

# What Makes the Good News Good? Seeing the Glory of Christ

by John Piper

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*The highest, best, final good of the gospel is seeing and savoring the glory of God in the face of Christ, which is the key to understanding lostness and salvation.*

**Duration:** 48:24

**Scripture:** Acts 26:17-18, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 2 Corinthians 4:6

**Topics:** "Gospel Message", "Glory Of Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher explores the concept of the gospel as good news and questions what the highest, best, and final good of the gospel is. He suggests various possibilities such as justification by faith, forgiveness of sins, and salvation from hell. The preacher then moves on to discuss the role of messengers in bringing about salvation, highlighting the parallel between Acts 26 and 2 Corinthians 4. He emphasizes that while God alone can give life and light, He chooses to use people as messengers to open the eyes of others. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the importance of patient teaching and the relational component in sharing the gospel, referencing 2 Timothy 2. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the ultimate goal of the gospel as the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and the need for individuals to embrace and treasure this revelation for their everlasting satisfaction.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). The text for Pastor John's sermon this morning comes from 2 Corinthians 3-17-4-7. So please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 3-17.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word. But by the open statements of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servant for Jesus' sake.

For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. Jar of clay.

Here we are. My heart is full of longings now for this message. And let me tell you what they are, and then I'm going to pray that God would do them.

At one level, I want to draw you in to the last three weeks of my labors and my thinking on a book called, I hope, God is the Gospel. Subtitle, Meditations on the Love of God as the Gift of Himself. I want you to taste this morning what I've been seeing.

At another level, I desire to cultivate at Bethlehem a unified, common understanding and conviction concerning the meaning of lostness. I want us to know as a family what it means to be lost. I want us to have a common vision of lostness.

And, the opposite, to be saved. What does to be saved mean? That's one level. Two levels.

Here's a third. I would like, I long that we at Bethlehem would be bold, patient teachers of the Gospel to unbelievers. Teachers.

Everybody who's a believer in this room, I would like to see you be bold, patient teachers. You'll hear more about that in about 30 minutes. But underline the word teacher.

Because, frankly, the world needs more from you than a relationship. Relationships don't save anybody. Faith comes by hearing.

And hearing by the Word of God. You'll also hear something very positive said about relationships in a few minutes as well. But mark this.

I fear that around the world, in missionaries, and at home, in lay witness, we are selling out the Gospel to this notion that if you be nice long enough, somebody's going to get saved. So my third longing is that we would all be patient teachers. I'm getting those words from a text, which I'll point you to.

Here's my fourth level of longing for this message. I long that some of you in this room who are not spiritually alive would be awakened from the dead by the Holy Spirit this morning through what I say. Now let's pray.

Father, the very point of the conclusion of this text is that John Piper, clay pot, cannot do any of these things he longs for. That's the point of verse 7. That I have a treasure in me this morning that is of infinite value. And it's in a clay pot so that it would have its effect in a way that gets for your surpassing power all the credit.

And so I feel very at peace with my helplessness this morning. And I ask that you would come and be God in this room and do everything that I have desired. Because I believe it's the Holy Spirit who has given these desires.

I ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I have five observations to make.

Three of them come from this text that was just read. And one comes from Acts 26 and one comes from 2 Timothy 2. So that's where we're going. Here's the first observation.

Lead into it like this. Gospel. You know the word gospel means good news, right? Good news.

Here's my question that drove this book and that's driving this sermon. What is the highest, best, final good of the good news that makes it good? Is it justification by faith? Is it the forgiveness of sins? Is it the removal of the wrath of God? Is it redemption from guilt and liberation from the power of sin? Is it salvation from hell? Is it entrance into heaven? Is it eternal life? Is it deliverance from all pain and sickness and conflict? All of those are precious, glorious gospel truths. And none of them is the best, highest, final good that makes the gospel good news.

In fact, I would go so far as to say if this other thing that I have in mind doesn't happen for you, none of those is good news. It takes something beyond those to make them good news. They are good news to the degree that they bring something to pass.

Now what is that? Let's read 2 Corinthians 4, verse 4 to get the answer. Verse 4 and verse 6 to get the answer. In their case, that is in the case of those who are perishing, the God of this world, that is Satan, has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

Now put verse 6 in parallel with verse 4. Verse 6 For God who said once at the creation of the world let light shine out of darkness has shown similarly into our own hearts to give the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Notice the parallels because we have one answer, not two answers here. Verse 4 The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

Now lay on top of that verse 6 The light, so light matches light, of the knowledge, knowledge matches gospel which is why there has to be teaching in evangelism as well as relating. Gospel and knowledge are parallel. Of the glory of God matches of the glory of Christ.

