

Jesus Christ (Alive and With Us to the End)

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes the authority and presence of Jesus Christ, urging believers to trust and follow Him for salvation and eternal life.

Duration: 44:22

Topics: "The Crucifixion", "Atonement For Sin"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the crucifixion of Jesus and its significance. He emphasizes that the crucifixion was not an accident, but part of God's plan. He highlights the verse John 3:16, stating that God gave his only son as a sacrifice for the world. The speaker also mentions that the crucifixion was punishment for sin, but not Jesus' own sin. He concludes with an illustration of two women who were killed while serving Jesus in Cameroon, questioning whether their deaths are a tragedy.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org. The authority for Pastor John's remarks this morning come from the Gospel according to Matthew chapter 28, starting with verse 16. But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him. But some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Lord, that promise includes this message and this moment in this service.

Authority belongs to you now over this service, and you'll be with me as I try to unfold this truth from your word. And I cherish those two promises. If I had to lean on my own authority or if I had to wonder if you were here to help me, I would despair.

But you have spoken. All authority is yours and I'll be with you to the end of these services, the end of this day and the end of this age and forever. It's a very precious thing to me, as it is to hundreds of people in this room, to know that the Christ who is alive will be with us.

So now come and make yourself known. That's what I asked for at the beginning. It's what I asked for again, that you, Jesus Christ, would be known for who you really are, because when you're known for who you really are, we believe you.

It's only distortions that drive us away. It's only the clouds of sin and unbelief that keep us from seeing you. So come, please, and reveal yourself now, power.

In your name, I pray. Amen. Now, if these two or three things that Sam just read are true, if they're real, that Jesus is alive, that he has all authority in heaven and on earth, all authority, and if he is with us to the end of the age, then the most important thing in this room right now for every person is believing him and following him as Lord.

I just can't think of anything that would surpass the importance and the need and the cruciality of knowing this Christ, believing in him and following him. If this is true, it's a big if, I know, but think on it. Just think of the implications of that statement, all authority is mine.

He is risen now from the dead, triumphant over death, to an indestructible life, and he says all authority in heaven and all authority on the earth belongs to me, all authority over politics and government, over armies and military might, all authority over industry and business, NASDAQ and the Dow Jones, all authority over science and education, all research and discovery and universities and colleges and high schools and grade schools, all authority over entertainment and media, TV and radio and magazines and newspapers and internet and theater and art, all authority over sports and leisure, over wolves and blazers and every other possible playoff game that will be played 10,000 times in the next eight weeks, and all authority over natural phenomena like weather and floods and volcanoes and tornadoes and earthquakes and hurricanes and warming globally and ozone layers and all authority over planets and moons and stars and light and energy and motion and time and all authority over our lives, our diseases, our health, our success, our failures, our death, he just takes your breath away, that all authority belongs to this Jesus, and if that's true and if he comes to you alive with that authority this morning and says, as he does in verse 20, I will be with you to the end of the age, when you put those two things together, all authority is his, I'll be with you, it doesn't get any better, nothing could be more important in this room right now than for you and me to believe that and follow this Lord. And so I'm praying, oh Lord, through my words, through this orchestra, through the choir, through the prayers, through the word read, through the worship, stand forth and make yourself known for who you really are, just be known, not for what I want to make you or what anybody else thinks you are, but for who you really are, that's what I'm praying, because I think if you saw him for who he is, you would marvel and believe. I've tried, I've tried this week to think of a greater event in history than the resurrection of Jesus from the dead like this, and I can't think of one except maybe one, namely what happened three days earlier when he died, that might be greater, the death of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus might be greater than the resurrection of Jesus, I don't know which is the greatest, and I'm glad that I don't have to choose, because if I had to choose, they would not be valid, the death without the resurrection wouldn't mean anything, the resurrection, had he not died, would be impossible, can't raise a non-dead person, and therefore both of them come together as a glorious moment in human history, and those are the two events that I want to linger over with you this morning.

