

THE LORD'S JOY

Zephaniah 3:14-20

As I come this morning to the last of these attributes I may have selected an attribute which you never considered as one of the characteristics of God's nature. The Lord's joy or to state it another way, the blessedness of God. One writer whom I have been using during this series concludes his remarks on the blessedness of God by saying and here ends the account of the attributes of God which all center and terminate in his blessedness. There are many ways that you could approach the subject of the Lord's joy. Many passages of Scripture speak of the Lord's joy and those things in which He delights. We could spend the morning very easily talking about the delight for example that God has in His Son. And you remember that during the earthly life of the Lord Jesus there were at least two times that God spoke from heaven and said this is my beloved son literally in whom I find all my delight. Or I could turn to Isaiah's prophesy in the 53rd chapter and take you to that expression in the 10th verse where it says it pleased the Lord to bruise him. And we could spend the morning very easily talking together about the way in which God delighted in the sacrifice of His Son. The expression of His wonderful grace. Or we could go to one of the Psalms and we could see that the Lord takes pleasure in us, the Lord takes pleasure in His people. The Lord delights in those who fear Him and those who trust in Him. And that I am sure would be a great encouragement to us. And there are other ways that we could approach this subject. But I want to approach it this morning just from the standpoint of what it means that God is a God of joy and what that means also as far as our lives are concerned. It might seem to you as I acknowledge it does to me in some ways strange to speak of the happiness of God. So little has been said of it. I looked through several dozen books in my own library and with the exception of the passages where this particular subject comes up it seems that very little has been said about the happiness of God, very little has been written about the happiness of God. And perhaps one reason for this is that we are so conscious of the fact that when God saw fit to give His crowning revelation of Himself to man

in the coming of the Lord Jēsus Christ, the Lord Jēsus Christ is described by the prophet Isaiah as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Times when it is said in the Old Testament that God laughs it usually has to do with the scorn that He felt in His own heart toward His enemies who were seeking to overrule His purposes. But nevertheless this is an attribute of God. And I want to show you from the Scriptures that this is the case. I am going to ask you to turn to the New Testament book of First Timothy and there is a verse in the first chapter and two verses in the last chapter that I want to focus attention upon this morning. In the first chapter, of First Timothy and the 11th verse Paul is in the process of giving something of his testimony speaking of what he was before he became a child of God and the word that has been committed to him and so he says in verse 11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust. Now turn to the 6th chapter of this same book and when he is charging Timothy beginning with verse 13 I will pick up the charge in verses 15 and 16 because these are the verses that I want you to note especially the 15th verse speaking now of Christ which in his times he shall show who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords who only hath immortality dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto whom no man hath seen nor can see to whom be honor and power everlasting amen. Now you have the same expression in verse 15 he is the blessed, the happy and only Pptentate. Now this word blessed is used in different ways in Scripture, the translation of different words. But I want to take the word that is used here and show you that it does refer to happiness. In Matthew 5 where we have what we call the beginning of the sermon on the mount you have going down through at least verse 11 in that chapter what we call the Beatitudes. And each one of the Beatitudes as the word suggests begins with the word blessed. Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are the meek and right on down the line. And that word every time it appears is the same word that is used here in First Timothy chapters 1 and 6 to describe our God. The word means happy. So that when the Lord Jesus spoke of His people as being

blessed under all of these circumstances described in the sermon on the mount He means that these are the conditions under which you can expect to find happiness as a child of God. And you just have to look through those beatitudes one by one to see how much in contrast it is with the way people in the world think that they are going to be happy. Now though the word is a Hebrew word instead of a Greek word you could also go to a passage like the first Psalm Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. And this is a word which expresses the happinesses, multiplied happinesses of the person who does not walk in the way of sin but instead who finds his delight in the law of the Lord and who meditates in that law day and night. So there we have the key to happiness and again it is pointing to the same situation that we have here in these two chapters in First Timothy where the Apostle Paul is talking not about the people of God but he is talking about God Himself. Now the teaching is actually very clear. It means that our God is a happy God, perfectly happy. That He is happy because of what He is. His happiness is not dependent upon anything outside of Himself. And this would mean just to clear up misapprehension that some have that God did not create man because he was lonely and needed someone with whom He could have fellowship. I want to say this very emphatically this morning and yet I believe that this is in accordance with the Scriptures and that's the reason I state it. God does not really need anyone outside of Himself. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are perfectly, infinitely, and eternally happy in themselves. And they would have remained so if there had never been a creation and even if there had never been any people like you and I are this morning by His grace the saints of God. God's joy is not dependent upon us or upon circumstances or any of these things. His joy is complete in Himself. So I want to establish this as the first point this morning. Our God is a happy God. Now by that I certainly do not mean to convey what we think of often in connection with happiness. I don't mean that God is frivolous. We are warned against that in Scripture. I mean that God is perfectly satisfied, perfectly

