

Colossians 1:21-23

Dear Friends in Christ,

I'd like for you to hear this Webster's definition of the word *happiness*: "...good fortune : prosperity...a state of well-being and contentment...a pleasurable or satisfying experience." There are aspects of the definition that can be applied to our lives in Christ. There is the reality that for most it doesn't work that way.

It is - or, should I say, **was** - the big part of the American dream: Happiness! But that's becoming more and more - should we say - hard to hold. It's the elusive and impossible dance with this world. The words ascribed to Patrick Henry are always appropriate:

There is just one thing more I wish I could give you. It is the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ. With it, if you had nothing else, you could be happy. Without it, though you had all things else, you could not be happy.

This morning we are considering . . .

## HAPPINESS

### I. Begins with Understanding Who We Were.

Our text begins: "And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds..." (vs. 21) Those terms are descriptive of every human before God: *Alienated...hostile in mind...doing evil deeds*. And there you are: The reasons people hate the Bible, hate Jesus, hate the church. What appear to be great, successful churches are usually "successful" not because they've discovered new methods and programs. They're successful because they religiously avoid certain, highly controversial features of the Word of God.

Remember that discourse from The Gospel of John where Jesus talked about being The Bread of Life? Jesus said, "'But there are some of you who do not believe.'" (John 6:64) John then writes, "(For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And (Jesus) said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.'" (Jn. 6:64-65) And then the reality that was then and is now: "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." (Jn. 6:66)

Do we see? Of course we do. Man wants to be happy with his world. Spends a lifetime in a search for comfort and joy with the world. Ignores death and then, when the moment arrives, comes all the flowery expressions that the person was good and deserving of God's love; the fantasies that make God into what man wants and thinks. Or...if you don't believe you simply perish into denial; at least until that flash of a moment and the surprise of surprises unhappily greets you!

Oh, friends, the truth: God says humans are, by nature, "alienated...hostile in mind...and doing evil deeds". There is no other explanation as to the centuries of war, hatred, greed, corruption, lying, murdering, exploitation, torture, torment - the fact that we are no closer to a "happy" world today than humans were 5000 years ago! The Scriptures never allow us to see ourselves as we think! They force us to see ourselves as God sees us. Listen to this from Psalm 14:

The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (vss. 2-3)

Some years ago a pastor by the name of Malcolm Nygren made this observation:

Denying sin has not freed us from it any more than hiding death has kept us alive. It has only made us unable to deal with it....If we dare not admit to any sin, in the end we dare not admit that anything is sinful.

Well, that's where we are! After all, we want to be happy! Anything goes. But the questions are chilling. Are we happy, for very long? Are most people? Why are most people at a grave side genuinely unhappy? Why doesn't happiness last, regardless of who you are, what you have and what you do?

## II. Is a Matter of What God Did.

Well, for us happiness is, in every sense, what God has done for us. Our text:

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. (vss. 22,23)

Listen again: "(Jesus) has now reconciled (you and me) in his body of flesh by his death." He has done everything necessary to remove the guilt and judgment against us - the consequences of the **alienation, the hostile thinking, the doing of evil deeds** - these things that bring upon us the wrath of God. Jesus has done all things necessary to present us **holy and blameless and above reproach before him**.

And here's a definition of reproach: "an expression of rebuke or disapproval." That's where sin leaves us. We were objects of disapproval - forever! Jesus stepped in and removed that disapproval and condemnation. Though we are still sinful and battle with sin, for the sake of Jesus - through faith - we are "above reproach." Just recall these words from Isaiah: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." (Is. 53:5) Regarding Isaiah 53:5 commentator Matthew Henry wrote:

...(Jesus) *made peace by the blood of his cross*. Whereas by sin we had become odious (smelly!) to God's holiness and obnoxious to his justice, through Christ God is reconciled to us, and not only forgives us our sins and saves us from ruin, but takes us into friendship and fellowship with himself, and thereby peace (that is, all good) comes to us.... Christ was in pain that we might be at ease; he gave satisfaction to the justice of God that we might have satisfaction in our minds, might be of good cheer, knowing that through him our sins are forgiven. (Matthew Henry's Commentary On The Whole Bible, Vol. 4, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass., 1991, p. 240)

## III. Is to Persevere.

Let's face it honestly. Every happiness we have of this world becomes past tense. Everything of this world is simply that: of this world. On the other hand, our text closes with the admonition of "if indeed you continue in faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister." (vs. 23)

The happiness we have in Christ is forever; it is fulfilled in eternity when we stand in the unending and forever filling love and presence of the Triune God! Our text promises this, as Paul says, "if indeed you continue in faith." To "continue in the faith" is what our flesh, this world and Satan would destroy.

Ours is a sinful world full of uncertainty, conflict, suffering and death - regardless of the pretty facades humans build. This is the type of "happiness" the world offers. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote:

The constant desire to have still more things and a still better life and the struggle to obtain them imprints many Western faces with worry and even depression, though it is customary to conceal such feelings.

To the child of God in Christ living in this world stands the admonition: "...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." As some of you know, the Greek word for endurance is *agona* - agony. So, while we're in this world we are called to "...run with *agona* the race that is set before us." I know that most want no part of that. I know that you and I must daily make a decision about that. The only way out is to walk away from the Lord. After all, do we not say "Fight the good fight!"?

I have one more insight from Matthew Henry:

Old men who have their hearts upon the world have never filled their days, never have enough of this world, but would still continue longer in it... The sinner, though he live to a *hundred years old*, shall be accursed. His living so long shall be no token to him of the divine favour and blessing, nor shall it be any shelter to him from the divine wrath and curse. The sentence he lies under will certainly be executed, and his long life is but a long reprieve; nay, it is itself a curse to him, for the longer he lives the more wrath he treasures up against the day of wrath and the more sins he will have to answer for. So that the matter is not great whether our lives on earth be long or short, but whether we live the lives (as children of God through faith in Christ, or as unbelievers). (Ibid., p. 305)

We have a goal. It isn't here. It's heaven; what Christ has won for us. Happiness....without end!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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Colossians 1:21-23: **“Happiness”**

- I. *Begins with Understanding Who We Were.*
- II. *Is a Matter of What God Did.*
- III. *Is to Persevere.*

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