

Psalm 90

The Christian's Desire for a Happy Life

O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days – v. 14.

What do you think the Christian has in common with a drunkard or a drug addict or a person who's been married and divorced and remarried several times or even a man about to commit suicide? At first glance you might not think that a Christian has anything in common with these kinds of people. After all salvation is a powerful force that lifts us from the fearful pit and miry clay. Outside of a common humanity and a lingering sin nature that you try to keep subdued you may think that you have nothing in common with those in the world that are hooked on their vices.

The truth of the matter is, however, that you do have something else in common with these people – something that is good and wholesome and right if it's rightly identified and sought – something that is so basic to every living being that you would have to identify it as a legitimate part of our being as humans.

The thing I have in mind is the desire to be happy. Everyone possesses such a desire. The thing that differentiates Christians from others would be the things that are pursued in order to see the desire for happiness realized but the desire itself is common to the Christian and the non-Christian alike.

The drunkard indulges in his drink because he thinks it will make him happy or at least it will make him less miserable than he would be otherwise. The same thing holds for the drug addict. Drugs bring pleasure to the flesh. Initially drugs bring great pleasure to the flesh. It isn't until he's hooked on the drugs that the addict discovers how hard it becomes to maintain his pleasure and eventually his happiness, like the drunkard, becomes relative to his misery – i.e. his happiness is gauged by his being less miserable than he otherwise would be without his drugs.

The man or woman who goes from one partner to another is also pursuing a quest for happiness. And even the man who's contemplating suicide is weighing whether or not things could possibly be worse than they are in this life. He's taking a gamble that in killing himself he'll find greater happiness than what he finds in his miserable life in this world.

The world bears a clear testimony to the truth that happiness is hard to gain in this sin-cursed world – especially is it hard to gain apart from God and Christ. Not even those who have everything this world can offer are able to find true and lasting happiness. So King Solomon says in Eccles. 1:8 *All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.* And in 5:10 *He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.*

The Christian, by way of contrast, is able to find happiness. He's able to find happiness above and beyond the world's happiness and he's able to find happiness that is not

contingent upon the ever shifting circumstances of life. Isaiah gives us a vivid picture of this happiness even during a time in which happiness would ordinarily be hard to find. Isa 58:11 *And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.* The Lord Jesus may be alluding to this text when He says to the woman at the well in Jn. 4:14 *But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

If this be the case – if Christians are to be as that watered garden whose waters never fail who possess within themselves a well of water springing up into everlasting life – how do we account for so many Christians that are not happy with life. It almost seems like an unorthodox thing to admit but if many perhaps even most Christians are honest they would have to acknowledge that in spite of their blessings and in spite of their hope they go through long seasons of not being happy.

Some argue, to be sure, that happiness should not be the Christian's primary concern. We should be more concerned about holiness and about obedience. If you look into the matter a little deeper, however, I think you'll discover that holiness and obedience cannot be attained apart from happiness. And if you look at the desire of Moses in the petition of our text you discover that happiness is his aim.

Satisfy us early he prays *with thy mercy* – why?, you might ask. Why does he pray for the people of God to be satisfied early with God's mercy? And the answer is given in the very next statement in the verse. *Satisfy us early with thy mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* Do you not see in this petition and the aim behind the petition the desire for happiness – indeed the desire for lasting happiness? – *that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

Our very first catechism question and answer recognizes such a desire. What is the chief end of man? *Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.* It has been suggested that the two ideas conveyed in this catechism answer could be merged so as to say *man's chief end is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.*

If you're familiar with any of the writings or the sermons of John Piper then you know that this kind of emphasis on Christian joy or Christian pleasure dominates his ministry. I have heard him describe the essence of his ministry by a statement that I would certainly agree with. The statement goes like this: *God is most glorified when His people are most satisfied in Him.*

It would certainly appear from our text that Moses himself would be in agreement with that kind of sentiment. Hence his petition in v. 14 *O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

I would like to look at this petition this morning in the light of the theme on the Christian's desire for a happy life. If this text presents anything to us at all it certainly conveys to us the message that:

The Christian Can and Should Realize His Desire for a Happy Life

And the question I want to raise and then answer this morning in connection with our time around the Lord's table is simply this: How can the Christian realize his desire for a happy life?

I. He Must Acknowledge the Validity of That Desire

The Christian might be tempted to think that he needs to rise above such a desire. After all isn't the pursuit of happiness the very thing that dominates the hearts of those that are unsaved? I said a moment ago that even sinners who are driven to do the most senseless things that lead to their own destruction are driven, nevertheless, by their pursuit of happiness. Should this be the Christian's desire too or should he rise above it?