contented. His pleasure, His happiness is absolutely complete and that He is independently happy because He does not have to go outside of Himself for happiness. He is the blessed God. And the Gospel which He has given us is the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. Now let me go a little bit more into the reason for His happiness. I have said that He delights in Himself. He delights in all that He is. Now for you and for me to delight in ourselves would be sin. Because we are not perfect and if we were to delight in ourselves we would be delighting in that which is contrary to God and displeasing to God. We can each one of us say with the Apostle Paul I know that in me that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing. So what is perfectly right for God to do would be sin for you and for me. For me to delight in myself is the very essence of pride. Because of the very fact as I have explained I am not perfect. But God can delight in Himself because all perfections are in Him and there is not the least degree of imperfection with respect to any of His attributes. Now let me ask you to turn to another passage of Scripture and this time to the Old Testament and the prophesy of Jeremiah and the 9th verse. I am sure that many of you have memorized these two verses Jeremiah 9:23 and 24 but perhaps you haven't looked at these verses in the light of God's delight in Himself. Jeremiah writes thus saith the Lord, Jeremiah 9:23. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich men glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this. Now to glory in anything means to find your joy in it. This describes a happy person. And when the Lord begins with these negatives and He mentions wisdom and He mentions might and He mentions riches, He mentions three of the most prominent things that people look to for happiness. They like to glory in these things. We like to glory for example in our knowledge. We like to glory in our degrees. We like to glory in our intellectual achievements. We like to glory in the advances that we have made in science but the Word of God says Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom because as much as man may know man to glory in his wisdom is glorying in that which is imperfect and that which can easily be outdated by something that may be discovered tomorrow.

Or take mans glorying in his might. From the Scriptures we can see especially in the book of Romans that it was the glory of Rome that they could speak of their might and their power and the way that they had subdued other nations and other cultures and how they had enveloped all of these things. Men love to talk about their power. Individuals like to think of their own influence or even their physical power and it's easy for us to glory in the authority that we have but when we stop to consider the things that we cannot do and compare that with the little that we can do we see that there is absolutely no reason for us to glory in our might. We are glorying in something that is imperfect. And when it comes to riches we all know and are seeing every day what can happen to whatever resources we might have because it doesn't take just a mighty man or a wise man or a rich man to glory in these things. We are all guilty of these things but our Lord Jesus Christ explained when He was here on earth that rust can so easily corrupt the treasures that are laid up on earth and these can so quickly vannah. The time of the last great depression in the early 1930's there were many, many men who took their own lives because their security was in their riches and they gloried in that and when that was gone they had absolutely nothing to fall back on. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this that he understandeth and knoweth me that I am the Lord which exercises lovingkindness which is an attribute, judgement or justice which is an attribute and righteousness which is a third attribute. I exercise these things in the earth for in these things I delight saith the Lord. Now here we have a clear statement of the things which God delights in and the implication of the passage is that you and I will never know what real happiness is unless we delight in the things that God delights in. And God delights in Himself therefore if we are to know real happiness we must also find our joy in Him. God delight sin His attributes in He delights in the exercise of His attributes. Now for several weeks we on Sunday morning have been considering these attributes. Let me just mention

