

Joy for the Journey (8): Joy for a Lifetime

I. Introduction

- A. Bulletin article tells of 6,000 Christians in India who reconverted to Hinduism.
1. There has been persecution of Christians in India, but that isn't the reason
 - a. Christian missionaries had promised these believers health-and-wealth
 - 1) God wanted them to have fancy houses, cars and material blessings
 - 2) But the promised blessing didn't ever "materialize" (*pun intended*)
 - b. They decided the church doesn't keep it's promises and is therefore false
 2. There are many teachers today who promise believers material prosperity
 - a. God wants his children to have nice things and to be blessed materially
 - b. These "*Prophets of Profit*" are all over the dial on religious TV/radio
 - c. What is bound to happen when people encounter hard times & struggle?
 - 1) They may think there's something wrong with them, with their faith
 - 2) Or, like those 6000 in India, they think something's wrong with God
- B. We do need to be careful about "*Truth in Advertising.*" (Title of the article)
1. The gospel doesn't offer a solution to all financial & relational problems.
 - a. Paul was successful and prosperous UNTIL he became a Christian.
 - b. Paul has a lot of friends and admirers UNTIL he became a Christian.
 2. It is simply not the case that faith solves all problems—it can create some
 - a. Jesus promised some would have conflict in relationships (**Matt 10:34**).
Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
 - b. Peter warns us not to think that struggle is something strange (**1 Pet 4:12**)
¹²*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.*
 3. The problem for which Jesus is the only solution is the problem of sin
 - a. Sometimes our prosperity is to be found in the hope of glory (**Rom 8:18**)
I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
 - b. Jesus doesn't promise us financial or social prosperity—he offers a cross
 - 1) That cross is God's ultimately promise of ultimate peace and joy
 - 2) But as long as we're here, we have to take up the cross and follow
 - 3) Sometimes that cross leads us to places we might not want to be

- C. Today we bring to a conclusion our sermon series on “*Joy for the Journey*”
1. We’ve seen the contrast between happiness of the world and true joy
 - a. The happiness stressed in the world is a happiness of what’s happening
 - 1) It is a happiness defined by possessions, power, pleasure or position
 - 2) If you aren’t happy, that means you need to change what’s happening
 - b. The joy that God gives is much deeper, more lasting and relational
 - 1) It’s a joy centered in being right with God— “*God is and all is well*”
 - 2) It’s joy deepening despite struggle because God reigns over struggle
 2. We must be clear what we mean about the “*joy, joy, joy down in my heart*”
 - a. Is living by faith fun? *Sometimes*. Does Jesus bring us happiness? *Often*.
 - 1) I love my job, but there are parts... like funerals, or worse, weddings
 - 2) Christian life is fun and happy, except when it’s not fun or happy!
 - b. But there is always joy, and it’s the only way to have joy for a lifetime
- D. Learn a lesson from someone in the Bible who had it all—money, power, fame
1. Ecclesiastes is one man’s look back on his search for meaning (happiness)
 - a. Traditionally, the writer is Solomon (*calls self “Qoheleth” or “Preacher”*)
 - 1) His annual income was 666 talents (25 tons) of gold (**2 Kings 10:14**)
 - 2) At current gold prices, that’s over a billion dollars... in gold only
 - 3) That’s not counting foreign tariffs or silver— he was one rich dude
 - b. Solomon used these resources to fuel a quest for meaning (*or happiness?*)
 2. Notice a sampling of Solomon’s search (**Read: Eccl 1:16, 2:1, 2:4-5, 2:8**)
 - a. Solomon’s list is pretty standard: education, pleasure, alcohol, work, sex
 - 1) What wasn’t standard was that Solomon pursued these without limits
 - 2) He was the richest, most powerful man in world—limitless resources
 - b. His limitless resources weren’t enough to make him happy (**Eccl 2:10-11**)

¹⁰ *I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.
My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.*

