

What Does God Expect From Me in This Life?

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening. So, during the festival this year in August, the Fringe Festival that is, I went with a couple of other people, who will remain nameless, and saw a comedian.

He's from the Republic of Ireland. He's a sort of minor TV celebrity over there. Just up in this little tiny back room up in Bristol Square. And he started his set by talking about drudgery and just being a bit miserable.

And how the people he knows, and generally sort of in the Republic of Ireland, among the people he knows, people like drudgery. Which didn't make a lot of sense. But he explained, he said, you know, it's like the person next door, he gets a new car, he gets this fancy big BMW or whatever, and then you think, oh, I wish I had that.

He's gone on a big holiday. I wish I had that. I wish I had went there. And it goes on. Until it's at the point now that it's just part of the culture. It's part of the norm.

And it keeps people going, and they have this weird enjoyment of it. And then, he turns to us, the audience, and asks, do you have that here?

[1 : 1 3] And I was sitting in the front row, and me being me. I was like, yeah, of course. Big part of our culture as well. We like more than about things other people have that we don't.

And we had a bit of our conversation, a back and forth about it then. And that came to mind as I was thinking and dwelling and reading about this topic. What does God expect from me in this life?

As part of our questions series just now. Because we can have this thought that God expects all these things from me. And I need to do all these things.

And that leads to drudgery. Or we can take the opposite view when we read God's Word and we see, man, he's asking a lot. He wants a lot. And I don't want to give him half quarter of all that.

And do all that. I don't want that. I've got enough rules to follow. I've got enough to do. And that leads to a kind of drudgery. Seeing God and God's law and God's Word is a kind of drudgery.

[2 : 1 4] And so there are two dangers with this question. And we are trying to get through the middle of them. And those are the two dangers, as I've sort of mentioned. And with all these questions, there are always questions and issues underneath and sort of behind them as well.

And one of the issues, particularly with this one, is, like I've said, does God, as I read his Word, want me to obey everything he says there? And if he does, how do I do that?

How do I obey all this? Because it seems impossible. And that's true. It is. And the other side, again, we don't need to do all that because I'm a Christian.

I've been saved by the grace and love of Jesus. So I'm not required to do and required to keep all these things. And both of these things really fundamentally are a misunderstanding and a misapprehension of who God is and what he's like.

So just as we go forward tonight and think about this question and try to come to an answer, one verse I want to think about and dwell on and sort of direct is Psalm 37, verse 4, which is up there on the screen.

[3 : 33] And it says, take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Because this is a question of desire and what we want, who we want to serve.

And so this verse in our culture might seem topsy-turvy, counter-cultural, and it is. And it should be topsy-turvy because it talks about taking delight in the Lord and he'll give us the desires of our hearts.

And surely a lot of us will think to him, but I want that guy's BMW next door or whatever that doesn't seem to fit, just for an example. So we're going to hopefully use this verse to guide us and take us along the path to some sort of answer tonight.

So we're going to, as we go, discuss and think about these two dangers I've mentioned. And then we're going to come to the answer.

So the first danger is joyless obedience. We read our Bibles, we study, we come to church, and a lot of things get said about what God wants, what God says, his rules and his commandments, and especially in the outside world, they think, oh, this is such a drag.

[4 : 52] You know, but then a lot of us will have the thinking that if I just keep myself right and really try hard, really buckle down, pay attention, I'll be able to follow a lot of these, I'll be able to keep a lot of these rules.

Others will be put off right away and think, close that, put that away. Not for me, thanks. So, and with the first view of I can do this, I can keep these rules.

I can do like God wants me to do. I can be a good person, a good Christian. You always sit and think, I can do that. He says, don't murder. Like that guy at work, he is annoying, but I'm not going to murder him.

I can do this. But that thinking is just topsy-turvy, it's wrong. And we're going to look at an example in our Bibles now of why that is wrong.

So if you want to look in your Bibles at Matthew chapter 19, Matthew chapter 19, verses 16 to 22. So it says, Just then, a man came up to Jesus and asked, Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?