Shouldn't obedience and the glory of God rank as higher priorities in the Christian's life? Doesn't it seem at least a little self-centered to suggest that any feeling or any emotion should dominate the Christian's life? The thing to keep in mind here is what I touched upon just a moment ago which is that you can't accomplish obedience and you cannot bring glory to God without being a happy servant of Christ. And certainly one of the clear indications that being glad is a valid desire is found in the fact that it's something the Psalmist prays for. *O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

You have heard me say it often that one of the sure ways of knowing that you're praying in the will of God is to pray the prayers that are given to us by God. Here is such a prayer – *O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* Our happiness is God's will.

This is conveyed to us even more forcefully when you consider the command that Paul gives to the Philippians and note that it comes to them with the force of a command - Php 4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord alway: [and] again I say, Rejoice.* The word *rejoice* could be translated *be glad*. *Be glad in the Lord always and again I say be glad.* And you should note that the verb tense in both instances are present tense verbs which speak of continuous action.

And so we find as strong an emphasis as you could find on the continuity of this command. In other words this a command that we must constantly be rendering obedience to. *Be always rejoicing* Paul writes and to stress it again he states it again *and again I say be always rejoicing.* The tense of the verb with the term *always* added and then a repeating of the phrase indicates to us that being glad in the Lord must be something that the Christian is giving heed to at all times.

And if you look at other references in the New Testament you discover that it doesn't matter what the circumstances of life are throwing your way – this command to be glad in the Lord must be heeded no matter what.

And so James writes specifically in his epistle to his afflicted brethren in 1:2 *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.* And Peter writes in his first epistle 1:6 *Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.* And Paul to the Romans writes Ro 5:3 *And not only so, but we glory (or boast or joy) in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience and experience hope.* And we see the Psalmist in Psalm 34:1 saying *I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

You begin to see, I trust, that happiness or joy or rejoicing is to be the Christian's portion at all times – circumstances of life notwithstanding. And you see that being glad in the Lord comes to us with the force of a command.

If ever there was a time where Augustine's prayer would be appropriate it would be with regard to our obedience to the command to be joyful in the Lord. Augustine once prayed *Lord, command what you will, but give what you command.* Our text reflects that desire – *O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* Would you notice that the Psalmist in this instance is not merely praying for mercy – he's praying for the effect of mercy to be ministered to his soul. *O satisfy us with thy mercy* – he wants the effect of mercy to be satisfaction and he wants that effect to serve the purpose of making the people of God glad all their days.

So the Christian's desire for happiness is a valid desire. As Christians we're to align our desires with God's commands. That really shouldn't be too difficult a thing to do in this case. God's desire for us and His command to us is that we find satisfaction in Him that we may be glad all our days.

Would you consider with me next that if we're going to realize this desire for a happy life:

II. We Must Confront the Challenges that Stand in Our Way

The very fact that the Psalmist must pray *O satisfy us early with thy mercy* indicates to us, doesn't it, that satisfaction in the Lord can be elusive. It's not our portion continually the way it ought to be. It's something that must be sought and so we find Moses praying for it. And don't we know this in our own experience?

We're supposed to be glad all our days but don't we have to admit that we go on sometimes for seemingly endless days without being glad in the Lord? If you look at the setting for our text you get the idea that gladness was not something that exactly dominated the heart of Moses or the children of Israel.

Look at how the Psalm reads beginning in v. 7 – *For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for*

it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.

This is not exactly the setting of the people of God being glad all their days. It's a setting of being aware of sin. It's a setting of experiencing spiritual barrenness. It's a setting of life transpiring so quickly that it becomes a tale that is told. And the Lord, in this setting, is conspicuous by the sense of His absence and so Moses prays in v. 13 *Return, O LORD, how long?*

Here is a barrier, then, that must be overcome – our lack of spiritual sensitivity and our hearts being dominated by the sense of our sins and our shortcomings. Our lives wasting away in a spiritual wilderness that seems so mundane and fruitless. When you think about it – it becomes easy to reason this way: how can I be satisfied in God when I'm so dissatisfied with myself? How can I really believe that God would be satisfied with me when I can see so plainly so much within my soul that God couldn't possibly be satisfied with? And if I don't think God could be satisfied with me because I'm not satisfied with me then how can I be satisfied with God? This is a major obstacle that must be overcome, then.

Another obstacle that must be overcome is the Christian's wandering heart that tries in vain to find satisfaction in all the wrong ways and from all the wrong sources. Listen to the Lord's complaint about His people that He conveys through the prophet Jeremiah – *For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water* (Jer. 2:13).

What tragic irony that the people of God must own! They turn from the Lord who has the power to refresh and renew and revive – they turn from the only source from whom satisfaction and gladness can come in order to drink from a well that contains sand and gravel mixed with a little muddy water.

