

Jonathan Edwards

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD

SERMON VI. This is the classic sermon preached by Jonathan Edwards on July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Massachusetts (now Connecticut).

Deuteronomy 32:35— . . .their foot shall slide in due time

In this verse is threatened the vengeance of God on the wicked unbelieving Israelites, who were God's visible people, and who lived under the means of grace; but who, notwithstanding all God's wonderful works towards them, remained (as verse 28.) void of counsel, having no understanding in them. Under all the cultivations of heaven, they brought forth bitter and poisonous fruit; as in the two verses next preceding the text.—The expression I have chosen for my text, their foot shall slide in due time, seems to imply the following things, relating to the punishment and destruction to which these wicked Israelites were exposed.

1. That they were always exposed to destruction; as one that stands or walks in slippery places is always exposed to fall. This is implied in the manner of their destruction coming upon them, being represented by their foot sliding. The same is expressed, Psalm 72:18. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction."
2. It implies, that they were always exposed to sudden unexpected destruction. As he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall, he cannot foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next; and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning: Which is also expressed in Psalm 73:18,19. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction: How are they brought into desolation as in a moment!"
3. Another thing implied is, that they are liable to fall of themselves, without being thrown down by the hand of another; as he that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down.
4. That the reason why they are not fallen already and do not fall now is only that God's appointed time is not come. For it is said, that when that due time, or appointed time comes, their foot shall slide. Then they shall be left to fall, as they are inclined by their own weight. God will not hold them up in these slippery places any longer, but will let them go; and then, at that very instant, they shall fall into destruction; as he that stands on such slippery declining ground, on the edge of a pit, he cannot stand alone, when he is let go he immediately falls and is lost.

The observation from the words that I would now insist upon is this.—"There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God."—By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no

obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than if nothing else but God's mere will had in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men one moment.—The truth of this observation may appear by the following considerations.

There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God. By the mere pleasure of God, I mean His sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty any more than if nothing else but God's mere will had, in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men one moment. The truth of this observation may appear by the following consideration:

1. There is no want of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment. Men's hands cannot be strong, when God raises up. The strongest have no power to resist Him, nor can any deliver out of His hands. He is not only able to cast wicked men into hell, but he can most easily do it. Sometimes an earthly prince meets with a great deal of difficulty in subduing a rebel, who has found means to fortify himself, and has made himself strong by the number of his followers. But it is not so with God. There is no fortress that is any defense from the power of God. Though hand join in hand, and a vast multitude themselves, they are easily broken in pieces. They are as great heaps of light chaff before the whirlwind; or large quantities of dry stubble before devouring flames. We find it easy to tread on and crush a worm that we see crawling on the earth; so it is for us to cut or singe a slender thread that anything hangs by: thus easy is it for God when He pleases, to cast His enemies down to hell. What are we, that we should think to stand before Him, at whose rebuke the earth trembles, and before whom the rocks are thrown down?

2. They deserve to be cast into hell; so that divine justice never stands in the way; it makes no objection against God's using His power at any moment to destroy them. Yea, on the contrary, justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment of their sins. Divine justice says of the tree that brings forth such grapes of Sodom, ". . . cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"— Luke 13:7. The sword of divine justice is every moment brandished over the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God's mere will that holds it back.

3. They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They do not only justly deserve to be cast down thither, but the sentence of the law of God, that eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between Him and mankind, is gone out against them, and stands against them; so that they are bound over already to hell. John 3:18—" . . . he that believeth not is condemned already," So that every unconverted man properly belongs to hell; that is his place; from thence he is. John 8:23—" . . . Ye are from beneath;" and thither he is bound; it is the place that justice, and God's Word, and sentence of His unchangeable law, assign to him.

4. They are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God, that is expressed in the torments of hell; and the reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment, is

not because God, in whose power they are, is not at present very angry with them; as he is with many miserable creatures now tormented in hell, who there feel and bear the fierceness of His wrath. Yea, God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on earth, yea doubtless with some who may be hearing me speak now, who, it may be are at ease, than he is with many of those that are now in the flames of hell. So it is not because God is unmindful of their wickedness, and does not resent it, that he does not let loose His hand, and cut them off. God is not altogether such a one as themselves, though they may imagine Him to be so. The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whetted, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them.

5. The devil stands ready to fall upon them, and seize them as his own, at what moment God shall permit him. They belong to him; he has their souls in his possession, and under his dominion. The Scripture represents them as his goals—Luke 11:21. The devils watch them; they are ever by them, at their right hand; they stand waiting for them; like greedy hungry lions, that see their prey, and expect to have it, but are for the present kept back. If God should withdraw His hand, by which they are restrained, they would in one moment fly upon their poor souls. The old Serpent is gaping for them; hell opens its mouth wide to receive them; and if God should permit it, they would be hastily swallowed up and lost.

