

God wants to bless you on the Sabbath

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] one verse from Psalm 73 and two verses from Isaiah 58. So, Psalm 73 to begin with and verse 25. Psalm 73.

Which says, now hear the word of the Lord, Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

Okay, whom in heaven? Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. Isaiah 58 then, which is turned right in your Bible.

I'm just helping you find it. Keep turning right. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, keep going. It's on page 618 in my Bible.

Probably won't help you at all. Okay, so Isaiah chapter 58 and beginning at verse 13.

[1 : 33] Again, hear the word of the Lord. If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath from doing your pleasure on my holy day and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable.

If you honor it, if you honor it, not going your own ways or seeking your pleasure or talking idly, then, then you should take delight in the Lord.

And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth. And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father from the mouth of the Lord.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Sorry. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. It is a joy, isn't it, to know that whatever part of Scripture we read, it is from the mouth of the Lord who spoke.

It's just God's word. Not just God's word, but it is God's word. And that we rejoice in. Well, we're going to come back to that. We're going to come back to both passages. But before we do, we're going to stand and sing.

[2 : 47] Speak, O Lord, as we come to you. That God is wanting to bless his people. In fact, the whole of Isaiah 58, God is effectively saying this.

Forget the religious self-deprivation that you can come up with. Fasting three times a day to get your prayers answered. Is fasting important?

Yeah, fasting is important. Is other kinds of religious deprivation important? Well, it could be. You know, you don't want to get caught up in the seven deadly sins. But God's really not wanting you to go without.

God is actually wanting to bless you. And that's what these few verses are saying. That even in these few verses alone, God is saying, I clearly want to bless you.

God wants to bless his people. There's also something else that can be stated about these few verses, which is remarkably clear. And that is that God's will is surprisingly easy to know.

[3 : 56] God's will is not difficult to know. God's will is not difficult to know in a whole. Now, if you're talking about the things, you know, I want to know the things that God isn't going to tell me. Well, that's going to be difficult.

It's not going to be difficult. It's going to be impossible. Because God's not going to tell you. But God's will, as it is revealed, as the things that he wants you to know, is surprisingly easy for you to know.

It's not difficult at all. Are there things that we don't know? Yeah, of course there's things that we don't know. God doesn't tell us everything.

Is it frustrating? Yeah, it's really frustrating. Do we want to know the things that God doesn't allow us to know? I think we often want to know the things that God doesn't allow us to know, far more often than we are concerned with knowing the things that God has allowed us to know.

So I think one of the reasons we get ourselves into a whole load of trouble concerning the will of God, it's not because it's difficult to know. It's because we're wanting to know the things that God is

keeping secret.

[5 : 05] So, number one, God really wants to bless you. It's clear. Number two, God's will about how he's going to bless you is surprisingly easy to know and to understand.

So what's our struggle? Well, I don't think our struggle is with knowing the will of God because he's told us what it is. I think our struggle is wanting to know the things that he hasn't told us and that is always going to be a perpetual struggle because God isn't going to be like the parent who has his arm tugged one too many times and says, all right, then I'll tell you.

God's not like that. If it's not for you to know, it's not for you to know for a really good reason. You know, God is not angry at you. He's not holding anything back from you.

The reason he doesn't want you to know is because you really are better off not knowing or at least not knowing now. The other thing I think we struggle with the will of God is just doing it.

I think the reason you struggle with the will of God, as I struggle with the will of God, is because even when I've understood exactly everything God wants me to do, I still think there is something else that I want to do first, that only if that happened, then I can carry on and do the rest.

[6 : 38] You know, Jesus told a parable very similar to that. He said, first give a little, then I'll see whether or not you can handle more. Why doesn't God give more?

Because you can't handle the little you have. Why doesn't God give what you necessarily want?

Well, because some things can only be handled with a good praying life.

And if you don't have a good praying life, you're not going to be able to handle what he has to give you. So he doesn't give it to you. Why? Because the blessing can actually turn up and be a real trouble for you.

Why? Because it takes a good praying life to be able to handle some of the things that God has for us. So, yeah, God's will is surprisingly easy to know, but very difficult when it comes down to the practicalities.

Because we're not perhaps praying as we should, as God will states, and other things. So God blesses us very clearly when we do his will.

