

Happiness

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Preacher: Rev A.J.Macdonald

- [0 : 00] Now let's turn to that passage we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 16, and some words in verse 11. You have made known to me the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.
- Especially the words, joy in your presence, eternal pleasures at your right hand. I suppose most people, if asked, would say that what they most want in life is to be happy.
- And it's often advanced as an argument against becoming a Christian, that Christians aren't happy.
- Christians don't enjoy life. So who wants to be a Christian when it seems to involve giving up everything in life that is enjoyable, things that make people happy?
- That is the kind of picture that many people have in their minds. Maybe it's a caricature, but that kind of idea is around, and many of us, no doubt, have felt it ourselves.
- [1 : 23] Well, there are two problems with such a view. The first is that the Bible has a great deal to say about joy, enjoyment, gladness, about being happy.
- And it's a great deal to say about these things in a positive way. It's saying these are good things. So whatever idea this is that people have about Christianity, it doesn't really do justice to what the Bible says.
- And surely our Christianity must be formed from what God says in his word, not from merely human ideas. But the second thing about this view that I believe is mistaken is that when we all attempt to pursue happiness as an end in itself, we don't seem to find it.
- This great happiness that the world speaks of, that Christians aren't supposed to have, who does have it? Because those who try to pursue happiness in any particular direction, they don't seem to find it.
- It seems to elude them. Now I want to take that point first and to look at it before we go on to look at what the Bible teaches about joy and happiness.
- [2 : 47] First then, the elusive quality of happiness. Now there are many different ways in which people try to pursue happiness.
- If we were to ask people, what would you like to make you happy? Well, you'd get a variety of answers, I suppose. But one of the things that I'm sure a lot of people would say is, well, I would like to be wealthy.
- I would like to have enough money to do whatever I wanted to do. So many people would think that having wealth, or having at least more wealth than what you've got, that would make you happy.
- Well, I think if we even just reflect on this in a very cursory way, we can see that it's just not true.
- If we take some of the people in the world who have achieved great wealth, so that you would think they don't need to worry about anything.

[3 : 47] They have enough wealth, enough money to provide for all their needs and far, far more. When you look at these people, very often you discover that not only would we judge that they're not very happy, but they themselves admit it.

The former Mrs. Onassis, who was married to one of the wealthiest men in the world, she said this, Wealth has not made me happy, and as the world knows, it has not made my husband happy either.

Now that is just one quote of many that we could make, and many no doubt that you could think of, of people who have achieved tremendous wealth or tremendous fame, and these things have not satisfied.

Now that's the case. If it is the case that people have sort of risen to the very peak in this kind of direction, of climbing to find happiness in wealth, and they have not been happy, how could it possibly be that we, who maybe get a little bit of this, how would we find happiness in that way?

If the person who has really achieved it hasn't found it, then how can anybody else? And then of course another way in which people would say that they would like to be happy, and this would very much cut across the Christian view of what life is about, many would say that they want to find happiness in sexual freedom, basically sexual immorality, having sexual relationships with anybody, no restrictions.

[5 : 37] What has been called the playboy philosophy says that self-gratification is always better than self-denial, truly a reversal of the Christian view, and that is what many people hold to.

In fact we might say, in biblical terms, that is the very essence of what sin is. Turning around what God says, and saying that self-gratification is what is good.

Well, irrespective of how such a philosophy affects others, tragically, and hurts other people, irrespective of that, does following such a philosophy make you happy yourself?

Well, again, I think if we look at the facts, it is not the case. We have a whole catalogue of broken relationships with all the guilt and the shame involved in that.

we have also the tremendous increase in sexually transmitted diseases, or more likely, in AIDS. If you pursue that view consistently, this pursuing of total sexual freedom, does it bring happiness?

[7 : 02] No, it doesn't. It brings frustrations, it brings guilt, and it brings disease. So, again, we find that when somebody tries to pursue a particular kind of pleasure to make them happy, you discover it doesn't work.

It's like sand just trickling through the fingers. You can't get a hold of it. So that whatever area of pleasure you want to look at or happiness, you discover the same kind of thing.

So that C.S. Lewis said something along these lines, when you try to pursue happiness, it always eludes you. But if you try to do something else, sometimes happiness just creeps up on you.

And there's a lot of truth in that. But the question really is, that we'll have to keep in our minds and try to answer this morning, is, what is that? Another point that we've got to note is a more general point, without going into any more different specific attempts to find happiness, is the transience of all such pursuit of pleasure.

