

SEARCHING FOR HAPPINESS

By

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In C.S. Lewis' charming fantasy of the Chronicles of Narnia, one of his characters is an odious young man by the name of Eustace, who excels in arrogant egotism. He despises all the others and in turn is despised by them, so that he leaves their company and his responsibilities to seek his own way. Taking refuge from a storm in a cave from which a wounded dragon had just emerged and died, he discovers it is filled with great treasure accumulated by the dragon. His mind and heart immediately fill with greed, and with dreams of his own power and wealth he sleeps on the pile of gold, jewels and precious treasure, only to awake to find that he had actually become a dragon.

One becomes what he is becoming. The life one lives while seeking happiness is the life that develops. Christians who are hot in the pursuit of happiness may be growing less Christian and more worldly, even though they actually hope to become better Christians.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with happiness. We all desire it, Jesus promised it, and we believe it is available now. In the final outcome it will abound for all the redeemed. But, to seek happiness is to become a happiness-seeker. To be a Christian means that we seek Christ and His way.

Jesus said, "Happy (blessed) are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (Matt 5:6). Not happy because you have been filled with all the things that are supposed to guarantee happiness — a new house with all the gadgets, a Mercedes in the garage, unlimited bank account, honor and respect of the important people, a comfortable retirement, with perfect health — but because you are filled with the righteousness you desired.

Christ did not promise to fulfill the American dream. He did not die to make us worldly prosperous. He doesn't reign for the purpose of keeping us entertained and comfortable and excited with fun events. The judgment will not be based on how much joy we were able to cram into life here.

Augustine wrote, "happiness consists in the attainment of our desires, and in having only right desires." Right desires are determined by looking to the purpose of God. It is right to desire what God desires for us, and wrong to desire that which displeases Him. From the beginning He desired that man be in His image, that we have the character of God. Jesus, who is the "express image of His substance," was the full revelation of what God wants man to be. Jesus said that He always did the things that were pleasing to the Father, and God said that He was well pleased with His Son (John 8:29, Matt. 17:5). Jesus was at perfect peace and filled with joy because He was totally occupied with one thing: God and His desire for man. Then the right desire of a Christian is to be like Jesus. Do we really want this? Do we really want to be like Jesus — humble, meek, unselfish, concerned more with pleasing God than man, or even ourselves? Probably this is not what most people think of as happiness.

Becoming Christian is often presented as simple and easy. “Just invite Jesus into your life.” That’s easy enough, but it ISN’T ENOUGH. Becoming Christian requires a total change (repentance, it’s called) and a complete re-focusing of life.

One who is sincere about submitting to the purpose of God will soon find that it is neither simple nor easy. Just to confess one’s faith may take courage, and to be baptized requires humility and submission. But this is only the beginning. Once life is given to Him, drastic processes begin. Once Christ has full control, He can rightly say, “This life belongs to me, to fashion into my image. Now watch how things change.”

He will strip it of all the veneer, all the layers of lies and hypocrisy, the false colors and fancy decorations — creations of a vain and sinful society — and remove all the sham pleasures and activities generally labeled the “good life.” All these things were supposed to give joy and happiness, but what they really do is insulate one from the true joy of God’s warm presence. So they are taken away one by one.

It is when the pain — removing and demolition of trim and decoration gets under way that so many change their minds. “Enough of that,” they say, “I wanted God to make me happy and He has taken all the fun away. I wanted Him to give me beauty and He’s stripping me of all the good and beautiful things. If this keeps up I’ll be a shame to my family, a scandal to my friends, a laughing stock to the world and life will be no pleasure at all. I wouldn’t have given myself to God had I known this was the way He would do me.”

So he takes it all back again and withdraws from God. As far as possible he puts all the paint back on and gets back into the swing of the world’s “good life” — often excessively just to prove he was not taken in by any kind of religious fanaticism. The last state becomes worse than the first.

Of course, the old longings for a better life return, and the craving for peace continues to burn in the heart. But, at least there is comfort in the fact that the same misery is being experienced by most all the rest. They even laugh about it and joke about it, as they try to chase it away with cocktails.

He never will know the design the Creator had in mind, how He would have refashioned and redecorated that which had been put into His hands. He will never know the depth of happiness he could have had by desiring only what the Creator could make of him.

Whatever a person’s status in life, whatever burdens he bears, whatever insurmountable problems he is facing, let him fully believe in and submit to Christ in obedience to His way, and his life will become one of success and fulfillment. NOT necessarily success in accomplishing his former desires and solving the former problems. Christ never promise to solve all the world’s problems, as some see to think. But when one submits himself to God he has a new desire, and a new set of problems. Only this time, they are ones that are solvable! The old problems which belong to the world are left behind, while the new ones are met by Christ’s purpose.

Former ambition rooted and geared to temporal pursuits will vanish, and along with that ambition will go all the tension and frustration generated by problems connected with accomplishing it. The new ambition is to please God and fulfill His purpose to have creatures in His image. This may bring problems and hardships — in fact He promises as much — but they do not interfere with accomplishing the work. They are only walls that keep us from wandering away from the main purpose; thorns that burst

our pride and pin us down to reliance upon God's grace. Therefore even the problems and afflictions serve to accomplish the task and grant our desire to be filled with the righteousness of God.

Happiness is not the product of coveting the image of happiness portrayed by the world. If you want to see happiness you will not go to Beverly Hills, Malibu or New York's Fifth Avenue. Go, rather where you find people bearing burdens in service, where there are people who suffer for the sake of righteousness, to those who covet only spiritual riches, to those who "mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate," to those who "love not the world, neither the things of the world" and who "owe no man anything but love."

You become what you are becoming. Happiness is not something at the end of the road, it is the road itself. It is found daily in responding to God's purpose to bring us to himself, in doing His will, in living in His presence.

This world is only temporary, but the life which is being fashioned after the image of God is to be eternal.

Happiness can be built only on that which harmonizes with the basic and eternal purpose for which we are created. "Happy are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

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