

God's Pleasure in the Prayers of the Upright

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Date: 28 November 2010

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[0:00] Well, last week we saw incredibly good news.! And the incredible good news was that God rejoices in doing His people good.

! We saw three fabulous promises from Jeremiah 32, verses 40 and 41.! And this is what God says in that passage.

I will make an everlasting covenant with them. I will never stop doing good to them. That's promise one. And I will inspire them to fear me so that they will never turn away from me.

I will rejoice in doing them good. That's promise two. And will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul. And that's promise three.

So, I will never stop doing good to them. I will rejoice in doing them good. And I will plant them in this land. And I will bless them with all of my heart and all of my soul.

[1:04] And those truths need to sink in into our lives and into our minds and in our hearts. This isn't just some out-of-the-way promise that every now and then affects us.

This is the ocean that we swim in. This is the heart of the new covenant. And this is the heart of the relationship that we have with God because of Jesus.

God rejoices in doing you good. He's never going to stop doing you good. And He does you good with all of His heart and all of His soul with enthusiasm.

And that's what Jesus has won for us on the cross. And that is what we will experience for hundreds and hundreds of billions of years from now.

God will be finding some new way of doing us good. God rejoices in giving us good gifts all the days of our lives.

[2:09] Well, that was last week. And this week we want to build on that. And we want to see that God delights in the prayers of the upright.

And so we're talking about the pleasure of God and the prayers of the upright. And you'll notice that we've changed the focus in this chapter. Up until this point, we've been talking about things that God delights in.

And they've all been things that He does. And who He is. So God delights in His Son. He delights in doing us good. He delights in election.

He delights in creation. He delights in bruising us His Son. But now we see there is something that we do that can bring delight to God's heart.

And so up until now, we've seen God's delight in God's actions and who God is. And today we see that God actually enjoys when we do something. When we do something.

[3:14] We can make the heart of God glad. And I'm afraid many Christians have a horrible feeling that there is nothing that they can do to make God happy.

Do you ever feel that way? That no matter what I do, it's just not going to be good enough for Him. God will see the sin in this and He'll just be all the more frustrated with me. So many Christians think of God as a perfect, critical person.

Who we are never good enough to make Him happy. You've met people like that, haven't you? They're so good. But their goodness makes them hard to live with.

And we think those thoughts about God. And that's not what the Bible says at all. Even though that's what our unbelieving hearts often tell us.

[4:19] That, you know what, God isn't happy with this. God is never happy with anything that I do. And that is not the message of the Bible if you are a born-again believer.

Ephesians 5 says this, Live as children of light. And find out what pleases the Lord. So Paul tells us to find out what pleases the Lord.

And obviously there's a way to live that makes God happy. And so He smiles on us. And He actually finds enjoyment in what we do when we find out what pleases Him. And we're supposed to find it. So pleasing God. Making God happy. That was not only what Paul commanded the people in his churches to do, but that was Paul's goal. In 2 Corinthians 5.9 he says, So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home, in the body, or away from it. So whether I'm in heaven or on earth, my goal is still the same. [5:19] I want to please God. Please the Lord. And so the Bible wouldn't tell us to seek the joy of the Lord, to find out what pleases Him, to make Him happy, if that was something that was impossible for us to do.

And so we can please God. We can bring delight to God. And the question is, how? How? He is perfect. How can we delight God? How can we delight someone who doesn't need anything that we can provide? Who doesn't need anything, period? I mean, remember what we've been talking about. Before we were born, God was doing just fine. Before there was a creation, God was completely happy in Himself, in the Trinity. And so, He's always been an overflowing fountain of delight and enjoyment in Himself. And so, He's looked at His Son from all eternity, and He's seen nothing but His own beautiful, radiant professions coming back to Him, and He enjoyed it. [6:34] And so, how can we bring pleasure to Him? We can't give Him anything that He needs because He doesn't need anything. And, you know what?

