

The Supremacy of God in Prayer

by John Piper

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, and prayer is the point where we express our emptiness and need, and God responds by delivering us and glorifying himself.

Duration: 37:55

Scripture: Psalm 50:12

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of serving God in a way that honors Him and responds to His infinite blessings. He believes that prayer is the key to achieving this. The speaker references Jeremiah 2:13, which highlights the sin of forsaking God and seeking satisfaction in broken cisterns instead of the fountain of living waters. He also mentions 1 Peter 4:11, which encourages serving in the strength that God supplies for His glory. The sermon concludes with the idea that prayer is the means by which we acknowledge our dependence on God and express gratitude for His abundant blessings.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.desiringgod.org. Let me begin where we left off last night by trying to clarify one of those key sentences, namely, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. As I read the Bible, there are two great passions that are expressed.

One is God's passion for his glory, which we focused on heavily last night, and the other is the passion of the human heart to be happy. That psalm that was just quoted in the prayer said, Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad in you all of our days. I believe that prayer, Satisfy me, O God, in the morning, that I may rejoice and be glad in you all my days, is the deepest cry of the human heart.

Now, most people don't know how to pray it. They say, Satisfy me. They say it to money.

They say it to prestige. They say it to style. They say it to marriage partners.

They say it to children. They say it to their jobs. Satisfy me.

Satisfy me. And the only prayer that works is to address it to God and say, Satisfy me in the morning with thy steadfast love, that I may rejoice and be glad in thee all the days of my life. So there are these two great passions in the universe.

The passion of the human heart to be happy and the passion of God to be glorified. And I've spent most of my adult life, since my seminary days, trying to understand how those two things relate to each other. And everything I've ever written and every talk I've ever given has more or less been an effort to bring them together because I see the Bible bringing them together.

And that sentence that I quoted last night and just a moment ago is my best effort to date of bringing them together. God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him, which means that the gospel that we have to bring to the world is that these two great passions are not at odds, but in a most marvelous and glorious way, come to simultaneous fruition in the act of delighting in God. God is glorified when you are satisfied in him.

The way you glorify a spring of living water is not by hauling buckets of your own self-wrought labor up from the valleys of humanity and dumping them in the spring and saying, there, be enriched, O spring. The way you glorify a spring is by recognizing how thirsty you are and forsaking every other kind of drink, walking to the spring, falling prostrate before the spring and drinking in the water and saying, ah, and in the strength of the spring, beckoning others to join you in it. Now, God is the spring.

In fact, Jeremiah was so stunned. He said, be appalled, O heavens, be shocked. My people have committed two great evils.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters and hewed out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. The great sin of the world is the failure to pursue happiness with enough intelligence and enough passion to forsake the broken cisterns of the fleeting pleasures of the world and move in on God's fountain and drink from him until we are satisfied. So, last night's talk, I know that when I've delivered that emphasis in many contexts around the country, namely that God loves God, God is passionate for God, the glory of God is central to God, does not always sound loving of God.

Because love, we've learned, does not seek its own. Love lays down its life for others. So when you make God out to be so self-centered, how can he be a God of love? What I'm trying to clarify now is God being the absolutely unique, infinitely valuable person in the universe has no choice but to make much of himself if he would be loving.

Because the most loving thing that God can do is to give himself to me for my enjoyment. And that is very egocentric of God. To think that he is so great that he alone could satisfy my soul.

That's simply the way God has to be because he is the only source of my infinite satisfaction. God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the highest virtue and the most loving act he can perform. For if he were to make much of me as the source of my joy, he would hate me.

But in making much of himself as the source of my joy, he rescues me from all the other vain desires that I have. So God is unique. You see, does this make sense? God is unique.

He must exalt himself. He must make much of himself if I am to have that which alone can satisfy the deepest needs of my life, namely God and the glory of God. Now, you've got to grasp that, at least in part, in order to make sense of what I'm going to say about prayer this morning.

I'm going to talk about the supremacy of God in prayer, and it's going to sound just like last night. Because prayer is the heart of worship. And it's the heart of that point where God is most glorified when I'm most satisfied.

Prayer is that point where I express my emptiness and my need and my craving and my longing. And that point where God says, I'm enough. I'm enough.

Ask, seek, knock, come, drink. I mean, prayer is the point where it all comes together, where the human and the divine meet with God being infinitely resourceful and me being perfectly bankrupt. They meet at a point of joy for me and glory for him.

That's the summary of the message this morning. I could quit right now, and you've got it. If you just understood what I said, I could quit and go home.

