

Thank God for the Mercies of Christ (Festival of Thanksgiving)

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's mercies, which are often hidden and hard to see, but bring hope and comfort to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Duration: 39:43

Scripture: Lamentations 3:21-25, Matthew 6:33, Revelation 21:4

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Salvation Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by outlining his plan for the message. He will read a passage from Lamentations Chapter 3 and provide brief commentary on it. He then shares personal stories from his childhood in South Carolina to illustrate the mercies of God and how they relate to sin, salvation, and faith. The speaker goes on to outline the biblical Christian solution to the problem of sin and urges the audience to seriously consider it. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of truth and the need to receive Jesus and God's grace for salvation.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org All that you are and all that you have, we now afresh receive by trusting you, banking our hopes upon you. And so now Lord, since you've taught us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, I pray that as I attempt to unpack parts of your scripture and illustrate the mercies of God, that you would work faith in our lives, make our faith stronger.

If there are those among us who don't trust you, I pray that you would make yourself appear to them what you really are, namely trustworthy, and so that you would awaken a reasonable faith in their minds and hearts. Lord, we dedicate the rest of this worship service to you and ask that you would receive our exaltation over your Word and fill us with increasing gratitude all through this week. Through Christ I pray, Amen.

I want to begin by telling you where I'm going, what my purpose is, and then how I'm going to get there, and then how we're going to close, namely by having everybody look at that piece of paper that you have in your worship folder, this one right here, we're moving toward. And the reason I want to tell you up front very clearly what my goal is and how I aim to get there and how we'll close is so that you're alert and able

to assess what I say clearly. I don't want there to be anything subtle or I don't want any surprises to be sprung on you.

I want you to have a sense, I know where he's heading, I know how he plans to get there, because truth really matters. You know, we have a banner on the building right over there, you can see it from the freeway when you drive by, it says, truth matters. That's true in your life.

It's true in Florida right now. It's true in the way I preach and what I say. Not only what I say, but how I say it.

Is it truth governed? And I know that when a preacher or a politician or anybody speaks into the context that we have in America today, the suspicion that it is not truth driven is very high. And so, though I may be swimming against the stream, I would dare to hope that if I can be as open and above board and up front with you about where I'm going, you might give me the benefit of the doubt and hope that he is meaning what he says. So here's my goal.

My goal in this message is to persuade you that the biblical Christian diagnosis of the human condition, your life and my life, is true and relevant. And that the biblical remedy for our condition is true and is found nowhere but in Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen from the dead. Now, that's what I'm after.

I'm on a persuasion crusade in these next 30 minutes or so. So you need to know that. I'm not trying to trick anybody.

I would like to persuade you to be fully Christian. And that's my aim. Now, how am I going to get there? What's my plan? Number one, I'm going to read a passage of scripture.

Number two, I'm going to comment on it briefly. Number three, I'm going to tell you some stories from Friday morning in South Carolina where I was in order to illustrate the mercies of God as I remember them from my childhood and how that leads into the issue of God and sin and salvation and faith. And then I'm going to outline very briefly the biblical Christian solution to the problem that grows out of my experience and your experience and commend it to you for your serious consideration.

Let's go to the text that I'm going to read. Lamentations chapter 3. You may have a hard time finding it. It's a teeny little book sandwiched between Jeremiah, the big prophet, and Ezekiel.

And it's a book that I do not expect many of you to know anything about because it is so small and so tucked away there. It doesn't get read very much. And one of the reasons it doesn't is because it's such a horrible book.

Because it is so shot through with horrific pictures of the judgment of God upon Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote this little book as Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 BC and the pictures of destruction are terrible, loss of life, starvation through siege. But, and here's the amazing thing, in the middle of this five chapter book, the middle chapter, comes some of the sweetest, most precious words that God has ever put in the mouth of a prophet to tell to his people.

And those are the ones I want to read because they have a special punch when you realize where they are. Verse 21 to 25 of chapter 3 of Lamentations go like this. This I recall to mind and therefore I have hope.

The Lord's loving kindnesses never cease. His compassions or his mercies never fail. They are new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I have hope in Him. The Lord is good to those who wait for Him.

To the person who seeks Him. Now that should boggle your mind because those precious words, especially the words, His mercies are new every morning, is spoken in a situation that was horrific in its suffering. The afflictions, the devastation, parents were eating their children.

They were so hungry and the siege was so horrible. Now how did these words, how did these words get into that book? And as a partial explanation I want to read two more verses. Drop your eyes down, if you're still there, to verses 32 and 33.

For if He, meaning God, if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant loving kindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men. Now the very least we can draw out of those verses is this.

