

The Search for Joy and the Supremacy of God in the Gospel

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of finding joy and satisfaction in Jesus Christ, highlighting how the Gospel removes obstacles to experiencing everlasting happiness in God's glory. It stresses the need to savor and delight in Jesus as the ultimate treasure, leading to a life of pursuing maximum joy in Him. The sermon encourages a deep, unwavering quest for Jesus as the source of true fulfillment and the key to glorifying God through joyful living.

Scripture: Romans 5:9, Ephesians 2:13, Ephesians 1:7, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 8:11, Ephesians 2:4, Colossians 2:15, Matthew 6:35, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 1:5

Topics: "Joy in Christ", "Pursuing Fulfillment in God"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, my heart's desire is that our hearts would be made not hard or deadened to your glory and your beauty, but would be made soft so that we can discern, feel, be touched, by your truth and your beauty, and that being touched we would see you more clearly, and we would savor you, and that in savoring you, really savoring you in our hearts as our supreme joy and treasure, we would show the world that you are supremely valuable. You are the greatest treasure in the universe, bar none.

And we want our affections to conform to that value, and our lives to flow over like a river from a spring, and like fruit or a tree from those affections. So that's what I'm asking. I'm asking that you would work that miracle in some of these women.

It might be new birth. For others, it might be a reawakening after a long season of drought, and I pray whatever it is, Lord, that by your power and by your grace you would attend your word. So come now, I pray.

And help me to that end, and help them to that end. I ask this in Jesus' name. The gospel of Jesus is the great work of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in which he removes every obstacle to your full and everlasting and all-satisfying enjoyment of his glory, and in which he displays the most beautiful portrait of that glory.

That's my definition of the gospel. The way that God removes the obstacles to your everlasting happiness is a revelation of the object of that happiness, namely the glory of God's grace in Jesus Christ. The reason the gospel is good news is that its design, its goal, is your happiness, your eternal fullest possible happiness.

That's why we call it good news. That's the design of the gospel. And the way that design is achieved is that in the gospel God destroys what makes your happiness fail, and he reveals and displays what makes your happiness full.

Christ died and rose again, to make your happiness possible and to make himself your happiness. Which means that you are experiencing the power of the gospel when you are enjoying the Christ of the gospel. You are magnifying the glory of God's work in the gospel when you are rejoicing in the worth of God's gift in the gospel, namely Jesus, for your all-satisfying treasure.

Which leads to this end. The life that drinks most deeply at the well of the gospel, the life that displays most clearly the worth of Christ in the gospel, the life that glorifies God's work most fully in the gospel, is a life of unremitting pursuit of Jesus as your all-satisfying treasure. If you're not on that quest, you're not going to drink deeply at the gospel.

You're not going to display the worth of Jesus. You're not going to glorify the work of God. If you're not on this unremitting dangerous quest to know him and taste him and be satisfied in him as your supreme all-satisfying treasure.

So that's where we're going. The gospel experienced in power, Christ displayed with clarity, and God glorified most fully through your undaunted pursuit of maximum joy in Jesus. So back to our definition for a moment of the gospel.

And I'm going to try to now unfold it from the Bible. Let me give it to you again. The gospel is the great work of God.

The gospel is a work of God through the death and the resurrection of Jesus in which he destroys every obstacle to your everlasting joy in his glory. And by which he displays most beautifully the glory in which you rejoice. So he removes every obstacle to the enjoyment of his glory and in the very way he removes them, he shows the glory most fully that we spend eternity enjoying.

So let's take the first half of that. The by which he removes every obstacle to your everlasting and all-satisfying joy in his glory. And the second one will be and in which he becomes the display and the object of that very glory and your joy in it.

So the gospel is the work of God by which through Jesus Christ he removes every single obstacle to your everlasting all-satisfying pleasure. And I've written down seven of those obstacles so that you get a feel for how magnificent this removal is. And I hope that as I walk through these you will find yourself leaping inside that you are no longer locked up to joylessness because of these seven things.

They are obliterated by the blood of Jesus. Number one, the wrath of God is the greatest obstacle to our joy in the universe. And it has been removed in the blood of Jesus.

