

The Kingdom Turn Part 7

KINGDOM PLEASURE



A ReVision Resource

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Kingdom Pleasure: The Kingdom Turn Part 7
A *ReVision* Resource of The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Contents

Welcome to <i>ViewPoint</i>	4
1 Created for Pleasure	5
2 The Pleasure of His Company	7
3 The Pleasure of Our Company	9
4 The Gift that Gives	11
5 Making Over	13
6 Pleased to Be Feared	15
7 Pleased in Jesus	17

Welcome to *ViewPoint*

Welcome to *Kingdom Pleasure*, a brief study investigating the nature of pleasure and how we may enjoy it in the Kingdom of God. *Kingdom Pleasure* is Part 6 in our series, *The Kingdom Turn*, and one of our *ViewPoint* series of studies in Biblical worldview.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We are happy to receive your suggestions for future topics and studies. Contact us at our webpage. And if you're not receiving *ViewPoint* first thing every day, then be sure to register on the website, www.ailbe.org.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Created for Pleasure

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. Genesis 1.31

Good News – really!

The Kingdom of God is Good News – *really* Good News. Jesus proclaimed it as such, as did the Apostles and all those down the ages who have heeded God’s call to join Him in His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12).

The Kingdom of God is Good News because it ushers all who receive it into God’s good plan for their lives, a plan which brings them, among other things, pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11).

Human beings were made out of and into the goodness of God (Gen. 1.26-31). It pleased God to create human beings, to establish them within an environment overflowing with goodness and abundance, and to promise them all the pleasures of everlasting life in His presence and according to His will.

God created people to know *pleasure* – to enjoy life, to delight in human intimacy and community, in making new and beautiful things, partaking of creation’s bounty, wondering at the diversity, splendor, colors, majesty, power, and potential of the vast cosmos, and engaging in good, satisfying, and wholesome work unto the Lord.

God intends people to enjoy life, and the Good News of the Kingdom of God is that enjoying life and all its pleasures, just as God originally intended, is within the reach of all who have made the Kingdom turn by believing in Jesus for forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

Pleasure

It’s clear from Genesis 2 alone that God created people to know pleasure – all kinds of pleasures. Pleasure is that state of happiness, wellbeing, peace, delight, and satisfaction that everyone seeks in one way or another. God wants us to know pleasure – aesthetic, gustatory, olfactory, sensual and sexual, vocational and creative, communal and spiritual. We are made for pleasure in all these ways.

But the problem that has plagued humankind from Genesis 3 on is that we tend to seek pleasure as an end in itself. We want to know pleasure for its own sake – really, for *our* own sake – and so we make pleasure, of one kind and degree or another, the thing we seek above all else in life. In the process, we forget about God or relegate Him to a secondary place in our experience. If we look to Him at all it is so that He might facilitate our achieving the pleasure we seek from this, that, or some other experience or thing.

God Who made us for pleasure becomes for many of us just a means to the pleasure we seek, not the end and greatest pleasure of all. Pleasure thus becomes our god, supplanting God Himself and setting us on a quest for that which can only disappoint.

Gods or God’s?

When we make pleasures our gods we become fools, as Solomon discovered the hard way (cf. Eccl. 2). No earthly pleasure of any kind, nor any combination nor accumulation of earthly pleasures, nor any pleasures we can imagine, can fulfill the deep-seated desire for lasting, pure, perfect pleasure which God has planted in the human soul.

When pleasures are our gods, we are on a course of fleeting happiness and long-term disappointment, disillusionment, and defeat.

When our pleasures, however, are *God's* pleasures, then we are on a course to know all the fullness for which He created us.

The pleasures of this life are gifts from God and tokens of the greater pleasure to be enjoyed within the orbit of His gracious rule and glorious presence. In Scripture, the idea of pleasure is addressed from two planes. First are the pleasures we derive from partaking of or participating in created things. All such pleasures – whether of eating and drinking, making and sharing, celebrating or loving, viewing or touching – all such pleasures are legitimate and meant to be enjoyed, but only when we receive them as *gifts* from God. When we pursue such pleasures as ends in themselves, then we are deceived and we run the risk of falling under the *displeasure* of God.

