

The Lord takes pleasure in His people

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[0 : 00] I'd like us now for a short time to turn to the passage that we read in the Old Testament Scriptures and the book of Psalms and Psalm 149 and we can read that verse 4.

For the Lord takes pleasure in his people, he adorns the humble with salvation. For the Lord takes pleasure in his people.

You can see from the title given to the psalm in your Bible, if your Bible has such, it is Sing to the Lord a New Song.

And that is maybe an instruction to us to help us understand how the psalm is meant to be understood.

Sing to the Lord a New Song. But it's not a psalm we sing often. It's not a psalm that I use often because for various reasons, the psalm itself begins with words that are celebratory.

[1 : 28] They begin with words that are an encouragement to God's people to rejoice and to be glad in God and to sing his praises and to make melody before him.

But then when the psalm moves on to a conclusion, it appears to have a more vengeful spirit. To execute vengeance on the nations, punishments on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains, their nobles with fetters of iron, and so on.

It seems quite different to the kind of spirit that you have at the beginning of the psalm. And you may find it difficult to sing these words because they're clearly words that, well, to all intents and purposes, they look to us as if they're inappropriate words to be sung.

And yet, we find within the scripture that such words are found often.

Certainly within the psalms and throughout scripture. There are words there which we might be uncomfortable with.

[3 : 07] Words that are clear.

The spirit of the New Testament should not allow such sentiments to be expressed. And certainly they should not be felt.

But one thing that should govern our approach to the words from the scripture with which we might be uncomfortable is to remind ourselves that if we truly believe the word of God to be the word of God from Genesis to Revelation.

And if God has seen fit to include within the scripture these words, then that should be what governs our attitude to what these words are.

The fact that God has brought these words to our attention. And that they speak of the vengeance of men upon men.

[4 : 46] But really, when we think about what the psalmist is using here is language that is not speaking about man's doing, but what God is doing by way of man for a reason.

And that there is always ways in which we can and we should allow God's word to inform us as to what is truly felt and meant by these words.

James Adams, who has written a book on the imprecatory psalms, suggests that, he looks at various psalms, and he suggests and informs us that many of these imprecations are really a response to the enmity that is directed towards God.

And the response that is evoked is the response of a holy God upon those who have disdained and despised that God.

And the spirit that is in the heart of God is not malignant or malevolent or in any way a negative response.

[6 : 14] It is the response of a holy God to those who live their life and to behave in a wicked way.

If we believe the scripture, we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has taught us that there is a day coming when he was going to return to the earth. He said that.

And when he returns, he's not going to be someone who's going to, as many would suggest, that the appropriate attitude of the Christian is to turn the other cheek.

That when Jesus comes to the world to judge the world, he's not going to turn the other cheek. He's going to judge the world in righteousness.

And his judgment will involve him in establishing those who are believers in him in a final state of holiness with himself, ever to be in his company.

[7 : 23] Enjoying that company with those who are fellow believers. But there is another element, another constituent body who will be separated from him.

And who will be established in a place prepared for them and for the devil and his angels. He's not going to turn the other cheek.

He has said this is what's going to happen. And this psalm, in essence, is a psalm that speaks about what will happen in the final victory.

There's only one place in the scripture that you find this psalm quoted, and that is in the book of Revelation. And it's quoted in Revelations chapter 5 and I think Revelations chapter 18.

And in both of these chapters, what's the focus is on the singing to the Lord a new song. The focus is on what will be done in glory, what will be done in heaven, what will be done in a place where God's people will be.

[8 : 35] It doesn't mention the final part of the psalm, but that doesn't mean that the final part of the psalm is not true. But the Lord has seen fit to highlight for us this truth.

That within the scripture there is going to be a final victory on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is going to be God dealing with his enemies.

That there is going to be the place prepared for God's people and the place prepared for those who are not.

And God will deal with them justly and righteously. But that's just by way of background. Because the psalm, if you're going to look at the psalm as a whole, it has both elements to it.

That there is what God is going to do for his people and with his people, just as surely as what God is going to do for those who are not his people.

[9 : 47] But the part I want to focus on very narrowly is this, the words of verse 4. For the Lord takes pleasure in his people. And that's the main part that I want to focus on.

That the Lord takes pleasure in his people. And the significance of what that means. It's more than just a statement which would be an encouragement to God's people.

Which it should be. God takes pleasure in his people. And when he says that, we have to appreciate and grasp the truth with all its significance.

And that's what I want to emphasize more than anything. While at the same time recognizing that as an additional thought, that there is the clear emphasis within the psalm.

That there are those in whom God can take no pleasure. And when God does not take pleasure in something that itself is something that is a very, very real and a serious thought that needs to be addressed.

[11 : 18] And very briefly, the challenge that there is there for us. If you are not already involved in a life where you are pleasing God.

