

Jesus Is Precious Because Through Him We Become Authentic

by John Piper

Jesus is precious because He gives authenticity at two levels: harmony between our inner self and outer life, and harmony between our inner self and God's purpose.

Duration: 30:01

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 14:1-9

Topics: "Preciousness Of Jesus"

Description

In this sermon series, the speaker emphasizes the preciousness of Jesus and the importance of expressing this value to others. The first purpose of the series is to fill believers' hearts with the preciousness of Christ, as what is in the heart will be spoken. The second purpose is to provide evidence that persuades unbelievers to see Jesus as precious and worthy of their faith. The speaker highlights that Jesus solves the problem of guilt and offers eternal life, addressing the universal quest for identity and purpose. The sermon encourages believers to live for the Lord and to be fully convinced in their faith.

Transcript

The morning text comes from the book of Romans, Romans 14, 1 through 9. As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats, for God has welcomed him.

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls, and he will be upheld, for the master is able to make him stand. One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind.

He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end, Christ died and lived again, that he might be both Lord of the dead and of the living.

This is the fifth message in a series of seven on the topic, Why Jesus is Precious. The series has two purposes. I argued back in January that believers' motivation to express to other people how much Jesus means to them or what value Jesus has will rise or fall in direct proportion to how precious Jesus really is to believers.

If he is precious to you, there will be no holding your tongue. If he is not, no gimmicks will loose it. So the first purpose I have, since we want our mouths to be full of accolades for Jesus, is to fill your hearts with the preciousness of Christ, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

The second purpose for the series is that I want very much to give evidence that God willing would persuade unbelievers that Jesus is precious and worthy of their faith as Savior and Lord of their lives. And those two aims don't require two rifles because the same truth that deepens our faith as believers is the truth that kindles that faith in the first place. The series began with two messages about why the biblical portrait of Jesus is true.

Because if all those statements in the Bible about how precious Jesus is aren't true, then they're of no lasting value to us. The third message was that Jesus is precious because he takes away our guilt. He solves the awful and universal problem of a guilty conscience and the worst problem of real guilt before the righteous God.

The fourth message was that Jesus is precious because he gives eternal life, that is, he solves the problem of death and our fear of it. And today the point is this, Jesus is precious because through him we find authenticity. Now, my assumption is that a fundamental human need and a very widespread longing in the world today is that we want to be authentic people.

There are two levels at which a person is either authentic or inauthentic. The first one is your relationship between what you are, or the relationship between what you are inside and the way you act and appear to other people outside. Authenticity is when these two things are in harmony.

The opposite of authenticity, therefore, is hypocrisy. Now, I know that all of us from time to time strike a pose, that is, we try to make other people think we're something other than what we really are inside. For example, we try to appear confident when we're scared, or we try to appear poised when we're shaken, or we try to appear peaceful when we're anxious, or happy when we're grieved, or enthused when we're bored, stiff, or healthy when we're sick, or intelligent when we're ignorant, or concerned when we're apathetic, or skilled when we're clumsy, or devout when we're really indifferent.

On and on the list could go. Some people do it very cleverly. Some people have done it so long, they're utterly enslaved to inauthenticity.

And you look and you listen, and you can't find a real person anywhere. There's just a conglomerate of one pose after the other. But, in spite of the fact that everybody in this room does that from time to time, we don't like to do it.

We don't come away with a great sense of peace and fulfillment when we have successfully deluded everybody about who we really are. There is a deep and, I believe, God-given longing to be real, to be authentic, and not to be always enslaved to what people think about us. We long to have integrity between what we are within and the way we are with everybody around us.

We want to have harmony between what Paul Tournier called the inner person and the outer personage. We don't like it. There is stress, there is guilt, laid on us when our energies are being expended into appearing instead of being.

Right? I think, I hope, that you resonate with that. We don't want to be that way. We want to be authentic people.

Now, I have no quarrel with the effort of psychotherapy to help people become authentic in this sense. It is a legitimate task to help people, as they say, get in touch with their feelings, find out who they really are, and develop consistent ways of behavior. But, I'm not optimistic about the success of non-Christian psychotherapy to help us become authentic people.

And the reason is that there is a second, deeper level of authenticity or inauthenticity that we desire very much to get rid of. There's nothing wrong with a quest to have harmony between the way we are within and the way we are without. I want that.

I have that quest. Anybody that can help me in that, I will thank them. It's just inadequate.

It's not enough. If everybody in this room, from this day forth, succeeded perfectly in being harmonious between what you are really within and what you are with other people without, you'd still be frustrated and plagued by a deep sense of inauthenticity because there is a second, deeper level that we long for. If authenticity in the outer life, our personage, the way we appear, demands that there be a harmony between that and the person within, then the authenticity of the person within demands that there be a harmony between it and their secular psychotherapy has reached the end of its resources.