6. There are in the souls of wicked men those hellish principles reigning, that would presently kindle and flame out into hell fire, if it were not for God's restraints. There is laid in the very nature of carnal men, a foundation for the torments of hell. There are those corrupt principles, in reigning power in them, and in full possession of them, that are seeds of hell fire. The principles are active and powerful, exceedingly violent in their nature; and if it were not for the restraining hand of God upon them, they would soon break out; they would flame out after the same manner as the same corruption, the same enmity, does in the hearts of damned souls, and would beget the same torments as they do in them. The souls of the wicked are in Scriptures compared to the troubled sea—Isaiah 57:20. For the present, God restrains their wickedness by His mighty power, as He does the raging waves of the troubled sea, saying "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further," but if God should withdraw that restraining power, it would soon carry all before it. Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul; it is destructive in its nature; and if God should leave it without restraint, there would need nothing else to make the soul perfectly miserable. The corruption of the heart of the man is immoderate and boundless in its fury; and while wicked men live here, it is like fire pent up by the course of nature; and as the heart is now a sink of sin, so, if sin was not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into a fiery oven, or furnace of fire and brimstone.

7. It is no security to wicked men for one moment, that there are no visible means of death at hand! It is no security to a natural man, that he is now in health, and that he does not see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there

is not visible danger, in any respect, in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world, in all ages, shows this is no evidence that a man is not on the very brink of eternity and that the next step will not be into another world. The unseen, unthought-of-ways and means of persons going suddenly out of the world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle, or to go out of the ordinary course of His providence to destroy any wicked man, at any moment. All the means that there are of sinners going out of the world, are so in God's hands, and so universally and absolutely subject to His power and determination, that it does not depend at all the less on the mere will of God, whether sinners shall at any moment go to hell, than if means were never made use of, or at all concerned in the case.

8. Natural men's prudence and care to preserve their own lives, or the care of others to preserve them, do not secure them a moment. To this, divine providence and universal experience do bear testimony. There is this clear evidence that men's own wisdom is no security to them from death; that, if it were otherwise, we should see some difference between the wise and politic men of the world and others, with regard to their liableness to early and unexpected death; but how is it in fact? ". . .how dieth the wise man? as the fool."— Ecclesiastes 2:16.

9. All wicked men's pains and contrivances which they use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ, and so remain wicked men, do not secure them, from hell one moment. Almost every natural man that hears of hell, flatters himself that he shall escape it; he depends upon himself for his own security; he flatters himself in what he has done, in what he is now doing, or what he intends to do; every one lays out matters in his own mind, how he shall avoid damnation, and flatters himself that he contrives well for himself, and that his schemes will not fail. They hear indeed that there are but few saved, and that the greater part of men that have died heretofore, are gone to hell; but each one imagines that he forms plans to effect his escape better than others have done. He does not intend to go to that place of torment; he says within himself, that he intends to take effectual care, and to order matters so for himself as not to fail. But the foolish children of men miserably delude themselves in their own schemes, and in confidence in their own strength and wisdom; they trust to nothing but shadow. The greater part of those who heretofore have lived under the same means of grace, and are now dead, are undoubtedly gone to hell; and it was not because they were not as wise as those who are now alive, it was not because they did not lay out matters as well for themselves to secure their own escape. If we could come to speak with them, and inquire of them, one by one, whether they expected, when alive, and when they used to hear about hell, ever to be subjects of that misery, we,

doubtless, should hear one and another reply, "No, I never intended to come here: I had arranged matters otherwise in my mind; I thought I should contrive well for myself; I thought my scheme good. I intended to take effectual care; but it came upon me unexpectedly; I did not look for it at that time, and in that manner; it came as a thief. Death outwitted me: God's wrath was too quick for me O my cursed foolishness! I was flattering myself, and pleasing myself with vain dreams of what I would hereafter; and when I was saying peace and safety, then sudden destruction came upon me."

