

Happiness and Enjoyment

About 30 years ago, a popular song stated that "Happiness is, different things to different people," and then includes a long list of people and the thing that makes each happy. Today we have a very diverse population that does not view happiness the same way. As we are "born again" by the Spirit and growing to maturity in our understanding of God and the scriptures, our happiness should become more and more like God's. Some examples of those who found happiness with God follow, beginning with a prophet who received a very timely lesson.

The book of Jonah describes the attitude of a prophet of God whose idea of happiness differed from God's. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach, but Jonah thought he knew best. He tried running the other way but was turned around. After preaching that the people needed to repent of their barbaric ways or be destroyed, Jonah went out of the city, built a shelter, and sat down to see what would happen. The people did change, and God allowed them to live. Jonah became angry because he wanted them dead. God caused a gourd to grow up over the shelter to give shade, which pleased Jonah. The next day, however, the gourd withered and died. As Jonah suffered under the sun, he was angry and prayed for death. God's answer was a question. Is it right for you to be angry? Is it right to be happy for a gourd that gave you some benefit but angry that it died? The further question is, does it seem right to be happy over a plant but not over the salvation of people? In the New Testament, Jesus said, *"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance"* (Luke 15:7).

In Acts 16, we see two preachers of the gospel mistreated in Philippi because of the result of a miracle. Paul cast a demon out of a young girl, but rather than being happy for the girl, people became infuriated with Paul and Silas. A mob formed, beat the two evangelists, and confined them in prison. Soon, Paul and Silas begin singing (Acts 16:25). This is not the reaction people expect for someone beaten and thrown into prison. They displayed happiness of heart and peace of the spirit rather than the pain of the body. The two did not know what the people would do to them. However, Paul and Silas did know a loving God, and the Christ who gave His life protected them spiritually.

The knowledge we have includes the past and the present. We do not know what the future brings. The wise man of Israel said, *"I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot"* (Ecclesiastes 3:22). Solomon also said, *"In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything that will be after him"* (Ecclesiastes 7:14). Pains and ills cause us discomfort. Is that more important than being alive with the opportunity to repent of past wrongs and praise God for his providence? New and unexpected diseases and political conditions cause many anxieties. We cannot forget that the God of Heaven ensures that His faithful inherit eternity. Joseph could not see the future reunion with Jacob while serving as a slave in Egypt (Genesis 39-47). Stephen did not know when the mob took him, that soon he would be welcomed into paradise by a loving savior (Acts 6 and 7).

In more modern times, the devastating effects of smallpox and polio caused panic, but they led to research that not only removed those threats but many others. God's promises were true then just as they are today. We cannot know now what the physical trials of our time will lead to in this world. We do know the God who cannot lie, has promised us a glorious future. The fear of the present

should never exceed the happiness and joy of anticipating our future, even when we find it hard to do so. Jesus said, "rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

Often, we leave each other with words like "have fun," "enjoy," or "be happy." Jesus used words like "rejoice and be glad" and "leap for joy." At times, our words might be heard by one who is in deep distress. Jesus' words were heard by those who would suffer at the hands of their brethren and the Romans. The idea of "sing and be happy" seems foreign to one suffering oppression and torture, yet we find examples in scripture of those in deep distress doing just that. Part of the final words of encouragement to the Church at Philippi are these that would serve us today. *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice"* (Philippians 4:4); and *"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things"* (Philippians 4:8).