

Will You Last?

by John Piper

The pursuit of joy in God is a means to glorifying him and loving the world, and this pursuit is a lifelong commitment.

Duration: 49:30

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:5, Hebrews 13:13-14, Hebrews 13:17

Topics: "Suffering And Perseverance", "Self Denial"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the struggles and suffering that the audience has endured in the past. He commends them for their compassion towards prisoners and their joyful acceptance of the plundering of their property. The speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking happiness and fulfillment in God rather than worldly desires. He addresses the objection of self-denial by referencing Bible verses that speak about losing one's life for the sake of the gospel. The sermon concludes with a powerful quote from Jim Elliott about giving up what cannot be kept to gain what cannot be lost.

Transcript

Desiring God Ministries presents the following message by Dr. John Piper. Well, it's been a great privilege for me to be here. I know that I have benefited more than any of you has, as is the case whenever you minister.

That's part of my lesson in coming. Leighton Ford said and asked, will we burn, will we risk, and will we last? Let me connect this morning's question, will we last, to Tuesday's question, will we burn? The connection goes like this. God loves his glory with white hot zeal and does everything he does to uphold and display that glory in the world.

One of the reasons we said that is not unloving, even though 1st Corinthians 13 5 says, love seeks not its own. One of the reasons it's not unloving for God to seek his own glory with such great passion is because God's passion to be glorified and my passion to be satisfied come to simultaneous consummation in one act of joy. And I illustrated that with the roses given to my wife.

The implication of that great truth, which is probably one of the greatest I've ever discovered in my theological reflections, is that you should make it your lifelong commitment to pursue happiness in God. Or to put it negatively, if any teaching in the world or any teaching in the church prompts you to try to sever the root of your desire for happiness and somehow deny or crucify your passion to be glad, that teaching

will compromise your worship and will weaken your love for other people. That remains to be shown, that last sentence.

Demas has deserted me in love for this world. That's the text that came to me yesterday as I thought of illustrating the opposite of lasting. Will we last? Demas did not last.

2 Timothy 4.9. Demas, in love with this world, has deserted me. He left the cause. He didn't last.

Now, I wonder how many of us would preach to Demas like this, in love with the world. Right. Demas, if you would just learn to stop seeking your own happiness, if you would just learn to cut the root of that passion for joy and start serving God and doing your duty, then you might last.

I wonder how many would preach to him like that. It's in the air, that kind of talk. That's not the biblical answer.

That is not the biblical response to Demas. The biblical response to Demas, I hope to show you this morning, and as the means of persevering to the end, is Demas, Demas, who has enticed you to stop seeking your joy in God? Who deceived you, Demas, that you began to think that you could find fulfillment in the broken cisterns of this world and abandon the fountain of living waters? Demas, wake up and pursue joy! That's the answer. That's the biblical answer to Demas.

People who fall in love with the world don't need to be told to stop pursuing joy. They need to be told it's serious about pursuing joy. Stop being deceived about where joy can be found.

So my counsel to you on this last question is that the secret to lasting is to recognize this truth that God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him, and therefore your fulfillment and his glory come to simultaneous consummation as you never ever forsake the pursuit of your gladness in God. Don't ever forsake it. Now the way I want to develop this this morning is to raise six objections.

I don't know how your mind grows deep in God, but I'll tell you how mine works. I get an idea reading one text in the Bible and then I meditate on it. I was reading in Psalm 77 this morning.

I will meditate on all thy works and muse on thy mighty deeds. I meditate. You know what meditation consists in for me? Asking questions of the thought I just had.

Raising problems from other passages of scripture that don't seem to fit this passage of scripture until I've gotten to the root of unity. I'm going to raise six biblical objections to what I just said and answer them all from the Bible, Lord willing. In doing that, I don't just want to defend what I said.

I want it to be understood because I know that when I stand up in the American milieu and say, make it your lifelong vocation to pursue your joy, it is very liable to misunderstand. If you were to think right now that this is just another echo of the self-esteem gospel or just another spinoff from the health, wealth, and prosperity, you would be lightyears separated from where I'm heading. What I'm doing here is finding, I hope, a new and creative way to torpedo the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel.

