

How Much Is Jesus Worth?

by John Piper

Jesus Christ is precious, and our power to bear a compassionate and authentic witness to unbelievers about Him will increase in direct proportion to how precious He is to us.

Duration: 40:07

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:22 - 2:1, 1 Peter 2:4-5, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal story about his experience with sharing his faith with a neighbor. He emphasizes the importance of cultivating the love of Christ and the patience of God in our lives. The speaker encourages the audience to continue in prayer and meditation on the worth of Jesus, as it can lead to transformative experiences. He also highlights the significance of sharing the gospel with others and the need to approach it with love and sensitivity.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.desiringgod.org. This message this morning is found in 1 Peter 1, 22-2, 10. So why don't you turn there and follow along with me as I read.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding Word of God. For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the grass.

The grass withers and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord abides forever. That Word is the good news which was preached to you. So put away all malice and all guile and all insincerity and envy and all slander.

Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation. For you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. Come to Him, to that living stone rejected by men, but in God's sight chosen and precious.

And like living stones, be yourselves built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a

stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious. And he who believes in Him will not be put to shame.

To you, therefore, who believe, He is precious. But for those who do not believe, the very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner and a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall. For they stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I have two truths that I want to press home for you this morning and try to undergird from Scripture and from experience. The first one is this, to you who believe, Jesus Christ is precious. And the second one is this, your power to give an effective, compassionate witness to Jesus Christ to unbelievers will grow in direct proportion to how precious Jesus is to you in 1982.

Those are the two things I want to talk about this morning. The first one, of course, comes from our text, and I would invite you to look at 1 Peter 2. It comes from verse 7, a direct quote, to you who believe He is precious. What I'd like to do is put that in context by backing up with you all the way back to verse 18 of chapter 1. And we'll walk through the context, making some comments as we go, so that you can feel the full force of what that little phrase means when we get to it in chapter 2, verse 7. Verse 18, you know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.

In other words, without Christ, we are all victims of a massive hijack. We are being held hostage, as it were, by our own sin and by the power of Satan. And the place of our captivity, according to this text, is called futile ways.

Sounds sort of like Pilgrim's Progress. All that we did and experienced before Christ was futile. That is, it was like a bubble that we blew up and it just popped and left nothing there.

Life may have been full of busyness and building, but without Jesus, it was all signifying nothing and would have just ended in a whimper. But Christ then pays the ransom. The hostages are freed and come into life and light.

As 1 Peter 2, 24 puts it, He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. So now nothing that we do is insignificant or futile if it's done in His name. Then verse 20, He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.

Through Him you have confidence in God who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory so that your faith and your hope are in God. That is, what makes this Jesus so special, that His blood is precious enough to ransom all believers for God, is that before He was manifested, He lived from all eternity in the blessed fellowship of the Trinity. He is preexistent and eternal and glorious.

And after the crucifixion, God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him to His right hand, and He lives forever as the King in glory so that He is a glorious person who then humbled Himself to such a degree that His blood was so precious before God that God counted it valuable enough that we could be redeemed by it through relying on it. And God did all that so that if we hoped in Him, it was for our sakes

and we could have eternal life. Now, I think that's the truth referred to in verse 22 here.

If we obey this truth, then, that is, we put our hope and our faith in God's Christ, then our souls are purified, according to verse 22. That is, our sins are forgiven and we are weaned away from old desires which hindered earnest, genuine love of the brethren. That's why I think we are purified unto the love of the brethren.

Or to put it another way, it says in verse 23, we are born anew through this living and abiding word, this truth of verse 22, the gospel, as it's called in verse 25. The purification of the soul through faith and hope is a new birth because with it is imparted a new nature to the believer. The Holy Spirit comes in and He begins to shed abroad the character of God, a new nature, until gradually we are fully conformed to the image of His beloved Son, as it says in Romans 8.29. Therefore, conversion to Christ is not simply a decision to believe certain facts about God.

It's a new person being born, a new personality coming into existence through the imperishable word of God, the gospel. The gospel begets children of God when it meets with life-transforming faith. Therefore, I think, He begins in chapter 2, verse 1, to urge us to confirm our newness by putting away old desires like guile and hypocrisy and envy and slander, malice, and in their place we are to give the sign of life.