10. God has laid himself under no obligation, by any promise, to keep any natural man out of hell one moment. God certainly has made no promises either of eternal life, or of any deliverance or preservation from eternal death, but what are contained in the covenant of grace, the promises that are given in Christ, in whom all the promises are yea and amen. But surely they have no interest in the promise of the covenant of grace who are not the children of the covenant, who do not believe in any of the promises, and have no interest in the Mediator of the covenant. So that, whatever some have imagined and pretended about promises made to natural men's earnest seeking and knocking, it is plain and manifest, that whatever pains a natural man takes in religion, whatever prayers he makes, till he believes in Christ, God is under no manner of obligation to keep him a moment from eternal destruction. So that thus it is that natural men held in the hand of God over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked: His anger is as great towards them as those that are actually suffering the execution of the fierceness of His wrath in hell; and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up for one moment. The devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain lay hold on them, and swallow them up; the fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out; and they have no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of; all that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will, and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God.

APPLICATION

The use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons to a conviction of their danger, this that you have heard is the case of every one out of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor anything between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.

You are probably not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of hell, but do not see the hand of God in it, but look at other things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw His hand, they would avail no more to keep you from falling, than the thin air to hold up a person who is suspended in it.

Your wickedness makes you, as it were, heavy as lead, and to rend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell, and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink, and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf; and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you, and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment, for you are a burden to it; the creation groans with you; the creature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly; the sun does not willingly shine upon you, to give you light to serve sin and Satan; the earth does not willingly yield her increase, to satisfy your lusts; nor is it willingly to stage for your wickedness to be acted upon; the air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies. God's creatures are good, and were made for men to serve God with; and do not willingly subserve any other purpose, so directly contrary to their nature and end. And the world would spew you out, were it not for the sovereign hand of Him who hath subject it in hope. There are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God they would immediately burst forth upon you. The sovereign pleasure of God, for the present, stays His rough wind, otherwise it would come with fury; and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and would be like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor.

The wrath of God is like great waters that are restrained for the present; but they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped the more rapid and mighty is its course when once it is let loose. It is true, that judgment against your evil works has not been executed hitherto; the floods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters are constantly rising and waxing more and more mighty; and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the waters back, that are unwilling to be stopped, and press hard to go forward. If God should only withdraw His hand from the flood-gate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God, would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power; and if your strength were ten thousand times greater than the strength of the stoutest, sturdiest devil in hell, it would be nothing to withstand or endure it.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string; and justice directs the bow to your heart, and strains at the bow: and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.

Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin, to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced

light and life, are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have reformed your life in many things and many have had religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets, and in the house of God, it is nothing but His mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction. However unconvinced you may now be of the truth of what you hear, by and by you will be fully convinced of it. Those that are gone from being in the like circumstances with you, see that it was so with them; for destruction came suddenly upon most of them; when they expected nothing of it, and while they were saying, Peace and safety, Now they see, that those things on which they depend for peace and safety, were nothing but thin air and empty shadows.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much in the same way as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; His wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; He is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in His sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in His eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended Him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet, it is nothing but His hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep; and there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you awoke in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given, but His mercy; yea, no other reason can be given why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.

O sinner, consider the fearful danger you are in! It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of the wrath that you are held over in the hand of that God whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment. And consider here more particularly.

1. Whose wrath it is. It is the wrath of the infinite God. If it were only the wrath of man, though it were of the most potent prince, it would be comparatively little to be regarded. The wrath of kings is very much dreaded, especially of absolute monarchs, who have the possessions and lives of their subjects wholly in their power, to be disposed of at their mere will. Proverbs 20:2—"The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul." The subject who very much enrages an arbitrary prince, is liable to suffer the most extreme torments that human art can invent, or human power can inflict. But the greatest earthly potentates, in their greatest majesty and strength, and when clothed in their greatest terrors are but feeble, despicable worms of the dust, in comparison with the great and almighty Creator and King of heaven and earth. It is

but little that they can do, when most enraged, and when they have exerted the utmost of their fury. All the kings of the earth, before God, are as grasshoppers; they are nothing, and less than nothing: both their love and their hatred are to be despised. The wrath of the great King of kings, is as much more terrible than theirs, as His majesty is greater. "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."—Luke 12:4, 5.