Romans 5.9 Since we have now been justified by his blood much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. Galatians 3.13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us. That's God's curse.

The law doesn't do anything. It's just there doing what God appoints for it to do and it curses us. And it curses us because nobody has fulfilled it.

And so Jesus steps in between at God's appointment and he absorbs the entire curse that God has put on us because of the law and his wrath is over. We call that propitiation. Romans 3.25 God put Christ forward, God did this.

Don't ever think of Jesus and God at odds here. God put Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood. That means he propitiated his wrath.

He satisfied his justice. So once the greatest obstacle in our lives, namely we can't be happy in God's glory, he's angry at us, is over. And all the omnipotence that once flowed into the punishment that we deserve now flows only, only, in mercy towards his children in Jesus Christ.

That obstacle is over because of the gospel. Number two, we were alienated and far away from him. Ephesians 2.13 in Christ Jesus, you who once have been, who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Romans 5.10, we call this reconciliation. While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. So not only is wrath removed, our distance way, way far away in our alienation, he's brought us near.

Wrath removed, distance overcome. Number three, in the gospel he removes the obstacle of real guilt, real sin in our lives. Ephesians 1.7, in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins.

First Peter 2.24, Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree. Isaiah 53.6, God has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The guilt and the burden of sin cannot be an obstacle to our joy.

It's on Jesus. If we let it become an obstacle, we dishonor the blood. We say it's inadequate.

It's not inadequate. It is totally adequate. And the sin is not a problem anymore for our everlasting joy in him.

That obstacle has been removed. Number four, the absence of righteousness in my life. Not only do I have real guilt apart from Jesus and real sin, I don't have any righteousness to commend me to a holy God.

None is righteous. No, not one. Romans 3.10, and so what did God do? 2 Corinthians 5.21, for our sake, God made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In him, you are righteous. Perfect. Romans 5.19, as by one man's disobedience, that's Adam, the many were made sinners.

We were counted as sinners because we were in Adam. So, by one man's obedience, the many will be constituted righteous. As we were counted sinners in Adam, we are counted righteous in Christ.

You know what this is called? Justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. That obstacle of the absence of righteousness, the absence of inadequacy, the absence of perfection in my life, is not an obstacle to my everlasting pleasures at his right hand forevermore.

Number five, I'm going to die, and so are you. Hebrews 9.27, it is appointed to man once to die, and after that, judgment. It's going to be over.

Will it be over? It won't be over. Not for those who are in Christ. My joy, so small, so in beginning stages now, won't be over.

What does the gospel do to that? Romans 8.11, if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through the spirit that dwells in you. You will not die. I am the resurrection and the life.

He believes in me, though he die yet shall he live, and he who lives and believes in me will never die. Your joy in Jesus, small as it is now, never stops. I put Karen Davis in the ground last Monday, and Karen Davis never missed a millisecond of joy experienced consciously in Jesus by this thing called.

Number six, spiritual deadness in my soul is no longer an obstacle to my everlasting, all-satisfying happiness in Jesus. My spiritual deadness, your spiritual deadness to glory, deadness to beauty, deadness to Christ, deadness to everything holy and good and right and satisfying from heaven began a long time before we died. We were born dead.

So how can a lifeless, dead, insensitive, hard heart that only loves what kills have everlasting joy? Because Christ died in order for this to happen, Ephesians 2, verse 4, God being rich in mercy out of the great love. It's the only place it occurs in the Bible. Out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive in Christ Jesus.

By grace you have been saved, which links it with the Gospel. You're not dead anymore, which means you have taste buds on your soul's tongue, and they were made to lick the lollipop of the Gospel. A lousy illustration.

It just came to my mind right then. It's the state of your manuscript. But you get the idea.

Before they were dead, and you licked sin, and it was so good, right? You licked sin, and it just totally had your tongue. And then something happened called the new birth, new creation. And the taste buds changed.

They came alive to glory. And so your deadness is not an obstacle anymore. And lastly, number seven, Satan hates your joy.

