

The Cost of Love in the Call to the Nations

by John Piper

The root of love and courage that can finish the Great Commission at the cost of our lives is the reward of pleasures at His right hand, which gives us the confidence to lay down our lives for the sake of the nations.

Duration: 33:57

Scripture: Hebrews 10:32-33, Hebrews 11:35, Hebrews 12:1-2

Topics: "Missions"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of compassion and identifying with prisoners. He emphasizes that when believers show compassion and identify with those in need, they may face persecution and have their property taken away. However, the speaker highlights the miraculous aspect of rejoicing in the midst of such loss, attributing it to the believers' understanding of their better and eternal possession in Christ. The speaker also addresses the controversy surrounding the motivation for doing what is right, arguing that doing right for God's sake is biblical and ultimately brings joy and glory to both the believer and God.

Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, I ask that You would now grant that the eyes of our hearts would see and that the taste buds of our souls would savor the supreme value of Jesus Christ. And that being so confident and so satisfied in Him, we would have the courage to lay down our lives to take the Gospel to the unreached peoples of the world, no matter what it costs.

And so, make Yourself beautiful in our eyes. The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life. Better than life.

I pray that every life in this room would feel that, really believe it, drive it down into the marrow of our bones, that You are more to be desired than life. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen. Standing beside the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus said to Martha, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live. And he who believes in Me and lives shall never die. Do you believe that? You will never die! Never! You won't die! Jesus said so.

He who lives and believes in Me will never die. Or chapter 6, that was chapter 11. Chapter 6, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to Me will not hunger. And whoever believes in Me will never thirst. This is the true bread that comes down from heaven, which if one eats, he will never die.

Have you eaten? If you have eaten of the bread of Christ, if you have come to Christ, who died for you and rose again and lives triumphant, if you have come to eat as the satisfaction of your souls, you'll never die. He said so. You will never be dead.

Or chapter 8, he who keeps My Word will never taste death. Ever! This is the root of love and courage that can finish the Great Commission at the cost of our lives. Paul said, one of my favorite passages in life verses, it is my eager, this Philippians 1, it is my eager expectation and hope that I might not at all be ashamed, but that now as always, Christ would be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Gain! Not death. It is not gain to be dead. When you die, you will not be dead.

Whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. To live in the flesh means fruitful labor for me, which I shall choose. I do not know.

My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. So you won't be dead when you die. You will be far better.

The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life. No Christian dies. Ever! Ever! Death has become not a room into which you walk, not a dark field.

It has become a door, and the door is paper thin, so micro-thin it has no dimension. You go through it without a millisecond in it. There will be no moment of death.

You move from life to life with nothing in between. You do not give your Godly One up to see the pit, nor let your Holy One see destruction. You show me the path of life.

In Your presence is fullness of joy. At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. That's what's on the other side of this thing called dying.

Pleasures forevermore. There's nobody in this room who could offer me anything better. In fact, there's no one in this room or in this world who can even conceive of anything better than fullness of joy and pleasures at His right hand forever.

There's nothing fuller than full. And there's nothing longer than forever. So if you come to me and say, I have a better deal for you than following Jesus, I would say, go ahead, try.

And then you would say, and I'd say, no comparison. Because there isn't anything fuller than full, and there isn't anything longer than forever. And that's what I get in joy in His presence.

The One who loved me and gave Himself for me and rose triumphant over the grave and reigns as a King in heaven will come again to make the world His own. You can't improve upon it. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3, don't boast in men.

All things are yours. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come, all things are yours. You are Christ and Christ is God's.

Death is yours, Liberty students. Death is yours. It's your servant.

It stands ready like an ugly handmaiden with a rough hand to lead you into everlasting pleasures. You will never die. You will spend now in fellowship with Jesus, and then on the other side, intensified fellowship with Jesus, growing in joy forever and ever.

Never, you cannot and you will not die. Here's the point. Believing that, down into the marrow of your bones, which a lot of you do not.

I can tell, and you know, that you're scared of little things, let alone dying. But if God would be pleased to use your time at Liberty, and this little piece of it right now, to drive that truth down into the marrow of your bones, it will become the root from which grows up a kind of radical love that will carry you into the face of opposition at the risk of your life to bring Christ to the unreached peoples of the world. Confidence in fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore in the presence of Jesus on the other side of this so-called dying is the root of love that is willing to lay down its life for the sake of the nations.

This confidence that you cannot die, but only have increased pleasures, produces martyrs who die in love, not martyrs who kill in hate. And that's what I'm after. If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn to Hebrews 10.

