

WHAT DOES GOD DELIGHT IN?

HOSEA 6:1-6

What's the most delightful, memorable and positive experience you've ever had? Was it a special vacation with your family or friends? Was it a memorable event that you still savor? Was it a phase of life that you look back upon now with nostalgia? It's striking to me personally to discover how many of our most precious, wonderful memories involve other people – parents, grandparents, siblings, children and close friends. We're capable of enjoying many things, but what makes those events and experiences truly special? It's the people who share them with us. People find enjoyment in other people. People delight in other people. By the same token, it works the other way, too. People can cause just as much hurt as delight. If I asked you to recall the worst, most distasteful and most negative experience you've ever had, other people would be inevitably involved.

God is a Person. Did you know that you have the power to bring both delight and hurt to the heart of God? The entire Old Testament can be thought of as the story of a relationship – God and the people of Israel. In that relationship God Himself experienced both profound delight and great hurt. Nowhere is that more movingly observed than in the Old Testament book of Hosea. We discover what hurts God in the book of Hosea. We also discover what delights God.

During July and August I want to explore with you some key passages from a portion of God's Word often referred to as the Minor Prophets – those twelve short books at the end of the Old Testament. Sometimes Christians tend to think that "minor" means less important. As a result, many rarely or ever read these books of the Bible. But, as many of you already know, "minor" simply refers to the fact that they're shorter in length than the Major Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel. They're not less inspired or inferior to the rest of God's Word. I'm calling this series of messages "Faith in a Minor Key." There's something different and distinct about this part of God's revelation. We shouldn't neglect the Minor Prophets... and we won't!

Now, the prophet Hosea lived in Israel some 750 years before Jesus in a very interesting, turbulent time. The politics were unstable at best. The people's understanding of spirituality was messed up to say the least. Many of God's people were worshipping golden cow statues and participating in sex acts with each other and their pagan neighbors that they thought had religious merit of some kind. Yahweh - the God of the Bible, the one true God - was not entirely forgotten. The people still offered up animal sacrifices to Him, but He was now just one God among many others that needed to be worshipped and obeyed.

The people of Israel wounded God deeply: their hypocrisy, their sham spirituality, their unwillingness to worship and serve Him alone. Out of His pain, however, God reveals through Hosea what delights Him and brings Him joy. Let's read our text just now: Hosea 6:16. Now here's another translation of v. 6 that

is just as faithful to the original Hebrew and yet perhaps reveals its meaning a bit more clearly: “I delight in constant love, not your animal sacrifices. I would rather have my people know me than have them burn offerings to me.” Right here God reveals what He enjoys or delights in. First of all:

GOD DELIGHTS IN BEING KNOWN.

At least two kinds of people are abnormal. On the one hand, the person who must divulge every last scrap of personal information to everyone all of the time is abnormal. On the other hand, the person who refuses to reveal his or her innermost self to anyone else ever is kind of weird, too! Normal people enjoy being known by others at least to some extent. Not many people enjoy absolute obscurity. Not many people delight in being unknown by everyone. On the contrary, most of you out there today enjoy being discovered - at least by a few other people - for the very special, unique and important people that you are!

Because God is a Person, He wants to be known. He doesn't enjoy obscurity or being unknown. God delights in the fact that other persons – people created in His image – discover Him to be very special, unique and important. Most of us have a pretty small capacity for truly intimate relationships. You're acquainted with many people. You're known really well by just a very few people. And you are intimately known and involved with probably less people than fingers on one hand! Here's where God and you are very different. God's capacity for intimacy with other persons is far greater; in fact, it's inexhaustible. You and me? Just a few! God? Millions upon millions can enjoy an intimate relationship with Him!

Nothing hurts more than the death of an intimate personal relationship. Ask someone whose spouse has died. Or ask those of us who've been divorced. Through the prophet Hosea we learn that God and the people of Israel have drifted apart. It's all Israel's fault. Israel – like an unfaithful spouse - wanted to sample other relationships by worshipping other gods. God wasn't about to tolerate that sort of relational nonsense! Israel couldn't expect God's continued blessing and protection if she insisted on playing the field. So how does Israel, as a nation, react to God's hurt and anger? That's what we find in v. 1-3. Now, that sounds like a fine expression of repentance at first glance, but there's actually an emptiness or hollowness to these words. Notice that there's a kind of flippant confidence about God's willingness to forgive. It's as if the people say, “Now, look, in two or three days, God's anger with us is going to blow over. Just wait and see. After all, isn't it God's job to forgive people?” Sure, the words sounded pious and flowery, but God saw beyond them to the real heart of His people. They didn't really know God at all.

