



## **GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE**

Some weeks ago I sent an article to our ministry mailing list telling about our new little dog "Buddy." This also provided an opportunity to express a "pet doctrine" of mine: that we should be *kind* to one another—and to animals!

Having saved Buddy from an animal shelter, he appreciates his new life so much! What a great time he has—throwing his toys into the air, running down the hall, or going out his doggie door into our enclosed backyard. There among citrus trees, palms, bamboo, and other plants, he enjoys life. He likes to ride in the car, and walks are a special treat! He has become like a "friend that sticks closer than a brother" (cf. Pro. 18:24).

We are blessed to see him blessed. The biblical word "blessed" is sometimes translated "happy"—*happy* are the pure in heart, *happy* are the meek, *happy* are the peacemakers, etc. (Matt. 5:3-10). It makes us happy to see him happy. We have **pleasure** seeing him have **pleasure**. In somewhat the same way, this is true of our heavenly Father—an analogy I used in a recent sermon which I will now share here.

God has pleasure when his people are blessed in various ways. Jesus said to his disciples: "Fear not little flock, it is your Father's good **pleasure** to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

These words of Jesus were rooted in scripture. "The LORD takes **pleasure** in them that fear him," and "the LORD takes **pleasure** in his people" (Psalms 147:11; 149:4).

We do not usually think of God having pleasure. We commonly think of "pleasure" in the sense of worldly or sinful pleasures. And the Bible does not deny there are pleasures in sin. We read that Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than

to enjoy the *pleasures of sin for a season* (Heb. 11:25). But the *contrast* here should be carefully noted. Sinful pleasures are only for a season. It might be *Champagne* one night and *real pain* the next morning!

But the pleasures we have in serving God will last *forever*: "In his presence is fullness of joy; at his right hand there are **pleasures** forevermore" (Psa. 16:11).

And pleasures for his people are *abundant*! "They shall be abundantly satisfied...you will make them drink of the river of your **pleasures**" (Psa. 36:8).

If the reader will allow a somewhat bizarre illustration, picture a man going down to the edge of the Mississippi River. He kneels down to drink. Someone asks what he is doing. He replies, "I am going to drink the river dry!" Impossible, of course. Even so, one could never exhaust the abundant supply of God's river of pleasures.

A well-known verse of scripture says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That's Philippians 4:13; but Philippians 2:13 says: "For it is *God* who works in you, both to will and to do of his good **pleasure**." It is awesome to know God works through us!

Isaiah 53 prophesied that Jesus would be rejected and despised by men, that he would be wounded for our transgressions, the chastisement of our peace would be upon him, and his stripes would provide healing. Then in verse 10 we read: "...he shall see his seed, and shall prolong his days, and the **pleasure** of the LORD shall prosper in his hand." And indeed it has. Beginning with a few disciples, the message of Jesus Christ is now known around the world!

When the Israelites were slaves in Babylon, God uniquely anointed Cyrus to set them free, allowing them to return to their land, to rebuild their city and

temple. "[The LORD] says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my **pleasure**: even saying to Jerusalem, You shall be built; and to the temple, Your foundation shall be laid ...Cyrus...shall let go my captives" (Isa. 44:28; 45:13). Such was God's pleasure, to bless his people. One of the amazing things about this prophecy is that Isaiah gave it years *before* Cyrus was ever born!

While some focus on the doom and gloom of the book of Revelation, it also includes sections of praise and worship:

"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for your **pleasure** they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11).

God has a plan for man; he takes **pleasure** in his creation!

A similar thought is expressed in Zephaniah 3:17: "The LORD your God in the midst of you is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over you with *joy*...he will joy over you with *singing*!" It may sound strange to think of God's people bringing joy to him, even causing him to *sing* about it—but here it is, *in Scripture!* It is his good **pleasure**.

We have here used an analogy involving our dog giving us pleasure, comparing it to God's good **pleasure** when his people are blessed. The Bible commonly uses animals to illustrate spiritual truths. Some passages are quite familiar, such as the Twenty-third Psalm about the shepherd and his **sheep**. God's people are the **sheep** of his pasture (Psa. 100:3). Gatherings of Christians are likened to flocks of **sheep** (Acts 20:28).

The ministry of Jesus to save lost souls, is likened to a shepherd who seeks for a lost **sheep** until he finds it (Luke 15:4,5).