The second plane is the plane of pleasure as God intends it – *divine* pleasure, or, pleasure as God according to the will and pleasure of God. God gives the pleasures of this life as gifts and tokens of the greater pleasure to be enjoyed in knowing Him. The pleasures we know in our earthly experience should turn our hearts with gratitude to God and lead us to seek the greater pleasure that comes from communing with Him.

The Kingdom of God is the arena within which human beings may discover true pleasure, and may partake of the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore which can be known in God and what pleases Him. The better we understand pleasure as God knows and intends it, the more truly pleasurable our lives will be within the Kingdom turn.

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you think it's appropriate to talk about "pleasure" within the context of Christian faith and the Kingdom of God? Why or why not?
2. What might be some differences between earthly pleasures and divine pleasures?
3. Why does making the Kingdom turn – believing in Jesus and entering into the Kingdom and glory of God – make all our pleasures more and more perfectly pleasurable?
4. What does T. M. mean by saying that all pleasures are "gifts and tokens" from God?
5. What are your goals for this study? What do you hope to learn to strengthen your walk with and work for the Lord?

Next steps: I think that, for many Christians, "pleasure" has a self-centered and negative connotation. Think: "pleasure-seeking" or "pleasures of the flesh." Why is this? And how can we learn to think about pleasure as part of our calling within the Kingdom turn? Talk with some fellow believers about these questions.

Prayer:

2 The Pleasure of His Company

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”
Acts 17.24, 25

He doesn’t need us

One school of Christian thought teaches that, in order for God to be God, He needed something outside Himself to love. Thus, He made the cosmos and in it, people as the crown of creation, the objects above all others of God’s love, and the key to His realizing His own being and purpose.

This view derives from a faulty understanding both of love and of God. It makes human beings the end of all love, the beings most deserving of love – so much so that even God Himself is fulfilled in loving them.

The folly of such a view should be evident. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, God needs neither us nor anything we might offer Him. God is complete within Himself, quite apart from anything else (theologians refer to this as the *aseity* of God). And this means that God finds full satisfaction and pleasure – perfect and pure – within Himself alone.

In the Godhead, the pleasure of God’s company is the ultimate pleasure, the pleasure above all else to be sought, known, and enjoyed.

What’s so pleasurable?

It might be difficult for us to imagine how God could be perfectly complete and content within Himself alone, apart from external things or experiences to give Him meaning or pleasure. However, a few moments’ reflection might reveal why this *must* be so.

God, after all, is perfection in all its forms. He is perfect being, truth, beauty, love, goodness, and life. God is also purity in all its forms – of being, knowledge, communion, enjoyment, and pleasure. God exists in three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each is wholly God, yet each is different and unique in His attributes and functions. These three enjoy continuous, perfect, uninterrupted, inexhaustible fellowship with and enjoyment of one another. That is, all the members of the Godhead are continually involved with the highest forms and experiences of everything lasting, pure, perfect, and pleasurable.

Thus, God is complete within Himself, even with respect to the pleasure He enjoys. God’s pleasure is complete, and God’s pleasure is perfect and pure. He wants nothing, no pleasure, beyond that which He enjoys in Himself alone.

The pleasure of His own company is sufficient for God. And it is pleasurable to God to invite certain others into the pleasure He enjoys within Himself, chief among them, all those who have made the Kingdom turn.

In God, partaking of His pleasure, we can know the pleasure for which we were created, pleasure perfect and pure, and pleasure that knows no end. We experience this pleasure as glory, which makes seeking and enjoying the glory of God our highest passion within the Kingdom.

