

February 3, 2008

Isaiah 42:1 / Zephaniah 3:14-17 / Luke 3:21-37

The Delight God Has In His Son — And In Us Because of Him

As I read this passage this week I thought, "There are so MANY ways I could go with this passage!"

I could speak on the probable mode of Jesus baptism. For instance, did Jesus walk into the river (which was probably about 1 foot deep at the place scholars think John baptized) and have John **SPRINKLE** water on Him, which would have symbolized (as at the temple) being sprinkled by the blood of the atonement (which Jesus didn't need since He had committed no sins that needed to be atoned for)!

Or was it **IMMERSION** (which would have been most difficult in such a shallow river) and also symbolism that would have been a bit inappropriate for Him, since immersion symbolizes one's dying to our previous life of sin and unbelief, and then rising again to live a new life of holiness to the Lord. Jesus had no sinful past that He needed to die to, or new life that He needed to rise to in contrast to His old way of life! Also, when it says, "He came up out of the water," it most does not mean "from being immersed," but walking out of the water onto the dry ground of the shore.

No, if we consider that most of the ancient pictures show John and Jesus standing in a shallow river with John pouring water over Jesus head from a shell, which symbolizes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon a person (and is exactly what was happening to Jesus at the time of His baptism), then it seems most likely that Jesus was baptized by **POURING**.

It's a point that seems to be confirmed by the fact that as He was being baptized, "**He was praying.**" So we can picture Jesus and John standing in the river, John pouring water over Jesus, and while John is doing that Jesus is praying, and "**as He was praying,**" we are told, "**heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove**" (v. 21b). It's a thought that would make us a little less dogmatic when it comes to the divisions caused in the church by fights over "how the water must be applied."

Then I could have preached on why it was that the Holy Spirit manifested Himself visibly, and why it was that He did so by taking the form of a dove. Not manifesting Himself as a dove, but most likely as an ethereal, ghost-like, spiritual manifestation that resembled the form of a dove (v. 22).

If a dove had simply flown down, or hovered over Jesus, it may have been touching (or St. Francis-like), but it would not have convinced anyone (including John the Baptist), that Jesus was the Christ. It was because John SAW the Spirit descend in the form of a dove, that He knew that Jesus was the Christ. ***“The one on whom you SEE the Spirit descend and remain is the One...”*** said God to John. ***“I have SEEN and testify that this is the Son of God,”*** says John. The visible manifestation of the Spirit, then, was necessary to confirm the true identity of Jesus.

Then again, I also could have preached on the genealogy of Jesus, and some of the shady characters in it, and why it’s even important enough to be included in the Gospel.

But those are not what I want to focus on today. What I want to look at today is the audible declaration that also attended the baptism of Jesus (in verse 22b) where God speaks from heaven and says: ***“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*** It’s a loaded statement, and another concrete sign of the true identity of Jesus.

But it’s more than that as I hope to show you today. The Greek word we translate ***“well pleased”*** is ***“eudokeo.”*** It’s a word that can be translated ***“enjoy immensely,” “esteem highly,” “find great pleasure in,”*** or ***“be delighted with.”***

In fact, it’s the Greek word that translators of the Old Testament used to translate the Hebrew word ***“rasahl”*** in Isaiah 42:2. The verse where God speaks of Jesus and says: ***“Here is my servant whom I have chosen; the one I love and in whom I delight...”*** The verse quoted in Matthew 12:18.

In other words, Jesus was one so loved by God the Father that God wanted everyone to know what great pleasure, immense joy, and sheer delight Jesus brought to His heart. And we hear that and say:

“Of course God took great delight in Him, He was Jesus! He was the perfect, flawless, sinless Son of God! How could the Father not delight in Him? He was perfection incarnate — “The exact representation of God’s being” as Hebrews 1:3 tells us – the radiance of God’s glory – His holiness, justice, righteousness, goodness, and love.

After all, doesn’t Deut. 30:8-10 tell us that if God’s people obey ALL the commands He has given us He would delight in us? And Jesus did that. / And doesn’t Jeremiah 9:24 tell us that God delights in kindness, justice, and righteousness — the very things Jesus exemplified all the time!

/ And doesn’t Psalm 147:11 tell us, ***“The Lord delights in those who fear Him,”*** whereas Isaiah goes on to say of Jesus that He would, ***“delight in the fear of God.”***

Thus we say: "Of course Jesus brought great delight to the Father's heart?! He was everything the Father was and everything the Father wanted! I mean, if I was as perfect and sinless and kind and righteous and just and God-fearing as Jesus was, then the thought of me would probably bring great delight and immense pleasure to God as well!"