them briefly without going into the meaning of them. We've talked about the eternity of God, about His sufficiency, about His immensity, His infinity, His omnipresence, we've talked about His holiness. We have talked about His goodness which includes His love and His grace and His mercy. We have talked about His power. We have talked about His wisdom, we have talked about His faithfulness, about His will, about His patience, about His righteousness and last Sunday we even talked about His wrath. And I certainly haven't said every thing that could be said about any of those attributes and there are probably some attributes which I should have included which I haven't although I have sought to bring to your attention the main ones. But the lesson that we have to learn from all of these attributes once we have come even to a partial understanding of them is that God is happy because He is all of these. And everyone of these attributes is found in Him in absolute perfection. Now we have divided the attributes into two groups. We have said that there are some attributes which are incommunicable meaning they are attributes which God has in Himself in which He cannot share with us and does not share with us. One for example is His eternity, another is His immensity. A third one is His self sufficiency. These are attributes which God possesses on His own. But there are other attributes which He not only manifests toward us but which He shares with us. Now you will always see them in their perfection in God. You never see them in their perfection in us. And here again I am talking about God's love. I am talking about God's grace. I am talking about God's wisdom. I am talking about God's power. I am talking about these characteristics that it is possible for us to share with God and yet we never share them in a perfect sense. The reason that God is infinitely happy and independantly happy is because He is infinitely perfect. So God's happiness is the crowning glory of all that He is and all of His results. And so if we are to glory in that which God glories in we are to glory not only in the fact that He is what He is but also in the fact that He manifests His attributes as He does. Let Him that glorieth

in this that he understandeth and knoweth me that I am the Lord. Now let's think for just a moment about some of the practical results or the importance of knowing that God is a happy God and why He is happy. And I want us to see as we look at this subject this morning the true significance or the true meaning of happiness and then as we relate it to our own lives that we can see that God Himself is the source of any true happiness that you and I are to experience. Happiness is one thing that every person is interested in. When you talk about happiness you don't have any trouble getting people to listen. We all want to be happy and nobody really enjoys being sad. And so consequently it is good to see that God is a God who is happy. And I am sure that you have lots of illustrations that you could give this morning of perhaps in your own life ways in which you have sought happiness in the wrong way and certainly as you have observed this in the lives of others. I heard recently on television a discussion about the evils of materialism. And I suppose that this was planned because at this time of the year we are all thinking in terms of giving gifts to one another with the approach of Christmas and especially giving gifts to our children. And in this discussion it was generally agreed that we give too much to our children. We give so much to our children that often after they open a Christmas gift they just cast it aside when they see what it is. Sometimes they will even express their unhappiness with something that they have received but they may cast it aside and never look at it again. Or the things that we can spend a great deal of money for may actually be broken on Christmas day and be in many instances is impossible to repair them. So I was not able to listen to all of this discussion but it seemed that the conclusion was that we just need to give our children less. And make them appreciate more of what they are receiving and perhaps spend a little more time with them ourselves. Now things like this might help temporarily but you see this is not the whole answer. Because if I merely take away and don't see that the secret of happiness or the source of happiness is never to be found in these things but it's to be found in an entirely different direction and I am not going to be

able to teach my children what the true source of happiness is. When I was in college I had a friend who from the standpoint of popularity and personal achievement he had everything. He was actually the idol of the campus. He was all conference in football and was a candidate for all American. He broke all kinds of athletic records. Physically he was one of the most handsome men I have ever known, muscular the picture of health, the girls flocked around him. He was popular with the administration of the school as well as with the student body. From a human standpoint he was all that everybody else would like to have been. But I was talking to him one day and he expressed to me as he was coming to the end of his college career his complete disillusionment and his complete unhappiness with all that he had because it had failed to bring him the one thing that he wanted more than anything else and that was happiness. I have lost track of him in the intervening years and I don't know what has happened to him but you see his problem was and this is the problem that I am sure all of us face in the trap that we all are guilty of falling in to to some degree we are looking for happiness but we are looking in the wrong place and we are looking at the wrong things. And we keep looking for happiness in the things that we have or we look for happiness in the achievements that we make and who we are. We look for happiness in the people that we know. We look for happiness in the place that we are. How many people will just pick up everything that they possess and they will just move to another location because they are unhappy in this place and they hope that they are going to be happy in some place else. Or a husband and wife will be having difficulty with each other and they are obviously unhappy and they feel that if they were only married to somebody else then they would be happy so they get a divorce and they get married to somebody else and often go through the same cycle again. All because we are not looking in the right place. Once the Lord Jesus said and I happened to read it in my daily reading this past week that a man's life consisted not in the abundance of things which he possesseth. And if you remember the occasion on which He said that and the person to whom He said it you remember that it was a man who