That's just a forecast that you misunderstand. Six objections. Number one, does the Bible really teach that you're to pursue your joy? I mean, joy, okay, if it's just an unintended result.

I hear that all the time. Don't pursue it. Let it come as a forgotten, unintended result of obedience.

Second objection, I'll just list them and then we'll come back to them. What about self-denial? What about Keith Park's fourth point? Renewed acceptance of the sacrifice principle. Third, doesn't this focus on my pleasure, my joy, my happiness, put too much emphasis on emotion? Isn't the essence of Christianity will, decision? Fourth, what becomes of the noble concept of being a slave of Christ? Paul's favorite word for himself, doulos, I'm a servant, I'm a slave.

It just sounds so different what you're saying. It doesn't sound like the service of a slave to his master. It's self-seeking pursuit of joy.

Fifth, it doesn't sound like love to other people. Is it loving to pursue your own joy? I mean, the Bible says love seeks not its own. First Corinthians 13.5. And finally, if life becomes a pursuit of my pleasure, how in the world can the centrality of God be maintained? Those are my six objections.

There is a resounding biblical answer to every one of them, and I hope it unfolds as well as defends what I'm trying to say, namely, that you will last in the service of the King if you can acknowledge and embrace the great truth that the pursuit of your joy is a means to glorifying your Father and a pathway to loving the world. Objection number one, does the Bible really teach that you should pursue your own joy? It does, and it does so in at least four ways. Number one, it commands it.

Psalms 37.4 is not a suggestion, it's a command. Delight yourself in the Lord. And there are many others.

Joy is commanded, and the pursuit of it is commanded. Delight yourself in the Lord is the opposite of being indifferent to whether you're joyful in God or not. Second, the Bible teaches this by means of threats.

I remember reading in C.S. Lewis one time a quote from Jeremy Taylor, which said, God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy. And I always thought that was clever, but I didn't know whether it was biblical until I read it almost verbatim in Deuteronomy 28, verse 47. Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, therefore you will serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you.

God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy. It does so, the Bible teaches this in three ways. I mean, in a third way.

The nature of faith demands it. For example, Hebrews 11.6. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe two things, that he is, and that he is a what? Rewarder.

Now just ponder this for a minute. You cannot please God unless you are fully persuaded in coming to him that you will be rewarded. You cannot please God unless you come to him for reward.

If you try to come to God in some self-denying way to do him a favor instead of get a favor for you, he is not pleased with your coming. If you try to put him in the position of a beneficiary and yourself in the position of a benefactor, you know nothing of biblical faith and cannot please God. Right at the essence of faith is the demand that you pursue your joy in God.

If you don't, if you fall prey to the stoic notion that somehow service of God is rooted in something else than your passion to be glad in him, God is not pleased. A fountain is pleased when you stoop to drink, not when you pour buckets. And the fourth way that the Bible teaches that this is an obligation upon Christians to pursue their joy is by the nature of sin.

Jeremiah 2, 12 and 13. Be appalled, O heavens, at this and be shocked. Be utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed two evils.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Now, what would be your definition of evil on the basis of that text? Evil is the insanity of forsaking the source of everlasting joy. That's what that verse says very clearly.

Evil is the universe appalling, heaven-stunning insanity of seeking joy in the broken cisterns of money, sex, alcohol, drugs, prestige, power, and forsaking the fountain of living water. Be appalled, O heavens, this is the essence of sin. They forsake the glory of God and embrace creatures and worship frogs.

Those four ways, at least, the Bible makes very plain that you must make it your lifelong goal and commitment and allegiance to pursue your joy in God. Never to deny the pursuit of joy, never to pretend as if you don't have this craving and passion and longing for happiness, but rather to glut it on God. So I say that the first objection is answered.

The Bible does teach that we should do this. Second objection, what about self-denial? And what about Keith Park's fourth point? Mark 8.35 says, whoever would save his life will lose it. Or John 12.27, he who loves his life will lose it.

My answer is simply to say, finish the verse. And whoever loses his life, for my sake and the gospel, will save it. Now, what is Jesus appealing to? What condition of the heart and motive is he appealing to when he says, if you try to save your life, you're going to lose it, but if you lose it, you'll save it.

