

FAITH THAT PLEASES GOD – ENOCH

Introduction

Do you ever wonder about the voice of God? What does it sound like? Maybe you've heard it. Scripture describes the voice of God all the way from to scary thunder to the thunderous sound of rushing water—all the way down to a still small voice—a whisper.¹ Interesting.

Related: I wonder it sounds like when God sings.

“The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

–Zephaniah 3:17 NIV

God sings over his children! He sings over us with delight when we turn to him and walk with him. He is pleased with us. I wonder what songs he sings. Maybe a modified version of *I've Got Friends in Low Places*? Maybe not. I imagine it's a personalized song of how much he enjoys you, how he is pleased with us, and how he delights in walking with us daily. What do you think?

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Earlier this Summer, on Memorial Day weekend, my wife, Kedra, did something pretty exciting in lots of ways. It was part of her journey to be untethered from some things, including the fear of heights. She went up in a hot-air balloon with her brother. And I watched it all from the ground—a bit envious. **PIC–Bal2**

It was a beautiful morning in Decatur, Alabama. As the sun was slowly rising, there was quite a detailed process of getting the balloon ready—lots of unpacking, straightening, tying, checking, and connecting things. The balloon was slowly inflated, first with a fan and then with fire. Then, when everything was just right and ready, the pilot, Kedra, and her brother climbed into the basket, which was being held down by a few people.

After one last check of everything, the pilot hit the fiery inflator once again, and fire shot up into the balloon, creating more lift. He watched it and then shouted, “Weight off”—meaning for everyone to let go, and they did, and when they did, the balloon slowly and beautifully lifted into the blue sky, so peacefully and quietly—up, up, and away. **VIDEO–Balvid**

A little later, they drifted back to the ground several miles away in a grassy patch between two cornfields. **PIC–Bal1** After some pictures, we had a little ceremony, a prayer, and lots of memories to share as life goes on.

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Once upon a time, there were two who often walked together. They always started at the one man's house. The Other would come by every day. The times might vary, but they would walk together daily. They were good friends. It was a like mentor-mentee relationship. The Other was clearly superior in all kinds of ways, yet he would show up daily to walk with the man.

The man would greet the Other every day with a smile and hearty “hello!” They really loved each other. They walked for miles and miles, and as they walked, they talked and talked.

They talked about the man's family. They talked about the beauty of the earth. They talked about the joy of living. They talked about violence in the world, and they talked about death. They talked about how to have peace—peace on earth, and peace within—and how to pursue a peaceful and pleasing life.

¹See Exodus 19:19, Ezekiel 43:2, Revelation 1:15, and 1 Kings 19:12.

One day, the man welcomed the Other as he always did. The Other had a huge smile on his face—a bigger smile than usual. The Other said to the man, “We are going to do something really different today. I am going to lead you on a new path to a new place—a path and a place like nothing you have ever experienced or even imagined.”

They left the man’s house and began walking. The Other smiled quietly for the first mile, and then he stopped, looked at the man, and asked, “Are you ready?” The man said, “I trust you, so, sure!” Then suddenly they both began slowly drifting up from the road. It was so peaceful, so quiet, so wonderful, and so beautiful. Up and away they went. Higher and higher they went until they were out of Earth’s eyesight.

Discussion

When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died. When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

—Genesis 5:18-24 NIV

The Story of Enoch stands out in a chapter—Genesis 5—that is marked by three words used 8 times. There is a bit of formula in the chapter:

*So and so lived so many years
and
(here are the 3 words)
then he died.*

Then. He. Died.

Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Jared, Methuselah, and others are listed:

*lived so many years
and
then he died.*

Enoch stands out as a striking exception.

*Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God;
then he was no more, because God took him away.*

Up, up, and away, God took him that day. I think it’s clear what Moses is saying: Enoch did not die. Which leaves us with an interesting question: Why? The answer from Genesis seems pretty clear. Twice it says:

Enoch walked faithfully with God.

Our Preacher in Hebrews likes Enoch’s story. Today we continue our summer series of sermons from Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11 is a key part of a long written sermon, I think. This sermon—Hebrews—is for a church that is discouraged. Some have lost their way. Some are deconstructing their faith in Jesus. Some are quitting. They are having problems. Persecution in various forms is looming. They wonder if it’s worth it to follow Jesus.