Our national poet, Robbie Burns, put it in his own inimitable way, pleasures are like poppies spread. You seize the flower, its bloom is shed.

[8 : 32] Or like the snow falls on the river, a moment white then melts forever. The idea that pleasures seem to be so attractive, but when you pursue them, when you grasp them, they just sort of disintegrate and leave no permanent deep happiness or lasting joy.

Now, this is no accident, and it's not just Robbie Burns who discovered that. It is the teaching of Jesus himself. It is what the Bible teaches.

He warned us, don't lay up for yourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust corrupts and thieves break in and steal. In other words, he's saying, you can try to pursue happiness in this world following the things that the world says will make you happy.

You'll find it doesn't work. Because these things that you place your confidence in, they are transient, they're fading, just like the poppies fading, and they will not bring lasting satisfaction.

So he counseled us, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and where thieves do not break in and steal.

[9 : 52] think too of his parable about the rich farmer who had a bumper crop one year and he decided he would use it all for himself and his own comfort, his own happiness, his own pleasure.

He would build greater barns, store up this great harvest and have plenty to eat and drink for years to come. wouldn't need to worry about a thing. But the point is that life itself is transient.

And so what happened in the parable Jesus told was that God said to him, you fool, tonight your soul is required of you. Then who? Whose will those things be? You see, not only are the pleasures themselves transient and passing, but we ourselves too are transient.

We don't have all the time that we might like to have in this world to try to pursue happiness. We've got to find out what real happiness is while we have the opportunity for our opportunities are quickly passing by.

So, the pursuit of happiness the Bible teaches, the pursuit of happiness or the pursuit of pleasure without reference to the source of all pleasure and all happiness is doomed to end in frustration because it is separated from the source and everything that is separated from the source withers and dies just like those poppies, flowers pulled up, they wither and die.

[11 : 42] So, the Bible teaches us about the true source of happiness. It doesn't deny that there is such a thing as happiness, that there is such a thing as pleasure, that there is such a thing as joy and it certainly does not say that these things are wrong but it tells us the true source of all that is really happy and really joyful.

And, to put it simply, the ultimate joy of everything that is a true source of enjoyment is God himself. We discover that the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 6 puts it like this in verse 17, command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth which is so uncertain but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Now, a lot of people would wonder if those last words were really written in the Bible but they are. God has provided us with everything for our enjoyment. Not just providing us but richly providing us.

Or as it's translated in the Authorized Version richly to enjoy. The emphasis here on the sheer extravagance of all the good things God has given with the intention that mankind should enjoy them.

So the Bible stresses God is the source of joy. He's the source of true happiness. Well, you might say if that's the case then, if the Bible affirms joy, affirms happiness and says it's a good thing, what's wrong when we pursue various avenues and try to find enjoyment, find happiness, find satisfaction and it doesn't seem to work?

[13 : 45] Why can't we just go ahead and enjoy ourselves? Well, the thing is that the world was once like that when God originally created the world, Adam originally didn't need to think well now, should I do this or that?

He instinctively, having been created by God, good, had good instincts as to what was truly a source of enjoyment and happiness.

God's but we don't live in that kind of world now because mankind fell, Adam sinned, Adam rebelled against God and we have a world now that is out of touch with God so that our instincts and our desires are not in line with God's desires, they're not in line with reality.

they belong to a world of illusion which I suppose sin ultimately is. The idea that if we go away from God we will find happiness and it's exactly the opposite.

Going away from God leads to eternal misery and the things that are truly joys that we experience in this life are given directly by God himself, not by sin.

[15 : 13] The devil never created anything joyful, anything good. Everything good or joyful you've ever experienced has been given by God. Even although you may have enjoyed it in a sinful way, the good thing itself was still given by God.

So the thing that the Bible is teaching us is that to know real joy, real happiness, we need to come to know God first. we need to know his ways as it is put here in Psalm 16 in verse 11, you have made known to me the path of life, the way of life.

And that's why then he can say you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasure. He knows the way, he knows the way to live, joy in heaven.

So he knows the source of all true joy and happiness. We need to know how to go about things in the right way. Ultimately, we need ourselves to be changed.

It's our desires that have to be changed so that they will be in line with the world that God has created, they will be in line with God's desires, they will be in line with God's plan.

[16 : 40] We've got to change. And when we change, our desires are changed, therefore the way in which we look at enjoyment, the way in which we look at happiness, the kind of enjoyment we're looking for, these change.

