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Title: 212: Anticipation

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

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Good morning and welcome. It's great to be together. Let's take a moment and pray. God, as we gather today, I pray that you would just be at work speaking to each of us. God, if I've prepared things that don't reflect your truth, I pray you'd keep me from saying them. And if there are things that would be beneficial for those of us gathered that I haven't prepared, I pray that you'd prompt me to say those, and I'd respond in this moment. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So many of the decisions that we all make, we make with a very similar goal. And what I mean when I say this is we make a decision because we believe that whatever decision we make will bring greater happiness to our lives in the days ahead or in the current moment. And so, we all make our decisions, but we make them because, for whatever reason, we think this will bring me some form of happiness.

So, for example, if you're somebody who with money says, I want to have security, you might save money and not want to spend money because you believe in the future that if you have more money, you'll be happier. Or you might be somebody who's more of a present spender who says, I am not guaranteed much in the way of the future. So, let's spend today and have fun today because who knows about tomorrow? So, let's just enjoy. By the way, those two people usually marry each other.

Or maybe you're somebody who says, I want to be happy, so I'm making every healthy decision today so that in the future I have as long a run of health in my life as possible. Or maybe you're somebody who says, you know what, I just want to have fun. Today, the Steelers are playing. It's 5:00 somewhere. Let's go.

I knew one guy who was so into this that he said, I heard once that if you exercise four times a week or whatever his stat was that you will live five years longer. And he said, I computed the math from how old I am today, how long it would take me to exercise four times a week, and it's a net loss of time versus the five years I would gain. So, he just said, I'm done with working out. I'm not going to give time to that.

We make decisions out of a desire to say, I want to maximize my happiness. There's a book that was written several years ago now by a professor at Harvard, a visiting lecture professor. And basically, he took one of his most popular classes, one of the most popular classes at Harvard, and he put it into a book. It's called *Happier*, and his name was called Tal Ben-Shahar. And he wrote this book called *Happier* to say how is it that happiness works.

And his thesis was basically this. So, what he says is that on one access, there's a future positive and a future negative. And then on the other access, there's a present positive and a present negative. And if you're choosing present negative and future negative, he says that ends up being nihilism, which is the philosophical word for I don't care basically about anything. And if you are always choosing the future, that means you're living in a rat race. You're always negating the present pleasure for the future and then you're in a rat race. If you're choosing the present positive over the future, he calls that hedonism.

And then he says the ideal is to maximize your future and your present happiness. Now, one of the illustrations he uses is around eating. He says that if you're the person who's always prioritizing the future, it's like you eat veggie burgers all the time. If you're a hedonist, you eat junk food. The ideal is the person who's always trying to find the balance between something healthy and something fun. And he says, the nihilist just doesn't eat. It's basically what happens in that.

Now, the reason that I point this book out is that his idea and the other part of his thesis is that happiness is the place where meaning and pleasure come together, where we say, I bring these things together, and this is what brings me happiness. So, this is what has been taught at Harvard for a while as being the best way to think about happiness.

But what's it missing? Well, let me just suggest that what's missing is this, and that is that this falls flat on at least one key point. And the key point that it falls flat on is if you load everything into this life, then this is a fine theory to say maximize your present and your future happiness. But biblical faith has a hope that's beyond this life.

And the reason that that's so important is because this life was never intended to hold all of our happiness. This life was never intended, in a sense, to be the place where we say all of my meaning and all of my pleasure happens here and now in such a way that I can be guaranteed that I'll get it.

And so, what happens when we don't account for a biblical perspective of faith or something beyond is we load into this life all of our needs, all of our desires, and we end up being frustrated. So let me give you another example. This isn't from the book. This is mine. And that is what we tend to do is we tend to look often at the horizon of this world, our life, and say, here and now is where we need happiness. And what we need to do in some ways is say, what's beyond this?