I want to just say a few words about the crucifixion, and I want to say a few words about the resurrection, so that you will see him in his dying, and see him in his rising, and know who he really is, and then, God willing, by his spirit, you'll feel your heart drawn out to him, and embrace him as your own Lord and Savior. So here we are in Matthew 28, and I'm going to back up earlier than where Sam started reading, Mary

Magdalene and the other women are there, blessed their hearts in courage and love to be there, risky though it was, and an angel in verse 3 is like lightning in the way he appears to them, and he says in verse 5 to Mary, the angel said to the women, do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. That's the phrase I want to linger over first.

He was crucified. Now, what can I say from the Bible about the crucifixion of Jesus that will set us up to properly understand and feel the force of his resurrection? I want to say five brief things. Number one, the crucifixion of Jesus was public.

That's important because it was not secret, and rumored, and therefore maybe mythological. It was public. There were people milling all around as he suffered and breathed his last.

The secular rulers, the religious rulers, they were all over the place. This was a public event. Tacitus, the Roman historian who was born in 55 AD, that's what, 20 years or so after Jesus died, had to figure out for himself where all these Christians came from at the end of the first century.

And so doing his historian work, he wrote his annals about the Roman empire, and he has this little paragraph in section 1554. He wrote, Christus, from whom they took their name, had been put to death as a punishment during the reign of Tiberius. It's a Roman emperor.

At the hand of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, so there's a governor, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for a moment, again broke out, not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome. So here's an unbeliever and a historian who rejects Christianity outright, writing about just the simple fact that I'm making. This is a public event.

Everybody knew Jesus lived, died, was crucified and buried. Everybody knew that. It's public.

The second thing I want to say about this crucifixion is that it was painful. I did a little more review and study this year. I always try to do this when Good Friday and Easter roll around just to let myself feel the force of Good Friday and Easter.

So let me read what I read from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia about the nature of crucifixion. The punishment was meted out for such crimes as treason, desertion in the face of the enemy, robbery, piracy, assassination, sedition. Among the Romans, crucifixion was preceded by scourging, undoubtedly to hasten the impending death.

The victim then bore his own cross, or at least the upright beam to the place of execution. The number of nails used seems to have been indeterminate. A tablet.

On which the feet rested or on which the body was partly supported seems to have been a part of the cross to keep the wounds from tearing through the transfixed members, according to Irenaeus against heresies. The suffering of death by crucifixion was intense, especially in hot climates. The swelling around the rough nails and torn, lacerated tendons and nerves caused excruciating agony.

The arteries of the head and stomach were surcharged with blood and terrific, throbbing headache ensued. The mind was confused and filled with anxiety and dread foreboding. The victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths.

The suffering was so frightful that Josephus wrote, quote, even among the raging passions of war, pity was sometimes excited. Unquote, the length of this agony was wholly determined by the constitution of the victim. But death rarely ensued before 36 hours had elapsed.

Death was sometimes hastened by the breaking of the legs of the victims and a hard blow delivered under the armpit before crucifixion. *Crura fracta* was a well-known Roman term, according to Cicero. The sudden death of Christ evidently was a matter of astonishment.

Shouldn't surprise us then when we read about loud cries from Jesus in the New Testament. Sometimes we romanticize this as though he had some kind of stoical control and he spoke these seven wonderful words from the cross. It wasn't that way.

It wasn't that way. There was screaming until his voice was raw, perhaps, and then these loud cries. Thirdly, not only was it public and painful, it was planned by God.

We need to see this lest we think it was some historical fluke, some mere effect of human injustice. It wasn't that way. Jesus, you remember, on the way to the cross said, the son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him.

Jesus said that they're going to kill me. So he knew it. How did he know it? Because his father and he had talked it over in eternity and agreed to make it happen.