And we discover, the Bible teaches, and experience confirms, that then we find a deep and true and lasting happiness.

happiness. Does this mean then, you ask, that Christians are always smiling, that Christians are always happy in that sense like, you know, Mr. Happy from the Mr. Men books that the children have.

Mr. Happy always smiling. Well, you know that's not true. You know that again is a caricature. Some people would have us believe that, that Christians are always like that.

But if you read the Bible you discover that's not true. The Lord Jesus himself even, is described as a man of sorrows. He was perfect, his will perfectly in line with God's will.

[17 : 45] Yet in this world there is so much source of sorrow because of sin and the misery caused by sin, it impinges upon us. And we would be unhuman if we weren't moved by that, if we weren't affected by that.

even if we were perfect in this world, which we're not, but even if we were, we would still be moved to tears and to sorrow because of the world. How much more, because sin still dwells in us, is our joy imperfect, spotted and affected by the sin and guilt that is still in us.

Of course, it is not true that Christians are always smiling, are always outwardly happy in that sense. In 1 Peter, in that passage that we read, Peter himself deals with this question.

In the age in which he lived, there were great troubles and sorrows for the Christian. And he says in verse 6, in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

You see, the joy, the rejoicing he's speaking about is not something that depends on the outward circumstances of our lives.

[19 : 15] If we seek our happiness in the mere outward circumstances of our life, we have absence from pain, that we have pleasurable, physically pleasurable experiences and so on, if that's our idea of what will make us happy, we'll never be happy because we live in a fallen world where there is pain and where there is frustration of all kinds.

But Peter says, he's writing to the Christians and he's saying, you rejoice, in this you greatly rejoice, even though at that time they were undergoing all kinds of trials, they were suffering grief.

The point is that their joy, their enjoyment, did not depend upon the outward circumstances or absence from physical pain or anything like that.

What did it depend on? Well, in verses 8 and 9 we have something of it. Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

Joy inexpressible and full of glory. For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. In other words, the point is that this happiness of which the Bible speaks is a deep thing.

[20 : 46] It is not just on the surface, it is not froth and frivolity, it is something deep in your heart, deep in your mind, something that you know that is going to carry you through the circumstances that before would totally destroy your happiness.

And that is because you have this thing called there by Peter, salvation. You know the salvation of God. What does it mean? it means that you know that God loves you.

You know that God loves you no matter what the circumstances of your life are. No matter how pain might come or trouble, distress, no matter what may come your way, you have this profound knowledge that God loves you.

And he loves you, you know, because Jesus died for you. God sent his son into this world to be the savior of sinners. You have trusted in Jesus Christ as your savior.

You know that he loves you. You know that Jesus has died for you. you know, therefore, that your sins are forgiven.

[22 : 11] The source of so much unhappiness, the source of so much bitterness, is guilt. that even in our most pleasurable times, voice says, ah, how about that, that you've done, that you've said.

You see, and the devil will delight in seeking to do that to the Christian too. But the Christian can say, I'm justified. Not in any arrogance, but on the basis of what God's word says, before God I am innocent, Jesus has declared me to be so when I trusted in you.

So, Satan, you can be quiet. Now, there is a source of happiness worth having. Something that can silence that voice that will destroy you and undermine all kinds of happiness.

You know too, if you know this salvation, that God will never let you go. He'll never let you go. So much of the problems that undermines our happiness is to do with fear and worry about what the future holds.

Because we don't know the details of what the future holds. We don't know what outward circumstances may come along. If our happiness is based on the fact that we've got health and strength and we can go out and do what we want to do, we don't know how long we're going to have that.

[23 : 48] We may be struck down tomorrow by some disease. We may spare to get old. We may become weak. Spend a long time in such a condition.

If your outward happiness depends upon these things, it's going to be frustrated. It's going to come to an end. But you know that your happiness is based on the fact that you know God loves you and that he will never leave you.

He will never let you go. Then even facing all possibilities in the future, you can still be happy. You can still have that joy knowing that he will be with you in and through whatever the trouble may be.

And of course, also in this great love of God and salvation is the fact that you know that you have a purpose in life. happiness.

This idea of happiness that so many people in the world have of pursuing some sort of pleasure to get happiness, it is really kind of divorced from any idea of reality and what the purpose of life is.

[25 : 06] Because if you actually sat down and analyzed one of these hedonistic pursuits of happiness, you would see right away that it doesn't make sense.

We've looked at that already, this idea of pursuing wealth or sexual freedom or whatever. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't tie in, for instance, with happiness for other people.