And the sign of new life is hunger, crying for hunger, desire for Christ. Like newborn babes, desire is the literal translation, desire the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up to salvation, for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. Conversion to Christ is caused by tasting His kindness and being completely convinced that there is no other beverage in all the world that could satisfy like this.

Conversion is getting hooked on the milk of God's kindness found in His word. If there can be a healthy baby who does not hunger for milk, then there can be a Christian who does not hunger or desire Christ. In verses 4 to 8, then, the metaphor shifts.

Not only is Christ milk, He is also a rock, the cornerstone, the precious rock which we are now not only to desire, but to come to as a result of that desire and have our lives individually and corporately built up on this rock into a church which is, to mix the metaphors, both a priesthood and a house, both a place where God dwells and a group of people who are ministering to the Lord by offering sacrifices of praise and obedience. Now, some, it says in the text further down, reject this rock and it becomes instead of a cornerstone, a stumbling stone, and they stumble over it to their doom. But verse 7 is the key verse for us.

To you who believe, He is precious. Now, notice what happens when you connect verse 4 and verse 7. In verse 4, Christ is chosen and precious in the sight of God. God regards this stone as very, very precious.

And in verse 7, therefore, He is precious to those who believe. In other words, believers are chips off the old block. What God chooses, we choose.

What God feels to be precious, we feel to be precious. Therefore, we see again that saving faith is not simply agreeing that certain facts about God or about Christ are true. That's not what saves, agreeing that certain things are true in your head.

Saving faith signifies a new nature, and the evidence of the new nature is that we desire Christ, to use the words of verse 2. Or we come to Him, we lean into Him, we go after Him, as it says in verses 4 and 5. Or He is cherished as precious, as it says in verse 7. And what Peter is doing when he says, To you who believe, He is precious, is distinguishing believers from unbelievers. He's not saying, well, there are a few

really spiritual Christians who feel that Jesus is precious and who really value the Lord. And another group who don't.

He is saying that the mark of a believer, the sign of life in the baby, is hunger for Jesus, desire for the Lord. And if you don't feel that preciousness, then I think it's very fitting to send your roots down, down into the blood of Jesus, the precious blood of Jesus, and draw up that life, and test whether or not your roots might just be down there curled around some old dry stones of tradition and custom and habit and expectations from other people. Is Christ an allurements to your affections? Or is Jesus just a duty to be performed? I think that's a really important question for every church attender to ask, because Glenn quoted something yesterday in the prayer meeting that he had heard the day before, that A.W. Tozer said 60% of the people probably in our churches don't know Christ.

Maybe that's because a text like this is true. I look out sometimes when we're singing and I wonder if people feel that Jesus is precious. How precious? How precious is Jesus? Where does He come in your scale of values, in your scale of desires? There was a parable Jesus told in which He defined for us or showed for us how valuable the kingdom of God really is.

Since Jesus is the King in the kingdom, and since He's the one who makes the kingdom valuable, He's the only reason you'd want to be there, the parable applies to Him as well. He said, the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up, and then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. Now notice well, it does not say that he begrudgingly sold all that he had.

Joyfully he sold everything that he had on this earth that he might have the treasure. Now the reason he could do that joyfully is because he knew how precious, how precious the treasure is. He knows that whatever he pays for that field, it's a steal.

No matter what he had to give up for it, it's a steal. Hudson Taylor said at the end of his life, I never made a sacrifice. Jesus is worth so much more than anything else in all the world that every loss we could endure to get more of Christ can be endured with joy and be felt as no ultimate loss at all.

Paul gave us a living example of this parable in Philippians 3, the text I'm sure you all know. Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. I count everything as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse in order that I might gain Christ. The gaining is reaching out there for Christ. The mark of a child of God is not perfection, Paul goes on to say.

Not that we have attained. The mark of a saint is hunger, desire, because we have tasted of the kindness of the Lord and we know it is most valuable. When a baby has life, he wants milk.

No Christian is satisfied with where he or she is. We are hungry and the more we taste, the hungrier we get. His value does not diminish with time and experience and exposure.

It increases higher and higher and more and more intense. And the better we know him, the more we love him. And when finally we get there and he presents us before the throne with rejoicing, you know what our song is going to be through all eternity.

Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. Worthy, worthy, worthy is going to be the word first and always to come out of our mouths when we're there. Your mouth is always filled, C.S. Lewis said.

Your mouth is always filled with praises for what you value most. Test yourselves. To you who believe, Jesus is precious.

