

God's Pleasure in His People

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[0:00] We're studying John Piper's book, *The Pleasures of God*. Three weeks ago yesterday, the Opera Company of Philadelphia brought together over 650 choristers!

to perform what they called a random act of culture. They were in Macy's at Center City, Philadelphia.

And these 650 singers, to start with, were just scattered and mingling among the crowd there at Macy's, appearing to be just shoppers themselves. And then at 12 noon, the biggest, world's largest pipe organ, the Wanamaker organ, struck up the introduction to the Hallelujah Chorus by Handel. And as that song began, all these shoppers suddenly turned into a choir and they all started singing to the top of their voices the Hallelujah Chorus to the shock and surprise of everyone else in the store.

And so their four-part harmony filled the common area of the mall to the delight of these surprise shoppers. King of kings and Lord of lords, and he shall reign forever and ever.

[1:21] And just listening to a recording of it and watching the surprise on people's faces put chills up and down my back. Music is a powerful, majestic music is a powerful medium.

But now, can you imagine what it would be like to hear God singing? Not 650 voices, but God Himself.

You know, there were times that men heard His voice at Mount Sinai. He spoke the ten words. And Moses' knees knocked.

And the people shook and said, we can't hear this and live. So awesome was the spoken word of God. What would it be like for him to sing and you to hear him singing?

It really goes beyond our imagination, doesn't it? But to think that he sings for joy and he sings for joy over me, stretches my imagination way beyond its limits.

[2:36] And yet we have it. Turn to Zephaniah, chapter 3. You can start at the back of the Old Testament and turn your way back.

About four books. Habakkuk, Zephaniah. Chapter 3. This was a prophet of God who spoke the very words of God. And it's from his lips that we hear about God singing.

Zephaniah 3 and verse 17. The Lord your God is with you.

He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

Now this brings us to the next pleasure of God in our study by John Piper with that very title, *The Pleasures of God*. It is that God takes great delight in his people.

[3:47] He has great pleasure in his people. The people he saves. And his delight rises to the degree of rejoicing over you with singing.

So he's singing for joy and he's singing for joy over you. Now if that doesn't humble us and amaze us and thrill us all at the same time, I don't know what will.

Me. The one who has offended him every day of my life. And whose sins are more than the hairs on my head.

And yet he delights over me with singing. Amazing. How can it be? But lest I doubt it, he says it over and over throughout his word.

Turn to Jeremiah chapter 32. His pleasure is in his people. And if we would know God and get to know him better, we must come to know him as a God who takes great pleasure in his people.

[4:50] And here in Jeremiah 32 beginning at verse 38. The Lord says, They will be my people and I will be their God.

I will give them singleness of heart and action so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

I will never stop doing good to them. And I will inspire them to fear me so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.

He's a God who delights in his people. He's a God who rejoices in doing them good. But now someone says, Wait a minute, John. This is a promise for Israel.

And you're just coming in here and jerking that out and reading it to us who are believers in the Lord Jesus and telling us that it applies to us. Isn't that kind of like reading somebody else's mail?

[6:10] Well, yes and no. Yes, it is written to Israel. But it includes all who in Christ have become a part of the Israel of God.

Now, that's a that's a pact and a loaded statement. That all in Christ have become a part of the Israel of God. And so I want to take just a little time to demonstrate the truth of that.

when in verse 40 God speaks of making an everlasting covenant with His people, He's referring to the new covenant. The new covenant.

You say, how do you know that? Well, He's just talked about it the previous chapter. Turn back to chapter 31 and notice verse 31 of Jeremiah 31.

The time is coming declares the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. And it will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt because they broke my covenant though I was a husband to them declares the Lord.

[7:31] This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother saying, know the Lord because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. So that's the new covenant that God promised to make.

That's the everlasting covenant which chapter 32 is referring to and one of the blessings of that covenant is to have God never stop doing good to his people and to rejoice in doing them good as we've just read.

Now remember it's the new covenant that is the covenant that Jesus sealed with his blood shed on Calvary. Remember at the Last Supper he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for many.