It can help us no longer. If it is true that what we long for is the integrity, not only between the inner and outer person, but the inner person and something ultimate, then no longer does psychology, but only theology, have the answer. And there are many psychologists who go beyond the first level of authenticity to the second and help us precisely because they are good theologians as well.

I appeal to your self-knowledge, the knowledge of yourself, just your own understanding of your deep longings. Does not your heart instruct you that if your inner self is the end point and the measuring rod of meaning and of purpose and of authenticity, life is meaningless? If your inner person is the end point and measuring rod of all things, life has no meaning. If there is no ultimate reference point by which to gain your bearings in the world as a person within, then your inner life is pointless like a bubble on the ocean that is just going to pop and have no significance whatsoever.

Is it not true that the authenticity you desire is not just to be the same outwardly as inwardly, but that your inner person unite and fit with something bigger, something ultimate, something that gives meaning to the universe and to all of life? Isn't that what we long for? Not for our inner self, just to kind of drift this way one day, drift that way the next day, be tossed here, be blown there. Don't we want to have root and gain form and eternal identity by being rooted in something ultimate? I think that's a universal human longing. And it is a grand irony that secular humanism, so called, can never satisfy the human heart for it is written on our hearts by God, I believe, that we are inauthentic and feel ourselves to be inauthentic until our inner selves correspond to the ultimate reality that gives meaning to the whole universe.

My main point today is that Jesus is precious because He alone gives authenticity at these two levels. He not only gives the freedom to be outwardly what we are inwardly, but more importantly, He enables us to

be inwardly what God, the creator and controller of all the universe, destines humans to be. Jesus brings to an end our frustrated quest for who we really are in the universe.

And He does this by showing us that there is a God, that this God made us for His glory, that we have sinned and fallen short of that glory, that in love this God sent His Son to die, that we might have redemption through trusting Him and have both inwardly and outwardly authenticity. Now, the textual support for all this is found in a surprising place. Romans 14, verses 1 to 9. And I'd like you to look at that with me.

The situation that Paul is writing to here in Romans 14 is described for us in verses 2 and 5 of Romans 14. Verse 2. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. In verse 5 at the end.

One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. The saints at Rome could not agree on what it was right to eat and what holy days were right to celebrate. Maybe it was the argument Sunday versus Saturday since that shift was taking place in those days.

Now, the way Paul goes about handling this problem is a window onto how to become an authentic person. His main point is stated negatively in verse 3, positively in verse 5. Verse 3 says, Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats. In verse 5 at the end, Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind.

Well, convinced of what? Verse 6 gives the answer. He who observes the day observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord since he gives thanks to God.

While he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. So, I conclude, whether you eat meat or just vegetables, whether you celebrate one holy day or don't celebrate the day, of this you must be fully assured, what you do, you do for the Lord. Right? That's what we must be fully assured of.

Whether you eat or whether you drink or whatever you do, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10.31, Do everything to the glory of God. We are not finally accountable to any man regarding opinions and behavior on matters of drink and solemn days and so on. We are accountable to the Lord whose will it is that we be pure and do everything out of gratitude to Him and for His honor.

Notice that radical orientation on the Lordship, the sovereign, unique, solitary Lordship of Jesus running through this passage. Another example of it is verse 4, which gives us the main argument for why a Christian vegetarian should not judge a Christian meat eater. He says, Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own Lord that he stands or falls.

Every believer is personally accountable only to the Lord. And we do well not to try to take Jesus' place and become judges of one another in this matter. Instead, as verse 1 says, we should accept or receive one another in spite of our differences.

Now, in verses 7 to 9, Paul does something very characteristic. And I love Paul for this. He makes a theological mountain out of an ethical molehill.

I just love people that make theological mountains out of anything. He moves from eating and drinking to living and dying. And he climaxes with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Isn't that amazing? None of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord. And if we die, we die to the Lord.

So whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. To this end, Christ died and rose that he might be Lord of the living and the dead. What a theological canon to level against these little teeny problems of meat and drink and holy days.

Who cares, Paul? Why do you suppose he did that? Why bring out your biggest theological guns to settle a dispute about such utterly insignificant matters compared to the ethical dilemmas that we find ourselves in in a nuclear age? Isn't the reason that Paul wants believers to be utterly authentic? In everything. In everything. Authentic, through and through, in the smallest details of your life.

That is, he wants us to know who God intends us to be, what God's divine purpose for our life is. He wants to establish a harmony between what we are in our hearts and what God created us to be. Notice verse 9. Verse 9 tells us the purpose, the divine purpose of God for human life.

To this end, for this purpose, Christ died and lived again. Namely, that He might be Lord of your life, whether you're dead or whether you're alive. God's purpose in sending Christ into the world was to purchase you from the slavery to the lordship of sin and transfer you over as servants to the lordship of Christ.