The great accuser. What happened at the Gospel to Satan? What happened at the cross to Satan? Two passages. Colossians 2, verse 15.

Christ disarmed the rulers and authorities, and put them to an open shame, triumphing over them in Him. Or in it, the cross. Two possible translations.

When Christ died, He stripped Satan of his armor, meaning the only lethal weapon Satan has in his hand against you is the weapon of the accusation of unforgiven sin. If he can get you there, you're damned. If Satan can go before the bar of God and say, her sins aren't forgiven, she's mine, you're his.

But if at the cross, every sin was covered, his mouth is shut. He has no weapon anymore. Oh, he can, I like to say to the kids in our church, he can gum you, but his fangs are gone.

And they remembered that. And the other text is Hebrews 2, verse 14. Through death, He destroyed him who has the power of death.

That is the devil. There are no obstacles anymore that can stop your everlasting joy in Jesus. Now here's the question.

If you, and I'm assuming that most of you have, though I'm sure all of you have not, not all of you have. Here's the question. If you have experienced propitiation, wrath gone, reconciliation, you're near, redemption, sins forgiven, justification, a righteousness in Christ that's His, counted for you, promise of resurrection after death, new birth so that your taste buds are alive, and the defeat of Satan.

If you have experienced that, have you experienced the gospel? Have you experienced the greatest good that makes the gospel good, and makes all of those things good, which they are not in themselves? And the answer is yes, you have, if you realize none of those things, those seven triumphs over the obstacles to your joy, none of those seven is good news, except as removing obstacles to something else. Removing God's wrath is not the goal of the gospel, it's a means. Drawing near to God is not the goal of the gospel, it's a means.

The forgiveness of your sins is not the goal of the gospel, it's a means. Being counted righteous in Christ is not the goal of the gospel, it's a means. Rising from the dead is not the goal of the gospel, it's a means.

Having new spiritual taste buds is not the goal of the gospel, it's a means. The defeat of Satan is not the goal of the gospel, it's a means. To what? What makes the gospel the gospel? What makes the good news ultimately, finally, supremely, all satisfyingly good? We haven't even got there yet.

We haven't said it. If I have offended Noel, my wife who is sitting here, and I need forgiveness, and I ask for it, why should I want it? Forgiveness is one of those seven means by which the Lord overcomes the obstacles to our joys. This is a little illustration of one of the seven, you could do with all seven.

So here now we have a human paradigm or parable of that. So I've offended her, I've said something ugly. I need forgiveness.

Why? Why should I want it? Why should you want to be forgiven by God? The answer to that question makes all the difference in the world whether you are believing the gospel. The answer is not, I don't like to have a guilty conscience when I go to church. It's embarrassing, it's inconsistent, it's contradictory.

I don't want to have a guilty conscience at work, it makes me uncomfortable. Bad answer. Or, maybe if we get this thing cleared up, there'll be a dinner when I get back.

Bad answer. Bad answer, that's not, that's why a lot of people want the forgiveness of God. Hell is hot, heaven's cool, that's better.

Better dinner. So I'll use any butler that can get me there. I need to set a good example for the church.

Be a good husband. Tell them the story about how I confessed and got right. Ooh, pastor's a good husband.

Wrong answer. There's only one right answer. I want my wife back.

I want her back. There's stuff in the way. I want her.

That's the reason I want forgiveness. And if I want it for any other reason, she is dishonored and so is God. This is why it's so crucial to realize that after all those seven removals of obstacles, realize we haven't said the ultimate goal of the gospel yet, which is to enjoy Him, savor Him, prize Him, be satisfied in Him, embrace Him, walk with Him.

It's about Him and all that He is for us in here. Oh, I think two or three thousand of you got this. Back to the definition.

Maybe the definition will start making more sense now. Here's my definition of the gospel. The gospel is the work of God.

In and through, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by which He removes every obstacle between me and my, your and your, you and your everlasting, all-satisfying pleasure in the glory of God, in Jesus. And, I said, in which, in that very removal, He displays the glory that gives us the greatest. What makes the gospel the gospel is not ultimately the removal of obstacles, but rather the joy that we have in Jesus, in the beautiful display of His glory in the removal of the obstacles.

