

Jeremiah 9:24

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[0 : 00] What does God delight in? How would you answer that question if you had to answer that question?

What does God delight in? This past week I participated in an in-service course in Edinburgh.

It was a good week. There were some very good speakers, refreshing fellowship, and great food. Cooked breakfast every morning. So, I'm not putting these in an order of importance, but the whole package was very enjoyable.

In the course of the week, I was struck with some force by one statement in one particular verse that was made reference to by one of the speakers.

And curiously, even now as I try and rake my brain and remind myself who it was who was speaking and in what context, I simply am unable to identify who it was or in what context.

[1 : 09] But nonetheless, the verse was made reference to and one truth within it struck me and that has remained with me. And it is this matter of what God delights in.

And the truth is found in the verses that we've read in Jeremiah chapter 9. And we can remind ourselves of the two verses in particular where we find this truth and where we will occupy our time and attention this morning.

Jeremiah chapter 9 and verse 23. This is what the Lord says. Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches.

But let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth.

For in these I delight, declares the Lord. Here in these words of God spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, we find God sharing with us a very personal word of testimony.

[2 : 35] As he shares with us, not only that he is a God who exercises kindness, and justice, and righteousness, but that he is a God who delights in so doing.

Just pause and listen to God as he declares this about himself. I delight in kindness. I delight in righteousness.

I delight in righteousness. Now this striking truth is found in the context of a charge or call that God directed to his people in Jeremiah's day, and that he continues to direct to us today.

And what I want us to do is to consider this charge as we find it in Jeremiah. And having done so, move forward to consider how Paul responds to the charge in a manner that is informed and enriched by the coming and saving work of Jesus.

So we'll begin in Jeremiah. We'll think about what God said through Jeremiah in these two verses, this charge concerning our boasting.

[3 : 57] But then having done so, move swiftly to Paul. And see how Paul really responds to the same charge, but in a manner that is informed and enriched by the coming and the work of Jesus.

The charge or call is to boast or glory in God. Now before we examine a little more carefully what that looks like or involves, we need to note the context in which God calls his people so to boast.

As we mentioned just very fleetingly in introducing the reading, these were dark days for Jeremiah and for the people of God.

We've read the chapter, but let's just read again the first two verses that captures the mood, as it were, of the man of God. Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears.

I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers so that I might leave my people and go away from them. Very vivid, very dramatic.

[5 : 13] I'd rather just leave them, just a wee bothy in the desert. And I'd go there and I'd be better off there than being in the midst of all these people and all this pain and all this rebellion.

That's what I want to do, says Jeremiah. And he had reason to feel that way. It's clear that the chapter is both describing the folly and rebellion of the people of God and also anticipating God's response in just and awesome judgment.

These are the years, as we commented some moments ago, the years that preceded the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

And the people of God were very adept at boasting. It's clear that in the midst of their foolishness and their rebellion at this, they had become very expert.

They were good at boasting. But tragically, they are boasting in that which they ought not to boast about. They're boasting in the wrong things. They are boasting in their own wisdom, as they perceive it to be.

[6 : 30] They are boasting in their own strength. They are boasting in their own riches. That is what we read there in verse 23, in which they are called up for.

I wonder if it's so different today. We, as proud sinners and as part of a proud society, how often do we boast or glory or delight in our wisdom, in our strength, in our riches?

And it is in such a dark day and directed to foolish men and women that God urges this radical shift in perspective and priorities.

And God comes to His people and He comes to us and He says, by all means, boast. But if you wish, He says, if you must boast, then boast in this.

Boast about this. Verse 24, But let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me.

[7 : 43] I said a few moments ago that this charge or call is to boast in God.

And that is true. But it's more specific and it's more intimately personal than simply boasting in God. The boast is to be born of and to flow from knowing God and understanding God.

Not just knowing about God or even believing in God. Rather, in God's own words, we are to boast about this, that we understand and know Him.

