

How Is Joy the Root of Sacrificial Love

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of having a future joy in Christ that sustains sacrificial love for others in the present, breaking the power of selfishness. It explores how looking to Jesus as the ultimate joy can lead to overflowing joy in sufferings, a life of sacrificial love, and making Jesus known as the all-satisfying Savior.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1, Hebrews 10:32, Hebrews 11:24

Topics: "Future Joy in Christ", "Sacrificial Love"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray. Father, I need your help in order to be faithful to your word, in order to get under it, in order to understand it, in order to feel affections that are appropriate to it, in order to speak it with clarity and faithfulness. And we together are dependent on you in order to be changed by it so that Christ is magnified.

And that's our desire. So come, please, and help me and help us and I think it will become obvious, Father, as we move forward, why the sermon you gave me to speak some months ago doesn't need to be changed in view of Sam and Ann's trial. And I pray for their sake that these things would be true in their lives.

In Jesus' name, Amen. So how we're in your shoes right now, and a guest preacher showed up to stand in this very sacred place where Sam has been so faithful for all these years. I would want to say, so who are you? Who do you think you are to stand there where he has stood and has proclaimed the Word of God with such faithfulness? And you wouldn't mean what's your name, or where are you from, or what's your education? You would mean what are you committed to? What's your standard of truth? What's your authority? What do you mean to do here? What's your purpose here? That's what you would mean.

So I hope that is what you're asking and I'm gonna give you three answers to those questions so that you'll have your bearings like, okay, this is who he is. This is what he stands for. This is where he's going.

So number one, three statements. Number one, I come as one who is, as far as I know my own heart, completely in allegiance to and submitted to the Bible as God's infallible Word. I have no authority in myself.

If I see things that are really here and I can speak them faithfully so that you can see that they're really here, I speak with authority. If you don't see what I'm saying here, you shouldn't believe it just because I say it. Now that's my opinion for how you should listen to your pastor as well.

Now it's just a guest preacher, which raises the bar for you very high. Number two, my life mission statement. I've had various life mission statements over the years.

They've all basically said the same thing since I was 22. But in 1995, I crafted this one. I crafted it for myself and then the church said, well, that should be our mission statement.

It's on the walls at Bethlehem Baptist Church. I exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples, with an S, through Jesus Christ. That's my life mission statement.

So that's why I'm here, in order to God willing, by His Spirit and through His Word, make that happen. I'm not here willy-nilly. I'm on a mission in order to awaken more deeply in your lives a passion for the supremacy of God in all the areas of your life through Jesus Christ.

Number three, I am driven, and this will not be a surprise in this church because of what I know of Sam Storms, I am driven by a particular truth that governs so much of what I do. And the sentence is, or the truth is, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. And that is one of the most powerful truths that I have ever discovered.

And I hadn't, I mean, I had planned to say this anyway, but given Sam's situation, more and more, the older I get, I fasten on the end of that sentence this. Let me start over again. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him, comma, especially during times of suffering while we walk the path of love.

It's one thing to be glad in God when all's well. Mostly the world looks at happy Christians like that, and it makes no difference to them because everybody's happy when all's well. But if your satisfaction in God is so deeply rooted, He's so real, and His preciousness to you, and His beauty to you, and His worth to you, and His greatness to you has become your joy, your most deeply felt joy, then come what may, cancer or anything else, it can't be shaken.

You don't lose that joy. And when that happens, the world looks at that, and it makes God, Jesus, look more attractive to them because they wonder, you know, like it says in 1 Peter 3 15, Be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you. Well, when was the last time anybody ever asked you that? What's the reason for the hope that is in you? Because they can't see it if it looks like you're hoping in the world.

But if you're in suffering, and you maintain joyful faith, then it looks like you're hoping in something they don't get. So that little addition at the end of the sentence, especially when you are walking through suffering in the path of love, that's huge. And that's what this text is going to be about.

So those are my three statements, and now let's turn to Hebrews 12. So if you have a Bible, I really do want you to see things, not just hear them, because God's Word is the authority and not me. So Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 is where we're going to spend most of our time in this message, with a few

other texts from Hebrews drawn in to underline the point.

So here's the question that I think this text answers that I desperately want answered for in my life. How can John Piper, and how can you triumph over my selfishness, slay it, kill it, so that I can walk in the path of love in such a way as to make Jesus look great? How can that happen? Where does that come from? Because that's very counterintuitive. It's counter-human.