¹¹ *Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.*
 - c. No amount of changing what’s happening can bring us true happiness
 3. Solomon decides that joy comes in the one place he didn’t look (**Eccl 12:13**)
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man

II. Life Well Lived

- A. **Point:** True meaning, joy and happiness aren't target at which we can aim
1. That is precisely what Solomon tried—scientific search for true joy
 - a. We jumped from object to object before finding that they had no meaning
 - b. He finally concludes that the whole point is to seek and obey God
 - c. When we make our target God, and then joy and happiness will follow
 2. What is meant parents mean by, *“Really, I just want my kids to be happy”*
 - a. Our kids might hear and say, *“I want to be happy too, so gimme the keys!”*
 - b. What we mean (*or should*) is that we want them to live a significant life
 - 1) We want for them relationships, work & morals that mean something
 - 2) You aim at significance and meaning, and happiness will follow
 - c. What is a life of significance that leads to real and lasting happiness (joy)
- B. Leslie Vernick (*Selfless Joy in a Me-First World*) suggests *“three grand essentials”* for meaningful life, *“someone to love, something to do, something to hope for”*
1. **Someone to Love:** God is love, and He created us to love and be loved
 - a. He created us to live in love with Himself and with others
 - b. The problem is that we so often focus our love on the wrong things!
 - 1) We can love money and the things of money (**Hebrews 13:5**)
 - 2) We can love the things of this world (**1 John 2:15**)
 - 3) We can love the praise of men more than praise of God (**John 12:42**)
 - 4) We can love being in positions of status and power (**Matt 23:6**)
 - 5) We can love darkness (sin) more than we love the light (**John 3:19**)
 - c. All of those get in the way loving God— *“spiritual adultery”* (**Jam 4:4**)
You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.
 - d. When we love God, then we also can love others and God intends
 - 1) God made us in relationship, *“not good for man to be alone”* (**Gen 2:18**)
 - a) Don't limit God's truth here to the context of Adam and Eve's marriage
 - b) We simply were not created to be alone—made for fellowship, sharing
 - 2) That's why God made the church, a family of faith relationships
 - e. Ultimately lasting joy comes from loving God and loving other people

2. **Something to Do:** We will not find lasting joy without accomplish work
 - a. Solomon tried to find meaning in great accomplishments and projects
 - 1) His work was not enough to find true meaning or lasting joy
 - 2) But he did find that there was a satisfaction in work (**Eccl 2:24**)

²⁴ *A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God*
 - b. Sometimes our jobs provide us with great satisfaction... sometimes not
 - 1) Sometimes the only fulfillment in our job is that we get a paycheck
 - 2) Slaves Paul writes to likely got little self-actualization from the job!
 - c. But God gives us a work that transcends our occupation (**Eph 2:10**)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

 - 1) We were saved by grace (*first part of text*) so we can do good works
 - 2) We'll never be joyful in a lasting sense without somewhere to serve
 - d. Serving others can be many things—huge ministries and little acts
 - 1) Jesus talks about giving a cup of cold water in his name (**Mt 10:42**)
 - 2) Stressing happiness can be selfish, but joy reaches out to serve others
3. **Something to Hope For:** Joy is content to look forward to something
 - a. Paul talks about the hope that we have in God's salvation (**Rom 8:24-25**)

²⁴ *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?* ²⁵ *But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

 - 1) The happiness of what's happening is very impatient— its about now
 - 2) We keep changing what's happening trying to find that happiness
 - b. Paul talks about a hope that is focused on a coming and certain future
 - 1) We don't live in a realized salvation now, and sometimes we struggle
 - 2) Hope allows us to struggle while focused on reality of the kingdom
 - 3) Hope gives us God's joy now while we wait on Him (**Rom 15:13**)

¹³ *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*
 - c. You will not be joyful EVER if you have to be happy RIGHT NOW
- C. God has given you “*someone to love, something to do, something to hope for*”
 1. Focus on those and you can enjoy the joy in which God want you to live
 2. But focus on being happy now, and you will never know God's joy