And then to explain how they are one glory the first one ends the glory of Christ who is the image of God and the second one ends the glory of God in the face of Christ. And now we see it. The best, the highest, the final good of the good news that makes it good is seeing and savoring the glory of God in the face of Christ revealed in the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection.

And if you don't this morning see glory, beauty, treasure, wonder shining off that table and the facts of the gospel of Christ crucified and risen you may not be a believer. You are probably not a believer. The reason, the only reason I say probably is because in the Christian life clouds come and go.

And sometimes our vision is temporarily obscured. And those are frightening times and they should be frightening times. And we should get on our faces and plead Oh Lord, open the eyes of my heart again that I might see the wonder of the gospel.

Don't let me in this darkness anymore because it is the God of this world who blinds the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God. And oh God, if this morning I am in that condition blow that cloud away defeat that demonic influence in my life and let me see again glory let me see light, let me see beauty let me see a treasure don't leave me!

And some of you have never seen it. Which is why going to church is so boring.

That song we sang Jesus, priceless treasure source of purest pleasure makes no sense at all. You can think sex, that makes sense I feel that. Food, I'm hungry right now that would feel good.

Jesus, I don't get it. You're blind. You remember how Jesus talked about it? 1 Corinthians 15, 3-4 is not Jesus' word but Paul's giving the foundational events.

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures. He was buried. He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

Those are the gospel events. But what makes them good news? You say, well justification, forgiveness eternal life, escape from hell. No! Those are only present to get us to God.

Justification. Why? It's good news because we stand accepted before the glory of the God who now satisfies our souls. He doesn't push us away.

Justification is a means to that. Forgiveness of sins is good news because now all those things that are making us unable to be in God's presence and unable to see Him because it's the pure in heart who see God they're cancelled. They're gone.

And now we have what we're really after. Removal of the wrath of God and salvation from hell are good news because in that escape from hell we now have entrance in to the very presence of the One who satisfies our longings as we behold His glory. Eternal life is good news because now Jesus has told us very plainly, John 17.3 this is eternal life that they know Me and the One who sent Me to know Christ is life.

It's not just the elongation forever of orgasm. If the only pleasures you know are physical pleasures you're like a six year old who just heard that word and don't have a clue what I'm talking about. So ask the Lord to grow you up and give you light.

That's the first point. The highest, best, final good that makes all the other parts of the gospel good news is seeing and savoring and embracing and treasuring and being forever infinitely satisfied by the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. If you don't know what I'm talking about the next point is the description of your life.

The next point is this. Lostness is blindness to glory. I said one of my longings for this message is that we at Bethlehem would have a common unified understanding of what it means to be lost.

Now let's read verse 4 again and get that definition. 2 Corinthians 4, 4 In their case Now the their case is referring back to verse 3 those who are perishing. In their case, here's what's true.

The God of this world, Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God. To be lost is to be blind to the beauty of Christ. Everybody in this room knows people like that and some people in this room are that person.

Everybody in this room loves somebody like that. We pour out our heart to them. We tell them about their sin with tender tones knowing that we too are sinners.

We describe Christ and His mercy, power, wisdom. I just read this morning it's funny how some phrases take you sitting on the couch in the living room. He put a child in their midst.

Did you read that this morning? He put a child in their midst and He took him in His arms and said to them if you receive a child like this you receive me. And I just stopped and I pictured Him. He didn't just set Him.

He said, come here kid. Two year old maybe, three, maybe smaller. He didn't just say stand there.

He reached down and He took him like this. So picture Jesus looking at you and saying you receive a child like this you receive me. And if you receive me you receive Him who sent me.

That's just a little glimpse and you say that to this person you love. He's like that. He's like that.

He owns the world. He runs the universe. He upholds all things by the word of His power and He's like that too.

And you do your best and they look at you like you're talking Swahili. Totally blank. Feeling nothing.

Thank you. Thank you anyway. We all know people like that and we feel so absolutely helpless.

We want to scream. We want to take them by the neck. We want to die.

We just want to die. I'll die. Lord anything.