2. It is the fierceness of His wrath that you are exposed to. We often read of the fury of God; as in Isaiah 59:18 "According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries," So Isaiah 66:15— "For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." And so also in many other places. Thus we read of ". . .the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."—Revelation 19:15. The words are exceedingly terrible. If it had only been said, "the wrath of God," the words would have implied that which is unspeakably dreadful; but it is said, "the fierceness and wrath of God;" the fury of God! The fierceness of Jehovah! Oh how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them? But it is also, "the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." As though there would be a very great manifestation of His almighty power in what the fierceness of His wrath should inflict; as though Omnipotence should be, as it were, enraged, and exerted, as men are wont to exert their strength in the fierceness of their wrath. O! Then, what will be the consequence? What will become of the poor worm that shall suffer it? Whose hands can be strong; and whose heart can endure? To what a dreadful inexpressible, inconceivable depth of misery must the poor creature be sunk, who shall be the subject of this! Consider this, you that yet remain in an unregenerate state. That God will execute the fierceness of His anger, implies, that He will inflict wrath without any pity. When God beholds the ineffable extremity of your case, and sees your torment to be so vastly disproportioned to your strength, and sees how your poor soul is crushed, and sinks down, as it were, into an infinite gloom; He will not forbear the execution of His wrath, or in the least lighten His hand: there shall be no moderation or mercy, nor will God then at all stay His rough wind: He will have no regard to your welfare, nor be at all careful lest you should suffer too much in any other sense, than only that you shall not suffer beyond what strict justice requires: nothing shall be withheld, because it is so hard for you to bear. "Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them."—Ezekiel 8:18. Now, God stands ready to pity you; this is the day of mercy; you can cry now with some encouragement of obtaining mercy. But when once the day of mercy is passed, your most lamentable and dolorous cries and shrieks will be in vain; you will be wholly lost and thrown away of God, as to any regard to your welfare. God will have no other use to put you to, but to suffer misery; you may be continued in being to no other end! For you will be vessel of wrath fitted to destruction; and there will be no other use of this vessel, but only to be filled full of wrath. God will be so far from pitying you when you cry to Him, that it is said He

will only "laugh and mock." "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."—Proverbs 1:24-32. How awful are those words of the great God. ". . . I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment:"—Isaiah 63:3. It is, perhaps, impossible to conceive of words that carry in them greater manifestations of these three things namely, contempt, hatred, and fierceness of indignation. If you cry to God to pity you, He will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case, or showing you the least reward or favor, that instead of that, He will only tread you under foot: and though He will know that you cannot bear the weight of Omnipotence treading upon you, yet He will not

regard that, but He will crush you under His feet without mercy; He will crush out your blood, and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on His garments, so as to stain all His raiment. He will not only hate you, but He will have you in the utmost contempt; no place shall be thought fit for you, but under His feet, to be trodden down as the mire of the streets.

3. The misery you are exposed to is that which God will inflict, to the end that He might show what the wrath of Jehovah is. God hath had it on His heart to show to angels and men, both how excellent His love is, and also how terrible His wrath is. Sometimes earthly kings have a mind to show how terrible their wrath is, by the extreme punishments they would execute on those that provoke them. Nebuchadnezzar, that mighty and haughty monarch of the Chaldean empire, was willing to show his wrath, when enraged with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and accordingly gave order that the burning, fiery furnace should be heated seven times hotter than it was before; doubtless, it was raised to the utmost degree of fierceness that human art could raise it. But the great God is also willing to show His wrath, and magnify His awful majesty and mighty power in the extreme suffering of His enemies. "What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:"—Romans 9:22. And seeing this is His design, and what He has determined, even to show how terrible the unmixed, unrestrained wrath, the fury and fierceness of Jehovah is, He will do it to effect. There will be something accomplished and brought to pass that will be dreadful with a witness. When the great and angry God hath risen up and executed His awful vengeance on the poor sinner, and the wretch is actually suffering the infinite weight and power of His indignation, then will God call upon the whole universe to behold the awful

majesty and mighty power that is to be seen in it. "And the people shall be as the burnings of lime, as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire. Hear, ye that are far off, what I have done; and, ye that are near, acknowledge my might. The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" —Isaiah 33:12-14. Thus it will be with you that are in an unconverted state, if you continue in it; the infinite might, and majesty, and terribleness, of the omnipotent God, shall be magnified upon you in the ineffable strength of your torments. You shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is; and when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty. "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." —Isaiah 66:23, 24.

It is everlasting wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration, before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your souls; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance's, and end, any mitigation, any rest at all; you will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so done, when many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed be infinite. O, what can express what the state of a soul in such circumstances is! All that we can possibly say about it, gives but a very feeble, faint representation of it; it is inexpressible and inconceivable: for, "Who knoweth the power of God's anger?" How dreadful is the state of those who are daily and hourly in danger of

this great wrath and infinite misery! But this is the dismal case of every soul that has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and religious, they may otherwise be. O that you would consider it, whether you be young or old! There is reason for fear that there are many who will hear this glorious Gospel, who will actually be the subjects of this very misery to all eternity. We know not who they are, or what thoughts they now have. It may be they are now at ease, and hear all these things without much disturbance, and are now flattering themselves that they are not the persons, promising themselves that they shall escape. If we knew that there was one person, and but one, of those that we know, that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing would it be to think of! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight would it be to see such a person! How might every Christian lift up a lamentable and bitter cry over him! But alas! instead of one, how many is

