

Sermon Outline

“GOD THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH”: FINDING OUR CONTENTMENT AND HAPPINESS IN GOD

GOD THE CENTER (GENESIS 2:15-17)

I. Beginnings

- A. In the beginning was *God*, the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable One. God is absolute Truth and Reality. God is indestructible Life.
- B. God sends forth his eternal Spirit and Word and brings into existence new beings that have never before existed.
- C. Happiness in God had its beginnings all the way in the fellowship of the Trinity, where God knew absolute contentment within himself, within the fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- D. As an overflow of his love, God offers himself to his creatures that they might know something of what it means to enjoy him.
- E. In order for us to fully enjoy God, we must recognize that God alone is God, and there is no other.
- F. God calls mankind to choose him above every created thing.
—In doing so, God lays down what is the most basic principle of all human existence—which is the principle of finding our ultimate joy and happiness in God.
- G. In Genesis 2:15-17, this principle becomes clear to us.
 - 1. The great original sin of Adam was a failure to find his contentment in God.
 - 2. It was this very first sin of idolatry/covetousness that gave birth to all the problems we have today in the world.

II. Holy Work (Genesis 2:15)

- A. Following the creation of the world, the Lord God creates the very first man, our father Adam.
- B. “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (v 15).
- C. God created man to work.
 - 1. Work was not originally intended to be punishment.
 - 2. Work was the means by which we show our devotion to God.
 - 3. Through work, we imitate God in his creative, order-forming work.
- D. Adam’s work was of special quality.
 - 1. The Garden of Eden was the very first holy place on earth. It was there that Adam and Eve communed with God.
 - 2. Also, it has been pointed out that the phrase “keep it” (Heb. *shamar*) is a phrase that is used for temple service. Consider the following:
 - Numbers 1:53: “But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the

people of Israel. And the Levites shall *keep guard* over the tabernacle of the testimony.”

- Numbers 3:7-10: “They shall *keep guard* over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. ⁸They shall *guard* all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and *keep guard* over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle. ⁹And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. ¹⁰And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall *guard* their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death.”

E. Remember that Genesis is part of the Five Books of Moses, the Torah.

1. When the Israelites hear of (a) Adam being tasked to keep the garden and (b) the Levitical priests being tasked to keep the temple, they would have made the connection and recognized the priestly nature of Adam’s work.
2. All this points to the fact that Adam’s work—the original work of the human race—was *holy* work. It was priestly work in God’s house on earth. (Michael G. Brown and Zach Keele, *Sacred Bond*, 51)
3. From the very start, God was the main recipient of man’s work. God was the center of all human endeavor. All work was consecrated and dedicated to God.

III. A Royal Feast (Genesis 2:16)

A. God made Adam his first priest-king in the world.

1. From Adam, the entire human race, both men and women, would function as God’s anointed *rulers* over the earth.
 - Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”
2. In his role as a *priest*, Adam would defend the Garden of Eden, God’s first holy ground in the world, and (presumably) offer up his work to God as acts of worship.

B. Serving as God’s priest and king definitely had its perks.

1. Verse 16: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,’”
2. The whole garden (and we can assume the whole world) supplied food for Adam and his family.
3. Every fruit-bearing tree was a buffet for the royal priestly family.
4. God had graciously and generously provided for the human race.

IV. The Tree (Genesis 2:17)

A. There was one tree in the Garden that was strictly prohibited, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

1. God says, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

2. Eating from this tree is punishable by physical and spiritual death—exclusion from the presence of God.
- B. The name of the tree itself provides us with a clue as to what it is.
1. According to Reformed pastor-authors, Michael Brown and Zach Keele, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil may also be known as the Tree of the Choosing of Good and Evil (*Sacred Bond: Covenant Theology Explained*, 49).
 2. The word for “knowledge” can also mean “choosing.”
 3. If this view is correct, then the knowledge that is in view here is not so much a state of knowledge as it is an act of knowledge (Brown and Keele, 49).
 4. So, in the way they relate to this tree of knowing good and evil, Adam and Eve will demonstrate whether they themselves are choosing what is good or what is evil.
—If they choose to disobey God and eat from the tree, then they are choosing and knowing what is evil—and they will die.
- C. Once again, bear in mind to whom Genesis was written and also the larger context in which it was written. Genesis was written by Moses to the Israelites.
1. Moses wrote Genesis as part of a collection of five books known as the Torah or the Law.
 2. In the concluding book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, we hear Moses saying these words to Israel as they prepare to take the Promised Land.

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. (Dt 30:15-16)

3. So Deuteronomy 30, together with Genesis 2, brackets the entire Torah and holds it together.
 4. This suggests to us that we should probably understand the Tree of Knowledge as functioning in the same way as Moses’ exhortations to Israel.
 - a. The Tree holds out a choice to every human being.
 - b. Every human must choose either to serve God and live, or disobey God and die.
—The Tree represents the choice to be satisfied in God and live—or else find our satisfaction in lesser things and die without the greatest treasure of all, who is God himself.
 - c. Hidden in that choice is the very obvious principle: God alone deserves the right to be our absolute and ultimate happiness. God alone is to be the center of our lives. Not food. Not beauty. Not even our relationships with one another. God alone.
- D. Yet again, we see that finding our happiness in God is the highest principle—the highest law—that is given to the human race. It is the first law from which all other laws come.