Yet, this is what I want to share with you today — That if you are a child of the Father, born of His Spirit and washed in the blood of Jesus by faith, that's exactly what God thinks of you, even though you do NOT obey all His commands / exemplify kindness, righteousness and justice at all times / or delight in the fear of God (which means living a blameless and holy life, and shunning sin and evil at all times).

THAT is part of the Good News proclaimed in the Gospel. Just as Jesus would take of the Spirit He received and pour it out on others (as we saw last week); so also He would take of God's great delight in Him, and in His perfect obedience, and flawless righteousness, and divine Sonship, and sinless perfection, and enable us to partake of that as well!

I can't count the number of times I've told you: What Jesus did, He did NOT do merely for Himself or for God — but for YOU and I as well. And if we don't understand or believe that, or if we fail to be assured of that, we will languish in our Christian walk. Because apart from that you can never be convinced that God takes great joy, pleasure and delight in you.

WHY? Because we know ourselves all too well! We know us, and God's commands, and how many times we fail to obey them (if not outwardly then at least in spirit — often doing the right things with the wrong attitude). We do things out of a fear of God that fails to delight in fearing God. And we know full well how many times we fail to show kindness, display righteousness, or do justice.

And thus, because I know myself, I know that if God's delight in me depended on my performance, or my doing all those things perfectly, I could NEVER BE FULLY SURE that the thought of me ever brought great pleasure, and immense joy, and sheer delight to the heart of my Father in heaven.

But that's why the Gospel is so precious! Because the Gospel assures us that Jesus was the sinners substitute — and not just in His death! When He obeyed the Father's every command, He was obeying for US — and achieving for US a flawless righteous obedience that would be credited to us by faith and cover ALL our innumerable disobediences.

His death on the cross was to pay the penalty for OUR sins, receiving in HIS body the punishment we deserve! And likewise, His resurrection was for your justification, says Paul / His ascension was for our good, said Jesus, because unless He went away the Holy Spirit would not come to us! / His life, His obedience, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and sending of the Spirit — it was all for US! For US He lived, for US He died, for US He rose and was glorified! He did it all in our place, as our substitute!

And by doing and achieving all that for us, He also secured for imperfect believing sinners like YOU and I, a perfect righteousness, full atonement, complete forgiveness, total pardon, irrevocable reconciliation, peace, friendship and intimacy with God — an adoption certificate into the family of God signed in the blood of Jesus.

And LISTEN: He not only secured your Sonship and adoption into God's family, but with it the sheer delight and great pleasure and immense joy that God had in His heart for His One and Only Son. "We have become children of God," says Paul in Romans 8, "and if children, then heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" — partakers of all that once belonged to Jesus alone!

When you are justified by faith, God no longer sees you solely as you! But rather, He sees you clothed with Christ, and Jesus living in you. He sees you as one to whom He has credited ALL the righteous merits of Jesus life, death, resurrection and ascension — one who has been joined to Jesus by the Spirit and faith.

Which means that when God looks at YOU, He can't help but feel the same great pleasure, and immense joy, and sheer delight that He first had in His Son. Because when He looks at you He sees all the same things He saw in Jesus on the day He was baptized.

I've quoted this before, but its well worth hearing again, where **J. I. Packer** speaks of the biblical concept of our adoption into the family of God:"

"Adoption, by its very nature," he says, "is an act of free kindness to the person adopted. If you become a father by adopting a son or daughter, you do so because you chose to, not because you are bound to." (It's an act of love, not duty.) "Similarly, God adopts us because He chooses to. He had no duty to do so. He need not have done anything about our sins except punish us as we deserved. But He loved us; so He redeemed us, forgave us, took us His sons and daughters, and gave Himself to us as our Father...."
 [Yet] *"The establishing of the child's status as a member of the family is only a*

beginning. The real task remains: to establish a genuinely (intimate family) relationship between your adopted child and yourself.... You set yourself to win the child's love by loving the child. You seek to excite affection by showing affection. So with God... throughout our life in this world, and to all eternity beyond, He will constantly be showing us, in one way or another, more and more of His love, and thereby increasing our love to Him continually. The prospect before the adopted children of God is an eternity of love.... God receives us as sons, and loves us with the same steadfast affection with which He eternally loves His beloved only-begotten. There are no distinctions of affection in the divine family. We are all loved just as fully as Jesus is loved. It is like a fairy story—the reigning monarch adopts waifs and strays to make princes of them. But praise God, it is not a fairy story: it is hard and solid fact, founded on the bedrock of free and sovereign grace. This and nothing less than this, is what adoption means. No wonder John cries, "Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the children of God." When once you understand adoption, your heart will cry the same."