Now that's the first thing I want to say. That's point number one. Here's the second one.

Your power to bear a compassionate and authentic witness to unbelievers about Jesus will increase in direct proportion to how precious Jesus is to you. Verse nine in our text, I think, implies this very clearly. He says that you who believe and feel this preciousness of Christ are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Now another good translation would be that you may declare his excellencies. The text says very explicitly the purpose, the reason, for which we have been chosen out of the world, made God's own special possession, is to be about the business of declaring, letting other people know how excellent God is. And the specific excellency I think he has in mind is how wonderful it is to pass from darkness into light, as the text says.

And so I take it to be the case that our primary mission in life is to so regard Jesus as precious that it is our constant vocation to be letting others know how precious he is, how excellent he is, how wonderful are his deeds. And I infer then from this text that the power of our witness will increase in direct proportion to how really precious he is to us in 1982. My prescription for how to be a fruitful church and bear a harvest in 1982 is very simple.

It's just love Jesus, lots and lots and lots, lots more than we do. Cultivate the love of Christ. Now, I want to tell you a story in conclusion.

It's a long story. The story is about an experience I had over the past 18 months. The reason for the story is to illustrate how the patience of God, continued prayer and meditation on the worth of Jesus caused me to do something last month I should have done a long time ago.

I have a neighbor named Alan. And he's a single man and in his forties I would guess. When Noel and I moved into the neighborhood over here, I met him probably the first or second day.

And in that conversation I asked if he went to church anywhere and he said no. And my response to that was, well, you're sure welcome to come to Bethlehem anytime. He knew I was the pastor there, I told him that.

And I dropped it. Now the reason I dropped it there, I mean, I assume when somebody says they don't go to church anywhere that they probably don't know Christ, because Christ moves his people into fellowship. The reason I didn't follow up on that, though I suspected he needed the Lord very much, is not because I had a very clear and wise strategy for reaching him in the next few weeks.

It's because I was inept and my faith was not vital and Christ was not very precious to me at that moment, communicating to me a love for this man. Now, a year goes by. During the year from the summer of 80 to the summer of 81, I saw him, I don't know how many times, but never in any extended conversation, just

passing along the way, Hi, Alan.

Hi, John. And that was it, pretty much, even though he lives right next door. And during the year, I could hardly ever go to prayer without him coming to mind.

I would go to God feeling low sometimes and say, God, I want power. I want blessing on my life. Is there anything standing between me and you? Is there? Every time.

I felt so guilty. And what happened was that I began to pray very fervently. And I asked the Lord to give me courage, most of all love, that I'd be authentic, really care so that when I spoke it was real.

And then the Lord began very patiently to move me step by step. Here was step number one. He caused me in the spring to start carrying this little booklet around, *Becoming a Christian* by John Stott.

I'd carry it in this pocket right here every day. And I vowed to the Lord, next time I see Alan, whip this out. And I'm going to talk to him about his faith.

I'm going to tell him, Alan, I care about you, and this book has been a help to me, and maybe you could read it, and we could talk about it. That was my tactic. The Lord laid that on my heart.

Okay. Summer, all the way through, up to July, end of July, and it's time to go on vacation. Never seen him.

Hadn't seen him for three months. I carry this thing the whole time. It's all shabby.

I got a new one out and put it in my pocket. Then, I think it was about the day before vacation, just before August, I had to get some grading done on the side of the house. And I had to get his permission, because it was going to go over into his yard, I thought.

And Karsten saw him outside one morning. Karsten comes running in. He's out there, Daddy.

He's out there. Okay. So I went out there.

Karsten and Benjamin on either side. This is great. And told him about the grading.

Is that okay? Oh, sure. Alan, I said, you remember last time we talked, you said you didn't go to church anywhere, and I assume that means you don't have much interest in Jesus either. And you probably know that I count him as my Lord, and I'm really concerned when people don't care about Jesus.

Listen, I've been carrying this book around for three months in hopes to give it to you so that maybe we could talk about what it means to trust Christ. Would you mind reading it? Sure, I'll read it. He was going to the Boundary Waters the next day.

He took it very courteously, thanked me for it, and it was the last I saw of him until Christmas. But I'm getting ahead of myself. After that, I was in constant prayer about how I should follow up on this.

