

Battling Unbelief

by John Piper

This sermon focuses on living by faith in future grace, as highlighted in Matthew 6:24-34, emphasizing the call to trust in God's provision and care rather than being anxious about the future. It explores the importance of seeking God's kingdom first, trusting in His righteousness, and letting go of worries about tomorrow. The sermon delves into the concept of future grace, where believers are encouraged to rely on God's continuous provision and grace in every moment, ultimately leading to a transformed life of faith and trust in God's promises.

Scripture: Matthew 6:25, Matthew 6:31, 1 Peter 4:11, Philippians 1:20, Acts 17:25

Topics: "Living by Faith", "Trusting God's Provision"

Description

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Transcript

We've been memorizing the Sermon on the Mount as a church, and many of you have been doing that, a fight or verse or two or three each week. And it is providential, I think, that the most recent paragraph, which we finish memorizing this week, is just about as clear and powerful a passage on living by faith in future grace as in all the Bible. So let me see if I can do it for you.

I'm almost tempted to say with you, but I think if you tried to talk with me, I would get all mixed up and wouldn't be able to say it. It's Matthew 6, 24 to 34, maybe it's 25 to 34. Therefore, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will put on.

Is not life more than food in the body, more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than the birds? And which of you, by being anxious, could add one hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field.

They neither toil nor spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So don't be anxious, saying what will we eat or what will we drink or what will we wear? All the Gentiles seek after these things and your Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

So don't be anxious about tomorrow. Tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

This course is designed to unpack what it means to live by faith in future grace. He's gonna take care of the birds and he's gonna take care of you. He clothed the lilies, he's going to clothe you.

O you of little faith in future grace. It changes your life, absolutely changes your life when you learn to live by faith in future grace. That's the name of the course.

Let me pray that God would help us and then we'll take care of a few details and then launch into the substance. Father in heaven, I think every heart that's listening to me now wants to live by faith in future grace. It's what we're made for.

We're not made to be anxious people. We're made to rest in promises. We're made to bank our hope on all that you are for us in Jesus and all that you promise to be for us in Jesus.

And so come and work faith in future grace into the hearts of your people, I pray. This is a great miracle that we need to have performed on our minds and hearts and I ask that these hours together would bring that miracle about under your merciful care. Pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. This is a course called, let me put my overhead up here, we'll get the title exactly right. Living by Faith in Future Grace, the Pursuit of Holiness in Life and Ministry, a Seminar in Partial Fulfillment of Practical Theology, a course of the Bethlehem Institute.

It's an attempt to take this book and unpack it in five hours, two tonight and three tomorrow. There's the outline of the class. Why does it matter, the passions behind faith in future grace? Is it biblical, the foundations of sanctifying power? How does it work for holiness, the origins of radical love? How does it work against sin, lust, anxiety, covetousness, bitterness would be, I hope four sample sins we will look at tomorrow as to how faith in future grace severs the root of those sins.

So that's where we're going in the five hours that we have together. So let's go to question number one or unit number one, why does it matter? And if you don't have one of those books, that's okay, you can just follow along here. The passions behind faith in future grace.

I've got three of them. And for those of you who've been around a while, they'll be very familiar. And so I won't linger long over them.

They are fundamental to almost every seminar and every sermon that I lead or preach. So passion number one, a passion for God's supremacy. In other words, what I'm looking for is a way to live that accomplishes these three passions.

And I think living by faith in future grace, as I'm gonna try to unpack it, is the way that these three passions happen in a person's life. So first passion, a passion for God's supremacy. This is Bethlehem's mission

statement, as many of you know.

We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. Why? What's the root of our passion for His supremacy? God is infinitely committed to preserving and displaying His glory in all that He does from creation to redemption. And in this commitment, we see His zeal and love and satisfaction in His glory.

The person that opened my eyes to this biblical truth was Jonathan Edwards in his amazing book, *The Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. And so I brought along this book, *God's Passion for His Glory*, where I took that book and included it in here. Half of this book is that book right there that changed my life so profoundly in 1971.

And then I put my appreciation for it in the first part of this book. And so that's what this is. And if that sounds intriguing to you and you would like to see how that worked for me, then that's the easiest way to get ahold of that book, which was written 250 years ago.

