

MTD and the True Goal in Life

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

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When Nancy and I were fairly newly married, we moved out of an apartment into someone else's home. It was a much larger place to live and it seemed like a nice upgrade from what we had been living in before as we moved in with our daughter, Hannah, and some other things that were going on with our family. In the early few days of living there, I was quite content. It was very nice to have a bigger place in which to live and it looked like things were going to go really well, but then one night we came home and I flipped on the light as we walked in, and just out of the corner of my eye, I just saw a little piece of gray motion, and that's all that I saw. I had this sinking feeling but I wanted to pretend that I had not seen what I had actually seen. As we got further along and I turned on the light again a time or two in subsequent days, we realized that we had a very serious rodent problem in that house, and this was a mouse-infested house of unimaginable consequence, and it took a good bit of time to eradicate the problem. Very distasteful to remember and I'm sure you're delighted that I put such a thought in your mind at the start of the message here tonight, but there is a reason for doing that. What seemed to be pleasant on the surface, with a little bit of light suddenly was exposed for being an infested place that no one really should have been living, and as we keep that little picture in mind, we have a sense of the prevailing worldview both within and without the church in what we've been studying, a term called moralistic therapeutic deism. It is a vague but powerful spiritual phenomenon. It is the prevailing spiritual philosophy of our age even within professing Christendom in Western culture. Even though it is not taught by that name by any religion, you can recognize it clearly once it is pointed out to you, and a little bit of light on the subject matter shows it to be a rat-infested, demonically-inspired piece of confusion that blinds people to what the truth is and makes people think they are Christians when, in fact, they are not, and somehow it blinds people into thinking that they have been born again and that they are true Christians when, in fact, all they are are just selfish people who want to live for themselves and want to use God to augment their personal happiness. Moralistic therapeutic deism teaches men that they should simply seek happiness in life and that that is the preeminent goal, that they would have a happy life. God is there, God exists, but his purpose is to help them along the way if he is needed, and in the end he receives all good people into heaven. We've looked at this over the past couple of weeks and we want to extend it another step here this evening.

Last time, last time we saw two of the foundational tenets of this philosophy and, again, one of the things that makes this so elusive and so slippery to study is that no one would call themselves a moralistic therapeutic deist. No church would advertise out on its billboard that it teaches moralistic therapeutic deism, and so we have to have a little bit more discernment and look at things a little bit more critically to see what is really being said and then to compare that with what Scripture says about these matters.

Now, last time we looked at two of the fundamental principles, the first one being that a god exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth. Without much light on that, that seems like that would be a nice room to step into but when you turn on the light of Scripture upon that, you realize how inadequate it is because anybody, really, anybody who has any kind of vague belief in God could say that, but that doesn't mean that they are in the truth, that doesn't mean that they are in a quality home, a quality spiritual home in which to live, because this could be said by Muslims, by Catholics, by Mormons, let alone anyone else, and what we saw last time is that, no, when we talk about God, we need to get specific about who he really is. We must speak of the sovereign, Triune God who is revealed uniquely in the 66 books of the Bible and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not enough to talk simply about a vague higher power and think that we are talking about the true God. We need to be specific. We need the light to be put onto it.

We saw, secondly, last time, that this mindset, this philosophy, these presuppositions go along this line, that what God wants from man is for people to be good, to be nice, to be fair to each other, and that this is the predominant principle taught by all world religions. You could find it in the Bible, you could find it in the Koran, you could find it in the writings of Mormonism, all of religion could be distilled down to this moralistic thirst that God wants us to be nice to each other and to get along. What we saw, again when the light was put on, when the light of Scripture is turned on, that actually what Scripture teaches is that all men are sinners who need to be born again. The idea that our obligation to God is satisfied somehow by the way we conduct ourselves with men is a totally inadequate worldview and is certainly something that Scripture would refute. God demands true worship from all men. He demands true worship from his creatures. Scripture says that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. That is not satisfied by simply being a generally good Joe to the people around you, and we looked at all of that last time and I won't repeat it any further here. My point is that these things that tickle the ears, these things that sound superficially plausible as if they are setting a little bit of a household for your faith that you can settle down into, is actually a spiritually rat-infested hole that no one is safe to live in. No one is safe in a religion that is teaching you these kinds of things and that is a little bit of review of last time.

