

Pilgrimage

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 May 2018

Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[0 : 00] Thank you everyone. Thank you so much for coming today. It's delightful to see you here on this beautiful, beautiful, sunny Sunday. As you know, we had a bit of a switch. Lenore's not here today.

And I want to thank Dr. Packer so much for filling the breach. What we decided was that we're going to do a bit of a more participatory session today, which I think is good to mix things up. And it's also good to revisit...

I'm going to step forward so I don't walk in front of you. Oh, I thought you were going to walk behind me. It reminds me of my days of square dancing.

So those of you that know Learners Exchange know that exchange is really an important component.

It's not a stage on a stage, but it's an opportunity for members of the congregation to share and for us to discuss and ask questions ourselves.

[1 : 04] So in that vein, we will start with a short introduction by Dr. Packer on pilgrimage. And then I, School Marm Alexandra, has a task for you.

We'll break into groups and do some discussion about pilgrimage and talk amongst ourselves in small groups and in large groups. So look around you and see who you want to be in your group. This is when I get my students to mill around so they can conveniently be by the people they want to be in group with. And then Dr. Packer will close the session.

So I would just like you to thank Dr. Packer for being here and for stepping into the breach on very short notice. Thank you, Alexandra.

And thank you for your welcome. As Alexandra said, the notice was very short and the presentation is going to be very short also.

[2 : 16] Well, you will agree with me that these things happen and that surely it's a Christian virtue to be flexible and willing to fit in when gaps suddenly open up in front of you and in front of other people also.

That, to my mind, is actually a major Christian virtue. And when I'm asked if I'll model it myself, well, I can hardly say no.

But now, let's get down to what I've committed myself to do. The word pilgrimage, it's a noun, of course, and it has in it the further noun, pilgrim.

And if one asks who and what are pilgrims, well, the answer is that from the second century onwards, those who could used to visit sacred sites, as they would be called.

There is places where events of Christian significance took place.

[3 : 57] The events can be of many different kinds. But the point is that these places were thought of as holy in a special way, sanctified, you see, by some act of special virtue on the part of some Christian serving God.

And then the thought went on, these things ought to be remembered. So, next step in the thinking, people who can, should visit the sites and celebrate what was done there.

And then, that wasn't the end of the thinking. By the Middle Ages, it had reached the point where the conclusion, undisputed, really, in Christendom in the Middle Ages, was that to visit a sacred site where something of spiritual note had happened, was honoring to God, and was, therefore, meritorious to the person who did it.

That actually was going over a sort of watershed. In the earlier days, the thought of merit didn't count for very much in this business.

But in the Middle Ages, it became a big deal. And those who were able to invest plenty money in long journeys to sacred sites, or, well, and, or, or, and, special celebrations at the site once they got

there, celebrations, that is, really, of their own arrival.

[6 : 23] Their own arrival, I mean, to celebrate whatever the sacred action in question was.

And it became, one is sorry to have to say, but it's true, it became a kind of industry, the pilgrimage industry.

And clergy generally believed that the pilgrimage industry was honored by God, was to be encouraged, therefore, in the parish, local congregation, whatever, and members of congregations who arranged pilgrimages for themselves, were celebrated as top-quality Christians.

Well, at the Reformation, all of that was swept away. The words pilgrim and pilgrimage didn't drop out of use.

The proof of that is that when John Bunyan had a dream, a dream which pictured the Christian life as a journey, full of ups and downs, challenges, and tests of one kind or another, he called it, nobody encouraged him to do it, he thought of this himself, he called it the Pilgrim's Progress.

[8 : 23] He felt the power of alliteration, you see, in his day, late 17th century, just as I think that if we are human, and I believe that most of us are, we also would feel, do feel, the power of alliteration in headings, and we appreciate it, and we sometimes indulge in it ourselves.

Yes, the Pilgrim's Progress from this world to the next. That was Bunyan's title, and part one of the Pilgrim's Progress, which was followed a few years later by part two, inevitably part two couldn't rival part one, for sales and, how can I say it, influence in the Christian community.

