
God is the Goal

John 11:1-6

Introduction

Last week I tried to honor God by giving a testimony of His grace tasted by me through John Piper. In recap here is what I said about grace.

My thoughts were organized around four liberating truths. The first liberating truth:

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

As Blaise Pascal said, “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end”.

The Apostle Paul confirmed that this hunger is due to Creation; not the Fall when he said, “*No man ever hated his own flesh*”. Simply coming to terms with how I was made primed me for the next liberating truth.

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

To keep me from placing my energetic affections upon myself and following my passions for God-replacements known in the Bible as idols, Piper argued from the Bible that I must have in my sights a joy that is premium and permanent. The joy suitable for a soul made in the image of God must be full and it must be forever. Every other delight in this life is imperfect and temporal. Where do I discover this type of joy? How can I taste of this type of pleasure?

When I came across the third liberating truth, I knew my quest was over. I was beginning to see how pursuing holiness was remarkably related to pursuing pleasure.

- 3) The deepest and most enduring happiness is found only in God.

I felt like I finally came home when I read Ps.16:11. “You will make known to me the path of life. And in your presence is fullness of joy; in your right hand there are pleasures forever”. Full and forever was the joy in God! This quenching, life-transforming joy was not to be found His gifts. It was to be enjoyed in Himself;

his manifold perfections; his exquisite beauty; his breathtaking glory!

He was the end of my quest; not the means of some further joy. To honor God as my treasure meant that I experienced him as my unrivaled pleasure.

How does this relate to worship and discipleship and evangelism? The next liberating truth pressed me toward the discovery of how all this relates to worship, discipleship and evangelism. Implications and applications came in abundance as I learned the next liberating truth.

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

I was coming to realize that God was most glorified in me when I was most satisfied in Him. And that this satisfaction in the glories of God was the power to sever my attraction to sin. The pursuit of holiness and the pursuit of happiness met and married in the breathtaking beauty of God as seen in Jesus Christ.

And that this delight in Him dilates when I share my joy in Jesus with others in ways of love and evangelism. What an amazing arrangement God put together. God pursues His glory in my pursuit of gladness when my pursuit of gladness ends in His glory. A life-transformation this was in the areas of worship, discipleship and evangelism.

God's agenda in Love

Tonight I desire to glory God by making clear another life-changing discovery I made in the Bible thanks to the help of John Piper. The topic for tonight is *what God's agenda is in his love for us*.

And so, to make this apparent let's try to answer these questions.

❖ What is God's agenda in His love for us?

❖ Alleviating what hurts?

For some the answer would cluster around alleviation of misery. "If God really loved me", the logic would go, "He would not have me suffer the way I am".

❖ Providing what thrives?

For others the answer may run in this direction. "God's love for me is demonstrated when things are going well. When I am thriving God is blessing!

We at the Chapel deny this definition as being biblical. We reject the notion that God's love for us keeps us central in his affections.

What I came to see some years back was mind-altering! Let me put it to us in a form of another question.

❖ When do you feel loved?

❖ Being made much of?

When someone we love and respect notices us in a special way, we feel loved. As so, God loves me when He notices me in a special way and makes much of me. May it never be! Rather,

❖ Being made capable to make much of God?

The Bible teaches that God is supreme. He is in a class all by Himself. He is HOLY! And love labors to secure for the beloved what is best. We ought to feel loved when we are being made capable to make much of God.

The overarching message tonight can be said in a sentence.

❖ *The love of God aims to focus our affections on the glory of God.*

Is this Biblical? What does this look like? Open your Bibles to John 11:1-6 as we notice the truth that God's love labors to set our hearts on nothing less than his glory. And that in doing so is what love is all about.

Confirmation of the thesis

(Read the John 11:1-6) The three amazing things I'm about to say came from the book "*Pierced by the Word*". Should you want a clearer picture of what I'm presenting tonight buy the book.

Seeking to understand how the God-centeredness of God relates to His love for sinners is made known in a surprising way. The story of Lazarus's illness and death demonstrates three remarkable things.

❖ Jesus' decision (v.6)

❖ To let Lazarus die

❖ To not relieve grief immediately

Jesus chose to let Lazarus die. Notice verse 6. Jesus thought through what He wanted to do. He looked at this situation from His perspective. And He decided to not hurry to get to Lazarus. He chose not to alleviate immediately the crushing weight of grief Lazarus's sisters and friends were experiencing. Urgency to lessen pain was not found in Jesus.

What are we to make of this? What would drive Jesus' decisions? What was his motivation? This can be seen in v.4.

❖ Jesus' motivation (v.4)

❖ To glorify God by displaying Himself

He was motivated by His passion to put God's glory on display by highlighting his own glorious power. Is that not what v.4 is teaching? "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it". God's glory seen in Christ was an infinitely higher value than relieving human grief and pain. Jesus' passion for exhibiting His glory motivated him to let Lazarus die.

Now my question for us tonight is: How does this teaching relate to God's love for sinners like you and me?

❖ And what all this expressed

❖ LOVE FOR SINNERS (Vv.5-6)

Vv. 5-6 tell plainly that both the decision to let Lazarus die and the motivation to magnify God were expressions of love for Mary and Martha and Lazarus. We see this remarkable teaching as we pay attention to the relationship between vv.5 and 6 (talk about this). So we see that:

❖ *The love of God aims to focus our affections on the glory of God.*

He will do whatever He thinks is best to break our hold to the idol of self and redirect the focus of our affection on the treasure of God. God's love has an agenda. It is not unconditional love in the sense of accepting us as we are with no expectations. It is not this "blanket of acceptance with infinite tolerance". God's love for sinners is active and jealous and intrusive and interfering and relentless and will cause pain! But oh, what He is after. He suffers and labors to give us the capacity to realize and relish infinite worth; namely Himself. Oh how this truth, if believed, severs the sin of grumbling and complaining and covetousness and pouting and pride. This is the love of God for sinners; namely to go to extremes if He must to get us to see and savor His glory; for this is the gladness of our hearts and the glory of His Name. Remember: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

Implications

How does this truth of God's love relate to worship, discipleship and evangelism?

- ❖ In Worship
 - ❖ God is kept central and supreme when He is sought as central and supreme.
- ❖ In Discipleship
 - ❖ We, therefore, long-sufferingly help each other to realize and relish the glory of God.
- ❖ In Evangelism
 - ❖ We, too, labor to put the breathtaking beauty of Christ on display and urge people to find their satisfaction in Him.

Exhortations

- ❖ When we are in hardship
 - ❖ Let us never grumble. Let us remember His agenda and worship.
- ❖ When we are loving each other
 - ❖ Let us suffer and serve to help each other treasure God in Christ.
- ❖ When we are reaching out to the lost
 - ❖ Let us labor to help them find their satisfaction in God; not His gifts.