The mercies of God are often hidden and hard to see while they are happening. Because it says He does cause grief and He does afflict and yet it says there's a merciful purpose in it all. And it's not coming from the bottom of His heart.

He does not willingly afflict the sons of men. There are purposes for His affliction. It's not the thing He delights most to do and yet He does it.

And if we'll trust Him, there are mercies hidden there for us. It's just like the book of Job. You know the story of Job.

He lost everything he had. He lost ten of his children, all of them. He lost all of his possessions.

He lost all of his health. And James, Jesus' brother, thousands of years later, in his little book called James, writes in chapter 5 verse 11 this interpretation of that book. He says, You have heard the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

So there's the point of the book of Job according to James. He lost all of his children. He lost all of his health.

He lost his possessions. And this says, The purpose of the Lord was compassion and merciful. So if we'll trust Him, that was the meaning of the destruction of Jerusalem.

That's the meaning of the loss of His health. And I don't know where you are this morning, but if you will trust God, mercy is in your life right now. It is all over your life.

Mercy, a design, a compassionate design. If you will trust God and hold on to Him for that, it will show itself sooner or later. We could say it in the words of Susan Shelley, Marshall Shelley's wife.

Marshall Shelley is one of the editors for Christianity Today. 1991, November 22, a few days before Thanksgiving, 8.20 p.m., their son was born. And at 8.22, two minutes later, he died.

Marshall wrote an article in CT about four years ago about it called, Two Minutes to Eternity. Magnificent article. The nurse standing over her, holding her dead baby said, Does the baby have a name? And she said, Toby.

It's short for a biblical name, Tobiah, which means God is good. And when Marshall came to speak to the Wheaton alumni a few years ago down at Wheaton and told this story, he said at the end of his talk, summing it all up, Life is hard and God is good. Life is hard and God is good.

That's the meaning of lamentations. That's the meaning of Job. You might say that's the meaning of the Bible.

Life is hard and God is good. And many of you are right in the midst of proving it to be so. Now, at least if you would trust Him, if I could persuade you this morning that God is trustworthy in it, and you held on to Him, you would discover that life is hard and God is good.

Oh, that God this morning would give us eyes to see His mercies in our lives, and we would see them all the more clearly, and know that they were mercies if we knew the price that He paid for them for us. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die so that my guilt would be taken away, His wrath would be removed from me, and there would be a free, open course for His mercies to flow to me, while He is just, even though I'm a sinner, I could be treated with mercy. That's a glorious thing that God has done in Jesus Christ.

And we would taste the mercies all the more sweetly if we knew the price. Now, here's what happened on Friday morning. Here's what happened that brought all this home to me so powerfully.

I mean, I haven't had experiences like this for quite a while. And it all relates to what I'm trying to persuade you. So this is trying to draw you in now to my experience, to taste what I tasted, and then to see whether or not God would help you interpret it the way I think the Bible interprets it.

I flew on Thursday to Greenville, South Carolina. I grew up in Greenville. My father is in Greenville.

He's 81. And my stepmother, his wife, had very serious surgery a couple of weeks ago. She came home for a few days.

Then it was so serious she had to go back, and now she's been moved to a nursing home. And when I learned that, that she'll probably never come home again, and that my father is now alone in that big house, I said, maybe we should use some of our frequent flyer miles. I'm just going to go down there and help Daddy adjust and go and pray with her maybe the last time.

And so that's what I did. Flew down on Thursday and had a good evening with the both of them, ate together with them, and prayed with her and read the Great Eight with her. That's Romans 8. And we just enjoyed our hope together.

Both of them are believers in Jesus, and their hope is strong. And then I spent a good evening with Daddy alone in the big house. Never done that before.

And we talked about a lot of things, about his situation. Can he stay there by himself? How's he going to manage? What if he falls down and doesn't have anybody to call and all this? And then we slept and got up and had another good time in the morning. And then it was time to go, and he took off to a meeting and

left me there for a few minutes in that house.

I'll come back to that in a minute and tell you what happened there. But I got in the car and said, I've got more time than I need here to do what I need to do. I'm going to drive to the old stomping grounds and just move through my life for about an hour.

So instead of just getting on the plane and coming back, I drove about 12 miles to where I grew up, and I passed the Coca-Cola bottling company. That's what it used to be. It's all boarded up now.

And just beyond it is a house where the dermatologist used to be, who worked on me during high school. I had a terrible, terrible case of acne. And my mother was so concerned about it that she sent me to a dermatologist, and he would burn my face with a lamp, and then he would take dry ice, and he rubbed around like this, and it would sizzle on my face.

