

Rejoice When You Are Slandered

by John Piper

This sermon focuses on the challenging command of Jesus to rejoice and be glad when facing revilement, persecution, and slander for the sake of righteousness. It delves into the humanly impossible nature of this command, the need for supernatural ability to feel joy in such situations, and the key to obedience lying in treasuring the greatness of the heavenly reward. The sermon emphasizes the importance of perceiving, treasuring, and being satisfied with the future reward described in the Beatitudes to experience the miraculous joy amidst persecution.

Duration: 37:55

Scripture: Matthew 5:3, Philippians 4:4, 1 Corinthians 4:12, Luke 19:41, Mark 10:27, John 3:3, Acts 5:41, Hebrews 10:34, 2 Corinthians 8:1

Topics: "Joy in Persecution", "Heavenly Rewards"

Description

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Transcript

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountain, and when his disciples had come to him, he sat down and he began to teach them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, they are going to see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice! Crazy, crazy statement! Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. So, Father, as we long to be obedient to this impossible command, would you come now and do the miracle? I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, my goal in these few minutes together is that God would take my words and make them a means of the happening of the miracle of verse 12. Rejoice and be glad when you are reviled and persecuted and slandered. That's my goal.

I call it a miracle because it is humanly impossible, as you, I am sure, have found out. In fact, I would argue that this command to rejoice is the hardest command in the Bible. To rejoice, to feel, to feel joy and gladness when reviled and persecuted and slandered.

It's a command to feel an emotion, or if you prefer, a spiritual affection that goes contrary to all human experience. Joy and gladness when lied about. Joy and gladness when verbally abused.

Joy and gladness when persecuted, including harsh physical persecution, even death. Now, later in the chapter, Jesus is going to command us to love our enemy, and he's going to unfold the meaning of love there and in Luke 6 to include, pray for those who persecute you, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you, and I'm saying the command of 512 is harder than that. I don't have any control over my emotions.

Immediately, they do what they're going to do. This command in 512 is not to do anything. There's no doing.

There's no moving of the muscles at all. All the others are doings. Bless, speak words of blessing, pray, get on your knees and do that, do good, do that with your muscles.

I can do that whether I want to or not. I can't do 512 if I don't want to. So, I think it's the hardest command in the Bible.

It is humanly impossible. You need and I need supernatural ability to feel what we are commanded to feel. Now, Jesus says that the key to obedience to this impossible command to feel joy when lied about, persecuted, slandered, reviled, the key is your treasuring the greatness of your reward in heaven.

Look at it. Are you with me? Get your Bibles open or your phones. Matthew 5, verse 12, Rejoice and be glad because here's the root of it.

This is how it's going to happen. Great is your reward in heaven. So, it's the greatness of the reward that makes the miracle happen.

Contrary to the mocking voices that say pie in the sky, by and by, are presently useless. And Jesus makes everything hang on it. We're not talking about pie.

Jesus teaches that if we perceive clearly enough and treasure highly enough and are satisfied deeply enough in the greatness of our reward, this miracle will happen. That's what I'm after in your life and mine. Rejoice and be glad.

Great is your reward in heaven when you are reviled and persecuted and slandered on my account. Let's just stop here for a minute. Take a little parenthesis on that phrase, on my account, for my sake.

In verse 11, he says on my account. If this happens to you on my account, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. And it's the very same phrase in Greek from verse 10 for righteousness' sake, or on account of righteousness.

You get on account of righteousness and on account of Jesus. Same phrase. What does that mean? It does not mean that the persecutor must acknowledge that their persecution is because of Jesus.

In fact, in America today, almost nobody would say that they are reviling or persecuting or slandering because of Jesus. It's because of Jesus that I'm saying what I'm saying in my hatred or reviling or slandering. They're not going to give you that credit.

What Jesus says is that we may be persecuted for righteousness' sake, on account of righteousness. He does not mean that our persecutors are going to concede that they are attacking righteousness. They're not.

That's not what they would say. Their refusal to say that is what justifies the persecution. No, they will be calling your righteousness wickedness.

That's the only way they can do it and get away with it in their conscience or in the world. Jesus said in John 16 2, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he's offering service to God. So revilers, persecutors, slanderers do not honor us by informing us that we are noble martyrs for a great future.

They don't honor us by informing us, as they persecute, that we are suffering for a great cause. They don't acknowledge that. So what Jesus says, for righteousness' sake, for my sake, means our thoughts, our words, and our actions are in fact conformed to the will of Jesus.

And they are met often with reviling, persecuting, and slandering. And it doesn't matter whether the people acknowledge that they're conformed to Jesus or not. The question is, are they? Are they from Christ? Are they for Christ? Whether anybody acknowledges it or not is the issue for you.

So for my sake and for righteousness' sake is not a statement about what the persecutors are thinking. It's a statement about what's true in you. Are your behaviors, words, attitudes conforming to Christ for the glory of Christ, whether they think they are or not? So close that parenthesis on the clarification of on account of me or for my sake.