To be lost is to be blind to the glory of God in the face of Christ. Don't scoff at people like that. There's way too much scoffing on Christian radio.

There's way too much scoffing on right-wing Christian talk shows. There's not enough tears. There's not enough brokenness.

There's not enough aching and longing and yearning and hoping and dying and suffering. Of course they're not going to believe. Don't scoff at people like that.

Rather weep and tremble and I'll get to my point about patience in a few minutes. So that's my second observation. First one is the highest, best, final good of the gospel that makes all the other good things good is finally being able to see the beauty.

Be satisfied by it increasingly forever. And the second point is not to be able to see that is what lostness is. Here's the third observation.

God alone can give light and take away the blindness. And that's verse 6. 2 Corinthians 4, 6 God alone can give this spiritual sight. Now this is a reference back to Genesis 1 where there was no light and God said let there be light and nothingness obeyed just like it will in the heart of the people we love God willing.

You see nothing there. There's nothing there. There's no hope.

It is dark. There is hope. For God who said once let light shine out of darkness has shown into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Let us at Bethlehem not only have a unified common glorious corporate idea of lostness but let us have a common unified idea of how we got saved. Every Christian in this room who has the slightest glimpse of

the compelling glory of Jesus that drew you to Himself are a Christian. Every one of you is a Christian because that happened to you.

Verse 6 happened to you. If somebody says how did it happen to you? Just read the verse. You don't even have to remember it.

It happened to you. Say it on the authority of the Bible. Once I was blind and now I see.

And guess what? I didn't put mud on my eyes. He made me see. He said to darkness once upon a time let there be light and once upon a time in absolute sovereign grace when I was in total rebellion could see nothing beautiful in Him He spoke light into my heart and once I opened my Bible and suddenly it looked interesting.

I had some questions and I wanted to know more and I started to feel like if this is true everything in my life would change and there was this trembling sense My God, I think I'm being saved. You are. And you didn't do it.

No Christian thinks he saved himself because being saved is having the blindness taken away. Blind people can't do that. Dead people can't do it.

God alone saves which is how helpless evangelists and lost people are when they meet each other they're both desperate. The difference is the evangelist knows it and is praying for power which is what I'm doing right now for you. God do it.

This is the work of God when the scales fall and the veil is lifted. We love stories like this, don't we? Sam sent me an email after last communion Sunday I was in my study just working away on my book checking my email every few hours hoping nothing's there but I wanted this one he just told me this is downtown Sam led communion and he said what I often say at communion he said, now here's who should eat and here's who shouldn't but you know it is possible to believe before the tray gets to you that's how gloriously simple it can happen.

A man had been brought to church for several months by one of our folks very foreign to the gospel but was learning little by little Sunday after Sunday he leaned over to the person next to him and said I'm ready and the man said ready for what? he said I want to believe and they bowed their head while the trays were on their way and he trusted Christ and he confessed with his lips that Jesus is Lord and he took communion for the first time in his life let's give you another little window there the kind of thing that was happening this was a man so foreign to Christian worship he'd never heard singing like this he would take his cell phone out call his girlfriend and keep it on during the worship service she was in China then give me one more story because we need stories like this we

need to see God at work because He is at work I got an email on April 4 from the Netherlands and here's what it said this is a Jewish man in the Netherlands listening online to the radio program God bless everyone who reads this I can't believe it took me two whole years to understand what is said in the audio sermon Education for Exaltation in Christ I am a Jew a Christian Jew as of two minutes ago I believe that Jesus is God Jesus is Elohim He who has the Son has life, you said God used that radio sermon to crush the mind of this stubborn Jew I must say I had troubles with the Father name being pronounced as in Jewish culture it is not common to pronounce the Father's name since we don't know how it is pronounced but I decided to go on and listen my eyes went open just today I was angry

with God I said to Him why are you letting me search without finding answers well I found it now Jesus is Elohim I will make sure that this gospel message will be spread out here in Europe I am from the Netherlands I can't believe it well, I do believe it actually Jesus is Elohim praise Jesus praise Elohim, your brother in Christ Michael this is point three salvation is when God sovereignly speaks light in your heart and you are enabled in a sermon in a tract in a radio program in a TV program a Billy Graham crusade reading your Bible listening to a friend talk about Jesus you are enabled for the first time to taste spiritual beauty glory treasure and be drawn to it that's God and that is the way salvation comes here is the fourth observation and now we're going to Acts 26 and I do hope

