

Desiring God – The Happiness of God

- This is the first time in over 15 years of teaching here that I have sermonized a chapter of a book like I am about to do here today and possibly the next several times I teach.
 - We as a church have done this together
 - Where we would read through a book and then on a Sunday morning or in our fellowship groups discuss the book
 - But I have never taken a chapter and put it in a lesson like this before so this is kind of awkward for me
 - Used the book to put together an outline – I will be using JP’s thought process – but modified a bit to meet my style and understanding of the topic
 - I will quote from him and others like CS Lewis, or Richard Baxter or Jonathan Edwards like he does in the book
 - So... pretty much the thought process will be John’s with my twist.

In the intro to the book – “Desiring God”

- We see where Piper’s ministry theme is derived (1st edition 1986)
 - “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him” – thus “Desiring God”
 - This is taken from Westminster Confession Shorter Catechism
 - Q1. What is the chief end of man?
 - A1. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
 - John adds a slight twist – the whole aim of the book is to persuade the reader that
 - The chief end of man is to glorify God **by** enjoying Him forever.
 - Not 2 separate thoughts but one in the same.
- He gives his own personal journey
 - He believed that if he did something good in service to God (like corporate worship) AND it brought him happiness then that seemed self- centered
 - The higher the activity then the less enjoyment there should be in it – worship to him was to be done out of duty not pleasure!!
 - Eventually he was converted to what he calls Christian Hedonism (more later)
 - Through reading, Lewis, Pascal, Edwards
 - He came to the conclusion that seeking one’s own happiness is part of human nature – it is part of being created in the image of God
 - God created us this way → to seek happiness (Joy – Don)
 - The problem – Sin causes us to seek pleasure in the world and indulging our flesh – it influences us to go places we shouldn’t go to seek happiness.
 - Once one comes to Christ then seeking happiness is then set right – in that we seek joy in God – in the pearl of great price.

- His mistake as a believer:

- Was he felt that the higher things in life – spiritual disciplines were done out of duty and not out of the pleasure of seeking after God!
- Piper came to realize that : “Our mistake lies not in the intensity of our happiness but in the lack of it.
 - We don’t do it hard enough!
 - CS Lewis (Reflections in the Psalms): Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.
 - JP Quote: “ As I look back on it now, it seems so patently obvious that I don’t know how I could have missed it. All those years I had been trying to suppress my tremendous longing for happiness so I could honestly praise God out of some “higher,” less selfish motive (out of Duty). But now it started to dawn on me that this persistent and undeniable yearning for happiness was not to be suppressed, but to be gluttoned—on God! The growing conviction that praise should be motivated solely by the happiness we find in God seemed less and less strange.
 - Praising God is the highest calling of humanity!!
 - We find this everywhere in the book of Psalms:
 - Psalms 37:4**Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
 - Psalms 42:1-2**As a deer pants for flowing streams,so pants my soul for you, O God.² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.When shall I come and appear before God?
 - Psalms 43:4**Then I will go to the altar of God,to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.
 - CS Lewis: “God in the Psalms is the “all-satisfying Object.” His people adore Him unashamedly for the “exceeding joy” they find in Him (Psalm 43:4). He is the source of complete and unending pleasure: “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). God in the Psalms is the “all-satisfying object”!
- The subtitle of this book is “Meditations of a Christian Hedonist”.
 - Seems like an Oxymoron? → Two words that contradict each other!
 - Yes... hedonism – def. pursuit of pleasure or sensual self-indulgence.
 - He’s aware of the pushback that he would get.
 - Oftentimes book subtitles are provocative... Why? – They help get our attention!!!
 - What it is not:
 - 1st**It does not mean that God becomes a means to help us get worldly pleasures
 - It’s not the prosperity gospel

2nd It does not make a god out of pleasure

- Goal is more and more of God... to seek him more and more and as a result we will find more and more joy. He is the all satisfying object.

3rd It does not mean we seek after God for self interest

4th It is not moral justification – I do not do a work because it makes me feel good

- JP “I do not come to the Bible with a hedonistic theory of moral justification. On the contrary, I find in the Bible a divine command to be a pleasure-seeker—that is, to forsake the two-bit, low-yield, short-term, never-satisfying, person-destroying, God-belittling pleasures of the world and to sell everything “with joy” (Matthew 13:44) in order to have the kingdom of heaven and thus “enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21, 23).

○ At the end of the introduction: He explains that Christian Hedonism is a philosophy of life built on the following five convictions:

1. The longing to be happy is a universal human experience, and it is good, not sinful.

- It’s part of us being created in God’s image.
- It’s only made right in Christ → As we seek after Him.

2. We should never try to deny or resist our longing to be happy, as though it were a bad impulse. Instead, we should seek to intensify this longing and nourish it with what will provide the deepest and most enduring satisfaction.