And it certainly doesn't give us a sense of purpose and a sense of nobility about what our role in life is.

But if you know the love of God in Jesus Christ, then you have a happiness in these other ways we've been mentioning, but also in this, that you know what your purpose in life is.

Your purpose is to glorify and to enjoy God forever. forever. It's not just something limited to a few moments, a few years even, in this world.

[26 : 13] It is to glorify and to enjoy God forever. You have that purpose here and now, to live for his glory, to live in the ways his word teaches, to reflect who he is and what he's done, and also to go on doing it forever.

And that's the last point. this joy, this happiness that the Bible speaks of, that is given to the Christian, is a happiness that lasts forever.

We mentioned how all the kinds of happiness that the world pursues are transient. They pass, some of them very, very quickly.

Others, maybe they pall after a while, they fade. the illusion passes away. But this happiness does not pass away.

In fact, it gets stronger. As you go on in the Christian life, it becomes stronger, this deep sense of peace and joy. And it goes on, we're told, especially by this verse that we're looking at in Psalm 16.

[27 : 27] It goes on forever. You will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand. The Bible's not afraid to use the word pleasure. The question is, what do you get your pleasure in?

And is it a lasting pleasure? Well, we've seen that if you put your pleasure in things of this world, they may last even all through your life, even if they did last that long.

But they might. But at death, they're taken away. Naked you come into this world and naked you will go. And none of these things will give you any peace or happiness or contentment beyond the grave.

But if you know God, then, even as you pass naked out of this world, you are passing straight to him and to the glory of living in his presence.

Now, we don't know all that's going to be involved in that. That's why Peter said inexpressible and full of glory, talking of this joy.

[28 : 36] Because though the Bible gives us hints as to what's involved in it, it's not really put into words. It's so great. But the great fact is that it's going to be with God.

It's going to be with Jesus Christ rather than separated away from him. In other words, we will be with the source of all joy. If it's God, as we believe, who has created this universe with all its potential for happiness, for enjoyment, for pleasure, if he created it, then to know him is to know really what happiness is about.

Because he made it all. The devil never made anything good. Only God did. joy in his presence forever.

There's a marvelous picture given of that in the New Testament. And again, of course, it's only in a picture that we can really be given any clue as to what the glory of that's going to be.

Near the end of the Bible in Revelation 19 in verse 7, we have this command given. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

[30 : 05] This marvelous picture of heaven as the marriage supper of the Lamb, the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his bride, the church, the people of God.

Now you know how a wedding is a time of celebration and happiness. Well, imagine that happiness, that sense of celebration going on forever, and never falling, never fading, but only increasing as we increasingly come to know him, and consistent with all the other things, hints of which are given in the scriptures, of discovery, of going on to know more and more of God.

That truly is what happiness is all about. So then, the question is, are you happy? Are you really happy?

Not have you had moments of joy, moments of happiness, moments of pleasure, the things that faded on the morning after, so to speak.

Bob Dylan, soon after he became a Christian, wrote these words, I believe in you even on the morning after. Now that really expresses what Christian joy is about.

[31 : 31] Christian joy is not just having us off time, when you get this happiness, you get this kick, and then the morning after you're left really flat.

No, I believe in you even on the morning after. Even after you had great spiritual experiences, even after you had a time where you know God's been doing great things for you, that can continue over, and there's no sense of guilt or bitterness following on after it.

You believe in him even on the morning after. Do you know what that real joy, that real happiness is all about? That's what God offers you in the Bible.

That's this message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Real joy and real gladness, real pleasure, that does not and will not disappear.

Let us pray. our loving heavenly Father, we pray that we might come to understand about pleasure and happiness and joy.

[32 : 43] We know that these words have been so taken over and twisted by the world, that they are your words, they are your realities.

We pray that you would help us to see that and to reclaim these words as Christians, that we will understand the great things that you do for us and the great things you have in store for us.

We pray for those who have been under misconceptions about happiness, we pray that their misconceptions may be turned upside down, that they may come to see the true happiness of which your word speaks, which is the only one worth having.

We pray, gracious Lord, forgiveness for those of us who as Christians have given a wrong impression of what your word teaches.

Enable us to have that sense of peace, that sense of joy, and enable us to show that in difficult and trying circumstances.

[34 : 13] Now, gracious Lord, we pray that you would remember those at this moment who know that the happiness that this world offers is a sham and a failure, and who feel bitter and empty, frustrated.

We pray that they, by your grace, may come to know the one who will never disappoint them, the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask all of this in his name, for his sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.