

Outside the Camp

by David Platt

The sermon challenges the church to die in their devotion rather than their religion, and to go to the hard places to fulfill the mission of God.

Duration: 35:31

Scripture: Psalm 148:1

Topics: "Mission Evangelism", "True Devotion"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the call to praise the Lord from all creation, highlighting the need to move beyond religious formalism and fear to true devotion and mission. It challenges believers to risk everything for the glory of Christ among the nations, drawing inspiration from biblical examples of faith and dedication. The central question posed is whether we will die in our religion, clinging to comfort and tradition, or die in our devotion, stepping out in faith to fulfill the mission of making God's glory known in a lost and hurting world.

Transcript

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise him in the heights above.

Praise him all his angels. Praise him all his heavenly hosts. Praise him sun and moon.

Praise him all you shining stars. Praise him you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded and they were created.

He set them in place forever and ever. He gave a decree that will never pass away. So praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding.

You mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on the earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them all praise the name of the Lord for his name alone is exalted and his splendor is above the earth and the heavens and he has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in their maker.

Let the people of Zion be glad in their king. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with a tambourine and harp. For listen, let this soak in.

The Bible says the Lord takes delight in his people. He crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.

May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all the saints. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary. Praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power. Praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet.

Praise him with the harp and lyre. Praise him with tambourine and dancing. Praise him with the clash of cymbals.

Praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

One purpose, the glory of God. He has created us. He has commissioned us.

He has commanded us to devote our lives and our churches to his glory in all the world. This is our purpose. I stand before you tonight with great hesitation.

I have been a pastor for a very short time, and if I can be completely honest with you tonight, I don't have a clue what I am doing. If you could keep that a secret from the church that I pastor, I would appreciate that. I'm not trying to be self-effacing.

I really am clueless. I am like Solomon in First Kings 3. I am only a child, and I do not know how to carry out my duties. And I know that as a pastor, I have nothing to bring to the table apart from the Word of God.

And I know that standing before a group of pastors and wives who are much wiser than I am, I know that I have nothing to bring to the table tonight apart from the Word of God. And so I want to go right there to Hebrews chapter 13. And I want to invite you to follow along with me in God's Word.

I want to read to you from what I believe is a summary statement of the entire book of Hebrews. And based on this passage, I want to ask one question tonight. The question is this, are we going to die in our religion, or are we going to die in our devotion? This is a question I'm convinced God's people have had to face throughout her history.

I believe it's the question the believers in the book of Hebrews were facing, and I believe it is a central question facing the church today. Are we going to die in our religion, or are we going to die in our devotion? Hebrews chapter 13 verse 11 says, the high priest carries the blood of animals into the most holy place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Obviously, we have many questions surrounding the book of Hebrews.

Who wrote this book? When it was written? We know that this book was most likely written to Jewish Christians in a time when it was not easy to be a Jewish Christian. Full conversion to Christ was costly in the first century, and apparently, many believers that are the audience in this book were being tempted to shrink back from their faith, and not just to shrink back from their faith, but to fall away from their mission. They had been given a mission to take the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

They were holding back. Basically, I think when you look at the whole of Hebrews, the author is addressing two primary struggles in the church. Number one, they were driven by formalism.

Somewhere along the way, how they worshipped had become more important than who they worshipped. It was style without substance, and the author of Hebrews spends chapter after chapter showing how the religious practices of Judaism pointed to the glory of Christ. They were in danger of missing Christ, driven by formalism.

Second, they were paralyzed by fear. Whether it was expulsion or persecution from the unbelieving Jewish community, it was costly for them to follow Christ. And many of them were trying to figure out a way to stay in the camp of Judaism and still follow Christ, and the author is saying it can't be done.

They had been given a mission to declare the glory of Christ to the ends of the earth, and basically, he is saying to them, you have two options. Number one, you can retreat from the mission that you have been given, or number two, you can risk everything for the mission you have been given. Retreat or risk everything.