What is that?

3. The deepest and most enduring happiness is found only in God. Not from God, but in God.

- Not in what he gives but in who he is.

4. The happiness we find in God reaches its consummation when it is shared with others in the manifold ways of love.

5. To the extent that we try to abandon the pursuit of our own pleasure, we fail to honor God and love people. Or, to put it positively: The pursuit of pleasure is a necessary part of all worship and virtue.

That is: *The chief end of man is to glorify God **BY** enjoying Him forever.*

CHAPTER 1: THE HAPPINESS OF GOD – The Foundation of Christian Hedonism.

- He turns that 1st question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism to say: *The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy Himself forever.*
 - The foundation of our happiness in God resides in God’s commitment to Himself
 - All of God’s works have an ultimate, primary goal and that is to glorify Himself
 - Appendix 1 – shows that this is God’s ultimate goal (primary)
 - All other of his works – which glorify him – including our salvation are subordinate (secondary)

- If God were not dedicated to his own glory then how could he possibly tell us – his children – to be dedicated to his glory.
 - JP: “If God were not infinitely devoted to the preservation, display, and enjoyment of His own glory, we could have no hope of finding happiness in Him. But if He does in fact employ all His sovereign power and infinite wisdom to maximize the enjoyment of His own glory, then we have a foundation on which to stand and rejoice.”
 - His whole thesis of Christian Hedonism – Desiring God as our ultimate happiness rises and falls upon this point.
- He does this by first showing that God is both “sovereign” and “self-existent” or Solitary

God’s Sovereignty and Solitariness is the foundation of his happiness

- Ref:
 - **Psalms 115:3**Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.
 - **Psalms 33:10-11**¹⁰ The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. ¹¹ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.
 - These texts imply that whatever God does is good, and right and just and he has the sovereign power to do as he pleases
 - If none of his purposes can be thwarted then He must be the happiest of all beings!
- What if God’s purposes could be thwarted or frustrated?
 - What if God grumbled and pouted because things aren’t going His way?
 - What if he was dejected, disheartened by what’s going on in the world?
 - He would be sad for sure – and a sad god is no god.
 - If this were true how could he expect us to be happy?
 - How could he expect us to glorify Him if he doesn’t glorify himself?
 - If he is not pleased in himself and his decrees?
 - He couldn’t... and we couldn’t...
- The foundation of our happiness, Christian Hedonism is in the happiness of God...
 - **Psalms 115:3**Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.
 - God is pleased in all he does!!
 - If the world was out of control and frustrating God then he would not be happy.
 - But as it is he is happy – pleased because of what He does
 - There are absolutely no rouge molecules in all of God’s creation.
 - He makes all things work to His glory
- The biblical basis for God’s pleasure in all he does is that He is Sovereign over all...
 - The fact that “God is God” – He is Sovereign shows us that he is pleased, happy in all he does.
 - It he wasn’t then He would not be God!!!
 - What if the purposes of God could be thwarted?

- There would be something or someone greater than Him and more powerful and more sovereign.
- But the scriptures say:
 - **Isaiah 46:9-10**⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'
 - His purposes cannot be frustrated and they all bring him glory.
 - **Daniel 4:34-35** At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"
- God's Sovereign will covers all – including calamities – there are no calamities to God.
 - Ref:
 - **Amos 3:6** Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?
 - **Job 2:10** But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"^[a] In all this Job did not sin with his lips.
 - We know in context here
 - Satan asks permission to sift Job
 - God then permits Satan to strike Job and his family – to perform His will.
 - We see this in the murder of Christ
 - **Acts 2:23** this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
 - **Acts 4:27-28**²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.
 - 2:23 man's hands & 4:28 God's hand
 - Mankind lifts their hand to rebel against the Most High only to find that their rebellion is unknowing service to the sovereign plan of God.
 - **Psalms 2:1,4** Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?... ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.
 - The evil disobedience of evil hearts cannot frustrate the plan of God but it leads to their realization.
 - As evil as the death of Jesus seems. The plotting and planning of man fulfilled the purposes of God:
 - In that sinful act of man God brought salvation thus fulfilling his plan

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

- God abhors the sin that put Christ upon the cross but it was his plan to do so.

○ There are no coincidences. God does what pleases him:

- Ref:

Psalms 135:5-7⁵ For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.⁶ Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.⁷ He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightning for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.

- This understanding of God's sovereignty come maybe to all of us first with a struggle – objections but after it sinks into the soul it brings incredible joy – happiness.

○ He details Jonathan Edwards struggle with this very thing (much the struggle and experience of many of us in this room):

“From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty.... It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God....

