

When it's Hard to Enjoy God ...

2 CORINTHIANS 12: 1-10

Our #1 purpose in life

- to glorify God;
- to enjoy him for ever;

- Some think that these are two opposite things:
- Not opposed to each other but go hand in hand

To enjoy someone is ...

- to take delight or pleasure in that person
- to receive or experience a benefit from the positive character traits of that person
- kindness, honesty, loyal, cheerful, optimistic
- In the same way, we can enjoy God's love, power, wisdom ...

To glorify God and enjoy Him involves ...

- knowing Him better and experiencing Him deeper
- Which attributes of God do I enjoy so much that I want to tell others?

God's attributes or characteristics

- His infinite powers: omni words
- His personality attributes: holiness, love, faithfulness

- **God's greatness**
- **God's goodness**

2 theological words describing God's greatness and goodness

- Sovereignty
- Providence

- “If you understood him, it would not be God.” – Augustine of Hippo
- “si enim comprehendis, non est Deus”

Sovereignty

- “God’s sovereignty is his right and power to do all that he decides to do.” – John Piper

God is sovereign because ...

- He is the Creator, Master and Owner of everything
- “I know that you can do anything,
and no one can stop you.” (Job 42: 2; NLT)
- But God is more than just Someone with infinite power and authority
- God’s sovereignty includes the other things we know about Him

When referring to God's sovereignty

- we bring in the other attributes of God found in the Bible
- ... love, wisdom, justice, righteousness, grace
- Leading us to another important word: Providence

Providence

- “wise and purposeful sovereignty”
- God’s “sovereignty-for-us”

Problems we rarely talk about ...

- Unanswered prayers
- Pain & Suffering

Paul's reluctant story

12 This boasting will do no good, but I must go on. I will reluctantly tell about visions and revelations from the Lord. ² I was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don't know—only God knows. ³ Yes, only God knows whether I was in my body or outside my body. But I do know ⁴ that I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.

⁵ That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses. ⁶ If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, ⁷ even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

What happened to the apostle Paul ?

- 14 years earlier, God brought Paul to 3rd heaven; he saw and heard amazing unspeakable things there
- After this incident, God gave Paul a “thorn in his flesh”
- “thorn” is a messenger from Satan to torment him
- “thorn” is to keep Paul from becoming proud

What is it ?

- we don't really know
- fierce opposition Paul from Jewish opponents?
- some kind of demonic oppression?
- a physical condition that handicapped Paul and limited his effectiveness?

Notice what large letters I use as I write these closing words in my own handwriting. (Galatians 6: 11; NLT)

What happened next ?

⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.”

Things that prevent us from enjoying God

- Unanswered prayers
- Pain & Suffering (weaknesses)

But ... God did answer Paul's prayer!

⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."

What happened next?

So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Because God didn't remove Paul's "thorn" ...

- Paul remained humble
- God's grace overshadowed Paul (protected him)
- the Lord's power worked through Paul's weaknesses (his life brought glory to God)

“That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12: 10)

14 years after being caught up to 3rd heaven

- He boasts about his weaknesses gladly, so that the power of Christ can work through him
- Because Christ's power works through his weaknesses, he takes pleasure in ...
 - his weaknesses
 - insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles he suffers for Christ
- Paul enjoys God and glorifies God through his weaknesses and suffering – for when I am weak, then I am strong (through Christ)

Some observations from Paul's story

- He experienced unanswered prayer
- humanly unexplainable
- except to say: “God has a higher purpose”

- Sometimes, God can do more through us by not answering our prayer

Just imagine. If God were to answer ...

- all your prayers
- all the time
- exactly as you prayed

- What would you be like today?

Unanswered prayers forces us to choose

- Do I continue to trust in God?
- Do I put my trust in someone or something other than God?

We grow and mature the most in the “dark”

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1: 2-4, NLT; cf. Romans 5: 3-5)

Providence

- “wise and purposeful sovereignty”
- Whether God says “yes”, “wait” or “no”, He is wiser than us
- He is our Heavenly Father who loves us and wants us to become like His son Jesus

14 years after his experience in the 3rd heaven ..

“So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, ... For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Who said this after over 20 years of troubles ?

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.” (Genesis 50: 20)

Q & A 27 of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. The almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty— all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.

Q & A 28

Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

A. We can be patient when things go against us,
thankful when things go well,
and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful
God and Father
that nothing in creation will separate us from his love.
For all creatures are so completely in God's hand
that without his will
they can neither move nor be moved.