

September 28, 2025

“Is God Your Delight?”

Isaiah 58:1-5 (really, whole chapter)

Intro:

In his book, “What’s So Amazing About Grace?”, Philip Yancey tells a story that was given to him by a social worker friend of his. This social worker had come across a prostitute in Chicago who was so desperate to support her own drug habit, that she was not only selling her own body for sex, but was also selling her daughter. It is a horrible story for a person to read and is unimaginable (even though true), but the story doesn’t end there. In the sessions of counselling, this friend of Yancey’s, seeing the deep hopelessness and self-hatred in this woman asked her if she had ever thought about going to church (the social worker knowing that the deep healing this woman needed could only be found in Christ). Her reply? “Church? Why would I go there, I already feel bad enough about myself.”

The point that Yancey was trying to make in retelling this story is that the one place where it should be expected that people could go to find non-judgmental grace, is the one place people are least likely to find it.

I do realize that my summary here does fall somewhat short of the whole of what Yancey was saying (he used a whole book, whereas I am only using a few sentences), but there is some truth in that story about how people view the Christian Church, and they are not necessarily always wrong.

In many cases, Christians have made pointing out the wrongs and sins of other people the focus of their worship. In many other cases, and on the other end of the spectrum, Christians have lost the truth and wonder of grace by effectively teaching that there is no sin in our lives because everyone can be forgiven, which really boils down to saying that since there is no sin, there is no need for grace to cover it.

Both extremes are, I believe, missing the mark of God's goodness, love, grace, and what it really means to worship Him. In Isaiah 58, we find a call to bring us away from the extremes and into the place where God's heart truly lies.

Let's take a closer look at what Isaiah is telling us.

The Passage;;

Verse 1 begins with the instruction from God to Isaiah to preach with boldness: "Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast. Shout aloud! Don't be timid. Tell my people Israel of their sins!"

I want to pause here for just a moment. This is the instruction to Isaiah on how he is to deliver this message. There are not a lot of places in Scripture where God tells his messengers (the preachers, prophets, and teachers) to be this vocal in proclaiming the message He is giving to them. What will follow must be something of great importance, something that the people need to listen to. Isaiah is to do everything he can to make sure that his words are heard – in this case. We have to be careful as Christians, especially if we have any voice in a public setting, not to take this instruction out of context. This is not a word from God that gives us permission to go out and assume the role of judge of character and sin, loudly pointing out where we think everyone else is going wrong and just exactly what those wrongs are. Jesus is the one who will judge the world and the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts of sin.

However, if we do feel that this specific instruction to Isaiah as to how he is to communicate also applies to us, then we have to be very careful to look at the message that Isaiah has been given to proclaim because that then also becomes the message we are to proclaim. I would suggest, however, that we might already have our hands full in heeding the message for ourselves and in striving to live as Isaiah will instruct.

So what is the message that Isaiah is to be yelling and shouting about? It is about worship. The sin that God is singling out here is not about bad behaviour or foul

language or dating or marriage or honesty or any other number of sins that we could easily identify as problems with people in our world today. The sin has to do with how God's people are approaching worship.

Isaiah is speaking to people who have been putting on a show of worship. They are making a production of prayer and fasting, of looking the part of pious and good people. All the while, they are turning their heads toward God and saying "look at me and how good I am at doing this wonderful worship of you!" But God sees this as the sham that it is. On the surface, they all look like good God worshippers, like good Christians if you will, but under the surface, behind the scenes, they are fighting and quarrelling and being quick to oppress and condemn others whom they believe are beneath them. This is not worship, God says. Nothing in that behaviour shows others, let alone God, that He matters to them. God says it is all selfish behaviour. It is the worship of self, not worship of God. It might sound right, it might be passionate, it might get you all fired up and make you think and feel that you are doing something that matters, but God sees that it is all false. It is a sin against Him.

Instead, God says – and this is not the only time or place that God articulates what He is looking for in worship – instead, God says that the fasting and worship that pleases Him is the kind that treats others with kindness. It is the kind of worship that puts the needs of others ahead of the needs and accolades of the self. If you read verses 6-10, you will find that it involves freeing people from oppression and the burden of the chains that bind them. This is Old Testament language that doesn't always feel like it fits in our modern world, but Christians are still oppressing others and laying on them heavy chains. These are not items of physical work or restraint, but of spiritual judgement and judgement of sin. God says here to ease up on that. People cannot be free from their sin, cannot experience God's grace in their lives, if they do not first encounter grace and freedom from God's people.

Conclusion:

I titled this sermon “Is God Your Delight?” This is both a question and a challenge. The verses in Isaiah 6-10 clarify what God is asking of us, but also give the promise of His presence when we live such grace-giving lives of worship. They help us to answer the question. They tell us what it looks like to say “yes, God is my delight”.

Worshipping God means pursuing His agenda, not our own. It means seeking to honor God with our lives, and not to use our relationship with Him as a means to elevate our own self-importance. It means to enjoy God without any ulterior personal motivation. (verse 13)

Then, Isaiah promises in verse 14, God truly will be your delight. When that happens, honestly and truly, He will satisfy your needs and will give you great honor, honor that is tied to His name and not to your own.

Maybe the question for us this morning should not just be “Is God Your Delight?”, but “How will you delight in God?”

Let’s pray.