What I want to do now is to move into some new material, and as we saw two weeks ago as we reviewed the five principles of MTD, we saw this third life principle, and I'll remind you of it. I should have the PowerPoint up but I keep forgetting to do that, so bear with me and forgive me for that. The third principle of moralistic therapeutic deism is this, and you'll want to write this down. I think this may be the most seductive aspect of it

all and the one that would be so easy to suck you into a mistaken view of life and of Christianity. The author of the book that coined the term moralistic therapeutic deism, puts it this way, "The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about yourself." The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about yourself.

Now that's very seductive. This is a spiritual adulteress beckoning you to come into her wiles, and it is critical for you to be able to discern that and to realize that that is not the central goal in life, and that that is not what Scripture would point us to as the reason for our existence, but what makes it so deceptive and so alluring is that every one of us wants to be happy, right? I mean, there is none of us that just actively want to be miserable in life. No one wants to be sad. No one wants to have a difficult life. We want to have happiness, whatever that means. We want to feel good. So to have a spiritual philosophy come and say that's the central goal of life, our sinful tendency and our self-centered approach to life leads us in that direction. We are fish looking for that bait, but we need to let Scripture inform us. We need to turn the light switch on and bring light to this room in the philosophy that has become known as moralistic therapeutic deism.

This concept, this central goal of life, the goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about yourself, this highlights the therapeutic aspect of religion. It's not just that we want to feel good, MTD projects that onto God and says that's what God wants for you also; that God wants you to feel good; that God wants you to have self-esteem; that God exists and wants your life to be better physically, materially, or emotionally. And in this, MTD is not focusing on revealed truth, it's not focusing on teaching doctrine, it's not focusing on teaching Scripture verse by verse, it's not teaching a systematic approach to theology to think rightly about God, about man, about sin, about salvation, about the church, about future things, it's all about what makes you feel good in the moment, about stroking you and helping you, and the emphasis is on good feelings and life advice.

There's a franchise of Crossroads Church in nearby where we live and it pains me every time I go by their billboard which is flashing their next sermon series or whatever they have to teach on that weekend, it all fits within this paradigm. It is a profound grief to me that that is the dominant spiritual influence in the Cincinnati region. This is critical for us to discern, for us, for you and me as we talk with neighbors and coworkers, to be equipped to help them see through this kind of deception which is nothing more than bait on a hook that will reel people into eternal destruction thinking that they are saved when they are not, simply because they want a self-centered approach to God and religion.

Now beloved, here's the thing. Let's start to unpack this and unravel this a little bit. When you think that happiness is the preeminent goal in life and that that's the purpose of everything is your personal happiness is at the center of your universe, then there is an obvious corollary to that, it means that God exists to make you happy. When your happiness is numero uno, when your happiness is number 1 in the order of the universe, then God fits under that. God is subordinated to that purpose and his job is to help you find that fulfillment. And beloved, take it another little step further, your personal experience in life with unbelievers will verify this to you, I say these things without any fear of contradiction: when you have the sense, when you think that your happiness is the

