

Title: Fighting “pleasure” with Pleasure
Text: Hebrews 11.5-7
Theme: Faith-driven fight for pleasure
Series: Hebrews #37
Prop Stmtnt The heart of faith is banking on the fact that God is our ultimate source of pleasure.

Read Text:

Genesis 5.1-24; Hebrews 11.5-7

Verse 3 tells us that God made the universe and everything in it by the sheer power of his Word. George Gilder, author of *Wealth and Poverty*, in a recent interview said, “*The essence of Darwinian thought is that at the beginning is matter and everything else that happens derives from a random selection among random mutations in material systems. Darwinian Theory is just another materialist theory. There are tons of them – Marxism, Darwinism, and Freudianism (based on the pleasure principle which is basically a materialistic concept). All these theories have collapsed in the 21st century. Creation is a fact. The entire universe is oriented to produce creative human beings in the image of their Creator. His presence pervades it. All of the universe is perfectly designed, in some sense, to support human minds.*”

Gilder is simply pointing out the obvious. In order for evolution to be true, one has to argue for the eternity of matter. When you accept the falsehood of the eternity of matter, then of course, matter (or stuff) has just become your god (materialism). There are two problems with this. One is factual and the other is experiential. The fact is, matter is not eternal – God is. The other problem is that stuff does not satisfy. Living for stuff is like drinking salt water. It only makes you thirstier. Only God can make your soul sing. You were made by God for God and nothing else will do. The relatively recent discovery and decoding of DNA has added another colossal amplifier that overwhelms Darwinism with decibels that scream Intelligent Design. Game, set match, the evolutionary game is over. It’s only a matter of time.

We understand (v.3) that what is seen (the universe) was made out of that which is unseen (the voice of God). Therefore, we are people who do not put our hope in what is seen (stuff, here and now), but in what is unseen (God’s commands and yet to be fulfilled promises). The here and now is appealing to us and calls to us, but we do not live by it and we are not defined by it. We live for Someone and something greater.

For example, let’s say that you go into a movie theater and instantly you smell the popcorn. For many of you that smell brings about a reaction of desire. It smells so good and you want it. The smell promises you the pleasure of taste and the pleasure of taste is very powerful. However, if your cholesterol level is dangerously high and you know that a large tub of movie theater popcorn contains 1,200 calories and 60 grams of artery clogging fat, and you know that if you do not bring your cholesterol level down that you are going to have serious cardiac issues, perhaps even death. Now, that still may not be

enough motivation for you, because you may be thinking, “Hey, what a way to go” or “I’d rather die on popcorn than tofu.” But, let’s say that in 10 months, your daughter is getting married and you want to walk her down the aisle and give her away and you want to enjoy that event as a participant and not as one who only gets to see the pictures, then this is what you do. Smell the popcorn. Take note of its promises. It promises pleasure. It promises satisfaction. It promises enjoyment. But then you compare that tub of popcorn with the anticipated delight of your daughter’s wedding. You are her dad. There is no one else on that day that should walk her down the aisle but you. She needs and wants to hear from you how proud you are of her, how beautiful she is, how blessed you are, how delighted you are, how grateful you are for this day. When the minister asks, who gives this woman to be married to this man, you need to be there to say, “Her mother and I.” And then to be with your wife as you two launch her and blow the wind beneath her wings – how does that compare to a tub of popcorn? What happens when you consider the promised, the anticipated, the yet to be fulfilled Pleasure of your daughter’s wedding against the pleasure of movie theater popcorn? The popcorn no longer has quite the same grip does it? Even though you can see the popcorn with your eyes and smell it with your nose you cannot see your daughter in her wedding dress, or the many friends and guests who have come to enjoy this day with you. The one is here and now, and the other is future. The here and now is trivial, inconsequential, even distracting and potentially dangerous to what really matters. That analogy helps you understand what Hebrews 11 (even this book) is all about. This is an example of what it means to live by faith.

Faith is that which securely fastens the believer to the reality of the promise of God that has not yet been seen because it has not yet been fulfilled.

When we live by faith, we are choosing to consider the yet to be fulfilled word of God to be more important, more precious and way more pleasurable than the pleasures of living for the here and now. This reality of finding ultimate pleasure in God is something that we really ought to make a big deal about, because it really is a big deal. I am convinced that it is much more difficult to fully grasp the grace of God than even the wrath of God. Christianity is being destroyed by cheap, plastic grace. Understanding God’s righteous wrath destroys cheap grace and then prepares you to consider his awesome grace. Now, last Sunday I had intended to preach on verses 5 and 6 but never made it that far and I am glad because as I thought on this text some more this week I realized some aspects to it that I had not yet considered. When you look at most of the people in this chapter, they are listed here because they gave up something now, for something greater in the future. In many cases, their lives were defined more by the giving up part and they died not yet having received what they were promised (39). **But, the emphasis of faith is not on the giving up part (saying no to the popcorn), but the emphasis of faith is looking for and longing for the fulfillment (wedding).** And that is why I think that the AH draws our attention to Enoch. What did Enoch give up? What sacrifice did he make? The text really doesn’t point one out – does it? So, why is he in this list?