Entering the pleasure of the Lord

The Scriptures encourage us to partake of God’s pleasure by seeking Him and gaining entrance to the fellowship He enjoys within Himself. We are encouraged to contemplate the beauty of the Lord (Ps. 27.4), thus to know the highest aesthetic pleasure anyone can ever know. The Scriptures promise that we can know

true oneness with the Lord, and share in the perfect and pure intimacy of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jn. 17.20-23) – an intimacy that is literally out of this world! We are even told we may *participate* in God and *partake of the divine essence* (1 Cor. 10.16; 2 Pet. 1.4), and so become enveloped in His eternal presence, redeeming grace, and transforming power.

When entering into the pleasure that God knows in Himself is our highest pleasurable aspiration, all the other pleasures of life – those many and varied gifts and tokens of His love – realize their fullest purpose and peak delight, because enjoying pleasure in and as the pleasure of the Lord gives to every earthly pleasure a perfection and purity that it otherwise must always lack.

Make no mistake: God does not *need* us to share in His pleasure in order for His pleasure to be complete within Himself alone. But it *pleases* God, in and of Himself, to invite us into *His* pleasure, there to discover the true meaning and lasting joy of *all* pleasures.

The pleasure of His company, friends, is the key to knowing all true and satisfying pleasure.

For reflection or discussion

1. What is meant by the “aseity” of God? Why does this matter, or why is it important?
2. Pleasure and its purpose in our lives is best understood abstractly rather than specifically. We cannot understand God’s pleasure in physical terms. Why not? And how does this encourage us in seeking pleasure as God intends?
3. Why is the pleasure God takes in Himself the highest of all pleasures? What does this suggest about the pleasure we seek in life, or the way we experience the pleasures we know?
4. As you think about it, what do we mean by “entering the pleasure” of God? Where, when, and how does this happen?
5. “The pleasure of His company, friends, is the key to knowing all true and satisfying pleasure.” What are some of the implications of this statement?

Next steps: In what ways do you experience the pleasure God has within Himself? How might this become a more consistent part of your daily walk with and work for the Lord? Talk with a pastor or church leader about these questions.

Prayer:

3 The Pleasure of Our Company

*For the LORD takes pleasure in His people;
He will beautify the humble with salvation.* Psalm 149.4

A contradiction?

At first glance, it might seem that what the psalmist claims in this verse is contrary to what we considered in our previous installment. Here it sounds like the pleasure of God is somehow enhanced or improved by factors outside Himself, namely, His people.

Previously we explained that God is complete within Himself, needing nothing. If there were anything outside God that could somehow improve or change or add to or enhance Him as He is in Himself, then that thing, whatever it might be, would actually be greater than God, since God Himself would seek it.

We have to be careful here, because we don't want to make the text say anything other than what it actually intends. A literal translation of the first part of verse 4 goes something like this: "For the LORD *pleasures* in His people." What's the difference between the Lord "taking" pleasure, which the text does *not* actually say, and the Lord "pleasuring" in His people?

The difference is subtle, but important, and to capture the psalmist's meaning we need to go back to verses 1-3 of Psalm 149.

Why are these people so happy?

Let's consider those three verses:

*Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
And His praise in the assembly of saints.
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
Let them praise His name with the dance;
Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.*

Here is a picture of pure, holy, jubilant celebration, involving singing, dancing, playing instruments, and having a pure and perfectly great time among many others who have made the Kingdom turn. We should ask: Why are these people so happy? What's bringing them such pleasure? Such sheer and holy joy?

The answer is in two brief prepositional phrases: "in their Maker" and "in their King." And verse 5 adds, "in glory." Why are these people so happy? Simple: They have entered into the presence of the Lord and His glory, and they are filled with the pleasure that comes from partaking of and participating in Him. And as they enter into His pleasure, they know Him, "in the assembly of the saints" (v. 1), "pleasuring" in them.

The pleasure Israel experienced in worshiping the Lord is nothing other than their participating in Him and the pleasure He takes in Himself. God "pleasures" in His people, in the pleasure of their company as they enter into the pure and perfect pleasure He knows within Himself.

Pleasuring together in the Lord

Knowing the pleasure of the Lord is heightened when we enter it together with others who are experiencing His pleasure. This only makes sense; it's the way we're constructed as image-bearers of God. I might take

great pleasure in watching my favorite football team win a game over their arch-rival. But put me in the company of ten or twenty others who share that favorite team with me, and I can guarantee you, a much more splendid time will be had by all.