preeminent goal in life and that God's purpose is to make you happy, then this falls out as a consequence, if you're happy in life, if you're satisfied in life, if you're pleased with your circumstances, then God has no claim on you. Why would he? The whole purpose of your existence and of God's existence is for you to be happy. Well, if you're happy without him, if you're satisfied without him, he has just been defined out of existence. There is no reason for him to be around. You're happy enough with life, with your relationships, with whatever other aspect of life that scratches your itch, then God has no purpose. There is no meaning to him under that mindset. Conversely, on the other hand, you are only obligated to seek God if you need him. Again, if the preeminent goal is happiness in life and you're happy, then you're not under any obligation to seek him because that's the only reason he exists is to make you happy, and if you're pleased without him, then there is no purpose for him and you can go forward in your selfish autonomous life without having to trouble yourself about who God is or anything that he might say in his word. That's the reality of it and, beloved, Scripture thoroughly refutes and repudiates that man-centered selfish approach to life and to thinking about God. Indeed, it's not at all too much to say that biblical theologians have refuted this for centuries long before it was ever given the name moralistic therapeutic deism.

Beloved, the first question, the first question in the famous Westminster Shorter Catechism is this: what is the chief end of man? Why does man exist? What is his purpose in life, in other words. What is the chief end of man? And the answer to that first question of that famous catechism is this and I quote: man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. The purpose of life is not your personal self-centered happiness, your purpose in life is to glorify God and to find your satisfaction and enjoyment in him, in who he is, in who Christ is and what he has done for you as a believer, and to rejoice in Christ, to rejoice in this God, and to live your life with an eye of bringing honor and pleasure and glory to him. That's the chief end of man and that is not the same thing as saying that your primary goal in life is to be happy.

There is a vertical dimension to the purpose of man. Let's think about it this way. The creature owes active worship to his Creator. It is your obligation as one created by God and created in his image, it is your duty, it is your responsibility, it is your prerogative, it is what you are created to do is to reflect worship and glory and honor back to the one who made you. That's why you exist and that's true as a universal principle to all 7 billion people who are walking on the earth today. Everyone exists and has that obligation upon them. As a creature, they owe worship to the one who has given them breath and who rules over them. Now as a Christian, we have that but then it is multiplied by infinity for us, that as sinners we owe our love and our devotion and our allegiance and our obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ who as our representative head suffered on the cross in order to save us from our sins. The one who shed his blood in order to wash away our sin, the one who came from heaven and lived in perfect obedience to the law of God that he might clothe us in his righteousness when we put our faith in him, that one is the center of our existence. He is our supreme affection. He is the supreme object of our desires. So God by right of creation and in Christ by right of redemption, has complete claim on all of our thoughts, all of our allegiance, all of our words and all of our actions, and our chief responsibility is to give glory to the one who has so graciously made us, so

graciously redeemed us, so that we bring every thought and the desire, as Scripture says, captive to obedience to Christ. That's why you exist. Your happiness is a secondary corollary to that at best, and familiar Scripture texts, as we'll turn to Scripture now, emphasize this overarching purpose of life.

Turn to the book of Romans, if you would, in chapter 11. Romans 11. We'll see this from an active positive side, we'll see it from a negative side, we'll work out some of the implications of this ever so briefly. If you wanted to try to capture this in a few points, let's look at the positive command to glorify God in life. The positive command to glorify God in life. Romans 11:33 says, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again?" Verse 36, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." Your life, your thoughts, your affections, are all swept up in this comprehensive view that all things are directed toward the glory of God, and anyone who has not processed that central theme of life has not begun to understand the reason for their existence, and someone who is convinced that the reason that they exist and God's whole purpose is just to make life nice and easy and comfortable for them, has not begun to understand the first thing about the purpose of God and the purpose of their life under his hand. They haven't begun to understand the first thing about it. How could you begin to think that you had started to understand the purpose of life if the central direction that all things are moving toward is the glory of God and that's not factored into your worldview? And yet moralistic therapeutic deism, this predominant philosophy, simply does this, it goes into the house and it just pulls the blinds over the windows that you would look out to see the glory of God and it just darkens everything so that it's just you alone in the room and you're the focus of your own thoughts and intentions. Well, what we have to do with Scripture is pull those blinds up and let the light in and to see that there is a whole world of existence outside that room in which we live, and as we look out the windows, we see magnificent vistas of the glory of God and we're lifted beyond ourselves into a different realm that compels us to give him glory.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 10, the next book over from Romans. 1 Corinthians 10, Paul speaking to believers. We saw the comprehensive sweep that all of creation is directed toward the glory of God in this positive command toward the glory of God, here we see it particularized to the life intentions of individual believers and in 1 Corinthians 10:31, it says, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." The most mundane aspects of your existence are to be done with an eye toward the glory of God. Eating, drinking, the day-to-day aspects of life are done with a spirit of gratitude toward the God who has given you such gifts, a recognition that what you have is from his gracious providential hand, and you realize that as an unworthy sinner, you have no claim on anything from God yet here you are enjoying this life that he has given to you. Very few of us if any in this room, miss meals because we don't have means to eat, and so we realize that we have been given so much graciously by God just on a day-to-day human level, and then when you add Christ to that, when you remember Christ beyond that, you remember this gracious Lord who has redeemed you from sin, and your mind is