And you know what? I could ask you if YOU believe that. I could. But I don't need to. Because in a sense all I really need to do is look at your face, or examine your countenance, and THAT will tell me all I need to know about how much you believe what I just read and said.

You see, there are 3 beautiful verses in [Psalm 149](#) about the effect it should have on a person when they believe or are convinced that "God takes great delight in them."

It says this:

"Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise His name with dancing and make music to Him with tambourine and harp! For the Lord takes delight in His people; He crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds."

Do you see what he's saying? He's saying that the knowledge and understanding and assurance that God delights in us as His people should make us "glad!" It should make us deliriously happy and want to dance (even if we are from Pennsylvania)! It should cause us to sing and make music in our hearts to God! It should make us want to grab those tambourines and play those harps (bang on those drums or play those guitars)!

The sheer honor of such an unspeakable blessing should make you sing for joy on your bed as you lay there basking in the knowledge and assurance that God takes great delight in you!

It should fill you with a sense of godly confidence, disperse all the clouds of gloom, and transform every sullen, depressed, timid, sad countenance into one that's like... well, like my dog (!) when I rub his head and squeeze him and get him all excited and he wags his tail and tries to jump up in my lap because he's so darn happy he can't get enough!

You see, there is **NOTHING** I would rather have you take away from this message than the assurance: That the love God has for His one and only Son, and the great delight and immense pleasure and joy He has in Him is yours as well through the Gospel! God wants you to know (if I may quote Packer again) that, "He will constantly be showing you, in one way or another, more and more of His love, and thereby increasing your love to Him continually. The prospect before the adopted children of God is an eternity of love."

And not just unaffected or dispassionate love. It's not just "duty" type love, or responsibility type love that does things because it should, or because it's the right thing to do, or simply because it has to!

It's a love that finds great delight in the ones it loves! Takes great pleasure in the object of its affections! Love that derives immense joy merely by thinking of the person it loves. And that type of love can't help but transform your being, light up your spirit, fill your soul with joy, put a song in your heart, a confident bounce in your step, and an irrepressible smile on your face! As the Psalmist says, you should find yourself singing and dancing and praising God!

You see, when my older kids were 8 or 10, I discovered something I'd never seen before in the Bible (even though it was there all along)! I was preaching through Isaiah and I kept running across this emphasis on God "delighting in His people." I read about the love God has for Jesus, and how that love included a great delight and pleasure in Jesus.

I came across it again in Matthew, where God calls Jesus, "the one I love and in whom I delight..." And I realized something was missing in the love that I showed to my wife and children — because although I'm sure they knew I loved them, I wasn't so sure they knew I delighted in them — and there is a big difference!

In fact, to the extent that we fail to delight in those we love, we fail to love them the way we should. And I was tremendously convicted, because Jesus tells us we are “to love one another as He loved us” — and His love for us (as we’ve seen) includes a great delight, pleasure and joy in us!

Not only that, I also started to notice the difference it made in the children whose parents delighted in them. They just seemed to exude confidence and a happy countenance / they were more motivated, and took risks, and had irrepressible smiles! They had a bounce in the step and a healthy sense of assurance about them.

And its not that my kids didn’t, but it just showed me a slant on love I’d never considered before. And I wanted that for them — because I came to believe that’s what God wants for them as His children (as we saw from Zephaniah 3:14-17).

I came to realize that much of what I did I did because it was right, and my duty, and what dads were supposed to do. But I also realized I had often been far too critical, and prone to pointing out their flaws to them / and correcting them more than I affirmed them / and focusing more on what they did wrong than what they did right.

And I realized that if you do that too much (which I personally think I did) without displaying great pleasure and delight, and immense joy in them, you rob them of those things the Psalmist speaks about when he tells us that knowing someone delights in us (not just loves us, but delights in us) fills the soul with joy, sets the heart singing, and the feet dancing, and changes one’s whole countenance!

Show me a son or a daughter who knows they are loved, and though secure in that, they may still struggle with a lack of joy and confidence / have esteem issues / and wonder if their parents are really proud of them / approve of them or cherish them.

But show me a child who knows his parents delight in him / Show me a daughter who is able to discern that the mere thought of her fills her mother’s or father’s heart with a sense of joy and admiration / Show me someone who is absolutely sure (even in spite of their flaws) that they are well pleasing to their parents — and I’ll show you a person who has a deep sense of inner security / a smile that lights up a room / a sense of confidence / and bounce in their step that others can only envy!