Jesus, as an innocent **sheep**, was led to the slaughter (Acts 8:32).

When Jesus sent forth his disciples, they would be as **sheep** among **wolves**, requiring that they be wise as **serpents**,

but harmless as **doves** (Matt. 10:16).

Righteous and wicked people will be separated as a shepherd divides his **sheep** from **goats** (Matt. 25:32).

Jesus contrasted a **gnat** and a **camel** in one saying, and of casting pearls before **swine** in another (Matt. 23:24; 7:6)

The peaceful conditions of Christ's kingdom are pictured as a **wolf** dwelling with a **lamb**, a **leopard** with a young **goat**, a **lion** with a **calves**, or a **bear** and **cow** grazing together! (Isa. 11:6,7).

A **spider**, by taking hold with her hands, may even live in a king's palace (Pro. 30:28).

**Ants** are an example of being industrious and planning ahead (Proverbs 6:6; 30:25).

Even as **oxen** were not to be muzzled while plowing grain fields, so those who preach the gospel are worthy of support (1 Cor. 9:9,10).

Prophets who failed to speak God's message were as worthless as a **dog** that does not bark to warn of an intruder (Isa. 56:10)

The devil as a roaring **lion** seeks whom he may devour, while Jesus is also called a **lion**, the **Lion** of the Tribe of Judah (1 Peter 5:8; Rev. 5:5).

Worldly treasures can disappear just as a **moth** destroys a garment (Matt. 6:20).

**Foxes**, though little, spoil vines; Herod was sly like a **fox** (Song 2:15; Luke 13:32).

Those who wait upon the Lord shall mount up on wings as **eagles** (Isa. 40:31).

The occupation of some of the disciples was to catch **fish**, but upon becoming followers of Jesus, they became "fishers of men" (Matt. 10:19).

A Psalmist's thirst for God is likened to a **deer** who pants after brooks of water (Psa. 42:1).

These analogies and many more in scripture are based on the characteristics of animals. "Fear not little *flock*, it is your Father's good **pleasure** to give you the kingdom!"

## FREE OFFER

As this mailing is going out, we are approaching another Easter season. As part of our ministry outreach, I am pleased to offer our 64-page book **EASTER—IS IT PAGAN?** It is offered **free** so no one is left out. For those of you on the mailing list who already have this book, you may request a copy to share with a neighbor or friend.

Growing up in church, I had known Easter as a victorious and joyous celebration of Christ's resurrection. More people attended church at this season than any other time of the year. A man who received Jesus Christ as his Savior while attending an Easter service, later became my pastor. I knew of no reason to question the Easter celebration.

In time, however, I would read literature that claimed the observance of Easter was "pagan," that the very word "Easter" was the name of a pagan goddess! It was claimed that the Easter celebration was brought into the professing church by "Constantine" at the "Nicene Council"! A passage in Ezekiel was quoted to show that people who attend Easter Sunrise Services are worshipping the Sun-god Baal! The 40 days of Lent, it was said, came right out of ancient Babylon! And, of course, Easter eggs and rabbits were abominable, vile, fertility symbols!

Often claims about pagan origins are based on *misinformation*. Some might produce a *thousand* examples of pagan tribes that observed a spring festival, this can have no bearing on why *Christians* celebrate the resurrection of Christ in the spring. The reason is obvious: spring is when he rose from the dead!

If the word Easter ever was the name of a goddess, that really has no bearing on how the word is used today. Many words no longer retain their original significance. We don't refrain from using the word "cereal," for example, even though it comes from the name of the goddess Ceres, goddess of grains! In **EASTER—IS IT PAGAN?**, I list and explain about *fifty* commonly used English words that come from the names of pagan gods or goddesses.

If the observance of Easter is a continuation of the worship of a pagan goddess, who is it that worships a goddess on Easter? I can tell you about Christians who at Easter worship "the MAN Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5)—but not a female goddess. Even with the emphasis that many Roman Catholics place on Mary, Easter is not Mary's day!

Can anyone name anyone, anywhere, that worships Easter eggs or rabbits? Are these things not merely seasonal decorations? We admire Christians who desire to stand for the purity of the gospel, who do not want paganism in the church. But we should be certain that what we reject is indeed pagan, so that in pulling up weeds, we do not pull up the wheat also.

Everything mentioned here (and much more) is included in the book **EASTER—IS IT PAGAN?** It is our FREE gift to you.

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