

God's Pleasure in All He Does

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[0:00] Well, last week we began a new study on John Piper's book, *The Pleasures of God, Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*.

! And I would definitely encourage you to pick up a copy. It is definitely worth reading. I think Ed Withrow is away, but you could probably see him.

I know DesiringGod.org, that's John Piper's ministry, they carry the book for \$10 if you want to order it on your own. Piper's book, the chapters include way more than we could ever fit into 45 minutes. And so, by necessity, we have to leave a lot out. And a lot of it is really worth reading and worth thinking about. And so I would encourage you to pick it up. Well, let me ask you, just to think for a second, how, well, is, is your God happy?

And what I mean is, when you think of God, do you think of Him as a happy person? Or is He generally displeased? And I don't mean sort of what your confession you would write it out as.

[1:18] I'm saying, as you think about God on a day-to-day basis, is your God happy? Or is He just generally displeased, morose, frustrated? And then let me ask you another question.

If God is happy, how happy is He? Is He sporadically happy, sort of generally happy? Or, as the Bible portrays Him, He's ecstatically, overflowingly happy all the time.

That God is the blessed God, the happy God. That is one of His characteristics. One of His attributes is that He is happy. And so much of our view of God turns on that question, on those two questions.

And how we answer those two questions really shape our relationship with God, how we think about God. If we're living in the same universe as a morose, sort of generally angry, displeased God, that's far different than living in a universe with a God that is happy, very happy.

And you know how it can be to live with a spouse who's just sort of a sullen person is one kind of life. But to live with a spouse that is a generally happy person, a joyful spouse, that's a far different kind of life.

[2:48] And so, the kind of God that you have in your mind, if it's biblical, is a happy God. But sometimes we get confused or we don't believe.

Now, the proposition of this study is that the God of the Bible is exuberantly, exceedingly happy. And that His pleasures, the things that He delights in and finds joy in, they're gateways, they're windows, so that we can see His glory.

And when we see the things that He delights in, the things that He enjoys, we see the value, the worth of His heart, the greatness and the glory of His heart.

And so, when we come to understand His delights, then we begin to understand how magnificent He is and how beautiful He is. Now, last week we said that God is exuberantly happy.

God always and forever has been ecstatically happy. And let me ask you, why? What did we say last week? Why is God so happy and why has He always been so happy?

[4:01] What was the first answer that we gave last week? That's for you to respond. Yes, Mark.

He's happy in His Son, Jesus Christ. He's been happy forever and ever because He's always had His Son with Him, Jesus Christ. Now, do you remember what it is about Jesus Christ that thrills God's heart so much?

His meekness, that was one. What else? There, yes. Okay, and talk me through that.

What does that mean? Oh. Oh. The Son reflects the Father.

Jesus Christ is the perfect image of the unseen God. And so, He is the radiance of the glory of God. He's the perfect mirrored image of God the Father, according to Hebrews 1.3.

[5:15] And so, when God sees Christ, He sees nothing but His exquisite perfections. He sees all of the meekness and the power and the grace and the love and all of these attributes of Jesus

Christ.

And those are His own, the Father's own glory, because He's the mirrored image of the Father. And so, God the Father is always looking at the Son and always seeing all of the Father's beauty reflected back to Him.

And it thrills His heart. So, before God is this panorama picture. This wide, beautiful picture of all of His own glory.

All of His own holy perfections. And it's all shining off the face of His Son. And God's heart is completely and deeply satisfied with His Son.

This is my Son with whom I am well pleased. God is most satisfied in God. So, do you have the picture?

[6:27] From all of eternity, God the Father has gazed on the glory of His Son and been happy with what He's seen. And He's found every reason to rejoice.

And the Son, in turn, has looked on the glory of the Father and has been thrilled by what He sees. And I think we could even go further and say that the Holy Spirit, He carries, He mediates the love of God the Father and God the Son.

And He is thrilled and He rejoices in what He experiences of God. And so, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit has always been exuberantly, ecstatically rejoicing and happy.

And there's no way that anyone can take away God's joy. Because His chief pleasure is not in anything made. It's not in anything that changes. It's in Himself.

It's in anything that changes in Him. It's in anything that changes in Him. It's in anything that changes in Him. And it isn't you and it isn't me. We're superfluous. It's Him.

[7:36] And if you ask me, that is glorious. It really thrills my heart to know that God has always been happy. And that in some way it feels right that I'm an extra on this beautiful love story that God has with Himself.

And it thrills my heart to know that God, He doesn't need me to make Him happy. He doesn't, it's not out of some need that He's made me. And it thrills my heart to know that God has always and forever been happy, happy, happy.

Well, it was also mentioned last week that because God is always and forever happy, and nothing can take away His happiness, that He's never constrained.