But I'm being asked to speak 30 minutes instead of five, so I'll keep going. And I'll put some biblical foundations under this. Now, here's the way I want to do it.

I am very zealous to find a way to serve God that honors God. A way to respond to infinite blessing in a way that honors grace. Those are my goals this morning.

And I happen to think prayer is the way to serve God in a way that honors God and to be blessed by God in a way that honors grace. So let me try to explain those two concerns and then unpack them. I believe the evangelical church, and it's not new, it's characteristically human to make this kind of error, is beset by a service mentality that works for God in a way that belittles him.

Here's the warning. Acts 17, 25. God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything for he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.

Now, hear that God is not served by human hands. Or mouths or arms or legs or brains. God is not served as though he needed anything.

Now, that sentence, pastors, lay leaders, is mind blowing for church philosophies of ministry, because many people serve as though God needed them in our churches. And in doing so, in the very act of trying to honor him, belittle him. God is belittled when we serve him as though he needed anything.

That's Acts 17, 25. That's not my word. It's the word of God.

Mark 10, 45. Jesus said, the son of man came not to be served. Do you serve Jesus? You're disobeying him if you serve Jesus.

Well, at least you have to come to terms with Acts 17, 25 and Mark 10, 45. The son of man came not to be served. We gloss over these texts so fast on our way to service that we scarcely give them a thought that we might blaspheme in our preaching or in our Sunday school teaching or our nursery work or our custodial work.

There's a warning for us. And I know all the texts that are coming to your minds right now on the other side of the coin. But let us hear this side and figure out how we will come to terms with such things.

It's a warning. How to serve God in a way that honors God. Now, here's the second concern I have.

I'll come back and answer that one because you're all asking, whoa, wait a minute. I thought we were supposed to serve God. Paul calls himself a servant of God, a doulos.

I'll come back. Here's the second warning. I said I wanted to so receive blessing as to honor grace.

I believe another characteristic of the contemporary evangelical church is what I have called in the most recent book that I think in the bookstore, maybe I don't know. I haven't been there called Future Grace. I've called it the debtor's ethic.

Here's another name you can call it. If you're over 40, you'll know what this means. Maybe the tanto ethic.

Now, raise your hand if you've ever seen the Lone Ranger and Tonto. All right. There's a few out there.

But, you know, there was only one episode. This is from 42 years ago now. There's only one episode that showed why Tonto was always getting the Lone Ranger out of scrapes.

And it's because the Lone Ranger saved Tonto's life when he was a young Indian. And in the culture of the Indians that Tonto was a part of, when somebody saves your life, you bind yourself to them by a pact to always serve them the rest of your life. Which means that because the Lone Ranger saved Tonto, Tonto now is going to spend the rest of his life saving the Lone Ranger.

That's a blasphemous way to relate to God. That's the Tonto ethic. He's done so much for me.

Now I must. And then how you finish that sentence determines whether you are going to honor God in the way you receive blessing and honor grace or whether you're going to turn grace into works. Romans 11, 33.

Oh, the depth of the riches and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments. How inscrutable are his ways.

Who has ever given a gift to God that he should be repaid? Or who has ever been his counselor? So as to teach him anything. For from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever and ever. If you want to glorify God, to honor grace, you must recognize that you stay a receiver always.

Always. He stays the benefactor. You stay the beneficiary.

If you try to reverse those roles, you dishonor him. If you say, oh, he's given so much to me. Now I must give so as to enrich or meet his needs.

Usually we don't articulate it because as soon as we do, it sounds awful, but we live it. Now, there are two or three reasons why the debtor's ethic. Is bad.

That is, God has given so much to me. I'm now in his debt. I will pay back the debt the rest of my life.

That's bad. Number one, because it's impossible. Every time you undertake to do an act that is meant to pay God back for grace, you just go deeper into debt.

You don't pay back any debt because everything you have is a work of grace. First Corinthians four, seven. What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though it were not a gift? So if you do anything for God, it's God enabling you to do it.

And therefore you go deeper into debt. You may as well get used to it. You're going to be a debtor for all eternity.

And there is no paying back. None. The second reason that you shouldn't buy into the debtor's ethic is that.

If it were possible, it would destroy grace and turn it into a business transaction. Like somebody who invites you over for dinner. I mean, do you want this to happen? You invite somebody over for dinner because you love them.

You delight to be with them. You don't expect them to pay you. And as they're leaving, you hear the husband whisper to the wife.

Well, I guess we'll have to have them over next week. And they destroy grace, and that's the way many people relate to God. Well, he did this for me.