V. Humble and Contrite

- A. Judging from this tree of testing, what is it that God desires most from us human beings? What kind of people would God want to put in charge of the world? What kind of people does God think would best serve his interests in the world?
—God thinks that people who honor, revere, and love him above all are best suited to serve as his priestly kings in the world.

- B. Isaiah 66:1-2 shows us the kind of human being who has the favor of God:

¹ Thus says the LORD:

“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?”

² All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the LORD.

But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.

- C. Secular society has names for the kind of human being described in Isaiah 66:

- “Ignorant”
- “Narrow”
- “Intolerant”
- “Religious fundamentalist”
- “Puritanical”
- _____

- D. Why should we act so surprised when we are indeed called such names (assuming we are striving to be the humble man or woman whom God loves and not just someone who takes pride in his or her own righteousness)?

1. The world has been separated from God and lives in the condition of death.
2. This hatred toward God and all that is of him is what death looks like.

- E. The downward spiral of our society today is but the natural and logical outworking of God’s curse on the human race.

—When God said to Adam that in the day he eats of the fruit he (and by extension, his children) will die, well, this is what death looks like.

- F. If God has passed the death sentence on the human race, the question becomes, Is it possible for anyone to know happiness in God once again? Is this possibility of life in God forever removed? Is the human race forever shut out of Eden?

VI. The God-Centered Adam

- A. Thankfully, the answer is No. God has found someone who will answer his original call, a Second Adam. Where Adam I failed to choose God, Adam II did not.

- B. Romans 5:18: “Therefore, as one trespass [the sin of Adam] led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”

1. Here is the answer to the failure of Genesis 2.
 2. Someone has succeeded where the first Adam had failed.
 3. The Second Adam has offered his entire life as a single, undivided act of loving, delightful, and reverent obedience to God.
- C. Romans 5:19: “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”
1. Jesus Christ is the Second Adam, the God-centered Man, who is humble in spirit and trembles at God’s Word.
 2. Jesus was such a man for those who would belong to him.
 3. Just as Adam’s original sin condemned those who would descend from him; Jesus’ perfect God-centeredness justifies those who would believe in him.
- D. What is the result of being in Christ?
1. First Corinthians 15:22 proclaims, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”
 2. Being made alive involves recovering what it means to glorify God and enjoy him forever.
- E. Before we delve further into what it means to be satisfied in God, we must ask whether or not we are even in a position to know this satisfaction.
1. Because of Adam’s sin, no human being outside of Christ can experience God as his or her absolute satisfaction.
 2. While we might be able to enjoy certain earthly blessings of God, such as physical life or prosperity, the special joy of knowing God is reserved for the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ—and those who are joined in him.
- F. We are joined to the Lord Jesus Christ and every good thing that he has for us *by faith alone*.
- G. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ? Are you resting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for God and everything good that God desires you to have?
1. If you are not yet a believer in the Lord Jesus and today you sense that God has kindled in you a desire to be reconciled to him, then come home to God by trusting in Jesus.
 2. Important: Don’t feel that you have to clean up your life first. That’s what Jesus will do in you when you come to him. Right now, your most immediate need is to call out to Jesus in prayer and ask him to save you from your sins.
 3. If you need the words to say, I can recommend you one of the earliest prayers that people have used to express their desire to be saved. This simple prayer takes various forms in the Scriptures.
 - a. Prayers
 - Matthew 9:27: “Have mercy on us, Son of David.”
 - Matthew 20:30: “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”
 - Luke 17:13. “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”
 - b. Such prayers were meant to be used by sinners who feel their desperate need for mercy and grace—and long to return to God.
 - c. Of course, we may use longer prayers to better express our repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus.
 - d. But it is not the length of the prayer that counts. What counts is that we trust in Jesus alone for our salvation. If we do, God himself promises that we will be saved.

VII. Re-Centered

Why ought we to strive to grow in our happiness in God? We ought to strive to grow in our happiness in God because this is what God desires most from us. From the fact that God made Adam his priest, from the restrictions that God placed upon the Tree of Knowledge, from the limitations that God placed on mankind, we see that the highest principle for all human existence is *God-centeredness*. God commands men and women everywhere to find their ultimate happiness in him alone. And even though the human race has fallen away from this, God restores us to this original calling through Jesus Christ. God re-centers us on him.

- A. As the Second Adam, Jesus fulfilled the Law of God-centeredness for his people perfectly.
- B. There was never a time when Jesus did not find his happiness in God above all.
- C. By his strong, unwavering love of God, which culminated in his atoning death on the cross, Jesus cancelled all our sin and healed the breach between God and us. Jesus reconciled us to God (cf. Eph 2:14).
- D. For us who believe in Jesus, happiness in God is no longer just a dream. It is a possibility.
—Better yet: It will be reality, because what was in Jesus—his perfect love for God—will be formed in us as well.
- E. You and I are on the way to becoming people of God-centeredness, because we now belong to Jesus Christ the God-Centered One.
- F. What Jesus began in our lives, he will finish. God will have the people he wants—people who are humble and contrite in spirit and tremble before his Word.