Christ did not just make our joy possible by the gospel. He became the supreme object of our joy in the gospel. Let me say that again.

Christ, in dying for us, did not simply make our joy possible. He died to become the supreme object of our joy in the gospel. And here is my key text for that sentence.

This is 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 4 through 6. In their case, 2 Corinthians 4.4, that is the case of unbelievers. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Let me say that phrase.

Satan doesn't want you to see with the eyes of your heart the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. I cannot, I cannot, I don't think, exaggerate the impact of that little phrase on my thinking about God, the gospel of life, marriage, church, everything. The gospel of the glory of Christ.

The gospel of the glory of Christ. The gospel of the glory of Christ, which I take it means, in His death and resurrection, He has secured my everlasting enjoyment of His glory, and He has displayed in its most beautiful form His glory. It's called the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

And then it's said again in verse 6, For the God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So, the gospel is designed to be the point at which the eyes of our hearts see the glory of Christ. And not just see it, the devil sees it, but he doesn't see it for what it is.

He doesn't see it as beautiful and attractive and all satisfying, which is what happens when you've got taste buds by new birth. You see it and you savor it. That's why I prayed for you that way at the beginning.

You see it, and I'm saying it right now so that you can see it. Please, God. And seeing it, savor it.

Perhaps like never before, meaning embrace it, love it, delight in it, be satisfied by it to the end that the world might be shown. See, savor, show. That's our little trilogy at Bethlehem.

It's about seeing Him and savoring Him and now showing the world He is supremely valuable, which means it's probably going to make you do some wild and crazy, wonderful, loving things which the world will puzzle about. A key text on that last point about savoring and showing, Ephesians 1, 5, and 6. God predestined us in love for adoption through Jesus Christ. So there's the Gospel.

According to the purpose of His will, unto the praise of the glory of His grace. The praise of the glory of His grace. The praise, He died for you so you would praise His grace.

Died so that you would praise. So He reveals it. He removes every obstacle to it.

And now your lifelong vision is, I will pursue that praising. And nobody praises what he doesn't enjoy. That's called hypocrisy.

And therefore, the goal is that you be satisfied in Him. So the design of the Gospel, its ultimate goal is that we see and savor the glory of Christ in the Gospel. That we show His worth by how much we treasure Him.

That we display His beauty by how much we delight in it. And that the preciousness of our Savior be shown by how much He satisfies our soul, which leads to this practical life-altering conclusion. The life that drinks deeply at the well of the Gospel.

The life that drinks most deeply at the well of the Gospel. And the life that displays the worth of Christ most clearly. And the life that glorifies the work of God's grace most fully is a life of unremitting pursuit of happiness in Jesus, and not in the world.

If that's true, the Christian life becomes a lifelong quest to make Jesus the lifeblood of all your pleasures. You don't have any pleasures apart from Jesus. It would be, why would I want a pleasure apart from Jesus? If there's a good thing in marriage, if there's a good thing in children, if there's a good thing in a sunset, if there's a good thing in art, if there's a good thing in music, I will enjoy it because of Jesus.

It will be for Him, it will be from Him, it will be through Him, and it will not compete with Him. Not on my life it won't. I will cut off my hand, lest anything compete in my affections as an idol with Jesus.

And of course it is true, it is true. And I'd like to take the last few minutes just to stress this. If I had time, I'd take an hour.

The pursuit of your joy, the pursuit of your joy is commanded by the Bible. Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice. The nature of faith beckons you to pursue your joy.

Jesus said, John 6, 35, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

So believing is a coming to Jesus for the thirsting satisfaction, the hungering satisfaction of your soul. That's what faith is. Faith is an embrace of Jesus as the bread that satisfies your soul, the water that slakes the thirst that's coming up again and again.

No more quest, He's the One. The nature of evil pushes you to this quest. My people have committed two great evils, Jeremiah 2. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewn out, dug out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

What's that? That's insane. And the whole world is doing it. Don't join them.

Don't forsake the fountain of living waters. You glorify the water by getting down on your face and drinking to your heart's contentment, lifting up your face and saying, ah, that's called worship. Ah, it's worship.

