

Gentle and Lowly Part 2: God's Joyful Heart by Ben S. **Reading Luke 15:1-17**

When you truly know someone you know what pleases and delights them. Our desire is to know more clearly who God really is at the very core of his being by the revelation of himself in Christ. Today, I want us to ask what brings God's heart joy and gladness and what pleases and delights him.

Answers from the Bible: We read that Creation, is pleasing to him. Proverbs says when we live wisely, making godly choices, it brings our father's heart joy. Proverbs says God delights in honesty and trustworthiness. Jeremiah tells us steadfast love, justice and righteousness delight God's heart. Hebrews 11 says our faith pleases God. The OT tells us God delights in obedience (far more than burnt offerings) and Jesus says in John 15 his joy is made complete when we keep his commands, especially to love one another. Colossians 1 says it pleases God when we bear fruit in good works, grow in knowledge of him, and walk closely with him. And right at the top of our list God is well pleased with Jesus. He delights and rejoices in his one and only Son.

Surprisingly, God is pleased when I do things for him: when I read the Bible, and pray, when I serve in his church and obey him in my life. Thomas Goodwin, a great Bible scholar in the 17th century, writes in his book *The Heart of Christ* and quoted in *Gentle and Lowly*, "*Christ's own joy, comfort, happiness, and glory are increased and enlarged by his showing grace and mercy, in pardoning, relieving and comforting his members here on earth.*" Christ's heart rejoices to forgive us. Jesus is glorified when we trust in him to save and heal us.

I think one of the reasons we find prayer so difficult is because we think our continual repentance must deplete his joy. We make God in our human image because there are only so many times we can show forgiveness to someone who wrongs us. But God is not like us. Every time we admit our sin and ask for God's forgiveness we do not take away from God we enlarge his joy. A good, human father rejoices more in his child's healing than his own so God gets more joy from forgiving us than we do from receiving his forgiveness! Our God delights to see his children healed and restored through Jesus Christ. This is the kind of God he is!

Jesus welcomes all these sinners with great joy and warmth. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law stand at a distance and mutter. They don't get this kind of behaviour. They don't understand the heart of Christ or the heart of God. So Jesus tells them this parable to give them insight. "*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'*"³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴"*Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'*" ⁷*I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*" (Luke 15:1-7) His parable is about a good shepherd determined to find and bring home his lost sheep. In v.5 his reaction is Joy! He is so pleased this foolish little lamb is back safe in his arms. He doesn't smack it for being so foolish. He carries the lamb home on his shoulders and then calls his neighbours together to rejoice with him for his sheep was lost but now it is found.

Believer, Jesus has found you and he is carrying you home through this life to glory. Trust in him. Rest in him. He does all the hard work for us. He laid his life down for his sheep. He feels Joy and comfort because you are safe in his arms and he has got you. Jesus tells the Pharisees: Heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. Our God must judge sin because he is good and righteous but our God delights to show mercy. Heaven erupts with joy when one person turns to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. When we grasp this truth about God's heart we will be less like the Pharisees and more like Jesus. We will be less self-righteous and more welcoming towards sinners and outcasts. We will have more hope for people. We will share the gospel with greater confidence and enthusiasm because our God at the very core of his being delights to show mercy and rejoices greatly when someone turns to him for salvation.

I want to share with you two more short verses to get a window into God's joyful heart. The author of Hebrews writes in order to help us not give up on our faith but to keep going. *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Hebrews 12:2) Why did our good shepherd go through with the agony of the cross? 'The joy set before him' is the anticipated joy of seeing all his people cleansed of their sin and with him in eternal glory.

When so many people make you feel so odd for believing the things you believe how are you going to run the race set before you in this life? *Let 'the joy of the Lord be your strength'*; let Christ's joy of seeing you ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven and with him forever be your joy also. When we draw on his atoning work he's glad the members of his body are receiving the cleansing and healing only he can provide. He's pleased we're trusting in him rather than our own strength and good works. If you have never turned to Christ for the forgiveness for your sin, I invite you to do that today. There will be more rejoicing in heaven over your repentance than over 99 people who consider themselves to be strong, healthy, righteous people by their own merit.

The source of our joy is revealed by what we ask of God. In John 17 We get to listen to the desire of Christ's heart and this is what he prays in 17:24: *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."* Jesus longs for us in his heart. He wants us to be with him in glory. He hasn't changed since he prayed that prayer. He still intercedes for us in heaven in the same way telling his father "I want those you have given me to be with me where I am" Of course the father will hear and answer the longings of his precious and worthy Son.

I don't know about you but when I feel like I am a constant disappointment to someone I tend to stay away from them. But if we are convinced God the father delights to show mercy and sings over his people with joy and God the Son delights to be united to us and yearns for us to be with him in glory forever and the whole of heaven rejoices every time I repent and draw on Christ's atoning work to cleanse and heal me, then I am going to come often to him to enjoy his presence and to ask for his help. Like the sinners and the tax collectors I will be drawn in close to his welcoming heart of grace. How could I stay away from a God like this?