suddenly exploding with reasons to give thanks to him, to give glory to him in a humble response of gratitude saying, "I have so much in Christ. I have so much in life. I'm just abounding in thankfulness to Him." So that you're now thinking about life outwardly, you're thinking about it vertically, you're recognizing God for who he is, and rather than having an inward subjective view of the purpose of life that you would feel good inside, rather you're now looking out, you're looking up with gratitude and recognizing the glory of God and ascribing glory to his name. Then and only then are you beginning to fulfill the purpose for which you were created.

You don't need to turn here, in John 3:30 it's summed up so well, so simply, "He must increase and I must decrease." Rather than my happiness being the increasing focus of my preoccupations, no, rather it must simply be the glory of Christ that is the focus of my preoccupation of my words, of my energies, of my life purpose while he gives me breath. It is Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Moralistic therapeutic deism, you would never hear that from somebody imbibed with the spirit of moralistic therapeutic deism. That's a tougher sell to a worldly audience, to tell a worldly audience that your happiness is not the center of life, that Christ deserves your full devotion and allegiance and obedience. You can't sell that in a room next to Costco. So you have to shave some edges off and cut some corners spiritually and you just continue to shape the blob until you're left with a religion that is made in your own image rather than one that is a reflection of Christ and his great preeminence.

Let's look at a second aspect here, we could call it the negative refutation of MTD. The negative refutation of MTD and I say these things, do you know what I like? I like for my points to just be descriptive and clear. They're not clever. I don't care about that so much. Maybe it hinders my communication but I'm just more concerned about clarity rather than cleverness. The negative refutation of moralistic therapeutic deism can be found in this way: Jesus said that the only ones with true faith are those who know spiritual mourning, spiritual mourning which is the exact opposite of the superficial happiness that is peddled as the religious wares of our day.

Look at Matthew 5:3. This is so crucial, beloved, and it is so clear and it is so obvious and Scripture comes against the prevailing mindset of our age as though it were a battery of bazookas blowing cannonballs against the false thinking and the self-centered thinking of our age. Jesus said in his opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3 and 4, he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Poor in spirit, those who have declared a spiritual bankruptcy that says, "I have no good in my spiritual account. If I am to be saved, it must be by the work and the actions of the love of another because there is no good within me." Spiritual bankruptcy that leads to a sense of mourning over sin. The true Christian, the one who truly knows God is one who has recognized his sin and it grieves him. He mourns over the way that he falls short of the glory of God. He mourns over his disobedience to the law of God. He detests the fact that he does not give God the love and glory of which he is so preeminently worthy. He realizes that he falls short and this is not just a superficial reaction, this is at the core of his being.