What must you do to please God so that he takes pleasure in you. So that you are numbered amongst those that are included here.

There are three simple thoughts. But I hope that there are thoughts that will encourage the believer. And encourage those who are yet to be believers to think about the privilege of being the focus of the God of heaven.

Who takes delight in his people. So I thought, well, what is it that the scripture tells us? What, where are we in the scripture reminded of occasions when God speaks about being pleased or being, I suppose we have to remember that the language itself when we're thinking of God, that there are words, that there are expressions, that there are statements that are used about God, that are really meant to help us understand what God is doing and the way that he is doing it.

Because God is not man. God is not someone who expresses himself in the same way that man expresses himself or herself.

[13 : 02] But there are truths that apply to God that need to be understood in the way that we can understand them. The first thing that we can understand about God is that the first time that he indicates to us that he took delight in something was when he created the world.

And that's an obvious place to start. As creator, he created all things by the word of his power in the space of six days, we are told, and all very good.

That's what it says. That's what the shorter catechism tells us. The Bible encourages us to understand that at the end of the work of creation, God expressed himself as a God who delighted in what he had done.

And when we think about that, well, we shouldn't be surprised. We shouldn't be surprised that God has ever done something that he himself is not pleased with.

You know, there are joiners here. There are bricklayers here. There are secretaries here, perhaps. And when you work for somebody, when you work for yourself, you do your utmost so that at the end of the day, you're content with what you've done.

[14:35] You've set a standard and you try and live by that standard. And hopefully, every one of us, whatever we're doing, we do to the best of our ability so that at the end of it all, we're saying, well, that's the best I can do.

And we're not ashamed of having done it. Now, when you think about God, there is no way you can think about God ever doing anything that he is not pleased with.

Because we are told repeatedly that at the heart of what God is doing is his own glory. And if he does anything that is in any way coming short, even of his own standards, then that glory is impacted upon.

It's affected. And the work of creation is one example of it. You could say about it that he took pleasure in it.

You know, if we read what the Apostle Paul writes about God, In chapter 11 of Romans, we find him there saying about God, For from him and through him and to him are all things.

[16:00] To him be glory forever. Amen. Now, I know that Paul is there probably speaking about the glory of the gospel and the glory of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ and the centrality and the involvement of God in that.

But the same statement applies to anything and everything that God does. He does all that he does well. He does all that he does in order to take pleasure in it, if that's the right word to use.

And he delights in what he has done. Nothing that he has done within the realms of creation, within the realms of providence, within the realms of salvation history, where his hand is seen and even where it is not, you are not able to accuse him of not doing all things well.

And when he does all things well, he can stand back and say, I take delight in it. I take pleasure in it. That's the first thing I want you to keep in mind.

The second thing I suppose is important, important, just as important because he tells us that he takes pleasure in his son, Jesus Christ.

[17:31] Of course, when you talk about God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, one God, so it would be unlikely that God the Father would not have pleasure in one that was one with himself.

But he has expressed a particular delight in his son when his son came in our nature into this world. And he spoke directly to his son as his son was in the world.

And he said to the world and those who were present within his hearing, this he said is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

So he, at that moment and repeatedly throughout the life of the son in the world, God declared not only an interest in him, but pleasure in what he was doing.

Pleasure in his sonship, pleasure in his humanity, pleasure in his role as Redeemer. Christ, you remember, there was someone who was from his very youth declaring the fact that he was about his father's business.

[18:58] Do you remember that? As an infant, as a young person, he had to be about his father's business. He had to be doing what God sent him into the world to do. But in John's Gospel, we read these words spoken by Jesus.

Jesus said, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.

And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him. And as he was saying these things, many believed in him.

He was always doing the things that were pleasing to God. Now, that was important for the Lord Jesus, that when he lived in the world, when he moved in the world, when he spoke, when he

performed miracles, all that he did, he did in the sight of his heavenly Father with the intention to please him.

God reveals his delight in the Son, his pleasure in the Son. If you go back to the prophecies of Isaiah and that famous passage in Isaiah 53, where we're told about the future of the cross and all that that involved, we see there that God takes delight in the gospel being proclaimed.

[20 : 44] God is looking forward to the day when the gospel reality will be preached throughout the world, where the fruit of the crucifixion of Christ will be made known.

And he takes delight in having that. Now I know there's a danger connected with attributing language to the life of God, the emotional life of God, the reality of the experience of God, but these are things that God himself has declared about himself.

That he takes pleasure in his Son, takes pleasure in the fact that his Son went to the cross, and so on.

Not because he took delight in making his Son suffer, but at the reason for it and the outcome that we have there. And again, we find the Apostle Paul speaking about this gospel that has been preached by him and that others before and after him have preached that he is doing something that God is pleased for him to do.