And the father sends the son into the world, clothed in human flesh for one reason. Humans can die. Gods can't.

Acts 427, Luke writes. Truly in this city, there were gathered together against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, all these people who were involved to do, it says, what your hand and your purpose predestined to occur. This is God's plan all over the New Testament.

I mean, what verse did you learn as a child? Maybe the only verse, you know, for God so loved the world that he what? That's enough. Did he? He gave it. He gave it.

This is no accident. According to Romans 832, God did not spare his only son, but delivered him up for his own. I thought Judas did that.

God delivered, delivered, handed over. It's the same word, handed over his son. So it was planned, was planned.

Here's the fourth thing I want to say about the crucifixion. It was punishment for sin, but not his own. It was punishment for sin, but not his own.

Listen to Galatians 1, 4 from the New Testament. Christ gave himself for our sins, according to the will of God. For our sins, it was planned and executed.

First Corinthians 15, 3. Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures inspired by God. So God planned it in public, painfully as a punishment, but not for his sins, for our sins. And if that weren't enough to win us, to draw us to himself in love, he does something amazing 700 years before it happens.

He describes it for us as a way of wooing us to him by saying, could I increase my believability by telling you what's going to happen 700 years before it happens and describe it in beautiful detail in the Jewish scriptures? I'll read it for you. This is Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah, chapter 53. He was wounded for our transgressions, not his own.

He was bruised for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. That's 700 years before it happened. As if God would reach down to you right now and say, can I help you? Can I help you believe? Can I help overcome obstacles to embracing the beauty and the truth of what happened at Calvary 2000 years ago by describing it 2700 years ago? I would like to help you this morning.

It was punishment, but not for his own sins for ours. Now, here's the last thing I want to say about the crucifixion. It was and is precious.

We sang there is a redeemer, Jesus, God's own son, precious lamb of God, Messiah, holy one. That word precious is not my word. It's not the songwriter's word.

You know whose word it is? It's Peter's word. Peter. Remember what he did? I never knew him.

I don't know who you're talking about. Scared to death, he denies his master in his greatest hour of need. And Jesus forgives him.

And then he writes a letter. Let me read you a couple of sentences from Peter's letter. You were ransomed from the feudal ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things like silver and gold, mere silver, mere gold.

But you were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ. And then he says later to you, therefore, who believe he is precious. If you saw him, I promise you, if you saw him this morning for who he really is, he would be precious to you.

If he's not precious to you, you don't see. That's why we're having this service. I want you to just see him, just see him, because if you saw him in his crucifixion and now I'm going to turn toward the resurrection, if you saw him in his resurrection, he'd be precious to you because he came as a ransom.

Remember what he said? Mark 10, 45, the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. When he died, his punishment was a ransom by which we get freed from punishment and wrath and hell and sin and guilt and condemnation and Satan, everything that holds us from life and joy. We get ransomed from it because he paid such an infinitely precious price.

And so I pray, oh, God, make your son precious in this room to everybody before we're done. So now let's turn finally to the resurrection. He wouldn't be precious if he were dead.

And you might say, oh, yes, he would. My mother's still precious to me and she's dead. Mine is.

Is? I wonder, is it the memory that's precious? Or if you believe she's alive? Yes. But if there is death and no more, all that can be precious about Jesus is a memory. If he's gone, if he's not alive, all that's precious about Jesus is a memory.

And I'll tell you, the New Testament and Christianity is not about a memory. It's about a living Christ who today is seated at the right hand of God, who's risen from the dead, and he's not merely a memory. So let's talk for just a moment about the resurrection.

Oh, if we had time, if we had time to do five piece with the resurrection, here's what they would be. But I don't have time, but I'll just tell you what they would be if I had time. It's public.

He appeared before a lot of people, 500 at once. Secondly, it's physical. He did not rise a ghost.

He had to persuade his disciples. I'm not a ghost. He held out his hands, touch me, give me a piece of fish.