As you know, the first part, where Christian makes the pilgrimage to glory, that was a tremendous hit from the moment it was published, published, and it has never been out of print since.

You can buy copies every now and then of part one without part two, but, of course, if you can't get hold of part one, you can't start.

Do you know what I mean? Well, so that's the situation we've got by the end of the 16th century, and it remains with us.

[10 : 19] What are we being told? Not that there is any such thing as merit. Certainly not that there is any such thing as merit for going to a place where, in the past, some Christian did or suffered something worth remembering.

But, the thought of pilgrimage, and of the Christian as a pilgrim, that has become part of the English language.

There was a certain amount of it prior to the Pilgrim's Progress, which was published at the date of the 1670s.

I can't remember which year it was. But, as I say, the idea had been, shall I say, exorcised, for evangelical Protestants, or, if you like to call them, by the name by which they were called, in their own day, Puritans, they, they, you, how do I say it, they, they used the word pilgrim, they used it in this sense, that I've, I've, walked around, really, of making a special effort, to travel somewhere, where something of spiritual significance happened, and to celebrate it, in some way, when you got there.

well, that usage, I think you will agree, is still part of the language, and we sometimes talk that language, that language, and sometimes we talk it in quite a secular way.

[12 : 38] I mean that, we'll use the image, of a pilgrimage, or, a celebrate, a pilgrim, celebrating something, for, a secular achievement, which is then, celebrated, by someone, who thinks, that it has value.

In the Middle Ages, there was, a pilgrimage industry, because, the church, had committed itself, to the idea, that, visits, to these, sacred sites, were meritorious, and, that Christian life, was, largely, a matter, of piling up, merit, in one way, or another, so that, you would have, a good seat, in glory.

Well, we don't have to, stop and brood, on that. As I said, a moment ago, I think, it was all, all that was swept away, at the Reformation.

But, the idea, of, a pilgrimage, as, marking out, the pilgrim, as a person, not simply, of, how can I say it, of, not, not simply, a person, of, holy purpose, but, of, major, and demanding, purpose, that, that, that idea, still, sticks, around, in the language, and, every now, and then, a person, who's, deeply, heavily, committed, to some cause, or other, will be spoken of, as, a pilgrim, in, quest, of, a state, of affairs, which, he, or she, is laboring, to bring about.

Well, now, that's, all, that I have to give you, in the way of information. The questions, I think, that it's good for us, to ask ourselves, are, all, variations, on the same theme, namely, is it, spiritually, enriching, in any way, at all, to think, and talk, about, pilgrimage, and, to define, particular, journeys,

visits, to particular, places, as, pilgrimages, we are, all of us, evangelical, Protestants, who we, certainly, I assume, don't think, in terms of merit, but, is it, an enrichment, of our Christian life, to think, in terms of, well, there are times, when special efforts, for the glory of God, are called for, this is one of them, and, by that route, see, that path, if you like, people do slip, into the idea, that they're, they're being, pilgrims, in relation, to something or other, and it will do us good,

[16:29] I think, to reflect, on whether there's, anything, substantially, spiritual, if I can use that phrase, in, in the situation, in which a person, does that, and having said, that much, I am going, to subside, and Alexandra, is going, to, divide us, into groups, and give us, questions, to work with, and then, I shall come back, right at the end, to say, how I think, we've got on, Alexandra, please come, and, take over, if this were lunch, I think this would be called, a working lunch, so, it's now time, for you guys to work, you folks, we work as a whole group, instead of, no, that's not going to happen, but thank you, we will, have the opportunity, as an instructor, it's really important, for me, to get as many people, to have voices, as possible, so, the format, that Dr. Packer, and I have talked about, is to divide you, into small groups, how do you discuss, one question,