[8:50] Mark 14 24. So what Jesus did on the cross was to shed his blood to secure and seal this new covenant to his people.

He purchases with his blood every blessing of the new covenant for his people and his blood or the benefits of the new covenant then reach just as far as the blood of Jesus reaches.

So are you trusting in Christ? Then you have the blessings of the new covenant. The apostle Paul had a ministry both to Jews and Gentiles and he refers to it as the ministry of the new covenant.

He preached the gospel repent and believe on Jesus and when you do you receive all the promises of the new covenant. We've just read them. The heart being radically changed such that the law of God is internalized and written on the affections and desires.

The fact that we know the Lord we have an experiential knowledge of him. He knows us we know him and the forgiveness of sins I'll forgive their sins and remember them no more.

[10:05] Those are the promises of the new covenant and they belong to all for whom Christ died they belong to all who by faith rest on Christ for life. And so Paul has this ministry of the new covenant and he says in Ephesians 3 and verse 6 that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel members together of one body and sharers together in the promises in Christ Jesus the promise in Christ Jesus.

So through the gospel we Gentiles have become heirs together with Israel. We inherit the promises of the new covenant. We're members together of one body we're the new covenant people of God. We are the new Israel of God. So believers Jeremiah's promise here in chapter 32 about God rejoicing to do his people good it's not like you're reading somebody else's mail.

It's got your name on the envelope because though you're not a physical Jew in Christ you have become a spiritual Jew one of the people of God.

Romans 2:29 A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly and circumcision is not that I'm sorry and circumcision is circumcision of the heart in Galatians 3:29 So then if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

[11:49] So the covenant promise is all yours in Christ. Now that should do something to your Old Testament that should put it in your mailbox and when you see promises made to the people of God in Christ you have become the Israel of God and so these promises indeed are for you.

We were once separate from Christ excluded from citizenship in Israel we were foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in this world but now in Christ Jesus you you Ephesian Gentiles you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

So God's speaking to all believers this morning in Jeremiah 32 this promise of the everlasting covenant is yours. Now there's three parts to the covenant three parts to the promise that I want us to look at this morning.

There's much more that's promised there that we don't have time to look at but this has to do with our topic. And the first part is this notice in verse 40 God says He will never stop doing good to you. He will never stop doing good to you. Only good unending good is what God does to you. Psalm 84:11 No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

[13:15] He will not hold it back. He'll not keep it in His back pocket. He'll not leave it on the shelf. No good thing will He withhold from them who walk uprightly.

Psalm 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy will follow me not just on my good days but all the days of my life. Surely this is something you can go to the bank with.

This is for sure goodness will follow you all the days of your life. So then when we're having what we call a bad day it's not that He stopped being good to us but rather that even then He's working all things together for our good.

When we're having a bad day He's just fixing to do us some good that we never would have even thought of. Indeed we wouldn't call it good but in the end we'll see what He was up to and it was nothing but good because that's the covenant that Jesus' blood purchased for us to never stop doing us good.

Psalm 119:71 it was just such a situation that caused the psalmist to say it was good for me to be afflicted. I didn't think it was good but now I see it was good for me to be afflicted that I might learn your decrees.

[14:35] I learned them in a way I couldn't have without that affliction. You didn't stop doing me good. Isaiah 38:17 Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish King Hezekiah says.

At the time I didn't see any good in it. But surely it was for my benefit because God never stops doing good to His people His covenant people.

George Mueller was 64 years old and still caring for hundreds of orphans when after 39 years of marriage his wife Mary died.

And shortly after the funeral when he was strong enough to preach what he called a funeral sermon what text do you think he chose to preach his wife's funeral sermon the best of earthly gifts to him. Well he chose Psalm 119:68 you are good and what you do is good period and he had three points in his funeral sermon number one the Lord was good and did good in giving her to me number two the Lord was good and did good in so long leaving her to me 39!