You got a piece of fish. I'll eat fish. I'm not a ghost.

He has a risen new body. And do not think, listen, you may have misconceptions about Christianity and how it all ends up someday, like we die. And then there's ghosts, little spirits with no bodies flying around all over universe somehow.

That's not the way it's going to be. When Jesus appears, we will be raised. We will be changed in the twinkling of an eye.

This mortal will put on immortality. This perishable will put on the imperishable, and we should be changed. And there'll be a new heaven and a new earth.

And if you love this sunshine, if you love like I love those little teeny white flowers on the hedge in my backyard with little green leaves are just poking through it. And the green is now competing with the white. And you love that.

And when you start dying, you think I'm going to lose that. You won't. If you believe in Jesus, because in the new heavens, in the new earth, Jesus will take everything good about this world and he will blow it up about 10,000 fold into things we never dreamed could be so good.

You will have a new body. It won't be the things you're disappointed with in your present body. It will be new and it will be glorious.

In fact, the Bible says you will shine like the sun in the kingdom of your father, the sun, you walk out of here and look up at that sun and remember that sentence. One day, if I'm a Christian, if I believe in this Jesus, if I'm a disciple following him, I'm going to shine like the sun cripple, though I be ugly, though I be fat or skinny, though I be, I'm going to shine like the sun in the kingdom of my father someday. It really makes a difference that it's physical.

And it's productive. He's the first fruits of all of those who are going to rise in him, but those are not the three piece I want to talk about. I just got carried away for a minute.

The really, the two peas I want to talk about in the resurrection are it is powerful and it is personal. So let's just close with these two. The reason I choose to linger over these two, just a little longer is because of verse 18 and 20.

So you can see the idea of powerful in verse 18 and can see the idea of personal in verse 20. Can't you verse 18, let's take powerful first. Jesus says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

That's power. All authority has been given to me over and over again. In the new Testament, we read things like this.

Peter says he has been raised and exalted to the right hand of God. Stephen, when he was being stoned, looked into heaven and God gave him a glimpse. And it says, I see heaven opened and the son of man standing at the right hand of the throne of God.

Paul says Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Hebrews says he endured the cross, despising the shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Why? Why does it say over and over again, Jesus was exalted to sit at the right hand of the throne of God? Because that's the place of authority.

That's the place of power. Authority over all politics, government, industry, business, science, education, entertainment, media, weather, stars, light, energy, life, death, you name it. He has authority over it and he cannot die.

And he's with you to the end if you trust him. And therefore you in him cannot lose. It is suicide to oppose or neglect Jesus Christ.

You can't win by opposing an indestructible foe. You can't win if you oppose an indestructible foe. And Jesus has all authority and therefore to neglect him, to resist him, to refuse him, not to follow him is suicide forever.

Don't do that. Don't do that. Now, one more point.

It's powerful and I know that the power of it creates a problem. And I don't want to talk about the problem. I want to give you an alternative way of looking at it that just might consume the problem.

Here's the problem. Thoughtful people right now are thinking it in this room. If he has all authority, like you just described, he has all authority.

Why is this world in such a mess or make it personal? If he has authority, like you says he had authority, like you said he had authority over life and death. Why my little girl died? Why'd my wife die? Why'd my husband die? Why did, why, why, why? Now that's a good question. That's not a bad question and it deserves lots of answers and there are lots of answers in the Bible.

But here's what I want to do. Instead of giving those answers, if you want to hear more of those answers, you come back for some classes here at Bethlehem sometime. But here's what I want to do.

I want to suggest that when Jesus said this, all authority in heaven and on earth is mine, he didn't mean first for these 11 to say, Hey, that's a theological problem. That's not what he expected to happen there. Rather putting it together with, and I'll be with you to the end.

