

Jealous Eyes

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[0 : 00] Well, when we read from the Bible earlier, in the two passages that we read from, I don't know if you noticed, but the word that popped up in both of them was jealousy.

And jealousy is kind of the theme of what I want to look at this morning. And I want to use both of the passages kind of to refer to. So we'll come to the passages in 2 Corinthians, but first just to think about jealousy a wee bit in general.

Now, jealousy. I wonder if somebody asked you if you're a jealous person, how you would feel in response to that, if you're a jealous person.

Quite a challenging question to be asked, I guess. In Galatians chapter 5, Paul writes about the fruit of the Spirit and how Christians should be as they keep in step with God's Spirit.

But he also writes about how we should not be and the sinful nature. And in that passage, he says this, The acts of the flesh or our sinful acts are obvious, sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy.

[1 : 19] And he goes on. Now, we think of jealousy, I think, as a bad thing, most obviously. When I think about jealousy, I have this expression that comes into my mind, the green-eyed monster.

I was thinking about jealousy and I thought, green-eyed monster, and I thought, what? Where did that come from? Have I got this right? So I looked up green-eyed monster, and green-eyed monster does refer to jealousy, it's a way of describing somebody or the condition of being jealous.

It comes apparently from Shakespeare, from the play Othello. Now, that makes sense because Othello, I don't know if you've ever read or seen Othello, Othello's all about jealousy.

One of the main characters, Iago, is a jealous character. And his jealousy just eats him up. And because he's so jealous and bitter towards Othello and other people, he kind of plots against them. And he uses all his power to try and make them jealous. So everybody in this play, it's a tragedy, becomes jealous of everybody else. It's a horrible play. It's a bitter play. And it's all about jealousy.

[2 : 30] But we have our very own kind of drama, in a sense, the biblical account of jealousy in the story of Saul and David, don't we? As we read through that, I don't know if you've read through that passage before, Saul, the king of Israel, God's chosen one initially, was somebody who had great responsibility to lead God's people.

But in that story that we read, and as we read through the account of Saul and David and ongoing what happens in his life, Saul becomes somebody consumed by jealousy and bitterness.

And he becomes a really tragic character, a really sad character. As we read through that passage there, what's happened is that Saul had been given a particular instruction, the way that God wanted him to operate as his king, as his representative to lead his people.

But Saul had thought otherwise, and so Saul had done differently. And he's rebuked for that. And God rebukes him and says, because I know your heart and because I know what you've done, you will no longer be king and I will take the kingdom away from you.

And he becomes aware that another one, David, is to become king. Now what happens to Saul is he starts to see that David's influence and relationship with God grows, while his own influence and relationship with God diminishes, just falls apart.

[4 : 06] It just kind of seeps away. But as that happens, what's tragic about this is it's not like a stimulus for Saul to realise the need to repent, because he craves for and wants to protect his relationship with God.

Rather, you see as we read that, the people are praising David for his success, and Saul is just utterly threatened by that, because he wants the power. He's not really drawn back to the Lord in repentance.

He's jealous of David for the power that he has and for the influence that he has. And so there's this kind of destructive stream running throughout his life from this point on.

So this is a kind of clear example of how jealousy, how we can think of jealousy, most obviously I think is just a bad thing. So if somebody says to you, are you a jealous person?

If somebody says to me, Tommy, are you a jealous person? I want to say no. I don't want to say yes. If I know of jealousies in my own heart, I don't want you to know them, because it's not pretty.

[5 : 15] They're not things that we want to share, are jealousies. We think about jealousy as a negative thing and as a destructive thing. You know, if there's a couple of friends and one of them starts behaving really badly towards the other one, another friend might come alongside and say, don't worry, she or he, they're just jealous of you.

And we use jealousy to explain why that person is behaving so badly towards the other. So jealousy is where we think there's something that somebody else has or something out there that will do us good, will make us better.

But the way we go about wanting it, the whole process can become so embittered and tragic and it can change the way we are towards other people. Have you seen that at work in your own life?