[16:06] years of marriage number three the Lord was good and did good in taking her from me and it's on that third point that he said this the Lord's goodness in taking her from me every day I see more and more how great is her loss to the orphans yet without an effort my inmost soul habitually joys in the joy of that love departed one her happiness gives joy to me my dear daughter and I would not have her back were it possible to produce it by the turn of a hand God himself has done it we are satisfied!

him! The Lord was good and did good when he took her from me you see God has promised to never stop doing good to his people and that promise holds them for every day the day of the death of the closest friend that we have on earth so Piper says quote if an enemy is temporarily given the upper hand we can say straight into the muzzle of a gun you mean evil against me but God means it for my good and God will have his way because he cannot stop doing good to me the blood of Jesus secures that promise what a way to live confident but nothing but good always good eternal good can come my way in Jesus Christ but the promise gets sweeter yet he not only promises to

never stop doing us good but secondly he rejoices to do you good do you see that in verse 41 I will rejoice in doing them good it's one thing to do good to someone it's another thing to rejoice in doing good to them so as he's doing good to us he's not doing so reluctantly begrudgingly perfunctorily well I've got to do him good I promised I would so here comes goodness John no there's none of that in his doing good he rejoices he delights to do us good he's thrilled to come up it no I want to ask you is that how you think of God how you think of him on your bad days that he's up there rejoicing to do me good God's delight in doing this good is like the Niagara Falls you look at it and you think surely this can't go on like this forever I mean won't it run out won't the source somehow where's all this water coming from and it just keeps pouring out surely it has to rest sometime but no it just keeps surging crashing and delighting visitors century after century such as God's goodness and his delight in doing you good it never stops it just keeps crashing into our laps he never gets tired of it never grows old to him he never does it without rejoicing!

takes great delight in doing you good he rejoices to do you good Psalm 35 27 says the Lord be exalted who delights in the well being of his servants he delights in the well being of his servants so God is a great master he's got a lot of servants his people are his servants and he not only looks after their well being as a gracious master he's looking after he wants his servants to have everything that they need but he's not just looking!

[20 : 16] after them and their well being he's rejoicing He's delighting to look after their well being he enjoys it! Do you remember Scrooge on Christmas morning after that glorious transformation has come upon him because of all of his dreams he never took delight in doing good to others before and that's why his giving was so niggardly but now you remember he looks out the window and asks the guy running by is the turkey still in the store he's just giddy isn't he he's just giddy with delight to do good to his servant Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim he's happy to see that his employee is well provided for that's God he delights in the well being of his servants he does so with great joy you know it's Jesus who taught us it's more blessed to give than to receive it's more happy to give than receive that's not just a theological construction that he took down and plumped on his disciples one day that's the experience of the master he found great delight in giving and his whole life was one of giving sight to the blind health to the infirm freedom from the demon possessed forgiveness of sins to the guilty and as he did so he did so cheerfully it's more blessed it's more happy to give than to receive the reason the

Lord loves a cheerful giver is because he is a cheerful giver and he never gives to his people but he rejoices to do us good now sometimes we have a hard time believing that because of our ongoing sin and yes sin was a huge obstacle to keep God from doing us good indeed sin would put the end to the goodness of God toward us and it would rather pull down upon our heads his wrath and vengeance and rightly so and so we see that obstacle sin and we think how can God rejoice to do me good but remember the Lord Jesus has taken that obstacle out of the way that's that's one of the promises of the new covenant in his blood that their sins he would remember no more he would forgive them so the obstacle is gone between God's heart to do you good because

Jesus took the wrath should have been mine and he gave me the favor that he deserved so that God now can just love on me and heap his goodness upon me with great delight my sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought my sin not in part but the whole was nailed to the cross and I bear it no more and that's why God can just go on being joyful and doing me good for Jesus sake none of our joys hold a candle to the joy God has in his people he says in Isaiah 65 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem I will be glad in my people no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress Psalm 149 4 for the Lord takes delight in his people he crowns the humble with salvation but the promise gets even sweeter first I will never stop doing good to you second