Well, beloved, if personal happiness and feelings of happiness are the preeminent goal of your perspective on religion, what Jesus says is absolutely opposed to that. Spiritual sadness and sorrow don't lend themselves to happiness and as we have said and pointed out many many times, here in these verses 3 and 4 when Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," he is making a statement of exclusivity. It is only those who are poor in spirit who will enter the kingdom of heaven. It is they and they alone that truly know God. It is they and they alone who mourn that will experience the true comfort of God. So you cannot run a detour around this, you can't run a detour around conviction of sin, of spiritual poverty, you can't go around that and come in the gates of heaven. And beloved, think with me a little further about Jesus' words. I know I've already pointed this out but as my wife and I talk about so often, some things just need to be repeated again and again and again because you hear them once, you hear them twice and they don't really sink in. It is the repetition over and over again of vital principles that sink deep into your soul and start to shape your worldview and give you the discernment that you need. So as Peter, I believe, said, "I will stir you up by way of reminder."

Look at Matthew 7:13, and as you're turning there briefly, let's state an obvious point. If true religion was simply about being happy and the purpose of God's existence was to make you happy and that was true religion, and if you had a God like that and you were happy, then, you know, you were on the path to heaven, everybody would want it. Who wouldn't want that for real truth from a human perspective? You don't have to love Christ for that to be appealing to you. "Oh, I can have a God who doesn't make any demands on me, who just wants me to be happy? I don't have to pay any attention to Him unless I'm kind of having a problem and then He'll step up and restore things so I can be happy again?" Beloved, the masses run to that. Why wouldn't they when there is no demand and there is no person asserting Lordship over your life, and the centrality of your personal happiness is the reason that you exist? Well, that all sounds well and good until you turn on the light of what Jesus said in Matthew 7:13, and then when you do that, you see rats and rodents everywhere in that line of spiritual thought. Jesus said, verse 13, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." The fact that this is the prevailing sentiment of our age identifies it as a false philosophy. The fact that so many people want this and embrace it is evident proof that it is not true.

Turn over to the book of James 4. James in many ways, although we've never really developed that from this pulpit, James in many ways functions as a parallel commentary on the Sermon on the Mount in so many different places. Remembering that Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," remembering that Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," with that in mind look at James 4:8, and we'll start in verse 7, why not? He says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." So there is spiritual conflict. We are talking about matters in an Ephesians 6 kind of way in the invisible realm where philosophies and demonic influences are driving the way people think. We need to resist the devil with our understanding of Scripture. And what does he go on to say after he brings the devil to

our attention? He says this in verse 8, he says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." Beloved, I ask you, where could this mindset of MTD have any place for James 4 in its thinking? Why if happiness, immediate happiness was the goal of religion, why would anyone turn to a verse that tells them to be miserable and to mourn and to weep and let their laughter be turned into mourning and their joy into gloom? You have to cut that out of the Bible for that to be your worldview. You see, beloved, the promises of God, the goodness of God, the faithfulness of God are not for the people who are selfishly autonomous in their approach to life. The promises of God, the goodness of God are for the repentant, those who are humbly dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ for their righteousness, those who look at themselves and find reason for mourning and only when they look up to Christ do they find reason for joy.

Now obviously, obviously God often blesses us with joy. Obviously we often find satisfaction even as we're walking through this life. Obviously but, beloved, the joy that God gives often comes in the midst of adversity that is personally trying and uncomfortable.

Look at John 16:33. There is no place in a Christian worldview for an assumption that God simply wants your life to be easy for you. Jesus said again and again the exact opposite. The exact opposite. In John 16:33 he said, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." Elsewhere in Acts 14:22, you don't need to turn there, I'll just quote it briefly, in Acts 14:22 it says that, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Look at 2 Corinthians 1. You can turn to this place. 2 Corinthians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ." Abundant sufferings. All our affliction. You see, the comfort that God gives comes in the midst of the afflictions that come from living with corruption in our souls and in the midst of a fallen world that cause us to despair of our self-sufficiency, that cause us to despair of hope in this world, and to look up to Christ who has gone before us as the forerunner and as our representative in his sufferings during his time on earth and ultimately at the cross of Christ. Would we follow a Christ who suffered without having a cross of our own? Perish the thought. Scripture speaks of affliction and tribulation being the mark of those who are truly entering the kingdom of heaven and, beloved, if you're here tonight and your life has been one of affliction or currently is one of affliction, then you have a sense, "Oh, I'm clinging to Christ in this but, oh, this is so hard." Well, let me just encourage you with the words of Scripture, this is to be expected for believers. This is sometimes the lot of believers.