I think that's why we read of it's mentioned in a passage like Galatians, because God does want us at a basic level to recognise things like jealousy, to kind of name and shame them in our lives and recognise them and root them out and destroy them, because they can be ugly and destructive things.

And they can be ugly and destructive things in a church, no different to they can be in the football field or in the pub or wherever, in university. It can be a horrible thing at work in our lives.

[6 : 42] Now, if we know that about jealousy as a general introduction, I think it can be maybe a surprise, maybe a challenge.

When we come to a passage like the one we read in 2 Corinthians and we read what Paul says there, with all that background and all that we've said about jealousy being a potentially negative and destructive thing, what does Paul say when he's writing to these people in Corinth, as the one who's brought the Gospel to them and as the one who's concerned for their Christian life and witness and testimony, Paul says to them in verse 2 of chapter 11, I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.

That's, I think, a startling sentence. It's quite a thing to say and I want to suspend a little while thinking about that, because you may well think, well, is Paul right to say that?

Putting jealousy next to God, godly jealousy. How can we say that? How can we say godly jealousy? It sounds like an oxymoron.

I'm not trying to use fancy words, I had to look the word up myself. Two things that just don't go right together. Godly jealousy. How can that be? Well, actually, it's right to say that God is jealous.

[8 : 07] I want us to look now as we think about this passage, a couple of things. First of all, God's jealousy and then we'll come on to Paul's jealousy. But first of all, we have to understand this thing, godly jealousy.

What does it mean to say that God is jealous? Is it right for Paul for us to say that God is jealous? How is God jealous? As we read through the Bible, as we go back into the Old Testament, and as you read of what God is like as he relates to his people, it's right for us to say that God is jealous. God is called a jealous God. God calls himself a jealous God. He wants people to know that he's a jealous God. And how is that?

Well, God, throughout the pages of the Old Testament, we read of God's relationship with his people. And that's really important, his relationship with his people.

[9 : 10] Because what God is doing in the pages of the Old Testament is we're learning of the way that he's calling his people, the Israelites and some others, calling them to himself, saving them.

He's being their saviour from their sin and from their waywardness and from their messed up lives. He's calling them to himself and he's saying, I am your God.

At the heart of all that God is doing with his people throughout all of the Bible is he's calling them to forgiveness and relationship. He's calling them into relationship with himself.

And he is jealous of the relationship that he wants between him and his people. He sets up this relationship where he will be over his people and care for them and save them and be the one that they look to.

And that relationship that he knows they need, he's jealous of. He's jealous to protect it. He's jealous that they don't just ignore it and run away from it.

[10:20] And the picture that's often used in the Bible is of a betrothal or a marriage. If you were here a few weeks ago and I was preaching just before Christmas, Mary and Joseph, Mary was betrothed to Joseph.

And the idea there is that they had the ceremony where they were betrothed or promised and then the marriage ceremony came maybe up to a year later. So they're promised to one another. They're looking forward to the marriage. But in the meantime, how are they to be with each other? They're to be faithful.

They're to be pure. They're not to go off with somebody else because they're promised to each other. And so they're to be pure and they're to be faithful.

And we see this picture being used throughout the Bible. God's people are promised to him. They're betrothed to him. He speaks about, we speak about the church as being the bride of Christ.

[11:25] And this is a picture that we get throughout the Old Testament. So God's people in the Old Testament were redeemed. They were saved. They were his people and they were to be faithful.

And they also had this idea of looking forward as well, didn't they? Because they were looking forward to the savior that he would send to the Messiah who was to come. But in the meantime, they were to be faithful.

So important for them to follow God and to be his people. Think of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments, when God gave the Ten Commandments, you read them in Exodus chapter 20, it's not just a random list of things that God wants people to do.

I'm God, so do these things because I feel like it today. Nothing like that. When God gives the Ten Commandments to his people, he says, I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt before giving them these commandments.

In other words, what he's saying to them is, you should know me. I'm the Lord your God who saved you. I called you to follow me.

[12:32] I have saved you and I am saving you. And in the meantime, this is how I want you to live. I want you to be faithful to me. And this is how here are these commandments, these ways to live.