I'll assign one question, at a time, and then, I would like, to have, three groups, report back, on that question, so you could give us, a consensus, from your group, or individuals, from your group, could give comment, and then we would, go on to the next question, and then three different, groups would give feedback, what we found, in the past, if we do large group discussions, some of us, are more vocal, speak up, in front of groups, more easily, this is an opportunity, to get people, who might not be, so comfortable, and also gives us, a bit of an opportunity, maybe to reflect, on something personal, that we don't want, to discuss, with the whole group, but we can ask questions, about in the small group, because I'm envisioning, so we will, in a way, the answer is yes, we will go to large group, several times, and we'll go to large group, at the end, but I would like you, to make a more intimate, small group, of no more than five people, so that you can, everyone, and whoever I will ask, I won't go into my lecture, on groups, which I do at first year, my first year students, but I would ask, that one person, in the group, ensure that everybody, have an opportunity, to speak, and encourage participation, from everybody, in your group, all right, oh, we've got a volunteer, right here, and I said, some people, more of what's spoken, number one, commitment, to spiritual, and someone added, prayer, okay, perseverance, purpose, someone said, historical research, I guess, depending on the kind, of pilgrimage, presumed to be beneficial, possibly miracle healing, so far, plus you need, time and money, time and money, true, true, true, excellent, okay, yes, please, we've got, the pilgrim, that's important, spiritual entrances, away from home, visiting a place, of spiritual significance, often, it involves travel, a reason for going, and preparation, ah, preparation, interesting, preparation, that's a good one, yeah, see, it's very interesting, the slightly different, observations, and finally, this group, we, we, we, we, we, we, we focused on one thing, in, intention, um, um, working for clarity there, and someone said, someone shared the idea, an idea that Eugene Peterson, has put out there, saying, if you remember a church school teacher, in your later years, who had a, an impact on your life, it would be an example of pilgrimage, to go and visit them, take them out for lunch, or coffee, and tell them, the impact that this person had on your life, that would be a pilgrimage, a modern, a doable, modern pilgrimage, so that way, again, the highlighting, our only, we only came out with one idea, in three or four minutes, we're, we're just getting up to speed here, but intention, in clarity of intention, why am I doing this, it was our big thought, very interesting, very helpful,

I would encourage you, you know, as these, these thoughts come up, um, we've all got a paper, take notes, if you want to reflect on it, there will, there will be a test, it won't be a test, but it's really interesting, then, um, and especially, as we get to question number five, if you choose to incorporate pilgrimage, in your life, at some point, so moving on, to question number two, and you've got another three minutes, all right, thank you, thank you, I just want to say, it's just so encouraging, to hear so many voices, talking, and discussing, and sharing, and exchanging, no, we're that kind of, well, I'm, I'm, I'm really encouraged, I'm inspired, um, so, uh, maybe, some different groups this time, that might be willing to, share something on their discussion, two or three groups, any, I'm not giving you the teacher, I, thank you, um, I grew up five miles from, a pilgrimage site,

St. Marie, among the Hurons, it's where the, the Jesuit bar, is for, marketing, and, um, we used to go, once in a while, to church on Sunday there, and it, it, a very special place, very spiritual, and, at the front, near the altar, on both sides, there was, uh, behind the, the fencing, there were all the

canes, and crutches of people, who had been there, and were healed, and left, and they left there, stuck behind, in the church, so, there was a lot of reflection, in my mind, when I was out of there, and I, I really realized, the specialness, of that spot, and Italian, pilgrims, would come, by the busload, so we usually have, anywhere from three, to five, bus full, of, Italians, coming on a Sunday, to, to pilgrimage there, and it was, it was constant, all summer long.

[22 : 56] Where was this again? It's in Midland, Ontario. Oh, the Italians, come every day, these days. They came, they were on, pilgrimage, from Toronto, the camp of Jerusalem, to see us, where our first, all right, say, you know, it's fascinating, relics, and everything.