I can't give Him anything to begin with because I'm broken and I'm needy. I don't have anything to make God richer because I'm poor.

So, how can poor, broken, finite people like ourselves bring delight to God?

Here's the good news. God is delighted with the one thing that we can bring Him. And that is our need.

God is delighted when we bring Him, when you bring Him, your thirst. First. So, picture a mountain spring. And that's God.

[7:37] God is overflowing. He's self-replenishing. He's constantly overflowing and He's always giving to others. He's not a watering trough.

So, we move from the mountain to the farm. He's not a watering trough. Now, how do you make a watering trough, you know, something that animals drink out of, how do you make that trough seem valuable and good and show how useful it is?

Well, what you have to do is, well, you either have to pump a lot of water in a bucket and then haul your bucket to the watering trough and empty it in, or you have to run a hose to it. Somehow, you have to keep giving to the trough to make it look useful.

And that is not what God is like at all. God is a mountain spring. And so, you don't show how wonderful and valuable and good a crystal clear mountain spring is by running a hose to it and trying to put water in it.

And you don't do that by going to your pump and pumping water and then hauling your half-filled bucket to it and dumping it in. Let me ask you, how do you show other people how beautiful and wonderful and valuable a mountain spring is?

[8:57] How do you do that? You drink from it. You drink from it. So you get on your hands and knees and you drink from it.

And you drink until you're satisfied. And then you go tell other people what you've found. You go down the mountain and tell the people, I have found this beautiful, wonderful mountain spring.

So brothers and sisters, do you see how we as weak, sinful people can please God? It's not by giving to Him like He's a trough that needs to be constantly filled up.

But it's by drinking from Him. By asking Him. It's not by dumping in our leaky, broken, half-filled buckets that we satisfy God.

And that is really, really good news. The one thing that I can bring to God, my thirst, my need, my brokenness, is exactly what pleases Him.

[10:06] It's exactly what glorifies Him. And now I think you begin to understand even more why those first three or four chapters when we talked about how God is so pleased within Himself that nothing can stop Him from enjoying everything that He does and everything that He is.

You can see why all that is good news for us. Because if God was broken, then He would need us to fill Him. But God isn't broken.

He's overflowing. And so He can fill us. And God delights in filling us. God delights not when we offer Him our strength, but when we wait on His strength.

Isaiah 64 says this, Since ancient times, no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.

That's our God. He acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. He doesn't delight in our power. He delights in showing us His power.

[11 : 22] And so I hope you are beginning to understand why God delights in the prayer of the upright. when people pray, it doesn't show their great power.

You know, we're not very powerful people when we pray. We're showing how weak we are. And it shows God's great power. It doesn't show anyone how strong we are, but it does say, this God that I am talking to, that I am asking from, He is strong.

and He is able to do it. And it doesn't magnify our goodness when we pray. It magnifies God's goodness. You know, if we were beggars, we wouldn't think that we were great because we asked a lot.

We would think that that person who is generous to us, He is great. But somehow, our sinful hearts take it and we switch it around. We think because we ask a lot that we're good people.

And we're good because we pray. And all our prayers are showing us is that we're broken and we're needy, we're poor, and God is generous. And it's exactly those things, those reasons, that God finds the prayer of the upright so delightful, so delicious.

[12 : 50] He compares it to an aroma that comes before Him. because it glorifies Him. Now, let's flesh this delight out some. Take your Bibles and turn them to Proverbs 15.

Proverbs 15.8. And this is where John Piper gets this chapter from. Proverbs 15.8.

It says, The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases Him. Or it delights Him. It's His delight.

So this verse has two parts. The sacrifice of the wicked and the prayer of the upright. And it's a contrast.

One, He detests. One's an abomination to Him. And one, the other, is a delight. And notice, it's not the acts themselves that make the determination.