What does it mean then to have a great reward? What is it? What's the greatness of our reward? Because everything hangs on it, Jesus says. What is it? I'm just going to stay right here. I'm tempted to go to all my favorite descriptions of the future all over the Bible, which are dozens and glorious, but I'm just going to stay right here, and we'll let the Beatitudes tell us what this future is, right? And you can get this.

I hope you see it. So there is a sandwich, as you no doubt know, in verse 3, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Verse 10, theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and between those six staggering descriptions of what it means to live under the eternal rule, the kingdom of God, what are you hoping for? If you were to die tonight, what would you want to be? What are you living your life in the light of? Or do you even think about the future? If you don't, this text makes no sense whatsoever, and you have no power to obey it.

So come with me. First, we will see God. Verse 8, they shall see God, and they won't be incinerated.

Number two, we will be shown mercy when we get there. Verse 7, they shall receive mercy. Number 3, we will be part of God's family.

Verse 9, they shall be called the sons of God. Number 4, we will experience God's comfort. Verse 4, they shall be comforted.

Number 5, we will be co-owners of the world. Verse 5, they shall inherit the earth. Number 6, we will be satisfied with personal and universal righteousness.

Verse 6, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. You're going to be satisfied. The presence of God, seen and savored forever in the face of Jesus, covering with mercy all your sins that you ever committed, calling you his children, comforting you for all the pain and loss of this world, bequeathing to you the universe as a familiar homeland, and everything set right in your soul and in nature and in the social order of the new earth.

That's a pretty good reward. Do you love it? Does it have power? If you can perceive that reward clearly enough and treasure it highly enough and be satisfied with it deeply enough, miracles will happen, namely, joy in the face of being persecuted for your faithfulness to Jesus. There is no other way.

God really has performed this miracle. We need to believe that. Even if you've not yet walked into the fullness of this, he has done this.

Acts 5 41, the apostles left the presence of the council rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for the name. The miracle happened. Hebrews 10 34, you had compassion.

All those in prison and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew you had a better possession and an abiding one. The miracle happened. Second Corinthians 8 1, we want you to know brothers about the grace, the miracle of God that was given among the churches of Macedonia for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of liberality.

What a miracle. I step by my favorite text on this issue. Acts 16, when they had afflicted many blows on Paul and Silas, many blows, they threw them into prison and the jailer put them into inner prison and fastened their feet in stocks and about midnight the miracle happened.

They were praying and singing. Midnight, after blows, feet in stocks, having no idea whether they're going to live or die, singing hymns. You want to be like that? I want to be like that more than anything.

Jesus didn't say these words in vain in chapter 5 verse 12. He did not speak into the wind and say this will sound neat for 2,000 years. Nobody will do it.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven. Now there are many obstacles to obedience to this command and I want to talk about four of them.

Some are peculiar to our culture in the moment we live in and some are always with us and my goal is to help you overcome these obstacles and be miraculously obedient to this command for the rest of your life because I have no idea what's coming to you. Number one, the context creates an obstacle because verse four says blessed are those who mourn. So if the sadness of mourning is pronounced blessed,

where does joy fit in? Where does rejoicing fit in? Paul said in Romans 12 15, weep with those who weep.

First Thessalonians, Paul says there is a kind of grieving that's not hopeless and you ought to experience it when your wife dies or your kid or many other situations. All those texts assume there are good reasons for tears and sorrow in the Christian life, really good reasons, not sinful reasons. To weep, there is real pain and pain always hurts and hurt makes you cry.

You don't choose to cry if the hurt is bad enough, you just cry. So where does rejoicing fit in? Being glad fit in. Where does it where is it in after before? Oh what what are we to do with the context? The solution to this obstacle is that the Bible presents two relationships between joy and sorrow or weeping.

Not just one, two. One is they are sequential. We weep and then we rejoice and the other is simultaneous.

Psalms 30 verse 5, weeping may tarry for the night but joy comes in the morning. First you weep, then you rejoice. Psalm 126 verse 5, those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy.

First you weep, then you shout with joy. Sequential. First one, then the other.

On the other hand, Paul says in Philippians 4 verse 4, rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I will say rejoice, even though just a few verses earlier in chapter 3 verse 18, he is weeping because of the enemies of the cross. I love the Apostle Paul.

I trust his inspired letters. He never contradicts himself. He's not an idiot, like within four verses.

No, I'm the problem, not Paul. I think if I said to Paul, Paul chapter 4 verse 4, chapter 3 verse 18, look contradictory to me. Tears, rejoice always.

I think he would quote 2 Corinthians 6 10 and say, we are treated as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich. Sorrowful, yet in it, under it, through it, always rejoicing. In other words, even though there are manifestations of sorrow and there are manifestations of joy that are very different and sequential, nevertheless, there is also an experience of sorrow and joy in which the joy is like a great boulder on a seacoast which may be submerged beneath the waves of sorrow, or it might be above water shining brightly in the sun.