Moralistic therapeutic deism and the influence of it, and I think that true Christians can be influenced by this when they're not aware of its influence, I think you can be influenced by this and recognize it by certain spiritual attitudes that it inevitably produces in those who think along these lines, that God just wants me to be happy. Well, where do you see moralistic therapeutic deism raising its ugly head? One place that you see it is when people collapse when supposedly bad things happen in their lives and they wander about as lost sheep saying, "I don't know where to go. How could this happen? Why would God do this to me?" Well, the reason that you ask questions like that is that you have a prior expectation that God is going to protect you from every tribulation, protect you from every harm, and that you'll walk through life relatively unscathed, and then when it happens, "Why is God doing this to me? Why is God angry with me? Something bad has happened." Well, no. Christ had done nothing bad, Christ had not sinned at all and he suffered greatly in Gethsemane. He suffered greatly at Calvary, of great internal anguish of soul. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" it was the appointed path for our Savior that he would perfect us through his own sufferings. Sometimes it's our appointed path that God will perfect us, sanctify us through suffering. Sometimes God will prepare you for future ministry by bringing you years beforehand through suffering, through sorrow, through difficulty that seems to crush you under the weight of it. Moralistic therapeutic deism has no place for that.

Another way and I have somebody specific in mind from decades ago in my life. I won't mention the name. You never know where things are going to go on the internet and so you want to be careful with what you say to some extent but it's probably not, I know that it's not just from somebody from decades ago. This is the way that a lot of people determine what God wants, the way God is directing their lives, they start with this presupposition, "Surely God wants me to be happy. Why wouldn't God want me to be happy?" So when that's their controlling presupposition in life, then when bad things start to happen, when adversity comes in marriage or in a job situation or in some other kind of life setting and a little bit of adversity comes, then what starts to come out of their mouth is this, "Well, maybe it's time for me to move on. Maybe this is God telling me to move on to something else in my life and I need to move out of this situation." And my point is that that is the first response to it, "I've got adversity. God doesn't want me to have adversity and so He must be telling me to get into another circumstance. I'm unhappy in my marriage, God wants me to be happy, it's time to buck out of here." Well, no. No. In those circumstances, adversity is simply justifying any means possible to seek an easier life and attribute it to God's will as you do.

You know, one of the things, and the more that I go with this, the more that I just hate this mindset of moralistic therapeutic deism, the more I thought about it, the more I truly hate it and think it is, I think it is more lethally dangerous than maybe anything we've talked about from a polemic standpoint because it's so subtle and it's so broad. Do you know what this mindset that Crossroads and others are teaching people, do you know what it will never produce? It will never produce people who are courageous in adversity. It produces people who run from adversity thinking that God wants them to be happy. You won't find noble people rising up from moralistic therapeutic deism. Where you find people of courage and nobility rising up is those who are confident in the sovereignty of

God, confident in his sovereign purposes, and are submitted to his purposes and say, "I will persevere through this. I will rise to the occasion of this adversity because I follow a Lord who has overcome the world, who has suffered and I'm following after a Lord who overcame and I want to be faithful to Him. I want to be like Him." But if you think adversity is a sign that God wants something different from you, all you do is run, run, run, and the person that I was alluding to, I realize I nearly forgot about that from 20-30 years ago in my life, this guy, bless his heart and bless his dear wife who had to follow him around, he struggled in ministry. He struggled in ministry and so he goes to another church and he's there about six months and inevitably troubles come up in the ministry and his response to that is not, "I need to persevere. What would God have for me here?" His response was, "God's moving me on to something else." So he moves around from church to church for a couple of three times and then he gives up and he moves back home and who knows what he ended up doing. But his fundamental presupposition, his fundamental thought was adversity was a sign that I needed to move on.

