

# Where I Am There Will My Servant Be a Call to Treasure Christ Together

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon emphasizes the importance of treasuring Christ together as a church community while navigating the challenges of growth and mission fulfillment.*

**Duration:** 39:35

**Scripture:** John 12:23-26

**Topics:** "Following Jesus", "Treasuring Christ"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the radical call to follow Jesus, highlighting the themes of self-sacrifice, treasuring Christ together, and the challenging yet rewarding path of obedience. It explores the concept of treasuring Christ as valuing, cherishing, and delighting in Jesus both individually and corporately, with a focus on eternal life, fruit-bearing, and God-honored closeness to Jesus. The sermon stresses the importance of experiencing the pardon of Jesus as a pattern for sacrificial living and the sustaining power of the gospel in our lives.

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## Transcript

Let's pray together. Father these are radical words. Hating our life, dying like a seed, the hour of crushing come, following you where you went on the Calvary Road.

And so I ask for help to be faithful to them and to you. It's come and apply this word to our church, to our lives. I ask in Jesus name, Amen.

Well in our little niche on planet earth, this feels like a historic moment to me in the life of this church. To be on the weekend before the launch of the third campus of Bethlehem Baptist Church and we're praying as I said for 750 folks from the Saturday night service and the two downtown Sunday morning services and perhaps, I don't know, some from the north campus to go south. And within any institutional historical marker, there are lives touched which feel bigger.

That touch feels bigger than the institutional reality. And some of you are contemplating that move after a year here, 10 years here, 20 years here, and 50 years here. That's no small thing.

Some of you built these buildings, paid for them, and we're asking you to go live in a tent in the wilderness. And that's why I chose this text. Treasuring Christ together has to do with everybody at Bethlehem.

Everybody. Going to south doesn't immediately impact everybody. It impacts those who go.

It impacts some of the staff. David Livingston and Rick Melson will focus almost entirely south. So their lives change.

They're looking at house purchasing, that sort of thing. That's big after almost 20 years here for David, laboring downtown. But everybody is a part of treasuring Christ together.

And so I know there are many new folks and we need to understand the bigger picture. Why are we doing this? Why do we do church like this? And so let me take a few minutes. Half of this sermon is introduction and half is exposition.

So tolerate that once in a while, okay? We need to get the big picture of what we're doing as a church and then we go to the text for the last half and apply it to our situation. So the big picture is there is this mission statement. We exist, if you know it say it with me, we exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

Now that's the reason we exist. I take that as my own personal life mission. Underneath that mission statement you must think through strategic ways of acting to make that happen with God's blessing and help.

And underneath that mission statement is this reality called treasuring Christ together. A movement of multiplying campuses, planting churches, and global diaconate, meaning touching with our money and our lives the poorest of the poor. Those three elements are part of treasuring Christ together.

Let me say a word about each one. The campuses, North has existed now. We voted on August 30th, 2002, to move to a multi-campus reality.

And so since the fall of 2002, the North campus has been a reality, or at least the North group has been a reality. We were in a tent for two years and now have been in a building for some time. Campuses are all a part of one church.

Single vision, single strategy, single theological foundation, single eldership, single constitution, single band of missionaries, single budget. That's what makes it one. Those realities make the campuses one church.

Church plants, like All Nations Christian Fellowship that most recently went out from us, or Jordan Thomas, who perhaps even more recently went from here to plant the church in Memphis. Those are totally independent churches with a common theological foundation, but no organizational connection with us. Charlie Handren is the new church planting resident.

We will commission Charlie, I believe, next week there, North. You'll meet him everywhere. So church planting is a big piece of treasuring Christ together.

And then the global diaconate is a fund and a network of people for touching the poorest of the poor to relieve as much suffering as we can, especially eternal suffering. So wherever a campus starts, or a new church starts, or global suffering happens, all of Bethlehem is involved in being a part of treasuring Christ together. So this historic weekend and next has an impact on all of us.