The preacher reminds them of how important it is and how it’s worth everything to follow Jesus—even with the problems of persecution. He makes his case, and then in chapter 11, he cites examples of people who had faith that empowered them to persevere and overcome all kinds of things. Enoch is among those listed. The Preacher has this to say about him:

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

—Hebrews 11:5-6 NIV

Pleasing God—is that possible? How does that happen? Ultimately, it’s about faith, isn’t it? Faith in the midst of doubt. Faith in the midst of discouragement. Faith in good times. Faith in God’s promises. Faith that trusts God with unanswered questions. Faith that allows us to seek God and have confidence in him. Faith that enables us to walk with Him, and to please God.

It seems it pleases God when we simply believe he exists and when we believe he will reward us. It pleases him when we pursue a life of walking with him—following his ways with, and by, faith.

BY FAITH, WE CAN PLEASE GOD

Let’s think about the kind of faith that pleases God. Enoch walked with God, and the Preacher says he was pleasing to God—*he was commended as one who pleased God*.

What does it mean to please God? And are you like me and wonder if that’s even possible because I am so flawed. To please someone means you make them happy and satisfied. From their standpoint, you are acceptable, approved, and liked. And maybe they like you so much they even sing a song about you.

Enoch pleased God by believing in him, seeking him, and walking faithfully with Him. I’m thinking God sang to Enoch—a song of delight, perhaps a playful song sung with a smile.

Pleasing God is to walk with God, and to walk with God is to please God. It’s all based on faith that God exists and wants us to walk with him. This pleases him.

A part of my daily ritual is to say several things I have memorized. A lot of them are Scriptures and all of them are based on Scripture. One of the things I say every day, shortly after waking up, is this:

I make it my goal to please him.

It comes from 2 Corinthians 5. There, Paul talks about our bodies aging and wearing out, which creates painful problems. We walk through those problems by faith, believing this is a part of our journey that ends up in the presence of God. Notice the connection between walking by faith and pleasing God:

We walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

—2 Corinthians 5:7-9 ESV

So what does it mean to please God, to walk faithfully with God, and to seek God—essentially to live like Enoch? If you are like me, the idea creates scary questions. Is my faith good enough to do this? Is my faith strong enough? Am I walking faithfully? Am I pleasing God? I make so many mistakes and misstep so often, missing the mark and sinning, falling far short of what God wants.

This is where I—you—we need to remember we are saved only by the amazingly strong initiative and grace of God. He loves us, is for us, and will continually forgive us when we turn to him through faith in Jesus. From that platform of God’s loving acceptance, we begin walking with God—Father, Son, and Spirit.

Walking with, and pleasing, God is a lifestyle—an intentional deliberate way of living. It’s a decision. It’s *not* about perfection; that’s not possible. It *is* about intention and desire. It’s about keeping in step with the Spirit—Galatians 5:25. While I cannot walk perfectly, I really do want to please God because I’m so grateful for the life he gives. I want to respond with gratitude and obedience—doing what he asks. I want to walk by faith into eternal life.

BY FAITH, WE CAN PLEASE GOD

Two women are sitting in a coffee shop. It's a younger mom who has reached out to one who is older. They have their coffee in hand and have finished the polite preliminary conversation. As the silence begins, the younger woman says, "I really want to be pleasing to God, but I don't know if I am. I'm just not sure how to do it. I look at you, and you seem so joyful and peaceful—so humbly confident."

The older woman smiles and shakes her head and says, "Well, I certainly appreciate your kind words. You should know that I still struggle with lots of things but I do rest in God's loving initiative, his grace, and his invitation to walk with him."

The younger one smiles and asks, "Can you tell what that looks like—walking with God, pleasing him? How do you know, and how do you do it every day?"

The older woman takes a sip of her coffee, slowly puts it down, and then says, "I've been around quite a while and have been through lots of things, including painful things that shook my faith, but I decided I was going to trust God with it all. Over the years, as I've thought about my walk with the Lord and how to describe it."

The young woman leans forward and eagerly asks, "How do you describe it?"

The older woman reaches for the little white napkin, flattens out it, takes a purple felt-tip pen out of her purse, writes, *Pleasing God* at the top, and says, "I'm an old English teacher—I like the power of simple words and I like alliteration. I have three words—they all begin with the letter P—that I use to describe walking with God, pleasing God."

The young woman watches carefully as the purple felt-tip pen begins forming words on the napkin.

"The first word is **PRESENCE**. God promises his presence over and over again in Scripture. I believe it. I believe he exists, is with me always, and wants me to be with him."

The young mom stares at the word and then looks up, "OK, but how do stay aware of his presence?"

With a laugh, the old English teacher says, "We all talk to ourselves, narrating our lives as we go. I try to invite Jesus into the narration, to at least be aware of His presence and to have Him as a conversation partner."