There's never a leash on God where He has to do something that He doesn't want to do. He's never constrained by any deficiency or unhappiness.

God never has to make up for a lack of joy. See, He's the opposite of us. We're always acting in a way to try to get, to find more joy.

[8:51] We're always trying to act in a way to get rid of some unhappiness. We're always trying to fulfill a need. And God isn't that way. Now, tomorrow is Monday morning, and most of you will go to work.

And maybe some of you, I hope not, but maybe some of you will go to a job that you really don't like. And you'll have to go. You're absolutely tired of being there.

You wish you weren't there. You wish you had something else to do. But you have to go because if a man will not work, he shall not eat. You're constrained to work and doing something that you don't like to do, or you starve.

You have a need. You have to work because you're needy. And you have to work because for some reason, even though it makes you unhappy to be there.

But God is never constrained in that way. No one ever has to force his hand. He never has to make up for any deficiency. He never has to work up or work to make up a need.

[9:57] And those two thoughts, that God has been always happy, and that God has never been constrained to do anything that he doesn't want to do, we need to let that sink in.

We need to let that sink in because this is what it means for God to be God. Psalm 46.10. What does Psalm 46.10 say?

Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am God. Now remember the context of Psalm 46. The mountains are being thrown into the sea.

The world is in chaos. And yet, what is the people of God? What is their hope? What is their peace?

Well, be still and know that I am God.

It's the very thought of God being God that brings calm into our lives. And God is saying, I'm forever happy. These horrible upturnings in this world that affect us so much, they don't affect me in the

same way.

[11:10] I am happy. I need nothing. And the reason I say that we need to think about all these things is because this is like strong timber. It gives us strength to hold up.

It's sort of like rebar for concrete. Rebar are those steel rods that they drive into concrete to give it strength, to keep it from crumbling and breaking.

And this thought that God has sovereign joy all the time, that is like rebar driven into our hearts. And so when our world is going crazy, it's this thought, this thought that God is happy, and that nothing can touch God like that, that gives us peace, and it gives us strength to keep believing, to keep holding on.

Now, it's these considerations that God is never constrained by any deficiency or unhappiness that leads us to what we're going to talk about today, our chapter today.

And that is that that is God's pleasure in all He does. God's pleasure in all He does. And this is sort of the flip side to last week, to some of the things that we thought about last week.

[12:35] If God never has to act out of unhappiness, that means He only acts out of joy. He never has a reason to act other than this will make me more happy.

So let me repeat that in a slightly different way. If God never has to act to make up for some unhappiness, then the only reason God acts is because what He wants to do will bring Him more pleasure, more joy, more delight.

Listen to Psalm 135 verses 4 and 5. I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods.

The Lord does whatever pleases Him in the heavens and on the earth and the seas and all their depths. So let me ask you, what does God do according to that verse?

What's that? Everything? Yes and no? No. The Lord does whatever did you hear the word?

[13:51] Pleases Him. The Lord does whatever pleases Him. So whatever brings Him delight and pleasure. So let me ask you, if the Lord does whatever pleases Him, what determines what the Lord will do?

What's that? His pleasure. So God does what He does for His pleasure's sake, for His joy's sake.

And so it isn't ever to make up for some unhappiness.

God does what He does because it pleases Him to do it. It brings Him joy. Listen to Psalm 115. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name be the glory because of Your love and faithfulness.

Why do the nations say, where is their God? Our God is in heaven. He does whatever pleases Him. Whatever pleases Him, He does.

And do you see in both cases in Psalm 135 and then in Psalm 115, the psalmist is saying this is the glory of God. That He does whatever pleases Him. Now turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 46.

[15:04] Isaiah chapter 46 and we'll look at verses 9 and 10. 46, 9 and 10. Remember the former things, those of long ago.

I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like me. I make known the beginning or the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come.

I say, my purpose will stand and I will do all that I please. So here in Isaiah, as in Psalm 135 and Psalm 115, you have the same basic word in Hebrew for pleasure.

And I think we have a tendency to read out the pleasure aspect when we read that word. We sort of come at it with, well, God does whatever He wants.

But we take out all the delight in it. And really, if we look at how that word is used throughout the Old Testament, it doesn't allow us to take the delight out of what God does.

[16:12] What God does makes God happy. So the same word is used in Psalm 1. His delight is in the law of the Lord.

Psalm 16, they are the noble in whom is all my delight. So there's pleasure there in both of those cases. Listen to Isaiah 62, 4.

You shall be called my delight is in her and your land married for the Lord delights in you and your land shall be married. So, how much does God love doing everything that God does?