And as you follow these commandments and as you live following these commandments, you're keeping in step with how I want you to be. You're being my people. You're being my faithful people. But the problem, of course, and the problem as we read so often in the Old Testament, is that they were unfaithful. They were unfaithful and they didn't follow God. And so this picture of being faithful to God as the ones promised to him, it just feels like it's being shattered time and again.

I've maybe said this before, but I used to feel when I was reading through the Old Testament, so frustrated, you'd read it and you'd think, ah, they've abandoned God again. How can they do that? And then, of course, we look at our own hearts and we see the way in which so often we can hear the way God wants us to be and the way he wants us to live. And then we just forget about it and we go our own way.

[13:37] The problem is, of course, that they broke fellowship with God so often. They broke that relationship. I just want to read one example in Deuteronomy.

I think it's a really clear description of the way in which this betrothal, this promise, this relationship was taken advantage of, really.

In Deuteronomy 32, from verse 5, rather than being faithful to God, here's what happened. They have acted corruptly towards Him.

To their shame, they're no longer His children. And it goes on, is this the way you repay the Lord, oh foolish and unwise people? So there's the message to the people, why have you been so foolish, just abandoning God again and just not listening to Him and the way He wants you to live? Why are you so foolish? Why are you so stubborn? Going after these other gods, because God knows what they need. He knows that they need Him.

[14:45] And then it goes on, and this is where we see an example of God as the jealous God. In verse 16, let me just read from verse 16, they, that's the Israelites, they made Him jealous with their foreign gods and angered Him with their detestable idols.

And it goes on in verse 18, you deserted the rock who fathered you. You forgot the God who gave you birth. God was jealous, why was God jealous of these people?

Because He knew them as the one who cared for them and who redeemed them and who brought them out of Egypt and who gave them His commandments so that they might live for Him.

He knew that they needed Him. There was no way they could save themselves. Running off after these idols, running off after the gods of the other nations did nothing for them.

He knew that they needed Him. And this relationship that He established between Himself and them, He was jealous of it. He wanted to protect it, because He wanted to protect them, His people.

[15 : 59] You know, I don't know the way you think when you hear the phrase of jealous God. I think sometimes people can feel threatened by that or uncomfortable by it because we don't want God to come into our lives.

And so a God who's jealous of us, we see that in just a negative way. I don't want God to bother me and to impinge on my life and to come into my life. I want to keep Him at a distance.

But we will think like that unless we understand that the God who is jealous for us is the best thing for us. And His love is good.

And it's what we need. And His love in our life, caring for us and knowing us and guiding us, is the best thing. When we understand that the love of God for us, the love that He so jealously wants to protect so that His people are faithful to Him, when we understand that love, then I think we want to follow Him.

The challenge for us is to see the times where we just grow cold. And we don't care, I think, because we don't see the good love of God for us in all His good character and the way in which He wants to care for us.

[17 : 22] Now, in the same way, this is true for Christians. God was jealous for His people and He's jealous for us. Because we're called to follow God.

We're called to follow a Saviour because we're equally, if not more needy, than the people of Israel. We are equally so desperately needy because we can't save ourselves by the things we do in life, by our religiosity, any of these things we can't save ourselves.

It's not possible for us to save ourselves. And so we're equally needy for a Saviour. And so we equally see God as a redeemer. We see the work of Jesus as the one who's been sent to be our Saviour and to save us from our sins.

And how does it work for us? Well, Paul speaks about, I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband. These people that he's writing to, and we are promised to one husband, to one Saviour, to Jesus as our Saviour.

Now, we know about Jesus that he's coming back. And that's a key thing for us to understand as Christians. We look back to see the way that Jesus has all that he has done in the way that he has saved us.

[18 : 42] But we also have this great sense of looking forward. Looking forward to the fact that he's not just come as a Saviour and then left us to it, but he's coming back.

He's coming back. And in the meantime, how are we to be? In the same way that those in our marriage situation who were betrothed had to be faithful.