[6 : 12] Why do you ask me about what is good? Jesus replied, there is only one who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments. Which ones? He inquired.

Jesus replied, You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. Honor your father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself.

All these I have kept, the young man said. What do I still lack? And Jesus answered, If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor.

And you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth.

So with this passage, it can seem because of that last verse, when the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth, that the issue primarily is one of just purely money, possessions, and the things he had and how he didn't want to give them up.

[7 : 15] But the issue really is far deeper and more serious than that. So the issue really behind all this and this young man and his attitude and what he says to Jesus and how he went away disappointed is that he was seeing God's law, God's rules, God's word as a checklist, something to be obeyed and followed, putting ticks in boxes and keeping yourself right.

And in fact, what he's missed, the big, huge, massive thing he has missed is the person that's given the law. He's missed the good God behind the law.

God gave the law as a kind of mirror to hold up to us and our state and who we are and to show us who we really are, apart from anything else and all the other influences and things that tell us who we are and try and show us who we are.

There's a lot of other mirrors out there, but God's word is the true mirror. All the other mirrors are like mirrors in a haunted house that distort the body and are sort of trick.

So when we look in this mirror, the mirror of God's word and God's law, it's like any other kind of mirror. You look in it and you see you've not got anything in your teeth, that you're all right, and then you leave the house.

[8 : 37] And so God's law is like this as well. It's a mirror, as I've said. We look in it, but unlike other mirrors where we see that we're all right and sort of fix ourselves, make sure our hair's looking all right, it shows us the sorry state we're in in our hearts and before God in terms of sin and rebellion.

It shows us sort of like a West Coast expression. Look at the state of you when we look in it. We look in the mirror of God's law and see someone there with food all down them, bloodstains, oil, bruised, and all these terrible things you would fix in a normal mirror.

And that's just our state before God. We're dirty and we are not fit for purpose when we look in God's law. And it's a huge way to try and think of keeping and making sure we obey all of God's law and we just can't do it.

It's an unbearable way for us, ourselves, and in of ourselves. And that's the whole point of this mirror. That's the whole point of God showing us the state we're in.

We're in is that he holds the mirror and then we are drawn from the mirror to the person holding the mirror and what else he tells us. We're drawn from the law to the author of the law who's going to clean us up and give us new clothes and dress our wounds caused by a rebellion against him.

[10 : 11] And the author of the law, God, wants us to come in this simple faith and rest in him and not worry ourselves with trying to keep this law to the letter because we just can't do it ourselves.

So in verse 20 of this passage in Matthew, the young man says, I've kept all these since I was a youth in reference to the commandments that Jesus shares with him and reminds him of. But the young man knows in himself there's something else here, there's something more, I need to go deeper.

And he presses Jesus and he says to Jesus in the rest of the verse, what else is there, what else do I still lack? And it tells us in verse 22, again, that the young man went away disappointed because of Jesus' answer, because of his great wealth and possessions.

But all through this conversation that this young man has with Jesus, he's asking about how he can get eternal life. And there are a couple of things in this conversation that the young man does correctly, which we don't always think about with this passage or talk about, which, you know, we should think on the good things that are in it from the young man's point of view.

First off, he shows this concern for God's kingdom. He comes to Jesus and says, how can I get into the kingdom? How can I be a member? How can I get involved? And that's right.

[11 : 35] And we need to follow that example and show this concern, how we can get into God's kingdom and how we can be involved. So that's one positive element that we can take away from this story and what the young man says.

And then the next thing that I noticed that the young man does correctly and does right and that we can take away from as a positive for us is that he sought out Jesus to ask about the kingdom of God and he sought out Jesus for answers to his questions, to these ultimate questions of life and death and eternal life.

There's loads of other sources for answers, but the other sources are wrong and are incorrect. There's any number of places that people and we can seek out answers, but there's only one source of truth and authority in these issues of life and death and eternal life that we have been thinking and talking about in all these sermons and many others, and that is Jesus himself.

Both then when he was speaking to the young man and now as we hear his voice speaking to us in the Bible. But unfortunately that's really where the positive aspects of this passage in Matthew end, where the young man is concerned.