Well beloved, beloved, I say this pastorally, I say this supporting you, I say this as one who prays for everyone in this room by name, and so I say this sympathetically to you. I say this to encourage you. I say this to help you. Let your first presupposition in adversity be that what God wants me to do is to humbly depend upon him and persevere. Maybe in time adversity becomes a means by which God moves you along, I wouldn't sentence anyone to a permanent staying in a bad situation, but don't start there in your thinking. Learn something about how to walk dependently in Christ when the winds are blowing against you. Learn something about persevering and finding your satisfaction in Christ when you're lonely in life rather than pursuing sinful fulfillments. Learn something about the sufficiency of God and the sufficiency of his grace when you're sad, when you're lonely, when life is going against you, and in the reality of a Christ-centered joy that is independent of your circumstances, as that flows out of your life as it does for so many of you, in the midst of that your joy is a testimony to the glory of God because it has no earthly human explanation. You see, when trials come, God does not promise circumstantial immediate relief. That's not why God exists. He promises something different. He promises something better.

Look at 2 Corinthians 12:7, and as you're turning there, I just want to point something out because I'm almost done here. I want to point something out. The things that help you see through this mindset that is superficially appealing, the things that let you discern it, these aren't rooted, it isn't rooted in, the discernment isn't found in obscure passages of Scripture. This is found in fundamental, basic, common passages that Christians know well, and so ultimately there is no excuse for us getting sucked into that mindset.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7, the Apostle Paul says, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations," that were given to him, he had gone up into the third heaven and saw marvelous things, verse 7, "for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me." "God, take this away! God, take this away! God, I ask you a third time, take this away! It's making me unhappy. It's uncomfortable to me. This is making life hard." And God

didn't take it away. Whatever that thorn was, verse 9, "He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" So that Paul, the last thing that Paul is saying here in 2 Corinthians 12 is that, "God wanted me to be happy and to be perfectly comfortable with my circumstances." Just the opposite. He said, "I was discontent in my circumstances, I was suffering, I asked God to take it away and God said no. I have something else for you instead. My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Paul learned to depend even more on the sufficiency of, "My favor and My kindness to you in Christ." And let that be the fountain from which you drink to find your satisfaction in life, not the circumstantial pleasant things that men seek after, rather the conscious knowledge that, "I am a good God and you belong to Me, and that Christ suffered for you, Christ died for you, Christ rose for you, and you are alive in Him." With that perspective, Paul says, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." And he says in verse 10, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

The garden-variety professing Christian, professing Christian in today's age would think that distresses and difficulties were a sign of God's disfavor and would be asking for relief and so moralistic therapeutic deism shows up when we expect an easy life as though it were our entitlement from God, or that we resent hardship, or that we run at the first sign of adversity. This is not true Christianity. Happiness is not the goal, happiness is a secondary byproduct of something else. God's glory, beloved, is the goal, and if God is providentially ordering your circumstances and has brought affliction into your life, then his intention is for you to show forth his glory in the midst of your affliction, not simply by relieving it from you so that you can feel better about yourself. And as you read Christian biographies, as you read about the ones who truly were the preeminent soldiers of the glory of God, you find that the ones who were the most noble were the ones who often suffered the most. Think of Jonathan Edwards being kicked out of his church for being faithful to a biblical view of communion and he's sent off and he's sent away, rejected; his congregation rejecting the greatest theologian that American soil has ever produced and he goes off and he's ministering to Indians, a small circle of Indians. Affliction. Unjust, unfair treatment. It wasn't that God was displeased with him, God magnified his grace and his glory in the midst of the affliction and at an age younger than I am now, took him home to glory.