And then he would poke at me for about 30 minutes until I looked like a boxer when I was done. And then I'd leave, get in the car, look at myself in the mirror, and go underground for about five hours, hoping nobody would see me, and then come up. Because even when you came up, it wasn't all that great to look at.

And as I drove by that dermatologist's house, 40 years ago, we're talking now, maybe 38, I felt it was all mercy. It was all mercy. Because it kept me off the fast track, it kept me away from girls, at least from my standpoint, nobody would ever want to be near me, and made me depend on God.

And I'm thankful. I'm thankful. It was mercy.

Hard mercy. Kept on driving, and I say this next illustration with sensitivity and delicateness, through the black section, we called it, 40 years ago. And I felt so much shame, because I was part of it.

I was part of that racist, southern mentality. And as I thought about that, and repented, as I've done so many times, the last 40 years of my life just broke over me with such gratitude, that the path I took to Wheaton, and Fuller, and Germany, and St. Paul, and Bethlehem, has brought us to where we are as a church, that I feel so thankful, so thankful, that even though we're very much in process on that issue, and everybody in this room is a sinner in regard to racism, and we have so far to go as a church, and so far to go as a culture, and a society, and an evangelicalism, I am so thankful for the mercy of God, to open some of my eyes, anyway, to what has gone on in this nation of ours, and what needs to happen in our church, and our nation. And I was so thankful that I am where I am, and so eager to go farther.

Man, I drove to the neighborhood, and I turned up on the road between the two motels, they have totally different names now, and turned right on Bradley Boulevard, and headed down the hill, I wanted to go by Billy Shaughnessy's house, because we always played football as teenagers in Billy Shaughnessy's front yard, and it was so small, it looked so small. And we never played touch football, or flag football when I was growing up. You don't play touch football, if you're a male.

And we tackled each other. And I remember the Saturday morning that we tackled Billy Shaughnessy, and broke his neck. And, which is why we don't do that so much anymore.

And he wore a very thick brace, I remember, like this, and he did not suffer paralysis. And my heart just, it was a strange thing, it just welled up, because I didn't say, oh, thank you that I've never been killed, or thank you that I've never been injured, I said, thank you that I've never killed anybody, and thank you that

I've never injured anybody permanently, because of the weight that would be. I was just so thankful of the mercies of God, that Billy made it, and that he's fine today.

I had two more stops. At the top of the next hill is 122 Bradley Boulevard, the house where I grew up. 1951 and 1952, my parents designed and built this house.

I moved in when I was six. All the memories that I have are there. I have no memories before six years old, in Greenville, South Carolina, strangely enough.

But, there were my teenage years, and there were my school years, and I got out of the car, parked on the side, and just wanted to smell it as well as see it. I didn't have enough time in order to go knock on the door. I don't know who lives there anymore, so I could just look.

There's a big blue house over here, sitting right on top of my pet cemetery. Desecration. And the big blue spruce has gone out of the front yard.

The big crab apple tree is gone. The front panel window is all different paint. They must have had to replace it.

All the shrubbery is different. The colors are different. But the dogwood tree is still there, right off center.

And it's about this big around at the bottom, instead of this big around. And it took me back to those times, I've written about them and told you about them, of sitting with my acne on the front lawn, under that beautifully blossoming tree, looking out across Delwood Valley to Piney Mountain, and feeling very much alone, and very sad, and writing poems, because they seemed to give shape and meaning to my feelings. And I was so thankful that God gave me hope, over and over again, as I did that.

That there would be a future. There would be a future. He came to me again and again and again, through His Word, through my mom, and through friends.

There's going to be a future for your life. There's going to be a hope for your life. Last stop.

My mom was killed in 1974 in a bus accident in Israel. And we buried her, and that's where I was going now, going to the cemetery. And I pulled over, and I was 28 when she died.

And I remember the scene very clearly, as we sang there, around her grave. It took me about five minutes to find the brass stone. I felt embarrassed by that.

There was nobody there to be embarrassed with. I just felt good grief. I should know where this is.

And I found it. And there's where, of course, as you can imagine, the dam broke, and I got a good 54-year-old cry, because nobody's within a thousand yards of me. And I just didn't do any effort to hold it back.

But those tears just overflowed with, thank you, thank you, thank you for a mom like that. Thank you for 28 years of a mom like that. Thank you that though my little children never knew their grandmother, they taste their grandmother every day because of her faithfulness in my life.

It was all mercy. I don't understand to this day why the Lord took her at age 56. I don't understand that.

But I accept it. I bow before it. I regard it as mercy that I had her so long.