That's what happens when children are convinced and know (deep down in their hearts) that their parents take great pleasure, and delight, and find immense joy in them! And

LISTEN: That's also what happens to the Children of God (to us) when we become convinced that our Father in heaven derives great pleasure and finds great joy and delight in us! Not simply loving us because He has to / or because He promised to / or because He made this Gospel deal with us (and now has to honor it in spite of the fact that He often wishes He hadn't or didn't have to)!

You see, God doesn't simply "put up with us," He delights in us! And He does it even though we're imperfect, and flawed, and stubborn, and rebellious, and sinful. **WHY?** Because He clothed us in the perfections of His Son. He credited to us the righteousness of Jesus. He clothes us in Jesus and thus loves us with the same delight-filled love He has for Him.

To understand the Gospel, is to understand that!

"No longer will they call you 'Deserted' or your land 'Desolate,'" (says the Lord in Isaiah 62:4) "But you will be called 'My Delight is in Her,' and your land will be called 'Married,' for the Lord will take great delight in you... As a young man marries a maiden...; and a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

Do you believe it? CAN you and WILL you believe it? Will you believe the promise of God and let it have its life-transforming effect upon your countenance?

In Isaiah 66:12-13 we read: *"This is what the LORD says to His people: 'I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees.'"*

That's not a common word nowadays, but to "dandle a child on the knee" is to sit a child on your knee (facing you) and bounce them up and down till they giggle deliriously! If you're a parent, you know what I mean! You put our child on your knee, bounce your foot, and they start to grin from ear to ear, and if you do it long enough you get them laughing hysterically (at which point you do too)!

And **THAT**, says God — that type of joy, is something He wants us to experience through our relationship with Him! Its part of the "inexpressible and glorious joy" that all Christians are supposed to have in believing, says Peter in I Peter 1:8-9.

Or take our passage from Zephaniah 3:14-17 which is such a poignant Gospel declaration:
“Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment, and has turned back your enemy.” (A vivid description of what Jesus would do for us on the cross!)

“The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you, never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, ‘Do not let your hands hang limp.” (And when He says that you can just see all these disillusioned, discouraged, depressed people knowing full well that God has promised to love them but still with their shoulders humped over and their arms hanging limp at their side — because they lack the confidence and assurance that God delights in them!)

Don't do it God says! Don't let those arms hang limp! Don't walk around with sullen faces and lifeless, depressed spirits! And why shouldn't they walk around like that? He tells us. It's because, *“The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing!”*

God will do that, says Zephaniah! Can't you just picture it? God looking down at the children He delights in — His redeemed, justified, forgiven, grace-adopted children — and as He sees them, He rejoices over them with singing! That is, you, if you are His!

He rejoices with singing over you! It's a passage that tells us (like so many others) that true love — Gospel love — the love God has for His redeemed, regenerated, justified, grace-adopted children is a delight-filled love! A love that finds great joy in it's loved ones! A love that finds us “well pleasing” in His sight. That is (unbelievable as it sounds to most of us) the thought of us brings God such pleasure He rejoices over us with singing!

It's an honor Jesus purchased for us. Because of HIM, and what HE has done for us, and HIS presence in our lives; by virtue of being joined by faith to the Jesus God loves and delights in, we becomes the objects of that same delight-filled love!

So, let me close by asking you to do THREE things:

- 1.) I'm going to ask you to believe that, which is simply another way of asking you to believe the Gospel, that you may partake of the benefits of knowing that love.
- 2.) Pray that God would heal you of ANYTHING that would prevent you from knowing and understanding and being assured that God loves you that much, and in that way.

3.) Knowing that God's love always has that element of joy, and delight and pleasure in it toward the object of its affections — I'm going to ask you to take and show such love to others. Don't withhold it until they achieve some degree of perfection, but offer it as a gift of grace to the undeserving (just like God does to us).

Jesus says we are to, "Love one another in the same way He loved us." And if the people we love ***DON'T SENSE IN OUR LOVE*** some degree of joy, or pleasure, or delight true love expresses to those it loves, then there is a sense in which we are not loving as Jesus loves. And if we are not loving as He loved we will not see the effects such love is supposed to bring about in the lives of those around us.

Let those you love (your children, your spouse, your parents) know that you not only love them (in the more stoical Pennsylvania type way), but that you also take great delight in them! That they make your heart rejoice and bring to your soul a sense of pleasure. Then watch the effect it has on them!

(The reaction of Krista and Becca the other night when I told them – "I just have so much love for you in my heart that it feels like its going to burst!" They got a huge smile and immediately hugged me around the neck.)