We're all selfish. We're born selfish, and we protect ourselves, and we exalt ourselves. We advance ourselves.

We nurture ourselves. We do everything we do, taking care of ourselves. We don't want anything intruding in here, threatening ourselves, and that's got to be killed.

And it's very unnatural for it to die. And this text is about how it dies, and I want it to die in me and in you. So let's read these two verses.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, we'll come back to that, talk about who they are. Let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run. So the main point of this text, I think, is let's run.

Run. That's the main point of the text. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Now comes how? Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him ran, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. So we're not going to talk about everything in this text at the same level of detail, but rather focus in on that phrase in verse 2, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. But I do want to get the rest of the text oriented so that this text doesn't just dangle without a context.

So chapter 11, you remember, is those stories from the Old Testament saints who by faith did this, and by faith did that, and by faith did this. And there's a lot of them, and they are, according to verse 4, still speaking. Abel, though he has died, still speaks.

All of them are speaking, and they're speaking because it's written down in chapter 11. They're speaking. So they come to the end of their lives, their lives are written, the witness of their faith goes on, and so when you get to verse 1 of chapter 12, I think that's who the witnesses are.

Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. So my picture is, since the issue is you run, you run your marathon, and looking to Jesus and the way he ran his marathon, and you got witnesses. So what are you supposed to think in that context? And I think of, here's the marathon race, and marathons are a modern invention, but that's old, that's as old as the Bible is.

Greeks ran marathons, they called them marathons, and they ran it, and the the Old Testament Saints finished it hundreds of years ago. They circled around, and they stood on the sidelines saying, you can do this! Finish this! You can do it! By faith we did it, you can do it! I think that's what the witness of chapter 11 is supposed to signify for us runners who are now facing the wind, and the hills, and the rain, and the sleet of our own life's marathon. Life is not a hundred-yard dash.

It is a long and hard marathon, and the witnesses are crying out, don't quit, you can make it! Now here's my modern-day paraphrase of verse 1, or you look and see if you see this. Verse 1 basically says, don't

run the marathon of your life with an overcoat on, and don't run the marathon of your life with illegal endurance-enhancing drugs in your veins. Do you see that in that verse? It says, let us lay aside every weight and sin, every weight and sin, and run.

So I think paraphrasing that means, don't be stupid and don't cheat. Right? Sin is cheating, like you took a shortcut and you cut five miles off the marathon, or you shut yourself up. That's too modern to really work back then, but they could cheat by taking shortcuts.

They knew what cheating was, that's sin. You break the rules, you're out. You don't get anything at the end of this race.

And weights, it's like being stupid, like putting, you know, I know we do exercise with weights on our ankles, but you don't run marathons with weights on your ankles, and you don't run marathons with an overcoat on. Don't be stupid! Now the reason, the reason I think the writer put both of those in is because maybe, maybe he had raised kids. I raised, with Noel, five children, four boys and a girl, and they're all grown, they're all married, all had kids.

Actually, one of them lost a kid, and so it's in heaven. And I remember as they grew up along the way, they would enter seasons of life in which they wanted to do things I disapproved of. And they would say, when I expressed my disapproval, Daddy, what's wrong with it? And thinking of this text here, I would say something like, that's the wrong question.

I just don't, I know, I get the question, but I want you to ask the question, how can I run the best race I can run? How can I be the best possible marathon runner? How can I get rid of every weight that would hinder me from being maximally prayerful, maximally holy, maximally powerful in my witness, maximally intense in my worship? Sons, don't, don't set the bar so low as to say, what's wrong with it? I think that's why this word weight is here. The Bible doesn't want us to think, how can I not cheat? That's just, I mean, that's so low. Of course, nobody cheats, but you want to win the game.

You want to do your very best. You don't want to just not cheat. I'm watching these preseason NFL games.

I tell you, those guys out there are not just thinking about, how can I not cheat? You want a spot on the team. So the text says, run. Get rid of all the sins you can, get rid of all the weights you can, and get on with maximizing your effectiveness in running this race.

And the question becomes, how can we run so as to maximize the glory of Christ and loving other people? Because that's what comes out in verse two. And verse two gives the answer of how you run. Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God.

So as you run, you're going to look to Jesus. And the reason that you're looking to Jesus is to see how he ran, among other reasons. But that's what he draws attention to.