And my prayer is that every member, North Campus, Downtown Campus, South Campus, will understand the vision, be moved by God to embrace it, and give to it so that people will become obedient to Jesus everywhere in the Twin Cities. I hope that we never think we've arrived. I hope we never think that as a church we can stop spreading.

We can just be comfortable with who we are without thinking about how to spread a passion for the supremacy of God. So I pray that thousands of you will find it as a part of your holy ambition to pray, and to work, and to give, and to make treasuring Christ together a great blessing in the Twin Cities. I pray that you'll look at line two.

I put my, I was going to keep my envelope, but I put it in the offering plate. I hope that when you look at line two of your little pink church giving envelope, and if you're regular here and would like one of those, just let us know and we'll send you a box of envelopes. It helps in record-keeping.

I hope when you look at line two it says, treasuring Christ together, that you will think lost people, risk-taking evangelism, authentic God-centered worship, growing disciples, young and old, single and married, men, women, urban and suburban, red and yellow, black and white, and all on the basis of the vision of the Bethlehem Baptist Church elder affirmation of faith. We are a theologically driven movement of multiplying campuses, planting churches, and the global diaconate. We do not plant theologically generic churches.

We plant churches whose leaders believe in 12 pages of biblical doctrine, and if they don't, we don't plant it, and we don't do the campus. It's a theologically driven movement. It costs a lot of money.

You have given \$800,000 this year to treasuring Christ together, which is a wonderful thing because that's twice as much as you gave at this time last year, so it's not trailing off. It's growing, which is the way it must because the vision is growing. We owe about eight million dollars on that North campus.

Ten percent of every dollar given to treasuring Christ together goes away from Bethlehem to church planting, and ten percent of every dollar given to treasuring Christ together goes to the global diaconate to touch the poorest of the poor, and eighty percent is devoted to paying for North campus start-up costs, South, and ongoing vision things. None of that money touches the 7.4 million dollars it takes to do the ministry and missions of this church. It's a totally separate fund, so treasuring Christ together, line two on your envelope, and church admissions, line one on the envelope, and that totals up to a need of ten million dollars a year or so in order to pay down the North campus debt the way we hope to.

So it's a huge thing. It looks breathtaking when you look at the numbers, and we simply pray earnestly and then try to live according to the text that we're going to look at in just a moment. So here are two questions I want to ask.

Why do we do it this way? That's sort of a picture of what it is. Now why do we do it this way? Just briefly with bullets, bullet points, and then the last question, how is it sustained? How does God mean to sustain this vision for decades? So question number one, why do we do it this way? Maybe four or five questions. No, I just have four, and bullet answers.

Number one, why not cease to grow and just work on the inner life of the church? There's plenty of work here. We're pretty imperfect folks and need to love each other better than we do, so why don't we just stop thinking growth and start just working on the inside? And the answer to that question is passion for the

glory of God, love for lost sinners, and obedience to Jesus make that not an option. Number two, why not grow only by planting churches and have only one campus? Just plant churches and handle growth that way.

Answer, we are committed to planting churches, but we don't think we are able or called to steward growth by church planting alone. And both those words are crucial. We're not able or called to steward growth only by church planting, partly by church planting.

Number three, why not grow by building one large complex downtown or in the suburbs instead of multiple campuses? Answer, there isn't room downtown for the complex and the parking, and we're called to be in the city. We're not going to the suburbs. Now while I'm the pastor, I'm not going to the suburbs.

I live down here. I'm gonna die down here, God willing, but I love people, and they live in the suburbs, and so we plant campuses there. But I work from the center.

I'm an urban guy. I'm committed here, and I go there. We're not gonna take this thing and plop it in wherever.

So we believe we're called to the city, called to the city, not just to the suburbs, and we believe that seeing, we see great advantages in 2,000 person campuses over a six to ten thousand person thing in one place, and I could give you a lot of reasons for that, but there's no time. Number four, why not grow by multiple campuses with multiple preachers instead of just one with a video answer? For now, at least, we believe that the churchwide unity across multiple campuses is served best by a unified teaching on the weekend. We think different notes struck on all the campuses week after week, no matter how good the notes were struck, would pull us apart rather than holding us together.