In 1 Corinthians 1, we see there what Paul refers to as the foolishness, the foolishness of the gospel or the preaching of the gospel.

[22 : 26] Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

And so on. Now we can't forget that, that there is a pleasure, a delight that God takes in the proclamation of this gospel of his Son.

He takes delight in the fact that such a gospel exists and that such a gospel is preached and proclaimed even to this generation.

The preacher, Don Carson, makes reference to this fact of the foolishness of preaching which he prefers to look at as at the heart of the power of God using the instrumentality of something that is so weak.

Paul says, when he who had set me apart before I was born and who called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his Son in me in order that I might preach him to the Gentiles or among the Gentiles.

[24 : 15] God was pleased to do this. Now, God, in other words, takes pleasure in choosing the vehicle of communication to this foolishness that is preached.

And if you take all of these things in aggregate, if you remember all of these things in which God takes pleasure, if you remember all of these things that God sees as important, and you read these words again, for the Lord takes pleasure in his people, you will realize that these words are not empty or meaningless or trivial.

Something that God takes pleasure in is of the utmost import to God. The creation was important to God. He took delight in it.

The son of his bosom was something he took pleasure in. The gospel that is at the heart of the salvation history of the world is important to God.

he takes pleasure in it. Those he has sent into the world to proclaim that gospel, he takes pleasure in it. So the people of God in whom God takes pleasure should believe themselves to be of the utmost import in his sight.

[25 : 47] They should believe themselves to be unique as far as this world is concerned. You know, the psalm that we were singing, Psalm 147, I think all of these psalms, the final psalms of the psalm, psalmody, they come, they all have their own slant.

But in the psalm 147, we read, the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

The Lord takes pleasure in those who hear the word of God and who believe the word of God and who trust the God who has given to us this word.

In Jeremiah, the prophet, chapter 9, we read there at verse 24, the prophet anticipating the gospel. I would imagine that that's the heart of what he says. Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast

love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I take delight, declares the Lord.
[27 : 16] God is pleased to bless his world. God is pleased to reveal himself through these medium where he is seen and what he delights in.

Now, I know the time is going. When you think about that, and I want you to think about it, I want you to remind yourself of it, the Lord takes pleasure in you, believers.

But what if you're not a believer? Well, what does the Lord say to you? The Lord says to you quite plainly that he cannot take pleasure in you in the same way that he takes pleasure in his people. The prophecy of Ezekiel, he says, why will you die, O house of Israel? For I will have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord.

Why will you die? Why would you die without Christ? Christ? Why would you die and not believe the gospel? Why would you die and not know that the God of heaven takes delight in his people?

[28 : 42] So what does the prophet Ezekiel go on and say? He says to you, he says to those who are not, who are going on in a state of spiritual death, turn and live, he says.

Repent and believe. Go to God who has made provision for you in the gospel. In the New Testament we're taught a lesson from the Old Testament that just shall live by faith.

That's a statement from the Old used in the New Testament and what we are told in the epistle to the Hebrews without faith, what? Without faith we cannot please God.

If we reject Christ and choose to live our life without Christ God is not pleased. It's as simple as that. It's not a difficult truth.

It's not a difficult message to understand. The face of God we are told is set against the wicked, the evildoer, the person who is not a believer.

[29 : 59] You know, when we think of that expression God's face being turned away or God's face being turned towards us it's a clear indication of God receiving you and being pleased with you or God being not pleased.

It's not difficult. So how can you please God today? Some people live their life thinking this is what I'm going to do to please God.

I will go to church and God will be pleased with me by my church going. I will read my Bible. God will be pleased with me because of my Bible reading.

I will be a good neighbor and God will be pleased with me because of my neighborliness. I will give to charitable works and God will be pleased with me because of all of these things.

There is no doubt that these things are pleasing to man. There is no doubt that these things are perhaps pleasurable in themselves. But what we need to remember and what I need to remember is if it is not of faith, if faith is not in it, if God is not in it, if the glory of God is not in it, then there is little profit.

[31 : 27] I'm not discouraging you from coming to church, but I'm reminding you that the reason for coming to church is to acquaint yourself with God in the passion of his son, Jesus Christ, and to believe in the provision made by him through him.

and that's the reason for us being here today, to glorify him, putting our trust in the finished work of Christ.

So do you want to please God? Well, this is what you must do. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to the saving of your soul. And when you do that, do you know what?

God will be pleased. God will take pleasure in you because he takes pleasure in his people.

He adorns the humble with salvation. It's an interesting thing. I haven't mentioned it, but it's at the heart of the gospel. You will not find in the heart of the sinner coming to God as a penitent anything other than the spirit of humility.

[32 : 51] It needs to be there because you're coming with nothing to the God who has everything. Thankful that from his everything he can give to meet your nothing, all that you require.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.