[7 : 42] Okay? Is that a condition? No, it's not a condition. It's called faithfulness. It's called obedience. God blesses us when we do his will. Now, Isaiah is teaching us here that believers can actually put themselves into the place of blessing, or they can remove themselves from the place of blessing.

It's up to you. Where do you want to be? God says, I will bless you as you do my will. He tells you where he will bless you.

And then he says, you know, not cryptically, but it's implied, that it's possible that if you're not doing any of this, you're going to take yourself out of the place where blessing flows. So, what do you want?

Now, the verse, verses 13 and 14, is broken up into two ifs and one then. Okay? If, verse 13, if you turn back to the Sabbath, if you turn back from doing what you want to do, and turn back to doing what I want to do on my holy day, if you do that, and, okay, the second if in verse 13, if you honor it, if you honor the Lord's day, not doing your own thing, not going your own way, or seeking your own pleasure, or going out fried or chit-chat, if you don't do any of those things, then, then, verse 14, you should take delight in the Lord.

And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth. In other words, I'm going to pour out my blessing on you. If, if, then. If you do this, if you do this, then I will bless.

[9 : 19] Well, is that conditional? No, I don't think it's conditional. I think the second if builds on the first if. The ifs are really testing your heart. The ifs are trying to find out where you are as a people.

The if is seeking you out. Do you want the blessing of God by being where God wants you to be?

Then he'll pour it out to you. Or, do you want to seek your own pleasure and go your own way and fulfill your own will and, you know, you can add to that list almost continuously.

If, if, then. So it's quite clear that believers can put themselves into a place of blessing where God is most definitely going to bless you. But it is also very clear that believers can take themselves out of that place of blessing by not keeping the day holy.

Well, that sounds like a condition to me. And here's the thing. Are some blessings conditional?

Well, we live in the day of grace.

[10 : 31] We live in the day of mercy. Well, here's the thing. The answer is yes. They are conditional. Even salvation is conditional. We say, well, salvation's free.

Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to the cross I cling. Or what about Ephesians? It is not by works, but by grace through faith, not of your own doing.

It is the gift of God. Well, that's not conditional. Oh, it is. The difference is, is Christ met every single one of the conditions for you. That's the point.

It's not that the cross... See, if God loved you unconditionally, then that means that God could never judge anybody. And that means everybody must make it into heaven.

Because if God loves me unconditionally, I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, wherever I want, because God will still love me unconditionally. Is that true?

[11 : 37] No, God loves me unconditionally on the other side of the cross. Why? Because Christ met every condition. He paid the penalty for sin.

That's a condition. And Christ has met every single one of these conditions. So, here's the thing. Don't look at this if, if, then as a condition. You could look at it like that, but I think it would be a mistake.

Rather, look at it as, are you faithful to God's will? Well, it's testing your desire as to whether or not you actually want to do God's will.

It's not a condition. It's just simply asking which side of the cross you're on. Are you on the side of the cross where you recognize the grace and mercy of God freely given to you, but every condition's met by Jesus?

So, you are free to enjoy everything, even his day, and keep his day holy. Or are you on the other side of the cross?

[12 : 36] You know, that sounds like a condition to me. So, the if, if, then is not a condition. It's really a searching tool to see whether or not you will turn to God's will and away from your own self-interests.

So, don't think of blessing as a conditional promise. It's not a conditional promise. Blessing comes to those who are faithful to God's will. And that's what the cross produces in the lives of people.

That's who you are. You are able to be faithful to the will of God because of what Jesus has done for you. You are able to receive the blessings of God because of what Jesus has done for you.

So, don't look at this, if, if, then, as a condition. It's not a condition. It's simply asking you, are you faithful to the will of God or are you wanting to turn to your own self-interests?

That's the point here. Another point to mention is the one of imitation. I think imitation is overlooked in Scripture and I think it's overlooked at peril.

[13 : 52] And that is, when you keep the Sabbath holy, when you keep the Lord's day holy, you are imitating God. You're imitating God as you sit here and rest in his presence and in his goodness and in his blessing.

Here's why. Because the reason that God gives for keeping the day holy in Exodus 20 is that he created the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested.

In other words, do likewise. Keep the Sabbath holy. Why? Because God worked six days and rested on the seventh. In other words, imitate God. In other words, when you keep the Sabbath holy, you're being like God.

You are imitating God and if you're imitating God, you are in his will. Because God isn't contradictory in himself. So why does he tell us this?

