

Happiness VS Joy

We are supposedly constitutionally guaranteed the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” People sometimes mistakenly interpret this to mean that we are guaranteed to have happiness in their lives. The result of this is that when they inevitably find out that happiness is elusive and is contingent upon the satiation of the “deadly monster” of greed, they are bitterly disillusioned and disappointed. They feel that they have been gyped out of what they think should rightfully have been their guaranteed right. Then, once they find themselves coming close to thinking they are obtaining it, their happiness then somehow seems to fade.

The 60’s musical icons “Simon and Garfunkel” had a song entitled “Richard Corey”. This man had everything the secular world could offer: money and power were all at his command. The song explicitly states that with “...the orgies on his yacht he surely must be happy with everything he’s got”, yet the song goes on and says “the evening headlines read, Richard Corey went home last night and put a bullet through his head[1]” This is not what I envision as a state of happiness.

King Saul was happy to be made king of Israel[2], yet how rapidly did this happiness fade into jealousy, anger and hostility which was directed toward he who had been appointed by God as Saul’s successor.[3] The life of Saul ended tragically, partially because of his failure to realize that happiness was not his right as king. His right as king was the same as the right of any Hebrew follower of YHWH, the right of obedience to God’s word. Saul, like the secular and fictitious “Richard Corey”, died by his own hand when his world collapsed around him[4]. This is again not what I envision as a state of happiness.

The search for happiness can be all consuming. It starts with a view that others are intended to be subservient to our demands. The prisons are packed with those whose attitudes are expressed by actions of animosity and bitterness towards those who may have what we have erroneously come to view as a step on the road to our happiness. Pharaoh in the Old Testament came to feel that he was divine and as such had the right to command others to do his will. He came to find out, however, that he was only a man, and not god. He discovered that his personal happiness was not the issue, but his obedience to God was. His failure to acknowledge the Lord as God caused him to be totally and ignominiously defeated by the God he chose to confront...Because it did not make him happy to view another as deity when all his “lackeys” were telling him (out of fear) that he, pharaoh, was god[5].

On the other hand, true joy is found in obedience to God’s word. Elijah when he confronted the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah on Mount Carmel was obedient to the word of the Lord as he stood alone while mocking the vain attempts to get their god of stone “make them happy”. The false prophets their “gods” would accomplish this by usurping YHWH from His rightful place as Lord of All[6]. Their hopes were dashed to bits because, in the end, all 850 false prophets were destroyed....And the people knew that the Lord was God.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews recounts the great men of Faith who suffered and died in order to proclaim the Lord as the one and true God. Stephen’s glorious speech to the Sanhedrin as he was facing death by stoning is a true testimony of his great faith.[7] These were not “happiness speeches” but rather one which emanates from a deeper relationship which expresses itself as joy.

Happiness is, you see, based on circumstances whereas joy is based upon relationship[8]. The latter is listed as part of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5: 22-23. The fruit of the spirit is available only through a deeper relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. When we accept Him as Lord and Savior of our lives, we are set free from the Law of sin and death[9], opening up the blockade we create by the “pursuit of happiness” so that His indwelling Spirit can set us free. We now have a deep relationship with our Lord and Savior....And that instills in me, joy.

[1] Simon and Garfunkel Song Richard Corey

[2] 1 Samuel 9-10

[3] 1 Samuel 18-19

[4] 1 Samuel 31

[5] Genesis 41-Exodus 12

[6] ! Kings 18: 16-46

[7] Acts 7

[8] Radio preacher whose name I cannot remember

[9] Romans 8:1