

Matthew 3:13-17

Our age could be called an “age of pleasure.” From the pictures on our walls, to the food we eat, we typically surround ourselves with what pleases us. We like things that are pleasing to the eye; aromas that are pleasant to smell; tastes that give pleasure to our mouth. And not only do we like to please ourselves—we want others to be pleased with us. And so we put on deodorant. We dress ourselves with the latest styles, and conduct ourselves decently out in public. Does it work? Are others pleased with us? Perhaps. But a far more important question is...“is God pleased with us?”

We may be able to cover up foul odors with Scope, Right Guard, and Irish Spring, but God sees us from the inside. He is not fooled by what we wear and how we act in public. He knows us as we are in our heart and mind—and that thought should be quite sobering. “Is God pleased with me?” Let’s answer that question this morning on the basis of our text.

It might be interesting to take a survey of people using our question. To ask, say, two dozen people—those we rub shoulders with in our daily routines—“is God pleased with you?” What responses do you suppose we would receive? “Yes...” “No...” “I don’t know...?” I would suspect that nearly every answer would match one of these three. “Yes, He is pleased with me.” “No, He is not.” “I really don’t know.” You may even find that brazen character who gives this pompous comeback: “No one can know!” But we can know, and we do know if God is pleased with us. Is He? Is He pleased with you, that is? What response would you give? It all depends on what we’re looking at.

I don’t like to look at my shortcomings...my faults...my sins...at how I hurt others and neglect to do the right thing. But it’s hard not to look at these things, because they stand out like red flags in my life. When I look at how I so often treat others; when I look at my failure to live up to God’s standards; when I take note of my selfish behavior—I can answer our question in one way, and in one way only—Is God pleased with me? No, He is not. For I have disobeyed Him. The good that I should do, I don’t do it. And the evil I should not do, that I do. When looking at my sinful life, I see a person whom God is not pleased with—not one bit.

Another place we have a tendency to look at—especially after looking at ourselves—is at each other. And when we do that, we answer our question this way—Is God pleased with me? Why, yes He is. He must be—compared to “that guy,” and to “that lady,” and to “that child,” I’m living pretty good. He must be pleased with me.

This is called self-deception. The Pharisee in the temple had this problem. He judged his life by that of the Publican. And as a result, he held his head up high, believing that God was surely pleased with him.

We do that, every day of our life. We look for the faults in others, and we even broadcast them to our neighbors, to make ourselves look better. But as I said, this is self-deception. I John 1 reads, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” Jesus declared that the Pharisee did not go home forgiven. He did not take note of his own sins and repent. All he took note of was the other guy. And he was deceived into thinking that God was pleased with him.

When we confess our sins, we may do it together, but we keep our eyes on ourselves. “I” am a poor, miserable sinner. “I” deserve both temporal and eternal punishment. When confronted with who we are by nature—sinful and unclean—and with what we have done and failed to do, God expects from us a “No” answer. “No, God, You are not pleased with me.”

But although He expects that answer from our lips, He gives us a different answer. When His called servant gives to you the Word of Absolution, God is giving you His answer. And His answer is, “Yes, I am pleased with you.” He gives that answer because He is looking at Jesus, and He wants us to look at Jesus, too. Let’s do that now. Let’s look at Jesus in our text: “And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him. And behold, a voice out of the heavens saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’” (Matt. 3:16-17)

Did you hear that? And a voice said, “(with Him) I am well-pleased.” God the Father was pleased with His Son. Why? Because He lived right? Because He never did one thing wrong? He was pleased with Jesus because His Son was entering into His mission to save sinners. In stepping down into the waters, Jesus was stepping forward into the role of Savior. He was being baptized for His great mission, and when He did that, the Father’s voice from the heavens said, “This is My Son in whom I am well-pleased.” The Son was entering into the task for which He had come. He was beginning His journey toward the cross. And for this, the Father was well-pleased with Him.

And that, my friend, is why God is pleased with you. Jesus went to the Jordan for you. Jesus sanctified the waters of Baptism so that when you were brought to those waters at the font, Jesus gave you His holiness, and you gave Him your sins. Jesus put life into the waters—His life—so that in your baptism, you would receive His life, and He would take your death. God’s Spirit came to Jesus in His baptism so that He would also come to you in yours. The heavens were opened when He was baptized, so that because of His death and resurrection, they would open to you in your baptism. Jesus entered the waters as God’s Son, so that those same waters make you God’s child. And with you, He is well-pleased.

Let me illustrate by using an episode of the Andy Griffith show. When his son, Opie came home with all “A’s” on his report card, Andy was so proud and pleased. But the teacher had made an error. She put down the wrong grades. Opie had actually earned “C’s,” “D’s,” and an “F.” He was ashamed to tell his dad. He ran away from home. When Andy found him, he gave him these words: I’m pleased with you and proud of you, not because of the grades you earn, but because you’re my son. Do your best. But whatever you do in school will not change my love for you.

And that is God’s word to you. Look at Jesus. See Him entering the waters for you. See Him suffering and dying and rising for you. Because of this, Jesus has made you God’s forgiven child in baptism—a child whom God loves—a child whom God is well-pleased with. And nothing you do can change that. The words “with you I am well-pleased,” are as much for you as they were for Jesus. For Jesus has made you sons of God.

How, then, do you want to live? We desire to please God with our lives. We want to live for Him, who loves us as dear children. But we’re not going to earn straight “A’s” on our

report card, are we? Our grades are like Opie's. We fall short of what God expects. That does not change who you are, and what God thinks of you. Jesus has made you a son, and that is who you are. God's love for you does not falter because of how you live. The way you treat your spouse, your child, your parent, your neighbor, does not change how He feels about you.

When Opie heard his dad's comforting words, he hugged him and went back home with him. God's word in Christ changes us, too. Because He is pleased with you through Christ, we come home—to God's House—so that He may take care of us here, as a father takes care of his child. Giving us "food" and "water;" giving us every blessing of the cross and the open tomb; giving us all we need for this life and the life to come. And giving us the assurance that while we try, with His help, to get all "A's" day by day—but because we're not "A" students, and we daily fail, He will love us and forgive us—not because we try, but because of who we are—His dear children in Jesus. Amen.