Saying it's a nice fountain while drinking from the river of the valley is not worship. So evil is defined in the Bible as the forsaking of your joy in God and the trying to find it anywhere else. That's a wonderful definition of evil.

The nature of conversion pushes you in this direction. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who found a treasure hidden in a field and in his joy, he covered over and went and sold everything he had and bought that field in parable. One of the shortest parables in Jesus' teaching.

What's the point? When the King arrives, He's a treasure. And if you see suddenly, I could have this. I could have Him.

And I've got all these clamoring, clawing joys in my life that are trying to drag me away in another direction. I will sell them all and the world will think I am crazy. They might even call it your hating.

You're not. Conversion is finding Jesus so valuable you would have Him at the cost of two more comments. You can't love each other and your husbands and your children and your friends and your enemies unless you are finding your joy in Jesus.

Listen to this word to the Corinthians about the Macedonians. We want you to know about the grace of God that's been poured out on the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty overflowed with a wealth of liberality on their part.

So where did their liberality, where did their love come from? It didn't come from the removal of affliction, that's intense. It didn't come from the removal of poverty, that's extreme. Where did it come from? The grace of God came down and their abundance of joy in affliction and in poverty overflowed.

Do you want to be an overflowing person? Biblically, there's only one way to overflow with Christ's exalting love for others. Be filled with happiness in Jesus. Happiness that may cost you your life, meaning you stay in a marriage or raise a disabled child or go to the hardest place on the planet to serve others.

The pathway of Christ is not an easy path, it's just a happy one. Finally, I'll close with my favorite rose story. Matt Chandler has his rose story, I got my rose story.

Matt Chandler's rose story is a beautiful insight into the nature of the gospel, and my rose story is an insight into the nature of worship. Or, does it really glorify God to pursue your joy? I'd stake my life on that. I'm almost done, and that's what I've said for 40 years.

And my rose story makes me happy because I can talk about my wife and it makes me happy because I love the truth of it. And so, here it is. So, it's our anniversary, right? December 21st, it'll be 44 years, and so let's pretend that somehow I can hold 44, I'll say, roses, but goodnight, that's too expensive.

Maybe not for 44. At any rate, we like daisies. There's a story, but you don't know the story.

And I ring the doorbell after work, which I never do, of course, and she comes to the door and is surprised that I rang the doorbell, looks at me kind of funny, and I pull the flowers out and say, at the anniversary, Noelle, they're beautiful. She says, why did you? And I say, it's my duty. What's wrong with that? What's wrong with that answer? Duty is a good thing.

Duty is a good thing. Ask a soldier, ask a Marine. It's the wrong answer.

Why is it the wrong answer? I did my duty. I read the book. I know how you're supposed to be, how you do marriage.

The right answer, ring the doorbell, she comes to the door, looks funny. Happy anniversary, Noelle. Oh, they're beautiful, Johnny.

Why did you? Makes me happy. There's nothing I'd rather do, in fact, than spend this evening with you, so I've made arrangements for Talitha to be where she needs to be, and we're going out. That's the right answer.

And not in a thousand years would she ever say, nothing makes you happier. All you ever do is think about you, you, you. You've always been a Christian hedonist.

You, you, you. Nothing makes you happier. Now, why would she never say that? Because she knows that when I'm satisfied in her, she's glorified.

She knows that. She feels that. And so does God.

The ultimate reason for why you pursue your everlasting, all-satisfying joy in Jesus is because it makes much of Him, like nothing else. So I close with my definition again. The Gospel is the great work of God.

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, by which He removes every obstacle to your everlasting, all-satisfying joy in His glory. And in which He displays most beautifully that glory for your enjoyment. He removes and destroys everything that makes your happiness fail.

And He displays everything that makes your happiness full. So I plead with you, give yourself to that. Make this your lifelong quest.

Cut off your hands if you have to. Do not rest until you find yourself sweetly, deeply resting in the all-satisfying grace and glory of our Lord Jesus. Do that, Father, for these women, I pray.

In the name of our great Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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