I believe God's people throughout redemptive history have had to face these same two options over and over and over again. Much of the background of the book of Hebrews is the scene of the people of God at Kadesh Barnea, back in Numbers chapter 13. If you want to go back there with me, Numbers chapter 13, verse 31, you remember the story.

The people of God are standing on the brink of the promised land, the land he has promised to give them. They send twelve spies out to look over the land that God had promised to give them, and they come back, and what do they say? Numbers 13, 31. The men came back and said, we cannot attack those people.

They are stronger than we are, and they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, the land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.

We saw the Nephilim there, the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them. That night, listen to what the people of God did.

On the brink of the promised land, all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, if only we had died in Egypt, or in this desert. Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder.

Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt? And they said to each other, we should choose a leader and go back to Egypt. They were retreating. The mission in front of them to take this land for the glory of

God, and they're saying, we want to go back.

We don't trust God. So amidst their rebellion, Moses intercedes for them, and God answers Moses' prayer. I want you to hear how God responds to Moses' prayer.

Numbers 14 verse 20, the Lord replied, I have forgiven them as you asked. Nevertheless, verse 21, nevertheless, as surely as I live, and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory, and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert, but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times, not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

It gets even more severe than in verse 32. This is God speaking to his people. He says, you, your bodies will fall in this desert.

Your children will be shepherds here for 40 years, suffering for your unfaithfulness until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. For 40 years, one year for each of the 40 days you explored the land, you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will surely do these things, to this whole wicked community which has banded together against me.

They will meet their end in this desert. Here they will die. Don't miss it.

God forgave them. He had bound up his glory in their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. He was not about to let them go back.

This is God's grace, his forgiveness, and yet here in Numbers chapter 14, we see a picture of God with his people, leaving them to wander in the wilderness until they die. They had retreated. The story is repeated all throughout redemptive history.

Once they're established in the promised land, they retreat from ridding the land of the Canaanites and the foreign gods as God had told them to. They defame the holiness of God among the nations. Once they're established, they reject God as their king.

So we want an earthly king to rule over us. In the process, they defame the majesty of God among the nations. Over and over and over again, this is the story of God's people.

God calling his people to mission and his people retreating. And so we fast forward to the book of Hebrews, and that's the picture we have here in Hebrews chapter 13. We have the people of God with the mission of God to declare the glory of Christ to all nations at the risk of their lives, and we see them retreating.

And so I invite us tonight to fast forward a couple of thousand years to June 22nd, 2009. Here's what I see. I see a world suffering from catastrophic natural disasters.

Over the last year, over a quarter of a million people have been killed almost instantly by cyclones in Myanmar, earthquakes in China and Pakistan, floods in Nepal and Bangladesh. Most of those quarter of a million people had never heard the gospel. And as we know, they're joined by a billion others who at this moment still have not heard his name.

I see a world where half of the population is living on less than \$2 a day. While we sit here tonight, all of us, extremely rich compared to the rest of the world. I see the nation of India where there are more people

living below the poverty line than there are people in the United States altogether.

I see a world where today alone, 25,000 people have died of either starvation or a preventable disease. I see our dogs and our cats eating better than our brothers and sisters in the Sudan. We realize last fall, in one week alone, in one week alone last fall, 50,000 people died of AIDS.

100,000 children died of hunger-related diseases. Thousands of other children were trafficked around the world for human sexual exploitation. Hundreds were killed in an earthquake in Pakistan.

All that in one week, and our greatest concern was how our football team played. On top of all this, I see thousands upon thousands of our brothers and sisters in China and North Korea and Laos and Saudi Arabia imprisoned and killed today because of their faith in Christ. I see all of these things, and then I look back in the church we have created and the church we are leading, and there is so little risk for the mission.

We have retreated. We have retreated into our nice big buildings where we sit in our nice cushioned chairs where we are insulated and isolated from the inner city and the spiritual lostness of the world where we have given a tip of our hats to world missions and evangelism while we go on designing endless programs that revolve around us. And when we should be on the firing line for God, the majority of our members are still in the nurseries of our churches drinking spiritual milk, and we stand today at our Kedesh Barnea, and we have two options.