You just can't. If you really care about somebody, you don't stick them with literature and run away. What do I do next, Lord? What's the next move? One Monday morning in the fall, I was praying back here in my study, and I couldn't get off my knees until I made a bow to the Lord.

And what I vowed was, I'll call Him tonight. Then I got up, and I told these interns that afternoon, guys, I'm going to call Him tonight, and I'm going to ask Him if we could talk about the book. And they prayed for me, and at 7.30 I called Him.

He wasn't home. I called Him again. He wasn't home.

He didn't come home all night. I felt good. I hadn't done that for a long time.

And that made me feel good that at least I'd done that. Incidentally, by the way, I missed one thing I wanted to stress. One of the things that made me feel so good about talking to Him just before I went on vacation was that Carsten and Benjamin were right there.

Oh, I tell you, I felt good that my boys watched me do that, reach out to a friend for Christ. Now, I didn't feel right to call Him the next night because the Lord started to lay on me another thing. Forget the phone.

Let's have a face-to-face. Go! Jesus went. Go! Quit this intermediate stuff and go if you care.

Now, the next thing that happened was this Christmas open house we had. That was the end of November. And He came.

That was the first time I'd seen Him since July. But the living room was just full of people. We sat on the floor together.

He felt so good to be there. He's just natural and nice. He's great.

He's not as scared of me. And that's good. But I didn't ask Him about the book fair because there's so many people around.

I don't know whether I should have or not, but I didn't. And He left. And I felt good that He had felt free to come.

And I felt like now I know He's not afraid of me and so we can be natural with each other. And then I did something that I recommend to everybody. Monday, December 14, I took a retreat day to get away all by myself and to pray.

Mainly I wanted to pray about messages in January. But I could not separate the messages of January from Ellen. For five hours I prayed and read the Bible.

And the Lord laid on me a great burden for last week's sermon and this week's sermon. And I suspected very strongly I couldn't preach it if I didn't follow through with Ellen. That's pressure for a preacher.

The fruitlessness of our witness at Bethlehem really weighed on me. And I knew the problem was as much with me as with any of you. And therefore, as a leader and a pastor, I knew some changes had to be made in me.

Sure, I witnessed every Sunday from this pulpit. And you may think, well, Piper, he's so fortunate he can just declare the Word all the time and feel great. And I talk to people about the Lord in my study every time they come there.

I hardly let anybody get out without the Gospel. That's easy. But when it comes to going to the people in the world where they are, like Jesus did, I am as hesitant as any of you.

So don't think any differently. We're all in it together. I knew something had to give in me.

Something had to snap. Some long ingrained fears had to be overcome if I was going to be any authentic minister. If I was going to keep going as pastor, I said to myself, I have to quit denying the Gospel through silence.

If I'm going to stand in this pulpit and say to you, love your neighbor, love your neighbor, love your neighbor, I had to quit contradicting that command by my own neglect. So, December 23rd rolled around. Fateful day.

Early before breakfast, I was praying downstairs. And the Lord did something He hasn't done for ever, in one sense, to me. I was wrestling, wanting the resolve, yet not wanting the resolve to get up off my knees and go knock on Alan McCook's door or call him and say I'm coming over.

And the Lord would not let me up until I vowed to do it. That night. Now, besides 18 months of prayer and faltering and little baby steps, the thing that brought me to that point was this question.

How much is Jesus worth? And I took one of these big yellow sheets of paper and I laid it beside me on the couch where I was kneeling. And I wrote for myself, how much is Jesus worth? At the top of the page. And then here's what I wrote in answer.

Jesus, I would rather have you as my Savior and leader than keep my health, have my sons and wife, or preserve my own life. You are more valuable to me than all I own, all the friendships I cherish, all the pastimes I enjoy, and all my plans for the future. And then I wrote, why? Question mark.

Why is He so valuable? And I wrote three answers. First, Jesus, I could have no peace with God without you. My conscience declares to me there is a God and I am an accountable sinner.

And without your death on the cross, Jesus, I would live daily in the misery of guilt. Second, Jesus, without you, my life would be like a ship without a rudder in a sea of time with no destination at all. I want meaning and significance to my life.

And I know if the Bible is true, only you can give that meaning because you give meaning to the whole universe. And then third, I wrote, without you, Jesus, eternity and death would be fearsome to me. But God sent you into the world so loving me that if I just believe on you, I need not perish but have eternal life.