I wonder, is that true of us? Would we have cause to be able to boast in this manner? Could we boast about this? But let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me.

What does that look like? What is the content of knowing and understanding God? Recognizing that it is in terms of a relationship that God is speaking.

[8 : 56] Nonetheless, that relationship has content. It involves knowledge concerning the one in whom we are in relationship with. What is that content?

Well, God gives us the answer to that question. God tells us, as he continues to speak there in verse 24, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.

In these words, the substance and content of knowing and understanding God is disclosed by God Himself. And we can identify three core elements.

This is one way we could summarize or systematize, if you wish, what God says here concerning what is this knowledge of God. And I think the three elements we could express in this way.

God is, God does, and God delights. God is, God does, and God delights. Notice there in verse 24.

[10 : 05] Let him who boasts, boasts about me, that he understands and knows me. And then there follows this description, if you wish, this self-description of God by God.

The first element, God is. That's what God goes on immediately to say, that I am the Lord. That I am the Lord.

Boast in this, that I am the Lord. God is. The one who speaks through Jeremiah to His people, and to you, and to me, is.

He simply is. I am the Lord. This is language that serves to set the one speaking apart and above. There were, there are, many gods that are the product of human imagination and fantasy, but the one who speaks simply is.

I am the Lord. The language also identifies the one who is. I am the Lord. I am Yahweh. I am Jehovah.

[11 : 12] This is my name. And I share my name with you because I am a personal God intent on a personal relationship with you.

I know you by name, and I want you to know me by name. I am the Lord. God is. But not only God is, we also have this other aspect or this other reality that God does.

It's very fascinating It's very fascinating how God describes himself. His self-description is grounded in what he does.

I am the Lord who exercises kindness, who practices kindness, who does kindness, justice, and righteousness.

Now we could ask the question and find an answer to the question in the Bible. We could ask the question, what is God like? It's a big question.

[12 : 14] It's an important question. And we can answer the question from the Bible. We could say, and rightly so, we could say, God is kind. We could say, God is just.

We could declare, God is righteous. And all that is true. But God, as he presents himself, as he describes himself for us and to us, God employs a dynamic description of himself.

He tells us what it is that he does. He does kindness. He does justice. He does righteousness.

Of course it is true that he does what he does because of who he is. And what he does reflects who he is. And that is, of course, the case.

But God places the focus. He places the emphasis on his actions, on what he does. God is a doing God.

[13 : 17] And what he does, he does for us and in our favor. But what does he do? Well, he tells us. He does kindness.

The Hebrew word translated here, kindness, is the word *hesed*, arguably the key word of God's self-revelation.

And it is such a rich word that it is variously translated, sometimes translated as steadfast or loyal love, sometimes as grace, sometimes as loving kindness or kindness as it is on this occasion.

This is a word that speaks of the unmerited love of God showered upon the undeserving. This is gratuitous grace.

God says, this is what I do. I do kindness. I do love. I do mercy. God does grace.

[14 : 28] He does unmerited favor. But he also does justice. Now, justice can be a very noble aspiration.

It can be a grand concept, sometimes codified in mighty tomes and expressed in grand declarations. When clever people gather for big conferences and they come up with this grand declaration concerning justice.

And of course, there's a place for all of these things. But what God says to us today is that he does justice. He secures justice for the downtrodden and the oppressed.

He punishes the tyrant and the oppressor. God does justice. He does justice now and he will do justice ultimately and definitively and exhaustively in his own perfect way and time culminating in one great and final day of judgment.

God does justice. He does kindness. He does justice. But he also does righteousness. Now, this word is related to justice but carries a somewhat different emphasis conveying the idea of behavior that is right, of acting with integrity and faithfulness, of keeping every promise.

[15 : 59] And God says of himself, I do righteousness. I do integrity. I do keeping promises. That is who I am and that is what I do.

And where does he do all this? Where does he do kindness and justice and righteousness? Well, he tells us, I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth.

