

The Pleasure of God in Hiding and Revealing

February 10th, 2013

Luke 10:21-24

"²¹In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²²All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

This is an intellectually sophisticated passage, but one incentive to do the hard work of understanding it is that being in a relationship of love with someone should compel you to want to know what gives them joy.

There are only two places in the four gospels where we get a glimpse of what causes Jesus to rejoice (surely He was, and is, and infinitely joyful Person, but His first advent was marked by suffering, pain, rejection and sorrow). One is in John 11: "¹⁴Lazarus has died, ¹⁵and for your sake *I am glad* that I was not there, so that you may believe." Jesus so prioritizes faith, that He rejoices that He wasn't there to save Lazarus' life so that the faith of His disciples could be strengthened.

The other explicit instance of Jesus rejoicing is here in Luke 10: "²¹In that same hour *he rejoiced* in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will." Here Jesus rejoices that "these things" have been hidden from some people (the wise and understanding), and revealed to others (little children). This was God's "good pleasure". And Jesus rejoices in it, and He rejoices in the Holy Spirit. So the whole Trinity exults in this hiding and revealing.

This raises many questions: 1. What are "these things" that have been hidden and revealed? 2. Who are these wise and understanding, and little children? 3. Why does it give God such pleasure to do this? We'll

try to answer those three questions, and then close by placing this short passage in its larger context in Luke 10.

What are "These Things"?

The answer to this first question was really the focus of last Sunday's message. First, we could say that "these things" refer to the fact that in Jesus, the Kingdom of God had come near. We see that in verses 23-24, where Jesus says to His disciples that they are blessed because what the prophets and kings had longed to see but did not see (that is, the Kingdom of God), their eyes had seen. The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are the down payment of our coming inheritance, to rule and reign with Jesus when He returns to make all things new (you're only a mile from the bank!). That is part of what had been revealed to His disciples, and the cause of their blessedness.

But beyond that, the more immediate context shows that part of what "these things" refer to is the identity of the Father and the Son. Right after Jesus rejoiced over the Father's hiding and revealing "these things", He says in verse 22: "²²All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'" Notice the word "reveal". Verse 21 says that Jesus was glad that the Father *revealed* these things to little children, and then verse 22 says that He and the Father alone know something that others can only know if it is *revealed* to them.

So I'm assuming that the revealing in verse 22 is the same as the revealing in verse 21. And what is this revelation? It's the true identity of the Father and the Son. Your eyes are blessed, disciples of Jesus, not just because you are seeing the Kingdom of God inaugurated, but because you've been granted to know the Father and Son the way they know One Another. And I tried (so imperfectly!) to help us feel the preciousness of that last week, to be brought into the full and forever

joy that God has known and delighted in from all eternity. O what profound blessedness is ours because of Jesus Christ!

Who are the Wise, and the Little Children?

Now, then, it becomes of utmost importance -- in light of how glorious and wonderful this privilege and favor and fortune is -- to know, who is that receives this blessedness? Because verses 21-22 clearly show that it's not given to everyone. "These things" have been hidden from the wise and the understanding, and have been revealed to little children. So who are these wise and understanding, and who are these children?

I think it's clear from verse 23 that the term "little children" (babes/infants, KJV/NASB) does not refer to 6-month old babies, because Jesus applies these words to the disciples: "²³Then *turning to the disciples* he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" So the disciples are among the little children that get the blessing of seeing what the Son chooses to reveal. So I think it's safe to conclude that the "wise and understanding" and the "little children" are two kinds of people beyond infancy.

Who, then are they? I think we get a clue back towards the end of chapter 9. As His disciples are arguing about who is the greatest, Jesus took a child by His side and said, "⁴⁸Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For *he who is least among you* all is the one who is great." The aspect of childlikeness that Jesus affirms is their lowliness, or weakness. I think that's what Jesus has in mind in Matthew 18 when He says that unless we humble ourselves like children, we'll never enter the Kingdom of God.

Children are a picture of humility, weakness, dependence. They can't feed themselves, or clean themselves, or clothe or protect themselves. They can't do anything on their own. They are utterly dependent on someone else to care for them and to meet their needs. So I would

suggest that in speaking of "little children," Jesus is speaking of a kind of person who is deeply dependent and humble enough to receive the help he really needs from God. The "wise and understanding" are proud and self-sufficient.

Confirmation in 1 Corinthians 1

This suggestion is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 1, where the apostle Paul seems to take up the same issue. The similarity in language here indicates that we are dealing with the same issue as Jesus was dealing with in Luke 10. Let's read these verses:

"¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. ¹⁸For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." [the same words that Jesus uses in Luke 10, wise and understanding]

"²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, [God has chosen to hide Himself from the wise of this world] it pleased God [just as Jesus says God is pleased to hide and reveal] through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

You can see we're dealing with a very similar issue here. So who are these wise and understanding people from whom God has hidden Himself? The central issue in 1 Corinthians 1 seems to be their response to the cross (v.17-18, 23). Human wisdom, the wisdom of this world, is offended by the cross.