The destiny of human beings is to bow before the Son of God and to live for His honor both in this life and in the life to come. And until human beings bow to the lordship of Christ, they will never know deep authenticity. They will be plagued.

They won't be able to put their finger on it. Something's wrong. I'm not satisfied.

Something's wrong. And the reason is that God made them to bow to Jesus and live under His lordship. But, lest there be a misunderstanding about what He's calling us to under this lordship, notice three things in the text that lordship implies.

They may be a little different than what you think lordship means. Verse 9 is given as the ground for verse 8, the basis of verse 8, which means that very likely we'll find explained in verse 8 what lordship that He purchased in verse 9 means. For example, at the end of verse 8, this sentence, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

Lordship means possession. He is our Lord in that He owns us. We are the Lord's.

We are Christ's possession. That, beloved, is an unspeakable privilege because you remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3 near the end? He said, all things are yours. Why? Because you are Christ's.

And Christ is God's. It is an unspeakable privilege to be the possession of the King of the Universe. Therefore, leading to the second meaning of lordship, not only are we possessed by Christ, but He supplies all our needs.

Look at verse 6. He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God. See the connection between doing something to the Lord and thanking Him? That must mean that lordship means Jesus will meet your needs.

And living under His lordship means receiving from your Master all you need and rendering back thanks to Him. The third meaning of lordship is in the first part of verse 8. Namely, we should do everything with reference to the Lord. If we live, we live to the Lord.

If we die, we die to the Lord. If we keep a holy day, keep it to the Lord. If we decide not to keep the holy day, decide not to for the Lord.

If we decide to eat meat, eat it for the Lord. If we decide that we will abstain from meat, abstain for the Lord. Living under the lordship of Jesus means aiming always and in everything to please the Lord and to honor His name.

In summary then, three meanings for living under the lordship of Christ. He possesses us, He provides for our needs forever, and we are to do everything to please Him and honor His name. That is the purpose, according to verse 9, that God sent Jesus into the world.

To bring us under the lordship of Christ in that sense. Which means that if authenticity is harmony between my inner self and the purpose of God, authenticity comes through bowing to the lordship of Jesus and no other way. And until we do, we will be frustrated and wonder what in the world is wrong.

God did not create us to be independent, self-sustaining people who do what is right in our own eyes. He made us for Himself. That means we might depend on Him, that He might sustain us, and we might do what He counsels us to do.

And oh, what a sense of righteousness and authenticity and freedom there comes when we yield to His lordship. The discovery of authenticity, of being within what we are created to be without, is one of the most precious discoveries that a human being can make. And the text teaches us that Christ died to give us that gift and therefore He is very, very precious.

Now just one more thing I want to observe from the text. Remember there were two levels of authenticity that we long for? Not only do we want to have a harmony between our inner self and God's purpose for us, but we long to have a harmony between our inner self and the way we act. We don't like to be one who is always posing, who is striking poses because we care so much about what other people think about us.

We want to be freed from that kind of bondage and be real. And I think verse 5 gives us a very important word on that issue. One man esteems one day better than another, while another man esteems all days alike.

Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind. Fully convinced of what again? Fully convinced that what he will do will win the most praise from the most people. Right? Fully convinced that he will appear most cool.

Fully convinced that he will appear in when he acts this way. Fully convinced that he is with it. No, none of those.

Let him rather be fully convinced that what he does, he does for the Lord. For the Lord. Doesn't that imply that if you determine your lifestyle, your conversation, your habits solely by what pleases the Lord, you don't have to worry anymore about what people think.

Galatians 1.10, Paul says, Am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 2.4 We speak not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. Be truly convinced that what you do, you do in reliance on the Lord and for His glory and hypocrisy goes out the window.

And that's a wonderful kind of freedom that the Lord Jesus purchased for us. It simply doesn't matter anymore what people think when you know you have pleased the King of the Universe. And now in conclusion, notice this.

The two levels of authenticity are both achieved by that same one submission to Christ as Lord. At the deepest level, we long to be one with the purpose that God has for us. At that second level, we long to be outwardly what we are inwardly.

And when we bow to the Lordship of Christ, that's what happens. Both of them happen. We yield to His possession, we depend on His provision, we aim at His honor, and we become authentic when we repent and do that.

By virtue of that submission, we become authentic inwardly and outwardly. See if this doesn't ring true. When we discover that we are possessed by Christ, we're no longer the slave of any man.

And when we discover that we can trust in Him for the provision of all our needs, we need fear no man. And when we aim to please Christ as Lord above all others, we're not controlled by what other people think anymore. And so the Lordship of Christ and our yielding to it make us authentic both at that deep level of harmony with God's purpose and at that other level of harmony between what we are within and what we are without.

And I remind you, it was Jesus who, Paul says in verse 9, died and lived again that He might purchase that authenticity for us. Submit to Him and His Lordship and you will be authentic.

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