it likely will remember these solemn reflections in hell! And some may be in hell in a very short time, before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some hearers, who are now in health, and quiet and secure, may be there before tomorrow morning. Those of you who finally continue in a natural condition who may keep out of hell longest, will be there in a little time! Your damnation does not slumber; it will come swiftly, and, in all probability, very suddenly, upon many of you. You have reason to wonder that you are not already in hell. It is doubtless the case of some whom you have seen and known, that never deserved hell more than you, and that heretofore appeared as likely to have been now alive as you. Their case is past all hope. They are crying in extreme misery and perfect despair; but here you are in the land of the living, blessed with Bibles and Sabbaths, and ministers, and have an opportunity to obtain salvation. What would not those poor damned, hopeless souls give for one day's opportunity such as you now enjoy? And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands calling, and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners, a day wherein many are flocking to him, and pressing into the kingdom of God; many are daily coming from the east, west, north, and south; many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in are now in a happy state with their hearts filled with love to Him who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day to see so many others feasting, while you are pining and perishing! To see so many rejoicing and singing for joy of heart, while you have cause to mourn for sorrow of heart, and to howl for vexation of spirit! How can you rest one moment in such a condition? Are not your souls as precious as the souls of those who are flocking from day to day to Christ? Are there not many who have lived long in the world, who are not to this day born again, and so are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and have done nothing ever since they have lived, but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath? O sirs! Your case, in an especial manner, is extremely dangerous. Your guilt and hardness of heart are extremely great. Do not you see how generally persons of your years are passed over and left, in the dispensations of God's mercy? You had need to consider yourselves, and wake thoroughly out of sleep: you cannot bear the fierceness and wrath of the infinite God. And you, young man, and young woman, will you neglect this precious season which you now enjoy, when so many others of your age are renouncing all youthful vanities, and flocking to Christ? You especially have now an opportunity, but if you neglect it, it will soon be with you as it is with those persons who spent all the precious days of youth in sin, and are now come to such a dreadful pass in blindness and hardness. And you children, who are unconverted, do not you know that you are going down to hell, to bear the dreadful wrath of that God, who is now angry with you every day and every night? Will you be content to be the children of the devil, when so many of the children of the land are converted, and are becoming the holy and happy children of the King of kings? And let every one that is yet out of Christ, and hanging over the pit of hell, whether they be old men and women, or middle aged, or young people, or little children, now hearken to the loud calls of God's word and providence. This acceptable year of the Lord, a day of great

mercy to some, will doubtless be a day of as remarkable vengeance to others. Men's hearts harden, and their guilt increases apace at such a day as this, if they neglect their souls. Never was there a period when so many means were employed for the salvation of souls, and if you entirely neglect them, you will eternally curse the day of your birth. Now, undoubtedly it is, as it was in the days of John the Baptist, the axe is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree which brings not forth good fruit, may be hewn down, and cast into the fire. Therefore, let every one that is out of Christ, now awake and flee from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over every unregenerate sinner. Let every one flee out of Sodom: "Escape for your lives, Look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed."

Boasting Only in the Cross

Passion's OneDay 2000 | Memphis

- Resource by
John Piper

- Scripture: Galatians 6:14 Topic: Christian Hedonism

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

You don't have to know a lot of things for your life to make a lasting difference in the world. But you do have to know the few great things that matter, and then be willing to live for them and die for them. The people that make a durable difference in the world are not the people who have mastered many things, but who have been mastered by a few great things.

If you want your life to count, if you want the ripple effect of the pebbles you drop to become waves that reach the ends of the earth and roll on for centuries and into eternity, you don't have to have a high IQ or EQ; you don't have to have good looks or riches; you don't have to come from a fine family or a fine school. You have to know a few great, majestic, unchanging, obvious, simple, glorious things, and be set on fire by them.

“Don't coast through life without a passion. Make your life count for something great and for eternity.”

But I know that not everybody in this crowd wants your life to make a difference. There are hundreds of you — you don't care whether you make a lasting difference for something great, you just want people to like you. If people would just like you, you'd be

satisfied. Or if you could just have good job with a good wife and a couple good kids and a nice car and long weekends and a few good friends, a fun retirement, and quick and easy death and no hell — if you could have that (minus God) — you'd be satisfied. *That* is a tragedy in the making.