In the mess and chaos and misery that is this minuscule speck rotating on its axis in all the vastness of the universe, God does kindness and justice and righteousness.

He does so in northern Nigeria. He does so on the streets of the great European cities. He does so in Syria and Iraq, in London and Washington, in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, in Torrey and King Korth, in cults and Rosemount, in your workplace, in home and marriage and life.

He does kindness. He does justice. He does righteousness on earth. God is. God does.

[17 : 09] But then God himself shares with us one other aspect of who he is and what he is like. The one that we are to boast in knowing and it is this, that God delights.

This is what struck me when the verse was read in a context that I can't even remember. Our God is a God who delights. He delights in himself.

He delights in who he is and what he does. He delights in doing kindness and justice and righteousness. Now think about this. Think about this truth, about this reality at a very personal level and how it impinges on how God relates to and deals with you.

I wonder, do you ever doubt that God will act kindly towards you? Well, may your doubts be assuaged by this, that he delights in doing kindness.

You don't need to twist God's arm that he would be kind to you. You don't need to negotiate with God that he would be kind to you. You don't need to plead with God that he would be kind to you.

[18 : 17] He delights in kindness. In these, I delight. Do you ever wonder if God will secure justice for the oppressed, for the massacred in the towns of northern Nigeria or wherever else?

Do you ever wonder if God will secure justice for the marginalized and the abused and the downtrodden and the persecuted? Well, let your doubts be assuaged by this, that God delights in doing justice.

He delights in doing justice. Do you ever fear that he will fail to act righteously and to keep his every promise? We'll be assured that that will never happen, for God delights in doing righteousness.

God is, God does, God delights. And so, I would invite you, behold your God. This is the God you are to boast and glory in.

Do you know him? Do you understand him in the measure that we are able to, on the grounds of what he reveals of himself to us? Do you experience in your life his kindness and justice and righteousness?

[19 : 38] Boast in this, that by his grace you know and understand him. Boast in this, that you can sing, the Lord is my shepherd.

Boast in this, that you can joyfully testify, he saved me and gave himself for me. God is, God does, God delights.

This is the God that we are to boast in. But let him who boasts, boast about this, that he understands me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth.

For in these, I delight. But now we want to fast forward. We want to fast forward from about 600 B.C. and Jeremiah to the Apostle Paul in the first century A.D.

And given that our starting point in Jeremiah chapter 9, or given that that is our starting point, that is a clear destination. in Paul's writings that we find in his letter to the Corinthians.

[20 : 46] And I say that's the clear destination if that is indeed where we want to go. Because Paul, as he writes to the Corinthians on at least two occasions, makes explicit reference to these very words of God in Jeremiah.

Listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 from verse 26. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and we'll read from verse 26.

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God. That is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

[22 : 00] If we do want to move forward from Jeremiah to Paul, well, there's a good destination. There's a good place to go. where Paul explicitly speaks of and references this charge that God directs to his people, boast in me.

Paul takes God's charge and challenges himself and God's people to respond to the charge in the light of who Jesus is and what God has done in and through his Son.

The charge to boast in the Lord becomes a charge to boast in God the Father and in God the Son, to boast in Jesus Christ. So we could detain ourselves there where Paul explicitly refers to the words of God spoken through Jeremiah.

But I want to direct your attention elsewhere to a verse that we read a few moments ago in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 14 where Paul again uses the language of boasting but does so in a radical and shocking way.

And Paul says this, May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can miss the scandalous nature of what Paul is saying.

[23 : 22] The word cross was unmentionable in polite Roman society. Even in pronouncing sentence on a condemned man, the judge would avoid using the word cross.

And yet Paul not only pronounces the word and mentions the unmentionable, but he testifies to boasting in nothing else. May I never boast except in the cross.

I want to ask one question. In order to understand how the person and work of Jesus informs and enriches the manner in which Paul can obey the charge to boast in knowing and understanding God.

Why does Paul boast in the cross? Why the cross? Well, he boasts in the cross because of what the cross displays and reveals.

