

"What Makes God Smile?"
Guest Speaker: Tom Rodenberg
Selected Scriptures

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. I like questions that get me thinking. The one before us this morning was posed in a book that took the Christian community by storm when it was published. Most churches I heard of were going through the 40 day study of Pastor Rick Warren's book, *Purpose Driven Life*. In that book, in chapter 9, Pastor Warren poses this most interesting question – "What Makes God Smile?" Isn't that a good thought provoking question. It's quite a thought to think of God smiling.
- B. To heighten the significance of his question, the first sentence of the chapter is, "The smile of God is the goal of your life." That's his premise in chapter 9, the smile of God is the goal of your life. That kind of statement really gets me thinking. The thought of God smiling is quite a thought. But when he says that is THE goal of my life is to make God smile, I really start thinking.
- C. You may think that sounds a little flippant as you think about God. God is not like us. He doesn't have a mouth. The question reduces God down to man. Or you may think it's a very catchy little idea to sell books, but there isn't any biblical support for the question. But you know, I think Pastor Warren is onto something with this question and his statement. I think Pastor Warren has used a great word picture to give us some deep food for Christian thought.
- D. Think about it with me. We know why we smile. We are pleased with something. We have seen something that makes us happy, that causes us to feel good about something. The smile is a beautiful image of something that is pleasing, something that satisfies us, that fills us with joy. When God blesses you in some way, I bet you smile. When you are pleased with something that happens with your children, I bet you smile. When someone does something for you that blesses you, I bet you smile. When we are pleased, a big smile often comes across our face. It means we are happy about something, that we are pleased with something or someone. A smile is a very visible indication of pleasure.
- E. That is where Pastor Warren takes us with this question. He uses a person from the Old Testament with whom God expressly says He was PLEASED. That's

what Pastor Warren is getting at with the question. By the use of a perfect word picture, one we would understand very well, Pastor Warren is more biblically asking each of us, "What Makes God Pleased?" If a smile is the picture of being pleased, and I think that it is, I should be concerned to make it my goal in this life to make God smile, to make it my goal to please Him. What satisfies God and fills him with joy so that he smiles at my life?

- F. Pastor Warren's premise stated in more precise biblical terms would be THE GOAL OF YOUR LIFE IS TO PLEASE GOD. In fact, in the New Testament, we are expressly told that the goal of our life is to please God. It is found in II Cor chapter 5. After reminding the Corinthians about life after death and that great truth that one day we will all be with God forever, Paul reaches this conclusion, "Therefore, we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." II Cor. 5:9. The NIV translates it in this way, "So, we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it."
- G. See, Pastor Warren is onto something with his question. God tells us that the goal of our life, whether alive or dead, is to please Him. The word "goal" is a compound word made up of love and something of high value or honor. Put together, the two words are also translated "ambition" or "goal". One translation says "constantly ambitious", another "try our best", and one says "our only goal". The compound word is one of strong drive, borderline obsession with something. God tells us that there is something that must be our goal in this life, something for which we must constantly strive, to do our best, to be obsessed to make sure we reach this goal. That goal, expressly stated, is to "please Him".
- H. Interestingly, the word "please" is a compound word. In Greek, compound words are used for emphasis, or to make an idea even more forceful. It is made up of the prefix eu which means "good" and the Greek word for "please". The goal of our life should be to be good pleasing to God. To be really pleasing. There is a single word for pleasing and it was not used here. To make a greater point, God had Paul use the compound word for pleasing. The goal of our lives should be to be really pleasing to God. To make God smile at how we live, to bring Him great pleasure as we go through this life and, as Paul points out, even beyond this life.
- I. As I mentioned earlier, Pastor Warren uses an Old Testament person to help us understand what it takes to please God with our lives. He does so because of this person, God specifically states that He was pleased. We will all know this person very well. Here is what God said, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of

the Lord.” For our theme this morning, I like the New Century translation, “But Noah pleased the Lord.”