Certainly when we find ourselves in such a condition we have need to pray *Return, O LORD, how long?* And we have need to pray *O satisfy early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* It certainly not the Lord's will or the Lord's desire that His people find it so hard to find satisfaction in Him. The fault is found in us. We're the ones that hew out broken cisterns. We're the ones that take the blessings of God so much for granted that we come to loathe His blessings the way the children of Israel eventually loathed the manna in the wilderness.

It remains for us to consider the remedy. We've seen that the desire for happiness is a valid desire. It's God's will for our lives. It is so much His will that He commands it. But there are barriers to overcome. Our carnal lusts and worldly wanderings and hard hearts bring us to the place that we have to pray *O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* Would you consider with me, then, finally, that if we're to see this desire realized for happy lives:

III. We Must Appropriate the Means for Realizing This Desire

The most obvious means revealed to us in our text is the means of prayer. The psalmist is praying *O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* Underlying this prayer, of course, is the honest acknowledgement that the people of God were not happy and were not rejoicing. You could say that there is an element of confession implied by the honesty of this petition.

Underlying this prayer is also the knowledge that only God can make us glad. I said earlier that this petition is not a petition for mercy, it's a petition for mercy (or more literally the lovingkindness of God) to have a desired effect upon the hearts of God's people. This petition certainly demonstrates to us the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation and over the blessings we enjoy in salvation.

Left to ourselves we will not rejoice, we will not be glad, we will not find satisfaction – not even in the Lord's mercy. We need the Lord, therefore, not only to minister His mercy to us but we need Him to minister the effects of that mercy. *O Lord let thy mercy penetrate and soften my heart. Let thy mercy fill and thrill my soul. Let thy mercy satisfy or fulfill the deepest longings of my heart that I may rejoice and be glad all my days.*

Another means of grace that we must utilize in order to realize this desire is the Lord's house. Our call to worship this morning was taken from Ps 36:8 *They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.*

I love to think of the Lord's house in this respect. This is a place where we come to worship and meet with Christ and the effect of coming to the Lord's house should be that our hearts are made glad. Too often church is thought of as just another burden, just another weight that must be added to the "to do" list. If that's what church becomes then church has lost it's meaning and purpose. It should be a place where our desire for gladness is strengthened and realized all the more.

While we were in Greenville this past week I was able to attend the prayer meeting. It's always a blessing to meet up with old friends by going to prayer meeting. While I was there this time I was greeted by Jeremiah Mooney, the son of Myron Mooney, our minister in Trinity, Alabama. Jeremiah is a freshman at BJU and it was good to see him. When I shared with Oonagh Panosian the fact that I had seen Jeremiah she shared with me something that I thought was interesting about Jeremiah Mooney. She told me that Jeremiah always seems so glad to be in the Lord's house. And I thought to myself there's a good indication that the church in Greenville is functioning the way it ought to function. O that the Lord's people would so view the Lord's house that it's seen as a place that makes our hearts glad in the Lord.

Another text that reinforces this idea is found in one of the beatitudes of the Psalms that we've looked at recently in our prayer meetings. Look at Ps 65:4 *Blessed [is the man*

whom] thou choosest, and causest to approach [unto thee, that] he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, [even] of thy holy temple.

So church is yet another means of grace to satisfy our longing hearts and to help make us and keep us glad all our days. One of the reasons, of course, that church can and should function this way is because the means of grace are ministered at church and this is what brings us to the Lord's table.

Here around the table of the Lord is where I become convinced that God accepts me in spite of me. Here is where we are reminded that Christ has redeemed us through the shedding of His blood. Here is where I see how God can be just and the justifier of those that believe in Christ. I believe that God can be satisfied with me because I'm reminded how God was and is satisfied with Christ. I'm reminded that Christ came into this world to represent me and throughout His life in this world His Father was satisfied with Him. I'm also reminded that He paid the price for my sins and bore my condemnation so that there is now, therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Him.

Here around the Lord's table is where we find opportunity to examine our hearts and to plead the blood of Christ over our sins and then appropriate by faith anew and afresh the blood of Christ for our salvation. Here in God's house and around the Lord's table are we able especially to drink of the river of God's pleasures and to have our hearts made glad.

As we think on Christ this morning, then, let's make this prayer of Moses our own – *O satisfy us early with thy mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* Let's ask the Lord to make this time a happy time in which we reckon upon the truth of our union with our blessed redeemer.

It is certainly my prayer and desire for us all that we may find satisfaction in the remembrance of Christ and that in that satisfaction we may rejoice and be glad as we leave the Lord's house this morning. May each one here this morning find satisfaction in Christ. May we all be satisfied with the goodness of His house and drink of the river of His pleasures as we remember His love and grace and mercy toward us in purchasing us to Himself.