

God's Passion for His Glory and His Love for You

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of Christ being central in our lives and institutions, distinguishing between being Christ-centered by external pressure versus being captivated by His intrinsic glory. It explores the biblical narrative from predestination to consummation, highlighting God's self-exalted motives and the ultimate purpose of glorifying Him. The message challenges the misconception of love as self-exaltation and presents a profound definition of love as laboring to enthrall others with what satisfies them most deeply forever, ultimately pointing to the centrality of Christ for true fulfillment and joy.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:5, Isaiah 43:6, Romans 3:25, Philippians 1:9, John 17:24

Topics: "Christ-Centered Living", "True Fulfillment in Christ"

Description

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Transcript

Father in heaven, I ask for your help now to use these next 30 minutes wisely and faithfully. Let what I say accord with the scriptures and would you fill me with your Holy Spirit and would you grant that the effect of our time together here would be that you become profoundly central in our hearts and in this institution and that you would be supreme in all things and that you would spread from this place for the joy of all peoples and this would all come through Jesus Christ for his great majesty and glory. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

I read in one of the brochures for this institution this sentence, home to 3,000 Christian students Cedarville is an accredited Christ-centered Baptist university. Christ-centered can mean two things and one I hope would be true here and the other I hope not. And so let me try to unpack with you what I think Christ-centered ought to mean here.

It might mean that he is made central by an alien constraint. That is, you choose to make Christ-central because somebody tells you to or because you can obtain some benefit which is not Christ but something else. That would be one way.

Here would be an illustration of that. If you saw a group of literature students huddled in a corner and all of them had copies of the novel Moby Dick and they didn't particularly like this novel but they happened to be in a class where the novel was assigned. Moby Dick would be central in that group.

Everybody's studying Moby Dick but it's not being constrained by the intrinsic value and beauty of Moby Dick. It's being constrained by this authority. This teacher assigned the book.

That's why everybody's made it central. So Moby Dick gets no glory from that. The alternative is that Christ is made central by his own intrinsic constraint.

He himself exerts an irresistible power, a captivating influence over your mind and over your heart by virtue of his absolute supremacy in wisdom and power and love and justice and beauty. Now the analogy there would not be a novel like Moby Dick with people gathered around because somebody told them they had to read it but rather the analogy would be the sun massive in glory and brilliance and brightness exerting a gravitational pull over billions of miles holding all the planets in place. That's the way it ought to be here.

That Jesus Christ stands forth with a massive, weighty, hot, blazing, beautiful glory that irresistibly draws all the planets of anthropology and history and physical education and mathematics and literature, the hard sciences, the social sciences, draws them all into an orbit with his majesty at the center, not because anybody's forcing you to do that, because he's constraining his own centrality by virtue of his supreme wisdom and love and power and justice and beauty over your minds and over your hearts. That's my prayer and my aim for this institution and for all of your hearts. Now, I think the best service that I can render therefore is to persuade you of something that may or may not be natural to your way of thinking, I don't know.

If this second kind of centrality is to be the centrality of Christ in your heart and in this institution, I think you're gonna have to be persuaded that Christ is not simply commanding Christ-centeredness, but Christ is being Christ-centered himself. Because if you are Christ-centered because Christ is man-centered, you are man-centered. And Christ-centeredness becomes a cloak for your own academic self-exaltation.

In other words, if you are not persuaded that Christ is radically Christ-centered, and you are not at the center of his life, he is at the center of his life, then your Christ-centeredness will very likely be a subtle cloak for your own self-centeredness. So I want to try to persuade you that biblically, Christ is the most Christ-centered person in the world. Or, God is the most God-centered person in the universe.

Nobody has a more passionate zeal for Jesus Christ than Jesus Christ has. Jesus Christ is not an idolater. He has no other gods before him but Christ.

And that's what I would like to persuade you of. And the way I'd like to go about it is to simply walk you through for a few minutes the major high points from eternity to eternity of redemptive history, observing God's own self-articulated motives in why he's doing what he's doing. So, he goes like this.

Predestination. Why did God do it? Ephesians 1.5. He predestined us to adoption through Jesus Christ to himself according to his own good pleasure to the praise of the glory of his grace. That's why he did it.

It is so crystal clear in verse 6, verse 12, verse 14 of Ephesians 1 that God's driving motive for predestining a people for himself is that they might praise his glorious grace. Therefore, there is a God-exalting, God-centered reason for why God predestines people for himself. Then he creates us.