We can retreat from the mission of declaring the glory of Christ in all nations. We can retreat into a land of religious formalism and wasted opportunity, or we can risk everything for the mission that we have been created for. And I want to say to you tonight, let's risk it all for the glory of Christ among a billion people who have not even heard his name.

Let's risk it all for the countless millions in your city, in my city, who do not know Christ and are headed to a Christless eternity. Let's risk it all for those who are lost in each of our communities and headed to an eternal hell. Let's risk it all for our lives, for our families, for our churches, for our children's lives.

Let's risk it all, because don't miss this. If we retreat from the mission, God will forgive us. He is gracious.

Our salvation is not at stake here. He will forgive us, but brothers and sisters, he may just leave us to wander in the wilderness until we die. He has done it with thousands of churches in the United States, and we are fools to think that he could not do it with any one of ours.

Are we going to die in our religion, or are we going to die in our devotion? Dave, don't you mean live in our devotion? Wouldn't that make a better sermon at the pastor's conference? Are we going to die in our religion or live in our devotion? That will get people coming down the aisles. Live in our devotion. Yes, but it's not what Hebrews 13 is saying.

Let us go with him outside the camp. We've got to put ourselves in the shoes of the original readers here. We've got to realize the images that come to their mind when they hear this phrase, outside the camp.

Immediately they go to the dirty places. Leviticus chapter 16, verse 27 and 28 tell us that the bodies of the bull and the goat on the day of atonement were sacrificed and then burned outside the camp. It was a representation of the sinfulness of God's people outside the camp.

Leviticus chapter 13, verse 45 and 46 tells us that if you had an infectious skin disease, that's when you go outside the camp. Lepers go outside the camp. Dirty place, the despised place, and the dangerous place.

Leviticus chapter 23, verse 13 and 14, this is where blasphemers are stoned. They go outside the camp. You don't want to go outside the camp in Judaism.

The dirty, the despised, the dangerous places. And that's the imagery that we have in verse 11 and 12 and it leads to that profound exhortation in verse 13. Let us then go to him, him being Jesus because Jesus is outside the camp.

Jesus went to the dirty and to the despised and to the dangerous. He went outside the city gates where he was cursed on a tree, where he endured shame and bore disgrace. That's where Jesus is.

He is with the dirty, the despised, and the dangerous. And if we're not careful, we will leave our churches and not go there. Instead of seeing Jesus among the dirty and the despised and the dangerous, we will craft Jesus to look a little different, a little cleaner, a little more comfortable.

A Jesus who does not call us to go to the hard places. A Jesus who calls us to comfort and safety. The danger is we have a tendency to craft Jesus into our own image so that he looks like us, a nice middle class American Jesus.

And if we do this, then we need to realize that every Sunday morning when we gather together and we sing our songs and do our worship, the reality is we are no longer worshiping Jesus. We are worshiping ourselves. Because Jesus is among the abandoned, the poor, the destitute, the hurting, and the places in the world that are most filled with disease.

And the places in the world that are most known for terror. Do we want to be with Jesus? He's there. I remember having my eyes opened when I moved down to seminary in New Orleans.

The first semester was in a class where we were supposed to be paired up with a church in the city there. We would do partnership and evangelism together. And the only church that was left when my team got to sign up was Eucharist Baptist Church in the middle of the French Quarter.

And so we go down in the French Quarter in New Orleans and we meet with the pastor there and he looks at us and he says, if you can learn to do ministry here, you can do ministry anywhere in the world. And he put us out in the streets and said, have a great semester. And so we walk down eyes wide open to Jackson Square.

Saw a lot of things that we'll not mention tonight, but then saw other things. Fortune tellers, tarot card readers, voodoo queen and king set up tables all around. We decided we wanted to get in a little bit of the action.

So we decided one day to set up a table of our own right next to the voodoo queen of New Orleans. We set our table out, put our tablecloth over it, chairs behind, some candles on the table and put up a sign that said, we'll tell your future for free. And people would come and they would sit down and they would say, tell my future for free? Yes.