In the same way that God's Old Testament people were called to be faithful. In the same way that the Corinthians were called to be faithful, so are we called to be faithful.

So that now, as we look forward to the coming again of Christ, as we recognize all that he's done for us and as we look forward, recognizing the big picture of God's salvation for our lives, we as individuals and together as a church care about our relationship to God.

So we're not careless with it. So we don't just let it go. So we don't think that we can live one day for Jesus and the next day for ourselves and just follow however like our mood takes us.

[20 : 01] We get a couple of different verses that express this really well. Paul's really concerned in this letter that the people look after and protect the relationship they have with Jesus.

He doesn't want them to get distracted and to go away. One verse in the 2 Corinthians chapter 1, 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 21.

He says this to the people, now it's God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ as this idea of being solid, grounded in the relationship with Christ.

He anointed us. He set his seal of ownership on us and put his spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Guaranteeing what is to come.

The salvation, the final salvation and the togetherness with Christ that is to come is guaranteed by the fact that we have the Holy Spirit now. And so now are you protecting the relationship with God that you have?

[21 : 06] Now are you concerned to live in a way that reflects all that you know that God has done for you and that prepares you for his coming again?

Not living carelessly. And one more verse, let me just read in Colossians. Colossians chapter 1. Once, verse 21, once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your mind because of your evil behaviour, but now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death. Why? To present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation. See, to present you as holy because he has this idea of being able to present the believers to Christ when he comes again as pure, as holy as those who've looked after the faith that they have and who've not been careless with it.

But he goes on to say, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the Gospel. And then again in verse 28, we proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

[22 : 28] These are challenging words. So that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. And so the relationship that we have with God is a precious thing.

And so being careless with the Gospel, that we may be heard all our life and never responded to, or that we've accepted but are growing cold with, being careless with that is a tragic thing because we're to protect it and to be jealous of this hope that we've been given by God.

Be jealous of it to protect it and to keep it. And so godly jealousy, if we think about the whole concept of godly jealousy, we can see that it's absolutely right and it's absolutely good because what God wants for us is good.

He gives us our salvation and he wants to protect it and he wants us to protect it also. But I also want just to look at briefly Paul's jealousy.

Paul himself says in this verse, I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. Now what does Paul mean when he says this? He himself sees that his relationship with Jesus is the most important thing for him and he wants that relationship for these Corinthians.

[24 : 01] He looks at them as one who brought the Gospel to them. He looks at them and thinks, you know, the most important thing for these people is that they know and love Jesus and that's what I want for them.

That's what I want for them. How do we see that in this passage? Well, the concept of betrothal, remember we mentioned that. In verse 2, I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.

I promised you to one husband. He reminds them because they need reminding. Remember when I brought you the Gospel, it was to one husband. He uses that image again.

It was to one Saviour Jesus. Don't be distracted. Don't look elsewhere for your salvation. Don't be jealous of all the things in life that you think are good for you.

You think are going to give you meaning. You think are going to make you popular, whatever. Don't be jealous of those things. Be jealous of your one Saviour Jesus.

[25 : 09] So there's a concept of betrothal in that verse. Also, following that, as we've seen, I hope we've seen, so that they might be faithful, so that they might live for Jesus.

See, as he goes on in verse 2, I promise you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. Now that language, that's maybe awkward language for us.

We wouldn't express it in that way. But what's this about? It's coming back to that same concept, isn't it? That Paul wants the people to be pure for Jesus, if we can put it like that.

To be faithful for Jesus. In the Old Testament, the people that we read in Deuteronomy, they were challenged because they constantly went after other gods. They thought, these gods will do me good today.

And maybe tomorrow these gods will do me good. And they were told, no, be faithful. And here he's saying to these people in Corinth, who were challenged to look elsewhere, that Paul wanted them to have this pure devotion to Christ.

[26 : 20] To be faithful. And there's a call to them, and there's a call to us. Also, in chapter 10, just before the chapter that we're in, Paul says this in verse 5, we demolish arguments in every potential that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Now, I find that really challenging. Take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. That's a challenging verse.