Well, He loves it as much, He finds it as delightful to do what He does as a honeymoon couple find it delightful to be married. God is thrilled.

in all that He does. And if it doesn't bring Him joy, He doesn't do it. He doesn't need to do it because the Lord does whatever pleases Him. So, as you think about that, does that excite you?

[17:23] I hope it does because in each of those cases, it was talking about the glory of God. This is what makes God so majestic. Not to us, not to us, but to your name be glory.

So, God is great. He's the sovereign, happy God and there's none like Him. And you see it there in your laps in Isaiah.

I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like me. So, our God acts in majestic, sovereign, freedom all the time.

Nothing can get in His way from doing what pleases Him because He has the sovereign power that removes every obstacle in God's time and in God's way.

Every obstacle to His delight is removed because He alone is God and He alone can do whatever He wants. So, C.S.

[18:30] Lewis has a wonderful quote about this. And you can take this for what it's worth, but I think the idea is good. He says, to be sovereign of the universe is no great matter for God.

We must keep always before our eyes that vision of Lady Julian's in which God carried in His hand a little object like a nut. And that nut was all that is made.

God who needs nothing loves into existence holy, superfluous creatures in order that He may love and perfect them. God's sovereignty doesn't weigh Him down.

To control all of His creatures and all their actions and to bring about everything according to His purpose, it isn't a big deal to God. Because everything that is is sort of like an almond in your hand. Weighs nothing. Easily closed, easily put in your pocket. You don't think about it. And that is everything that has been made to God. It doesn't trouble Him to be sovereign.

[19:42] And we are superfluous creatures. That means we're not necessary. We're extras to the main thing. And God is the main thing.

God is the main And so He only makes us because it delights Him to show off His glory. It delights us for Him to show off His love.

And so God is this awesome, powerful, happy God that does whatever pleases Him in heaven and on earth and the sea and everything in it. And He only does what pleases Him.

And so everything God does delights Him. Now, there's two possible objections to this.

And we want to spend the remainder of our time thinking about these two objections. The first is sort of related to what Dare said. And it sort of kind of covers this whole area of why well, I look around the world and there's entire countries like Saudi Arabia, like Iran, where Christianity is pretty much shut out.

[21:06] It's oppressed. They're persecuted. Islam has an iron fist wrapped around the people. And, you know, in India, there are millions and millions of people that live and die who never, ever hear the gospel.

And then when we think about the past, just think about the thousands of years in the past, there's been people, millions and millions of people who have lived and died with never hearing the gospel. And it hardly seems, as we look at our world, that God is getting his own way. It hardly seems that God is doing everything that pleases him.

Because wouldn't it please God to save these people? Wouldn't it please God to get rid of all the evil in the world? To stop evil from happening?

Wouldn't that make him happy? If it pleases God to save people and to spread the gospel, then why up until the 18th century, India never had the gospel at all?

[22:24] Basically, and millions of people, millions and billions have lived and died. Never heard the gospel. And that's the objection.

If God does whatever he pleases, why do I look around and see the world as it is? Now, let me ask you to put on your thinking caps and think about how could you answer that.

It's not the easiest objection to handle, but what are some things we can say? How can we reconcile these realities?

Yeah. may Okay.

So I think both of what you were saying kind of connect in the sense that God not only has his grace to glorify, he has his justice to glorify, and we also need to bring into these thoughts that God is just, that God is holy, and we need to factor those into our thinking.

[24:16] Lou, did you raise your hand? I have a very nice view to the leaders and to the governor that described he is my death, he is all in heart, he is all in this, he is free, it's all in this, it's yours.

And that's all I have to do is someone have an answer for Lou?

been suffered to walk in their own ways for so many ages past.

That's a powerful picture. Could the Lord have sent the gospel to India in the first century and conquered it for Jesus Christ and made everyone a Christian there and gotten rid of all the bad things and gotten rid of all the evil in the world?

He could. Sure. But he had his eye on greater glory, more conspicuous, more obvious glory for himself and for his son. And so he let sin dig down deep into India.

And he let sin dig down deep into our world. And so in India, he allowed Hinduism to enthrall the people and for Satan and demons to reign there.

[31 : 27] Why? Because when the gospel came, the glory of the grace and the power of God and his gospel would be more obvious to everyone when he tore down Satan's kingdom, when he won the victory.

It would be more clearly seen by humanity. It would be more clearly seen by all the watching angels that when the gospel shined and it destroyed this darkness and the evil, that God is powerful and God is good.

And so, yes, much of this world is enthralled, enslaved in darkness, but God only allows it to make a greater name for himself. And so like Deir said, we need to have a greater, greater understanding, a greater picture of what God's joy is.

Carrie didn't say, well, God's been disappointed with the gospel. He's been disappointed in his sinful, disobedient church. And we are sinful.