And I'll find out later why. Why the timing, Father, of that departure. Now, all these little stories about the mercies of God are connected to what I'm trying to do here because of how they fed in to a sense of God and sin and salvation and faith that came to a point before the mourning happened.

And that was back there when my daddy had left the house. I was alone in this big house. This is not the house I grew up in.

I stood on the sun porch looking out over the backyard. I've been visiting this house for 25 years. My father will celebrate his 25th wedding anniversary in two weeks.

And he was married to my mother for 36 years. That's a lot of marriage. 36 plus 25.

But I stood there looking out over this backyard, looking, feeling the strangeness of this house. So I've been there for 25 years. It's not my house.

This is my dad's and stepmother's house. And it hit me, one of these old saints is going to die soon. Daddy will move out or he'll die first.

And I will stand here one last time trying to divvy up what's hers and his. And I'll never come back again. I won't darken the door of this house.

And I won't come to Easley again in my life. And the closedness of it all. The coming to an end of something that seemed so imminent was very powerful.

And you know what happened? There was this almost a cry of rebellion that said, Lord, is life just an accumulation of endings? As you move through life, are chapters just closing and closing and closing so that there's less and less life to live and more and more memories to have? Is that all there is? And as I reflected on that moment since then to get ready for this message, this is the question I've asked. And I ask it to you now because you've all tasted these things. You've all tasted this.

If you're old enough at least, you have tasted closings of chapters. A 10-year chapter, a 25-year chapter, a 50-year chapter. You stand there.

You relive it. And the question is, is this immense, massive longing, the things not closed, that they not be that way, this almost reflexive rebellion against the endings of good things, is that just a chemical evolutionary reaction that's happening in your animal body a little farther down the evolutionary chain than what a dog might feel? Or is that a testimony of God saying, the reason you feel this way is because you were made for something else? This is an echo of something for which you are made that is permanent and lasting and personal and not mechanistic. And the reason these endings feel so awkward and so foreign and so alien is because you weren't made for endings.

You were made for something lasting, for something permanent, for something resilient, for something that will never grow old. Could that be a true assessment of what goes on in the human soul at moments like those? Is this not an echo of what the Bible is teaching us about ourselves? And so, I want to close this message by outlining for you what I believe the biblical diagnosis and the biblical remedy is for the issues that rise at a moment like that and say, no, it can't just be a series of endings. There's got to be something more permanent.

And as I look back with remorse and I look forward with some fears, what's the solution to that? Number one, four observations quickly. In Genesis 1.27, we are taught by the Bible that we're created in the image of God. God created man in His own image.

In the image of God, He created him. Male and female, He created them. That's the Bible's identity teaching of who you are.

You are made in the image of God. That's why you are so different from the animals. That's why as you contemplate what goes on inside of you, there are loves, there's a sense of justice, there's a sense of duty, there's a sense of right and wrong, there are fears, there are remorse, there are longings, and these are not things you share with the animals.

You know at your best, highest, most honest moments that the erupting of your heart in love and hate and in justice as you assess what might happen in Florida, say, and something rises up inside of you and say, they better not do it that way. Or you're maybe on the other side, they better not do it that way. That's not an animal reaction.

That's a justice issue. And that's a reflection of the image of God in you. Oh, how I get so upset with this Ranger Rick magazine that I get in the mail every month.

Because it is so evolutionary in its assessment of these kids that it's written for, calling them animals, teaching them that they're animals. Oh, I just burned. I read it last night.

You may say, well, why do you subscribe to that thing? And I do it because I like the pictures. These strange fish and spiders and the armadillo. Have you ever looked at an armadillo? You worship when you look at an armadillo.

But when I read with my little girl Talitha last night about her and all the other animals, I almost tore the magazine in half. Don't say to me, well, technically, biologically, we are in the animal blah, blah, blah. Well, yes, that's not the point.

Of course there's an overlap. I breathe, there's oxygen, I know all that. That's just utterly beside the point.

You know you don't want to be treated like an animal. You know you're not an animal. There is an infinite qualitative difference between you and the animals and it's because, at least this is the Bible's teaching, and I'm commending it to you as the best explanation of humanity.

You are created in the image of God. That's why we have buildings like we have buildings and roads like we have roads and transportation and entertainment and business and commerce and philosophy and love and songs and marriage and children. And, oh, you're going to call this evolution? Matter plus time and energy, a little sprinkling of information from who knows where, and you get you.

You don't believe that. You know that's not an adequate explanation. And so the first thing the Bible teaches us is who we are, namely we're created in the image of God, which sheds light on so much, so much.