Let me ask you a couple of questions. They would say, okay. We would ask them a couple of questions, would establish the fact that they had sin in their lives and we would look at them and tell them that their

future looked really bad.

And then we would share the gospel and it was in those days and the days to come that we began to get to know homeless men and women and some of the most pagan people that I have ever met. Sitting there on the streets with them and talking with them and getting involved in their lives and it was not easy and it was messy. And it took a long time, but after months of doing that, one by one people started coming to faith in Christ.

They started getting baptized. Before Katrina hit, there was a worship gathering every single Sunday morning in the middle of the French Quarter with about 40 or 50 homeless men and women, former pagans. I went down to New Orleans not long after Katrina and I was walking along the street and a man comes up to me, tattoos all over his body.

He had come to Christ in that ministry. He had been baptized. He comes up to me.

He gives me the big bear hug and he looks at me with tears in his eyes and says, David, I just want you to know that now I am leading the French Quarter ministry at the church. Jesus is at work among the dirty places. He is at work among the dangerous places.

I had the privilege by the grace of God to teach in a seminary in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-dominated nation, Indonesia. This seminary, in order to graduate from this seminary, every student has to plant a church in a Muslim community with at least 30 new baptized believers. Spoke at their graduation.

Everyone sitting in front of me had planted a church in a Muslim community with 30 new baptized believers. Two of their classmates had been murdered in the process. It's our brothers and sisters in underground house churches in Asia.

You know about them, gathering together in secret late at night to worship. First time I was in one particular country, by the sovereignty of God, met up with two house church leaders. They asked me if I would be willing to do some training with them in God's Word the next day.

I said sure, and so I met them the next day. I was thinking maybe a little hour of Bible study. I walk in and these leaders are sitting around in this underground closed location on the floor with their Bibles open, ready to study.

I don't remember where we started, but eight hours later we were still going strong. They're choking in the Word. We get late into the evening.

They say, we want to do this again tomorrow. I said, maybe tomorrow night? They said, no, early tomorrow morning. I said, how long will we go? Late tomorrow night.

So the next day, we began studying. I remember walking them through the book of Nehemiah. I was showing them the background of the book of Nehemiah and the history of the book of Nehemiah, showing them the importance of God's Word in the middle of God's people there in Nehemiah 8. And afterwards, we took a break, and I could tell they were talking about something, and they sent someone over to talk to me.

And they said, we have a question. I said, okay. They said, we have never heard all of that about the book of Nehemiah.

We didn't know any of that. We want to know if you would be willing to teach us all the books of the Old Testament like that. That's what I did.

I laughed. I said, that would take a long time. They said, we'll do it.

These are farmers. They left their fields completely unattended. And for the next week and a half, we walked from Genesis to Malachi.

I want you to imagine trying to teach the book of Song of Solomon to a group of Asian believers and just praying that they don't ask any questions. What does this mean? It doesn't matter. Move on.

Next book. Next book. We got next to the last day.

We had one day left. We finished up in Malachi. I got there the next morning.

I didn't know what to teach. We'd been through Habakkuk. What else is there to cover? I walk in, trying to think about what to teach.

I started teaching something, and about 30 minutes in, a guy in the back raised his hand, and he said, we've got a problem. I said, what's the problem? He said, you have given us all the books of the Old Testament, but you have not taught us all the books of the New Testament. I said, we've got one day.

He said, I know. I said, all right. For the next 11 hours, we walked from Matthew to Revelation.

They love the Word. It means something to them. They risk their lives for it.

Imagine going not to an all-day training in the Word. Imagine going to a worship service. They tell you to put a dark jacket on and dark pants, and you get into the back of a car, and they drive you into this village late at night.

You get out in the darkness of night, and an Asian believer meets you there at the door, and you go down this little path as you're following their footsteps with your hood over your head. You round the corner into this small room, nowhere near the size of this stage. Sixty believers crammed in on little stools, one little light bulb hanging in the middle, ready to worship and study the Word at the risk of their lives.