[13 : 52] The acts themselves aren't wicked or good. They're both actually good. They're both good things to do. A sacrifice was an act of worship. And so, obviously, it is right to make sacrifices.

And prayer is obviously something good to do. And so, the difference is not in the act themselves, but it's in the disposition of the heart of the person who is offering it.

So the difference is not in the outward actions, it's in the heart of the person who is either worshipping, sacrificing, or praying. And so, what makes one an abomination and the other a delight?

Well, it's the heart of the worshiper. And so, in God's eyes, the beauty and delight of any action is determined by the heart that's behind it.

It's an outworking of the inner beauty or the inner ugliness of the heart behind it. And so, God looks on the heart. Looks on the heart.

[14 : 55] He always sees our actions as extensions of our heart. And so, Proverbs says, the wicked person, he comes into the temple and he offers his sacrifice and God hates it.

It's an abomination to him. Mere external righteousness does not please God. Romans 14, 23.

Whatever is not from faith is what? Sin. Whatever is not from faith is sin. In Hebrews 11, you know this verse, without faith, it's impossible to please God.

And then we go a few verses later in Hebrews and it says, by faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.

So, what was the difference in Cain and Abel's sacrifices? It was the faith behind it or the lack of faith. And so, exactly what is faith?

[16 : 02] What is that disposition of the heart that makes a sacrifice either abomination or a delight to God? What is the disposition of faith?

Well, it's that heart that looks to God as sovereign and strong and good who is ready to give, who doesn't need, but he delights to give.

And so, think with me of the first time you believed. Maybe you can't remember the exact situation, but just remember the birth of faith in your life.

You saw God as big. You saw God as having everything that you needed. You saw yourself as broken and sinful and wicked, and you saw in Jesus Christ that he had everything that you needed. And not only did he have everything that you needed, that he was willing to give it to you. And that's what faith is. You're seeing that God has everything you need and he is ready to give.

[17:14] And so, when you turn from your sin, you turn from your brokenness, your idols, your things that didn't work, and you turn to God. And that is the heart of faith.

And that is what the wicked don't have when they pray. So they can be really bad, wicked people. They can be really good, wicked people.

But whatever their behavior is, their heart doesn't beat with faith. It's not there. They don't see themselves as needy. They see themselves as giving God something instead of asking God for something.

And that's why the Pharisees and their religion was such a farce and why Jesus hated it so much and why God found it so disgusting because they thought they had everything in hand, didn't they? They had everything they needed. They had all their ducks in a row. They could do what it took. They could do what it took to please God. They thought they knew exactly what to do and by doing it they were pleasing God.

[18:26] But Jesus said they were nothing but whitewashed tombs. They look good on the outside but inside they were full of dead men's bones. And so in their pride they thought they were giving to God.

And the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to God. But the prayer of the upright is his delight. And so we ask, well, what is it about the prayers of the upright that delight God?

Well, we've kind of already hinted at faith. We'll see that more. But three things. One, the prayers of the upright are humble. They're full of faith.

That's the second thing. And the third is they resonate with God's desires. They resonate with the Lord's desires. Now, the upright are humble.

we saw this last week. This is the man to whom I will look. He that is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

[19:32] The upright tremble at God's word. They tremble because they fall far short and they know it. And they tremble because they feel vulnerable to God's judgment.

And so when they read Ezekiel and when they read Jeremiah, they don't say, those Israelites are so sinful, they deserve what they had coming to them.

They say, woe is me. Because the same sins that those Israelites have, I have in my heart. Who is going to save me from the wrath to come?

The upright know themselves to be sinners. And they tremble at God's word. Not only because they feel like judgment is written against them as they stand by themselves without Christ, but they look behind it and who is speaking?

It's the Lord, the maker of heavens and the earth, and he is speaking to me. The upright know it and they're humble and they're contrite because they know their sinful heart.

[20:43] And that contrition translates into their prayers. believers, when they come to God, it isn't like they're going to a job interview. So what do you do when you go to a job interview?