Now, what do you want to do? Lose it or save it? And the answer is, I want to save it. He says, all right, I've told you how to save it. Lose it.

But in no way does he compromise the principle that we should passionately want life. Rather, he simply tells us how to get there, namely, die. And if you try to cut the nerve of your longing for life, you rip the heart out of that text.

The measure of your longing for life, your longing for everlasting joy, is the amount of comfort you are willing to give up to get it. I preach incessantly at my church against the padding of our lives with comforts. Because it's a rattle.

It is not going to pay off. Flannery O'Connor, I don't know if you've ever read any of her novels, southern Catholic novelist, she said, I don't assume that renunciation goes with submission or even that renunciation is a good in itself. Always you renounce a lesser good for a greater.

The opposite is what sin is. That's exactly right. The struggle to submit is not a struggle to submit, but a struggle to accept and with passion.

I mean, possibly with joy. Picture me with my ground teeth, stalking joy, fully armed, too, for it is a highly dangerous quest. You might get your head chopped off by a Muslim Shiite or something like that.

You know, as I've pondered more and more this way of thinking, missionary biographies have become the greatest resource of support. And this is so encouraging because so many people think what I'm saying without, they don't give any attempt to understand it, they just hear a few words, that it cuts the nerve of missions. You all know the great saying of Jim Elliot, we have t-shirts at Bethlehem with this saying on the

back of them that our young people wear.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain, what he cannot lose. And Elizabeth Elliot ended her book when the press had said, what a tragic and stupid loss of these five missionaries. And she said, that reporter did not understand the second line of Jim Elliot's credo, to gain what he cannot lose.

Jim Elliot did not commit any ultimate sacrifice or any ultimate self-denial. His whole philosophy of life was, it would be foolish to stay in Wheaton, Illinois. It's not foolish to give your life away to gain what you cannot lose.

Lottie Moon said, there is no greater joy than the saving itself. David Livingstone came back from Africa and spoke at Cambridge. I wish I had the quote here, it's found in the Perspectives book, it's found in my book, but the sentence that's most crucial is this.

David Livingstone said to those young men and women, I never made a sacrifice. Hudson Taylor in his little book, *The Spiritual Secret of Hudson Taylor*, says exactly the same words, and I've historically wondered whether there's some kind of copying going on there. Hudson Taylor at the end of his life, as he made his last tour with his son, getting up in the middle of the night, reading his little Bible at 2 a.m. in the morning, said, I never made a sacrifice.

Zwaymer, at the end of his life, looked back over the years and remembered those days of 107, 105 degree temperatures and the week in which he lost both of his daughters within one week, little girls, and he said, the joy of it all comes back to me and I would do it all again. Ralph Winter, who can't stand my word hedonism, I don't think he's been converted yet, I call this Christian hedonism, by the way. Nevertheless, in his magnanimity, was willing to say a nice thing about the book, because I think I hooked him, see I trapped him, because one of the ways I moved towards mission was a little book he wrote about that big, I think University put it out, and the last sentence in the book after describing sacrifices says, and don't forget the joy, which is a perfect paraphrase of Acts 20, 35.

Remembering it is more a blessing to give than to receive. So he doesn't have to buy my language, but he is a Christian hedonist, whether he likes to admit it or not. And as I said last night, I mean, as I sat last night, right back there, listening to that magnificent message from Keith Parks, and he hit number four.

See, I know that when people hear this, are we willing to reaffirm the principle of sacrifice? And at my church, if anybody said that, all eyes would shift to me. What's Piper going to do with that? Now, how did that message end last night? I wish I had the poetry, a little bag, Christ extends his hand, gives him a little crumb, and he goes home and he opens his bag, and it's just a crumb of gold. And I wrote it down real fast.

The bag could have been full of gold. That's the point of the story. Keith Parks here, that's the point of the story.

The bag could have been full of gold, be given his whole life away. Now, therefore, we must always put sacrifice and self-denial within a certain framework. Peter, I believe, was rebuked in Mark 10 for this statement.