But there's more to learn from this conversation and it helps us inform our journey to our answer. What does God expect from me in this life?

[13 : 06] So the young man, as I've said, comes to Jesus and through what he says we see that he has this misunderstanding of who God is and what he wants, what he expects.

For him God's law is about gaining brownie points, earning kudos from God. And he's really looking at the sort of bare minimum he can do and achieve in his own strength and in his own way to get in, to get through the door.

And for him the law and God are sort of really detached by this point and are unrelated to each other. Really the correct view is that the law and keeping it is about glorifying God and it's about enjoying God, not just ticks and boxes and keeping yourself right and keeping yourself on the straight and narrow and the hope that with that, that'll be enough, that'll get me in, that'll get me over the bar and across the threshold.

So that's what God wants from us and expects of us from this point of view. He wants us to glorify and enjoy him. And that's what the law is about, as well as pointing to our condition, our sinful condition.

He wants all of us to enjoy him. He doesn't want us just to obey him without thinking and without that enjoyment and without that joy. Not just for, we're not just to enjoy the commands in and of themselves, but we're supposed to enjoy the good and gracious God who gives the law and who is holding that mirror that we thought about.

[14 : 43] So, we thought about that angle. And then the second danger in this topic and with this question is what I've deemed Christian freedom.

And I'll explain in a moment what I mean by that. So, as part of my studies up at ETS, in the first year we had to read a book, which is called, should I put a picture up of it?

But, too late now. And that book is called, if you have a pen and a piece of paper there, you should take a note of it, and I'll talk about it again later. It's a book called The Whole Christ by Sinclair Ferguson.

And Sinclair Ferguson is talking about this issue of sort of legalism and speaking about obeying the law to the best of your ability and just cracking on, trying to put ticks in boxes.

And then the other side of the debate and the issue, this Christian freedom of, well, I'm saved. I'm a Christian. I'm enjoying the grace of God. This has relieved my worries and my stress.

[15 : 49] I can go about and do as I please now. And in this book, although the two seem like completely unrelated, completely nothing to do with each other, Sinclair Ferguson really thrashes it out.

It's a really hard book to read for me anyway, but well worth the read. He calls Christian freedom and the other danger of joyless obedience, this legalism, as non-identical twins from the same womb.

So they seem completely at odds with each other, but actually he says, no, in fact, these things are the two, one and the same. They're the same thing and from the same place.

That misunderstanding of who God is and what he wants and what he expects. And these are both errors. And both of them really see God cast as a sergeant major in a uniform and he's barking orders and one says, aye, aye, sir, I'll get that done.

I'll do that. I'm going to stick to this. And the other says, no way, I don't need anyone else barking orders at me and tell me what to do. So, just like the young man, as we thought about, and people here in Brunsfield and other churches and various other places in the outside world who see this all negatively, who are obeying joylessly, they see God and his word as lifeless and joyless.

[17 : 17] And then on the other side of it, with this one, it's people seeing the grace of God that is there and we should enjoy and we should love and revel in that we have this joy and this grace of God.

They see it as a get out of jail free card from like Monopoly where you play the card and you're off scot free. That's what salvation and faith is to them to some extent.

And an example of that, in our sort of modern culture would be like a Christian boyfriend and girlfriend who start having sex and doing that without ever being married.

Sort of in the thinking that, oh, we're Christians, it's okay, we're saved, we're going to get married someday, it'll be fine. We're just wanting to have a bit of fun now. So that's just massive misunderstanding of God and his grace.

And this problem was even present back in the sort of early church right at the very beginning. And I want to look at another passage just now in 1 Peter.

[18 : 27] So Peter sort of addresses this kind of problem and this thinking that was prevalent in being taught in the early church by some teachers.

So 1 Peter, just chapter 1. If you look at that, we'll look at it in a moment. So 1 Peter, part of this book addresses this problem with this Christian freedom.

I'm saved, I've enjoyed the grace of God and now I'm free to do as I like. And people are actually teaching that the more we sin, the more God pours out his grace, the more he's gracious, which is just so topsy-turvy.