Now, we've been working our way through the Book of First Corinthians for some time, and in the last several months we've been in chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14 we'll be in soon. And Chapter 13 is what's known as the love chapter. But in the last few verses where he says, love never fails, and then he talks about tongues and prophecy and knowledge, and we talked some about that last week, so I won't talk much about that this week, but what he does do here is he says now we see in a mirror darkly.

In fact, some translations will say something like now we see in a mirror dimly, and the word is used only here in the New Testament, the Greek word that underlies our text, and it means, in essence, to be obscured or to have a riddle. And so, when he uses the mirror imagery and some people have said Corinth produced a lot of mirrors in the day, he says when you look in a mirror, it's as if that mirror is never as good as seeing something face to face. It's never quite the same.

And what he means in some ways is that what you know, what you feel, and what you experience in this world, in this life, is always partial, and it's never complete. And so, biblical anticipation says that whatever experiences I have here and now are not everything. They're partial.

So, what does that mean? Well, let me give you two implications. The first is this, and that is our best moments in life are not ultimate. Now, you may say that doesn't sound very hopeful, but let me show you why this is hopeful. So, again, in First Corinthians 13, verse eight, it says, "Love never fails." Some translations say love never ends. And there's a debate about whether it is a minority text, or a majority text, and how to translate it. But there isn't really that big of a difference.

But if you say love never ends is an acceptable understanding of this, you could say that what this is saying is that love continues to expand and expand. And where there's prophecy and there's knowledge and there are tongues, these will cease. But love never has an ending. That it goes on, that it's past the horizon if you will.

And so, there's faith and there's hope and there's love. But the greatest of these is love because what he's doing is he's basically saying that love will always endure. So again, why is that hopeful? Well, a lot of times what people do with Christian faith or the idea of Christian faith is they say, well, there's this reality that God created, but there's sin in all of us, and therefore we need a savior to avoid punishment.

And that's not an incorrect way to think about salvation and Christianity, but it's not really robust in the sense of you could also say that you and I were created in the image of God and given this world to enjoy and to steward. But sin came into the world and marred the image of God in creation and in people.

And Jesus has been on a rescue mission to restore and redeem what was lost, and He invites us to be a part of it. And saying that now we see darkly, but then face to face is a little bit like this. And this is what I mean when I say that our best experiences, our best things, our best pleasures are really just a taste or they're not ultimate.

Here's what this means. If you were to say what was the best meal you've had in the last year? That is just a taste of what's ahead. Meaning you don't have to chase another great meal because that's a reminder that there's something beautiful ahead. And you could say, well, maybe I've experienced some beauty in the last year. Think about the most beautiful place you've been, your vacation, your trips, and your experiences in seeing a vista that you say is just amazing. Or maybe you went to a show or a concert or a theater and you said this was incredible art. Well, it's just a taste of what will be.

Or maybe you've had some successes, you've worked hard and you've built something that's really done well and you've loved the achievement in the process. But even that is just a taste of what the promise of heaven is and the feeling of meaning and significance.

Maybe you've worked hard to foster relational connections and you've had great relational connections. Maybe some beautiful times with friends or maybe a romantic relationship. But even those are just a taste of what will be.

Years ago, John Piper wrote a book called *Desiring God*, and in it, he basically argued for this idea of being what he calls a Christian hedonist. Now, you'll notice that Tal Ben-Shahar's book puts hedonism in the idea of you don't live for the future. And what John Piper says is that Christian hedonism is the idea that God has given us all things to enjoy.

But a few decades before John Piper wrote this, C.S. Lewis wrote something, which by the way, if you track often, C.S. Lewis wrote it before anybody currently. But this is from *The Weight of Glory*. This is a lengthy quote, but I think this is worth hearing. So just hang with this for a moment. Here's what C.S. Lewis writes.

He says, "If you ask 20 good men today what they thought, the highest of virtues was, 19 of them would reply unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old, he would have replied, love. Do you see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not

primarily of securing good things for others, but of not going without them yourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point.

I do not think that this is the Christian virtue of love. The New Testament has a lot to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find, if we do so, contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit to you that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith.