You dress up nicer than usual. You put on a confident face, even if on the inside you're a storm, you're a wreck. You put on a confident face, and you hide your flaws, or at least you gloss over them, or they teach you to take your flaws and somehow make them sound like strengths.

That's what you do in a job interview. And when the upright pray, it isn't like that at all. They come just as they are. The sacrifice that God accepts is a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart.

Oh God, you will not despise. God sees the heart of the upright and smiles. God isn't looking for perfection when we come to pray.

He's looking for brokenness. And brothers and sisters, that's good news. Because that's what we are. God wants you as you are.

[21:57] No mask, uncovered, unveiled. He wants you to come in your sin, in your pain, even in your selfish desires.

He wants you to own what you are before him and stop pretending to be something that you're not. And we struggle to believe this.

See, we have the old Pharisee in us still. That thinks when we pray we need to be offering up something good to God. We need to be something where God won't be accepted or he won't accept our prayer.

And that's why we find prayer so exhausting. When we pray, we try to be all put together. We try to be something we aren't. We're not humble, but we act like it.

I don't know if I'm just speaking for myself, but I can say the right words to sound humble even when I'm talking to God who knows my heart. And we act like we don't love sin, but we do.

[23:05] and we don't say it. Instead of confessing, you know what God, when I pray this prayer, I think it might be selfish. We somehow pretend that it's not selfish.

We pretend like our heart isn't there. And we act sophisticated and think God will be more pleased with the nice words that I'm saying rather than the real words of my heart.

And so we act like we're on a job interview. And we don't act like children asking their father for something. So little children are so unsophisticated.

They're so unpretentious. They ask for the craziest things. They ask for the most selfish things. And they don't see it like that. They don't pretend that it's something that it's not.

They just see it. They want it and they ask for it. And Jesus says the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. So it's the unsophisticated, it's the honest, it's the humble prayers of the upright that please God.

[24:14] Because that shines a light on just who we are and it shines a light on his goodness and his fatherly love for us. And so even when their prayers are selfish and wrong headed and uninformed, the Lord treats those prayers with gentleness and patience as they're coming from an honest, humble heart.

So think of James and John. This is an example of what I'm saying. Think of James and John. They come to Jesus and they say, can one of us sit on your right hand?

And one of us sit on your left hand when you come into your kingdom. So they're asking for, we want to be in the two highest spots right below the king.

That's what we want. What a request. I mean, would any of you have the audacity to say, God, this is what I want from you.

I want Jesus here and I want to be right below him in heaven forever and ever. I mean, we're way too sophisticated for that. But James and John are not.

[25:27] I mean, they even have their mom ask, which, I mean, come on. So, you know what?

It was unsophisticated. It was childlike. It was childish. Childlike. It was something. But, how did Jesus respond to them?

If you read that passage, he doesn't berate them, he doesn't rebuke them, he doesn't call them names, he gently responds. He didn't call them hypocrites.

He said, you don't know what you're asking. How many times as a parent have you had to say that to your children? You don't know what you're asking.

My daughter just came up with something the other day. She wants to be a professional wreath maker when she grows up. Like, you don't even know what you want.

[26:32] And that's how Jesus responds. And I can't help but think that Jesus was at least smiling on the inside when he said, you don't know what you're asking.

Here his disciples are. Yeah, their request was wrong headed. And yeah, it was brash and it was probably a lot of selfishness.

But it was so simple. There was no duplicity behind it. There was no guile. They were coming and asking for the craziest thing. Their prayer was wrong.

But you know what? It's that kind of heart, that kind of simplicity of heart that delights the Lord. And so a gentle correction would do.

A gentle correction would be okay. And so they were childlike, humble, honest, and they're asking, and that kind of prayer pleases the Lord because it shows that we trust him.

[27:37] It shows that we can be vulnerable with him and that he is good and that he is worthy of our trust. Now secondly, the prayer of the upright, it pleases the Lord because it's full of faith.