The brief account of Enoch’s life is told in Genesis 5. In the scant and short verses that describe him, we are told twice that “Enoch walked with God.” This man brought the Lord great pleasure. Think of this. The very reason that God made the universe was so he

would have a place in which to hang the earth. The reason he made the earth was so that he would have a place in which to put people. The reason that he made people was so that God's pleasure and enjoyment at being God could be shared and enjoyed by more. You can go to the finest art gallery and be amazed at skill on display. You can go to the finest restaurant and be impressed with the cuisine. You can go hear the finest orchestra or finest band or watch an exciting football game, or go to Cedar Point and ride all of the big ones. But, if you do it all by yourself it is not the same as doing it with other people. When you see an amazing catch, why is it that you instinctively turn to others and say, "Wow, did you see that?" When you taste a premium piece of steak, do you not want to share that with someone? Or at the end of a glorious concert, do you not look at others next to you and enjoy standing with them and applauding with all of your strength? The rides at Cedar Point are great, but when you do it with others and raise your arms and scream in their ears on the way down the Millennium Force it is exponentially greater. The enjoyment of something is not as great as it could be until that enjoyment is shared with others. Beloved, God enjoys being God. God has incredible pleasure being God. He made us so that we could enter into a relationship with him so personal that he can share his pleasure of being God along with us. Creation is God going, "Here, taste this – isn't that good? Here, watch this – isn't that amazing? Here, do this – wasn't that fun?" God made us to enjoy Him and nothing else will satisfy us like Him. Now, we try all sorts of things instead of God. We try to replace him by making idols out of the gifts that he has given us, but while they are capable of giving some pleasure, they cannot provide the real Pleasure that comes from walking with him. Enoch got it. Enoch walked with God. Beloved, I am convinced that God decided to use Enoch as an example of what his intention was with us all along.

Death was not part of the original creation. Death is only a "natural" part of life because of sin, but it was not always this way. So, to be technical, death is not natural in the ultimate sense. I believe that Enoch is included in Hebrews 11 because Enoch lived in a way that illustrates what God has desired all along. Enoch walked with God, that is, Enoch lived in such a way that he pleased God because he pursued God, and communicated with God and believed God and trusted God and enjoyed God, which of course, only expanded God's pleasure at being God.

Now, before you say, "Well that was long ago and far away and things like that don't happen any more" – hold the phone! Why is Enoch in Hebrews 11? Because he lived by faith and God took great delight in his faith. Enoch's faith put God's glory on display. In Enoch's enjoyment of God, he only increased God's enjoyment of being God. Enoch's desire to be with God only increased God's pleasure in his goodness. It did not increase God's goodness, but Enoch's faith increased God's enjoyment of his goodness.

Ok, let's say that you are a grandfather and your grandson says to you one day, "Papa, I don't care what we do. I just want to be with you." You would give him the world – wouldn't you? Why? Because even though you enjoy being a grandfather, now your enjoyment of being grandfather was just increased exponentially. You see, in Enoch's case, he did not sacrifice, or give up something like others because there was something in the way of him believing God. Perhaps he did and the text does not say. Clearly, if

there was something that would have potentially blocked his enjoyment of God, he would have gotten rid of it. But, Enoch was so convinced of the reality of God and the goodness of God that he lived his life daily banking on God and God through Enoch's life shows us what he intended for us all along. Which is why this is such a perfect spot to spell out for us the critical nature and role of faith.

The Essential Nature of Faith – (6)

1. **Faith is the only possible means that we have to please God.**

Here's why

a. **Faith makes much of the object of faith.**

Have you ever bought a jersey of a player who turned out to either disappoint you, or went to another team? When Lebron James was signed by the Cavaliers, he was going to save the city by saving the team. The team, the organization, the entire city esteemed him greatly because they looked to him to do what they had here-to-fore not been able to do themselves. By trusting in his ability they made much of him, which only set them up for such bitterness when he announced that he was leaving Cleveland in order to join Miami.

Whatever you put your faith in, whatever you are relying upon, whatever is bearing your confidence, or whatever you are looking to in order to supply you with the encouragement or strength, or confidence, to accomplish a task is, by the very nature of your trusting and your dependence something that you are elevating and esteeming. You esteem and honor that which you put your faith in. You are demonstrating by your hoping in, that you consider the object of your faith to provide something that you cannot. Now, this is a good place to stop and ask, "What is it that you put your faith in to help you make it through life?" Think about that. When you are under pressure, what do you turn to? What do you think you have to have in order to calm your nerves? The way you answer that will help you identify the real object of your faith. The question is, is that object of your faith, really worth you making much of? There is only One who is worth your complete trust and affection. All others are imitators and imposters.