Well, he tells us this not only for us to imitate, but in order for us to understand that it is an example being set. That God is setting us an example to follow.

[15 : 03] I worked and I rested and that's what I want you to do. Imitate me. And another reason why he says that is because we are created to be imitated.

People who are made in the image of God are actually to be like God, surprisingly. Or not so surprisingly, is it? If God has made you in his image, what do you think he wants you to be like? He wants you to be just like him. You remember a couple of weeks ago God doesn't need you? And that's really, really good news. Because the only reason you're here enjoying his blessing is because he wants you to share in his goodness.

In other words, he doesn't need you, but he wants you. So it isn't surprising that God wants us to imitate him because he made us in his image.

He wants us to be like him. But this kind of imitation is really, really hard. Here's why. Think of it this way.

[16:12] Imagine an empty room and you put 10 toys into it. And then you've got this room with 10 toys and then you put one child into this room. And that child is perfectly free to choose with any one or all of the toys as he or she pleases.

And it just so happens that this one child chooses this one particular toy. And they're playing happily away, no bother. Then you introduce another child into the room.

There are nine other toys to choose from. And you're all laughing. Why? Why? Because imitation is very hard to break.

the child doesn't choose any of the other nine. He goes straight after the one that's already being played with. Why? Because God has created us to be imitators.

It's all about what we imitate. What was Asaph's problem in Psalm 73 when he wasn't here on the Lord's Day?

[17:19] Was it not that he was out in the world and what did he want? Did he want God? No. He wanted what other people had. He's like the little boy that comes into the room and he's got the choice of almost everything else but he doesn't want everything else.

He wants what somebody else has got. Why is in the whole of human nature that pattern repeated time and time and time again? It's very, very simple. It's because God created us to be imitators. What we're imitating is the issue. And when we're out of the sanctuary, not hearing the word of God, not being blessed by God, then we're in the world and we think, oh, we've got our own self-interest.

You've not got your self-interests. Your interest is everybody else's interest. Your self-interest is our other people's interests. You're wanting the one toy that everybody else is playing with.

Why? Because we're created to be imitated. We have to follow. We have to copy. And so in the world, you end up in that cycle where you envy what they have and you go after what they have.

[18:28] And it's not until you come back into the sanctuary of God are you finally free from that type of imitative rivalry. Now you're free.

Now you have God. You're not concerned with anything less. You have God. God. So imitation is incredibly difficult in many ways because if you're not imitating God, if you're not in His will, in fact, imitating God is doing His will, then you're in the danger of imitating something else that can take you away from God and can actually take you to a place where you start envying what other people have.

In other words, I don't think we should ever think of imitation as something that we should get beyond. Imitation is absolutely crucial to the life of the church.

Imagine it this way. Children who come to church simply because their parents do. A good thing or a bad thing. It's incredibly a good thing to do.

Well, someone in the back row will say, well, they need to have a faith of their own. Well, of course they need to have a faith of their own, but how do you think they will get it? By imitating their parents who put themselves under the word of God and show their dependence on Him.

[19:55] How do you think children grow in the faith? Why do you think the command is to bring our children up in the faith and not in doubt? Very important.

Imitation is God's will. Imitation is fruit. Fruit. Remember that. Imitation is fruit. It is the very fruit. Now, it does depend on what we're imitating, whether it's bad fruit or good fruit, but nevertheless, imitation is fruit. What do you think Paul says to Timothy, follow me as I follow Christ?

Imitation is fruit. Why do you think it says in Ephesians, be imitators of God? Why do you think Jesus comes and says, follow me? And the thought is, copy me, imitate me.

Why? Imitation is fruit. So don't ever think that imitation is something, you know, that children have to get beyond. You know, they need to grow up into their own faith.

[21:02] The way they grow up into their own faith is by imitating their parents and by imitating godly Christians within the church. That's how they grow up into the faith. And what about us?

Well, we're not beyond imitation either. We need to look out for someone who truly is godly. And say, you know, I'm not sure whether or not I've got this Christian life down to a T.

is there someone who can disciple me? What's discipleship? Well, it's imitation. Follow me as I follow Christ. So never think getting beyond imitation is somehow more authentic.

It isn't. Imitation is the will of God. Okay? Imitation is the will of God. So we're to imitate God.