What becomes of us, Lord? We've left everything to follow you. And what was Jesus' response to him? I don't know whether he gritted his teeth and went like this, but I'll just pretend that he did. Peter, get off it.

The self-pity, self-sacrifice, self-denial thing, get off it. Nobody has left house or mother, sister, father, brother, lens, for my name's sake, that won't be repaid back a hundredfold in this life and in the life to come, eternal life with persecution. Don't ride this self-pity thing, delight in me.

There's so many other missionaries we could quote on this point of the true place of self-denial. There's no ultimate self-denial in the Christian life. You deny yourself tin so that you can have gold.

You deny yourself sand so you can stand on a rock. You deny yourself mud pies in the slums so you know what a holiday at the sea is like. There is no ultimate self-denial.

There's only temporary, minor self-denial. That's objection number two. I hope it's answered.

There is a place for self-denial, but it isn't ultimate. There is a place for sacrifice, but it isn't ultimate. The third objection, aren't we making too much of emotions when we stress that we should pursue joy, happiness, pleasure? I'm using those terms interchangeably, by the way, because the Bible does.

Thou dost show me the path of life. In thy presence is fullness of joy. At thy right hand are what? Pleasures forevermore.

I don't bellyache and quibble about it. Words are butter. You can make words mean anything you want.

The Bible uses joy, happiness, and pleasure interchangeably all over the place in the Psalms. I want you to pursue pleasure. At God's right hand, forevermore.

Now, the question is, doesn't that put too much emphasis on emotion? Isn't the essence of Christianity a decision, a will to do a thing, to accept the Lord, to obey? Joseph Fletcher, who wrote Situation Ethics, I read that when I was a junior at Wheaton in an apologetics class. And I remember one argument from it that left me cold and seemed to warm everybody else, as I recall in those days. He said, love is commanded in the Bible.

Emotions cannot be commanded. Ergo, love is not an emotion. It's an act of will.

Everybody was excited about that. I think that's dead wrong. I couldn't articulate theologically why that didn't sit with me in those days.

I know why it didn't, because I grew up in the Bible and I knew that emotions were commanded everywhere in the Bible. For example, rejoice in the Lord. Joy is commanded.

Hope in God. Hope is commanded. Fear him who can cast both soul and body into hell.

Fear is commanded. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. Peace is commanded.

Be aglow with the spirit, never flagging zeal. Zeal is commanded. Weep with those who weep.

Grief is commanded. Desire the sincere spiritual milk of the word. Desire is commanded.

Be kind to one another and tenderhearted. Tenderheartedness is commanded. Be broken and contrite, James 4, 9. Be wretched, mourn, and weep.

Be proud and arrogant. Gratitude is commanded, Ephesians 5, 20, for everything you think. Now, all of those are emotions.

You cannot turn any of those on by an act of will directly, but they're commanded. You see, I didn't have the theological savvy in those days to call this Augustinianism. Please turn the tape over now for the remainder of the message.

I didn't have the theological savvy to recognize that there is a biblical reality called the right of God to demand from his creatures what they deserve, what he deserves, whether they can give it or not in their fallen corruption. I didn't read Augustine, command what thou wilt and grant what thou commandest, until much later. And he was talking about sexual continence at the time.

So I understand theologically now why Joseph Fletcher was dead wrong. He's not an Augustinian. He doesn't believe in the sovereignty of God over human souls that has a right to tell a corrupt human being who hates him, love me or go to hell.

God has a right to tell a human being, love me, fear me, trust me, follow me, even though that human being is dead and trespasses and sins and hates God and never will move until the Holy Spirit moves him. Now, I don't think, therefore, that the essence of Christianity is willpower. And I think one of the great maladies of the evangelical church in America is that we have de-supernaturalized conversion to make it manageable in evangelism by saying all you need to do is decide something like sign or go or do or something.

You don't have to be changed. You don't have to be born again. You don't have to have a new set of affections.

Nothing needs to change except the decision that you want to go to heaven and not hell. And Jesus is the way. Who wouldn't want that without any change at all in their behavior or in their affections? I don't think we've done well and it is the source of horrendous nominalism in the churches and the perplexing thought of so many people as supposedly converted and never ever being changed.

