

Preparing for Your Departure

Sovereign Grace Churches Pastors Conference 2025

John Piper

November 18, 2025 - Session 1

As Noelle and I were walking back today from Disney Springs, having had lunch together, I said to her, as an overflow, it is so sweet when brothers dwell together in unity. Thinking about coming to be with you tonight, and feeling very, very at home in distinction from an experience she and I had not long ago where we didn't feel at home. It's sweet because I knew there would be emotional resonance, which is huge in a relationship and doctrinal soundness health is huge in a Christian relationship, and so just know my heart is happy to be here. I feel sweet about that. Noelle finished it when she said it's like oil dripping down on the beard of Aaron and the reason she knows that Psalm is because we raised four sons and when brothers dwelled together in unity, a mom is really happy.

That was her go-to Psalm in the Old Testament. Let's pray. Father in heaven, I need your help now at multiple levels and I ask for it in Jesus' name; that I would have a voice, that my thoughts would be clear, and my affections would be in tune with those thoughts. I pray that these friends would have hearts attentive and eager to hear truth, and that the Holy Spirit would come in power and saints would be built up; those outside the faith would be drawn in, all our ministries would be made stronger, and Christ would be exalted in these minutes. I ask in his name, Jesus' name, amen.

So, what's the relationship between saving faith and Christ our glory or the glory of Christ? By the glory of Christ, I mean the radiance of his greatness, his beauty, and His worth. With those three words, greatness, beauty, and worth, I mean to capture something of the magnitude and majesty of Christ. Something of the loveliness of his spiritual perfections and something of the infinite value that He has as the greatest treasure in the universe. By putting the word radiance on the front of greatness, beauty, and worth, I mean to say that those three ways of looking at the glory of Christ come together and unite in a shining forth in the world and in the Word such that they can be seen and savored by the people of God. More specifically, how does seeing the glory of Christ relate to that moment when you passed from death to life, from the power of Satan to the power of God, from being a child of wrath to being a child of God, at that moment when that miracle happened?

How does faith relate to that? What is it at that moment? How does it relate to seeing and savoring Christ our glory at that moment? Asking that kind of question shows that you're hearing the workings of the mind of a Christian hedonist, who believes as you've just heard, that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. If that's true, then the affections being satisfied can never be marginal because our giving God glory hangs on our being satisfied in his glory. If you believe that, which I do and I've given most of my life to defending that, emotions or affections are never peripheral. They're never the caboose at the end of the train. They're never

just icing on the cake. As I said this afternoon, they are of the essence. Having heartfelt affection for Christ is of the essence of being a Christian.

Is saving faith a mental psych of the glory of Christ received by the mind and honored as true and reliable? Or is it also a heartfelt savoring of, delighting in, and loving the glory of Christ? At the moment of new birth, when a person passes from death to life, what is saving faith? What is it? I wrote a whole book on this a couple of years ago. It was very controversial, probably the most controversial thing I've written. Very disappointing to me that it happened that way and that people rose up and said, "I don't like what Piper's saying here." So, I'm trying again.

Jesus said in Acts 26:18 to Paul, "I am sending you to open their eyes," which is amazing. "I'm sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins." Receiving forgiveness of sins, that's faith. Faith receives the forgiveness of sins according to Acts 10:43. In that miracle moment of passing from darkness to light, power of Satan to God; in that moment what's happening? Consciously, which we call faith, in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4. This is a long introduction of posing the question over and over again from different angles and then we're going to spend most of our time in the gospel of John. So just keep clarifying in your head, 'what's he asking?' 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." What is it that Satan cannot see and doesn't want unbelievers to see? What is it? He can see the gospel, he can see Christ, he can see the facts of the gospel, he can see the crucifixion, and he can see the resurrection. He believes it totally. He knows it happened, no doubt about it. You may doubt it, but Satan never doubts it. He knows that Christ rose from the dead. He knows the deity of Christ. You are the holy one. He knows the miracles of Christ and he's blind. To what?