And that thinking, sin particularly was used as a reason for immorality of all sorts, but especially in the sexual realm where people were having affairs and having sex with each other in the church.

And it was just like the more we sin, the more God pours out his grace and we're saved so we are free to enjoy our bodies and use them as we see fit, really. So Peter writes this letter to correct this, to address this and in 1 Peter chapter 1 he does this in a positive way and then in chapter 2 he does it in a more stronger way where he's correcting the errors and really sort of calling these false teachers out for their errors and for leading God's people astray into this wrong thinking.

[20 : 05] And he's not just interested in saying this and he's not just saying this to these Christians because it's violating God's law so it's just like stop doing that, you're being naughty, you better stop that, that's wrong.

He's really invested in caring about God, not just his law but about God himself and he is obsessed with and his desire is that God would be glorified and that these people would come back to glorifying God properly and enjoying God and enjoying the inheritance and the good things of God.

So in 1 Peter I want to look from verse 13 sort of on for a few verses I'll just read that Therefore with minds that are alert and fully sober set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming as obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance but just as he who called you is holy so be holy in all you do for it is written be holy because I am holy since you call on a father who judges each person's work impartially live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors but with the precious blood of Christ a lamb without blemish or defect he was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake through him you believe in God who raised him from the dead and glorified him and so your faith and hope are in God now that you have purified yourself by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other love one another deeply from the heart for you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God so Peter's bringing back to them and reminding them what's been done for them and why what they're doing and what they're thinking and teaching and believing about grace and about the law is wrong and topsy-turvy and upside down

Peter's saying to them these people in the early church and to each one of us here tonight as well just as much set your attention and desire on the things of God and not this cheap petty selfish worthless and ultimately temporal like it'll run out it'll expire way of life that you had before God who you've got this faith in and who you've received faith from is eternal and he's glorious he's our glorious heavenly father who sent his own beloved son not just anyone else his own beloved son into the world to redeem you by his blood you weren't redeemed by earthly things jewels gold silver or whatever else but by the blood of the son of God so you need to just see the great thing this is for you and how important it is to throw off these things and get rid of them to come back to where you were before seeing the goodness of the word of God the law of God and what it tells us about our salvation and God's grace that he has for us so this word redeemed is important in this passage and a lot of other passages in the New Testament because it comes out of the slave trade which is different from modern slavery and American chattel slavery that we often think of when we say that word and to redeem people out of slavery you would go to the slave market and you would see some person that you wanted to be taken out of slavery and you would pay a sum for them in money or land or whatever else and you would give them their freedom so that you would pay a price for someone and it would be a hefty price so Peter is really driving home to them and they would have had a much better understanding of that language than we do in our own modern context but that's some of it that what a dear and huge price

God has paid in sending his own son to us we've been redeemed not just with money or land or whatever else was used but by the life of the very son of God so that we can become members of God's family it's not just in those days when people were redeemed from slavery they wouldn't then get into the royal house or whatever the emperor or king or local lord or whatever but this is the case in our redemption in our purchase from slavery that we become members of the royal house of God's family which is so much bigger than just receiving your freedom there you're free go and do as you please we're bought into this new better family so surely in reading this passage and various other places as well with what Peter is saying and what he's teaching us surely we should do is he encourages and set our desire on God and his glory rather than our own for the glorious thing that has been done on our behalf so that is sort of the two sides of the equation that we can that we're all danger of falling into in both and we will fall into at different times and in different ways so what is the answer

[26 : 07] Peter you'll like that one with the rubric cube so the answer to some extent and it's a huge topic for discussion and better minds and people than me have written extensively on it and spoke about it but it is joyful obedience that is the answer to our question tonight of what does God expect from me he wants obedience from us because of the love that he has for us and the good thing that God's law is and what it's been done for us like we thought about from Peter he doesn't want us to be robots who see ourselves as programmed to do what we have to do because God said it just plain and simple black and white to get into heaven just to get us in there just do enough to earn our way to earn our passage but he wants us to be people who have had their desires changed completely because of the faith we have and the work of the Holy Spirit who is indwelling in us who makes our desires change who makes the things we want change to the things that God wants and the things that God desires and the love the things that