You know, if we had time, I'd love to go over John 3, 18 to 20. Light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light. They do not come to the light because they love darkness and their deeds are evil.

You see what that means? People do not come to the light. Now, in John's vocabulary, coming to the light means believing on Jesus and they don't come because they hate the light. So, what must come first? Coming to the light or loving the light? Now, where do you hear that in evangelism today? That you must be so born of God that you cease to hate the light, that you trust the pathway to God.

We've got things turned around, I think, and it's reaping a harvest of nominalism. Fourth objection to what I'm saying is what became of service? What became of being a slave of God? Now, this is very important. This could be the key element to your lasting in your ministry.

What is your service like? I want to try to show you that most of our people do not understand what it means to serve God. Is God a plantation owner whose business just won't make it if he doesn't have sufficient slave labor? You like that analogy? Of course you don't. Well, you better be careful about the way you talk about service then, right? Acts 17, 25, God is not served by human hands as though He needed anything, for He Himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.

You can't serve God. That ought to be the text you use when you talk about service. It can't be done.

Psalm 50, verse 12, If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Pay your vows to the Most High.

Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you will glorify me. I'll deliver you, and you'll glorify me. You don't work for me, I work for you.

I get the glory for doing the work in this affair. Service isn't slave labor for an employer who needs you in order to make it in the business world. Service is fundamentally receiving.

I'll show you this from another great text. Matthew 6, 24, No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and money. Now, have you ever asked yourself, how do you serve money? Is money a master who is telling you things to do so that money will get your help and benefit? No, that's not the image. How do you serve money? You serve money by being devoted to a lifestyle of positioning yourself always to benefit from what money can get you.

Say that again, that went a little fast maybe. So serve money is to always be devoting yourself to be in the right position to get maximum benefit from money. That's the way you calculate your life.

Now, if that's the way you serve money, let's just flip it around and ask, now, how do you serve God? You devote your life to always being in the place to get maximum benefit from God. And that's right. That's what service is.

And that's the pursuit of joy in God's service to God. It's like God's got this light that shines down on the stage of the world called the light of his love and the light of his blessing, and he's moving. And in this light, there pours down just infinite love, infinite forgiveness, infinite joy, and he starts to move it through the world.

Serving God means watching it and just kind of moving around, stay in the light, walk in the light as he is in the light. My most important text for a philosophy of ministry at my church is 1 Peter 4.11. It says, let him who serves, not the word, let him who serves serve in the strength that God supplies, that in everything God may get the glory through Jesus Christ to him be the dominion forever. The one who gives the strength gets the glory.

Beware of this notion of working for God. Of course, Paul said he was a servant. Of course, there are biblical words and sentences that say serve him and work for him and lay yourself down for him.

But if you don't take them in the whole context of who God is as an overflowing fountain and the one from whom all blessings come and all strength comes and all wisdom comes, you might fall into the notion in your executive capacities of thinking that you are really indispensable and that God is a plantation owner. And if you don't do your neck of the work, then poor God, he'll just be at his wits end to know how to get the job done. It's a very, very dangerous thing.

It's very self-exalting and very belittling to the all sufficient wisdom and power of God who will finish his work. I use the illustration about duty concerning my wife and the roses. Let me use another one from Edward John Carnell, because that's really what we're talking about here, serving and doing your duty.

Carnell has made a great difference in my life. I never met the man, but he has meant a lot to me. He said, suppose a husband asks his wife if he must kiss her good night.

Her answer is you must, but not that kind of must. This is his comment. What she means is this, unless a spontaneous affection for my person motivates you, your overtures are stripped of all moral value.

And so it is in the service of God. You say, I must serve him. He might just say, not that kind of must.

Now, the fifth objection I want to raise is, is it loving to live this way in view of what 1 Corinthians 13 says, love seeks not its own. Here I am telling you to spend your whole life pursuing your own joy in God, unwavering allegiance to the fulfillment of your passionate desire for happiness. Am I leading you away from joy? I mean, from love? Well, to take this text as a jumping off place, two verses early, it said, though I give all my goods away and give my body to be burned and have not love it what? Prophets mean nothing.

