going to reach America, and if we are going to reach the nations, we must die so that we might live in this kind of God-centered joy. So, delight your heart in God as central and supreme in your emotions.

Above all things, labor to do that. If you're here now saying, frankly, I love pornography more than I love God, I love money more than I love God, I love the praise of men more than I love God, then we're being called to fast today. Fourth of July.

What a dumb thing to do on the Fourth of July. Fast over the lunch hour. Pray.

I think Charles is going to come lead us, or somebody is, in a minute, to just pray for a few minutes, and then dismiss us to go be with God. If you're in that position, lay hold on Him and say, until you are my treasure, severing the root of all these other competing delights, I will not let you go. I will hold on until I

see you as supreme.

And the second thing is, go and make disciples. That is, preach this and counsel this and confirm this and converse this all over the world. America desperately needs to see God's centeredness in all things.

Let's pray. Father in Heaven, You are God, and I confess that we are scarcely capable of seeing how passionate You are for Your glory in our repentance and in Your love for us. And I ask that our eyes would be opened, O God.

Would You open the eyes of this people that they might see the radically joyful, God-centered sorrow of repentance as they delight first in You above all things and then are brokenhearted because they do not live consistently with that delight. And then, God, would You show us what it means to be loved. O God, fix our heads on this one.

Grant, I pray, that we would see that to be loved is to be taken, justified by faith alone, purified, brought into the throne room and given an everlasting vision and an ever-increasing joy in Your excellency. Through Christ.

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