She takes her pen and writes a second word, **PROMISES**, and then explains. "To walk with God—to please him—we need to be forward-looking and future-focused. Hebrews 11:6 says we need to believe that God *rewards those who earnestly seek him*. The ultimate promise of God is eternal life in his pure presence. I have hope—a confident expectation—that everything will be OK when everything is over. I take these promises of the future and back them into my present life. This is the foundation for my peace, joy, and confidence."

The young woman shakes her in awe and appreciation. "This is so helpful. I'm eager to hear the third word."

"The third word is **PRAYER**. To walk with God is to talk with God. I respond to his PRESENCE and his PROMISES with gratitude. I'm so thankful for all he does. We walk; we talk. I tell him what's on my heart—the good, bad, and ugly. A key part of prayer, though, is listening. I listen to him primarily through Scripture. I start my day reading from the Bible. I get good thoughts in my mind that help me deal with the day."

The younger woman's phone vibrates, she grimaces, and says, "I'm so sorry, I have to go soon. One of my kids just got sick at school. Can we continue this sometime soon? It's been so helpful."

"I'm so sorry about your child, and I understand. Certainly, we can continue this wonderful conversation. I've so enjoyed it. Just one more thing, quickly. Sometimes people ask if their faith good enough or strong enough to please God. I always tell them what Tim Keller—a great scholar and teacher—said. He said something like this: If you're falling off a cliff, a strong faith in a weak limb that breaks will not save you. But a weak faith in a strong limb that holds you, will save you. Then he explains: it's less about the strength of your faith and more—much more—about the strength of the object of your faith which is Jesus."

The older English teacher, finishing her coffee, watches the young mom leave. She prays for her.

Conclusion

Let's return to Enoch's deathless exit from this world. The only other person in Scripture to not die is Elijah the Prophet. According to 2 Kings 2:11, Elijah was caught up in a whirlwind and carried away by horses and a chariot of fire into Heaven. So Elijah, like Enoch, did not experience death. Wouldn't that be nice?

Jesus says some really interesting things about death which makes me wonder if our experience of death—as believers in Jesus and as pleasers of God—will somehow be Enoch-like, maybe Elijah-like.

I have stood and sat on holy ground a few times over the years and watched some take their last breath. I wonder: will somehow, someday, when it's time for us to go, if we have been pleasing to God—and we can be—will we simply go up and away in a peaceful way? Will we be like poor Lazarus in Luke 16? Will we be carried by angels to Paradise? I've watched people die so peacefully. They believed what Jesus said.

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

—John 11:25,26 NIV

Just two or three weeks ago, one of my best friend's father was in a hospice facility. Though, I did not this man well, I felt prompted one morning to visit him and whoever was in the room. It turned out to be the man's wife of 69 years. She told me about her husband's faith journey. It was only in the last couple of years that he turned to Jesus and was baptized. In his new life, he liked to sing, and his favorite song was, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*—a song of hope born of out slavery that reflects Elijah's exit from this world. This man loved to sing it. There's a line in the song that should catch our attention:

*I looked over Jordan and what do I see
A band of angels coming after me
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot*

A couple of hours after I left that hospice room, after praying for the man with his wife, I received word that he had passed from this life. I imagine the chariot swung low and the angels picked him up and carried him home. I imagine God welcomed him home with a song of delight. He pleased God by believing in him.

Years ago, a good friend of mine had a good friend who had a disease that robbed him of so much, including his ability to speak. As this relatively young man was getting closer to death, family and friends surrounded him and sang his favorite hymns. He was nearly unresponsive but listened peacefully. One night, shortly before he died, a group had gathered to sing. As they were singing, suddenly his eyes opened and he raised up, clearly disturbed. They stopped singing. He was wanting to communicate something, and he did. He essentially said: *There are angels in this room, and they are singing with us!* Was it the band of angels coming for to carry him home? I don't know. I'd like to think so. He died shortly thereafter.

Someday—and we don't know when—our life as we know it will end. If we embrace Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life and live by believing in him, which pleases him, then, somehow, in some mysterious way, we will pass from this life in a different way—like Elijah, like Enoch.

The key is pleasing God by walking with him. He makes it all possible through Jesus. Have faith—believe—that God is, and trust that he wants you to walk with him all the way to life eternal. He'll sing over you as you go.

So, how are you going to respond today? Do you need to accept Jesus and be baptized? Do you need to come back to him? I want to challenge all of us, especially my brothers. **Men**, it is time for us to rise up and walk with the Lord and invite others to do the same. I hope and pray you are looking forward to September 6th!