

MY GOAL

My goal in this sermon is to try to convince you that you need Jesus more and to tempt you to want him more. And to want him more to the degree that you are willing to humbly and honestly and trustingly and expectantly ask him, “What would you have me do, Lord?” and then to act on that and see what wonders he will do.

Let's pray.

WHAT TO PREACH ON?

I mentioned to Dan recently that his role as the regular preacher carries a unique challenge of bringing the message of God week in and week out in a faithful, fresh and powerful way. It's not unlike a wife or mother tasked with preparing meals each day for the family. It's challenging, right? “Oh, we're having THAT again?”

It's different for people like me. I get to start thinking about and preparing for (and worrying about) a sermon weeks in advance. And then I get to revise and edit and polish and tweak (and freak out) for weeks to try to get it just right. And then I get to come in, deliver the sermon, and be done for another year or so.

But one of the struggles for people like me is: what ONE thing, out of ALL that God has to say, do I choose, does God want me to bring to you?

Often what ends up happening in this situation is one of two things (and they're sometimes the same thing): either we choose something that is weighing heavily on us, or impacting us at the time that we think would be helpful for people to hear or we have a hobby horse topic that we are ALWAYS thinking about and that we think always needs to be heard more and we choose to preach on that.

CHRISTIAN HEDONISM

I'm going to do the hobby horse thing this morning, and those of you who know me at all can probably guess that my hobby horse is something that in some quarters goes by the name “Christian Hedonism”, but it's really just an unpacking of Jesus statement: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”* (Matthew 22:36-40 ESV)

To me, Christian Hedonism is the most important, relevant and crucial theme in Scripture that the church, that the whole world, needs to hear. I believe that if we understood, embraced and applied God's message from Scripture of Christian Hedonism the world, the church, our families and lives would be transformed.

So what is Christian Hedonism, you ask? I'm glad you asked. Let me tell you.

Hedonism is the idea that everything we humans do is out of a desire to and with the aim of getting happiness, pleasure, enjoyment out of life. That even those who seem to be very self-sacrificial, on the one hand, or self-destructive on the other are doing so because it they believe it will bring them happiness. All of my study of Scripture and my life experience leads me to believe this to be true.

Christian Hedonism brings out the theme of Scripture that not only is wanting to and trying to be happy not a bad thing but that it is a drive that God has put within us and that God's chief goal, his command, for us his

human creatures is that we do what will make us the most happy and satisfied and joyful: namely, knowing and loving HIM. Time and time again in Scripture God gives as the reason and motivation to obey him the promise of reward.

- *"Delight yourself in the Lord, [WHY?] and he will give you the desires of your heart."* (Psalm 37:4)
- *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* - Matthew 6:19-21
- *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.* - Hebrews 11:24-26

Christian Hedonism tells us:

- That God himself IS the best and greatest treasure in the universe - the highest good; the best pleasure; the most enjoyable reality that exists.
- That God made us humans to enjoy HIM and be satisfied in HIM primarily and preeminently
- That all other good and pleasurable things in the world are secondary to and derive their goodness and enjoyability from HIM and are meant to point us and guide us back to enjoying and being satisfied in HIM.
- —> Example: when our kids were little in order to try to get them to understand God as the greatest good treasure we used to explain it like this:
 - Think of something that you like a lot - anything
 - The goodness of, what is enjoyable about, that thing came from and shows the personality of God.
 - Even inherently sinful things have at their core a good pleasure that has been twisted. Which shows, by the way, the smallness weakness of Satan compared to God.
 - He doesn't have one evil pleasure that he has ever created, that is original to him.
 - He is not a creator.
 - He is merely and tragically a bender, a twister, a breaker of the good things of God.
- All pleasures have their origin in God's character and were put into the world as a tangible experience meant to point back to the fullness of goodness that is in him
- That we humans are only ever truly happy when we are knowing and enjoying and walking with our creator God as our highest treasure. At the core of our being we NEED to find our happiness in God. We will not be satisfied in anything else.

- In an oft used quote by C. S. Lewis he puts it this way: "The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses ***in order that*** we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to **desire**. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."
- As Augustine said over 1600 years ago: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you."
- as the Psalmist says *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.* (Psalm 16:11 ESV)

Amen?!

...But this point isn't my main aim in this sermon.

We need to make an important distinction here: Christian Hedonism IS NOT Christian humanism. That is, our happiness is not the ultimate end. We are not at the center.

Christian Hedonism goes on to show that God's goal for us to be crazy happy in him above all is actually a *sub-goal* of his *main overarching goal* of **displaying his greatness in the universe - or, in other words, his goal of glorifying himself**. He calls us to be happy in him primarily because us enjoying him is what shows his greatness more than anything else!