I will rejoice in doing you good but third I will do it with all my heart and soul verse 41 I will do it with all my heart and soul so he rejoices in doing this good with all of his heart and soul how do you know when somebody's heart is not in something you tell me how do you know when you say he did it but he didn't do it with all his heart and soul what do you notice that tells!

you that gives you that inclination no enthusiasm! okay maybe half baked yeah with a sigh good Dale no joy in it grinding this thing out okay you get the picture you know it you've seen it in your children you've seen it in your employees perhaps you've seen it perhaps in yourself you did it but there was no joy in it God doesn't give to us that way folks no he gives good to us with all of his heart and soul in it with great enthusiasm with great joy nothing half baked nothing boring or ho hum when he comes to do us good there's a zeal and eagerness and enthusiasm he throws himself

into it with all of his heart now how do we describe someone who throws their whole heart into it where could we go in the common scenes of life to find somebody doing good to another with all their heart and soul well he takes us first of all on a honeymoon and he compares what he does for us to a bride groom rejoicing over his bride turn to

[26:12] Isaiah 62 Isaiah 62 the whole marriage language that we saw in Hosea of God being the husband to Israel is seen in the prophets and here we see it in Isaiah 62 starting at verse 4 and I'm going to go ahead and read the meaning of the names that are given here you'll find them usually in your footnotes of your Bible but I'll insert them Isaiah 62 4 no longer will they call you deserted or name your land desolate that's how it was under the present conditions of God's judgments but you will be called Hephzibah that is my delight is in her and your land will be called Beulah which means married for the Lord will take delight in you and your land will be married as a young man marries a maiden so your sons will marry you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride so will your

God rejoice over you so when God would get across to us just how enthusiastic he is about doing us good he goes to the honeymoon suite and he says the bridegroom rejoices over his bride there's the picture of how much I rejoice in doing good to you now we sometimes speak sometimes jokingly sometimes there's nothing funny about it about the honeymoon being over what are we referring to we're referring to that first love intensity that enthusiastic love that carried us away the excitement of the honeymoon can be lost but God never loses it for us that's the point now he complains of our losing our first love for him but he never loses his first love for us he rejoices over us like a bridegroom rejoices over his newlywed bride on their honeymoon his heart is in it with all his heart and soul and with

God the honeymoon never ends he will never stop doing good to you and doing it with all of his heart and soul in it now that's in my Bible so that I can go around Monday Tuesday Wednesday every day of my life remembering that I am the bride of such a wonderful bridegroom now how much does that weigh into your self conscious identity do you think of yourself I am the bride part of the bride of this this this bridegroom who loves me with honeymoon intensity well another way God describes this joy of doing us good with all of his heart and soul is to compare it to the father's rejoicing when finding his lost son it's the old man running remember we saw that recently in Luke 15 twice Jesus says that there's joy in heaven over one sinner that repents it's not just that God has joy over his people as a whole every individual one he takes joy in their repentance and he illustrates it with the three parables of the lost sheep that was found the lost coin that was found and then most supremely at length the lost son that was found and when the prodigal returned the father rejoiced over his son dinky and we saw that dignified and aged men do not run no they walk they keep their composure they show that they're in control of their emotions except in this story when God is seeking to show us the kind of joy that he has in us and then old dignified men forget convention and run for joy of receiving the lost son his joy over you he fell on his neck he kissed him he embraced him he did good to his son didn't he called for sandals a robe a ring and start the band let's have music let's have singing let's rejoice he rejoiced in doing good to his son to say that his heart was in it is an understatement isn't it this is God's wholehearted rejoicing in you believer Zechariah 3 17 he will take great delight in you he will quiet you with his love he will rejoice over you with singing so when the father calls for music and song it's he himself who leads the chorus in singing with loud singing over joy of having you with him and this too is to enter into the way that I think about God and the way I think about myself I am the son of such a father's love in doing me good I am the son of a running father so eager to do me good that he can't walk I am the son of a! [31:59] singing father who can't hold in his joy but must express it with song now this is God's pleasure in doing good to his people should that not produce a wonderful joy in me this is the so what of the lesson if he rejoices to never stop doing good to me with all of his heart and soul then surely I ought to get some joy out of that in return I should find trouble obeying Philippians 4 forever again to rejoice in the Lord always to rejoice in the fact that he's rejoicing over me and doing me good are there no joys in being loved by this bridegroom with intense love are there no joys in being loved by this father well how much of his joy will you receive into your heart his joy is to warm your heart with joy how much will you enjoy of this joy in

