

The Pursuit of Happiness

Psalm 37:4; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; 2-5-2023

Introduction

Today, I want to continue a series that I began on New Year's Day. I want to continue talking about pursuing our happiness and pursuing that happiness in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The first message was: *Be Happy This New Year!* (1 Thessalonians 5:16) This message focused on the call to 'rejoice always' and how it highlights the reality that God commands us to be happy in all the right ways. Today, I want to talk about the pursuit of that happiness. (Psalm 37:4)

The Pursuit: We do pursue happiness. Both Scripture and experience affirm the proper pursuit of happiness. (Isaiah 55:2; Galatians 5:14) In other words, pursuing your own happiness is important and fitting and natural. (1 Timothy 2:1-2) But there may be the fear in us that true happiness is only an illusion. Because true happiness is something to be had by fallen image bearers of God, Christian pastors/elders should be seen as joy brokers, happiness helpers, or comfort consultants. Good shepherds lead people to the Supreme Good that will make them truly happy. (2 Corinthians 1:24) In thinking about happiness and the pursuit of it, some distinctions need to be kept in view.

- ❑ Joy and happiness are not opposites or entirely different. *Biblical joy is happiness in God and His love!*
- ❑ The pursuit of happiness is not simply the pursuit of pleasure.
- ❑ The pursuit of happiness is not simply doing what we want to do.
- ❑ A person may argue that they are happy without God.

The Premises: We should pursue happiness. There are some foundational realities that should undergird our pursuit of happiness. In other words, all pursuits of happiness are not created equal. (Proverbs 3:13-18) Here are three foundation 'stones' for the pursuit of happiness.

- ❑ *Premise 1: God wants us to be happy.* God is love, therefore, He wants His creatures and, especially, His children to be happy in Him. The pursuit of our happiness is not contrary to our purpose in life as created by God but is at the heart of our purpose! (Nehemiah 8:10)
- ❑ *Premise 2: God commands our happiness.* God is light, therefore, He wills and commands that His creatures and, especially, His children find their happiness in Him. The pursuit of our happiness is not contrary to the Word of God but is the very track on which it is laid! (Philippians 4:4)
- ❑ *Premise 3: If we want to grow in happiness, we must grow in trust and love.* We need to see that both faith and practice are crucial to our happiness in God. The pursuit of happiness involves both 'heart' (attitude: what goes on inside of us) and 'hand' (action: what goes on outside of us). (Galatians 5:6)

The Means: We should pursue happiness rightly. It matters how we pursue our happiness. In other words, you can fail to pursue your own happiness even when you think you are. (Proverbs 16:25) We often see faith (trust) and love mentioned together in Scripture. (1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 1:15; 3:17; 6:23; Colossians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 3:6; 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:5, 14; 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13; Philemon 1:5; Revelation 2:19) We see the importance of trust and love in the pursuit of happiness in one of the best Reformed catechisms: *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*. A catechism is a way of teaching the essentials of the Christian faith to children and new converts that uses a question and answer format.

1. *What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.*
2. *What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him? The Word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.*
3. *What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.*

The Truth: To be happy, I need to believe rightly. The pursuit of happiness requires that we believe what is true. In other words, lies will not produce the happiness we are looking for. (1 Timothy 4:1-5) In order to be happy, I must believe the truth (trust). (Romans 15:13) What we believe about God, man (ourselves), Jesus, faith and love is crucial to our happiness. Therefore, our degree of unhappiness in this life is the result of unbelief. In heaven, we will be perfectly happy because we will perfectly believe! In other words, we will have His joy because we will have His mind. (Romans 12:1-2)

The Practice: To be happy, I need to live rightly. The pursuit of happiness requires that we live a certain way. In other words, happiness is not found in living any way you want to live. (**Proverbs 29:18**) In order to be happy, I must live in light of the truth (love). (John 15:9-11) Our involvement in gospel communication, communion, community, compassion and common grace roles is crucial to our happiness. Therefore, our degree of unhappiness in this life is the result of disobedience. In heaven, we will be perfectly happy because we will be perfectly obedient! In other words, we will have His joy because we will love just like He loves! (Romans 12:1-2)

Conclusion

We cannot pursue our supreme good in God until we deal with our supreme guilt before God! To be happy in God we must first be reconciled to Him. (Romans 5:9-11)

Questions for all of us:

- Are you pursuing your own happiness as you should?
- Are you resting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior?
- What are you giving your mind to?
- What are you giving your life to?