Why? Isaiah 43.6. Bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone whom I created for my glory. There's not a doubt in my mind, there should be no doubt in yours why you were made. You were made to make God look good.

That's why you were made. You were not made to stand in front of a mirror and like what you see, which is what the gospel is in America. Let's raise kids, train kids, send them to colleges, and do whatever we can do to help them like what they see in the mirror as though heaven were a hall of mirrors where we like what we see.

It won't be. I don't think there'll be any mirrors in heaven. Christ will be everywhere.

Every mirror will become a window onto the glory of Christ, which is the way it ought to be now. You were made to make Jesus Christ look magnificent to every city in which you live. That's why you exist.

What about the incarnation? Behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be to all the people. For unto you this day is born in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you.

You'll find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with that angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, glory to God for the incarnation. Jesus Christ was born a baby to grow up and die on the cross.

And the angels, they cannot but say glory to God for the incarnation. Jesus Christ came into the world to make His Father look magnificent. God sent His Son for God's glory.

Why did He die? This is the fourth step in our pilgrimage through history. Why did Christ die? Romans 3.25, God put Christ forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith. This was to demonstrate God's righteousness because He had passed over former sins.

It was, I say, to demonstrate His righteousness that He might be both righteous and the One who justifies those who trust in Jesus. Twice He says it. Christ died to vindicate the righteousness of God because in passing over so many sins, it looked as though He didn't take His glory seriously.

Because you know what sin is from verse 23, right? Sin is a falling short of the glory of God. Sin is all about trampling on the glory of God. Sin by definition is any attitude, any thought, any deed that makes God look less valuable than what you're choosing.

That's what sin is. And therefore, if God passes over it, it looks as though He's saying my glory is not infinitely valuable. It is infinitely valuable and the way God vindicated His righteous allegiance to His glory is by killing His Son to show He doesn't sweep sins under the rug.

It's all about making God look magnificent in a world where sinners can be saved. Fourth, fifth, wherever we are, predestination, creation, incarnation. We just did propitiation, now sanctification.

Why are you being made holy? How do you pray for holiness? Here's the way Paul prayed for holiness, Philippians 1.9. This I pray that your love may abound still more and more with real knowledge and all discernment that you may be filled with the fruits of righteousness that come through Jesus Christ to the

glory and praise of God. Now just collapse all that long sentence down. God is being asked by Paul to bring the fruits of righteousness about to the glory of God.

God, make your people holy for your name. I just read this morning in my devotions, Romans 1.5. Through Him, we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations. The obedience of faith for the sake of the name.

Sanctification is all about making the name of God magnificent in this world. Finally, consummation. Why is He coming back? Why is Jesus coming back? Here's the reason that Paul gave in 2 Thessalonians 1.9. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord from the glorious power when He comes to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed.

Two things. He's coming back to be glorified in the saints. He's coming back to be marveled at in all who have believed.

Christ is coming back for Christ. Now those are six massive events in human history and all of them are explicitly stated in the Bible to be done by God for God. Therefore, my conclusion is from all over the Bible, the most passionate heart in the universe for God is God's heart.

The most God-centered being in the universe is God. And Jesus Christ is the most Christ-exalting, Christ-centered person there is. And I think in order to put that foundation underneath the statement that this institution exists to be Christ-centered, for that foundation to be there and thus to make this statement of purpose of this institution durable rather than a cloak for academic self-exaltation, I need to answer this objection.

That does not sound loving. I don't like people like that who go around exalting themselves. And you just made God out to be one colossal megalomaniac and so foreign from my Sunday school, John 3, 16, love for Jesus because of God's love for me.

I don't think I believe what you just said. I don't care how biblical it is. Well, I have a lot of sympathy for that response because I had it for many years.

And Michael Prowse who wrote this article in the London Financial Times has it. He wrote, Worship is an aspect of religion that I always found difficult to understand. Suppose we postulate an omnipotent being who for reasons inscrutable to us decided to create something other than himself.

Why should he expect us to worship him? We didn't ask to be created. Our lives are troubled and we know that human tyrants are puffed up with pride and crave adulation and homage. But a morally perfect God would surely have no character defects.

So why are all those people on their knees every Sunday? You want to join him in the objection? No, you don't. And here's the reason you feel that objection rising in your heart. You have all absorbed from the air you breathe in America a false definition of what it means to be loved.

You are operating by and large unless God has really gotten ahold of you and weaned you off of the man-centered air you breathe. You are operating by and large with this assumption. I feel loved when I am made much of.