Indeed, if we consider the unblemished promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by a vacation at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

You see, what happens for some of us is we load into our pleasures in this life ultimacy. And so, we're constantly disappointed because none of them were designed to carry ultimacy. But if we see them as a taste, then we're free to enjoy them and indulge them as a taste, a foretaste of what will be. So that's the first implication.

Here's the second, and that is our worst experiences are not final. Again, the text says now we see in a mirror or darkly. And he says, one day we'll know, even as we're known. And so, there's this implication of one day you'll have a more fully known, full way of understanding things in this world.

And what he's saying is that if we load everything into this life, then we will be devastated by the things that don't go very well. When we're confronted with a failure, a broken relationship, or a health scare, all of a sudden, we're devastated because we're counting on this life to give us everything that we think we need.

I remember years ago, I saw something on the news, and actually, after I told the story last night, someone sent me the details on it because it was their cousin that I'm talking about right now. But that's kind of funny in its own way. But I saw a news story. It was about a missionary pilot who had flown on a trip to Peru and in the course of the trip, there was a miscommunication with the military, and the military shot at his plane. And in the process of shooting at the plane, they killed his wife and his daughter.

And the news personality who was interviewing him later said this. She said, "Where was your God? Where's God now? You went on a mission to serve your God. Where's your God?" And it was in her mind, I think, a gotcha moment. Like I'm going to ask the question if you're God so great, why did this happen to you?

And although it's been years since I've seen this clip, his response is something that's stayed with me. He said, "I have a really easy answer for you. I wasn't created for this world. We weren't created just for this world. There's something more."

You see, if you and I live just for this world, what's inside this horizon, then any piece of bad news can devastate us completely. But when we can say love is the greatest, it means that God's love doesn't end. And so, whatever the hard things are that we walk through, we can say, this is not final. This is not the final resting place of everything that I'm experiencing.

I don't know if you've ever been to one of these county fairs. It's been a while for me, but this will date me a little bit. Do you remember the old Tilt-A-Whirl thing that used to be at county fairs? Does anybody remember that? It was this ride that they had, and it would go round in a couple of different planes and people would get on it and they'd be spun around so hard when they'd get off, they'd throw up.

And I'm not so sure that it happens as much now. But just imagine with me for a moment that there's a child who's in line to get on the Tilt-A-Whirl. And this Tilt-A-Whirl has been the excitement of his day because he's thought when I get on the Tilt-A-Whirl, I'm going to have an amazing time.

And then all of a sudden, the Tilt-A-Whirl line shuts down. They say, sorry, for safety concerns we had to shut this down. Now, if you're a child, if you're six, seven, eight, nine years old and that happens to you, it is devastating because you say, I'm at the fair, there is no fair tomorrow. There's no like Kennywood. There's no future. The Tilt-A-Whirl is everything.

And so, the child has a meltdown. And if your parents know what I'm talking about here? The child can have a meltdown because the child starts to say, how in the world will I be able to go on when the Tilt-A-Whirl line is done? I can't. But as you get a little older, what happens is you say, have you heard about the roller coasters at Kennywood? Have you heard about Cedar Point? Because these are even better than the Tilt-A-Whirl. And there will be other amusement parks, other fairs, and other rides in your life. This is just one day.

Did you see this in this text? He says, when I was a child, I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. But when I became a man or an adult, I started to reason like an adult. When you and I think like a child, we say, I have to load everything into this life. And when we load everything into this life, when we cannot manage things or things happen in such a way that all of a sudden, we're confronted with negative present realities and negative future realities, nihilism or depression or despair is almost guaranteed.

And when we load everything into this life, we can be prone to being a grinder or somebody who's in the rat race who just says, I'm always working for the future, or we can be given to a type of hedonism that says, I don't care about the future. I just want to feel good today. And when we get to that point, what happens is we're not living with any sense of anticipation.

We've called this series 212 just to represent the boiling point where things transition. And what we've tried to say is that when we build some disciplines into our lives, it's like adding heat to our spiritual lives. And what anticipation does, living with a sense that there's more beyond this world, is it adds heat to our lives because we live with the reality of saying this life isn't everything so my best moments are a taste of what's to come and my worst moments are not final.