Before faith is in operation, a person must recognize that they have a problem that they cannot solve on their own. This problem reveals the need for someone else to come into the picture and fix the problem. That is why faith in God is the logical, necessary, heart-driven and worshipful response of the needy, broken, empty, sinner, expressing confidence in and complete reliance upon God as the only One who can save and save completely to the uttermost. Faith makes much of the object of faith and since God is the ultimate Being of goodness and glory and the ultimate supplier of relationship and forgiveness and the ultimate restorer of brokenness, then faith in God is making much of the only One who is truly worthy of making much of. He will never leave you, so when you put on his jersey, you will never have to worry about him leaving town. The other part of this is that...

b. **Faith destroys self-sufficiency**

I do not need faith if I have do not have any problems. A few weeks ago I blogged about the news that the outspoken and arrogant atheist, Christopher Hitchens has cancer. He is facing a problem that he cannot fix. His own body, the object of his trust has turned against itself and is destroying itself. Therefore, he is need of a savior from outside of him. So, he has put his faith in chemotherapy. In order to do that Christopher has had to give up on the idea that he can save himself, though it remains to be seen whether the goddess of chemo will be able to save his body for a few more months or years. He is willing to believe in chemo, but not willing to believe in God, because that would demand that he give up, what he perceives is his right to rule his own life.

Faith in God is the obliteration of self-rule and self-reliance. Faith in God is the acknowledging that I cannot do this on my own and I need you. And beloved, that is the actual truth of our condition. We are finite, sinful creatures. We need the infinite, righteous Creator. And what is so glorious about all of this, is that the infinite and righteous Creator is infinite in mercy and so generous with his righteousness, that he became part of his own creation in the person of Jesus Christ and lived on this earth in order to live the life that we could not live and then died on the cross in order to pay in full the penalty of our sin, so that all who repent of their sin and come to him by faith, that is, who believe in what he has done in their place are forgiven of their sin and declared righteous. We become part of the people of God, only by faith, because God's people are those who do not trust in themselves but instead, trust in God. The other thing that is so glorious about this is that God wants to be trusted. God delights in being depended upon. Sometimes you get weary when people always look to you to do the job, have the answers or fix the problem. Right mom? How many of you mom's wonder, what would happen around this house if I wasn't here to keep everything together? Well, if it's anything like my house, it wouldn't be pretty if you weren't around. But, the weight of those constant expectations can be draining. Why are they draining? Because you are not God. But, they are not draining to God because he is God and he delights in the glad dependence of his children.

He made us as dependent creatures to rely upon Him and when we rely upon him by taking him at his word, and by talking with him and relating with him, and enjoying him we are not making him more glorious, we are simply adding to his enjoyment of his glory as God. Faith is the only possible means to please God because (#2)....

2. **Faith is necessary in order to draw near to God.** (6b)

“for whoever would draw near to God...”

That is exactly what we need. That is exactly what, in reality we were made for. We are never at rest, nor at home until we are fully absorbed in the mercy and life of God. Every need that we have for forgiveness, atonement, redemption, soul-cleansing, shame-removal, guilt-absorption has been provided for by Christ. Every longing that we have for love, acceptance, belonging, participation, camaraderie, and involvement is provided for us by Christ. Every capacity that we have for amazement, for creativity, for worship and

for beauty is filled by God. Every need that we have for security, confidence, joy and hope is ours in Christ. The reality is, we need to draw near to God. If we do not draw near to God we shrivel and die. But, to draw near to God, we have to have faith because...

a. Faith is necessary to believe in God

“must believe that he exists”

You have to believe that he exists. Your believing does not make him exist. He exists whether or not you believe him, but believing gives you eyes to see the invisible, that is faith enables you to live now as if you can see what it is that you will see. Now be careful here. It takes faith to believe in God as He has already revealed himself. This is the God who has spoken to us through his Son (1.1).

b. Faith is necessary to believe that God is good

“and that he rewards those who seek him.”

In order for you to have a relationship with God, you have to believe in your heart of hearts that God is telling you the truth, and that God has always and will always tell you the truth. Relationships of any type are based upon trust. Therefore, an intimate relationship is based upon the highest and deepest trust possible. Deep trust can only come from confidence in God's goodness. When you believe that God is the rewarder (lit. paymaster) of those who seek him, that means that you believe that God is fundamentally good and therefore will respond in goodness and joy toward those who pursue him. What is the good that he rewards with? What is the gift that God gives to those who seek him? God gives the greatest to those who seek him, and that greatest is himself.

He is worth believing because he does what he says he is going to do. He is worth believing because he delivers what he promises. He is worth believing because his Word cannot be stopped.

Now, what is your popcorn that calls you and tempts you? And how does that stack up against the Wedding when we stand before our King? What will we on that day wish that we believed on this day? On that day, when you see how good God really is, and how there is nothing that he is that is worth your resentment, bitterness, our doubt, and your heart is overwhelmed with his mercy, how will you on that day, wish that you had responded on this day?

Today, there is a young pastor (30's), who lives in Iran and serves several small congregations. He is married and has two children and has been arrested and charged with apostasy from the Islam faith because of his commitment to the gospel. He is scheduled to be hanged in 19 days, unless he returns to Islam. How could this young husband and father accept that verdict given all that he stands to lose? All that he stands to lose, pales in comparison to what he cannot lose – forever.

Little pleasure vs. Eternal Pleasure (Psalm 16.11 – memorize and meditate)