had come to Him who was afraid that his brother was going to take his inheritance away from him. And the Lord said I am not the judge over you in these things but I want to tell you that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth. Now evidently this man and it doesn't indicate what his age was felt that his happiness depended upon his inheritance. And if he could only get his inheritance he would be happy. And yet the Lord Jesus indicates that he could have all of that and he could even have his brother's inheritance and 10X that or a thousand times that but his inheritance would never produce happiness for him. Because happiness doesn't come that way. Now God gives us all of these things to enjoy and I would be the last one to minimize the importance of these things. God provides our needs and we are thankful for the money that He does give to us. We have had an opportunity to go to school and to be trained and to be educated so that we can lead a profitable and useful life. That's something to be thankful for. If God has put us in a place of authority or in a business where we can exercise a good influence why you see all of these things are important and all of these things must be looked upon as gifts of God. But what the Scriptures are indicating is it is possible not to have any of those things or even to have these things and then see them swept away and yet to have learned a secret of happiness so that the happiness can go on in spite of the fact that you don't have all of these things which men look upon as essential for happiness. Riches, and might and wisdom are the things that have to do with us. In this passage in Jeremiah when he speaks of lovingkindness and justice and righteousness these are the things that have to do with God. And the first wisdom and might and riches have to do with what we possess but lovingkindness and justice and righteousness have to do with what God is. So Jeremiah 9 indicates that you and I will only find true lasting happiness when we seek it in the things where God finds His delight, in the things that do not please Him will never bring happiness and joy to you and to me. And I want to take this a step further and ask you to turn to yet another passage of Scripture and this time back to the New Testament

and to the book immediately following II Timothy the book of Titus and I want to look at a very familiar passage of Scripture with you along the line of what we have been thinking. Now God is not only infinitely happy in Himself. But according to what we have seen in Jeremiah God is the source of our happiness. When I begin to learn of Him and this is one reason that learning the attributes of God is so extremely important. When I begin to learn of Him I am learning of the One who can really make me happy, who can satisfy the desires of my heart. Who is able to satisfy me even though I might not have all the props that sometimes men look upon as the source of true happiness. Now the study of words in Scripture is a very interesting study. And if you have an exhaustive concordance you don't need to know a lot of the details of the original languages to get a great deal of blessing because you can tell by the numbers at the end of the references in an exhaustive concordance just what words are being used and where the same word is being used in a similar passage and it is interesting to trace these words down. Now in looking at this subject of happiness I discovered something that I had never noticed before in a verse that I have known for many, many, many years. And I am sure that many of you have known it and that is the 13th verse of Titus 2. And I want you to see it this morning in connection with our study. The 13th verse says Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. Now we are talking this morning about the blessed God, the blessed and only Potentate. We are talking about happiness in God and we are talking about the attributes of God, the very nature of God, the knowledge of God as being the source of our happiness. That is is absolutely impossible to be truly happy, to be happy in a way that is not dependant upon your circumstances and not dependant upon your possessions and not dependant upon your achievements. It's not dependent upon all of those things. It's dependent upon God alone. So that when the Spirit of God led Paul to write to Titus about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ he called it and he used identically the same word he calls it the blessed hope. Now literally this means the happy hope. This means the hope