Testimonies to the Unwasted Life

Three weeks ago we got word at our church that Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards had both been killed in Cameroon. Ruby was over eighty. Single all her life, she poured it out for one great thing: to make Jesus Christ known among the unreached, the poor, and the sick. Laura was a widow, a medical doctor, pushing eighty years old, and serving at Ruby's side in Cameroon.

The brakes failed, the car went over the cliff, and they were both killed instantly. And I asked my people: Was that a tragedy? Two lives, driven by one great vision, spent in unheralded service to the perishing poor for the glory of Jesus Christ — two decades after almost all their American counterparts have retired to throw their lives away on trifles in Florida or New Mexico. No. That is not a tragedy. *That is a glory.*

I tell you what a tragedy is. I'll read to you from Reader's Digest (Feb. 2000, 98) what a tragedy is: "Bob and Penny . . . took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball and collect shells."

The American Dream: come to the end of your life — your one and only life — and let the last great work before you give an account to your Creator be, "I collected shells. See my shells." *That* is a tragedy. And people today are spending billions of dollars to persuade you to embrace that tragic dream. And I get forty minutes to plead with you: don't buy it. Don't waste your life. It is so short and so precious. I grew up in a home where my father spent himself as an evangelist to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost. He had one consuming vision: preach the gospel. There was a plaque in our kitchen for all my growing up years. Now it hangs in our living room. I have looked at it almost daily for about 48 years. It says, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."

I am here at One Day in a sense as a father. I am 54 years old. I have four sons and one daughter: Karsten is 27, Benjamin is 24, Abraham is 20, Barnabas is 17. Talitha is 4. Few things, if any, fill me with more longing these months and years than the longing that my grown sons not waste their lives on fatal success.

The Plea of a Loving Father

So I look out on you as sons and daughters and I plead with you as a father — perhaps the father you never had. Or the father who never had a vision for you like I have for you, and God has for you. Or the father who *has* a vision for you, but its all about money and status. I look out on you as sons and daughters and I plead with you: Want your lives to count for something great and for eternity. Want this. Don't coast through life without a passion.

One of the reasons I have loved the vision of Passion 98 and Passion 99 and One Day is that the 268 declaration is so clearly what my life is about. The declaration is based on [Isaiah 26:8](#): “Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.” Here is not just a body but a soul. Here is not just a soul, but a soul with a passion and a desire. Here is not just a desire for being liked or for softball and shells, here is a desire for something infinitely great, and infinitely beautiful, and infinitely valuable and infinitely satisfying — the name and the glory of God — “Your name and your renown are the desire of our souls.”

“Don't waste your life. It is so short and so precious.”

[Tweet](#)

[Share on Facebook](#)

This is what I live to know and long to experience. The mission statement of my life and the church I serve: “We exist — I exist — to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples.”

You don't have to say it like I say it. You don't have to say it like Louie Giglio says it (or like Beth Moore says it or like Voddie Baucham says it).

Finding and Sharing Your Passion

But whatever you do, find your passion and find your way to say it and live for it and die for it. And you will make a difference that lasts. You will be like the apostle Paul. Nobody had a more single-minded vision for his life than Paul did. He could say it in different ways.

I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

One thing mattered: Finish my course, run my race.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ. (Philippians 3:7-8)

How shall I help you? How can I be used of God in this moment at One Day to waken in you a single passion for a single great reality that will unleash you and will set you free from small dreams and send you to the ends of the earth?

A Key Scripture Text

The answer I think the Lord gave me was: take them to one verse of Scripture that is as close to the center as you can get and show them why Paul says there what he says. The verse is Galatians 6:14:

May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

“I exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples.”

Tweet

Share on Facebook

Or to state it positively: only boast in the cross of Jesus Christ. It is a single idea. A single goal. A single passion. Only boast in the cross. The word can be translated “exult in” or

“rejoice in.” Only exult in the cross of Christ. Only rejoice in the cross of Christ. Paul says let this be your single passion, your single boast and joy and exultation. In this great moment called *one day* let the *one thing* that you love, the one thing that you cherish, the one thing that you rejoice in and exult over be the cross of Jesus Christ. This is shocking for two reasons.

1. One is that it’s like saying: Only boast in the electric chair. Only exult in the gas chamber. Only rejoice in the lethal injection. Let your one boast and one joy and one exultation be the lynching rope. “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” No manner of execution that has ever been devised was more cruel and agonizing than to be nailed to a cross. It was horrible. You would not have been able to watch it — not without screaming and pulling at your hair and tearing your clothes. Let this be the one passion of your life.
2. That is one thing that is shocking about Paul’s words. The other is that he says this is to be the only boast of your life. The only joy. The only exultation. “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What does he mean by this? Really? No other boast? No other exultation? No other joy except the cross of Jesus — the death of Jesus?