God loves which is an encouragement for us because as I said I've thought about we can't do this ourselves so the Holy Spirit has been sent to help us in this through this faith in the Lord Jesus that we're given we are also given this sweet freedom from these chains that bind us metaphorically speaking from the chains of sin and death and that's great news and we should all celebrate that and love that thought and that is the way God wants us to be he wants us to celebrate these things and revel in them and love the freedom that we've been given in this grace in this tremendous thing that's been done for us but it doesn't free us just to live and do as we please and it's a fine line between these two things these two dangers and both of them like I'd said at the start involve this drudgery the drudgery of being told what to do and thinking what a drag

I need to go and I need to really crack on and get knuckled down and get this done and the other side of the drudgery of I'm not interested in this this is far too much and I'm not going to do it because it's seen as this drag so it is this fine line between just following along and the freedom and just exploiting the grace that we've been given and abusing it as well in a sense so the only true solution that we have as a touchstone is this trust in Jesus we thought about the faith and the Holy Spirit that's been sent to Elvis in this but it's through this faith in Jesus so if we find ourselves in the first camp of the joyless obedience following along doing as we're told as best we can for all intents and purposes where God's like this sergeant major barking orders at us and we're determined to follow them that will bring us no pleasure and we will not grow in our

Christian lives whatsoever we'll be stunted but in saying that if we do find ourselves there as we will do from time to time then we have to stop and remember the price has been paid for us by Jesus and remember as well that it's not down to our work the work has been done the price has been paid we are redeemed we can't do this work ourselves we can't pay this price ourselves but it has been paid for us and that was done through this perfect obedience to the will of God that Jesus had all through his life and we can rest in that work and thank God for it and if we find ourselves rather in this second camp of thinking how we want to break free get gone run off stop worrying about all these rules and all these setbacks then stop and remember again that Jesus obeyed his father perfectly which we can't do but he obeyed his father perfectly and cherished the law of God and took delight in it says it all through the gospels so if the

Lord Jesus cherished it and delighted in it and to obey it as well there must be something good about it and we should follow suit as the Lord Jesus did and when we ultimately do find all of this hard going the two dangers are there when we find all of this tough as we will and it happens a lot to all of us remember that Jesus is sitting there at the right hand of God to this day interceding for us and speaking for us on our behalf and as I've said the Holy Spirit has been sent to help us on our way to an answer to this question and to help us apply it and live it out and if we think about this if we can obey joyfully in light of all this how good will it be when people in the office and in the hospital and wherever else we go on life's journey how good would it be for those people we mix with to see people who are obeying the law of

[31 : 59] God joyfully and obeying their heavenly father joyfully like the Lord Jesus did that have been moulded by the love of the Lord and love of his word because that is true freedom for all of us and I think that would really turn the world upside down and so that is an attempt to answer the question what does God expect from me in this life and I just want to end with this verse here that's up on the screen Psalm 37 verse 4 take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart how true that is when we delight in the Lord we will be rewarded so much more for the things that we give up here in this life and he will give us the desires of our heart which will be so much sweeter than the desires we had previously let's just pray and then we can have a break and get a drink heavenly father we thank you so much for your word and for your law and how you use it to teach us and to lead us and to show us how much we need you and we need the

Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit that it shows us just in what a sorry and poor state we're in by ourselves but we thank you Lord that you know our hearts you know our minds you know our desires you know all these things about us and yet when we come to you in faith you accept us and we thank you that that is because of the Lord Jesus and his work and we are given that freely and we are represented and we don't need to work ourselves and Heavenly Father we pray that as we go from this place tonight into the coming week that we will remember that you want your children your people to love you and to obey and serve you not out of obligation and not out of trying to put ticks in boxes but really out of true love and devotion and we pray Lord like that

Psalm 37 verse 4 says we pray Lord that we would take the light in you and that you would be giving us the desires of our hearts and we pray Lord that you would be changing the desires of our hearts so that we would be honouring and glorifying you and we just pray this now for all of us in the precious name of the Lord Jesus Amen