But never could I give an account, how, or by what means, I was thus convinced, not in the least imagining at the time, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it; but only that now I saw further, and my reason apprehended the justice and reasonableness of it. However, my mind rested in it; and it put an end to all those cavils and objections.

And there has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, in respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this; so that I scarce ever have found so much as the rising of an objection against it, in the most absolute sense.... I have often since had not only a conviction but a delightful conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not so.”

- What did the understanding of the Sovereignty of God bring to Edwards?

- A delightful conviction... exceedingly pleasant... bright... sweet... He loves to ascribe it this sweet happiness and joy to the absolute sovereignty to God. AMEN!
- God delights in His sovereignty... and so does his creature Jonathan Edwards
- And so do we!
 - We should...
 - God's sovereignty leads to our happiness.

○ God has infallibly designed, planed every event in history, good and bad, to bring glory to his name, to “fill his being with joy over all he does”.

- JP “And if our Father's heart is full of deep and unshakable happiness, we may be sure that when we seek our happiness in Him, we will not find Him “out of sorts” when we come to Him.”

- “We will not find a frustrated, gloomy, irritable Father who wants to be left alone, but a Father whose heart is so full of joy that it spills over onto all those (Christian Hedonists) who are thirsty.”
- God is absolutely sovereign over the world, that He can do anything He pleases and what pleases him:
 - **Psalm 104:31** May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works
 - Because we serve a God like this we can rejoice in him!!!

God is fully happy in himself (Solitariness of God)

- What if God was not self-existent... what if he was not complete in himself... What if God needed something else to make himself complete – to please himself – to make himself happy?
 - That would be idolatry... for God to look to something else to make himself complete.
- So let me ask this question... what is it that God delights in most... What is the one thing that God pursues in everything he does? If we could answer that then we would know what is uppermost in his affections?
 - What is it??? Himself
 - His own glory... (see Appendix 1)
 - God delights himself in himself...
 - God is solitary
 - He is complete in himself... in need of nothing
 - **Acts 17:25** nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything
 - What delights God uppermost is his own glory
- As a side note... Piper asks... What is glory? It's not so easy to define...
 - It is like beauty... But how would you define beauty?
 - Piper gives it a try
 - God's glory is the beauty of His manifold perfections.
 - JP, “It can refer to the bright and awesome radiance that sometimes breaks forth in visible manifestations. Or it can refer to the infinite moral excellence of His character. In either case it signifies a reality of infinite greatness and worth.”
 - God's ultimate goal therefore is to preserve and display His infinite and awesome greatness and worth, that is, His glory.
 - God has many other goals in what He does.
 - But none of them is more ultimate than this.
 - They are all subordinate.
 - God's overwhelming passion is to exalt the value of His glory.
 - Now here's the very good part:
 - JP “To that end, He seeks to display it, to oppose those who belittle it, and to vindicate it from all contempt. It is clearly the uppermost reality in His affections. He loves His glory infinitely.”

- God would be an idolater and ultimately unrighteous if he were to value anything more than himself.
- An example of how God values his own glory- GOD DELIGHTS IN THE GLORY OF HIS SON
 - Last week we saw how the son is fully God and fully man.
 - Paul says this about God the Son:

Colossians 2:9For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

 - We also saw this in:

Hebrews 1:3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

 - Also in:

2 Corinthians 4:4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
 - From all eternity God the Father has beheld the image of His glory in His Son.
 - Jesus is the perfect reflection of the Fathers glory
 - John 17 – Jesus expresses his desire to once again be in the presence of that glory:

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

 - Jesus desires to return to that glory!
 - Philippians 2 → he set aside that glory – we have no clue what that took for Him to do that.
 - At the Lord’s baptism we the Father expresses his pleasure in His Son:

Matthew 3:17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

 - When the Father contemplates the image of his son he is “well pleased” ... infinitely happy.
 - In a prophecy about the coming messiah:

Isaiah 42:1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
 - The Godhead... Father, Son and Spirit – have been perfectly happy in themselves from all eternity – they are all perfectly pleased in each other.
 - There is nothing else that they need to make themselves happy.
 - JP: “God has been uppermost in His own affections for all eternity. This belongs to His very nature, for He has begotten and loved the Son from all eternity. Therefore, God has been supremely and eternally happy in the fellowship of the Trinity.”
 - God delights in Himself – Father, Son and Spirit
- This begs the question – Is God only for himself and not for us?