Whoa. You mean we're supposed to be interested in profit? It's right there in 1 Corinthians. The answer is right there in 1 Corinthians, two verses away.

Of course, you're supposed to be interested in profit. Paul is appealing to your desire for profit, not money, life, joy, meaning, pleasure at his right hand forevermore. No human being will ever criticize you for enjoying loving them.

I've been to many hospitals, hundreds and hundreds of times into the hospital to see people. Let me ask you this. Do you feel more loved when you are visited begrudgingly or cheerfully? Do you feel more loved when you are visited begrudgingly? It's the pastor's duty, he must come.

Or cheerfully? I love being here with you. Well, the answer is you feel more loved when you are visited cheerfully, I think. If that's true, what must a pastor always pursue in his visitation in order to be maximally loving? Carefulness, joy.

You see this. If you try to abandon your pursuit of joy in the ministry, you won't love people. You'll abort.

You'll dry up. It says in Hebrews to the church, let the pastors serve joyfully, for otherwise it would be of no benefit to you. If you want to benefit your people, you must serve them joyfully.

A morose, gloomy, downcast pastor is deadly to his people. Nobody has ever criticized me as being unloving when I have told them I love or I delight or I enjoy serving you. They've never said, well, get off your joy kick and start being beautiful.

It just never happened. This is very profound because the Bible could so lightly be misunderstood at 1 Corinthians 13.5 and numerous other places where it says love seeks not its own. What that means is love seeks not its own limited, private, materialistic pleasures.

Love is willing to lay down its life for other people for joy. Now, we've got enough time to go to Hebrews. We're going to spend the rest of our time, and I want to show you the most hedonistic writer in the New Testament.

Let's go to Hebrews. I don't know who it is. I wish I knew.

I have a feeling it might be Barnabas. I wrote a paper one time that Barnabas wrote Hebrews, and I developed a 20-page case for Barnabas. I named one of my sons Barnabas.

I'd like it to be Barnabas. But I don't know who it was, but he was somebody who taught me that what I'm saying is biblical. Let's go to chapter 10.

I'm going to say the same thing, and all of them show that love for people flows from the pursuit of joy. The first one is in Hebrews 10, 32-34. So relevant right now in many, many places in the world where Christians are incarcerated.

Let's start reading at verse 32. Verse 33, 34. Recall the former days when you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with suffering, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated? For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully... Underline that word.

Back in the earlier days, some people had been arrested evidently and put in prison, and the Christians who were not yet in prison were forced with a choice. Will we identify with those who have been publicly in prison or will we go underground and lay low? And they prayed and they came to the conclusion evidently that they would identify with them, sometimes being partners with those so treated. So what do they do? They say, well let's go visit them.

Let's go visit them. And they said, well if we go visit them while we're gone, they'll light our house on fire or beat us up in the streets if we identify with them. And they say, let's go anyway.

They looked at their lives and said, the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life. And they looked at their possessions and they said, we have a possession in heaven that cannot fail. And they looked at their goods and said, let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also, the body they may kill.

God's truth abides still, this kingdom is forever. And they sang a hymn, walked down the street, and they burned their houses. Or something like that.

Threw the furniture in the street. They plundered your property. They plundered your property.

And they joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. Now I ask you, is not in this text the pursuit of joy in the superior inheritance of heaven, the ground of their ability to love those prisoners? As they contemplated, shall we love them with our bodies or not, the power to love them was the pursuit of reward in heaven. Had they not loved that reward more, they would not have gone.

Now, let me confirm this with three other passages. Hebrews 11. I'm going to skip Hebrews 11, 6, where we've already talked about the nature of faith as believing that God is a rewarder.

Hebrews 11, 24 to 26. By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. Underline that word, fleeting.

He chose to share ill treatment. And you could, if you stopped right there, I suppose say, see, he's not pursuing joy, he's pursuing ill treatment and he's forsaking joy. But keep reading.

He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. Why? For he looked to the reward. He had a choice here.