How did Jesus run? How did he endure his marathon? How did he finish? And he finished by looking to the reward, by having a joy set in front of him that he wanted so bad, that it sustained him through his marathon. And his marathon was 33 years. And the last three hours of it, he was running with nails in his hands.

And nails in his feet. And a crown of thorns on his head. And he finished.

He went to the end, running like that. That, I think you would agree, was the greatest act of love that's ever been performed in the history of the world. So Jesus loved his own, and he loved them to the end, to the uttermost, he says.

And the question is, how did he do that? How did he do that? That's what the text is written to answer. It says he did it, in verse 2, for the joy he was sustained, he ran, he ran, endured the cross, endured the shame, for the joy that was set before him. So he was sustained in his death on the cross by the anticipated joy at the end of his marathon.

That's what it says. Now, I don't think that means that he did not taste any joy on this side of the grave. It says explicitly, for the joy that was set before him.

So on the other side of the grave, and the resurrection, he could see himself exalted at God's right hand, surrounded by a countless number of redeemed people that he purchased, glorifying his Father and his people, glorifying him. And that was a joyful prospect for him. However, pervasively, the New Testament says, rejoice now.

Rejoice in the Lord, and again I will say rejoice, Paul in Romans 5, rejoice now in hope. So how does that work? How does the present experience of joy relate to that future hoped for joy, which sustained Jesus in this text? Am I legitimized in saying, even though it says he was sustained by the joy that was set before him, I may interpret this to mean, and he tasted it now. Is that okay to say that, or is that reading into the text? Well, it might be, except, now see if you agree with me here.

Let's look at verse 1 of chapter 11. Verse 1 of chapter 11 says, faith is the substance of things hoped for. Now it might say in your version, evidence of things hoped for, or assurance of things hoped for.

The Greek word, hypostasis, three times used in Hebrews, one of them back in chapter 1, where it refers to the essence of Jesus in his relation to the Father. So we have to make a choice, which of those two meanings, assurance or essence or substance. And I'm taking it to mean, faith is the substance of what's hoped for.

Now what would that mean as Jesus looks into the future, and is sustained in the cross and in the shame, by the joy that is set before him. What would that mean? He's believing right now, he's trusting his Father. And this text says that trust is the substance of that joy.

So I think that means, at least, true believers always taste now the joy that they hope for in fullness later. It's going to be better. Believe me, it's going to be better.

In your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. It's quite fragmentary right now, and quite limited, but it's not unreal.

And it's not powerless. Oh, the power that it had in Jesus' life, especially as he came to the end. So my rationale, my exegetical warrant for arguing that verse 2, when it says, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross.

That's how he loved us. He loved us because of the joy set before him that he wanted so bad, he endured the cross, means or includes, yes, he tasted that now. So in Gethsemane, weeping his eyes out, sweating

blood, he could taste it.

He could taste it. It wasn't the kind of experience where there's a little raw, raw joy. But oh my goodness, how many of us who've lived a few decades know the raw, raw joy isn't the sweetest joy.

It's the joy in tears. It's the joy of 2 Corinthians 6, 10. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

You lose your loved one, and as you weep and weep and weep, you rejoice and you rejoice. They're with the Lord. I say this just because that was so true when my mother died.

Oh my goodness, it was sweet. And it was totally not supposed to happen at age 56. It was a car accident.

And so you've tasted what it is to weep and weep and weep. And in the weeping, not after, it's not sequential merely, it is simultaneous. In the weeping, you are tasting the sweetness of Christ.

And it is the sweetest kind of joy there is until we get to that last day. So, I believe I'm warranted in saying Christ loved us. The greatest act of love in the history of the world was performed by the taste of a hoped for joy, sustaining him in the moment of his suffering.

So, my summary then of what the marathon of the Christian life is, is this. Your life in Christ, your marathon, however long it is, is joy in Christ, or in God and all that God is for us in Christ, sustaining you through sacrifices of love that make Christ look so satisfying others want to go with you. That's what I think your life is about.

So now, to fill that out and underline it, to see and test it, to see if we're on the right track here in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews, let's look at two places in Hebrews that repeat the same understanding of how to run the marathon, namely by having a joy set before us that sustains us through the hardships of love. Chapter 10, verse 32 to 34. I love this passage because it is so crazy radical and fills me with longing for what I would like to be.