We've kind of already talked about this a little bit, but another reason we find prayer so exhausting is because, like I said before, when we pray, we think we're coming to God, and by our coming, we want to bring something.

We want to do something for him. And somehow it gets all mixed up in our heads. And so we look like we're trying to bring something to God instead of looking to him in faith.

And so we treat him like a trough instead of a mountain spring. And that's not childlike. Little

children always think their parents have the ability to give them what they want, don't they?

Little children always think their parents are willing to give to them. And you know this, it makes no sense to a little child that you don't have the money right now to buy that.

[28:54] Because you're mom and dad. And mom and dad can do whatever they want. I mean, they're all powerful. They have the almighty checkbook. They have the almighty debit card.

All you have to do is write it and it's mine. And you can go to the store and buy anything and everything and the car breaks down and it's time to go to the car store and buy a new car. That's how children think of their parents, little children.

They're full of faith in their parents' ability. And they always think they're willing, parents are always willing to give them something. And they're standing in line and there's the candy bars.

Why in the world wouldn't they give me a candy bar? That's what they're thinking. They have faith in your goodness. And they have faith in your ability.

And it's that kind of childlike faith that pleases our Father. When we look at them, when we look at Him and say, you know what, God, I know your heart and it's full of love and I know your power.

[30:01] There's nothing too hard for you. That shines a light on God. And so God is pleased when the upright pray. And so faith, it marks the prayers of the upright.

They expect Him to do them good. They know that He has the ability to do whatever they ask. And so their faith shines a spotlight on their weakness and His strength, their poverty and His wealth, His generosity and their neediness.

prayers of the upright pleases God. Because it's full of faith. Now thirdly, God delights in the prayers of the upright because their prayers resonate with His passions.

They resonate with His passions, His desires. They're in harmony with it. Now, here's a hard question. The shorter catechism asks, what is prayer?

Does anyone know the answer? You have to get pretty far in the catechism to get there. What is prayer? Prayer is offering up our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will in the name of Christ with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.

[31:30] And it's that first clause that I want to pay attention to. Prayer is offering up our desires unto God for things agreeable to His will.

Now, I think that can cause us some problems because we're afraid to pray for things because we're not sure if they're God's will or not. And that's really a separate issue.

I think Jesus repeatedly says, pray for anything. And I think He's using that language because we're so slow to pray.

We're imbalanced and He's bringing us back to center. But prayer is offering up our request unto God for things agreeable to His will.

Now, what is God's will? desire for this world? Let's start with a big, big, big picture.

[32:33] Okay? What is God looking for in this world? Where is He going? What's His purpose? What's His desire for this world? That's for you to answer. His own glory.

Worshippers. What do you mean by that? Flesh it out there. Okay.

Very good. What else? Expansion of His kingdom. Yeah.

Well, those three things are actually the same thing, aren't they? And I think we can sum it up best. With how Jesus did it with a great commission.

As Jesus is leaving the world, this is His final commission. He's putting out His orders. This is what He wants from the world. He says, go into the world baptizing, making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you.

[33:43] You're supposed to go into the nations. You're supposed to make disciples. And they are to worship. Be worshipers. And that's all for His glory.

And so that's God's passion for this world. God wants His kingdom to spread. He wants people everywhere to worship Him for His glory. Now, the prayers of the upright reflect that passion.

They're like a mirror of God's heart. They reflect it back to God when they pray. God's And so they want to see disciples for Jesus from every nation and tribe and language and tongue.

They want to see people everywhere worshiping God. And they want to see people everywhere obeying everything that He has commanded. And they want to see God glorified in those things.

And so that's the heartbeat of their prayer life. The upright resonate with God's desire. They're righteous because He's righteous. And their desires and His desires are becoming more and more one.

[34:50] And as they pray, they're reflecting God's glory or God's passion and desires back to Him. And so we pray, I want this person to believe. I want this for your glory.