What does it mean to know God? We distinguish between levels of knowledge. Someone asks you, “Do you know John Smith?” You might reply, “Well, I don't know John, but I'm acquainted with him.” Just acquaintance with someone isn't the same as truly knowing him or her. To know God means several things. First

of all, to know God is to fear Him. The Bible says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...." (Pro 1:7 NIV) Fear is not terror, or dread that God is going to whack you! Fear is ultimate respect for God. Fear is awe before God. Fear is a strong desire to obey and willingness to change. Fear means a daily recognition that God is the boss. God matters in everything and to everything in your life. God must never be taken lightly or blown off.

Secondly, knowing God is to become personally involved in and identified with Him. You begin to understand what brings joy and sorrow to God's heart. You seek to bring Him joy and to avoid anything that would grieve Him. You become attached to Him. You're concerned about God and for God. That's what happened to the prophet Hosea. He'd married a woman named Gomer and she bore three children. But Hosea wasn't the father of all three. That's because Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea and became a prostitute in the process. She broke Hosea's heart. Through the tragedy of his own marriage, Hosea began to understand God's pain over Israel. God saw Israel as His bride who - by worshipping other gods - had become unfaithful to Him. In addition, by depending on other nations for military security rather than the Lord Almighty, Israel rejected the role of God as her "husband-protector." Hosea's personal tragedy enabled him to understand and identify with God.

Another evidence that you know God is that you come to know yourself. That doesn't mean that you hate yourself. It simply means that you see yourself for the sinful, broken person that you are. But you aren't content with that insight either. Because you know God, you keep on coming to Him asking for His forgiveness, cleansing and restoration. How often do you do that? As often as you need to! I like to think of it as brutal transparency. No pretending, no acting. God knows everything, so you just lay it out there before Him every day. When you live like that, the result is peace, joy and wholeness. Another way of saying it is that you commit all you know about yourself to all that you know about God.

Arthur Burns, a Jewish economist of great influence in Washington during the tenure of several Presidents, was once asked to pray at a gathering of evangelical politicians. Stunning his hosts, he prayed thus: "Lord, I pray that Jews would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Buddhists would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Muslims would come to know Jesus Christ." And then, most stunning of all: "And Lord, I pray that Christians would come to know Jesus Christ."

Do you know God this morning or are you just acquainted with Him? Do you fear Him? Are you so personally involved with Him that you know what grips His heart and it grips your heart, too? Do you live your life before Him with a kind of fierce, brutal transparency? You are fully capable of knowing God. Everyone has the capability to know God. The question is really one of willingness. The Lord said through another prophet, Jeremiah, "...Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But

those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken!” (Jer. 9:23-24 NLT) God delights in being known by you and me – truly and eternally known. Now, when you admire someone, you might say, “To know him is to love him.” That’s never truer than of God. To know Him is to love Him. You can’t truly know God and not end up loving Him. Not only does God delight in being known, but...

GOD DELIGHTS IN BEING LOVED.

The Bible never mentions love without the concept of commitment being an integral part of it. That word or that concept – commitment – has both its detractors and its advocates in our culture. Some people think of commitment when it comes to relationships as cramping their style and being too restrictive, but others recognize that love without commitment is shallow and pointless.

You don’t even have to come from a Christian perspective to realize that love and commitment go together. Some years ago now, George Leonard wrote a book entitled The End of Sex. He laments how sex has gotten separated from love in our culture. For many people it’s just a harmless recreational activity between consenting individuals who may or may not have any lasting commitment to one another. Leonard ends up advocating something strangely biblical –something he calls High Monogamy. He defines it as “a long term relationship in which both partners are voluntarily committed to exclusivity” not out of fear, or boredom or legalistic rules, “but because it is what they want.”

A woman was sitting beside her sick husband’s bed looking at him. He said in a weak, feeble voice, “What are you doing?” She replied, “Just loving you.” When God looks at you and asks, “What are you doing?” let your answer be, “Just loving you, Lord.” That’s how you want to be loved, isn’t it? That’s how God wants to be loved. He is most delighted when you voluntarily commit yourself to Him with the utmost exclusivity – not out of terror, or obligation or some legalistic rules – but simply because that is what you really, truly want. Come to think of it, isn’t that how God loves you? God doesn’t need to love you and He’s not obligated to love you. He just wants to love you.