What he meant to happen was you are now mega problem solvers. Because if I have all authority and I am with you to the end, then you can now be unstoppable in your loving of people, in your sacrifice, in your risk-taking, in your laying down of your life in this world to overcome problems and be part of the solution and not part of the problem. I think that's the way he meant it to be heard and understood.

Because when he, he spoke the first one, he put a little thing called the great commission in there. Go make disciples of all nations. And he put a second half in there, go and tell them to do everything I've taught you to do.

And what's the main thing he taught us to do answer, love our enemies, love God and love your enemy. Now here's the closing question. If that's one of the biggest problems in the world, if man's inhumanity to man is one of the biggest problems, not the only one, but one of the biggest ones.

And I now commission you that I have all authority over all things. And I will be with you as your powerful lover, helper, friend, savior, Lord, go and do what I taught you to do. I think that's the key to becoming the kind of person that almost everybody in this room wants to be.

Because deep down, there's nobody in this room who's cherishing the thought, Oh, what I really want to be all my life so that I can think I've become it at the deathbed is selfish. I really want to be selfish boy. If I could be more selfish than anybody, I would love to be selfish so that when I get ready to die, I can dream about how selfish I've been all my life.

Nobody in this room is feeling that right now. You may come close because of how deceitful sin is. But I said in your best moments, you know, that's not what you want to be.

What you really want to be is big hearted. You want to have something inside of you that is so capacious. It's just so stretching.

It's so full. It just gets out and, and gets around others and does more good than you could ever do harm. That's, that's the dream and the best moments of every human being.

And sin distorts it all over the place. So what's the solution. I want to give you a closing quiz or illustration and how you answer it is up to you, but the illustration will make plain what the, what this solution is to becoming the kind of people Jesus is calling you to be.

And I think you want to be in your deepest soul. Here's illustration number one. I read in world magazine this week that three children wandered in Bosnia into a mine field where their landmines and got blown up and killed three children.

One of them was 11 years old and she didn't die right away. She called for help for hours and nobody would go get her. Nobody would go get her.

Why it's a minefield. Would you have gone to get her? Come on now. Don't check out here and think about the blazers and the wolves for a minute.

Just ask yourself the question, would you have gone to get her? I don't know. When I read that, I put the magazine down. I said, Lord, what I want more than anything in the world is to be the kind of person who would go to get her.

That's what I know for sure. I want to be that kind of person. And then the question is, how do you become the kind of person? And here's the biblical answer from our text.

All authority over landmine locations and footfalls belong to Jesus. And I will be with you to the end. That's the only answer I know.

If you go out of here without Jesus and the confidence that all authority belongs to Jesus and that he's with you to the end, you won't go probably. But if you walk out of here saying, really, all authority over landmines, all authority over my feet and where they fall, and you'll be with me whether I die or whether I live to the end. Then you might go.

Oh, I hope you'd go. You would go if you believe those two things. And you heard Jesus.

My command is that you love your enemy, that you love your neighbor as you love yourself. If you were there, would you want somebody to come? If your daughter were there, would you want somebody to come love your neighbor as you love yourself? How are you going to obey that if you don't have a Christ who governs footfalls in landmines and is with you to the end? And I'm not promising you that you would get there. That's not in the Bible.

What I'm promising you is he has authority over whether you get there or not. And if you don't get there, you go home and you'll go home gladly. Oh, what a good thing.

Just think of all those people who didn't go and what they're sleeping with now. When you'd be home, happy, and your relatives would write books about you, you can't lose when you believe this Christ and when you obey him. Here's my closing illustration.

On Wednesday, this week, Ruby Eliason, over 80, and Laura Edwards, 78, were killed in Cameroon. I smile. You see me smiling? I'm smiling.

Why am I smiling? I asked Abraham yesterday over lunch, is this a tragedy? Let me tell you who these women are before you answer that question. Ruby Eliason, over 80, served the poor, the diseased and the lost around the world and in Cameroon, especially, all her life, medically. Laura Edwards was a missionary in India for a long time, came back here, practiced medicine as a doctor here in the Twin Cities.