Now, we get that picture. They're sitting on the floor, one little light bulb. What can we do, Dave? Can we take up an offering? Can we send something to help them? Ladies and gentlemen, I'm here to tell you tonight that the Holy Spirit of God is doing just fine in that country without all of the resources we surround ourselves with.

Somewhere along the way, they have gotten the idea that the Word of God under the Spirit of God is enough to accomplish the mission of God, and they are right. They're right. We clap, but do we believe.

When I was preparing to go to the Sudan, where thousands and thousands of our brothers and sisters have been killed in persecution of genocidal proportions over the last 20 years, I received a Baptist state paper in the mail, and there were two articles on the front side by side. On the left, it said, First Baptist Church, fill in the blank, celebrates new \$23 million building. And this two- or three-page article talked

about all the great things in that building.

On the right, the headline was, Baptist Relief Helps Sudanese Refugees. It talked about how 350,000 refugees at that point in Sudan, Western Sudan, were dying of malnutrition and may not make it to the end of the year unless they get food or water. 350,000 of them.

And it got to the end, and it said, Baptists had raised money to send to the Sudanese refugees. I thought this was great until I read that last sentence in the article. Remember, on the left, First Baptist Church celebrates new \$23 million building.

On the right, Baptists have raised \$5,000 to send to refugees in Sudan. \$5,000 is not enough to get a plane into Sudan, much less one drop of water. This is not an indictment of that church, and it's not an indictment of church buildings.

It is an indictment of us. We have prioritized our comforts over the needs of the world around us, and we need to repent. We need to repent and risk it all, like our brothers and sisters in Cuba, India, China, the Middle East, Central Asia, who are giving their lives.

Why? Why should we risk everything? Why are our brothers and sisters risking everything? Don't miss verse 14. Four, here's why. Four, here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

We see this over and over again in the end of the book of Hebrews. They were longing for another country, a heavenly one. They did not count this world their home.

This is why we risk everything, because we are not living any longer for the comforts of the United States of America. We are living for another country. And we long to see His glory.

We want, we desire to see His glory more than we desire our own safety and our own lives and our own comforts. This is why we go. This is why we go to every corner and every inner city in the United States, because there are hundreds of millions of people in this country who right now are headed to a Christless eternity, and we long for them to see the glory of God.

This is why we go to Africa, because there are 3,000 tribes. They are animistic religions, completely devoid of God. And there is a God who is worthy of every single one of their glory.

It's why we go to Japan and Laos and Vietnam, because there are 350 million Buddhists in those countries who are following Buddha's rules and Buddha's regulations, and Buddha is not worthy of their glory. Jesus is worthy of their glory. It's why we go to India and Pakistan and Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and Nepal, because there are 950 million Hindus in those countries that are following more gods than you or I can even imagine, and there is only one God who is worthy of every single one of their glory, and His name is Jesus.

It's why we go to China and Laos and North Korea and Cuba, communist nations that have grown up in an atheistic philosophy that completely deny the existence of God, because there is a God, and He is worthy of all their glory. It's why we go to the tough places. It's why we go to the Middle East, because there are 1.3 billion Muslims who are fasting and giving alms and making holy pilgrimages to Mecca and praying five times a day to a false god, and Jesus has died on the cross, rose from the grave, ascended to the Father in heaven, and He alone is worthy of all their glory.

He is worthy. This is why we go. Mark it down.

Mark it down. Brothers and sisters, God will make His glory known, regardless of whether or not we risk everything. He does not need you, and He does not need me.

He does not need your church, and He doesn't need my church. He doesn't need this seminary or that seminary. He doesn't need this state convention or that state convention.

He does not need the North American Mission Board or the International Mission Board. The reality is the entire Southern Baptist Convention could drop dead and turn to dust, and God will still make a great name for Himself among the nations. The question we have with the glory of God in our hearts and the mammoth needs of a lost and dying world in front of us and a mission to make the glory of God known in that world is, are we going to die in our religion, or are we going to die in our devotion? God, may Your grace enable us to choose the latter.

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