God well the measuring cup is faith how many times did Jesus say according to your faith be it unto you and that's it here the measuring cup of his kingdom is faith how much can you believe the word of God that he rejoices over you is saying if you got a little!

you'll have half cup of joy if you can believe it that much you'll have that much joy but if you can open your mouth wide he'll fill it and he'll enable you to rejoice in in his fame in his in his son for them and in doing good his doing good to his people you see how it all focuses on him he gets joy in himself who he is what he does but from here on out the book will shift to look at

God's pleasures in some of our responses to him and his gospel of grace from now on we'll start to look at God's pleasure in our hope in him in our prayers to him in our obedience to him and in our doing works of justice and mercy now the order is intentional Piper says he says we had to start with God's pleasure in himself if we had started with his pleasure in us what have we done but when the gospel comes to us then we start to think that we're at the center of the gospel that we're at the center of the whole universe of God why God has done what he's done well because we're so valuable to him you see and we give him such pleasure what wonderful people we must be how lonely he must!

have been before he got me and we put ourselves right in the center of it and Piper has gone to great lengths to show that's that's hogwash a few years before you were born he was just doing fine with pleasure within himself in fact for all eternity you can't even think how long he's been delighted before you even arrived on the scene his delight in himself seeing the reflection of himself in his son and the fellowship of the spirit and then in creation and all that he is and all that he does he finds great delight in himself it's not like his cup of pleasure is half full and he needed us to fill it not at all so once we get it that God takes great pleasure in himself and he's absolutely satisfied in himself then we're ready to start thinking about his delight in us and in our prayers and in our responses to the gospel of grace because now we can think of it in such a way that will not insert ourselves at the center of the universe so we're thinking about our responses to the gospel if

[36:43] God is at the center in his pleasure then our responses to the gospel will also in some way demonstrate that God is still at the center we're not coming to replace him he takes great pleasure in us but not in a way that puts us at the center and magnifies us no even our responses will magnify his grace and I just have a minute to go to psalm 147 and very quickly let's look at our response to the gospel of grace is one of faith one of fear one of hope trust and that's what God takes pleasure in psalm 147 10 and 11 says that his pleasure is not in the strength of the horse nor is delight in the legs of a man the Lord delights in those who fear him in those who put their hope in his unfailing love you see it very clearly tells us another of the pleasures of

God his pleasure is in those who fear him in those who hope in his unfailing love love now you horse lovers and you runners what does God have against horses and strong legs well nothing in and of themselves he made them remember and you can turn to Job and chapter 39 and see him rejoicing over his creatures and he specifically mentions his joy in the horse and its strength but what's wrong with horses and legs is when they replace him in our trust and in the day of battle men put their hope in their horses and they put their hope in their strong legs and that puts God out of the edges and it puts man in the center God does not take pleasure in that what does he take pleasure when we hope in his unfailing love because that response keeps

God at the center it says I'm looking away from self there's nothing here for help I'm looking to the Lord for help and all my expectation of good is upon him I hope in his unfailing love you see how that response to the gospel of grace of hope in him faith in him puts keeps God takes great delight in those who hope in his unfailing love well close with a quote from Piper as he concludes this this section he or artistic excellence or legal processes when these things are the treasure in which we hope or the achievement in which we boast!

Why? Because when we put our hope in horses and legs then horses and legs get the glory and not God so there is a response that is required of us upon entrance into the new covenant blessings would I have this new covenant promise poured out upon me and all of its blessings well then what's my response it's hope in his unfailing love it's faith that looks away to him and so he gets the glory and I get the good he delights in me and I delight in him we're dismissed away may!