But Doesn’t Paul Boast In Other Things?

What about the places where Paul himself uses the same word for “boast” or “exult” for other things? For example:

We exult in hope of the glory of God. ([Romans 5:2])

We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that they produce patience and approvedness and hope. ([Romans 5:3])

Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses. ([2 Corinthians 12:9])

Who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you?” ([1 Thessalonians 2:19])

So, if Paul can boast and exult in all these things, what does Paul mean — that he would not “boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”?

But what does that mean? Is that just double-talk? You exult in one thing and just say that you are exulting in another thing? No. There is a very profound reason for saying this — that all exultation, all rejoicing, all boasting in anything should be a rejoicing in the cross of Jesus Christ.

He means that, for the Christian, all other boasting should also be a boasting in the cross. All exultation in anything else should be exultation in the cross. If you exult in the hope of glory you, should be exulting in the cross of Christ. If you exult in tribulation because tribulation works hope, you should be exulting in the cross of Christ. If you exult in your weaknesses, or in the people of God, you should be exulting in the cross of Christ.

Why Boasting Only in the Cross Is Central

Why is this the case? For this reason: for redeemed sinners, every good thing — indeed every bad thing that God turns for good — was obtained for us by the cross of Christ. Apart from the death of Christ, sinners get nothing but judgment. Apart from the cross of Christ, there is only condemnation. Therefore everything that you enjoy in Christ — as a Christian, as a person who trusts Christ — is owing to the death of Christ. And all your rejoicing in all things should, therefore, be a rejoicing in the cross where all your blessings were purchased for you at the cost of the death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

One of the reasons we are not as Christ-centered and cross-saturated as we should be is that we have not realized that everything — everything good and everything bad that God turns for the good of his redeemed children was purchased by the death of Christ for us. We simply take life and breath and health and friends and everything for granted. We think it is ours by right. But the fact is that it is not ours by right. We are doubly undeserving of it.

1. We are creatures and our Creator was not bound or obligated to give us anything — not life or health and anything. He gives, he takes, and he does us no injustice.
2. And besides being creatures with no claim on our Creator, we are sinners. We have fallen short of his glory. We have ignored him and disobeyed him and failed to love him and trust

him. The wrath of his justice is kindled against us. All we deserve from him is judgment. Therefore every breath we take, every time our heart beats, every day that the sun rises, every moment we see with our eyes or hear with our ears or speak with our mouths or walk with our legs is free and undeserved gift to sinners who deserve only judgment.

And who bought these gifts for us? Jesus Christ. And how did he purchase them? By his blood.

Why God Gives Us Gifts

Every blessing in life is designed to magnify the cross of Christ, or to say it another way, every good thing in life is meant to magnify Christ and him crucified. So, for example, we totaled our 1991 Dodge Spirit last week, but nobody was hurt. And in that safety I exult. I glory in that. But why was nobody hurt? That was a gift to me and my family that none of us deserves. We are sinners and by nature children of wrath, apart from Christ. So how did we come to have such a gift for our good? Answer: Christ died for our sins on the cross, and took away the wrath of God from us, and secured for us, even though we don't deserve it, God's omnipotent grace that works everything together for our good. So when I exult in our safety, I am exulting in the cross of Christ.

“Find your passion and find your way to say it and live for it
and die for it. ”

[Tweet](#)

[Share on Facebook](#)

And the insurance paid us \$2,800 for the car and Noël took that money and went to Iowa and bought a '92 Chevy Lumina and drove it home in the snow. And now we have a car again. And I exult in the amazing grace of so much bounty. Just like that. You wreck your car. You come out unhurt. Insurance pays up. You get another one. And move on almost as if nothing happened. And in thanks, I bow my head and exult in the untold mercies even of these little material things. Where do all these mercies come from?

If you are a saved sinner, a believer in Jesus, they come through the cross. Apart from the cross, there is only judgment — patience and mercy for a season, but then, if spurned, all that mercy only serves to intensify judgment. Therefore every gift is a blood-bought gift. And all boasting — all exultation — is boasting in the cross. Woe to me if I exult in any blessing unless my exulting is an exulting in the cross of Christ.

Another way to say this is that the design of the cross is the glory of Christ. The aim of God in the cross is that Christ would be honored. When Paul says in [Galatians 6:14](#), “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he is saying that God’s will is that the cross be always magnified — that Christ crucified always be our boast and exultation and our joy and our praise — that Christ get glory and thanks and honor for every good thing in our lives — and every bad thing that God causes to turn for good.