We teach our parents to raise their kids that way. We teach our high school and junior high school teachers to teach their kids that way. Kids feel loved when you make much of them.

That's the gospel of self-esteem. It is the air we breathe. It just won't work when it comes to the biblical definition of God's love for us.

There are many people writing books and trying to persuade you that's exactly what the love of God is and make him the means of your self-exaltation. I'll test you. Do you feel more loved by God because he makes much of you or because he at the cost of his son's life enables you to enjoy making much of him forever? I'll ask you again.

Test your heart. Do you feel more loved by God because he makes much of you or because he has enabled you through regeneration and the empowering of the transforming Holy Spirit at the cost of the life of his son to enjoy making much of him forever? Which do you feel more loved by? And if it's the former, you will never be able to compute with the Bible. Let me give you a definition of love that just might help wean you off of that addiction to your own self-centeredness, making God the lackey of your value.

Here's a definition for you to try out. Love is laboring and suffering in order to enthrall the beloved with what will satisfy them most deeply forever. That's my definition of love.

Love is laboring, sacrificing, if necessary, dying to enthrall the beloved with what will satisfy them most deeply forever. Forever. Guess what that is? God and God alone.

Therefore, any form of pretended love that attempts to help people be enthralled with themselves is curse. Pour your lives out to enthrall people with God. Be the kind of person that makes God look glorious and you will be a loving person.

Let me take you to one text if you have a Bible. We have just a few minutes left. Would you go to John 17 with me? I am going to take for granted in these last three or four minutes that you believe that the high priestly prayer of Jesus is an act of love toward us.

This whole chapter is called the high priestly prayer. It's that long prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. For you, I say for you because of verse 20, I do not ask for these only, but for those who would believe in me through their word.

That's all of you, I hope, many of you anyway, are believing on Jesus through their word. Jesus is praying this for you 2,000 years before you existed. That's amazing.

Therefore, I want you to feel what it is to be loved in this chapter. How does Jesus love you in this prayer? Listen to the strange way He prays for you in the first five verses. When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come, glorify Your Son.

Now that's an odd way to pray for you. His first prayer is for His glory. Father, make me glorious again with You in heaven.

What a way to start a prayer for you. That the Son may glorify You since You have given Him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all You have given Him. And what is that life? Verse three, this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and me, Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

I want them to know me, I'm the center here. Verse four, I glorified You on earth having accomplished the work that You gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me.

What an amazing way to pray for you. Glorify me in Your own presence with the glory that I had before the world existed. What a megalomaniac.

Forgive me, Father. It ought to jar You to the foundations of Your being that Jesus prays that way. You dare not pray that way.

You would walk out of this room, and rightly so, if I began this service saying, oh God, may the main thing that happens here is that John Piper be exalted, lifted up, made much of, shown to be glorious. Amen, Lord, thank You for making so much of me. Give me more glory.

You would all walk out. You should. So why do we love Him? I'll tell you why.

Because love is to labor and suffer and die to enthrall the beloved with what will satisfy them most deeply forever. And Christ is stuck with being that. You're not that.

He is that. Christ is the one being in the universe whose self-exaltation is the most loving act. You may not imitate Him in this, or you blaspheme.

If He does not exalt Himself to be known and enjoyed forever, He is cruel. But if He is the all-satisfying bread of heaven and the all-satisfying living water, He must exalt Himself to be loving. And so I direct your attention to one last verse, and then I pray.

Verse 24, because here He makes the connection between what He just prayed for His own self-exaltation and you. Verse 24, Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am to see my glory. That is the most loving verse in the Bible and the most self-exalting of Jesus Christ.

Yes, Father, I want to be restored to my place of Trinitarian excellency at your right hand. And I want my people to come and watch me burn forever with glory. Because that alone will satisfy them most deeply forever, and that is love.

So, President Brown, and faculty, and administration, and students, and guests, do not begrudge God His God-centeredness. Do not begrudge our Christ His Christ-centeredness. It is the durability and authenticity of the mission statement of this school, and it is the ground of your everlasting joy.

If you stiff-arm Christ's Christ-centeredness, you abandon all hope of joy. Oh, Father, would you come now and apply this word from your word to these students' minds so that they behold in Jesus an intrinsic, captivating force that makes Himself central in mathematics and central in history and central in philosophy and central in music and central in physical education and central in sociology and anthropology and central in physics and chemistry and biology and central in dating and central in dreaming and central in the use of our computers. Oh, God, at every level, make Yourself supreme in this place, I pray in Jesus' name.

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