

Happiness Is a Choice

Psalm 146:5

“Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.”

After the death of Sonny Bono, TV Guide reported that Cher claimed to have spoken with Sonny through a medium, James Van Praah, author of “Talking to Heaven: A Medium’s Message of Life after Death.” Cher said Sonny was quick to encourage her that he was happy and doing just fine. No one was to worry about him.

In our search for happiness many have turned to the New Age, or in the words of Ruth Tucker, the Occult made respectable. The New Age religion is a virtual kaleidoscope of “fads, fantasies and follies.” With its blend of marketing, many people out of their sense of desperation, have embraced the New Age seeking some sense of relief.

Therefore, as we continue our study in this area of happiness, today, we are going to see that happiness, in its truest sense, is a choice. Many people think of happiness as something that just happens. If it happens to happen to them, terrific! If not, they curse their bad luck.

But happiness never just happens. It comes to us by our own choice. We decide whether to be happy or miserable, peaceful or anxious, fearful or serene. Much more of our lot in life than we realize proceeds from our choices.

Moses knew the power of choice to bring blessings or curses upon the nation of Israel. In one of history's most dramatic statements, he stood before all Israel and shouted with all the power of his aged voice in Deuteronomy 30:19, "This day I call heaven and earth as

witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."

When Abraham and Lot stood together on the fertile plains of Jordan, Lot made the choice that was to be his undoing. In Genesis 13:11 we are told, "So Lot choose for himself the whole plain of Jordan." He pitched his tent toward Sodom, ignoring the moral and spiritual dangers.

Listen to the hissing of the brimstone as it falls from the sky, bringing annihilation to Sodom. Look at the sons and daughters of Lot running in panic, uselessly seeking a place of refuge. This was the consequence of their **father's choice**.

Joshua gathered the children of Israel together for his farewell address. He reviewed God's blessings upon Israel. He called upon Israel to abandon their idols and serve the true and living God. He closed his address with one of the most memorable statements in history, as recorded in Joshua 24:15, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve..." Then he made it very clear what his **choice** would be, "...As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

When the apostle Paul was on the road to Damascus, God knocked him to his knees and struck him blind. Paul had a choice to make. He could remain blind for the rest of his life or he could obey God. The book of Acts records **Paul's choice**. He did not ask, "Why me?" or even say, "Poor me." **He obeyed**. He picked himself up from the dust of the Damascus road, set his face like flint and shook Rome to its roots with the power of the gospel of Christ.

When Jesus stood before Pilate on trial for his life, Pilate said, "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22). This is the choice every man or woman on earth must make: either **for** Christ or **against** Him.

Jesus Christ is not just a good man or a great moral teacher. He is either **Lord, liar, or lunatic.** He is either **God's sinless Son** or He is the **greatest con artist** who ever lived. **If He is the Lord, we must serve Him with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength.** If not, we must **ignore Him.** We must ignore **His teachings, His death and resurrection,** His **promises to return** with **power** and **great glory.**

The choice we make about Jesus Christ, above all others, determines the amount of happiness in our lives. **It is impossible to do nothing about Jesus Christ.** Not to decide for Him is to decide against Him. **There is no such thing as indecision.** Until this choice is made, we can never be happy in an unhappy world!

It is hard for us to imagine that someone might actually choose unhappiness over happiness. But millions do every day, often for reasons even they don't fully understand. Some choose unhappiness to manipulate those around them, to get attention or sympathy. **Some choose unhappiness indirectly, because they don't know where or how to find happiness.** Some religious people choose unhappiness as living proof of their **"superior spirituality."**

Did you hear the story about the preacher who was preaching on Happiness? His congregation was laughing with joy. Suddenly a **self-righteous religious peacock** stood and coldly rebuked the preacher and the congregation for their laughter. **Without missing a beat, the preacher announced,** "Let us now allow this unhappy brother to lead us in a moment of corporate misery."

Happiness begins with an attitude. That is why we have been told in **Philippians 4:8,** "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think on such things."