This is how worship works to edify us in the Lord. If we think that the best way to make worship satisfying and edifying is to focus it on ourselves – by singing lots of easy and familiar and pleasing melodies, giving us an opportunity to talk about ourselves, making worship into something that’s “fun” or “relevant”, or focusing everything on us and our needs – if we think this is the way to true and edifying worship, we’re deceiving ourselves. The way to true and edifying worship is to *get into the pleasure of God and share in that pleasure with Him!*

This means our worship needs to be focused on God in whole and in part. It needs to lift us out of our sinful, pleasure-seeking lifestyles, into the purity and perfection of the pleasures God enjoys *in Himself alone*. Our worship will draw us into the pleasure of the Lord as we contemplate and celebrate His beauty and goodness, marvel at and bow down to His majesty and might, meditate on each of the Persons of the Godhead and Their many perfections, submit without reservation to His Word, and give ourselves entirely to His pleasure and will.

Then, in the company of others similarly convinced and devoted, we will enter the pleasure of the Lord, and know Him pleasuring in us.

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you describe the worship your church offers to God? Is it primarily designed to enter into the pleasure of God or to give pleasure to those who are attending? Explain.
2. What does it mean to find pleasure “in” the Lord? How do – or how *should* – the different aspects of worship serve as portals into that pleasure?
3. What are some things that can keep us from entering the Lord’s pleasure in worship?
4. How can believers encourage one another to know more of the Lord’s pleasure in worship?
5. Meditate on Hebrews 10.25. Why is it important that believers gather and worship together?

Next steps: Would you describe the service of worship in your church as primarily centered on entering the pleasure of God or primarily bringing pleasure to the worshipers? Why? Talk with a church leader about these questions.

Prayer:

4 The Gift that Gives

“Do not fear, little flock, for it your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12.32

The Kingdom of God

There is and only ever will be one place where pleasure is known in the fullness of its perfection and purity, and that is within the Godhead, among the members of the Trinity.

Even in the new heaven and new earth our experience of the Kingdom, and all the glory of its righteousness, peace, and joy, will be limited by the fact that we are finite creatures and can only know so much and only experience so much at any given time. To be sure, in that setting we will always be able to improve in the glory and pleasure we know, but we will never exhaust the potential for ever-increasing glory and growth.

But God knows perfect righteousness, perfect peace, and perfect joy at all times, past, present, and future. The Kingdom of God in all its unfathomable fullness exists within the fellowship of the three Persons of the Godhead. That uninhibited, unrestrained, unrestricted, and uninterrupted communion of liberty and love is a source of eternal pleasure to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And part of that Kingdom is its uncontainability: God is infinite, and so His rule is infinite as well. The rule of God must extend and must be expressed wherever anything or anyone other than God exists, for anything that exists apart from God can only exist *in* Him. This is what it means for God to be sovereign over all things. The rule of God within Himself, which is a source of great pleasure to Him, must reach to everything which is other than Himself, bringing the righteousness, peace, and joy He knows *in Himself* into the experience of all other beings and creatures.

Called to the Kingdom

God calls people to enter into His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12). The sense of this is that He invites us to receive as a gift, by entering with all our soul and life into His glorious and pleasurable self-rule, the delight He takes in the mutual submissiveness, compatibility, communion, and synergy of the members of the Godhead. The pleasure God knows in Himself is available to all to whom He gives the Kingdom, all who make the Kingdom turn.

In another sense, God and His Kingdom being what they are, even those who do not make the Kingdom turn, remaining apart from the Gospel and the offer of forgiveness and eternal life, nevertheless come under the rule of God, since that rule cannot be avoided or resisted. Thus all people partake of the *benefits* of that rule, and so know at least some of its pleasures, in the here and now; however, ultimately, the full force of that rule will break upon those who have not made the Kingdom turn so as to exclude them, not only from the pleasure of God, but from all pleasure forever.

