

# Volcanic Joy ■ What Makes the Heart of God Happy

by John Piper

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*This sermon delves into the joy of the Lord, emphasizing God's ultimate aim in creation and redemption to display His glory by preparing a glorious bride for His Son who finds supreme satisfaction in Him. It explores how God's joy is intricately tied to His glory and how various aspects of His character, from creation to redemption, reflect His delight. The sermon culminates in the profound mystery of God's joy in the sacrifice of His Son for sinners, highlighting the complexity of God's emotional response to sin and His ultimate plan for the church to be holy and without blemish, fully satisfied in Christ's infinite value.*

**Scripture:** Psalms 104:31, Isaiah 53:10, Ephesians 5:25, John 17:24, Romans 1:23, Proverbs 8:13, Psalms 147:11, Ephesians 4:30, Psalms 7:11

**Topics:** "Joy of the Lord", "God's Glory in Creation and Redemption"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Amen. Lord, when this poor stammering, lisping tongue is all finished, we will groan our way into glory and sing your power to save. Keep us faithful to that end, I pray.

Bethlehem College and Seminary longs to be faithful to you to the end. Help us now, help me in this moment to be faithful to your word and to continue this worship over your word. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

My theme is the joy of the Lord, or the joy of God, and I'm going to begin with my conclusion because my aim is not to surprise you but to persuade you and to bring you with me to a conclusion with your well-founded and heartfelt agreement. So here's my conclusion. God's ultimate aim in creation and redemption and judgment and providence is to display and communicate his glory by bringing into being and preparing and preserving a glorious bride for his Son whose beauty will consist most essentially in her

being supremely satisfied in the Son with the very satisfaction that the Father has in the Son.

There are other ways to say it, like this, God's ultimate aim is to glorify himself by redeeming the people whose supreme and eternal joy is to share God's joy in God. Or, one more way to say it, God's ultimate aim is the aim of the gospel, which is the grace of God sending the Son of God to show the love of God by dying for the sinful people of God so that they share in the joy of God without impugning the righteousness of God forever. Now, I know those are complex sentences, but I am not talking to a fifth-grade Sunday school class.

This is a chapel of Bethlehem College and Seminary, and my expectations are very high. Don't disappoint me. Do you see the implication of the conclusion? Namely, the divine purpose of all things collapses if God is not a happy God.

The goal of all things is that his people would share that happiness and thus glorify him as infinitely valuable and all-satisfying. So here's what I would like to do to bring you with me to that conclusion. I would like to ask the Scriptures, because if you're visiting you need to know this, if you're here you should know this.

If you don't see in the Scriptures what I'm saying, then you have no reason to believe it. So I want to take you to the Bible, to the Scriptures, and ask, has God revealed to us in his word that he is a happy God? And when we come to the cross of Christ, I'll try to draw the mystery of the joy of God in the face of sin and suffering, and then finally try to show how all of this leads to that conclusion. So the question, has God revealed in his word that he is a happy God? And the answer is yes, in many ways.

I'm gonna give you eight of them, but underneath all his rejoicing is the volcano of God's erupting zeal for the supreme worth of his own glory. God knows and God feels with infinite intensity that his beauty and his greatness, his excellence, is the greatest treasure in the universe. He knows this.

He feels this. Compared to him, all else is dust in the scales, as Jason quoted from Isaiah 40 recently. Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as dust in the scales.

Beneath his delights, all of them, is this volcanic passion for his name and his glory. You hear it most explicitly, probably, in Isaiah 48. For my name's sake I defer my anger.

For the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. For my own sake, for my own sake I do it. How should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

That's the deepest root of all his joys. Whatever reveals that, whatever expresses that, whatever magnifies that, whatever clarifies that, whatever esteems that, whatever prizes that, that glory, that name is part of his joy, and so his joys are very many. Number one, God rejoices in the works of his creation.

Psalm 104 31, May the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in his works. Job 38 4 to 7, Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding, on what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Those angels shouted for joy with God.

Those were holy angels. They were not idolatrous. They shared in God's exuberance over what he had made at the beginning before we were ever on the scene.

Number two, God rejoices in all his works of providence, that is, all that he does in his sovereign rule of the universe and of history. Psalm 135 verse 6, Whatever the Lord pleases, he does in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. Psalm 115 verse 3, Our God is in the heavens, he does all that he pleases.

Isaiah 46 10, He declares the end from the beginning, from ancient times things not yet done, saying, My counsel will stand, I will accomplish all my good pleasure. God is pleased with everything he does, and he does everything he does because it pleases him. Because in God there is perfect harmony between what is right and most desired.

Jeremiah 9 24, I am the Lord who practices steadfast love and justice and righteousness in the earth, because in these things I delight. He does what he does because he delights in it. So he always does what he's right because the highest desire in God and the right in God always coincide, which does not mean God never disapproves or hates what he delights most to ordain.

We will see this in Scripture very shortly when we come to the cross. It pleased the Lord to bruise him. Isaiah 53 10, The sinful bruising of whom he hated as he hates all sin.

Number three, God rejoices in doing good to his people. I love these texts. Jeremiah 32 41, I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness with all my heart and all my soul.

Deuteronomy 30 verse 9, The Lord will take delight in prospering you as he took delight in your fathers. Psalm 35 verse 27, Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, Great is the Lord who delights in the welfare of his servant. Luke 12 32, Fear not, little flock, it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Doing us good, prospering us, seeking our welfare, giving us the kingdom are God's great joy. Four, God rejoices in the prayers of his people. Proverbs 15 8, The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Revelation 5 8 says that it's like a incense rising in the nostrils of God where he smells the fragrance of the faith that looks to him for everything. Five, God rejoices in the obedience of his people. First Samuel 15 22, Samuel said, Has the Lord as great delight in overt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen than the fat of rams.

When faith in Christ bears the fruit of good deeds, Paul calls them, in Philippians 4 18, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. He delights in the faith-filled obedience of his people in spite of all its imperfections. Six, he doesn't just delight in doing his people good, he delights in his people.

Psalm 147 11, The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. Psalm 65 verse 19, I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. Zephaniah 3 17, The Lord will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you by his love, he will exult over you with loud singing.

You don't believe that. I hope you do. It would change everything.

Seven, the deepest root of that delight in his people is God's delight in his Son, the image of his glory, the person with his own name, because what makes his people delightful is their conformity to the image of the Son. Romans 8 29, Those whom he foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. Why? Why did he predestine his people to be conformed to the image of his Son? Not only because, as the verse says, he wants the Son to be the firstborn among many image-bearing brothers, but also

because God intends for his Son to have a beautiful bride.

Ephesians 5 27, God intends for the Son to have a beautiful bride, that is, to present the church to Christ in splendor without a spot or wrinkle or any such thing. So conformity to the glory of the Son is the most splendid beauty that there could be, and therefore that's what the bride will have. God rejoices in the church because the church shares the beauty of Christ and becomes the bride of Christ with that beauty.

She is Christ's image and she is his delight. So God's joy in the Son is at the root of his joy in the church, and his joy in the Son is the deepest, highest, most original joy in God that there is. God said at the baptism, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

Matthew 3 17, and that same exuberance for the Son overflowed again at the transfiguration. A bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice from the cloud said, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him. And Matthew applies Isaiah 42 to Jesus. Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased.

That's reaching pretty deep into God to say my soul is well pleased. Only the Son of God was before God from all eternity. Only he is the deepest, highest, most original joy in the soul of God.

All other joys derive from this, which brings us now to the cross, the event where the complexity of God's emotional life is on full display. The cross of Christ, the foundation of the gospel, without which we would be undone. So number eight, lastly, God rejoices in the sacrifice of his Son in the place of sinners.

Isaiah 53 10 is perhaps the most explicit statement of God's heart at the point of the death of his Son. It goes like this, the Lord was pleased to crush him. He has put him to grief.

When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. The good pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Now this is a seminary chapel, and therefore I will expose myself to your assessment. The Hebrew word chafatz, the Lord was pleased, which is not the ESV translation, King James. The Hebrew verb chafatz has, I looked them all up, the regular meaning of delight in, wish, prefer, not simply will or purpose.

There are other Hebrew words that Isaiah could have used, did use, don't swear, which don't carry the implication of delight and preference, joy and eagerness, but only counsel and will. Therefore, I translated, the Lord was pleased to crush him. But you don't have to depend on that translation.

In Ephesians 5, 1 to 2, Paul wrote this, Be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. What does fragrant mean? Fragrant to whom? Not Herod, not Pilate, not even to the disciples until they learned from Ephesians to imitate God. Jesus knew it would be fragrant to his Father, that is, pleasing, well-pleasing.

