

## Sunday Morning Message

April 15, 2018

*First Love / First Works*

*The Pursuit of Happiness*

Text for Today's Message – Acts 5:12 – 42

Congregational Reading – Acts 5:40 – 42

### Introduction

In our text, we see the Apostles in temple healing people and preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and many people were gloriously saved. This did not happen without the notice of the religious leadership of Israel who were very afraid that all of their people were going to leave Judaism and follow the Lord Jesus Christ whom they rejected.

[Read the text explaining the story.]

It is important to point out that Peter and John had already been arrested for the same thing and were released after being held overnight, but only after being threatened with further punishment if they were to continue doing what they were doing. Peter and John told the religious leaders plainly that they would obey God rather than men.

The focus of this message is drawn from verses 40 and 41:

*"... and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." (Acts 5:40-41)*

Isn't strange that we see the words beaten and rejoicing in the same context. We would think that being beaten would produce sorrow, but here we see that these people who were suffering for the cause of Christ were very happy, obviously not because of the beating, but because they had obeyed the Lord and had suffered for His cause, just as Jesus had.

[Read Acts 16:19 – 25]

Paul and Silas had also been beaten, yet they were singing praises to God. That is unnatural, and certainly would seem very strange to most people.

[Read 1 Peter 1:3 – 9]

Here we read again of believers who are rejoicing greatly with joy unspeakable, even though they are going through manifold temptations.

### Illustration

A Russian countess accepted the Lord Jesus as her Saviour and was open about her testimony. The Tsar was displeased and threw her into prison. After 24 hours with the lowest level of Russian society, in the most miserable conditions imaginable, he ordered her brought into his presence. He smiled sardonically and said, "Well, are you ready now to renounce your silly faith and come back to the pleasures of the court?"

To his surprise, the countess smiled serenely and said, "I have known more real joy and more real happiness in one day in prison with Jesus than I have known in a lifetime in the courts of the Tsar." She found out what was really the easy way.

## Transition

Mostly all people in the world today are pursuing happiness. Some are pursuing it through achieving a position of status; some through acquiring possessions and wealth:

## Illustration

"Researchers have found almost no correlation between income levels and happiness. Between 1957 and 1990 income levels in the U.S. doubled. Yet at the same period, people's levels of happiness did not increase. In fact, reports of depression actually increased tenfold. Incidence of divorce, suicide, alcoholism and drug abuse also rose dramatically."

Some people try to find happiness through amusing themselves with pleasures; and others through attempting to expand their knowledge.

However, as we have already seen in the four passages that we have read, true happiness is not found in any of these pursuits, but can only come through obedience to God and fulfillment of His will.

Solomon was a man who successfully achieved all of these things and was still miserable in the end.

[Read Ecclesiastes 2:1 – 18]

Solomon finally came to a conclusion. Life needs to be about God, not self.

*"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

Many people who have unsuccessfully attempted to find real joy through worldly pursuits, tried to drown their sorrow and emptiness through alcohol or drugs, which ultimately only increases their unhappiness. Sadly, some not finding happiness, choose to end their lives:

## Illustration

Rick Chollet was a financially successful entrepreneur until March 18, 1991. He had even been the president of Brookstone Company, a small mail order business that he transformed into a national retail leader selling products for craftsmen. But on March 18 Mr. Chollet locked the garage door of his New Hampshire house, climbed into his BMW, and turned on the engine. He left behind a note that read, "Please forgive me, but the thought of going through the torture of living is just too much to bear."

Some successful entrepreneurs have a fear that they won't be able to reproduce or sustain earlier achievements. Gerald Kraines, a psychiatrist who treated Chollet, said, "They're on a treadmill where they can never savor their success, because they have to keep working harder."

Many Christians feel the same way. They think that they must keep working harder for the Lord and forget to spend time with him.

Everyone out there is pursuing happiness, but most are coming back empty, but God, in His Word, has revealed the secret to living a truly happy life; a life filled with contentment, peace, and real joy. If you find that you are often depressed consider some of these Bible principles to living a happy life.

### 1 Happiness is found in Salvation

[Read Acts 8:26 – 40]

Notice verse 39:

*"And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:39)*

I have often wondered if it was Philip or the eunuch who went away rejoicing. I actually believe that they both did, though grammatically, the "he" in v. 39 refers to the eunuch. And why wouldn't he be rejoicing. The God shaped hole that he had in his heart had finally been filled. His sins were forgiven, he had found peace with God, he was on his way to Heaven, and he now had a purpose for living: telling others about the Lord Jesus, just as Philip had told him.

### 2 Happiness is found in Soulwinning

There is no greater joy than leading someone to a saving knowledge and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

*"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)*

When Paul and Barnabas reported back to the churches what God was doing, it produced great joy:

*"And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren." (Acts 15:3)*

### 3 Happiness is found in Sharing

Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive:

*"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)*

David took up an offering from the people of Israel for the Temple that his son Solomon was going to build.

*"Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy." (1 Chronicles 29:9)*

When the people returned from Babylon back into the land of Judah, they gave great sacrifices:

*"Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." (Nehemiah 12:43)*

The world would say that receiving is the best source of happiness, but God says it is giving.

*"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)*

Notice that your heart follows your treasure. You don't give because your flesh wants to; you give because God wants you to, and giving will change your heart.

However, you must give with the right motive. You don't have to give, you get to give back to the Lord a portion of that which he has blessed you with.

*"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)*

Someone once said that the happiest people on earth are the people who have discovered the joy of giving.

#### 4 **Happiness is Found in Serving Others**

[Read Philippians 2:1 – 18]

Paul said that he rejoiced because he served, and that the Philippians would also rejoice.

The world thinks that happiness can only come from being served, but God says it is just the opposite.

#### **Conclusion**

Happiness is not found where most people are looking for it.

In our text we saw that the Apostles most of the saints from the first century found real joy in suffering and sacrifice, not pleasure, power, position, or possessions.

#### **Illustration**

##### **Where is Happiness Found?**

Not in unbelief, Voltaire was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Not in pleasure, Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone."

Not in money, Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying, he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

Not in position and fame, Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret."

Not in military glory, Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent because, he said, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

Where then is real joy found? The answer is simple, in Christ alone.

If you want to avoid the counselors couch, why not try finding happiness by living for the Lord.

Are you saved?

Are you telling others about the Lord?

Are you sharing what God has blessed you with?

Are you serving others?

These are all actions that will produce real joy in your life.

### **Illustration**

John Wesley was about 21 years of age when he went to Oxford University. He came from a Christian home, and he was gifted with a keen mind and good looks. Yet, in those days he was a bit snobbish and sarcastic. One night, however, something happened that set in motion a change in Wesley's heart. While speaking with a porter, he discovered that the poor fellow had only one coat and lived in such impoverished conditions that he didn't even have a bed. Yet, he was an unusually happy person, filled with gratitude to God. Wesley, being immature, thoughtlessly joked about the man's misfortunes. "And what else do you thank God for?" he said with a touch of sarcasm. The porter smiled, and in the spirit of meekness replied with joy, "I thank Him that He has given me a life and being, a heart to love Him, and above all a constant desire to serve Him!" Deeply moved, Wesley recognized that this man knew the meaning of true thankfulness. (and genuine happiness)