And now in retirement, we're talking retirement, what, 13 years after, 65, she's there alongside the 80-year-old, the 78-year-old serving Jesus and the poor and the diseased and the lost in Cameroon. And the car goes off a cliff under the authority of Jesus. And I ask Abraham, is this a tragedy? And we agreed, yes and no, which is the answer to most of the questions I ask.

Yes, every death is in one sense a tragedy. There are people who will miss them, love them. But then we began the conversation in earnest.

And I said, you know, there are hundreds of thousands of 70 and 80-year-old people spending all their time in America in relative health with one aimless, empty leisure day after the other. And that's a tragedy. That's a tragedy.

But I ask Abraham, is it a tragedy when an 80-year-old and a 70-year-old woman, when they could be resting in northern Minnesota somewhere with everybody's approval after a faithful service, have gone under the authority of King Jesus to bless the poor and the hungry and the diseased and the lost in Cameroon, in the very midst and act of their love along that treacherous road between dew and bim, and in the very moment of love, instead of dwindling away in a painful disease over an Augustana home, or instead of protracted years of an oppressive sense of uselessness, are taken immediately into heaven? Is that a tragedy? And I answer, it is not a tragedy. It is a glory. It is a glory.

And I say rather, O Christ, O living Christ, give me such a life, such a ministry, and such a death. Give me such a death and let no one weep, but glory. These are two women nobody should weep over except that we will miss them, because they have gotten their reward in a way all of us, oh I pray all of us, would want to get it.

So I'm done. And the point is, Jesus came into the world, he died for sinners, he rose again in order to make people like that, who live forever and who have lives of significance now, he came to make you like that. And how do you become like that? You look at the promise, all authority is mine.

You look at the promise, I'll be with you to the end. You look at the death, he died for my sins, and you take all that and you say, yes, that's mine now. I believe it, I embrace it.

Sinner though I be, I receive the forgiveness, I receive the power, I receive the presence and the personal love and fellowship of I will be with you, and I count myself to be his. And we want to serve everybody in this room, members and regular attenders and visitors. And why don't you take this out of your worship folder? We concocted this so that we could serve you better.

And let me show you how very clearly everybody in this room, regular Bethlehem folks, regular attenders, visitors, we would like everybody to turn one of these in in a moment. And the reason is because there's something on here for everybody. We will pray for all these prayer requests.

You see that up at the top. How may we pray for you, pray for you? And you say, really, you're going to pray for 2000 prayer requests. And the answer is yes, we'll assemble 40 people or so on Tuesday afternoon.

They're already there and we will pray over every one of these. So we'll pray for you. So somebody will have a prayer request.

And then the next one is I'm interested in taking part in a five week discussion group here at Bethlehem about the Christian faith called Quest for Joy. If you'd like to be in a class for five weeks to learn more about the pursuit of joy along the lines I've been describing it, check that the next one. I would like more guidance in knowing and following Christ.

We'd love to send you some material. The next one is perhaps the most precious of all to me and would bless my heart the most. This service.

And I mean, God and Jesus Christ and the spirit through this service has helped me see who Jesus Christ really is. And today I put my trust, my faith in him. If that's happening, has happened in this service, would you check that? Because I would be so encouraged.

Nothing would make my life more than to know that God has used this service and this word to bring someone to saving faith in Jesus. So let's just bow as we fill them out in prayer. Father, I thank you so much for Jesus.

I thank you that he has all authority in heaven and on earth. And I thank you for that personal word that I'll be with you to the end of the age, forever, always. And that when these two come together, we can walk into minefields in the cause of love.

We can go to Cameroon in the cause of love and we can cross the street in the cause of love. We can do whatever it takes because you are with us. And so in these closing moments, we just want to celebrate Christ.

So come and help us as we sing in Jesus name. I pray. Amen.

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