- J. Noah becomes a perfect example for us when you think about the background to God’s statement about him. We all know the story. It is found in Genesis 6. The people God created had become so sinful and evil that God was fed up with the whole world. Listen to how fed up God was with the world he had created. READ Genesis 6:5-7. Wow. Now that is fed up! He was so fed up he was crying, grieving, in pain, sorry for what He had created. So sorry, grieved, in pain, that He intended to destroy the entire creation.
- K. In a world that was filled with sin and evil, a world that was making God cry, God found someone he could smile about. When God decided to bring a worldwide judgment on mankind which was so great that it would wipe out all of mankind, God was pleased with one person, a person who surely made him smile, and his grace was extended to that person and his family. In Noah, Pastor Warren finds a living illustration of what it takes to make God smile.
- L. Pastor Warren shares five things he sees in the life of Noah that make God smile. Some are by inference and some by direct statement of God. I am going to take those five statements and look to the NT for some extra emphasis. I hope you don’t find any of them to be a surprise to you. I hope this is simply a good reminder to each of us about what makes God smile.

II. LOVE GOD SUPREMELY.

- A. The first way we make God smile is really an inference from the life of Noah. In Noah, God found a person who was righteous, who possessed godly character, who faithfully walked with God. God smiled at Noah because Noah LOVED GOD SUPREMELY. That’s what it takes to make God smile. We must love him supremely. There must be no greater love in our lives than our love for God. It is our love for God that will result in following him in a world which would point us in a thousand other directions. It was no doubt Noah’s love for God that resulted in God finding pleasure in Noah, in a smile from God, in a world that was completely dominated by sin and evil. Noah loved God supremely and faithfully lived for him.
- B. As I mentioned, I hope it comes as no big surprise that we must love God supremely to make Him smile. Jesus himself made this point very clearly. When the Pharisees sought to trip him up, they asked him what was the greatest commandment in the Law. He responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your

strength.” (Mk. 12:30). Jesus said this was the greatest and foremost commandment. There is nothing greater that we can do than to love God supremely, with our whole being, with all that we are, even with all of the human strength we can must. No matter what befalls us and no matter what the world would put before us to replace God, we must love him supremely. That makes God smile.

- C. Jesus would teach this same truth in perhaps an even more dramatic way to his disciples. As He prepares to send them out to spread the gospel, He gives them some direct instructions on how to proceed. Listen to these words of preparation for ministry. READ Matthew 10:24-27. Did you hear it? If you love father and mother or even your own children more than God, you are not worthy of being His disciple, His follower. That’s a pretty direct truth for us. If we don’t love God supremely, more than anything in life, even parents and children, we cannot make God smile.
- D. Loving God supremely is hard in the devil’s world. Our world seeks to turn our affections to many other things. It seems much easier to love money, work, pleasure, and a whole host of other earthly things including even maybe other people. It’s hard to love God supremely in our day. But that is what will make God smile. When the one who created us sees our supreme love for Him. Seeing the love of someone for us is certainly enough to make us smile. The same is true for God.

III. TRUST GOD COMPLETELY.

- A. There is another characteristic we see in the life of Noah that certainly makes God smile. It comes out rather dramatically in the life of Noah. God told Noah that he was going to destroy the world by a great flood of water. Noah, build a really big ship so you, your family, and the animals will survive. And Noah did it. There is some dispute about how long it took him. The outside suggestion is that it took him 120 years. I saw another estimate of 2-3 years. Seems like it would have taken a lot longer than 2-3 years. It surely took him years to build it. He kept on building when year after year there was not one serious indication of a flood coming along. I would imagine that the people watching him, and maybe even his family, gave him quite a lot of grief. Noah, what in the world are you doing. For me, sometimes waiting on God 2-3 hours seems like eternity.
- B. But Noah was doing something that really makes God smile. Noah was TRUSTING GOD COMPLETELY. Noah lived by faith. The writer of Hebrews points that out. “By faith Noah, when warned by God about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world

and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” (Heb. 11:7). Noah lived his life by trusting God completely. Noah believed that God would keep his word. Noah trusted God completely to protect him from the great flood. Noah trusted God when to do so might seem completely absurd.