There are two kinds of attitudes: good ones and bad ones. There is a little saying that goes like this: "Two men looked out the prison bars: One saw mud, the other saw stars."

Two men in exactly the same circumstance made opposite choices that determined their capacity to be happy. Which choice would you have made?

Why not choose a positive attitude first thing in the morning, before things even have a chance to go wrong? The Word of God teaches us in Psalm 118:24, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." And once more in Philippians 4:4 this Bible says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" That choice, when you get up in the morning, will set the mood for your whole day!

You might be thinking, "That's easy for you to say, but you just don't know my circumstances." **Listen very carefully; our attitudes do not have to be determined by our circumstances.** *Circumstances* control you only if you let them. In John 14:27 Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." **He did not say these words from an ivory tower in some Shangri-la.** He said it to His disciples the night before He was to be *crucified* by the Romans. He refused to let the *circumstances* control His *attitude*!

When Paul and Silas were in prison at Philippi, they sang at midnight. When the circumstances were at their worst, they were at their best! **What did God do in response? He sent a squadron of angels who shook the jail off its foundations with an earthquake.** Paul walked out of there with the *jailhouse keys in one hand* and a *new convert in the other* - because he refused to be mastered by his circumstances!

Our attitudes toward others determine their attitudes toward us. If we adopt a *negative, fault finding* attitude, of course no one wants to be around us except other *negative, faultfinding* people.

Some people make others happy when they arrive. Others make them happy when they leave. Which are you?

The truth of the matter is that our attitudes do not have to be permanent. We can change our attitudes, just as soon as we are willing to. Our attitudes will determine the quality of relationships we will have with our wives, our husbands, our children, our bosses - even God Himself. Our choice of attitude controls the quality of our happiness for today, and today is the only unit of time we really have!

Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow may never come. We can only be happy today. And we can be just as happy as we decide to be!

Many Christians are unhappy because they refuse exercise their faith. Many Christians in today's world seem to believe that faith is a "take it or leave it" item, one that makes little difference in the quality of life. But that, my friend, is a lie!

Let me ask you this question: What happens when a man loses faith in himself? or in God? or in the future? Does he sing for joy? Does he throw his arms around his closest friends and say with laughter saying, "I have no faith in myself!" Is his face radiant with the glow of happiness?

Of course not. There is no joy. No peace. No happiness. Instead, trembling hands reach for mind numbing tranquilizers, or for a drink to drown the sorrows, or for a snort of cocaine, or wallow in self-pity.

What happens when a woman loses faith in her marriage? Does she laugh for joy as she phones her lawyer? Does she call her friends together and celebrate the collapse of her life?

No. There are tears and agony of heart, expressing the pain of broken faith. Without faith in your marriage partner, your home becomes hell on earth.

It is no accident that the Word of God reminds us in Romans 1:17 that "The just shall live by faith." Faith does not demand miracles; faith produces miracles.

Faith is the soul daring to go further than the natural eye can see. Faith is a choice, not an argument. Faith is a decision, not a debate. Faith is a commitment, not a controversy.

Faith gives us the power to walk fearlessly, run confidently and live victoriously. No one need live in doubt when he can pray in faith. Even if our faith cannot yet move mountains, it can give us the power to climb over them.

Faith is important for living happy in an unhappy world! Try living one day without it and you're on your way to the nut house. Faith is the fabric that clothes the heart, soul, mind, and body with old-fashioned, overflowing, heaven-sent happiness!

Hebrews 11:1-3 & 6 tells us, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders received witness. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear... (For) without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarded of them that diligently seek him." The Bible teaches that there is only one way to all the treasures of God, and that is the way of faith. By faith and faith alone do we enter into a knowledge of the attributes, become partakers of the beatitudes, and participate in the glories of our ascended Lord. Although our mind cannot conceive God, it is through our faith that we receive Him for Who He is!

Therefore, it is by faith that we learn to *expect* and *ask* all things from Him, and thankfully give Him credit for whatever we receive. And unless we place our *entire happiness in Him*, we will never yield up our whole selves to him in *truth* and *sincerity*.