I'm going to spend the rest of our time in Hebrews, and I'm going to try to prove from Hebrews the point that being totally, deeply, fully satisfied in the reward of pleasures at His right hand and fullness of joy forever, being deeply satisfied in Christ as your supreme treasure forever is the motive power to lay down your life in love for the good of the nations. That's what I'm going to try to prove. And it's a very controversial statement because if you're studying philosophy, you will know that there have been historical wise philosophers who have said that is a defective motivation.

You ought not do what's right for reward. You should do what's right because it's right. That is an atheist talking.

Right for right's sake is an atheistic statement. Right for God's sake is a biblical statement. And when you analyze to the root what for God's sake means, it doesn't mean doing Him a favor.

It means doing yourself a favor for His glory. You get the joy, He gets the credit. When you do right, that's what we're going to try to prove because it's very controversial.

So there are four or five passages. It's amazing what you see in Hebrews. And I invite you to look first at 10.32. Recall the former days when after you were enlightened, and you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.

So they were converted and as baby Christians, they endured a hard struggle. Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction. And sometimes being partners with those so treated.

So we've got a picture of that on the platform this morning, right? We're not in prison. Saeed is in prison. So it's this right here, verse 33.

Sometimes being partners with those so treated. So what happened when they partnered up? Verse 34. You had compassion on those in prison.

And you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. So what happened when they identified with the prisoners is that they got labeled as that kind of person and people plundered their property. Or confiscated their property.

That's what happens when you do compassion. That's what happens when you identify with the right. You might lose your property.

You might scribble, the Go Home Christian on the wall of your dorm room. Or they might steal from you. Or they might malign you.

Or they might kill you. That's what happens in the cause of the mission. And did you notice that unbelievable word in verse 34? Joyfully.

Joyfully. You had compassion on those in prison. And you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property.

Now this is what I'm after here. I'm after miracles. This is a miracle.

None of you is like this in yourself. This is a miracle. Somebody strips off everything you've got.

Rips off your car. Rips off your iPhone. Rips off everything you've got.

And instead of seething with anger, you rejoice. That's a miracle. That is crazy.

How can that be? And the answer is in verse 34 at the end. Since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Does that sound familiar? Better and abiding.

Full forever. In Your presence is fullness of joy. At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

You have a better possession. You have an abiding forever possession. What is an iPhone? What's a car? What's a life? You will never die.

You will only have better and abiding. That's where the joy came from. That's where the compassion came from.

That's where the visit to the prison came from. And that's where it will come from today or it won't be Christian. These people didn't go to the prison and joyfully accept the plundering of their property out of raw duty.

It's the right thing to do. That's what you're supposed to do. It says so in the book.

That's not what the text says. The text says they joyfully did it because they knew they had a better possession and an abiding one. So that's text number 1 from Hebrews.

Here's number 2. Chapter 11, verse 24. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called Pharaoh's daughter. I'm sorry, refused to be called the son.

It was a good thing not to be called Pharaoh's daughter. That's another sermon. Invite me back, I'll preach that one.

Okay, let's try this again. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God. This is craziness again, right? This is just utter counterintuitive.

Choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. Fleeting. The whole world lives for pleasure, right? The only difference is, theirs is fleeting, ours is forever.

That's not the only difference. Ours is Jesus. So, he checks out and weighs in the balance all that Egypt could offer him, all that serving with a people under the reproach of Christ could offer him, and he chooses the reproaches of Jesus.

Why? Verse 26, he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth. How are you doing? Is being made fun of part of your treasure? That you love? He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. How? For he was looking to the reward.

That's where it came from. The thesis of this message is if this reward, pleasures at your right hand, joy forevermore, goes down to the marrow of your bones so that you know, instead of being dead, I will be with Christ forever. Joy forever.

That will become the root of all your love of the people of God and the nations of the world so that you can embrace reproaches for the Christ and call them my wealth. This is just utterly different from the world. That's number two.

Here's number three. Verse 35, chapter 11. Women received back their dead by resurrection.

Oh yes, I believe in miracles of that kind too. And then, middle of verse 35, some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Oh, where'd that come from? Where did that courage come from? No, I'm not going to renounce Him.

I'm not going to renounce Him to get out of jail. I would rather rise to a better life, a better abiding joy. But if you don't have that, you will cave.

Keep going. Verse 36, others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned.

They were sawn in two. They were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy.

What does that mean? Of whom the world was not worthy. They're wearing skins and living in caves. Of whom the world was not worthy.

That means, they were a gift to the world, and the world didn't deserve the gift. So that's what I want you to be. I want you to be a gift to the world.

And the world doesn't deserve you. It doesn't deserve you. You don't go to the world, to the Muslim world, or the Hindu world, or the Buddhist world, or the atheistic world, or the secular world.

You don't go to the world because they deserve to have you come. You go because Jesus went. And because going there will lead you to a full and abiding reward in the presence of Christ.

Chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. This may be the most important one of all. I have two more. Chapter 12 of Hebrews, verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus.

Alright, we're looking to Jesus. The founder and the perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Now the reason this may be the most important is because up until now, I can imagine, though it's hard, somebody saying the motivation that you're commending, namely looking to the reward as a sustaining and motivating power for love is simply low and defective.

It's a low motivation. To want to move through persecution and through death into the presence of Jesus and experience His fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore, that motivation for enduring this is low. If you are thinking that, you are on the brink of blasphemy because of verse 2 of Hebrews 12.

Because you are about to say, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe, had a base, low, and defective motivation on the cross. And He didn't. Here's His motivation.

For the joy that was set before Him, therefore God has given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That therefore, at the beginning of verse 9 in Philippians 2, is based on He was obedient unto death, even death on a cross. He knew that.

He knew that. He knew that was coming. Rising triumphant over death, gathering millions and millions of people from every tongue and tribe and nation surrounded by them, praising Him forever, triumphant over all of His enemies.

He knew that was coming. And that hope stayed His hand and kept Him on the cross. He despised shame for the joy that was set before Him.

He looked at shame and He said, I despise you. Make my day, shame. I put no stock in you.

You don't govern me, shame. I embrace you. I own you.

Strip me, kill me. Bloody me, curse me. You mean nothing to me.

I have a reward coming beyond Sunday. For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame and was seated. So, if Jesus was motivated to be and stay on the cross for the joy that was set before Him, you should be too.

It is not a low motivation. It is the highest motivation. To want to be in the presence of God in fullness of joy, taking as many with you as you can, is the highest of motivations.

One more. Chapter 13, verses 12-14. So, Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood.

Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach that He endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek a city that is to come. So, Liberty students, Jesus suffered outside the gate to sanctify you.

That is, to make you His own, set you apart, as a uniquely precious, holy possession of His own. That's why He died. And now He says, join Me, because to do that, I had to go outside the gate to the cross and suffer.

And that's the way my mission will be completed. You know, among the unreached peoples that are yet to be engaged and to be reached, most of them don't want you to come. And if you don't have this mindset, that will be enough reason not to go.

But if you have this mindset, you will say, well, the Great Commission didn't say go make disciples of all the nations except the ones that don't want you to come. All is all. You go to the peoples, all of them.

And they're outside the camp. They're in the hard places. They're behind the hard cultures.

They're behind hard languages. And they're behind hard attitudes towards the West, the Satan of the West. And we are called to go.

So what's left to be done is the hardest thing. There are some wonderful mission stories about arriving there and through redemptive analogies the whole tribe gets converted and you're a hero. That's a rare story.

A wonderful story. A true story. But a rare story.

God has a people among all the peoples of the world, and we go to call them out. Call them out. And it will cost us our lives.

It will cost many of you your lives. I don't know. I mean, you're a very young school.

I don't know whether you have a list of martyrs yet. But one day, there will be a wall. There will be a wall here.

And the pictures will be there. They went. We did it for the soldiers in the First and Second World War.

Most churches, old churches, have plaques. And their names are listed. And they will be listed in churches.

They'll be listed in schools. And that's why I'm here. I want to recruit martyrs who die in love, not martyrs who kill in hate.

And I think that kind of love comes, I know it comes, from being satisfied in Jesus so deeply that you know you can't die. So look at finally verse 14. Here's the ground of going outside the camp and bearing reproach with Jesus.

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek a city that is to come. The reason we are willing to go outside the camp and suffer is because this world is not our home. We seek a city that is to come.

I want to end on this, because I know the kind of school I'm talking to here, and I love what I see. 90% of you, 95% of you, are here growing in knowledge and skills that will enable you to serve this city called the city of man. The city of the world.

This one. We have no lasting city. That non-lasting city is Lynchburg.

It's America. It's the workplace. It won't last.

And if anybody were to take my message about loving our everlasting reward to mean you just skip the city and go to that, you've totally missed the point. My point has been this. All the students at Liberty aiming to pour your life into the city of man for her good, for her everlasting good, will serve her better if you love the other city more.

If you love the city that is to come, the Lord that is to come, more than this city, you will serve this city better. You'll be able to be so different from this city. So able to lay down your life for the good, the everlasting good of this city, that you will go to the hardest places on the planet and the hardest peoples on the planet in order to make plain the value of that other city and that other King.

Let's pray. Father in Heaven, I ask now that these passages from Hebrews, John 11, John 6, and John 8, and 1 Corinthians 3, and Psalm 16 would be like a double-edged sword that penetrates into the hearts of everyone in this room for the sake of finishing the Great Commission in the hardest places among the hardest peoples of the world no matter what it costs, because the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life. I ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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