The Hebrew word for love in Hosea 6:6 is “hesed.” It’s a word that combines commitment and love together. “Hesed” is constant love expressing itself in absolute loyalty and faithfulness to the one who is being loved. It’s utterly exclusive and joyously so! “Hesed” is far more than obeying the Law and offering burnt sacrifices. Oh, and by the way, it’s far more than attending church and following a bunch of do’s and don’ts. God isn’t interested in being your acquaintance. God delights in a relationship with you that’s full to overflowing with “hesed.” Again, He says there in v. 6: “I delight in constant love, not your

animal sacrifices. I would rather have my people know me than have them burn offerings to me.”

Israel had a problem in Hosea’s day. To use a word we hear often today, the people lived in a pluralistic society. In other words, there were all kinds of different ideas, different approaches to life, different religious beliefs and certainly different gods to worship. Israel didn’t abandon worshipping the Lord. Why, they still did the equivalent of churchy stuff by sacrificing animals to Him on a regular basis! They just added the worship of other gods to their lifestyles. They worshipped both Yahweh and Baal or Yahweh and Molech. No doubt they felt cosmopolitan, sophisticated and congratulated each other on their tolerance for diversity. The world’s a big place and to limit truth, or religion or spirituality to just one God – Yahweh – seemed silly and narrow.

Sound familiar? We also live in a pluralistic society. That’s why people will look at you with a mixture of amusement, shock and disdain when you claim that Jesus alone – exclusively – is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Now, sociologists might call that “pluralism.” God calls it idolatry: sampling lots of things but never loving Him supremely, exclusively and only. When Aaron Baker was growing up he went out to dinner with his family on occasion. When the possibility of ordering dessert came up, Aaron’s father would say to him, "Don't order the apple pie." Now, Aaron’s father wasn’t a cruel man who hated dessert. He just wanted to protect his son from disappointment. Aaron’s mother makes the best apple pie in the whole world and Aaron’s father had learned from experience that no apple pie could ever compare to Mrs. Baker’s apple pie. In the same way, when you allow the pluralism of the culture we live in to seep into your soul, you do yourself a tremendous disservice. When you substitute anything for Jesus you’re going to be dissatisfied. When you love Him exclusively, you will find the greatest joy. That kind of love delights God.

Like the Old Testament people of God, you and I are just as susceptible to trying to worship more than one God. Are you spiritually pluralistic? You can be more loyal to your career than to God. You can want money and the things money can buy more than you want what grips the heart of God. It’s even possible to love your country more than God. Truth be told, we have as many gods as the people of Israel all clamoring for our attention and devotion. Just like the Israelites in Hosea’s day, you can forget who you are, to whom you belong and end up worshipping the same gods that your pagan neighbors love and adore. And if I’m understanding the implications found here in Hosea correctly, the “animal sacrifices” of church attendance or the “burnt offerings” of “churchianity” will not convince God that you know Him and love Him the way He wants to be known and loved. God always values spiritual reality before religious practices.

Look with me again at Hosea 6:4 (MSG). “What am I to do with you, Ephraim? What do I make of you, Judah? Your declarations of love last no longer than morning mist and predawn dew.” Can you hear God’s broken heart? Nothing

hurts you more than love that just isn't love. Unfaithful "love." Uncommitted "love." Disloyal "love." And, by the same token, nothing feeds your soul more than faithful love, committed love, loyal love. God is just the same. That's what He yearns for from you and me. That's what He delights in.

Perhaps you're thinking just now, "I want to love God like that, but I feel so incapable and so inadequate. How can I ever truly love God constantly, faithfully, fully and exclusively?" Maybe that's the honest cry of your heart today. I feel that way about my own love for God at times, too. It just seems kind of pathetic at times, doesn't it? One thought comforts me. God never asks you for what you don't have. So take whatever love you have for God today – feeble and fickle as it may be – and give it to Him. The Holy Spirit will take that, ignite it and you will discover a new capability for loving God that will grow, expand and experience God's blessing.

Wayne Cordeiro, a pastor in Hawaii, observes that the more you love something, the more you become like it. For example, he has a friend that loves tennis. He wears tennis stuff. He reads tennis magazines. He has tennis talk. He has a racket and his hair looks like a tennis ball. Wayne has another friend that loves surfing. He dresses with surf stuff and he reads surf magazines. He has a surfing way of talking. He's even starting to smell like seaweed. Everything about him is starting to go that way. Isn't it true that whatever you love, you start moving that way? Some of you love food. Don't go there, Rick! "He's stopped preaching and gone to meddlin'." The Bible says the greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. That is the greatest commandment of all. As you grow in that love for God month after month, year after year and decade after decade, God will give you the power to change. You will become like what you love.

What does God delight in? God delights in being known and in being loved. And the more you know Him and the more you love Him, the more you will become like Him.