Pure and faithful to Jesus. And also following on from this, Paul is just worried that they'll be taken away, that they'll lose it as he goes on into verse 3 and 4.

He uses the analogy with Eve, Adam and Eve in the garden. I'm afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your mind might somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion.

You see, Satan, the accuser, when he came to Eve in the garden, what did he do? He challenged her understanding and her belief of who God was.

[27 : 40] He said, did God really say? And he started trying to persuade her to question God and who God was to her. And so she acted in accordance.

She followed his temptation. Paul is saying to these people, I'm concerned that your minds will be led astray.

And that they'll essentially flirt with other ideas, flirt with other ways of living, flirt with other gods, with other concerns, be jealous for other things.

And then he goes on again in verse 4. Someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached. Or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

You see, he's saying to them, I know the temptation you have to follow other ways. But the problem is that I think you're too quick to follow those other ways.

[28 : 44] You see what he says there at the end of verse 4? You put up with it easily enough. Now, we need to contrast that with verse 1. Paul introduces this chapter by saying, I hope you'll put up with a little of my foolishness, but you're already doing that.

In other words, he's saying, I know that you're already putting up with me. Paul was the one who brought them this gospel. He brought them the knowledge of the Savior Jesus.

And now their attitude has changed. And their attitude towards him and to the gospel is potentially just indifferent, careless.

But their attitude to new ideas, new ways of living, things that will give them, they think, more fulfillment, a better life. Well, they're quite keen to take those things on board.

They're quite keen. And so, godly jealousy. Godly jealousy is about God's desire that his people would be kept safe from going away from him.

[29 : 45] Because what he gives them, what he gives us is what we need. It's what's best for us. Paul's concern, I want you to think about this.

Paul, this is amazing because Paul looks at others and he wants that for them. He sees the need for that first in himself.

But then he sees the need so much that he wants other people to be kept pure. He is jealous that they will be God's people and that they'll be kept pure.

So in finishing, just two things before I lose my voice. Think again about the relationship that God wants you to have with him.

This relationship that he wanted his Old Testament people to have, that he wants his New Testament people to have, he wants us to have. It's a good thing and he's jealous for it.

[30 : 51] He's protective of it. He doesn't want us to leave it. We read our city group on Wednesday night, a few different passages just before we prayed. And one of the passages that we read was from Sam Forte.

And I think it's one of my favorite verses. I just want to read a bit of it. Sam Forte verse 17, towards the end of the Psalm says, As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.

And that's a beautiful verse because it speaks about the fact that God, in all his majesty and in all his power and reality, knows individually his people.

But the Lord takes thought for me. Other translations say, may the Lord think on me, I think. So that concern of God for you personally and individually, is that something that you've responded to?

Secondly, thinking about Paul's jealousy for other people. What do you want for the people that are closest to you in your life? How do you think about the people that sit next to you in the pew, or that you work beside, or that are your brothers and sisters?

[32 : 11] Is what you want for them a good life? Well, that's fine. Health is fine. But is what you want for them a godly life?

A life where they know the Savior, and they know the presence of the Lord, and they know his salvation. So we have the opportunity to live and to breathe the gospel for others, and to want that for others, and to pray that for others.

And as Christians, it's a challenge to think, are we living up to that? And do we have a godly jealousy for our neighbours and our friends and our younger brothers? Those who we maybe have influence over in our lives, and those who we can speak to about the gospel.

So jealousy, are you a jealous person? Well, jealousy can be a terribly destructive thing, but it can be most importantly the most important constructive thing, where we know the Lord, and we want that knowledge of the Lord for others.

And I pray that we would know that. Let me just close in prayer. Lord, we praise You. Often we don't know what's best for us, but You do.

[33 : 29] You always called Your people to account for the way that they went off and abandoned You. Lord, call us to account this morning we pray, and help us to follow You.

We pray that we would see the goodness of the salvation that You offer in the relationship You want with us. And we pray as well that we would want our brothers and our sisters and our colleagues and our flatmates to know You.

In Jesus' name, amen.