Fascinating, fascinating. Anyone else? All right, we'll move on, to question number three, then. So, question number three was, what do you think, are the benefits, of pilgrimage, and are there any, negative aspects, or risks?

Benefits and risks. So, who'd like to start? Thank you. We haven't said anything yet. So, we think, obviously, there's a, a spiritual benefit, to spending the time, with God, and seeking out something. We noted that, a lot of people, who aren't believers, will go on a pilgrimage, just because there's, sort of a sense, that there's something, important out there, that they can look for. I've tried to look at, purely pragmatic, benefit to the church, in the middle ages, and that is that, if, important families, went on pilgrimage, would sort of, cement their involvement, in the church, and would build the church, in a, sort of a pragmatic way.

Even if, they weren't, the church wasn't making money on it. But, someone also mentioned, that, it can actually, be divisive, among the church, because if you spend, 10 days, with people, who you really dislike, then they're, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, you know, so that was, that was, in your house.

[24 : 52] Thank you. That was very interesting. Unfortunately, I'm having memories. A church holiday. We thought that, in nearby, or far away places, visit the grave sites, can be very connecting.

We pondered, why that's the case, deeply, but we can't say, we can't say, why it's so deep. We just know, it's there, in our, our need to connect sometimes, with those who passed away, physically, you don't know, a photograph, just isn't quite the same.

You need to be there. I think, Harvey, I think about, I mean, I often go to, to the, graveyard, when I go to, places, especially old places.

So, I think that's, looking at the people, in these graveyard, and, and thinking of their lives, you see the huge, gravestones, they were rich, and you know, the small gravestones, of the children, and it's amazing, in some of them, how many, of the women, there was not, maybe one, woman in that, cemetery, who was 440.

440. 440. ten thousand, even the people that do searches, into bodies too, this big thing about, inside the body of Henry Kilmer, like, okay, in the whole, what was the help, that he have, it's positive, something of the dipl[redacted] and death, you know, what makes his situation smaller, but, yeah.

[26 : 28] Oh, one last comment. I was bringing up the idea of retreat versus pilgrimage.

Because I have done lots of retreats. There's various places. For instance, just even in the lower mainland, where one can go on retreat.

So, although, and I don't know your name. Laurie. Laurie said, well, he views all of life as kind of a pilgrimage.

That you don't have to go. Oh, interesting. Yeah. But anyway, there's that kind of, should you go somewhere? Do you need to go somewhere?

Do you need to go somewhere? And although we just thought that as a component that it was going somewhere. Getting in a bus and going somewhere.

[27 : 35] But you're allowed to change your mind through the questions. Oh, right. That's the whole idea of reflecting on things. But even for me, that's really helpful. I think I tend to blur pilgrimage and retreat.

And maybe, are they different? Can they be the same? Interesting. That's true. All right. And the fourth question, Bible references.

This is where you get to test your Bible knowledge. How about it? Well, that's very important. Thank you.

I want to see you doing a marvelous job of counting through a lot of information in a limited time. So, how did you do? Biblical references. Anybody come up with any?

Here? Yes. First of all, the Old Testament pilgrimages. There's three traveling vacations a year, depending on your location. For Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacles.

[28 : 38] Men and boys, compulsory. Woman and optional. You know, depending on their condition and so on. You know, just the overall prescription for time off, the sabbatical, extra holiday every month, and so on.

Interesting. And New Testament, of course, just all of it. It was mentioned we've made retreats, like Christ retreating for spiritual renewal. And, of course, just all the traveling that Paul and other apostles did.

Their basic human need. Oh, interesting. Thank you. Thank you. Anyway, another group. Very good. Well, the psalms of ascent.

The psalms of ascent. Oh, that's nice. I don't know if you have a lot of people like to speak to them. It's good. Yeah, it's a kind of one.

Interesting. I love all of them. And the 40 years in the desert. Yeah. I mean, the Israelites, if it was a forced march. And then forced over. Right. Which raises another question.