So when Jesus says it is the Father’s good pleasure to give the Kingdom to all who make up His loved and cared-for flock, this is simply another way of showing us how the pleasure of God is available to us, both to know and to share with others.

If God, then us

It is the Father’s good pleasure to give us lives of liberty, love, goodness, beauty, and truth within a domain characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). This is the pleasure God takes within Himself, Who, because He is everywhere present, must necessarily extend that pleasure to others, if only by degrees.

And if it “pleases” God – is consistent with His “pleasuring” in us – to give us this high and holy privilege,

then we should expect that it we would find pleasure – pure and perfect and lasting pleasure – in doing the same.

But how can we give the Kingdom, this gift that keeps on giving, to another person?

Jesus shows us how. First, we must *incarnate* the Kingdom for others, just as Jesus did for us. Jesus brought the eternal pleasure and power of God from a Kingdom not of this world into the kingdoms and chaos of the everyday lives of ordinary people. He showed us what it means to live with an eternal purpose as our focus. He demonstrated the presence of God’s loving rule by loving even the unlovely and the unlovable. He exercised Kingdom power in standing up against wrongs and injustices and in bringing people together around the promise of a new and better tomorrow. Above all, He demonstrated the utter other-worldliness of the Kingdom by taking our burdens and sins as His own, even to the point of laying down His life so that we might live forever.

But Jesus did not only incarnate the Kingdom; He *proclaimed* the Kingdom as well. When people see us living the Kingdom turn, bristling and abounding in the hope of glory, they’ll want to know where this ebullience and confidence and joy come from; many will ask a reason for the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3.15). We need to be ready with a clear, concise, and personal account of why the Kingdom of God is such Good News – why it brings us into the pleasure of God and makes all our earthly pleasures so much more enjoyable.

It is our Father’s great pleasure to give us His Kingdom, increasingly, and with greater power and joy. Let’s make it one of our great pleasures to give that Kingdom to others by every possible word and deed (2 Thess. 2.16, 17).

For reflection or discussion

1. What is the Kingdom of God? What does the Kingdom of God have to do with being a Christian?
2. God calls all who believe in Jesus to enter His Kingdom and glory – to make the Kingdom turn. How can someone know if he’s made that turn?
3. What does it mean for you to *incarnate* the Kingdom in your daily life?
4. What opportunities do you have for *proclaiming* the Kingdom? Are you ready for this, when the opportunity arises (1 Pet. 3.15)?
5. What’s the difference between seeking the Kingdom and giving the Kingdom to others?

Next steps: What’s involved in “giving” (at least offering) the Kingdom to an unbelieving friend or co-worker? How can we give the Kingdom in greater measure to our fellow believers? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

Prayer:

5 Making Over

“I also know, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness.” 1 Chronicles 29.17

*Let them shout for joy and be glad,
Who favor my righteous cause;
And let them say continually,
“Let the LORD be magnified,
Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.”* Psalm 35.27

Mad for makeovers

These days “reality” programming is all the rage on television. I haven’t tried to count them all, but I’d venture to say that a large percentage of shows on all the networks are of this nature – people in everyday life doing everyday reality kinds of things.

And it’s interesting how many of these programs are of the “makeover” type. You can get a personal makeover by purchasing the jewelry, clothes, or make-up you see modeled or used before you. You can makeover a meal by combining unlikely ingredients in new and creative ways. Makeover an old piece of furniture or a whole room in your home. Or take an old house, tear out its guts, shore up its foundations, bring in all new designs and furnishings and just make the whole thing over, all within the space of an hour or so.

We’re mad for makeovers, it seems, and the pursuit of this kind of pleasure, if only vicariously, reveals something about us and the God Who made us. God, you see, is in the makeover business. It gives Him delight to restore old, broken, and ruined people and things. And since we are made in His image and likeness, it only makes sense that we gravitate to and find pleasure in making things – including ourselves – over again as well.

Restoration

It pleased God, in the beginning of things, to make human beings whole and complete in a whole and complete world. Whole and complete, but not perfect; that would only come through obedience and with time. Solomon says that God made human beings “upright,” (Eccl. 7.29), but, as is our wont, we rebelled against the divine plan and thought we could find a way that seems right to us apart from His purposes and pleasure (Prov. 14.12).

Of course, we were – and are – wrong in thinking this way. What’s worse, we’re all like Humpty Dumpty. Thinking we could scale any wall or heights on the strength of our own wits and wiles alone, we’ve all experienced great falls of one sort or another, and we can find it difficult, if not impossible, to put ourselves back together again.

But God is in the making-over business; He delights to restore people and things to uprightness and wholeness. It pleases Him, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to give His Kingdom and glory to those who believe in Him, and to begin in them a work of restoration that sees them increasingly being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and enabled to know and do the pleasure of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Phil. 2.13).

The reality show makeover madness of our day is an expression of that deep-seated sense every person has of knowing pleasure in new things. Jesus Christ is making all things new, according to the eternal purposes and pleasure of God (Rev. 21.5; Eph. 1.11); thus, we should expect that we may both *know* the pleasure of the Lord and *share that pleasure with others* by joining with Jesus in His work of restoring all things.

Projects abounding

God invites us to join in His work of renewing creation, culture, and people according to His original good and complete design. This project begins in our own souls, where we apply ourselves to the tools of spiritual life, and work with the Spirit as He refurbishes the core components of our being. From there we have the daily privilege of restoring all our words and deeds so that they refract the pleasure of God, flowing from our souls.

The work of making things new continues into every area and aspect of our lives – all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Nothing in our lives is ever what it should be, not our relationships, homes, work, diversions, communications, or possessions. Everything about us must be daily brought under the renewing plan of the Lord Jesus to be adjusted, tweaked, abandoned and replaced, or reconstructed according to His pleasure. We will find our lives more pleasurable by joining Him in the pleasure He takes in returning us and everything about us to uprightness, goodness, and wholeness.

And we will find pleasure in aiding others in their various makeover projects as well. Making over is what God is about; it pleases Him to make all things new. And making all things new can be a source of true Kingdom pleasure for us as well, who have made the Kingdom turn in every area of life into our Lord Jesus Christ.

For reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God? How does being God's image-bearer come to expression in your life?
2. Meditate on Ephesians 4.17-24. What can you learn from this about God's "makeover" project in your life?
3. How much of a believer's life should he or she expect to come under the makeover priorities and power of the Lord? Give some examples of what that might look like.
4. "Nothing in our lives is ever what it should be, not our relationships, homes, work, diversions, communications, or possessions. Everything about us must be daily brought under the renewing plan of the Lord Jesus to be adjusted, tweaked, abandoned and replaced, or reconstructed according to His pleasure." Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
5. Do you find the Lord's work of making you over a pleasurable experience? Why or why not?

Next steps: How much of your life at this time is presently "under construction" for the Lord and His Kingdom? Are you neglecting or overlooking any area of your life in this divine makeover? Talk with a church leader about these questions.

Prayer:

6 Pleased to Be Feared

*The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him,
In those who hope in His mercy.* Psalm 147.11

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. Mark 9.5, 6

Pleasure in being feared?

I confess, of all the things Scripture teaches about what pleases God, this is the most difficult for me to understand.

And, I suspect, I'm not alone. We don't hear much about fearing God these days. Frankly, we don't want a God we have to fear. We want a God Who doesn't judge us – because He's judged Jesus on our behalf – and Who is infinitely patient and forbearing with our sinful preferences and practices. We want a God Who does *for* us rather than one Who insists that we do *for Him*. We accept God and maybe even love Him; after all, He's done much good for us, no? But *fear* God? And think that *fearing* God *gives Him pleasure*?

That just doesn't sit well with most people who claim to be followers of Jesus. And the reason is twofold: First, they do not understand *why* God insists that we fear Him. And, second, they can't understand how fearing God and knowing pleasure in Him could possibly go together.