I can be rich in Egypt and safe in Egypt if I disassociate myself with these ragtag Israelites. Or I can identify with these Israelites and get myself in big trouble. Which will I do? Where does the source and power of loving these people come from? And the text says he looked to the reward.

What did he think when he looked at it? Oh, that's, I shouldn't live for that. I should turn away for that. I should forget that and get that out of my mind and be dutiful here.

That's just crazy. He looked to the reward and fell in love with the reward, found himself liberated from the love of the praise of men and the comforts of this world, and he laid his life down for 80 years for those people. Here's another text.

You all know this one far better than those. Chapter 12, verse 2. The greatest act of love in the universe was driven by the pursuit of joy. Believe that? Look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross.

What was the strength to love me? The joy that he saw beyond, and I think the joy he saw beyond, was the glory of his Father in a chorus of redeemed people with the Son thrown in their midst. And for the joy of my redemption, praising him and his Father, he was willing to endure anything. But if you were to tell Jesus Christ, in order to love me, you must stop pursuing your joy.

You would oppose the atonement. If I understand verse 2. One more. I'm preaching on this in three days.

I'm working on Hebrews 13. Hebrews 13, 13. The title of my sermon is The Sacrifice of Suffering.

Verse 12 says that Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people, and then it applies to us. Verse 13. Let us go forth to him outside the camp for, let's just stop right there, and bear abuse with him.

Let us go forth to him outside the camp and bear abuse with him or for him. That's what I'm going to summon my people to do. And I'm going to paint a picture of the glory of laying down your life with Jesus and for Jesus outside the camp.

And I'm going to talk about evangelism outside the camp. I'm going to say the camp is the comfortable place. The camp is the easy place.

The camp is secure. Outside the camp is where the rattlesnakes are. And you better go with Tim White out there, the boy that was killed a few blocks from our church.

And then I'm going to close with verse 14. But we seek a city that is to come. It doesn't just happen to arrive because we lay down our lives with no view to the city.

So this notion that there is a stoic Christianity that somehow is surprised by reward at the end, that it was never pursuing and didn't give any care for it all, is not biblical. And it cuts the nerve and heart right out of joy in the Christian life. And it strips us of our power to love.

My last objection, with this I close, is in the pursuit of my joy, my pleasure, my happiness, what becomes of the centrality of God, which is what I held up for us on Tuesday. And the answer is so simple. Let me get at it in two ways, just briefly.

Sometimes people say to me, aren't you making a god out of pleasure? I say, no. You have already made a god out of what you take most pleasure in. Pleasure is not a god.

Pleasure is worship. Money might be your god. Sex might be your god.

Power might be your god. A big staff might be your god. But pleasure is simply the pursuit of whatever you have as your god.

I haven't made pleasure into a god. You all are pursuing something with a passion. That's your god.

You magnify your god by the intensity of the pleasure that you seek in him. Money or God. You make central, not pleasure, but whatever you take most pleasure in.

That's my first answer. I'm not making pleasure or myself central when I say I can only find fulfillment and joy and delight in God. He is central.

And here's my second way of getting at it, just a little image that maybe will stick in your mind. There are eight little puppies, little brown furry puppies on the kitchen floor and they're all hungry and thirsty and they're tangled and they're fighting each other like this. And you take a big yellow bowl of water and you put it on the floor.

And suddenly these tangled eight little self-consumed puppies are going to the water. And there they are like little brown petals around this yellow center. Now I just ask you, what is central in that scene of those thirsty puppies? What is central? What are we making central at that moment? Thirst? Water.

And when the Holy Spirit comes upon us and you and your ministry so that you and all of your staffs and all of your personnel can say with the psalmist, oh God, thou art my God, I seek thee, I thirst for thee as in a dry and weary land where no water is. At that moment, two glorious things are going to happen. God is going to be glorified as the fountain of living water and all your people are going to be satisfied in him.

And it's the discovery of that truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him that I think will make you last and keep your service from being legalism and depleting and discouraging. Oh Father in heaven, if I've said anything amiss, I've used any scripture amiss, just clear it up, cancel it out. But if I have hit any nail on the head, drive it home.

Oh God, for our everlasting joy, for our burning, for our risking, and for our lasting. And above all things,

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