[29 : 41] Can a pilgrimage? It's only mandated. Yes. Right. Any other biblical references you came up with? Ecclesiastes. You're actually got grasped in Ecclesiastes chapter 3.

There is a time for finding your time slots. And then when you're in the mood to maybe be still like Jesus. Ah. You need it. It's just as important as work. You need to have a balance. How about we have this objection of Abraham setting out?

Right. He didn't know where, actually. So pilgrimage with an unknown end. And we're strangers and pilgrims here in the Hebrews.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Interesting. All right. Are you last? I just thought it was possibly Mary going to visit Elizabeth. Oh. Oh.

I'm so impressed by the people that I associate with. You're brilliant. You're brilliant. All right. All right. Are you willing to take on the last and final question?

[30 : 49] Would you consider incorporating pilgrimage in your life? And if so, how? You've got another four minutes. All right.

Fifth and final question. So, I just was talking to Dr. Packer. And I have to say, I think this is the first learner's exchange I've been to where every person was the speaker.

I'm giving you the credit. So, who would like to go first? Some observations about pilgrimage and how we might incorporate it in our daily lives.

I'll be mentioning the first question that modern-day pilgrimage would be taking somebody out to coffee or lunch.

And I'll be talking to you. Yes. So, this happened. This wasn't St. John's. It was a church we went to prior to that. But when we first went to the church, we were welcomed in such a way.

[31 : 58] And we had lunch afterwards. And the welcoming was just so amazing that instead of going for one Sunday, we went for many years.

And I just said to our group that my pilgrimage would be to take this person out to lunch and tell him the effect he's had on my life and how it's helped my Christian journey for a long of years.

Thank you so much. Just one word. The word incorporating, I would probably want to use the word recognizing.

Incorporating and we're starting to recognize in our lives. Because otherwise, it's like the lottery. Probably won't happen.

But, you know, the Holy Land, I'm not so sure I'd ever make it there. But, you know, the same thing is investing in something which is not probably going to happen, like winning the lottery.

[33 : 07] So, recognizing rather than incorporating. Yeah, and maybe recognizing what we can do. I mean, even though I'd never thought of the definition of actually taking someone for coffee as a pilgrimage or doing a service as a pilgrimage.

You're right. It's recognizing those other opportunities as well. Yeah. That's a personal touch, taking the time to talk to somebody. That's a nice. And coming back to that intention.

Yeah, having the intention. Yes. Well, I'm going on a pilgrimage. Oh, next week. Next week. Well, I'm leaving Monday. How timely? I'm leaving Monday. Yeah. But I'm spending a week in Scotland with relatives.

And then I'm going to Warwick and by, partly walk, partly bike, the Camino de Santiago. Oh, wow. Oh, wow. I'm really doing about 900 kilometers because we're going right to the ocean, to Muiqian.

And I'm going with my daughter. I'm getting teary thinking. I've got a long journey to be going with this beautiful, wonderful young daughter.

[34 : 08] And I really want this time to be part of going closer to God. So it's a very special time.

And I think that is one of the special things to me of going away. That, yes, I think you can do it going skiing or going or being here or just sitting on your chair at home.

But the fact is there's nothing else to do. So you have to, I'm hoping this is a thing. There's so much time to just be with God.

It's such a gift. I feel that it's such a gift to me. So. Well, thank you. Thank you for sharing that.

Wonderful. Harvey. How many Christians do you know in this room who have made a pilgrimage to the Bird and Baby Pub in Oxford?

Where C.S. Lewis and Tolkien and Tolkien drink beer. I'm telling you, I have a joke of Christians who are made out of a pilgrimage. They're serious.

[35 : 12] That's where the man was. How many people have been to the Bird and Baby Pub? You have. You have. We're Tolkien and he doesn't even know.

Huh. You have been to the Bible. You have to listen to Tolkien what? You have to listen to Tolkien. You have to listen to Tolkien. Many of us, yes. And if it motivates you, do you agree? I think this is a bit of a confession.