It's right to fear God

Let's start with why we should fear God. Simply put, it's right and good to do so. And, since God delights in all things right and good – they are, after all, a reflection of Himself – then for us to fear God is pleasurable to Him.

We should fear God for two good reasons. First, because of Who God is and what He's capable of doing. Not too long ago our son Casey came to visit us from New York, where he lived at the time. He took the Vermonter and we picked him up at the train station. It's been a while since I was at a train station and on a platform. I watched as the Vermonter was arriving from the south, and as that Amtrak engine pulled alongside me, I shuddered. This huge, powerful, loud, bundle of enormous power sent a chill down my spine. The thought ran through my mind that if this thing came off the track, I'd be done for!

If we shudder at the power and danger of a human cultural artifact, how much more should we shudder at the power and danger involved in relating with the holy and just and pure and sovereign God of heaven and earth! What if He "jumped the tracks" on you at some point? You wouldn't stand a chance!

And that leads to the second reason to fear God: You and I deserve Him to train wreck all over us, every day of our lives. We should fear the Lord not just because of what we know about *Him*, but because of what we know about *ourselves*, and what we actually deserve from God.

So it's right and good to fear God. Fearing God is the other side of the coin of loving Him. When we fear God, we acquiesce in whatever He wants. As we do, we find Him to be forgiving, merciful, and gracious beyond our wildest imagination. And this leads us to love Him. We cannot love God as we should without fearing Him as He requires (Deut. 10.12ff).

Pleasure in fearing

Peter's experience on the Mount of Transfiguration shows us why even fearing the Lord is a way of entering into His pleasure. I don't know about you, but if I'm terrified of something, the last thing I want to do is

remain in its presence. I want to get outta there right now!

But not Peter. He was filled with unspeakable pleasure at being in the presence of Jesus and Moses and Elijah, the radiance of Christ's glory surrounding and bathing him and the other disciples. Nothing in Peter's life mattered more at the moment than extending those moments in the glory of Jesus. He was filled up with pleasure in the presence of the Lord and His glory.

But he was terrified as well – terrified of the power? The unfamiliarity of it all? The presence of dead spirits? The radiance and brilliance and portent of it all? All that, yes, and more. Peter feared the Lord in His glory, and he took great pleasure in continuing in that fear, because he knew Jesus, and he knew that Jesus loved him and would protect him from whatever might threaten his wellbeing.

It pleases God for us to fear Him, for everything that is right and good is pleasing to God. And fearing God, at the same time we love Him, is the right thing to do, and one of those mysterious pleasures available only to those who have made the Kingdom turn.

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you agree that it is “right and good” to fear the Lord? Why or why not?
2. In what sense or senses can we say that the fear of God and love of God are two sides of the same coin?
3. How is it evident that Peter was filled with pleasure and fear on the Mount of Transfiguration? How should his experience there instruct us concerning our everyday lives?
4. What would you say to someone who insisted that it's not necessary to “fear” the Lord? Or that “fearing” the Lord means just “reverencing” Him?
5. T. M. used the phrase, “mysterious pleasures.” What do you suppose he means by that? Why are divine pleasures often “mysterious”? Does their being mysterious make them any less real?

Next steps: How do you feel about fearing God? Do you believe that fearing God can be a source of pure and perfect pleasure? Why or why not? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions.

Prayer:

7 Pleased in Jesus

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved, Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" Matthew 17:5

The pleasure of the Lord

By now it should be clear that the greatest pleasure any human being can know is pleasure which is pure, perfect, and lasting. Pleasures demean, disappoint, and destroy us when they are merely fleeting, fleshly, and foolish. The pleasure we ultimately seek, and for which we were created, can only be found in one place, in fellowship and communion with the Lord of heaven and earth.

All the pleasures we know in this life, all good and perfect gifts, come down to us from God as gestures and tokens of His love (Jms. 1:17). By the pleasures of this life God summons us to join Him in His pleasure, the pleasure He takes within Himself. We will never know true pleasure, pleasure that satisfies completely, until we know pleasure as God knows and intends it.