- C. God smiles when we trust him completely. The writer of Hebrews tells us this. He writes, “without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Heb. 11:6). Without faith, we can’t make God smile. John MacArthur puts it this way: “Faith is not simply one way to please God; it is the only way.” (*Hebrews*, p. 289). Faith requires that we believe that God is who he says he is and will do what he has said he will do. That’s how Noah lived and he found favor with God. He made God smile.
- D. Faith makes God smile because it is the indication that we are drawing close to him. The only way to have a relationship with God is faith. It is the only way we can demonstrate our love and devotion to a God we have never seen or met. We show our supreme love for him by our faith, by our complete trust in a God we have never seen. Hebrews chapter 11 makes this clear. The author points to those who lived by faith in spite of all the odds. They were people who made God smile and who experienced his great blessing.
- E. This is another tall order in our day. We may talk of our trust in God as long as all goes well. But what about trust in God when the hard times come? When a job is lost and a new job just is not coming along. Trusting God when a deep recession turns finances into a big disaster and God just doesn’t seem to be responding to a plea for help. It is easy to trust God when things are going our way. But what about when God tells us to build an ark and for 120 years not one drop of rain falls?
- F. God smiles when we trust him completely, no matter what the circumstance, good or bad. When we believe that he is working all things together for good, that he is working his will no matter how bad things may be or look. God smiles when we trust him completely with our lives.

IV. OBEY GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY.

- A. There is a third thing we see in the life of Noah that made God smile. It too is very clear in the story in Genesis. Noah, build an ark, make it big, bring in the animals two by two, and I will protect you and make a covenant with you. “Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.” (Gen. 6:22). Noah, take clean animals by seven, take two of the unclean animals, birds take by sevens. “And Noah did according to all that the Lord had

commanded him.” (Gen. 7:5). Saving the entire animal population of that day would require great attention to detail. Noah did not waiver from what God told him to do. He did all that God called him to do and he did it exactly as God had instructed him. The Scripture expressly notes that Noah obeyed God wholeheartedly.

- B. God smiles when we OBEY GOD WHOLEHEARTEDLY. God was pleased when he saw Noah’s complete commitment to obey what God had told him. God must have smiled. We show that same smile when our children obey us. That’s the idea. We smile, and God smiles, because obeying wholeheartedly is the clear evidence of our love for God.
- C. Jesus would likewise make this very clear with his disciples. In his final meeting with the disciples, hours before his death, when he was giving them final instructions on how to live in his absence, he repeatedly told them, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (Jn. 14:15). He would tell the disciples, “he who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” (Jn. 14:21). He would also tell them, “You are my friends, if you do what I command you.” (Jn. 15:14). John got the message. John would write, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments”. (I Jn. 5:3). Obeying what God has asked us to do shows our love for him and causes him to smile.
- D. I also like the statement of Jesus in Luke 11:28. Jesus had just done a great miracle and delivered a crushing argument against those who suggested he did so by the power of demons. In the presence of such a awesome display of power and authority by Jesus, a woman in the crowd yells out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” This woman, perhaps a mother, was just overwhelmed with the thought of being the mother of Jesus. To her, that would have been perhaps the greatest blessing of life. Jesus had a quick response, “On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and observe it.” Blessing in life, happiness in life, making God smile in life, comes from obeying Him wholeheartedly.
- E. Don’t miss the “wholeheartedly” part. Noah didn’t question. He didn’t offer God partial obedience. He didn’t pick and choose the commands of God that he wanted to follow and those he did not want to follow. Partial obedience is disobedience. It can’t be I’ll attend church, but I won’t share in the fellowship. I’ll help around the church, but don’t expect me to give any money. It can’t be I’ll take time to pray, but not for that person I just can’t seem to forgive. God smiles when we obey his word wholeheartedly.

V. SERVE GOD FAITHFULLY.

- A. Pastor Warren pointed to another quality that made God smile at the life of Noah. He put it slightly differently. I put it this way, God smiles when we SERVE HIM FAITHFULLY. Noah knew God's will for his family and the world of animals of his day and he unselfishly served God for the good of others. That's what serving is. It is giving of ourselves for the benefit of others. That is precisely what Noah did. He faithfully served God by building the ark for the benefit of others.
- B. God smiles when we serve Him faithfully, when we give our lives for the good of others. He smiles because he sees Christ in us when we serve. Remember the words of Christ, "Even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:45). In that final meeting with his disciples, his first message to them was by a powerful object lesson. He washed their feet and called upon them to wash one another's feet. It was a powerful illustration of what it takes to make God smile. It takes serving him faithfully by giving of ourselves for the benefit of others.
- C. As we know, God has given each of us a spiritual gift. God commands us through Peter, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." 1 Peter 4:10. It makes God smile when we serve others with the gifts he has given us.
- D. Faithfully is the big key. Above all, God tells us that a servant must be found faithful. Paul tells us that in 1 Corinthians 4:2. After pointing out his role as a servant, Paul tells us that it is required of a servant that one be found faithful. Some give of themselves for awhile, while its convenient, or give for people who inspire us to give because they are so deserving. That is not how Christ served. He gave of himself for his enemies. He served God by humbling himself to the point of letting others put him to death. Christ lived to do God's will, to serve him faithfully. When we do the same, we give God reason to smile.