At my men's Bible study on Friday night, they're going to have a movie night on Saturday, probably in July.

And I said, I can't make it because Saturdays is film, movies are your thing, but for me it's music.

And I like to keep that evening separate for a musical event.

Well, two weeks ago, I wasn't at the Oxford pub, but I was at the Wolf and Hound. Because it was excellent. Anyways, I was going to say for a pilgrimage, I live at 12th and Vine, and I don't have to go very far, but I can walk straight up 12th Avenue and end up at Regent Bookstore.

[36 : 31] And I did that yesterday, and I didn't even have to step in the door on one of the outside tables.

The biography of Eric Liddell was 50% off. Bill, did you? That's a good book. This advertisement was not paid for.

A new time, a pilgrimage site. Yes, exactly. Any last comment? Well, I just wanted to, we were talking about, again, this is not necessarily pilgrimage sites, but places where you can go on retreat in the Lower Mainland, where you don't have to go far.

And I've just become aware that Aroscha is a place where you can go, and it's not as expensive.

Going out to the Abbey, you have to, if you're a woman, you need to have another woman with you.

You can go to Rivendell, which is very beautiful, but you have to take food with you. And where else? In August, there are some, or five or seven.

[37 : 52] One out in Ladner. Oh. I think it's a hard event without limiting. I don't know. But anyway, there are, so there are a couple of local places that aren't too far.

If you feel that going away would be helpful, which for some of us is, if you're distractible with me, is a need of time.

Thank you. Thank you for that. All right. And as we're wrapping up, I know that they're just on the prayers. I will pass it over for some final remarks.

I just want to thank you all for your contributions. I know that when I spoke to Dr. Packer, I was thinking of cancelling today's session. And he encouraged us to do the discussion.

And I just think, I want to thank you so much. I think you've just been amazing. Thank you. We all renewed that. And over to Dr. Packer.

[38 : 58] Well, I don't think there's much I can say. What I'd like to do in my last sentence or two is to catch the spirit of enterprise, which I think has been stirred up in quite a number of hearts by this discussion today.

And when I say enterprise, I mean an activity or project in which you've never committed yourself before.

And you see it as making for the glory of God through your life in a new way.

I don't think one can be more specific than that. But I think if one is less specific, one is falling short of the enterprising spirit of the saints in the Bible, who from time to time in different ways are followed, tracked, shall I say, as they commit themselves to various forms of good work in which they had never engaged before.

So I think the good question to take away from this discussion is, what new enterprising venture for God shall I attempt before the year is out?

[41 : 00] And then when we get to January, the question will be, what new enterprising activity for God shall I attempt before the end of June?

And then July 1st. In other words, think in terms of six-month units in your life, each one containing an activity which in one way or another is new to you, enterprising to you, and for the glory of God in some one way or another.

You aren't attempting to score merit points. You are attempting to see the possibilities of life as God has laid it out all around you.

And one thing which you are afraid of is vanishing into a rut of your own devising.

At the bottom of a rut, I am sure, life can be very steady, but at the bottom of a rut, life cannot be very enterprising.

[42 : 39] Well, some of us, I think, would almost instinctively have said, well, being enterprising is a big deal in the Christian life.

be as big in enterprise as your physical condition allows. And I would like to think that one result of this discussion is that we shall all be a bit more enterprising in living for God than we have been this last, shall I say, this last 12 months.

Well, that's Packer casting his bread on the waters. Whether this is a good word for you, only God knows.

I don't, but I think it likely that under God it will be a word which many, perhaps all of us ought to take seriously.

Enterprise is, and should be, a big deal in the Christian life. Okay, well, I've stuck my neck out a little in saying that, but there it is.

[44 : 22] That's, that is the honest mind of Packer. And if you don't think that it's wisdom, well, he isn't too sure of it himself.

On that note, I just want to thank Dr. Packer again. I didn't know he was coming with homework, but I want to thank him for, for his words of wisdom and help.