that for us is going to produce the ultimate in happiness regardless of how much we may experience true happiness, the happiness that comes from God, the happiness that is not dependent upon us or other people or things or circumstances but dependent upon Him alone regardless of how great our joy may be in this life. Your joy and my joy will never reach the proportions that it will when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and I am sure that every Christian listening to me this morning agrees. When we see the Lord Jesus Christ our joy is going to be full. David said long ago thou wilt show me the path of life in thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures forevermore. Now that's an Old Testament description of heaven. It may be experienced to a limited degree here on earth but here is the Apostle Paul saying that our happiness is going to be complete when our hope is realized. It's the happy hope, it is the blessed hope. It is the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. Now what's going to happen when the Lord Jesus Christ comes. Why is that going to be a blessed hope? When we talk about the happiness of God. Well I am sure that most of you can see the point. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes we are going to be caught up into the air. We are going to see the Lord Jesus Christ. We are going to be with Him then for all eternity. But even all of that is not the secret of our eternal happiness. It's going to be wonderful to see the Lord. It's going to be wonderful to be with the Lord. It's going to be wonderful to get out of this world isn't it. And some of us feel that if we could just get out of this world and get to heaven that that alone would make us happy but you see the reason the blessed hope is a happy hope is because in addition to all of these things there is going to be a marvelous transformation in you and in me. We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. And you see how this ties in with what we have been seeing in Jeremiah 9. Let him that glorieth glory in this that he understandeth and knoweth me that I am the Lord that I execute all of these things for in these things I delight. So that my greatest happiness is to be found not only in knowing Him and learning of Him here on earth but my greatest happiness is going to be experienced when I

am like Him. When I become like the Lord Jesus Christ, when I have a body fashioned like unto His glorious body according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself. And that's when my blessedness is going to be experienced to the full. Because the one who now is the source of my happiness and the one who is infinitely happy in Himself is the one who through the marvelous work of salvation is working to make every single one of us just like the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Being confident of this very thing that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Well you say how do you get in line for this. How do you have this happy hope as your hope. And the passage tells us here and let me just mention this quickly because my time is gone. The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men teaching us that denying ungodliness now let me stop; there for just a moment because ungodliness basically means anything that is not like God. So rejecting ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously and Godly in this present world. So I reject that which is unlike God and I turn to all that is like God and the only reason that I would ever do this is because the grace of God has brought salvation to me. And even in this life I find happiness when I turn from ungodliness and I turn to godliness looking for that blessed hope when by the miracle of His power and of His grace those who have received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior can look forward to that blessed hope when the work of salvation is going to be culminated and the secret of happiness and joy is going to be learned as never before when we become like Him, when we see the Lord Jesus Christ as He is. Now I just have two questions to ask as I close. One is this do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. There are lots of issues involved but let me say that you will never find the happiness that you seek until you come to know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Until your sins are forgiven, until you receive the life that only God Himself can give and that is to be found in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. There is no other way. Nobody is going to be in heaven except those who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. And if

you have been looking for happiness and satisfaction and contentment and peace in all of these other areas you are looking where at best it can only be temporary. The permanent answer is only to be found in God. And you can only know God through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. But let me ask those of you who know the Lord Jesus Christ a question. Are you denying ungodliness and worldly lusts and seeking by the grace of God to live soberly, righteously, Godly in this present world looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. Or have we fallen into the trap of the world and are we saying at least to ourselves if I could only be there, if I could only accomplish this, if I could only have that, if I could only get acquainted with this person, if, if, if. And I am living my life in those things that can never satisfy, things that do not please God, things that I am warned against in Scripture and I have lost sight of the fact that my chief purpose on earth is to get better and better acquainted with the God who redeemed me through the death of His Son and daily to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him. Looking for that happy hope when one day when the Lord Jesus returns I am going to be transported from this world of sorrow and unhappiness and broken hearts and sin caught up into His presence to see Him face to face, to be with Him for all eternity and most amazing of all to be like Him for I will see Him as He is. O may God in His wonderful grace move upon our hearts this morning. I don't know what your particular need may be but I know from my own experience so easy for us to turn from the One and the only One who is able to satisfy the deepest needs of our hearts and give us that joy which stands steady through all the trials and testings of our lives. It's so easy for us to lose sight of Him and to turn to things that never satisfy or profit. May God cause us to remember that God Himself has said that remember my lovingkindness and my justice and my righteousness for these are the things that I delight in and to the extent to which we delight in all that God is we will experience the joy and the peace and the happiness which only He can give.