What doesn't he see? What's the decisive thing that unbelievers don't see? What's Jesus referring to when He said, "seeing they do not see." They saw so much. Judas, I just read it this morning in my Bible readings, he's a thief and helped himself from the money bag and he saw everything; and he didn't see. He didn't see. What didn't he see? There's a difference isn't there? Between seeing greatness, beauty, and value, but not valuing the value that you see. Between seeing beauty and seeing it as desirable. I mean, would Jesus even call it seeing if you saw it and didn't like it? Have you seen it?

Seeing value and valuing are not the same thing, which I think implies that the seeing that Satan could not do and didn't want unbelievers to do according to 2 Corinthians 4:4 is a seeing of glory that consists in the savoring of glory. A seeing that consists in a savoring of glory. Satan saw and didn't see because he didn't savor. He hated what he saw and thus the Bible talks like he didn't see it. He didn't have that kind of seeing. Ephesians 1:18; we talked about this a little bit this afternoon, the eyes of your heart, Paul wants, by prayer to be enlightened. Are the eyes of your heart enlightened to know the riches of the glorious inheritance and the power? Are they enlightened to know? I think he was praying for a valuing of the greatness. I want you to see the greatness of your inheritance.

Would he say they've seen it and they call it valuable? There's no valuing, there's no cherishing, there's no delighting, there's no embracing. Have they seen it? Evidently not in the way the Bible talks. A seeing that consists in valuing, cherishing, and treasuring. That's what Satan does not have. Unbelievers don't have. How does that relate to faith? Psalm 34:8, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." Didn't he mean there is a seeing of the Lord's goodness you can only have by tasting? Isn't that what that verse means? There is a seeing of the Lord's goodness that you can

only have by tasting. Jonathan Edwards used honey to illustrate this. You can know that honey is sweet in two ways. Look, it's brown, it's sticky, and it's produced by bees. Therefore, it must be sweet.

I just fear there's so many Christians like that. Or you can taste it and then know it's sweet. The Bible teaches us that Christ our glory is rightly known and savingly known when he's tasted as great, beautiful, and supremely valuable. That tasting is a seeing of glory. It is a saving seeing of glory. It is what saving faith does. Spurgeon said on that text in Psalm 34:8, "Faith is the soul's taste." That's really controversial evidently. I wonder if it is here. What I'm going to spend the rest of my time doing is defending that understanding of faith as a tasting of the glory of Christ and thus necessarily involving the affectual dimension of the human soul. What tasting is from the gospel of John. The reason I'm here is because years ago when I did the word search and made the realization of this fact, I've never been able to let it go, and I've been working on how in the world to understand this. In the gospel of John, the noun faith, or belief, never occurs.

My wife had a course from Tenney at Wheaton 50 years ago, and the name of his commentary was The Gospel of Belief. That word never occurs in the gospel of John, but the verb believe occurs 98 times. That cannot be an accident, can it? It's the only book in the New Testament that makes that kind of choice. I'm going to use the verb believe 98 times. I'm never going to use the word belief or faith, *pistis*. Why John? That's what I want to know because I think the answer to that question goes to the heart of what saving faith is as tasting, but that's getting ahead of myself. Many times, you can read Sunday school explanations or commentary explanations for that to this effect. Well, John wants to get across the fact that faith is active.

Yes, but what is often meant by that is that it produces actions like love, which it does. That's all over the New Testament; faith working through love. That's true. I don't think that's why John chose to use the verb 98 times. It's not the same thing to say that faith is active and faith brings about actions. That's not the same thing. I want to linger here; it's active in and of itself before it moves any muscle to do anything loving towards another person. It does that, but before it does that, it is an acting of the soul. What is it? What kind of acting is faith in the gospel of John?

Keep in mind now, and you know this, that we're talking about saving believing, or saving faith, because the gospel of John more than any other book is about bringing people to eternal life. How many times? I wrote eight of them down. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever believes has eternal life. That's what this gospel is about, bringing people to believe in Christ for life. 3:36, 3:15, 3:16, 5:24, 6:40, 6:47, 11:25, 20:31, over and over again. Whoever believes has eternal life. That's how you live; you believe. We're not talking about a marginal thing of faith here that's like another kind of faith besides saving faith. I'm asking about saving faith in order to be saved. What must your faith be doing before it does anything outwardly? What's doing in here? That's my question. Let's begin at a very familiar place, chapter 1, verse 11. You know this by heart: believing is receiving Christ. I'll read it to you. "Jesus came to his own and his own people did not receive him, but to all who did receive him," this is a positive. Remember that from seventh grade English, probably not, but I do, and I bless God for Mrs. Adams. She taught me everything I know about the English language.