He piles text on text, hundreds of them, to show that God exalts in the display of His glory for all that He does from beginning to end. Here's his conclusion. It appears that all that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God, which is the name by which the ultimate end of God's works is most commonly called in Scripture and seems most aptly to signify the thing.

In other words, everything God does, He does to the end that His glory might be seen and savored and displayed. That's the root of passion number one, our passion for God's supremacy. And here are just a few biblical texts.

Isaiah 48 and 9 to 11. For my namesake, God says, I defer my anger. For the sake of my praise, I restrain it for you that I may not cut you off.

Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver. I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it.

How should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. So one, two, three, four, five, six. Six hammer blows of self-exaltation.

For my sake, for my sake, for my sake, I do this for you. You find that kind of text all over the Bible. I think I'm gonna pass over this one.

It's long and I think it's plain from the others, but you can see that nature there declares the glory of God and God puts it forward in order that we might give Him glory. Let's just use this one, Romans 11.33. Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and how unfathomable His ways.

For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has become His counselor or who has given to Him that it might be paid back to Him for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things and I would put therefore to Him be glory forever and ever. God sees to it that everything is from Him. He sees to it that everything is through Him and He sees to it that everything is for His glory and therefore to Him be glory forever and ever.

When you find enough of those texts in the Bible, it turns your world upside and it creates a kind of Copernican revolution in your mind so that you no longer are at the center. God is at the center. You're not at the top.

God is at the top. He does everything for His glory and righteousness becomes defined then as what exalts and manifests the glory of God, not what treats me in a certain way. God's value is the most important value in the universe, not mine.

Hardly anybody believes that in America today which is why God is brought into such disrepute but I hope you will embrace it. Now my question was what kind of lifestyle fulfills this passion to live for the supremacy of God? Here are some preliminary texts to show that living by faith in future grace highlights and magnifies the glorious all-sufficiency of God and so expresses our passion for the supremacy of God in all things. By faith in His grace, His future grace, we get the help, He gets the glory.

Now let's see a few texts where that shows up. Acts 17.25 and Mark 10.45 are amazing texts because when I was first shown these, namely to the effect that they teach us not to serve God, I was just shocked. You're supposed to serve God and these texts tell you don't serve God in a certain way.

Acts 17.25, God is not served by human hands as though He needed anything since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things. So if you get this turned around and start serving God as though He needed you, then you will dishonor God as the source and ground of all things. But if you let this stand, don't serve Him, He serves you, then He will be magnified as a fountain, not as a needy trough where your buckets of effort get poured in.

Or Mark 10.45, for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, He did not come to be served, so don't do that, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. So now you got two texts that point out the danger of serving God, the danger of putting God in need of your service as though He needed anything. So how are we to think about our service so that God's supremacy is magnified rather than being compromised or belittled by His being put in a needy position of our service? And 1 Peter 4.11 gives a magnificent and wonderfully practical answer.

Whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Probably there is no text in 25 years that I have quoted in prayer or to my own mind bowed in prayer before walking into the sanctuary to preach than this one. I'm about to go in there, Lord, and I have to stand before these folks, then I'm expected to do something, I'm expected to serve You.

And I pray now that You would enable me to go in the strength that You supply so that when I'm done, it will have been manifest that the supply came from You and You will therefore get the glory. That is a miracle when that happens. It's a miracle in me and it's a miracle in the listeners.

And that's the Christian life. Learning to preach by faith in future grace. And let me clarify now, this may be as good a place as any, what I mean by future, when I say future grace.

Don't think merely He means the second coming. That is one use of it in 1 Peter 1.13. Hopefully in the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. So grace is coming someday when Jesus returns to all God's people as they are finally redeemed.

That's not merely what I have in mind. I have in mind the future that passes between now and now. About three seconds of future became past right there.

This future that I have in mind, this future grace is like a river flowing toward my life, which has always lived in my present. It's the only point where it's lived. It's not lived in the future, it's not lived in the past.

I live right here, I have a point where I live. And this river of the future is flowing over this little precipice called the present and accumulating in a reservoir called the past. And I can look up the river in the future called promises and I can look in the reservoir of the past called history.

And both are very crucial glances. But the one upstream is the one that makes so much difference in this. Let him who serves, here you go now, you're moving into the pulpit, you're moving into an act of service.

The cars are on their way to Baton Rouge as of one hour ago to aid in the Katrina victims. They're moving into service. How is their mind functioning? There's some anxiety there, I've talked to them.