you'll go with me would you turn to Acts 26 if you have a Bible if you don't just listen carefully but I want you to weave together in your mind and in your Bible these three texts 2 Corinthians 4, 4 and 6 and now the second one Acts 26, 17 and 18 or just remember 18 the fourth observation is that though God alone can give life light He uses people to bring it to pass He uses messengers now listen to the end of verse 17 of Acts 26 through verse 18 and listen for the parallels with 2 Corinthians 4, 4 and the remedy that is tailor made for the horrible lostness of 2 Corinthians I am sending you see those words at the end of verse 17 this is Jesus speaking to the apostle Paul or Saul on the Damascus road telling him why he just knocked him off his horse and made him his own I am sending you

to open the eyes of the Gentiles to open their eyes you so that they may turn from darkness to light from the power of Satan that's the blinding one in verse 4 of 2 Corinthians from the power of Satan to God that they may receive the forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me notice the perfect remedy I am sending you Paul I am sending you Bethlehem I don't do this miracle illumination in human hearts without human messengers I am sending you to do what? to take away blinding effects of Satan who is blinding the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ I am sending you to do what only I can do oh listen this is devastating and gloriously encouraging it is saying when you talk to

that loved one when you talk to that colleague that friend, that neighbor and they seem so far from any interest so far from any delight any pleasure any joy any resting that you just want to throw in the towel remember you are helpless and you're appointed to make it happen it's a wonderful position to be in you can't make it happen and it will only happen through you or somebody God doesn't move around through the world doing his little he doesn't save people like that he saves people like this like that he doesn't do this he does this and you're the this you're this so he won't he won't just go over there oh lord save my neighbor save my neighbor save my neighbor go because there's this amazing this is so thrilling that the miracle of supernatural illumination Jesus is saying to Paul I

send you to open there and only I can open there so be the agent of my power isn't that why verse 7 is at the end of the text back in 2nd Corinthians 4 we have this treasure meaning the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ we have this treasure in clay pots in order that the surpassing power might belong to him we're all clay pots our words are never adequate you ever come away from a witnessing situation feeling whoa I really did it good never never never will that ever happen you will always be a broken clay pot and there's design in that God wants the glory and he's going to get it for his power that's the fourth point let me rehearse them for you and then we'll give you the last one number one the highest best final good of the gospel that makes all the other wonderful

parts of it good is the glory of God in the face of Christ offered to you for your everlasting satisfaction as you are enabled to see it second lostness is blindness to that glory third salvation is only possible because

God says sovereignly let there be light and fourth he doesn't do it without human emissaries Acts 26 18 last point in the mouth of those emissaries patient teaching is called for I want you to hear two clusters of ideas there patience is one teaching is another there's this relational component I said I would come back to relationships and say something positive this is big while I'm talking turn to 2nd Timothy 2 would you do that? 1st and 2nd Thessalonians 1st and 2nd Timothy Titus, Philemon Hebrews get your bearings there find this little book of 2nd Timothy because I

want you to connect 2nd Corinthians 4 4 Acts 26 18 and 2nd Timothy 2 26 as the three verses that have a whole world view if you understand those three verses and the connection between them you got a massive grasp on Christianity I said there are two clusters there's this patient cluster that has to do with relationships and ethics and then there's this teaching cluster that has to do with the content of what you say now let's read 2nd Timothy 2 24 to 26 this is for all of us now addressed to Tim and Timothy he was a pastor but it's relevant for all of us Tim and Timothy and he's being told how to be an agent of what only God can do alright this is like filling up like if Paul said to to Jesus on the Damascus road this does not make sense you're sending me to do what only you can do well

give me some details these are the details 2nd Timothy 2 24 the Lord's servant that's the messenger that's you or Paul or me the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome so try to avoid knock down, drag out word battles you can't always do that that's ok if you can't, you can't but try don't be known for that must not be quarrelsome but kind that's big relationships matter kind to everyone here's the next one able to teach isn't that interesting teach I'll come back patiently that's where I got that word enduring evil you got to take your lumps in evangelism from your kids or your neighbor or your colleague your dad you've spoken and it just comes back with bad news it can always turn against you and you feel like you've blown it oh patience, patience, patience patiently enduring evil