Wouldn't trade her class for a million dollars, seventh grade English. A positive; "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name" (because of the same thing), "He gave the right to become the children of God who were born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of God." We've got John's clear statement about the kind of acting faith does before it does anything outwardly. It receives. It receives Christ. What is that? Don't limit verse 11 and 12 to

the point of conversion. "Jesus, I do now receive him more than all in him, I find, he hath granted me forgiveness. I am his and he is mine. Hallelujah. What a savior. Hallelujah. What a friend, saving, helping, keeping, loving." How's the last line go? "He is with me to the end." You should sing that every day.

Jesus, I do now receive him. Right now, in as much as my mind is free to take Jesus into account at this moment, I should be receiving him. Not pushing him away. I am welcoming him as my enabler, my guide, my friend, my sustainer, my wisdom, my salvation. I'm receiving him all day long, every day as our mind turns to Jesus. It is receptive and it will be that way for eternity.

We're never going to stop receiving Jesus. I don't think 1:11, 12:13 should be limited to the point of conversion. To believe in Jesus right now in your Christian life, is to receive Jesus right now in your Christian life, which leads now to a double question. Receiving Jesus as what?

Second question: What is this soul act of receiving? Can we push it further in? What is the receiving? What is that like? What are you doing when you're doing that? What are you preaching for, or toward, when you want that to happen in your people? I'm going to give two answers to that and then we'll look at some texts. First answer: Receiving Jesus is the soul's drinking the living water that Jesus is. Drinking with sweet, soul satisfaction. I'll give you a text for that in a minute, but that's my first answer to what is receiving. It is a drinking of the living water that Jesus is with a sweet soul satisfaction. Second answer: Receiving Jesus is the soul's eating the bread of heaven that Jesus is to the soul's satisfaction. Same point; one with drinking, one with eating. Believing in Jesus is a saving way of eating the best food when you're famished, saving way of drinking the most satisfying water when you're desperately thirsty; that's an analogy of what it is to receive Christ. You receive him by drinking him as satisfying water.

You receive him by eating him as satisfying bread. Now the key text is John 6:35, as you might well know. John 6:35. Keep in mind that when you step back and think about it; bread and water are the two staples of life. You got to have nutrition, or you die; and you got to have fluid hydration, or you die. He's taking those and applying them to eternal life. What are the two essentials for eternal life? The answer is bread and water. Jesus. That's the picture. Here's chapter six, verse 35: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me," here's the key word; believes, "shall never thirst." The parallel between those two, coming to me shall not hunger; believing in me shall never thirst, shows that in Jesus' mind and John's mind, believing is a coming to Jesus to eat until satisfaction because you'll never hunger again. The coming to Jesus to drink, because you'll never thirst again.

Receiving Jesus is an eating until satisfaction and a drinking of Jesus unto satisfaction. There's no geographical movement in this coming. I don't think Billy Graham was wrong to say, "come," and have people walk to the front. It's interesting to think about how the body relates to the soul in this regard. I think it is very often helpful to do things with your body which represents the motion of the soul. Like kneeling, if you want to say to God, "I'm not God, you're God." Be good, go onto your knees every now and then and just say with your body, "I'm not God."

It's not the kneeling that God is watching. He wants to know: Is that true? Is your soul humble before me? When I say come to Jesus to eat, come to Jesus to drink. I do not mean the movement of any muscle at all. These are movements of the soul. These are movements of the heart. There's no spatial, no physical, no geographical movement in this coming. It's a moving of the heart Christward; the moving of the soul, the affections, the capacities of the soul to drink and eat and taste and savor. That's the movement. The coming to water is the movement of thirst. The coming to the bread is the movement of soul hunger. These are soul movements, not body

movements. They are the heart affections, desiring, longing, drinking, feeding, embracing, treasuring, tasting, and feasting on Jesus. Then notice the implication of the two phrases; not hunger and never thirst. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst. That 'not' and 'never' imply that the coming for soul food and the coming for soul drink results in eternal life.