What does the cross stand for? It stands for the ungodliness and helplessness of man, and the undeserved, unmerited grace of God. It makes humans look weak and dependent and helpless -- like little children -- and magnifies the sufficiency and provision and freedom of God in giving salvation to helpless, poor, miserable, weak sinners. If humans could find God and know God by their own wisdom and intelligence, they would be able to boast that they had conquered the chasm between man and God. So God planned that humans could not know God in this way; the cross screams that there is no salvation apart from childlike dependence on the grace of God in Christ crucified.

The "word" of the cross is that if we are not willing to see ourselves as helpless, ungodly sinners and cast ourselves wholly upon the mercy and grace of God, we will not know God or be saved by Him. The wisdom of the world does not like this, because it likes to boast in self, its resources, its knowledge and understanding and virtue and ability. But God has chosen to confound this kind of wisdom by revealing Himself to the weak, the foolish, the low, the things that are not (1Cor1:26ff), so that no human being might boast in the presence of God (v.29).

Not Intellect, but Attitude

If we take this understanding and bring it back to Jesus' words in Luke 10, we have a clearer picture of who God is pleased to hide and reveal Himself to. "Little children" are those who know and feel themselves to be helpless and unworthy of any good from God. They do not feel resourceful in themselves to know God or to save themselves from His judgment. They can humbly admit that if they are to ever know God for who He really is, it will be owing not to their wisdom and strength, but to a wonderful work of God's gracious revealing.

The "wise and understanding", on the other hand, are offended by the message of the cross. Self-exaltation and self-determination are the deep pleasures of the "wise and understanding". They despise the cross

and think of it as folly because it undermines all human boasting, and the wise and understanding love to boast in themselves. They love to feel as though they can do things on their own, without help from outside themselves.

So the difference between the wise and the understanding and the little children is not one of intelligence, but of attitude. It's like my daughter Halle, who yelled at me last week as she tried unsuccessfully to zip her coat zipper. I said, "Halle, I can help you with that." And she said, "No! I can do it!" That is the movement from "little child" to "wise and understanding". There was a time when she was happy to let me help her, because she knew she was weak and dependent on me. Now she says, "I can do it! Leave me alone!" And when we approach the Almighty like that, He will not allow Himself to be found.

Why is God Pleased to Save this Way?

And God rejoices in this, because He loves to exalt and display the riches of His glory: "¹⁷And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day." God's plan for the ages is to humble the pride of man and exalt the glory of His grace, and so He delights in hiding Himself from the wise and understanding and revealing Himself to little children, because this highlights His goodness, power and grace, so that the glory belongs to Him. And remember, His greatest glory is our greatest joy (Psalm 16:11).

He is pleased, in His love, to save us in a way that highlights our weakness and dependence, "⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Heaven is not a hallway full of mirrors in order for you to be impressed with yourself, but an increasing vision of infinite greatness, and that greatness is God's. He gets the glory; we get the joy. This is our great salvation!

Keeping God's Pleasure in Context

This may seem like a lofty, philosophical, impractical message, but as we keep the context of Luke 10 in mind, I think we can see some ways that it has everyday relevance to your life, and those around you.

First, remember that Jesus rejoices in this way upon the occasion of His disciples returning from their successful mission. Jesus is rejoicing that His Father is pleased to use such foolish morons like you and me! Here is great hope as we begin to spend six Sunday nights talking about the mission of disciple-making. To the praise of His glory, He uses fools to accomplish His work. You're qualified!

And what hope this gives as we go out into the harvest field. It doesn't depend on you. Conversion is God's work. You can't argue or bully them into God's Kingdom. Relax, bear witness to Jesus in word and deed, and do so with the gentleness and graciousness that comes from knowing that the success of the mission isn't on your shoulders.

But you may not be ready to move out in mission, because you're not yet sure whether you know God through Jesus or not. The way to determine whether you belong to Jesus is not how you feel, but your response to the cross of Christ. Is it offensive and ugly and foolish? Can you get to God and figure Him out on your own? Or do you see yourself as spiritually bankrupt, unable, helpless, weak, dependent on grace? To see yourself this way is itself a fruit of God's grace.

Finally, "rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (v.17). If you have come to know the Father and the Son, give Him glory! You have come to know Him not because of your superior intellect or virtue or character, but because of His gracious revealing work. "Who made me to know You, but You? When dead in sin you gave me new life. Now my heart is filled with love for you. Thank You, Father, for opening my eyes to the Christ of Calvary!" Conversion is a miracle (2Cor4:6). Praise Him for opening your eyes, and unveiling Jesus Christ!