Recall the former days, this is Hebrews 10, verse 32, recall the former days when you were enlightened. I think that means when the light of God shone into your heart and you were born again. Recall the former days when you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.

Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully, that's the crazy word in this text, you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. Since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Oklahoma City and Minneapolis where I live desperately need to see that kind of Christian. That's a really, really crazy Christian. You see the situation, right? The gospel came, many believed, some went to jail.

It says that right at the beginning of verse 34. Some are in jail, the rest have to face a choice. Will we identify with them? Will we take food to them in the prison? Because if we do, we don't know what's going to happen to us and our kids.

A crisis of love, it's a crisis of love, compassion is called here. And they triumph over selfishness. This is what I want for you and me.

I want triumph over John Piper's inborn selfishness. Who at that moment would say, Wow, we just cannot go public with our faith in view of what just happened to them. Well, they did.

They triumphed over selfishness and they went to visit them in prison. That's what it says. It says verse 34, you had compassion on those in prison.

And it happened, it happened, the bad thing happened. The plundering of their property. Now, we don't know whether that's mob violence or official confiscation.

The verbs don't make clear. Either way, your goods have gone. They're burning them down or they're taking them away.

And this text says that as they were walking to the prison, maybe singing, let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also, the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still. Let's go to the prison. And they looked over their shoulder and their houses are on fire.

And what did they do according to this text? They rejoiced. That's what Minneapolis needs to see for us. Oklahoma needs to see it from you.

Because to rejoice in the good times is easy and doesn't impress anybody. To rejoice in that situation, crazy. Off the charts, otherworldly, inexplicable.

Except, except, to make Jesus look good, really, really good. So I ask you, and if this were a class, you would answer me. How did that happen? How did they become people like that? How did they get victory over their selfishness? And it says, since, I know I got a little thing in my basket in my room at the hotel that had lots of little Sam, Sam things.

And one of them was for, therefore, because. There it is. Since.

Sam, are we okay? Since you knew you had for yourselves a better possession and abiding one. Is that not exactly the same logic as chapter 12, verse 2, because he had a joy set before him, he could endure the cross? Because you've got for yourself a better possession and an abiding one out there beyond the grave, you can rejoice while they burn your house down? That's the logic. Oh my goodness, we need to be so radically Christian.

There's just so many, many churches in America that have made Christianity just almost nothing. It's a little religious paste on an ordinary American life. This is crazy and radical.

Let's look at one more text. Chapter 11, verse 24. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God.

I take that to mean something like Jesus choosing the cross. OK, so he's got a choice to be. I can stay in the palace as Pharaoh's daughter's adopted son and live a life of ease and security and luxury and pleasure the rest of my life.

Or I can go out and identify with those slaves and for the next 40 years have my life made miserable by rebellious people. As I try to lead them to the promised land. And the text says choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

And the word fleeting is really important, isn't it? Because there are pleasures in this life that are not of God. And they are pleasures. They are pleasures.

They would not be a temptation if they were not pleasures. And if you get rational, that is, if you're born again and you see things the way they are, you will regard an 80 year pleasure as ridiculously short. Because what is 80 years compared to 80 million ages of years? Nothing.

Vapor. So don't be tricked. I'll offer you pleasure.

It'll last your whole life, you see. So? I'm going to live forever in heaven or hell. I'm going to live with exquisite pleasure forever or suffer forever.

And you're trying to tempt me with an 80 year pleasure? Thank you anyway. I mean, let's get real, folks. Let's wake up.

The world is laughing up its sleeve. Satan is laughing up his sleeve at how many Christians he tricks into living for the pleasures of this world. So keep reading.

Then to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin, he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. Okay. You see what's coming.

But let's just stop right there. So he had these options in front of him. The reproach of the Messiah a life of love in service of God's people or the treasures of Egypt.

And he regards the reproach and the suffering as a treasure that is of more value and ultimately more joy than the treasures of Egypt. And how did he do that? Because that's what I want. I want to be that kind of person.

I want to get victory over my selfishness. A love affair with the treasures of Egypt called America. And his answer is, or the answer of the text is because or for, there you go, Sam.

It's one of your favorite words. For he was looking to the reward. So would you not agree with me that the logic of verse 26 for he was looking to the reward is the same as chapter 12, verse 2 because of the joy set before him and chapter 10, verse 34 because they had a better position and an abiding one.