It displays and reveals the three truths concerning God that God speaks of in Jeremiah. God is, God does, and God delights.

[24 : 34] The cross displays that God is. Remember what God said through Jeremiah, that I am the Lord. Let a man boast in this, that he knows and understands me, that I am the Lord.

And who is the one hanging on the tree? Who is the one nailed to the cross, dying in the place of sinners? The God who is.

Marvel of marvel, wonder of wonders, the one hanging there on that cross is the God who is. To an incredulous and mocking audience, the one raised up on his unlikely throne, one could have whispered or cried out, I am the Lord.

The cross displays that God is, but perhaps much more clearly and evidently, the cross displays that God does. He exercises kindness and justice and righteousness, and nowhere is this reality more powerfully displayed and evidenced than at the cross.

At the cross, God does loving kindness as Jesus dies in the place of those he loves. At the cross, God does justice as sin receives its just reward and punishment.

[26 : 01] At the cross, God does righteousness as he acts with absolute integrity in perfectly satisfying both his love and justice and in keeping his promise to save a people for himself.

The cross displays that God is a God who delights. The cross displays what God delights in. He delights in kindness and justice and righteousness.

He so delights in kindness and justice and righteousness that he is willing to die to display and secure kindness and justice and righteousness for his people.

But the cross does something else. Remember that God through Jeremiah calls us to boast in this, that we know and understand God.

But how can we know God personally? How can we enter into a relationship of friendship with God and growing understanding of God by what Jesus has done on the cross?

[27 : 12] At the cross the penalty of sin was paid and our forgiveness secured. It is the cross that opens the door for sinners to approach and to know and to love God.

And so it is a wonder that Paul declares, I will boast in nothing except the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. Well, where does this all leave us? The only fitting response is to do what God calls us to do. What is it that God calls us to do?

Well, we simply turn to what he says in Jeremiah. But let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth.

For in these I delight. And informed and enriched by the person and saving work of Jesus, we join with Paul in declaring, May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 25] But I wonder this boasting that we are called to, that we are charged with participating in, this boasting, is it just about admiration, admiration, admiration, admiration, admiration, as we admire who God is and we admire what God does and as we admire that which he delights in.

Is this just about the verbal expression of our convictions concerning who God is and our privilege of knowing God in the person of Jesus, our Savior?

Well, it most certainly is about admiration, but it's also about imitation. We boast in the Lord as we imitate our Lord.

We boast in the Lord as we exercise, as we exercise and delight in kindness and justice and righteousness. We could pause and ponder on this, I think, profitably for some time, but we're going to do so only very fleetingly.

Just imagine, just imagine for a moment a community, this community, this congregation marked and shaped by this reality.

[29 : 43] Men and women and boys and girls, very different, but who are united in this, that we delight in kindness, that we delight in justice, that we delight in righteousness that we delight in doing kindness, that we delight in doing justice, that we delight in doing righteousness.

Can you imagine how delightful and irresistibly attractive such a community would be to a sin-sick world that has lost its way?

But perhaps even more thrillingly, can you imagine how delightful that would be to God, the one who declares himself to be, the one who delights in kindness and justice and righteousness.

He delights in his own kindness and in his own justice and in his own righteousness, but he delights also, surely, in the kindness and justice and righteousness of his blood-bought people.

but let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord.

[31 : 09] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for who you are. We thank you that you are the God who does indeed declare, I am the Lord.

We thank you for what you do. We thank you that you are the God who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness.

We thank you for the manner in which you have done so, so marvelously, so powerfully, and at such great cost in the giving of your own son, Jesus, to die on the cross in our place.

We pray that we would indeed look in awestruck admiration at who you are, but we pray that we would also, as we by grace come to know you and in a measure understand you, that we might also imitate you and reflect you, that we would be a people who delight in doing kindness, who delight in doing justice, who delight in doing righteousness.

Help us to be such a people and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.