Never hunger again, never thirst again. You're going to be, not temporarily refreshed, but refreshed forever. You're going to have eternal life, eternal satisfaction. If your soul finds its thirst and hunger satisfied in Jesus, you'll never thirst again, never hunger again, and never die. John 6:58, "Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." What is believing in the gospel of John? First answer: It is receiving Jesus, John 1:12. What do we receive him as? We receive Him as living water. We receive him as bread from heaven. This Jesus water and Jesus bread are the staples of eternal life. You don't have life unless you eat this bread and drink this water. If we don't eat this bread and if we don't drink this water, we perish. That's what it means to receive Jesus, to believe in Jesus. Then, once you see that, you just trace it right through the gospels.

The gospel of John especially. This receiving is the motion of God-given thirst, putting its lips to the fountain of received water. Or it's the motion of God-given hunger, placing its tongue on the richness of the bread of heaven. It's the motion of the soul's embrace of the Savior coming to us and offering Himself to save us. It's the soul movement of leaning into light received glory (Ch. 3, Vs. 18). It's the action of the glad, eager soul, opening the door to a friend, opening the door to a helper, opening the door to the Lord, opening the door to a teacher, opening the door to the shepherd, and on and on through the gospel of John. It is to receive Him for all that God is for us in Him. When I ask why does John never use the noun 'belief' and uses the verb 'believe' 98 times? I'm only claiming to have a partial answer. I don't claim to know the whole thing. John's gospel is I think perhaps more layered than any other book in the New Testament. It is so simple at one level. That's why we use it in evangelism and children read it and get it. Then there are these layers; it's the most predestinarian book in the Bible, and most people don't know that.

I'm only claiming to have part of the answer. I think it's an absolutely essential part of the answer because it gets so close to the nature of saving faith. Namely, John loves to foreground; believing the verb, believing the action, believing as the spiritual act of the soul in receiving, coming, drinking, eating, enjoying Christ. That's my answer to, "Why did he use the verb 98 times?" To foreground that the soul doesn't just produce actions, it is an action and the action that it is a receiving. The kind of receiving it is, is an eating and drinking of living water, and the bread of heaven that gives you and sustains eternal life. That's my answer. It's not a movement of the body; it's a movement of the soul thirst. I've had to correct myself on this. It's not even, in the gospel of John, a condition or a state of satisfaction.

I've often said that believing is a state or a condition of being satisfied in God. I think John would kind of be uneasy with that language. It's not state, it's not condition, it is emotion. Here's your cup and here's a pitcher on the table and it's always full of Jesus. When your cup gets half full, then you come over, he pours some more in, and you go back. Now I'm a state of satisfaction, come over, and he pours. That's not the picture in the gospel of John. The picture in the gospel of John is a branch and a vine, right? There is no moment when the branch is not drinking, none. Its life is to receive. I think John 15 is a parable about faith. What is faith? It is being grafted into the vine and it's receiving all that God is for us in Jesus all the time.

You're drinking it in and you're eating it. There's no picture of two separate things over here, and this one is now in a state of satisfaction for a while, while Jesus is here and he can pour a little

more in. It's vine and branch, not cup and pitcher. Now, no doubt there's more to see in this regard, but that's my best effort to answer the question, why all these verbs and why no noun? So let me do this to move toward a conclusion. Let me relate that to a few practical things in our experience. Including the political explosiveness in which we constantly live, especially if we're online at all with acrimony among Christians to a remarkable degree because we can just listen into everybody's attitude.

Here's what Jesus said, and this is expanding further what we've seen already. This is chapter four, verse 13, the woman at the well. Everyone who drinks of this water in the well will thirst again. Whoever drinks of the water that I will give to him, and I'm interpreting now to be himself, I'm the living water. The water that I will give to him, will never thirst again. The water that I will give to him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. That's vertical, not yet horizontal.

