

Selections from the Psalms | Joy • Lament • Jesus

02 Joy Commanded

June 18, 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

We are far too enamored by those around us and their stuff, success, and their seemingly put together lives. Sometimes we are so caught up with their lives we question our lives and begin to believe we are missing out. Right, other people's stuff, wealth, and success far too often draw our attention. Perhaps even just this weekend you drove by your neighbor's house and felt a sense of inadequacy, like something was missing from your life...

or that promotion your co-worker received and you could not congratulate them because you were so jealous of them thinking they are better than you because of this new recognition...

or as the years pass you begin to believe the best years are behind you for whatever reason. You think... If I could just have this or this, life would be joyous and better.

Oh, the dangers that lurk around the corner when you give yourself to this thinking. This thinking prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). This comparison game will eat you alive and worst pull you away from the greatest source of joy. It will strip you of the very thing that offers deep unshakable joy.

Fathers in the room, this could not come at a better time for us, when, sad to say, many churches this morning will give platitudes to Father's and celebrate this day by giving in to a more consumeristic approach and not give us dads what we

really need, Jesus, and reminding us of his work in our lives that enables us to do the greatest work we will ever do, being a Dad!

Let this morning be a shot in the arm if you will and a fresh reminder of what we, as Christians, have in the Lord through Christ.

READ Psalm 37:1-9

What we have here are individuals who are perhaps enamored with those who are not following God. They see them to be more intriguing with how they live their lives and through focusing on them are being persuaded to follow their path. Verse 1 really seems to be the best summary of the entire Psalms, *“Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.”* This could serve as the thesis of the entire poem. David is being a good writer here, a clear concise statement of the argument he is going to develop.

You can see it in the Psalms development from beginning to end. First Psalm 37 is what is called an acrostic poem, meaning that David took each letter of the Hebrew alphabet and then in order begin each line with a different letter. This was a common practice to thoroughly deal with a topic, kind of like an A-Z of something. So this is an A-Z of the differences between faithfulness and wickedness.

Next, the structure paints a compelling picture of faithfulness vs. wickedness. The first 9 verses David impresses upon their hearts to trust the LORD (YHWH); therefore establishing characteristics of the faithful, action of those who love God.

There are 11 imperatives, commands, that he strongly urges them to do and then really the remaining verses 10-40 are the plight of the wicked and therefore the joy of the righteous. David goes on a long comparison between the wicked and the righteous.

Specifically in 12-22 he gives the ultimate fate of the wicked, they are cut off, David then specifically discusses the blessings of the faithful (23-29), then contrast the present state between the wicked and faithful (30-34), and then contrast their futures (35-38), and ends with, as is typical within the Psalms, confidence in the LORD (39-40) (YHWH).

II. TRUST YHWH (1-9)

A. Like I mentioned earlier there are 11 commands in the first nine verses that characterize the faithful one, the one who loves the Lord as opposed to those who do not.

1. Trust in YHWH
2. Do Good
3. Dwell in the Land
4. Befriend faithfulness
5. Delight in YHWH
6. Commit your way to YHWH
7. Trust in Him
8. Be still before YHWH
9. Wait patiently for Him
10. Refrain from anger
11. Forsake wrath

III. DELIGHT YOURSELF IN YHWH (4)

A. There is so much here in this beautiful Psalm and much we could explore...but I want to spend some focused time exploring *delight yourself in the Lord* in the life of a believer, or as this psalms calls them, the faithful, meek,

and its favorite term righteous. The reasons I want to stop and focus on this is because:

1. I feel like this one characteristic is most odd, many of the things mentioned make sense to us but this one verse seems hard to really wrap our mind around.
2. This one verse gets a lot of attention and is often misunderstood; and therefore, misused (especially since the result is *he will give you the desires of your heart*)
3. Unfortunately, this characteristics is not seen very often in the life of most believers and very rarely followed by those of us who love God.

What does this mean to *delight* yourself in the Lord and why is this important and why is it so hard to find our joy in God alone? These are just a few questions that raise to the surface when reading this text.

Since last week we established that God alone should be our source of joy and that nothing else can provide joy in our sometimes difficult lives, it makes sense that David would then command for us to delight in the Lord. Over the centuries we find the early church fathers to more modern day scholars agreeing with David's statement here, that we should find joy in God alone. Matter of fact...

