



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The LORD Almighty -- A Person's Delight (Psalm 37:4)

MAY 15, 2012

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, May 15, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, May 15, 8:30 PM in Room #301**
(Speaker Pro-Tem's office)

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." --Thomas Jefferson

"Without exception we all long for happiness...all agree that they want to be happy...They may all search for it in different ways, but all try their hardest to reach the same goal, that is, joy." --Augustine

Dr. John Piper has written a book entitled "Desiring God" which addresses the fact that the pursuit of what makes a person happy is not wrong, in and of itself. The first of his five foundational convictions states, "The longing to be happy is a universal experience, and it is good, not sinful."

Dr. Piper later writes, though, that the problem is not our longing to be happy but that we trade the eternal for the temporary. He quotes C.S. Lewis, saying, "We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."¹

In light of our Bible studies this session covering the greatness of God as revealed in Isaiah 40-48, one may draw the conclusion that God is an immense, untouchable being. But that is far from the truth. My prayer for this study is to examine God's command to delight in Him and thus realize that the God we have been discovering in these chapters of Isaiah is not only the great sovereign of the universe, but He is also the only One in whom happiness for the human soul can be found.

INTRODUCTION

If asked to make a list of the commands of God, what would most people come up with?

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength
- Love your neighbor as yourself
- Don't murder, steal, lie, commit adultery, or covet
- Have no other gods before Him
- Honor your mother & father
- Cleanliness is next to godliness (??)

Here is one most would not list: "Delight yourself in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4).

To "delight in the Lord"—a command? Yes! The author of Psalm 37, King David, wrote this verse of the song with the imperative form of the verb; in other words, he gave a command to the readers. It is not a suggestion or a good idea. David is not saying "If I were in your shoes, I would..." It is a command. But it is a command which comes with a promise.

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. (NKJV)

I. THE COMMAND

DELIGHT YOURSELF

The Hebrew word translated "delight" is rooted in the idea of delicacy and tenderness. Its use expands into living a life of ease or pleasure; and used in its form here in verse 4, it encompasses the idea of finding pleasure, delight, happiness. Thus the command is to seek our pleasure in God—in His being, perfections, love and friendship. Charles Spurgeon writes, "Every name, attribute, word, or deed of Jehovah should be delightful to us, and in meditating thereon our soul should be as glad as is the epicure who feeds delicately with a profound relish for his dainties."²

A modern day word picture would be that of listening to new grandparents. Just ask them about their new grandchildren and be ready to listen for a time. The stories will flow, the pictures will be brought out and the pride will burst forth. They cannot wait to see the little ones again and would rather not see their own children, unless they bring the grandchildren along with them. The new addition has brought much happiness and joy to the family.

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #301

TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4TH FLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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Again, this desire for happiness is not a sin. It is found within the heart of every person. God has created humans with the capacity for the emotions of delight and happiness. Pascal writes, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."³

What is sinful is the pursuit to find our happiness and delight in anything else besides the One who has created us. Placing the affections that God has given us to be used towards Him is, in essence, idolatry.

And besides that (as if idolatry wasn't bad enough), it is also quite foolish. If the pursuit of happiness takes someone to a final destination other than in God, the happiness is, at best, temporary. No doubt there is a moment of pleasure, but it never lasts. Along with temporal aspect, it is always unsatisfying and many times it turns out to be harmful—even to the point where God lets people go the way of these pursuits (Romans 1:18-32).

Elsewhere in the Psalms, David writes about his delight in God:

Psalm 84:1-2, 10 How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD

Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

¹⁰Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.⁴

This longing in David gives us insight to his earnest plea of repentance in Psalm 51. After David was confronted with his sin with Bathsheba, he turns to God in repentance cries out to Him:

Psalm 51:11-12 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.

For the man who would rather be in the presence of God than any other place on earth, his greatest punishment would have been to be cast out of that presence. David did not want to be separated from that which brought

him his greatest joy—Yahweh God. In God, he found his delight, his place of peace, his rest.⁵

ALSO

Two other commands in verse 3 precede the command in verse 4. The insertion of "also" (not included, but seems to be implied in the NASB translation) ties these commands together. In verse 3, the commands are given "Trust in the Lord and do good". It is a fact that someone can trust something without delighting in it. I had an old small pickup truck a few years ago that I trusted to get me where I am going, but I did not delight in it. If I had my friends fully restored 1968 Firebird ragtop with a 454 under the hood, I could both trust and delight.

“ALL MEN SEEK HAPPINESS. THIS IS WITHOUT EXCEPTION. THE WILL NEVER TAKES THE LEAST STEP BUT TO THIS OBJECT. THIS IS THE MOTIVE OF EVERY ACTION OF EVERY MAN, EVEN OF THOSE WHO HANG THEMSELVES. “
--PASCAL

And the same can be said about the second command to command to “do good” which, in essence, is obedience. A person can obey without delight. Anyone with teenagers can testify that their command to clean a room was obeyed, but that does not mean it was done with joy and delight. In fact, Moses warned the children of Israel about this very thing when he said they may be uprooted from the Promised Land "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart..." (Deuteronomy 28:47).

Trust and obedience are essential for a life pleasing to God, but so does having one's delight in Him.

IN

The preposition "in" is quite important. Note that David does not say "from". He does not command that we find delight in that which comes from God; rather, our delight is in God. Now, we can show our delight in God by marveling at His gifts—that is a part of true praise. True praise and thankfulness includes enjoying God's good gifts (for example, a beautiful sunrise or sunset), as well as recognizing they are from Him. But our delight is never to be based in the gift (for example, what happens if it is cloudy and it is blocking our view of the sunrise or sunset?). The command is for our

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delight to be "in" Him. "I do not say that loving God is good because it brings joy. I say God commands that we find joy in loving God."⁶

John Howe stated, "For the particle which we read in the Lord... signifies also 'with' or 'by', or 'besides', or 'before' or 'in presence of', as if it had been said, 'Come and sit down with God, retire thyself to him, and solace thyself in the delights which are to be found in his presence and converse, in walking with him, and transacting thy course as before Him, and in His sight.'"⁷ King David said,

Psalm 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

II. THE PROMISE

For the person who pursues God (God as revealed in Scripture and not a "God" of their own making) as their portion in life, they will find the things which they desire to be fulfilled by the God who gives graciously to those who are truly undeserving (which would be every person on earth).

THE DESIRES OF OUR HEART

"Our innermost desires are here meant, not our casual wishes; there are many things which nature might desire which grace would never permit us to ask for; these deep, prayerful, asking desires are those to which the promise is made."⁸

These words from Spurgeon are a necessary reminder, but should not be seen as a qualifier. The person who is faithfully seeking after God for their happiness and contentment in life will not expect self-glorifying, self-centered, sinful desires to be satisfied. Again, as the character of God gives confidence that the promise will be fulfilled; the character of God is what directs the desires of the heart of the one who seeks after Him.

What are the desires that shall be given to the one who delights in God?

Every person on this earth is looking for true peace, true contentment, true love and true happiness (my friend, Tom Rees, adds beauty, romance and adventure). Even though each has its own philosophical nuances and some people may add other desires, there is not much debate that these are things

people desire in their lives. It may look different to each person, but nonetheless, the pursuit for these things is still there.

So let me ask a question: Imagine putting your delight in something other than God--will you find the desires of your heart?

- In money—will you find contentment, love, peace, lasting joy & happiness?
- In fame—will you find contentment, love, peace, lasting joy & happiness?
- In knowledge—will you find contentment, love, peace, lasting joy & happiness?
- In nature—will you find contentment, love, peace, lasting joy & happiness?
- In fleshly gratification—will you find contentment, love, peace, lasting joy & happiness?
- In power—will you find contentment, love, peace, lasting joy & happiness?

King Solomon had all the above. He wrote "*All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor*" (2:10). But as an old man, his conclusion was "*all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun*" (2:11).

Maybe one wants to look outside of Scripture for an example. Then look to the music world at the lives of Hank Williams, Elvis Presley, and Kurt Cobain. Hank said the only place he felt alive was on stage and died in a drunken stupor in the back of a car. Elvis said he would give his millions if he could have that "Peace in the Valley" he sang about. Kurt Cobain killed himself while he and his band were at the height of their careers and left a suicide letter filled with unfulfilled expectations and anger.

Friend, there is no doubt that the temporary delights (and they are fun for a while) of this world distract the mind for a season, but they cannot fulfill the eternal desires of a person's soul. You see, the reason I say 'cannot' is because these things do nothing concerning sin, guilt, judgment and death—which, with these things hanging over our heads, we cannot find nor have true contentment, love, peace, lasting joy and happiness.

And dismissing the idea that there is a God to whom one must be accountable does not solve anything. For people have been striving to find these things without God for thousands of years and have not found true

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contentment, love, peace, lasting joy and happiness. Simply put: if there is no God, these desires will never be met.

But God is. And while we were in rebellion toward Him, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die as a sacrifice so that these things--sin, guilt, judgment, death--could be conquered for the person who believes and puts their trust in Him. Thus, the desire of your heart can be fulfilled if you seek after Him.

AND

Please note in this passage that it does not say "Delight yourself in the Lord, SO He will give you the desires of your heart". It says "Delight...AND He will give you the desires of your heart." We do not delight in God to get these things--like a child who cleans his room SO he can have ice cream. We delight in God because He is something worthy of our delight. The promises are the benefits for the person who obeys the command to delight.

Therefore, the next logical question seems to be: "IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR DELIGHT?" The Bible describes Him as:

- All powerful, all knowing, and in all places at all times.
- Self sufficient, self existent, eternal, transcendent, sovereign.
- Gracious, kind, sustaining, compassionate, love, merciful, patient.
- Just, jealous, right, and majestic in holiness.⁹

The Bible also reveals that He does all things for the glory of His name and for the good of His people. He has promised never to leave nor forsake those who delight in Him. The God who has commanded us to find our happiness in Him is the God of eternal glory.

Is God worthy of our delight? Who has a better resume? Is more qualified?

Exodus 15:11 "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

CONCLUSION

Friend, so much more can be said concerning this text and the teaching it provides. For now, I will leave you with a word from Augustine.

Augustine was much like Solomon. He had all a man would want in "wine, women and song." But knew something was amiss. His loving mother

continued to pray for her son. Even though he felt drawn to God, it was not true conversion. He wrote "I did not persist in the enjoyment of my God."

And at the age of 32, while wrestling with bondage and slavery to fleshly lusts, God brought about circumstances in which Augustine was drawn to Him. Later, Augustine wrote:

"How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose... You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place, you who are sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood, you who outshine all light, yet are hidden deeper than any secret in our hearts, you who surpass all honor, though not in the eyes of men who see all honor in themselves... O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth, and my Salvation.¹⁰

Psalm 43:4-5 Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

God can forgive your sins--are you interested?

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, Oreg.: Multnomah Publishers, 1996), 17. The theme of his book is "The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever."

² Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* Vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 171.

³ Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées*, trans. by W. F. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), p. 113 (thought #425).

⁴ References from this point forward are taken from the New American Standard Update Bible.

⁵ Let this be a lesson: If we have the same longing after God, may it be an incentive to stay far away from sin. Sin causes a separation between the believer and God. Therefore, let those who believe draw closer to God and resist temptation (James 4: 7-8). But since even the greatest of Christ-followers fall and sin, let believers also learn that God is a God of forgiveness. When one truly repents, God forgives and restores (1 John 1:9).

⁶ Piper, 20.

⁷ Spurgeon, 182.

⁸ Spurgeon, 171.

⁹ This is basically the argument that Isaiah has been laying out in his prophecy that we have been examining in our weekly Bible Studies this legislative session. As he prepares the people for their future defeat and captivity, he assures them of God's eventual restoration by reminding them of His sovereignty, power, wisdom, eternity and tender mercies.

¹⁰ Augustine (*Confessions*, 181) as quoted by John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 57.