This is the pleasure God intends for us within His Kingdom. We can know this pleasure, know it truly, joyfully, and continuously, and thus discover why the Kingdom of God is such very Good News.

And the way into this pleasure of God is by the One in Whom God is "well-pleased" – Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Savior and Lord.

Why God is well-pleased with Jesus

Why is God "well-pleased" with Jesus? Undoubtedly, many reasons could be cited. I will mention five, each of which is but an extension into time of relationship Father and Son enjoy together in the Spirit within Themselves.

First, God is well-pleased with Jesus because the Word of God readily, gladly, and whole-heartedly *submitted* to the Father's will (Phil. 2:5-11; cf. Jn. 17:4). Throughout the course of His earthly ministry, Jesus faced many temptations to deny the Father and serve Himself, especially during His testing in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11) and His trial before the Romans and the Jews. He was tempted to vaunt Himself, gratify Himself, and save Himself – to seek pleasure for Himself apart from the will and purpose of God. In each case Jesus maintained submission to the Father, knowing that joy and pleasures forevermore were being prepared for Him upon His return to His heavenly throne.

Second, God is well-pleased with Jesus because of His *faithfulness*, in particular, His faithfulness to the Word and counsel of God. Jesus knew the Scriptures and He followed and taught them assiduously. He never departed from the Word of God, and He never failed to teach all that God had entrusted to Him. As faithful as Jesus was in submitting to the Father, He was equally faithful in teaching the Word of the Father, and for this reason God commands all who know Him to "Listen to Him!"

Third, God must have been well-pleased with Jesus' *courage*. He came unto a people He knew would reject Him, scorn Him, mock, scourge, and crucify Him. But He never flinched from His calling, never backed down from what He knew awaited Him, and never allowed the fear of men to turn Him from His course and calling in life.

Fourth, God was well-pleased with Jesus because of the *love* He exhibited throughout His ministry. People were astonished at Jesus not just because of what He taught but because He loved the unloved and unlovely, and even His enemies and those who opposed Him. God is love, and Jesus faithfully represented God's love

to the people of His day. For this as well the Father is well-pleased with Him.

Finally, God was well-pleased with the *endurance* Jesus showed. He stayed the course to the bitter end, never turning His mind's eye away from the Father or the promise of exaltation that awaited Him. He remained strong, consistent, and unbending, even as they mocked Him on the cross and His disciples abandoned Him to His suffering.

Into the pleasure of the Lord

We can never hope to be as consistently and thoroughly submissive, faithful, courageous, loving, and persistent as Jesus was. But we can know the pleasure of the Lord by resting in Jesus, walking with Him, and *listening* to Him speaking to us from His Word. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we will know *in Him* more of the good pleasure of the Lord, pleasure that cannot be known *apart from* Him.

For being in Jesus is the ultimate pleasure, the defining pleasure, the culmination and touchstone of all the pleasures of this life, rightly received and enjoyed. In Jesus all the pleasures and Good News of the Kingdom of God come together in a single Person. To know Him, to set our minds on Him, to be seated with Him in heavenly places, to commune with Him in prayer, His Word, and the sacrament – this is to know, if only as a foretaste, true, lasting, perfect, and pure pleasure, pleasure to satisfy in every situation, every day of our lives.

For reflection or discussion

1. What can we learn about pleasure from the earthly sojourn of our Lord Jesus?
2. “For being in Jesus is the ultimate pleasure, the defining pleasure, the culmination and touchstone of all the pleasures of this life, rightly received and enjoyed.” Do you agree or disagree? How have you experienced pleasure in Jesus?
3. How would you counsel a new believer to seek the pleasure of the Lord – and all the pleasures of life – in Jesus Christ?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study?
5. How are you planning to incorporate that lesson into your walk with and work for the Lord?

Next steps: On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest rating, how would you assess the consistency of your walk with the Lord Jesus? Do you know His presence and pleasure as consistently and truly as you would like? Share this exercise with a Christian friend.

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.