Why? We're to imitate God by coming to the Lord's Day. Why? So that we don't forget the God who we worship. Okay?

[22 : 04] God's built it into his Lord's Day. Worship the God on the Lord's Day. Turn away from your own. Why? Why? So that you don't forget the God who you belong to.

Imitation's key. In other words, come to the Lord's Day because God does. Okay? Come to the Lord's Day because God does.

One more thing then before we get to the exhortation and that is desire and ability and opportunity. These you've heard before but they need stressing. Psalm 73 says that Asaph came back to the Lord.

Why? Well, he came back to the Lord because he had the opportunity to come back. The Lord hadn't gone anywhere. He also had the ability to come back.

The sanctuary was there. All he had to do is wander in. And as he did, he turns away from his self-interests and turns into the presence of God.

[23 : 08] And the moment he did that, here's the surprising thing. That the moment he did that, he came back into the place where he saw things clearly. He got refocused.

Suddenly, the things that were muddled before have now become clear as he's come back into the presence of God, into worship, worship, and to the word.

Now he is captured by the fact that wherever he goes, God is everywhere. And so as you come back into the sanctuary of God, as you come back and keep the Lord's day holy, this day holy, you're exposing yourself to the means of grace.

You're exposing yourself to the one who can transform your life, to the one who will bless you and has promised to do so on this very day. Why does God call us to keep this day?

Well, he could have called us to keep any day holy. But the pattern's already been set in creation. God worked sixth and he rested on the seventh. So we come together because we want to imitate God.

[24 : 15] We want to be like God. But there's other things that have to be considered and that is ability and opportunity and desire. What about ability? Do you have the ability to be able to get here on a Sunday morning and a Sunday evening?

Well, you're here. But do you have the ability to be anywhere else? Well, yes you do. But you're here. What about opportunity?

Do you have the opportunity to be able to come here on a Sunday morning and a Sunday evening? Yeah, you do. Why? Because the doors are always open and I'm always here. There's always an opportunity to sing to God and to pray to God and to hear his word and to have fellowship.

Why? Because the opportunity is always there. So the first two are covered. Do you have the ability to be here? Yeah, you have the ability to be here. Do you have the opportunity to be here?

Yeah, the doors are always open. But do you have the desire to be here? Now, here's this thing. Some people will say, well, until people get the desire to come back to God, they won't come back to God.

[25 : 28] The interesting thing about that is, is that Asaph understood that his desire for God didn't return until he first came back. Let me say that again.

Asaph's desire for God didn't return until he came back. Psalm 73, verse 25. Which says this. After he's come back, verse 17, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I discerned their end.

All the way down to verse 25, he's now in the sanctuary of God and he says, who in heaven of high but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

Well, yes, now that's the case. But that wasn't always the case for Asaph. Asaph's problem was that he was envious of the wicked. He was envious of what everybody else had.

While he was out in the world, he never had a single desire for God and it was not his desire for God that brought him back. It was his wearisomeness, his tiredness, his sheer frustration.

[26 : 34] And only when he came back into the presence of God did his desire for God actually then come back and return. And this is spelled out in a number of ways in the New Testament.

If you honor the day of the Lord, if you take delight in him, then your desire for him will return. This idea that, you know, they're not going to come back until they have a desire for God.

Well, when you look at the New Testament and you go through the Gospels, how many people came to Jesus because they actually had a desire for him?

You think of the paralyzed man who came and then Jesus forgave his sins. Is that why he came? No. He wanted to be healed. You think of all the other people who came to Jesus.

Did they come because they desired Jesus? No. They came because they wanted something. So this idea that somehow you first got to have a desire for Jesus before you can come, it's not true. [27 : 42] What about the prodigal son who already knew the love of the Father? Did he come back because suddenly he had a change of heart concerning his dad, his father, that suddenly he really began to love him and desire him?

No. He ran out of money and he was hungry and he was in deep, deep trouble and then he returned. Here's the thing.

You leave here, the Lord's Day, you don't keep it holy. You'll begin to imitate something that's not holy and it will rob you of all your joy and all your desire for God and you won't get it back out there because the world can't give it.

You can't find it there. You can only find it in the place where God gives it and he sets this day apart asking you to honour it, asking you to take delight in him.

It's when you come back that you will actually find yourself doing that. When Asaph was out in the world, he desired the world. When he came back into the sanctuary of God, it was then that he began to desire God once more.