- B. The westminster shorter catechism (written in 1647) begins its entire book of questions and answers that summarize the Bible's teachings about our lives with this... "*Q-What is the chief end of man? A-Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*" A recent scholar and Pastor has

restated this to say, “*Man’s chief end is to glorify God, by enjoying him forever.*”

This might get to the heart of this text very well; that when we find God most enjoyable we will draw attention to him—when you love something you talk about it—and when we find God most enjoyable all other pursuits will become unattractive compared to the joy that is found in God through Christ. So what does it mean to delight in the Lord and how does one do that?

- C. **WHAT?**—A great definition of the Hebrew word (‘oneg | נִינֵן) underneath this command to delight is, “Take pleasure and enjoyment in an object, implying desirability of the object.”¹ Other places this term is found is Is 58:14 / Job 22:26, 27:10 with each basically meaning the same thing; find delight, pleasure, enjoyment in God alone.

So what David is saying is find pleasure in the Lord, notice he is commanding, strongly suggesting that you do not put down the pursuit of pleasure but rather it is the Christian’s duty to pursue pleasure but the caveat is that it must be looked for in the Lord. Notice the small caps again, the Lord God who has pursued them and made them his people, the personal name of God, the holiest term they have for their God, our God.

Delight in Him, not stuff, fame, fortune, if you are single—don’t make the mistake like many of us did thinking you will only be happy in marriage...yes, marriage is joyous and used by God to grow us, but it only works when we

¹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

first delight in the Lord then we know how to rightly love others.

The location one finds their joy determines their course in life. The word *in* is just as important as the word *delight*. It might seem foolish to call someone to delight but when it is in the Lord, then come and bath and be refreshed.²

D. **How?**

1. Context of the Psalm

By being mindful of what we have in God rather than our stuff, fame, or fortune...Ps 37:16, *Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked*. Emphasis on what we have in the Lord.

Rehearsing the truths of Scripture daily (Ps 37:31). This is exactly what this Psalms does, reminds us of who and what we are in the Lord.

Verse nine makes this explicitly clear, *“For the evildoers shall be cut off, but this who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.”* For the believer, this should bring about great joy, that in the Lord he will bring about ultimate fulfilling but for the evildoer, he shall be cut off which refers to divine judgement.

2. Here is the real meat and potatoes on how one delights in the Lord. Paul in his letter to the Philippians says this, *“Rejoice in the Lord”* (3:1, 4:4). A clear use of the command here in Ps 37 is commanded again but focused on Christ, a whole new look at the Lord (term used in the LXX for the personal name of God).

² William Plummer, *Psalms* (Geneva Series of Commentaries, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Trust, First Print 1867, Reprint 2016), p 449.

Chapter 3 of Philippians is the same exact scenario of Ps 37; a comparison between evildoers and the true righteous ones. Philippians makes it clear that our righteousness is found in Christ

- E. *He will give you the desires of your heart...* What?! This has led to terrible misuses of this text. Many take this to mean whatever our hearts want but what most fail to acknowledge is the dependence this line has on delighting oneself in the Lord. They are parallel lines that indicate dependence and that they are meant to be read together. Line A leads to line B; therefore line B is dependent on line A...This is exactly what is stated in Ps 37:30-31, “*The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.*” Delighting in the Lord is placing his truth in our hearts and therefore our heart desires what God wants. God is not a jeannie, but a heart surgeon. He does the work of changing us!

IV. THEREFORE

- A. C.S. Lewis once said famously wrote:

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.³

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

- B. In context of this poem, delighting in the Lord reveals the foolishness of other pursuits...the glory of earthly recognition and wealth all fade, so as one scholar put it,

As tempting as it might seem to throw off the bonds of faith and to adopt the cynical, self-serving practices of the wicked in hopes of sharing in their "prosperity," the psalmist, and many other biblical writers agree that such a path leads only to destruction.⁴ so believer heed the words of the Psalmist...Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. -Ps 37:1

- C. Non-believers in the room...The greatest desire of man's heart, whether they recognize it or not, is to be right with our Creator. The Lord has granted us that desire through Christ. This is why Paul said *Rejoice in the Lord* because in an ultimate sense we can only delight in God because of Christ work on the cross. Matter of fact, it is terrifying rather than a delight when one comes to the Lord without Christ sacrifice being applied to their life. Delighting in God is impossible without the God-man. Man begins this delighting by first trusting Christ sacrifice and turning from lesser joys, turning from sins that cannot promise joy beyond measure.

Info slide

Do not leave this room without talking to someone. If God is working on you ask some questions before you leave. I will be around or feel free to contact me this afternoon, but please don't hesitate. If God is working respond.

⁴ Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, (NIVAC, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), p 612.