I guess I'll have to serve a term of Sunday school teaching or have to. Be a missionary or. And God's grace is destroyed.

Here's the third reason why the debtor's ethic is so bad. It deflects attention away from all the future grace that God offers us. By trying to pay back for past grace and in deflecting our attention onto the past, away from the future, we cease to live in the power of promises.

And it's the only power there is to break sin and overcome discouragement. Two warnings do not serve God as though he needed anything and do not receive blessing as though you can pay back grace. Now, my contention this morning is prayer.

Prayer, when properly understood, guards us from these two awful mistakes. Prayer is the point at which a bankrupt, empty, helpless human says, this is a quote from the Psalms, what shall I render to the Lord for all of his bounty to me? Here's the answer. I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

Is that a payback or what? Isn't that amazing? What shall I render to the Lord for all of his bounty to me? Answer, I will hold up a cup of salvation for more and call upon the Lord to fill it again. And that's what the Lord wants from you this morning. That's the payback for grace, more grace, more grace.

Yes, I'm 51, Lord, and you have sustained me moment by moment for 51 years by solid grace alone. What shall I render to you? I will lift up the cup in hopes that you will give me grace to finish this message. I will lift up the cup to hope that you'll bless my wife while I'm away and enrich her life.

I'll hold up the cup to say, keep me faithful and strong, and don't let me turn on the television and watch anything ugly on the television in my hotel room. I will lift up the cup of salvation and ask for physical strength to be the pastor you've called me to be. That's my return to you for 51 years of grace.

Make your day, God. Be God in my life some more. Does that make sense? Prayer is an empty cup of salvation lifted to the Lord like a little child.

Do it again. Daddy, do it again. Where do I get that? Well, I've given you one.

Here's the other one. Psalm 50 verses 12 to 15. This is such an important song.

This is Robinson Crusoe's text in that novel. Spurgeon preached a sermon on it called Robinson Crusoe's text. Psalm 50, 12.

If I were hungry, God says, I would not tell you. You hear the I'm not served as though I need anything. If I were hungry, I would not tell you for the world and all that is in it is mine.

Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? I offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the most high. Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will glorify me. Now, mark those three phrases.

That's verse 15. Call upon me in the day of trouble. Got a day of trouble.

Everybody in this room is in a day of trouble. If you don't think you're in a day of trouble, that's your biggest trouble. Call upon me in the day of trouble.

I will deliver you. I will flex my arm. I will use my wisdom.

I will display my grace. I will move in ways you can't imagine. Why would I do that? And you will glorify me.

That's the dynamic of prayer. That's the supremacy of God in prayer. Prayer is, I call on God.

He works for me. I render glory back to him. The giver gets the glory.

That's why there's these awful warnings in the Bible. Beware how you give to God. The giver gets the glory.

God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything. Because if you served him as though he needed anything, you'd be the giver and you'd get the glory. And oh, the danger in subtle service lifestyles in our churches that don't reckon with the sovereign self-sufficiency of God who needs nothing and who is continually the giver.

Prayer is the point where we confess, I am always the receiver in relation to God. So that he is the one who gets the glory and I get the joy. Two texts from the Gospel of John to let you hear.

John 16, 24, Jesus says, Hitherto have you asked nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full. Why does prayer exist? So that your joy may be full.

And then put it alongside that text, John 14, 13. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Now put them together.

Ask me and I'll do it that your joy may be full. Ask me and I'll do it that the Father may be glorified. Does that sound familiar? God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

Prayer is the point where those two things come together. I want you to bring them together. I want God to be glorified in the CMA.

And I want the hearts of the people to be satisfied in the CMA, because only that kind of heart will attract a desperate world. The question is, I suppose, that you might ask right now. Does the Bible really talk of service this way? I mean, you've warned us not to serve God.

And you've told us to pursue our satisfaction in God. And in their doing, God would be glorified. And prayer is the point where that happens.

Does the Bible really talk this way about serving God? I think the answer is yes. And let me point you to a few texts. In Isaiah 46, there's a description of God in distinction from the foreign gods of the Babylonians.

Now, this is text that's very relevant for missions, by the way. Because I'm going to argue and am arguing that this self-sufficiency of God that makes him continually a giver who will not be served, but always wants to be the servant of his people, is unique among the religions of the world. I get that from Isaiah 64, 4, where it says, from of old, no one has heard or perceived by the ear.

No eye has seen a God besides thee. Now, if you stop right there and say, well, there's lots of gods. There's gods many and lords many.