- If God is utterly complete and satisfied in His own glory then is he selfish?
 - How can he be a God of love if he does all things for his own sake?
- Don't the scriptures teach:
 - **1 Corinthians 13:4-5** ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
 - Love is not self-serving.
 - Is it vain for God then to command our praise – our adoration in Him when he is perfectly complete and happy in Himself?
- NO... NO it is not... the fact that God is for Himself is the foundation of our happiness.
- The scriptures are full of commands for us to praise God... to receive our joy in him because that ultimately is the goal of all he does.
 - Paul says in:
 - **2 Thessalonians 1:10** when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.
 - In redemption He shares his glory in his Son with the elect.
 - Three times in Ephesians 1 when exalting God's elect purposes in His Son it is all to the "praise of His glory"
 - JP "All the different ways God has chosen to display His glory in creation and redemption seem to reach their culmination in the praises of His redeemed people. God governs the world with glory precisely that He might be admired, marveled at, exalted, and praised. The climax of His happiness is the delight He takes in the echoes of His excellence in the praises of the saints.
- People stumble over the fact that God is uppermost in His affections – 2 reasons
 - One: We don't like people that need praise and adulation - they seem insecure – because they constantly need complements to prop them up – they have some kind of deficiency.
 - We admire people that are secure!
 - But God...
 - Has no deficiencies
 - No weaknesses
 - He is secure in himself
 - He does not need man's praises to prop himself up as if there is something missing in his character
 - Two: The bible teaches us to not seek our own glory and adulation.
 - How can God seek praises yet tell us not to seek our own
 - How can God be loving yet utterly devoted to seeking his own glory and yet be loving?
 - Loving towards his people?
 - The answer:
 - JP: "I propose is this: Because God is unique as an all-glorious, totally self-sufficient Being, He must be for Himself if He is to be for us. These rules that we apply to us

cannot apply in the same way to its Creator. If God should turn away from Himself as the Source of infinite joy THEN He would cease to be God. He would deny the infinite worth of His own glory.”

- He would imply that there is something more valuable outside Himself.
 - Once again... He would commit idolatry.
 - And fatally... This would be no gain for us.
- The fact that God is sovereign and Self-sufficient – Solitary in his being is to our gain.
 - This is why Edwards praised God – this thought became “exceedingly pleasant and sweet”
 - Because he in his infinite wisdom share his glory with us through His glorious Son!
- Brings us to our last thought → Delight is incomplete unless it is expressed!!!
 - If God is sovereign, omnisufficient, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and omniglorious (a word?) then how could he prove to us that he is most loving.
 - What could he possibly give to us to show that He loves us?
 - HIMSELF!!!
 - If he withheld himself from us – this would be most unloving.
 - If he gave less that would be unloving because he would not be giving us the greatest thing he could give - HIMSELF
 - What do we do when we have something that is beautiful or excellent?
 - We praise it!
 - We praise our wives... our children... our grand children
 - We praise our favorite team... or car...
 - We praise art... and dance... and song...
 - God does not need our praise... But in His eternal counsel He chose to desire our praise... he demands our praise.
 - Why??? It is the best thing for us!!
 - CS Lewis brought this home to JP from Lewis’ book: “Reflection on the Psalms”:

“But the most obvious fact about praise—whether of God or anything—strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless (sometimes even if) shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mates, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game—praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars. I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious, minds praised most, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least...”

I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?” The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they (LISTEN UP) speak of what they care about. My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can’t help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.”

- To sum up this thought – we praise what we enjoy because the delight is incomplete until it is expressed in praise.
 - If we cannot praise what we admire our joy would not be full.
 - The Father loves the Son... So He praises the Son – and he communicates the praise of His Son through His word.
 - He gives us His word, the story about his Son – in that story He tells of His redemption through His Son. So that we would hear this story and be saved to the praise of His glory.
- If God loves us then he must give to us the most valuable being in the universe – Himself (so he sings his praises to us in the gospel)
 - And not only does he give himself to us but he wins our praises – not because he must complete some weakness in himself but because He loves us and he seeks that our “joy be filled”. That the fullness of joy, our happiness can only be found in knowing and praising him.
 - JP. “God is the one Being in all the universe for whom seeking His own praise is the ultimately loving act. For Him, self-exaltation is the highest virtue. When He does all things “for the praise of His glory,” He preserves for us and offers to us the only thing in all the world that can satisfy our longings. God is for us! And the foundation of this love is that God has been, is now, and always will be for Himself.”

In Closing:

- God is sovereign – He does what pleases Him (not frustrated- but happy)
- God is solitary – he is not in need of anything (Self-existing)
 - Complete in Himself – completely and perfectly happy
 - He delights in Himself (Father-Son-Spirit)
- God sings His praises to us thru his word (gospel)
 - All of the works that he delights in culminate in the gospel – good news of Christ
 - We here the praise of the gospel and then return those praises to God
 - And He glories in our praises

- “God’s pursuit of praise in us and our pursuit of pleasure in Him are one in the same.
- The best thing for us is that God is for himself. And because he is for himself the best thing he can do for us is give himself to us and to make our joy complete we return this amazing grace in praise.