One of the verses that are perplexing to a lot of American Christians is a verse in Matthew 22 where Jesus is interacting with some people, and he says that in the resurrection or in the age to come, we won't be given in marriage. And some people have said, well, how could there ever be happiness in the future without romantic love, a very American way of thinking, by the way.

And what Jesus is doing is he's saying, I want you to understand that whatever is in the future is even better than your best concept of romance and relationship and intimacy. Now, some of you are saying, I can't imagine that heaven could be heaven without that kind of relationship or without my spouse. And it's not that there isn't that person or a relationship, but what he's saying is it's not exactly like it is here.

And some of you are saying to tell me that there's no marriage in heaven, and I don't have to be married to that person is the best news I've heard in church in a long time. But do you see what the reality is here is that when you can say, my best moments are not ultimate, they're just a taste, and my worst moments are not final? It is actually where you can enjoy what you have today without loading too much into it.

But there's one more thing I need to say. I've stated this today by saying our best moments and our worst moments. But the hour here assumes faith in Jesus Christ. What the Bible is clear about is that God created people in the garden to live in relationship with Him, and that sin did mar that, and that Jesus is the substitute. He is the way that we come into relationship with him.

And so, if you're a person who says, you know what, I'm not sure about God, about faith, about Jesus, what that means isn't that you get kind of to say, well, because I don't like how God has worked, I can step back from it. Because even that sense of I want something to be a certain way is actually proof of the divine because what it means is that you're saying things should be better than this.

And if we're just the results of chemistry, then why would we expect things to be better? But if you're a person who says, but I still find it hard to believe, what that means is that your best things now are as close to heaven as you will ever be. So that meal that night with friends, that beautiful concert, that is your heaven. It's not just a taste. And if you haven't trusted Christ, it means that your worst things are just a taste of what will be.

But if you're in Christ, then you can say with certainty. Now I see in a mirror dimly, but one day face to face, my best things are not ultimate. They're a taste of what will be. And my worst things are not final because there's a God who will redeem and restore everything that is broken.

And so, here's my simple plea today, and that is, if you're a person who's here and you say, I haven't believed, maybe today is your day, just to say, I want to live with a horizon that's greater. Maybe you're not ready right at this moment. But reading a book like *The Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis or getting into the Core Christianity class, or one of the options here to explore faith would be greater.

Maybe you're at a place where you can say, I have been kind of believing around Jesus, but maybe today is just your day to say, okay, God, I've been trying to do this my own way and I'm frustrated, jaded, and now I need to trust that there's one who can give me real anticipation for more.

And maybe you're here and you say, you know, I believe the gospel message. But the truth is, I've been loading too much into my life. I put too many demands on my marriage, and it's part of why my marriage is struggling. I put too many demands on my kids. I put too many demands on myself because I'm always trying to control an outcome so that I can get happier.

And maybe believing the message of Christianity doesn't mean that you don't strive for something better in your life, but will allow you to enjoy the gifts that God has given you and celebrate them as a taste and not demand more from them than they're intended to give you.

And maybe as you face something hard and challenging, maybe even devastating, you can say, I don't want to think like a child. I know that as hard as this is today, this is not the end of the story. The line for the Tilt Tilt-A-Whirl is not the last line I'll ever be in. And that'll give you hope and will raise the spiritual temperature in your life.

Father, as we're gathered here, I know just from conversations and friends that there's a lot of pain among us, things that we wish were better, different things we're striving to make better. But God, I also know that when we have a horizon that's bigger than this world, that allows us to enjoy the gifts and not be devastated by hardship. And God, I pray I would be able to live with that freedom, and I pray that would be true for each person here who's a follower of you.

And God, for those of us who are gathered here today and we're not certain where we are spiritually, I pray that just the awareness, the Christian faith offers something so much greater than just pleasure in the here and now, would lead to a real embrace of your goodness and your invitation. And we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.