VI. PRAISE GOD CONTINUALLY.

- A. Noah did something once the waters were gone and he could get out of the ark which gave God a reason to smile. We find it in chapter 8 of Genesis. "Noah built an altar to the Lord and . . . offered burnt offerings on the altar." (Gen. 8:20). The Lord smelled the aroma of the sacrifices and promised to never again curse the ground in spite of the sinfulness of mankind. God smelled the sacrifice and was pleased with Noah.
- B. We make God smile when we PRAISE HIM CONTINUALLY. No shortage of calls to praise in the Psalms. "I will extol You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your

name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. Ps. 145:1-3. David wrote, "I will praise the name of the God with song, and shall magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it will please the Lord." (Ps. 69:30-31). The repeated call from the Psalms is to praise the Lord.

- C. The call is the same in the New Testament. We are told that in everything, good or bad, we should be people of praise, people who give thanks to God. (I Th. 5:18). We are to bring our prayers to God with an attitude of thanksgiving. (Phil. 4:6). We are to come together with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in our hearts. (Col. 3:16). We are to be people who continually give God our praise and thanksgiving.
- D. The basis for our praise is who God is and what he has done and does. Once again, this is very clear from the Psalms. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. For his lovingkindness is everlasting." (Ps. 118:1). Many of the Psalms recite the works of the Lord on behalf of his people as a basis for praise and thanksgiving. We often hear the same as people in our day and time praise God for what he has done. The culmination of this age will find the great multitudes in heaven giving praise to God.
- E. Once again, the key is "continually". Praise cannot be a part time activity. It can't be limited to when things are going well. Ours is to be an attitude of gratitude and praise always in all things. When we live that kind of life, we will be pleasing to God, we will make him smile.

I. CONCLUSION.

- A. What a great question. What makes God smile? What does it take to please God? That's the truth behind the picture of making God smile. How should we live if we hope to please God, to make him smile. We must love God supremely, trust God completely, obey God wholeheartedly, serve God faithfully and praise God continually. I would dare say that if we could take those five statements and live them, we would make God smile really big.
- B. As I thought about the goal, the Spirit took my thoughts to what is the goal of the goal? Why should making God smile be the goal of my life? We could all probably think of several reasons. How about two real obvious ones to motivate us to achieve our goal.
 - 1. I want to start with the most obvious one first. It is found in the Scripture which supports the goal of making God smile. Look at the very next verse.

READ II Cor 5:10. We should make it our strong ambition to please God because of the ETERNAL REWARD that awaits those who do. God is very clear. While works could never save us, we are saved to good works and will be judged for our works to be given an eternal reward. I kind of wish we could get our minds around eternity in a more real way.

2. The second goal of our goal is perhaps less directly stated in God's Word, but very real nonetheless. I would suggest to you that another very important goal of making God smile is ABUNDANT LIVING. Isn't that what Jesus tells us. He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. He came to enable us to really find joy in life, to really make the most of the days God has given us. Jesus also taught the disciples that blessed, happy is the person who hears God's Word and does it. It seems to me the key to an abundant life could easily be found in loving God supremely, trusting God completely, obeying God wholeheartedly, serving God faithfully, and praising God continually.
- C. It's quite a thought that we can make God smile. I like the way that Pastor Warren concludes the chapter with challenging us to refocus in light of the goal to make God smile. He reminds us that our focus should not be how much pleasure are we getting out of life, but how much pleasure is God getting out of my life. I think Pastor Warren used a fantastic word picture to help us understand how we should live. I agree with Pastor Warren. It should be the goal of our lives - to make God smile. Let's pray.