Demons everywhere. Gods competing for people's worship. Spirits that people are worshiping all over the world in animistic cultures.

Principalities and powers to which people yield up their allegiance. But we shouldn't finish the sentence there. From of old, no one has heard a God, heard or perceived by the ear.

No eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him. That's what doesn't exist in the world, except in Jehovah God Almighty. The only God who presents himself to his people as a God who will not be worked for, but who works for them, is our God.

And there's the message for the nations. Do you know the God who will not be served by human hands? Or do you only know a God who demands that you serve him or he will strike you dead? Offer that chicken or you're done for. Do you know the God who undertakes to work for those who wait for him? Now, this text in Isaiah 46 contrasts Jehovah with the gods Bel and Nebo.

Bel bows down. Nebo stoops. Their idols are on beasts and cattle.

These things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop. They bow down together.

They cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. Now, there's a description of foreign gods. They must be carried on carts.

They must be served by human hands. They cannot carry. Now, here's the contrast.

Verse three. Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel who have been born by me, born by me, carried by me. From your birth, carried from the womb, even to your old age, I am he.

And to gray hairs, I will carry. I have made and I will bear. I will carry and will save.

God is the carrier. God is the bearer. God is the savior.

And how then shall we serve? Well, let me close perhaps by just drawing your attention to one or two texts just briefly. First Peter 4:11 says, let him who serves. All right.

Yes, I admit that was an overstatement at the beginning. I confess. Let him who serves.

Here it is. Let him who serves serve in the strength that God supplies, that in everything God may get the glory. That's first Peter 4:11.

So we must find a way to serve God such that he is always the giver. Serve by receiving, serve by receiving, serve by receiving. So that in all of our serving, God is getting the glory as the giver.

You got to find that if that's a paradox to you, if that sounds strange to you, it may be you're on the front end of your Christianity this morning or one other. Matthew 6:24. No one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and money. Now, how do you serve money? You don't serve money by working to benefit money. You don't bless money.

You don't add to money. You serve money by calculating all of your thinking and all of your investing and all of your behavior so as to put yourself in the position so as to benefit from all that money can give. That's where you serve money.

You think and you strategize so as to be in a position where money will maximize its benefits for you. God says you cannot serve me and money that way. So how then shall we serve God exactly that way? You serve God by using all of your mind and all of your maneuvering and all of your heart so as to be in the place to maximize your enjoyment of God.

Where is God blessing? Where is God moving? Where can I have most of God? There is the place of service. Some of you are struggling with where's place. Here's a guideline.

Where is the waterfall? I want to be under the waterfall of God. Where will I know most of God? Where can I enjoy most of God? And go where the waterfall is. When I get invitations to speak.

I bow and I say, Lord, is there going to be a waterfall in Charlotte? I stand in that pulpit. To speak about the supremacy of God. Are you going to be there? Pouring out your blessing because I'm going where the waterfall is.

Because when I drink of the waterfall and am bathed in your enabling power. You get the glory. If I go outside the waterfall and try to live in a kind of debtor's ethic off of past blessing.

I'll gut it out. And I'll get the glory. But if I can find where the waterfall is falling and just walk underneath it.

Then I'll be real, real happy. Let me close by saying this. I wish I were.

I wish I were in Minneapolis right now. For one reason. My 14 year old boy.

Is getting on the plane in 10 minutes to go to Uganda. And I love him for it. I love him for it.

But I took him yesterday and I said, I got to go preach. And I just want you to know, son, that we've got a family verse. And God is sufficient for this.

And you'll be saying the family verse. And I'm going to say the family verse. And the family verse is.

Fear not, for I'm with you. Be not dismayed, for I'm your God. I'll help you.

I'll strengthen you. I'll hold you up with my victorious right hand. So you go, son, in the strength of that verse.

And every day you trust this God. And every day you pray as a helpless, empty beneficiary of this promise. And when you do, when you pray and when you trust as a helpless little kid.

God will work for you and he will get the glory and you'll get the joy. So, Lord, that's the way we want to pray. That's the way we want to serve.

That's the way we want to receive blessing. Would you do that here? For every pastor who's starving for you, for every lay person who's hungry for you, for those who've been trying to serve you and work themselves to a frazzle. Would you lead them high up into the mountain? Lay them prostrate on the green grass of your pasture.

Put their face in fresh streams of living water. And at this council meeting. Satisfy them with your steadfast love and your all sufficiency.

So that when they go home, there is power. Not their own, but yours. So that you get the glory and they get the joy.

In Jesus name, I ask it. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission.

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