So you see, beloved, when you and I remember our Lord Jesus Christ, we remember his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his session in glory and how he represented to us at every step along the way, and one day he's coming back for us, when we remember Christ, we turn away from our preoccupation with the things of this life and we set our hearts on his kingdom and glory as the goal of life, as the preeminent purpose of life. Jesus himself said, Matthew 6:33, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." The central goal is Christ. The central goal is his glory, his righteousness, his kingdom. A God-centered, Christ-centered focus is what true Christianity is, not a self-centered perspective that can leave him out of the equation as long as you're happy, and as these things crystallize in our minds, the goal of life no longer becomes our personal happiness but something far better.

You know, really for you and me as true Christians, the goal of life cannot possibly be about anything that happens during the window of life between our birth and death. That can't possibly be why we exist. That can't possibly have anything to do with your highest aspirations in life, what you most want out of your existence if you're a true Christian. That can't possibly be it because, beloved, the thing that you and I are really living for, the central purpose of our existence lies beyond the river, lies beyond this life, it lies even above and beyond being in heaven, if I can be so bold as to say this. Let me just tie this back in as I close here with what we said on Sunday out of Philippians about being slaves of Christ. Christ is our Master, we are his slave, our desire is to please our Master. What you're living for really as a true Christian, the only thing that matters, the thing that will compensate for everything else, every difficulty in life, every conflict, every want, every sorrow, the thing that would compensate for it all is when you stand before Christ, whatever that looks like, and he looks upon you and he says at the end of your difficult life, he says, "Well done, you good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master."

You see, beloved, that's our goal. We want to live in a way in response to our salvation that we hear those words from our Lord and if you hear those words from Christ, the goal of your life has been perfectly attained no matter what happened in the so-called 70 year window between your birth and death. You know, honestly, honestly, if all that eternity was for us, if all that eternity was for us was to be able to sit somewhere and rehearse and to remember in our minds that our Master said, "You were a good and faithful slave. You pleased Me. You did what I wanted. You glorified Me. I affirm you. You accomplished what I gave for you to do." If all that eternity was was just rehearsing and remembering that and having heard that from the lips of our Lord, that would be glory. If that's all that it was, now it's going to be a lot more than that but, beloved, our goal is to please Christ and the affirmation that we get from him lies outside the bounds of time. "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master," Matthew 25:21. Beloved, that's what matters. That is our goal in life.

Let's pray.

Father, we accept the fact that sometimes affliction will be our lot, disappointment will come. We realize that as our sovereign Lord, You have the prerogative to design our circumstances as You wish and we submit to that. We pray not our will but thine be done. I pray for the struggling believer that is under the sound of my voice here this evening, Father, and I pray that You would encourage them with the sufficiency of Your grace even as You did the Apostle Paul, that a remembrance of Christ, the remembrance of His faithful loyal love to us, the promise of His coming, the promise that He will receive us into His kingdom, Father, may that fan the flames of satisfaction even if life itself does not bring the results that we might want at any given time. We thank You for Your wisdom in appointing this life. Father, we thank You that even the afflictions of life have a beneficial spiritual purpose to us, they wean us from this love of the world that we have, our ties to this world, and they cut cords in so many different places so that our affections are free to long for the glory that awaits us in heaven in the presence of our

Lord and Master. Father, we pray that You might help us be vital, clear, vivacious witnesses for Christ in this life that You have given to us. We pray against the encroaching darkness in the region that is around us, and we pray for the many loved ones and friends and coworkers that we know who have fallen under that dark shadow, Father. We pray that You would rescue them from a false sense of life, a false sense of Christianity, and lead them into the truth by the great power of Your omnipotent Holy Spirit, and that You would draw many to Christ as He is truly proclaimed. Help us to that end. We love and thank and praise You and we give You glory which is our central purpose in life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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