correcting opponents his opponents with gentleness there's got to be some correction if somebody says I think Jesus is a reincarnation of a cat you've got to correct that but you do it gently and then here's 2 Corinthians 4, 6 all over again if you didn't get it there please get it here when you behave like that and when you teach like that God may perhaps he's God, we're not we don't wrestle God into doing anything he may perhaps grant them repentance I want you to notice the 3-fold sequence I'm going to read it very slowly and comment as I go and then we'll be done there are 3 things that God will do here perhaps this afternoon as you lovingly, patiently kindly, gently teach someone some beautiful things about Jesus whether they seem to receive it or not this is what God may do it's 3

things and they're in sequence and they're just mind-boggling first, let's just read them I don't need to say too much he will grant them repentance you know what repentance is metanoia means a change of mind or heart like we were regarding television this afternoon it's really exciting I don't know what's on this afternoon that might be exciting but there might be something and you're really excited about it and then somebody's talking to you or maybe it's happening right now and a mind and a heart are changed is there a book I could buy to read this afternoon about Jesus? somebody I could talk to about Jesus? is there a walk I could take around a lake today to behold what Jesus has made? a change happens it's called repentance it's turning from what once satisfied you to a whole new way

of being satisfied by spiritual reality namely Jesus Christ so God may give that that's a gift that's a gift you don't make that happen you can't make yourself like what you don't like so it may happen and then what happens after that? unto he may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth well you might say wait a minute that was my teachings I'm teaching them and they know some truth I just told them the

truth they know the truth that doesn't take any repentance the devil knows the truth so obviously this must mean something more than devil knowledge I mean the devil knows more truth than you'll ever know until you get to heaven knowing truth doesn't save you by itself so this knowledge of the truth which comes from repentance not leads into repentance you see you're

giving them some knowledge at the front end that God will use to lead to repentance and then that knowledge becomes another kind of knowledge that's called the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God that's the kind of knowledge we're talking about here eternal life is to know me and him who sent me this is a knowing that is a relational embrace of what is truly seen to be glorious this is knowing it's not like opening a treasure chest full of gold and thinking it's rust and saying next you saw it, you knew it but you didn't know it it's opening it scraping it a little bit and saying I'm going to buy this field I'll sell everything to buy this field that's repentance and that's the new knowledge that comes lastly this is the sweetest for some of you right now I

have seen in my life and in my ministry the devil in some pretty powerful ways I don't toy with the devil I hate the devil and I think it's right to hate the devil since he's beyond repentance it's not right to hate people who are demonic but it's right to hate the devil because he's gone and all he does is make people miserable that's all he does so I hate him and he's very powerful he's way stronger than I am only I know the one who when he speaks the devil obeys and I want the devil to let people go in this room some of you his fingers are so deep into your groin and so deep into your mind and so deep into your heart you can't even tell it and so let's finish reading it and then we'll pray that God do it and close when repentance is given and fresh knowledge of glorious things in

Christ are given that they may they may escape from the snare of the devil having been captured by him to do his will this is amazing to me I've been involved in at least one major dramatic exorcism in which a person was demonic and flopped around on the floor like a fish I've seen that, I know it happens and for those in certain cultures it happens more often I think this is more normative deliverance is it not amazing to you that this text could say the devil takes people captive to do his will so they're just in bondage to pornography, in bondage to some kind of lust in bondage to greed, in bondage to anger they can't do anything but be angry just bondage and this text says now here's my prescription, mom son, brother, friend don't be quarrelsome be kind teach, teach teach, teach be

patient when they come back at you, take your lumps correct them with gentleness that's it it's like, oh god it's a big, big thing no no god's the big thing, you're not the big thing no thing is the big thing god's the big thing yours is, can you do that? can you over the long haul, keep speaking sweet powerful gospel truth, god may perhaps grant that they would repent and come to a knowledge of the truth and be freed so Christian open your mouth don't be silent, don't be impatient keep on telling, keep on teaching the glorious Christ an unbeliever who's sitting there wishing this would be over may god please make this message or someone else's message the means of your repentance and a recognition in the gospel of the glory of the greatest treasure you could ever know the lord bless you

and keep you the lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you did you hear that? the lord make his face to shine upon you and into you and be gracious to you the lord lift up his mighty countenance upon you and give you light and peace repentance knowledge liberation from the devil and all the people said amen do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission we invite you to visit Desiring God online at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)

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