In either case, it's a boulder. It is unshaken. It is what it is.

Covered with tears or shining in the sun, it is what it is and is a rock-solid confidence in God's Word and the greatness of our reward with affectional dimensions that cannot be destroyed. That's what it is. So I don't think the context and the obstacle it seems to erect for us is in fact an obstacle.

Obstacle number two, to obeying the command, rejoice and be glad when you are reviled and slandered, persecuted. This obstacle is that one of the dominant currents in American culture today is all flowing in the other direction from this command, namely a direction which says these words of Jesus and words like them, these words discount the experience of those who suffer mistreatment. They tolerate the verbal violence of the abuser.

They become complicit with the structures of power and people who need to be called out and punished. That's our culture. Now one of the reasons that cultural stream can take root in the church is that the Bible does say there's a place for rebuke.

There's a place for discipline. There's a place for accountability. If Christians speak evil of other Christians, if Christians mistreat other Christians, so I'm not saying that the fabric of the church and our life together is woven out of only one material.

There are strands of patience and mercy and endurance and tolerance, and there are strands of accountability and admonition and rebuke and discipline. One of the ways that secular culture distorts the biblical teaching and the congregational life together is by pulling out one or more of those strands in the fabric of Christian relationships, with the result that the beauty and the symmetry and the balance and the proportion of the tapestry of Christian teaching and Christian life is disfigured. And what I'm suggesting is that the miracle of Matthew 5 12 is not woven proportionately into the fabric of the personal and communal life of many churches.

It's too hard. Paul did as much rebuking as anybody in the New Testament, probably more, and yet the tapestry of his life as an apostolic whole is summed up like this in first Corinthians 4 12. He said, when reviled, we bless.

When persecuted, we endure. When slandered, we entreat. We have become and are still like the scum of the world.

He just took that as a given. I will be treated as the scum of the world. He didn't get any backup about that.

That was his calling and the refuse of all things. And behind that miracle, that miracle ministry that I love so much, is the miracle of Matthew 5 12. He rejoiced and he was glad when he was reviled and persecuted and slandered.

That's obstacle number two and how we might overcome it. Number three, this is the one that's probably got this message going. Have you ever noticed, have you ever thought, that the people in Matthew 5 11 who reviled you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you are lost.

They're lost. They're perishing and they might be members of your own family. So we're being told by the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus, to rejoice, even though the occasion for our joy is the sinfulness that could take our loved one to hell.

And he said this. This didn't sneak up on him. He said this knowing that he would weep over the unbelief, the reviling, and the persecution and the slander of Jerusalem against him.

Luke 19 41, when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, Would that you, you slanderers, you persecutors, you revilers who will crucify the most innocent human being ever, would that you had known on this day the things that make for peace, but now they are hidden from your eyes. So how are we going to get over this obstacle emotionally? Because this is all about emotion, folks. This is a feeling joy and feeling gladness in the face of reviling and slander.

So how are we going to get over this obstacle? I think the crucial insight in overcoming this obstacle is to realize that if the unbelief and the reviling of people we love could destroy our joy in the greatness of the reward of Christ, we would have nothing to offer them. It is precisely the indestructible joy that we have in the great reward of the worth of Christ, the indestructible joy that we have in the greatness of the reward of the worth of Christ, the infinite all-satisfying worth of Christ that glorifies him as precious. It makes him look precious.

So let me say it again. Our joy in Christ, in spite of slander, is what shows the slanderers the preciousness of Christ, which they need more than anything. That siren goes off the first Wednesday of every month, and I'm always preaching.

That's an overstatement. I didn't want you to be distracted and wonder what that is, like a tornado coming through, but you could rejoice anyway. Therefore, paradoxically, though the tears flow when the loved one reviles the name we love, rejoicing in the face of that reviling testifies to the reality and the preciousness of the one they need most badly.

It is, therefore, an act of love, not a sign of indifference to their lostness. Last obstacle and we'll be done. It is an impossible command.

That's a pretty big obstacle. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a fallen human being to feel joy when reviled and persecuted and slandered. And Jesus faced, throughout his earthly ministry, he faced these impossible situations, and he had a word for them.

They didn't take him off guard. He was not surprised if I said to Jesus, that's impossible. He wouldn't blink.

He would say, Mark 10, with man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God. How would you paraphrase that? I'd paraphrase it like this.

You must be born again. It's a miracle. The Christian life is a miracle.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. If you have been born again, this is my last sentence, and I'm assuming virtually all of you have.

If you have been born again, you have within you the power to perceive the greatness of the reward clear enough and to treasure the greatness of the reward high enough and to be satisfied in the greatness of the reward deep enough that this miracle can happen in your life. So Father, we beloved children who we believe have been spoken all these beatitudes over us because we are yours, would you grant us to see it clearly enough and to treasure it highly enough and to be satisfied in it deeply enough so that we would experience the miracle of joy and gladness when reviled and persecuted and slandered for our faithfulness to you. I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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