I want you to raise up workers to go to these people because they need to become worshipers.

They need to become disciples. And we pray, Lord, help me to obey.

Lord, help me to witness. Open up the doors. Make your word run quickly. That's how the upright pray. And when God hears those prayers and sees that heart, He is pleased.

Because that's His heart. And so when Paul asked the churches to pray for him, this is what he said. Pray also for me, the utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.

It's Ephesians 6 and 19. Colossians 4. Pray for us also that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ.

[35:59] 2 Thessalonians 3.1. Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified. It's those prayers. Lord, I want opportunity to witness, to minister.

Lord, I want to see your word run and triumph. Lord, I want to be able to speak in a way that shows the mystery of the gospel.

So prayer is a wartime walkie-talkie. It's a radio. It's a battleground radio. It's not a domestic intercom.

prayer is for waging the fight of faith. It's for calling in courage when our hearts are fearful.

It's for calling in reinforcements when we need more people. It's for asking God to heal wounded soldiers.

[37:02] prayers. And so God gives us prayer so that we can wage war. So that we can expand his kingdom, not so that we can increase our comforts.

And I think that is one reason we get so frustrated with prayer. Because we have our battleground walkie-talkie and we treat it like a domestic intercom. And we ask for things that would bring us comfort instead of things that would extend God's kingdom.

So here's a very wealthy man. He lives in a mansion with his servants and he's sitting by his pool and he's thirsty. And so he goes over and he goes to the domestic intercom and he says, Jeeves, give me something to drink.

And too often that's how we treat prayer. God, I want this. It will make me feel better. It will make my life better. And that's not what prayer is about.

That's not what prayer is for. And James says, no wonder you don't receive what you ask for.

Because you want it so that you can spend it on yourselves. So prayer is not a domestic intercom.

[38:10] It's a battleground walkie-talkie. And the upright use it that way. They use it for its intended use. And when God sees that, it delights his heart.

They ask for things that delight him. They ask for things that please him. And so he's glad to give them what they ask. And he's glad to hear their voices. He's glad to hear their prayers.

So listen to John Piper in this extended quote. Almighty God has spoken. If he is God, it is sure that his word will accomplish all his purpose.

God's truth must win the spiritual war of the ages. But 2 Thessalonians 3.1 says, pray that the word of God will triumph. And I take this to mean that God will indeed cause his word to be glorified, but he does not intend to win without prayer.

God will be duly glorified when the knowledge of his glory fills the earth like the waters cover the sea. And the earth will be filled with the knowledge of his glory when the word of the Lord triumphs among all the peoples of the earth.

[39:22] And the word will triumph through mighty prevailing prayer. You see there's this chain. God's word will win.

God's word will triumph. But God has said unless you pray, you have to pray. It's only going to happen if you pray. And it will win through mighty prevailing prayer.

And therefore, the intensity of God's pleasure and prayer is proportionate to the intensity of his passion that all his purposes be complete. So if he loves his son, if he loves his sovereignty, if he loves his creation and his fame and his electing grace and his redeeming work, and the good of his people and the ingathering of all the children of God, then he must love prayer with all his heart.

So do you get it? The upright pray for the glory of Jesus. And they pray for the healing of a created world.

And they pray for God's fame and for the ingathering of all of God's people from every nation and tribe. And they pray for the completion of the great commission. They pray God's desires back to him.

[40:43] And so when God sees it, he's delighted. It thrills his heart. And so the conclusion is simple.

Pray. Pray. Pray earnestly. Pray expectantly. Pray for little things. And pray for big things. Pray honestly. Pray humbly. Pray God's desires back to him. And pray hopefully because God delights in the prayers of the upright.

He smiles when you come with your broken requests. He smiles when you are struggling for his glory and you ask him for help. It's to his glory to answer your prayers.

So let's be praying. We're dismissed. may may