But here's the second thing it teaches, and this finishes shedding light. We are all sinners against God. We haven't trusted Him, we haven't loved Him, we haven't followed Him, we haven't worshipped Him, we haven't thanked Him the way we ought, and therefore there's an alienation between us, and He's just and

holy and good and can't look on sin.

So there's this breach between us. Our own conscience is testified to us. You wake up in the morning, you feel dirty or guilty.

You go to bed at night and you feel this unspecified sense of inadequacy and wrongness about something in the universe, and you and you haven't lived up to your own standards, let alone society's, let alone God's, and your own conscience is just constantly teaching you're made for God. You're made for God. You're made for God.

Come home. You're going to feel rotten and inadequate. Everything in your life is going to go wrong, and society's going to go wrong as long as we keep running from God and don't come home and rest and trust and worship and thank and love and obey God.

And none of us do. We go our own way. We're all rebels to the core.

And the third thing the Bible teaches is that the remedy for this diagnosis is Jesus. God sent His Son into the world to die for us. So many Bible passages teach this so beautifully.

You know the most famous one of all, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, not that closing, but have eternal life, endless mercies forever and ever and ever. I love the passage. I'll use this one other passage.

From Romans 5, 6, following where it says, While we were yet helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. Scarcely for a righteous man will one dare to die. Yet perchance for a good man one might even die.

But God commends His love for us in the while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having been justified by His blood, shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. And if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more now being reconciled shall we be saved by His life.

It's such a clear, powerful teaching that the remedy for my alienation from God, from which flows all the mess of my life, my sense of remorse. I was driving up Bradley Boulevard, and I have no idea why this happened, just before I got to the house, and I was trembling. Why was I trembling? And I asked myself, are you trembling because as you are almost transported back into age 14, 15, you're scared somebody's going to find out.

They thought you were a pretty good guy, White Oak Baptist Church. They didn't know what was going on inside your head. Everybody in this room has remorse about something.

Fears about the future, failures in the past. God has not only an identification teaching for you that you're in the image of God, not only a diagnosis for you that you and I are sinners, He's got a remedy for us. That Jesus Christ came into the world to bear my sins so that sinner though I be, I can be forgiven, my guilt can be taken away, His wrath can be removed justly, and I can have everlasting joy and new mercies and be transformed in this world so that I might be of some use someday to somebody, even though I'm imperfect.

That leaves one last teaching from the Bible that I want to commend to you, and that is that the only way we enjoy this gift of salvation is by receiving it as the treasure of our lives. So if you were to sit there now

and say, Okay, I hear the diagnosis, I hear the identity, I hear the remedy, Christ died for our sins, do I have to do anything? How do I get in on it, if that's true? If this begins to hit home to me as the best explanation of reality that I know of, and I want to reach out and embrace it and put it to the test, what do I do? And John, the apostle of Jesus said, As many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the children of God. Receive Him.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, the Bible says. Or to make it really crystal clear over against the alternative, Ephesians 2.8, By grace are you saved through faith, not of yourselves, not of works, so that nobody might boast. There's only one way to participate in God's great remedy, and that is receiving Jesus, receiving grace, receiving salvation as the treasure of your life.

Not working for it, not trying to earn it. Well that's it, that's my outline of the Christian message. And I would just remind you that you're on a porch right now, looking out over the backyard, and a 10-year or a 25-year or a 50-year chapter is closing this morning.

And God has you here for a reason, in this room right now. And the reason is that you would be hearing God's interpretation of your life. What's the meaning of your life? What's the meaning of your potential? What's the meaning of your sin? What's the meaning of your hope and your fears? And He's summoning you, come back to me, you're made for me.

Come back through my Son, Jesus. And Father, I pray that as they go, that you would minister to every need in this room, solidify the work that you've begun, I pray, and set us on a course where there's not closings merely, but an opening to everlasting joy and everlasting life, where there'll be no more pain, no more crying anymore, for the former things have passed away. In Jesus' name I ask it.

Amen. Have a great Thanksgiving week. You're dismissed.

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. We invite you to visit DesiringGod online at www.DesiringGod.org. There you'll find hundreds of sermons, articles, radio broadcasts and much more, all available to you at no charge.

Our online store carries all of Pastor John's books, audio and video resources. You can also stay up to date on what's new at Desiring God. Again, our website is www.DesiringGod.org or call us toll free at 1-888-346-4700.

Our mailing address is DesiringGod 2601 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406. Desiring God exists to help you make God your treasure, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/7/SID7161.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/thank-god-for-the-mercies-of-christ-festival-of-thanksgiving/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net