When you eat and drink Jesus, you become the Spirit in you. We're going to read in just a minute, the Spirit in you becomes a well of life-giving water up to eternal life. You keep drinking forever. Now add this one, chapter 7, verse 37: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink whoever believes in me." Now pause right there. See, we're in exactly the same mindset as chapter six, verse 35, right? "If anyone thirsts let him come and drink." And then he uses belief language, well believing language. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said out of his heart, will flow rivers of living water. Now you're going this direction. In other words, when we turn from the broken cisterns of the world, including the faults and hopes of political partisanship for example, and drink from Christ, the heart not only becomes a deep, peaceful reservoir of satisfaction between you and God, it also becomes an outflowing river of living water to other people.

The sweetest experiences of being satisfied with the fullness of Christ. (This is the question CJ asked me this afternoon, "Why do you feel alive when you preach?") The sweetest experiences of being satisfied with the fullness of Christ are those moments when the river of affection carries all obstacles before it and spills over for the good of other people. We all know this. It is more blessed to give than to receive. The intensity and sweetness of your feeding and drinking of Christ is increased as you become a well of living water and a river of living water for others. Here's how it happens for me. I'll give you just one kind of example and it's very limited, but very precious. So here are Noel and I, sitting in our spot in worship. Someday, you'll have a spot like this CJ, if you step down before you dead, okay? Unlike others, we haven't done that.

So here you are and you step down, alright? Maybe 10 years from now. You and Carolyn will have your seats in your precious church, right? You're going to die there, but you don't have to be in the pulpit. Noel and I have our spot over on the right-hand side, about three fourths of the way back. Everybody knows we're there. Don't make a big deal about Piper. He is there. We've been there for 13 years since I stepped down as a pastor. We go to our church, we love our church, hope to die in my church, and I'd like the Pastor at Bethlehem do my funeral. It's that simple. So here we are and we sing like you do for 30 minutes and we're standing up. Except sometimes people sit down because it's a long time. I love to stand up, and as I'm standing up, I am feasting on the truth and the beauty of Christ in these songs. Our worship leaders do a very good job to spread a feast for us in music and lyrics. And I'm with Jesus.

At that moment, there rises within me regularly, not always, but regularly, a sense of the preciousness of Christ that simply makes the pride, anger, and petty worldliness of my response to some jerks online. The fact that I would call them jerks is a problem that needs to be

overcome. I am made to love them. My heart softens. It softens as Christ is tasted for who He is. You cannot commune with Christ in the Word and in corporate worship and hold on to bitterness that just doesn't belong there. You can't do it. I just thank God for the corporate experience in worship of communion with Jesus, by eating and drinking Christ as we sing together. That's just one of many ways that Christ, being my food, Christ being my drink, causes a horizontal conviction of sin.

It happens in marriage. I mean, goodness, we've been married for 56 years and there have been hard times, very hard times when we're not even talking to each other. I'll walk into worshiping and I'll be trying to sing, feeling totally hypocritical. I'm the pastor. I'm going to preach in 10 minutes. I look down the row at Tom Stellar, my associate for 30 years, and his hands are like this. Everything in me says, "Tom's where I should be right now. Tom is enjoying Jesus right now." My whole orientation shifts off our petty, my petty quibbling, and onto Christ. My marriage has been saved by communing with Christ in corporate worship, I think. My life has been saved. I think my marriage has been saved. It's no small thing for me to say that saving faith enjoyed moment by moment consists, as Jonathan Edward says, very much in the affections.

I would just close with this since there are a lot of preachers in the room. Is not the trusting, believing in Jesus as a receiving of him as satisfying bread and satisfying drink; is that faith not the secret of life-receiving and life-giving preaching. It certainly is for me. Out of the heart and out of the mouth will flow rivers of living water. That's preaching. If the pastor has been drinking, if he's been believing and receiving. Out of whose heart does it come? The pastor whose heart is drinking and feeding on Christ our glory. For the sake of your own soul, for the sake of the good of your people, the admonition then is belief. Believe, that is receive Christ, drink Christ, eat Christ unto the soul's satisfaction and you will become a river of living water. Father, please grant I pray, that you would manifest yourself to us in this soul satisfying way. Help us to believe in you, to receive you, to drink from you and your Son, and to eat the bread of heaven. To enjoy already eternal life and be the instrument of many people passing from death to life, that is coming to saving faith, I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.