We see a number of things here

- The most important thing that needs to happen in the universe is the displaying of God's greatness. There is nothing above this - nothing more important than this in all of the universe. Because of who God is the biggest potential travesty in all the universe would be if all of the dimensions of God's greatness were NOT put on display.
- God's greatest is not MOST shown when his human creatures merely intellectually understand and acknowledge that he is good and great and dutifully obey him,
- But God is MOST glorified when we see that he is good and great, and we **delight in, trust in** and are **satisfied** in his goodness and greatness above all else.

We know this don't we? The highest form of praise for a thing is the genuine enjoyment of it. If I saw a gorgeous sunset - where the sky was just painted in a panoply of amazingly brilliant colors - and my response was:

- Well, look at that. There appear to be 43 different colors on display right now ranging on the Pantone palate from #27 to #423. It's a remarkable phenomenon of the sun's light being refracted by the earth's atmosphere at just the right angle.
- Does that give honor to the beauty of that sunset?
- You know what response from me would show the splendor of that sunset?
- [a big smile on my face and stammering words of praise]

God doesn't want us to merely acknowledge that he is good and great and to obey him out of a sense of duty. Yet some people spend their whole lives thinking that that is all Christianity is!

But That Doesn't Honor him!

Instead he wants this:

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
 The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
 They feast on the abundance of your house,
 and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
 For with you is the fountain of life;
 in your light do we see light.* (Psalm 36:7-9 ESV)

Amen?!

...But this point also isn't my main aim in this sermon.

Do you see the problem with this CH thing yet? We've hinted at it already with what honors and what dishonors God.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." (Romans 1:18-23 ESV)

The fact is that despite God being the best and highest and most glorious thing in all of the universe his very creatures deny, reject, and replace God's rightful place as the FIRST and GREATEST good and they substitute other things, even detestable things, in his place.

THIS is a BIG problem. Because God WILL NOT be replaced. God WILL be honored by his creatures:

- *For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.* (Malachi 1:11 ESV)
- *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence*

of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." - Revelation 14:9-11

- As Jeremy Taylor (a cleric in the Church of England in the 1600s) put it, "God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy."

So what does God do with these creatures of his who belittle and demean his worth by seeking happiness apart from him, the source of all goodness? Does he justly wipe them all out? He could. And he will do so to many of them. And it would magnify his righteousness to do so. But God wishes to display all aspects of his glory - including his mercy and grace.

So, instead of pouring out the judgment deserved by these rebellious human creatures of his (and you know this. this is the gospel) he sends his own Son to become one of them - to become their representative - and puts all of the punishment we deserved on him at the cross to purchase our pardon, and then he makes our dead hearts alive so that we can receive this pardon by faith and run back into our Father's arms to enjoy him and treasure him the way we desperately need to.

- *For 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. (2 Corinthians 4:6 ESV)*

But there's still a problem.

*Be appalled, O heavens, at this;
be shocked, be utterly desolate,
LORD,
for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jer. 2:12-13 ESV)*

It makes sense that those who are dead in their sins would not see and know and celebrate the goodness and greatness of God. We get that.

But how is it that WE whom God has made alive, whom God has brought out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son - how can it be that we also lose sight of our True Treasure and submit again to the yoke of the slavery of lesser pleasures?

...Because we do this, don't we? ...

- *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:19, 24 ESV)*

The hard reality of where we all live is this:

-while we are no longer what we once were

(“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Cor. 5:17 ESV)”),

-we are not yet what we will be.

- “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it! Prone to leave the God I love!”
- “*I believe; help my unbelief!*” (Mark 9:24)

But do you want to hear something cool? How amazingly cool is it that God’s main mission for you is to accomplish your true and lasting happiness?! That when God tells us in his word

- that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion
- that he is working all things for the good of his children
- that he will never leave you nor forsake you
- that he gives you eternal life, and you will never perish, and no one will snatch you out of his hand.
- that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus

...that what he is saying is that he is on a relentless, unstoppable and guaranteed successful mission to deliver you from the misery and tyranny of fake and fleeting pleasures and to bring you into the fullness of joy and everlasting pleasure which is knowing and loving him!

...But this point isn’t my main aim in this sermon.

HE IS

My main aim in this sermon, if you remember back to the beginning, is to tempt you to want more of Christ and for that desire to be strong enough to propel you past the comfort and ease and security of your status quo, normal life into some action, some step that God wants you to take that will bring you more of his presence and more enjoyment of him in your life.

Maybe what we’ve already talked about has done that a little in you today. But I wanted to take us past the WHAT and the HOW to the WHY.

- Not just saying THAT God is glorious and the satisfier of your soul’s longings.
- Not just saying HOW we need to seek him and find him more and more satisfying for the sake of God’s glory and our joy.
- But to show you WHY is he satisfying?
- WHY is he to be desired more than anything else?
- WHY is God himself, and not his gifts, our treasure and our very great reward?
- WHY is it that in his presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore?