

## **"A life that is pleasing to God"**

We find happiness in many things in our lives. When a goal is achieved, or when a prayer is answered, we delight in these things.

When a customer eats a dish and is satisfied, that happiness also becomes the happiness of the owner of the restaurant. If a customer says, "You picked the perfect car for me", a car salesman finds joy in this. In this way, when we find joy in our work, we find our work worthwhile and rewarding. I think people who find their work rewarding are blessed.

We work hard, and at times sacrifice ourselves to see the happy faces of others. Even if we labor, if it brings someone joy, our burdens are no longer become burdens.

In the Bible, it is written that God gave us life, and watched over us as we were made in the womb. When we gave our first cry for breath, God watches over us in the same way our parents did with joy.

We were formed in our mother's womb, and we were born into this world because we bring joy to God. Therefore, we exist for God's glory, and our purpose is for his delight.

To bring joy to God. That is one of our purposes in this life. This morning I want to talk about how we can bring joy to God. First let us talk about worshipping God.

### **Worship God**

Today, we are all gathered here. For what purpose? Is it because there are people we want to meet? Or because there is good food being served? No, we gather here today to worship God.

Then what does it mean to worship God? Sometimes we think in our hearts. "I was taught a lot, and received a lot of encouragement at today's worship service". That is a wonderful thing. However, that does not reflect everything about worship. That is because learning something, or receiving something is not the most essential or important part of worship.

In the language of the New Testament, Greek, the word "worship" is Proskuneo. Pros means "forward to" or "toward" and kuneo means "to kiss". Therefore, worship means "kissing forward to". The act of kissing meant showing the highest respect, and this word is synonymous to bowing down and worshipping,

Therefore, right now we are here today to show our respect as if we are kissing towards God, and worshipping him. Worship is not something that is for our happiness, but is us bowing down and worshipping the one that is the cause and reason for our existence.

In Romans 12 1-2, Paul wrote,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Here it says, "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—that is your true and proper worship". Paul wrote here "pleasing to God". The core of worship is for us to offer ourselves to God, and please him. Yes, God rejoices when we worship him from the bottom of our hearts.

When I lived on the island of Okinoerabu, people on the island produced potatoes, and when the season came, people came to me to deliver the first produce picked. When we receive something, and hear it is the "first picked" our happiness and gratitude increase.

That is not necessary because the first picked produce is the most delicious, but because when the person picked the first produce, they thought of me, and thought "I want to have this person eat this first". That is what makes me happy. And I thank their heart for that.

When a Samaritan woman came to Jesus asking about where to worship, Jesus did not speak about the place to worship in, but the condition of the heart.

<sup>23</sup> Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

Jesus says here that because God is spirit, so we must worship in the spirit, because that is what God desires. He is pleased by worship from our hearts.

In Genesis Adam and Eve's two sons bring offerings to God. This story is written in the Bible like this.

**4** Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." <sup>2</sup> Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,

Everything on this Earth, the flocks, the soil, all are given to us by God. Cain and Abel offered these things to God, but all these things were God's to begin with. Therefore, offering is giving God's belongings back to him, and not something that we should be prideful about.

Abel and Cain both offered to God a portion of what they were given, but God looked with favor to Abel.

Why was this? That is because Able brought the fat portions from the firstborn in the flock. But what Cain gave may have not been rejected unripe produce, or leftovers. And God did not delight in this. The offering in itself belonged to God in the first place, and what God found pleasing was Abel's faithful heart.

This is a calendar used in Japan. This is a calendar American's generally use. Can you see the difference? In this calendar, Sunday is at the end of the week. But to us, Sunday is the first day of the week.

This difference is bigger than we may imagine. For us, Sunday is the beginning of the week where we offer our hearts to God. Sunday is not the end of the week, where we give what left-over energy we have from the week. Instead, we reflect on the past week, and come to God with thanksgiving for everything he has given us. Then we start the new week with expectation and trust in God.

On the morning of Sunday, out of everything we do in a week, we make worshipping God the first thing. And by this, God is pleased, and our hearts are reoriented to start the week in his hands.

We may think at times, I could be doing this or that instead of going to church. But what better way is there to prepare for the week than bringing joy to God and receiving his favor?

<sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

This verse is not something we understand with our minds, but a conclusion we affirm and find for ourselves as we put into practice what Jesus commands.

### **By Serving Christ**

Worship is not only limited to Sunday mornings. In fact, worship is not just a part of our lives, but how we live each week.

It is exactly how it is written in Romans 12.

<sup>2</sup> But be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We must constantly be pressing into finding God's will, and what pleases him in our lives.

Then what can we do to bring God joy? In Romans 14:18, it is written, <sup>18</sup> because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. Here it explains what we ought to do to please

God. That is, whenever we serve him, we bring joy to God, and we also gain the approval of other people.

In John 12:26, it is also written,

<sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

When we serve God, he is pleased by us. But not only is he pleased, God honors us when we serve him.

When we think about the kind of person we want to be, there is a person who exceeds the desirable model, and that is Jesus Christ. We know many great famous people. And many of these people claim Jesus to be one of the most influential people in their lives.

The ideal we should seek is in Christ. In Colossians 2:9-10, this is written in these words,

<sup>9</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

In Christ the Deity resides. It is not that a part of God resides in Jesus, but in complete fullness.

A skilled servant knows what the master wants and what the master would do in different situations. Serving Jesus means to pursue what Jesus feels, thinks, and would do in certain situations, and living it out.

If we were a master, we would be delighted and honor a servant who does this. In the same way, God is pleased and honors those who serve him. Dear brothers and sisters, it is not about seeking human approval, for there is no greater glory and encouragement than being honored by God

When we live to serve God, there is another surprising blessing, and that is that we also receive "human approval".

It is difficult for us to accept each other. However, God receives us completely as we are. And when we begin to serve Jesus, we become

accepted by people around us. In other words, those honored by God, are also honored by people.

A few weeks ago, I talked about a pastor named Mitsuru Fujimaki. He spent his youth in domestic violence and as a hikikomori-someone who never steps outside their house. He did not get along with people at school, and was expelled from 17 schools. He hated his parents, teachers, and peers. But he met Jesus Christ, and was accepted as he was. And as he began to serve Jesus, the remarkable change he saw in himself was that the people he hated so much began to appear as good people.

Pastor Fujimaki began to learn from these people and returned to academics. He goes on to make great contributions in the scholarly world. The person who was rejected by 17 schools began to be accepted and honored.

By serving Christ, we learn that Jesus takes delight in us. We are honored by God and accepted by people. I cannot explain the impact of this way of living through my words.

Therefore, the secret to our lives is hidden here. Our lives do not exist without human relationships. The thing that empowers us and discourages us is almost always caused by people. People cause joy and sorrow in our lives. To be accepted by people, that is a great yield for us.

Even the servants of Jesus Christ, who manifests the full deity of God, are accepted and loved by people.

### **By retuning to God**

In the Bible, there is a section that clearly reveals what pleases God. This is written through three parables in Luke chapter 15. And this joy is on a whole different level. This is a joy that causes people to jump up and down. Let us look at each of these parables in Luke.

Luke 15:4-7

<sup>4</sup> "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? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his

shoulders<sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'<sup>7</sup> 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 15:8-10

<sup>8</sup>"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?<sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'<sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The third parable is a famous story of a prodigal son.

There were two sons. The younger son takes his half of the fortune and leaves home to spend his money recklessly. He ends up at a stable where he takes care of pigs and becomes desperate to the point where he eats the pigs' feed. One day he decides to return to his father and ask to be made one of his servants. His father must have been thinking of him when he was looking outside that day. He sees his son in the distance, and runs to him and embraces him. He gives him the finest robe and kills a fattened calf to throw a feast for him. The older brother sees this and feels resentment towards his brother. Why is my brother rewarded when I have been working so hard all this time? His father sees him and says "We have to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found".

What are these three parables illustrating? They are pointing to the reality that we are originally lost and far from God. And God is seeking and looking for us. He is waiting for us to turn back to him.

And the common aspect of these three parables, is that when we turn back to him, God rejoices greatly. And this joy is out of the ordinary. This joy cannot be kept to one person, and the father can't keep the joy to himself. It overflows as people are invited to celebrate together and in heaven the angels are rejoicing.

What pleases God the most is when we return to God when we are lost. There is a big smile facing towards you in heaven in that moment.

Theme of this parable is God's joy when the lost are found. This parable applies to everyone, even to Christian's, who wander towards things that are not of God, and turn back to him. When someone returns to God, God rejoices greatly.

Nehemiah said, for the joy of the LORD is your strength. When we find that God is pleased with us and is smiling at us, we find joy in God. And that joy becomes our strength. This is not happiness that is temporary or situational, but everlasting joy throughout our life.

This morning we looked at three things that brings God joy. If we desire to please God, our first priority is to worship God from our hearts. Secondly, we are to serve Jesus Christ. And if we turn back to God, there are shouts of joy in heaven above.

To be pleasing to God, to cause God to rejoice, that is amazing grace. We cannot miss this opportunity. To be honored by God, is there anything in this world more reassuring than this? Let us pray.

Translated by Kou Okura