We are accountable for the slowness of the gospel. But behind that, God's plans were at work. God wasn't frustrated because he just couldn't make his people holy enough so they would do what they were supposed to do.

[32 : 47] It wasn't that. Carrie didn't put the problem on God's doorstep where God isn't powerful enough to deal with it. The reason that so many nations, the reason that sin happens, is not because God is infinite.

It's because he is wise. And he sees greater pleasure for himself in waiting and delaying. And so the objection is short-sighted because God's pleasure is governed by his wisdom.

And he's willing to wait on something to make his pleasure greater. And so he doesn't spoil, you know, he doesn't spoil his appetite by eating the cookies when they're half-baked.

And God is working everything together, including sin and darkness, that he would have more joy, more delight. Now, we only have a few minutes.

Turn in your Bibles to Ezekiel. We're going to talk about the second objection. Ezekiel 18. And maybe some of you were thinking of this verse all along. You have been thinking about it.

[33 : 57] 18, verse 23, Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, I am not pleased when they turn from their ways and live.

And verse 32 says, For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live. So how can God say that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked if, in fact, he accomplishes all of his pleasure?

If he does whatever he pleases, how can we reconcile these two verses? And I want you to think of some possible answers. But let's look at a wrong way to solve this problem at first.

And the wrong way is to go back to Psalm 135, where it says, God does whatever pleases him in the heavens and the earth, and say, you know what, God only does his pleasure in the natural world, not in the personal, in the natural sphere, not the personal sphere.

Psalm 135 says, He makes his clouds rise at the end of the earth, and he makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses. So maybe God does all of his pleasure in nature, but not with people.

[35 : 16] Now what's wrong with that view? Nature affects people. So December 26, 2004, an earthquake happens off of Indonesia, and a tsunami is set off and destroys a quarter of a million people.

Now the idea that God started that earthquake, and then he was surprised, and saddened by the fact of the tsunami killing people is really preposterous.

We can't say that only God, that God only does what he wills in the natural world, but not in the personal, because the natural and the personal intersect all the time. Every time someone gets cancer, the natural world and the personal life becomes entwined, intersect.

So before we get to a possible solution, we're going to make this problem even harder. Some people, they don't think it's a big deal for God to be handcuffed and cornered, where he's forced to do things that he doesn't want to do.

They don't think it's a problem that God is saddened that he has to judge people, and that they're, they don't have any problem saying that there's no sense in that God takes delight in the death of the wicked.

[36 : 36] There's no sense in which he does that. But God won't let us even go that far. In Deuteronomy 28, Moses is giving the blessings and the curses of the Old Covenant, and in verse 63, he's in the curses section, and Moses says, just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin you and destroy you.

God is saying, you know what? Your sin is not going to take away my pleasure. Your sin will not stop me from getting pleasure. I was pleased to prosper you, and I will be pleased to destroy you. And so we're brought back to this inescapable fact that in some sense, God does not take delight in the death of the wicked, and that in another sense, God does take delight in the death of the wicked.

Now let me ask you, how can we answer that objection? How can we reconcile those two points? Any ideas?

Dave? I think that hits on the two things, the two ways we can answer this. In the first way, is that God's emotional life, as Lou pointed out, that Mark pointed out, is much more, it's complex.

[38 : 12] It's much more, it's a bigger, greater, more incomprehensible thing than our emotional life. So I want you to think right now, how many prayers is God hearing?

And he rejoices with those who rejoice, and he mourns with those who mourn at the same time.

Now there's a sense that God's emotional life, ours is a teaspoon, and his is an ocean.

So, we need to have our minds expanded and realize, you know what? Somehow, in the whole big scheme of things, God is delighted in the death of the wicked, and God is not delighted in the death of the wicked.

And the second point is, that God is not a sadist. He's not malicious. He doesn't enjoy the fact that the wicked die.

He's not bloodthirsty. He doesn't throw a party when a sinner is thrown into hell, like he throws a party when a sinner repents. But when the wicked die, God's justice is vindicated, and God delights in it.

[39 : 21] It's not like that when God judges sinners, he's defeated. It's not that at all. When God judges sinners, God has an opportunity to glorify his justice, and he takes delight in that.

He takes delight in the fact that people see that God is just, and they love him for it, and his glory, and his worth is lifted up. And so that should be a warning to us.

God is not mocked, ever. No one can take his joy away. He's never trapped, or cornered, or coerced. As Dave was saying, on the road to Calvary, Jesus had a legion of angels at his disposal. But for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. And so God is never trapped. No man takes my life from me. I lay it down on my own accord.

God is never trapped. He's never forced. And so we need to stand in awe of this eternal, happy, sovereign God. Our God is in heaven, and he does whatever pleases him.

[40 : 35] We're dismissed.