They don't know what they're gonna find. How does their mind work? And they hear this, serve in the strength, let him who serves do so by the strength which God supplies. When does he supply it? Moment by moment by moment as the future cascades over the present into the past.

You live drinking future grace as it arrives in the moment. And you bank on it that it'll be here to help me finish this seminar in an hour and a half. And it'll be there to keep me out of hell at the judgment day.

And it'll be there in all the minutes in between. And it'll be there for eternity as more and more of God's beauty is revealed to me. We're talking endless resources of future grace arriving.

And the key to the Christian life that I'm trying to unpack here is learning how to live on that arriving grace so that it slays sin, slays anxiety, awakens radical risk-taking love. That's what we're after. But here the point is, look who gets the glory when you live like that so that in all things God may be glorified.

So we like to say at Bethlehem, the giver gets the glory. Therefore, never be a giver to God. Always be a getter from God so that God will always be seen as the fountain, the bread, the water, the treasure, the bank account.

And you will always feel like empty, needy, bankrupt, hungry, thirsty, and when He comes, satisfied. That's the way God gets glory. I just want to cultivate so much in this church that God will be glorified by our being satisfied in Him.

That's the way it happens. That's how texts point to God's supremacy. I think I'm gonna skip over those other texts and go to passion number two.

That's enough on passion number one, a passion for supremacy. Here's passion number two, a passion for joy, the whole concept of Christian hedonism that I've devoted my life to try to understand, explain, live, lead in at Bethlehem. Is it biblical to want to be happy, to have a passion for joy? Is it wrong when you're interviewed to say, if they say, what do you really want? I say, I want to be happy.

Is that a low, inferior answer? Not if you are happy in God and He satisfies you so that you are liberated from all the other lying happinesses in the world. Psalm 100, shout joyfully to the Lord. Shout joyfully to the Lord.

All of you, serve the Lord with gladness. Don't serve Him with sadness. Serve Him with gladness.

If you're serving Him with sadness, repent and then ask with the psalmist, restore to me the joy of my salvation. Psalm 32, be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart. Jesus' words, Matthew 5, rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Bank on what's coming to you. If the times are hard now, they will not always be hard. Death is gonna deliver you into paradise with endless displays of Christ's all-satisfying beauty.

My, oh my, I've got so many texts on this. I think I'm just gonna skip them all and jump to this question because that's what I talk about all the time, Christian hedonism, and this is familiar. Is passion one, my passion for God's supremacy, at odds with passion two, my passion for joy? And Edwards, this paragraph probably, I think, is the most important paragraph in Jonathan Edwards I ever read.

God, in seeking His glory, seeks the good of His creatures because the emanation of His glory implies the happiness of His creatures. And in communicating His fullness for them, He does it for Himself because their good, which He seeks, is so much in union and communion with Himself. God is their good.

Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory. God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks Himself, and in seeking Himself, that is, Himself diffused, He seeks their glory and happiness. There is another paragraph that is equally important to that one, but the point of that paragraph is that there is no conflict between God's pursuit of His glory and God's pursuit of my joy, or my pursuit of God's glory and my pursuit of my joy.

And the text that comes closest in the Bible to showing this, there may be others, and I just haven't seen them. This is the one I love to go to. This text points me to the truth that God is most glorified in me when I'm most satisfied in Him.

And if I want to pursue my joy and I pursue it in Him, then He gets the glory and I get the help. Paul said, it is my eager expectation, this is Philippians 1.20, eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed but with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored. So there's His goal, amen.

That's passion number one. Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death, for for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Now that's passion number two.

I want gain. I'm not eager to pass into eternity and lose. I want gain.

And the relationship is this. Let's just take the death half. I want Christ to be honored in my body by death for for me to die is gain.

The ground or explanation of how death honors Christ is that I experience death as gain. Does that make sense? Let me paraphrase it the way I see it. If I want in my dying for Christ to look magnificent in the hospital or the Coliseum, I must experience it as gain.

I lose my wife, at least temporarily. I lose my children. I don't see the grandchildren go up.

I had some plans for retirement. They will not happen. I lose everything this world has to offer and all I get in return is Christ and I call it gain.

And when I do that and have about me the appropriate affections and demeanor, he is honored.

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