Education for Exultation

But now here’s a question: If that is the aim of God in the death of Christ — namely, that “Christ crucified” be honored and glorified for all things, then how is Christ to get the glory he deserves? The answer is that children and youth and adults have to be taught that these things are so. Or to say it another way: the source of exultation in the cross of Christ is education about the cross of Christ.

That’s my job: to get glory for Jesus by teaching you these things. And then your job is to get more glory for Jesus by acting on them and teaching them to more people. Education about Jesus is for exultation in Jesus. And if we want there to be no exultation except in the cross, then we must pursue education about the cross — and under the cross.

Or maybe we should say, “on the cross.” Education on the cross will lead to exultation of the cross. What do I mean? Look at the rest of verse 14: “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Boasting in the cross happens when you are on the cross. Is that not what verse 14 says? The world has been crucified to me, and I have been crucified to the world. The world is dead to me, and I am dead to the world. Why? Because

I have been crucified. We learn to boast in the cross and exult in the cross when we are on the cross.

When You Were Crucified With Christ

Now what does that mean? When did that happen? When were you crucified? The answer is in [Galatians 2:20](#): “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.” When Christ died, we died. The glorious meaning of the death of Christ is that when he died, all his own died in him. That death, that he died for us all, becomes our death when we are united to Christ by faith.

But you say, “Aren’t I alive? I feel alive.” Well, here is a need for education. We must learn what happened to us. We must be taught these things. That is why [Galatians 2:20](#) and [6:14](#) are in the Bible. God is teaching us what happened to us, so that we can know ourselves and know his way of working with us and exult in him and in his Son and in the cross as we ought.

So we read [Galatians 2:20](#) again to see that. Yes, we are dead and yes, we are alive. “I have been crucified with Christ [so I am dead, and he goes on]; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me [why? Because I died, that is, my old rebellious, unbelieving self died, and he goes on]; and the life which I now live in the flesh [so, yes, I am alive, but it isn’t the same “I” as the “I” who died] I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.” In other words the “I” who lives is the new “I” of faith. The new creation lives. The believer lives. The old self died on the cross with Jesus.

“All your blessings were purchased for you at the cost of the death of the Son of God.”

Tweet

Share on Facebook

And if you ask, “What’s the key for linking up with this reality? How can this be mine? The answer is implied in the words about faith in [Galatians 2:20](#). “The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God.” That is the link. God links you to his Son by faith. And when he

does there is a union with the Son of God so that his death becomes your death and his life becomes your life.

Now take all that over to [Galatians 6:14](#), “May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Don’t boast in anything except in the cross.

Becoming Radically Centered on Christ’s Cross

And how can I become that radically cross-centered — so that all my exultation is traced back to the cross? Answer: realize that when Christ died on the cross, you died; and when you trusted him, that death took effect in your life. Paul says it’s your death to the world and the world’s death to you.

Meaning: when you put your trust in Christ, your bondage to the world is broken, and the overpowering lure of the world is broken. You are a corpse to the world, and the world is a corpse to you. Or to put it positively, according to verse 15, you are a “new creation.” The old you is dead. A new you is alive. And the new you is the you of faith. And what faith exults in is *not* the world, but Christ, and especially, Christ crucified.

This is how you become so cross-centered that you say with Paul, “I will not boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The world is no longer my treasure. It’s not the source of my life and my satisfaction and my joy. Christ is.

But what about safety in the car accident? What about the insurance payment? Didn’t you say you were happy about that? Isn’t that the world? So are you dead to the world?

I could be. I hope so. Because being dead to the world doesn’t mean going out of the world. And it doesn’t mean not feeling things about the world — some negative and some positive ([1 John 2:15](#); [1 Timothy 4:3](#)). It means that every legitimate pleasure in the world becomes a blood-bought evidence of Christ’s love, and an occasion of boasting in the cross. We are dead to insurance payments when the money is not what satisfies, but Christ crucified, the Giver, satisfies. When our hearts run back along the beam of blessing to the source in the cross, then the worldliness of the blessing is dead, and Christ crucified is everything.

That is the goal of education for exultation — in the cross. Oh, may God grant us to dream and plan and work and give and teach and live for the glory of Christ and him crucified!

John Piper (@JohnPiper) is founder and teacher of [desiringGod.org](https://www.desiringgod.org) and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is author of more than 50 books, including *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* and most recently *Coronavirus and Christ*.

For video or audio – go to

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/boasting-only-in-the-cross>