[28 : 58] See, the will of God is surprisingly easy. Just imitate God. Do what God does. So, is God going to bless you?

Yeah, he's going to bless you. But notice where he's going to bless you. He's going to bless you when you're not doing your own pleasures. He's going to bless you at the end of verse 13 when you're not going your own ways.

When you're not seeking your own pleasure. When you're not having idle chit-chat. You know, are there places like that on the Lord's Day? Yeah, there's plenty of places and people like that on the Lord's Day.

You can go and be with them, but that's not where God is. God is everywhere, but that's not where God is in that sense. Imitate God. Be like God.

And allow God to bless you in the place where he wants you to be. So, the question is not opportunity or ability.

[29 : 57] You have those things. That's why you can use the opportunity and your ability to do other things. The issue here is desire. Well, my desire is not straight.

Well, this is where you need to be. This is where you need to have your desires set back into the right priorities and the right order. Why? Because if you don't, your self-interest is just going to look like everybody else's interests.

That's all that it is. Your self-interest just looks like everybody else's interests. Rather, forget those things and come back into the place where God is going to bless you continually.

Why? Lest you forget the God who you belong to. Lest you forget the God who you are to worship. And as I said, Isaiah delights, or rather God delights, as we're told in Isaiah, far more in you enjoying all the blessings that he has for you than you going on a three-day fast to get your prayers answered.

God, is that impressive? Maybe. But God wants to bless you far more than he wants you to go without. He wants your heart more than your sacrifices.

[31 : 13] He wants to bless you and he wants to bless you and the way that he makes it clear to us is simply by saying, copy me. Imitate me. And by doing so, you'll find yourself in the will of God.

So here's the exhortation as we close. The contrast here is not about do's and don'ts. The contrast here is about our will and God's will on his Lord's day, on the day that he wants us to keep holy.

Can we do those things any other day of the week? Yeah, of course we can if they're right and just. But not today. Why? Because God wants you for you. He wants to see whether or not you can rest in him and he wants you to rest in him and he will bless you when you do so.

In the New Testament we read that we're to do all things to the glory of God but this again is more difficult than it first seems. It's not about how some things are permitted and some things are not allowed.

No. God wants you to enjoy everything. He just wants you to have them in the right order, in the right place. In fact, what is God's proper place? Let me try and illustrate this in a slightly different way.

[32 : 33] Is it possible to sleep to the glory of God? Yeah, if we're to do all things to the glory of God then it must be possible to sleep to the glory of God.

Well, how do you sleep to the glory of God? See, you're all very interested in this, I can see. Yes, if I go home this afternoon and lie on the settee, whoever you may be or whatever you may do, or even tonight, you know, as I lay my head on the pillow 10 o'clock tonight, 11 o'clock tonight, whenever it may be, 9 o'clock tonight, whenever, and I go to sleep, am I going to be sleeping to the glory of God?

Yes, of course you are. Why? Because you're sleeping when you're meant to be. So is it possible to sleep not to the glory of God?

Yes. Yes. And it's called sleeping when you're not meant to be. See, everything has its order. Everything is to the glory of God, but everything is to the glory of God in its proper place and proper order. Am I meant to work? Yes, I'm meant to work. Am I meant to do that to the glory of God?

[33 : 47] Yes, I'm meant to do that to the glory of God. When do I do that? On the six days that he has given me. Is there a way of working that is not to the glory of God? Yes.

On the day that he asked me to rest. So the point here is not about do's and don'ts. It's rather about everything having its proper place.

It's rather about whether or not God really does have his proper place within your life. That the position that God should actually have.

And so here's the point. God wants to bless you. He will bless you. And so he calls you to keep his day holy lest you forget him.

Lest you forget the God who you belong to. Lest you forget the God who you are to worship. God wants to bless you and so he calls you to the day on which he's going to do that.

[34 : 49] God is telling you that he's going to bring about blessing and then he tells you whereabouts he's going to bring about that blessing and it's here right here. So don't go your own way.

Don't go and seek your own pleasures. Don't go and get caught up in idle chit chat. Yeah you can do all those things but don't do those.

Rather come and be blessed by God. Rather come to the place where God is present lest you forget the God who you are to belong to.

Lest you forget the God who you are to worship. Come. That's the call. Come and be blessed. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.