He knew it would be fragrant to his Father because he said in John 10 17, for this reason the Father loves me, because I'll lay down my life that I may take it up again. The Father, he knows the Father is going to look upon the horrific laying down of the life of the Son of God and say, I love you for this. This is beautiful, this is fragrant, which is why when he breathed his last, Jesus said, Luke 23 46, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

These hands were the hands of a very pleased Father, very, very pleased. Therefore God has highly exalted him because he was obedient unto death, even death on the horrific cross. Therefore I celebrate this event.

My Son obeyed me to the end. That is beautiful, and I find it fragrant. That was the most beautiful, most glorious, most excellent act in the history of the world.

God planned it, and God was pleased by it, infinitely pleased, and if he wasn't, there's no gospel. Yet it was the most horrible, most sinful, most despicable, most God-desecrating human act in the history of the world. The murder of the Son of God is a great sin.

There is no greater. And the Bible bears uniform testimony to God's implacable opposition to sin, his hatred of sin. Proverbs 8 13, pride and arrogance and the evil way I hate.

Isaiah 61 8, I the Lord love justice, I hate wrong. What could be clearer than that the conniving, cowardly, envious, expedient killing of the Son of God was wrong, yet planned by God so that his good pleasure could be accomplished in it. Acts 4 27, truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

So what becomes plain at the cross is that both the hatred of God for sin and his joy in the death of his son for sinners are both essential for the gospel to be a saving gospel. Not only because sins are abounding around Jesus, but also because they are being laid on Jesus. Not only did Jesus say on the cross, Father into your hands I commit my spirit, but in the sinning he also said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Matthew 27 46.

Part of what made the death of Jesus so pleasing to the Father was Jesus' willingness to fall under the Father's infinite displeasure. If Jesus had not willingly endured the forsaking displeasure of his father, the father would have taken no pleasure in the death of his son. The entire saving achievement of the cross demands both.

So here we learn a great mystery. I'm sure you feel it like I do. Here's the mystery.

Though God is grieved every hour of every day by the sinning of Christians, Ephesians 4 30, and though God is angry every hour of every day by rebellious unbelievers, Psalm 7 11, nevertheless the totality of his infinite joy is not diminished but served by the perfection of his responses to all things. In conclusion then, what did the Father and the Son achieve on Good Friday? And it was Good Friday. Paul puts it like this in Ephesians 5 25, Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, that she might be holy and without blemish.

What is the splendor of the redeemed church? Her splendor, in the verse, is her blemish-free holiness. That is, her splendor is to be free from all sin and all of its effects. What is sin? Sin is the exchanging of the glory of God for the glory of the creation, Romans 1 23 and 3 23.

It is preferring, wanting, delighting in, being satisfied with anything above God. That's sin. To be free from that is our splendor, or to put it positively, the beauty of the bride of Christ consists most essentially in being supremely satisfied with her husband, the Son of God.

Now, one last question. Having purchased that greatest of all gifts, that most beautiful of all beauties for his people, how does God bring it to pass in the church? Christ died to purchase it. How will we ever be satisfied in Christ in a way worthy of his infinite value? And Jesus answers in his prayer, John 17 24 to 6, Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory.

I made known to them your name. I mean, it's one thing to see the glory of God in answer to Jesus' prayer. It's another to feel its worth with a joy corresponding to its worth.

That's the biggest human challenge. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, here's his answer, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them. That's our only hope.

How does our love for Jesus, our love, our delight, our satisfaction, our treasuring of Jesus become a final unsurpassed experience of all his all-satisfying glory? How does that happen? It happens when the love with which the Father loves the Son becomes our love for the Son. It happens when, in the age to come, God's delight in the Son becomes, by the Spirit, our delight in the Son, and we're not left to our paltry capacities to enjoy God. What a tragedy that would be.

When, in the age to come, God's delight in the Son becomes, by the Spirit, our delight in the Son, then our beauty, the splendor of the Church, will be complete, and the marriage will be complete, and the glory of God will fill the universe as the overflow and the exhibition of God's delight in God. Father, I want to thank you that in your great exuberance for your glory you conceived that you would magnify it in the beauty of a people whom you purchased at the cost of the death of your Son in order to bring us into everlasting joy in you, in your presence. This is a gospel worthy of dying for 10,000 times among any people group of the world, planting any church, enduring any hardship, pressing on in any marriage.

God, I pray that your people would be so gripped by the awesome treasure of Christ and all that you have done to make a full enjoyment of treasuring him possible, would so grip us, so hold us, that until you come or until you call, we would walk faithfully and make known to this needy world that are so drunk on the emptiness of this world, clawing at the dirt for the fountain of living water. You would help us make known your infinite value and delight. I ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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