That may be God's will for us someday. The elders don't think that's God's will for us now, that we be pulled apart toward separate independent churches, but if that's the case, then it appears that a unified teaching on the weekend will help maintain unity across the campuses. Now dozens more things could be asked and dozen more things could be said, but that gives you a flavor of why we're doing it the way we're doing it.

It wasn't an easy decision. We were years in the prayer and thinking about it. Now let's go to the text, because the text that I've chosen, John 12, especially verses 23 to 26, is the answer to my second question, namely, how shall we be sustained? How shall this mission, this strategy, treasuring Christ together, be sustained over the decades? Each of these four verses, 23, 24, 25, and 26, each of those four verses has in it, we will see, a destination, or a goal, or an end, and each verse has in it a pathway on which you must be to get to the goal.

So what I want to do is walk through the verses and notice both the destination and the the pathway. The destination happens to be spectacular, wonderful, joyful in every case, and the pathway is painful in every case, but don't hear the word painful as joyless. Don't hear painful as joyless.

We all got that? Don't hear painful as joyless. The Calvary Road behind Jesus is painful. There is no getting around it.

Through many afflictions we must enter the kingdom of heaven. There is no shortcut. The Calvary Road is the only road that leads to glory.

It is painful and filled with joy, a very different kind of joy than many people have tasted. Sorrowful yet always rejoicing is the banner that flies over the emotional ethos of this church. We're always talking, I'm always pushing on the leaders and on the worship leaders.

We are sorrowful yet always rejoicing because I want people who come to this church broken in half by life not to feel like we are chipper. We don't like that word here. That's my bad word.

We are happy with tears on our face. We've tasted the pain. We've been broken.

We've been shamed. We've known pain. We've known loss and we know unshakable joy.

So don't hear when I say every one of these four paths are painful. Don't hear joyless. Number one, verse 23, Jesus answered them, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Now the obvious thing in that verse is that the Son of Man would soon experience glory. That's obvious. The time has come for the Son of Man, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

So what's obvious in the verse is that he's going to be experiencing glory very soon. What's not obvious is the path. At least not in that verse.

It's not obvious. You know the path. And it's all in that little word hour.

The hour has come and you should ask what hour? And the answer is given in verse 27. Now, now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? Now that's something bad's about to happen here.

He wouldn't talk like that if something bad weren't about to happen. The path on the way to glorification is painful here. Father shall I escape? Should you save me from this hour? But for this purpose, I have come to this hour.

He's going to die. We all know what this hour is. He's going to suffer and he's going to die in a matter of hours from when he's saying this.

So the hour is the hour of his death and on the other side is glory and there's the path and there's the destination. Glory through the cross. Number two, verse 24.

Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Now that verse comes between verse 23, which is about Jesus and verse 25, which is about us.

And I think it's pointing in both directions. Who's the seed here that dies? He's just said his hour has come. So he's dying.

He's dying. He's the seed. But he's just about to say something very similar about us and our suffering.

And so the seed is us. He's relating us and himself here as the seed. Unless a seed goes in the ground and dies, there it is, healthy, shiny seed.

You put it in a glass jar, fill it up with a thousand of them, put it on your mantle. Cool. Yeah, they are.

Yeah, they are just alone and hard. They don't rot. They just sit there on the mantle.

But if you put them in the ground and they get all wet and rot, it looks like they're rotting, they might produce a thousand seeds in the fruit that comes out on their branches. And that's what happened when he died. He died and he has, look at all of you, just look at you.

Most of you in this room are new creations in Christ because he died. It's amazing what happens when a person dies. So it's clear what the goal is here.

The destination is fruit bearing. I want lots of fruit here. I want people to be saved and I want them to be obedient to Jesus.

I want them to shine like lights in the world and give lots of glory to the King. That's the kind of fruit Jesus wanted, died to get, and we should. We should live our lives the way he lived his, with whatever dying he requires of us in order that we might bear fruit and not be nice and comfortable and all alone on the mantle.

And the pathway there is death, just like in verse 23. Now, verse 25, number three, whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

So what's the destination here? Eternal life. And you can miss it. How do you miss eternal life? If eternal life is there and you're aiming for it and you miss it and go to hell, how did you do that? Loving your life.

It's plain and clear as day, right? Whoever loves his life loses it. You don't get eternal life if you love your life. How do you get it? What's the path? What's the path that leads there? The path is whoever hates his life in this world will have eternal life.

There is a pathway that leads to perishing, the pathway of loving your life, and there's a pathway that leads to eternal life. That's the pathway of hating your life in this world. So, the destination is eternal life and the pathway is self-hatred in this world.

What does that mean? Self-hatred in this world. Isn't it wonderful that he added the words in this world? Because if he had asked me to hate my life forever, I would have collapsed in despair. You mean there's no, there's never a time when things are going to go well for me.

There's no heaven. There's no fellowship with you. There's no relief from guilt.

There's no restoration of fellowship. Never. It's just always bad experiences.

But he didn't. He said, there's a season. There is a season for this.

Now, what is it? And my answer is that it's what he did on the Calvary Road and it's what a seed does when it goes into the ground and dies. It is choosing behaviors in life that look to the world like you must hate yourself. The opposite of hating yourself in this world would be devoting most of your energies to securing yourself, comforting yourself, becoming famous, whatever worldly desires you have, just giving energy to more acclaim and more comfort and more security.

Whatever this world, whatever this world can give you, that's what you live for. But if you hate yourself in this world, you count it all as rubbish. That's Paul's language.

You count it all as rubbish in order that you might gain Christ. And so you're going to make some very peculiar choices with your money, housing, your mission trips, where you rear your family, what you do

with your leisure. It's not going to be driven by worldly desires.

It's going to be driven by heavenly desires. It's going to look strange to the world. It's the same thing when he said, unless you hate your mother and father and your own life also, you can't be my disciple.

You make choices in life, like going to East Africa, where you can't even name the country or the people group because it's so dangerous. And maybe there are some grandparents, I don't know, the Jones's grandparents, who say, don't do that to my grandbabies. It's like hating them.

We understand why they might say that. So the pathway in verse 25 is eternal life. And I mean, the goal is eternal life.

And the pathway there is to hate your life in this world. Number four, verse 26, if anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there will my servant be also.

If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. And here Jesus says, serving me means following me. And where's he going? He's going straight to Calvary and then glory.

So don't think there's any sideline service. You don't serve Jesus off the path. If you want to serve me, get on the path.

That's what he's saying, right? He who serves me, follows me. You're not over there in your little safe cubicle. You're on the road behind me.

And we're going together outside the gate where it's hard and some risks are taken with your life and your health and your family and your money and where you go to church on Sunday morning. You see why I chose to take? It calls us all to rethink our whole lives. So let's sum up the destinations now.

Line them up. Four destinations. One, Jesus' glorification.

Two, fruit bearing, both Jesus and ours. That is, other people coming to the Savior and coming to believe and obey. Three, eternal life.

Four, God-honored closeness to Jesus. I didn't say anything about that last phrase I should have. If anyone serves me, following me on the road, the Father will honor him.

Where I am, there my servant is. So the goal, let me make it clear for verse 26. The goal, the end, the destination in verse 26 is God-honored closeness to Jesus.

That's the goal in verse 26. God-honored, God-commended closeness to Jesus. Where I am, there my servant will be.

We're going to be together. Together on the cross, together in heaven, together in pain, together in everlasting pleasure. We're going to be together.

And God's going to be honoring you. You stay near me, you get honor from my Father. So those are the four.

Glorification of Jesus, fruit bearing, eternal life, and God-honored closeness to Jesus. Can we collapse those into one now? Can we say it one? Here's my effort. It just lines them up.

The goal that we should have is glorious, God-honored closeness to Jesus forever with others who are there because of our lives. That's my summary of the four goals. Say it again.

Glorious, God-honored closeness to Jesus forever with lots of other people doing the same thing who are there because of our lives. This text calls us to. And the pathway? Verse 23, death.

Verse 24, death. Verse 25, hate your life in this world. Verse 26, follow him on the Calvary road, death.

In other words, when Jesus calls a person, he calls them to come and die. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jesus Christ. So how are you doing with your readiness to die daily? He would come after me, let him take up his cross daily, take up his cross daily and follow me.

A painful and a joyful path. Check yourself. Let me relate this now to treasuring Christ together.

Think of treasuring Christ together, not as multiplying campuses, plant churches, and global diaconate, caring for the poorest of the poor. Think of treasuring Christ together now as the literal meaning of the words. What happens in your heart by way of valuing, esteeming, cherishing, loving, embracing, delighting in, being satisfied by Jesus.

That's what treasuring Christ means. And think of it as doing it with others. Together.

With others. That's heaven. When all our sin is gone and he's present.

I think the destination of these verses that we've just looked at defines treasuring Christ together. That's what we want to be. That's what we want to do.

Glorious, God-honored, closeness to Jesus forever, with others, treasuring Christ together with others because we're there, because of our lives. We're not about rejoicing in Jesus alone. No Christian should be content to treasure Jesus alone.

We should want to do it in corporate celebrations called worship services, and we should want to do it with any unbeliever we know. It's called evangelism. Prayer.

Missions. I think the answer to the question, how will God sustain treasuring Christ together, the strategy, it will be the hope of this happening. The precious hope that we will one day experience glorious, God-honored, closeness to Jesus forever with others who are there from Eagan and Apple Valley and Bloomington and Burnsville and a host of others.

They'll be there in heaven with us because the salt was spread, the light was spread with many other faithful salt-spreading, light-spreading churches. One more final statement about what sustains us that I've got to stress from the text and from the table. Namely, that Jesus took this path to glory as both pattern, which we've seen so clearly in the text, and as pardon, example, and substitute.

And the pattern follows the pardon. Pardon proceeds and enables the pattern. You cannot follow Jesus to Burnsville faithfully without first experiencing the pardon of Jesus in your heart where you live and right now.

We're a gospel church. Everything relates to the gospel. The center.

The cross. And it's because He died for us. When He said the hour has come, what hour did He mean? This hour.

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. That's what happened in that hour. So, He laid down His life for us.

What happens when He lays down His life is that all our sins, past, present, and future are covered. Our forgiveness is purchased. We are made in Him acceptable to God.

And a huge freedom and relief and power and courage and boldness and risk-taking and self-hatred in this world with joy comes into our lives. The question of whether you've experienced this will be whether you walk out of here tonight not oppressed by the word self-hatred. If you walk out oppressed by the word self-hatred, you didn't understand.

It is so liberating to be freed from the love of self the way Jesus means it. That is, bigger house, bigger car, bigger income, more fame, bigger, more world, more world, more world, more world. It's so freeing to say, you mean I don't have to live that way? You mean I can live simply? I can look to the world like a fool because I'm bound for heaven where I'll own the universe? If you walk out oppressed by this, you didn't understand it.

So I hope that you will understand that what he's saying is a radical way of living quite unlike the urban world and the suburban world. So that people ask us about the hope that is within us and we say our hope is God-honored closeness to Jesus forever with lots of people like you joining us in everlasting happiness or whatever words come to your mind at the time. So we want to close in prayer and ask that God would bless this imperfect B-plus strategy, maybe B. I love to share with the church that we elders don't think we ever get it better than a B or a B-plus.

There are no A-plus plans in this church. We just muddle through with our imperfect understanding of strategies and venture forward because the cross is so good. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I'm so thankful that you are willing to come down and touch a C, C-minus, B, B-plus, even D-plan sometimes. You just bless them because you're God and not a man. Your ways are higher than our ways and your thoughts are higher than our thoughts and so we come to you and trust in you for this next move.

And I ask that you would touch the north campus with great blessing and touch the downtown campus with great blessing. And for the hundreds now who are going to be praying about whether to make this move to the south campus, I pray you'd touch them with this text, this destination, this pathway, and all of us. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. Amen.

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