So I just point out these three texts chapter 10, chapter 11, chapter 12 all of them arguing the way you run your marathon and break the power of selfishness in your life and become a radically loving person is by having a joy in front of you that is so great that it severs the root of all the fleeting pleasures of this world and frees you to love other people. Now I know that one of the big objections at least when I was trying to understand these things in my 20s and 30s especially was where I was forging my understanding of ethics and how I get motivated as a Christian. One of the biggest obstacles to this this way of understanding motivation as having a future joy out there that you want so bad you'll endure anything to get it.

One of the objections was look, if you tell me that you are loving me in order to get a joy for yourself I'll say you're not loving me you're loving you. That's the standard objection to Christian hedonism. God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him so seek to be satisfied in him above all things and do whatever you have to do to get that satisfaction and people will respond and say you seek your own satisfaction you're just using me, you're just using me.

You say you're loving me you're just using me. And realize that's not a problem for John Piper that's a problem for Hebrews. I'm not making up what I just said to you it's right there three times in the text Love the future that God has promised you so much in his presence that you will endure anything in the cause of love to get there.

That's in the Bible. Why isn't it selfishness? It's not selfishness for this reason. Selfishness is when you use other people to get what you want without any regard to their good.

That's my definition of selfishness. Using other people in order to get what you want without any regard to them and their desires and their needs and their loves and their wants and their good. That's not going on in any of these texts.

Nobody calls it selfishness when you pursue your joy in the path of loving another in order for them to go with you into that joy. So if somebody says to me you're just using me in order to get what you want I'm not just using you to get what I want I'm suffering on your behalf in the hope that you will go with me because when I get there if you're with me my joy is bigger. A shared joy is a double joy.

Paul didn't call his loved ones his glory and his joy for nothing. So I'm just going to say flat out to an unbeliever that I'm trying to lead to Christ if they say I know your theology, Papa. You're one of those Christian hedonists you can have more joy.

The problem with that sentence is the word just. I don't want you to come to Christ just so I can have more joy. I want you to come to Christ so that you will go with me into the joy that I hope for because I know that having you there with me will intensify my joy.

I'll see Christ reflected back to me in you. I want you there. I'm dying to get you there.

Jesus did. So that's my answer to the question is it selfish to pursue your joy in a life of sacrificial love for others? And I'm saying no because that life of sacrificial love for others is designed to take them with you. Jesus died for sinners.

He wasn't just dying for the joy that was set before him. He was dying to take millions of people with him to heaven. That is love.

That's not selfishness. So I conclude from Hebrews 12, 10, 11 the meaning of your marathon if you're a Christian is hoped for joy in Christ flowing back into the present as you taste it right now that taste of the hope for joy is sustaining your love, freeing you breaking the power of selfishness and the power of fleeting pleasures breaking that power and freeing you to lay your life down for other people so as to make Christ look so great they want to go with you on the marathon. That's what your life is about.

So I say get to know Jesus. I think Sam would be real happy if the last thing said to a guest preacher here who had come to mark the end of his 14 years and the beginning of his next season if that person ended like this. Bridgeway if you're going to look to Jesus according to verse 2 if you're going to look to Jesus that means get to know him.

Look at him. Get to know his vast wisdom which is greater than Solomon's. Get to know the greatness of his power upholding the universe.

Get to know his majesty over all the governments and armies of the world. Get to know the tenderness of his kindness as he welcomes children. Get to know his long patience as he welcomes penitent prodigals back into his fellowship.

Get to know his amazing suffering love even for his enemies and get to know his mercy which touches lepers when Peter's chopped it off. Get to know the mercy of Jesus. Get to know him until he is the joy set before you at the end of your marathon.

If that happens, if Jesus becomes the joy at the end of your marathon that sustains you all the way through every manner of affliction on the way there which includes cancer three things are going to happen. One, your joy even in the sufferings will overflow. Your joy even in sufferings will overflow.

Not sequentially, simultaneously. Second, your joy will sustain a life of sacrificial love. And third, that joy sustained love will make Jesus look like the all satisfying Savior that he is.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, these things are easy to say and impossible to experience without the power of the Holy Spirit moving in our lives to create in us new hearts, new affections, new loves. So I ask you to do your work now through Hebrews in the lives of these people.

Slay the selfishness of our lives. Awaken love for people and sustain it by a clear sense of the joy laid up for us in heaven. I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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