And I put a text with each one of those reasons for why He is so valuable to me. And I jumped up off the floor and I said, I'm going to read that to Alan McCook today. And I went over and typed it on a piece of paper so I could give it to him.

I haven't typed for years. I typed on a piece of paper so I could give it to him. Before I left the room, I asked the Lord for a promise.

I need a promise, Lord, because I'm going to chicken out today. I'm going to chicken out if you don't give me a promise. And you know what he gave me? Chariots of Fire, the movie.

And the text, He who honors me, I will honor. It comes from 1 Samuel 2.30. And I looked up another one. If anyone serves me, Jesus said, the Father will honor him.

And I just paraphrased that for myself. I said, OK, if that's true, then it means He who aims in love to testify of my value, I will honor. And the Lord opened my eyes to see there is nothing in the world more valuable than to be honored by God.

And I fought the battle all day with that text. And it was great. At noontime, I went to Logos Bookstore and bought A New Testament and Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis.

And I wrote a message of hope and a prayer in each one of those. And I wrapped them up as a Christmas present. And that night, we had guests for supper.

And after supper, I asked these people, I told them what I was going to do, and asked them if they would pray for me while I go next door. And we prayed, and I called them. Hello, Alan? This is John Piper, your neighbor.

I've got a Christmas present for you. Can I bring it over? Sure. He's home.

Great. Victory number one. Now, I let them pray.

That was Tom and Julie and Dana and Carol Steinbach. And they were praying, and Carsten Benjamin, praying around the table. And I go over and knock on his door, and he lets me in.

We stand there in the living room, and the television is on. And I say, I've got a couple of books here I wanted to give you for Christmas. And there's something else I want to say, too.

Is it okay? Sure. I said, let me get this right here. You know from our conversations that Jesus is real important to me, and I know that you don't believe in Him the way I do.

And I've been praying for you every day for almost a year. And I just felt this morning like I had to come tell you why Jesus is so valuable to me. Because I'd like like crazy for you to believe in Him, too.

And I took out this piece of paper. And I was going to read it. But the television was on right there beside me.

And I just can't imagine the atmosphere. It was so rotten for sharing something so precious. So instead of reading it, I just held it.

I wrote these down. I'll leave them with you. And I paraphrased them.

I said, this is how important He is to me. And I said, these are the reasons. I gave them those three reasons in my own words.

And then I said, Al, have you ever desired that kind of a relationship? Have you ever wanted to know Jesus like that? And he said, turn off the television and sit down. That's great. Because Dana had just prayed, help him to turn off the TV.

I learned that when I came back. And we sat down on the couch and talked. And among the things that we said, he said, I read that book in the Boundary Waters.

And I heard some Christians singing a song in the Boundary Waters. And I said, that might be kind of nice to have faith like that. And I said, what hinders, what's the hindrance? Is it what it would cost, lifestyle, or is it intellectual problems? And he said, yeah, the latter.

And I said, well, one of these books, C.S. Lewis, was a tremendous help to me when I was a freshman in college. Overcoming lots of those hindrances. And I'd love to talk with you about that book and about those problems.

And he said, yeah, that would be great. Could we talk again? Sure. Thank me for my concern.

And after we talked about the squirrels in the attic, we left. Now, that's where the story stands today. That I pray for him every day.

Now, that's the first time I ever did that in my life. Go to a neighbor. I've talked to other people about the Lord.

A neighbor. The hardest people to witness to. And go into his house and say, I love Jesus.

It's so important to believe in Jesus. Can I tell you why it's important? And I did it. And I would do some things very differently.

Retrospect is always better. You learn by experience. Now, here's the lessons for us from that story.

Number one, God is patient. Don't give up on God. He's patient.

Eighteen months of guilt feelings and he did not abandon me. Two, if you continue in prayer, this is all you've got to do. I promise.

If you will not quit praying, the Lord will do the rest. That's all. He'll get you one way or the other.

All you need to do is pray. What we do is, we feel so guilty every time the name comes to mind, we put it out. We blank it out.

But if you don't blank it out and you keep praying, he'll do the rest. He'll make the way. And third, if you do what I did, take a piece of paper and write out, how much is Jesus worth? And put that in your own words.

And then say why. And write why. There's your testimony.

And it's yours. It's authentic. It doesn't have to come from any book.

And you'll have a testimony and you'll have the prayer support and our church will be on the way to harvest in 1982. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, Pastor for Preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission.

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