

“The Secret of Happiness - Death”

Scripture: Philippians 3

Graphics: smiley face, cross, tomb

Big Truth: The secret to happiness seems to be something that we desire and even chase after, but often don't experience. Life circumstances, family relationships, work, school, and many other things rob us of our joy, which affects our happiness. The Apostle Paul had every reason to be unhappy, but he was filled with joy because of the people who loved him, partnered with him, and were growing in Christ. Paul gave us a formula for the secrets to happiness - gratitude, humility, death, and celebration.

Focus Phrase: Happiness comes in my life when I am ready to be resurrected from the dead.

1. Introduction

A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**

B. It's a scene every person in this life has or will experience. The death of someone you know personally.

- i. It almost always entails a time of shock and grief at the news of the death of a family member or friend. It sometimes means that we make our way to the funeral home and church to pay our respects to the family or have others greet us with words of consolation.
- ii. In many cases, there's a pastor who stands before the congregation and leads them in not only remembering the one who has died, but also gives the people hope in a gracious and loving God.
- iii. In my 20+ years as a pastor, I've presided at 108 funerals and/or graveside services. That's actually a pretty low number compared to some of my colleagues.
- iv. I've buried people from aged 2 months to over 100 years, including teenagers, people who died tragically, some too soon, and many who died peacefully. Some were not believers. Some were pastors. Most were salt-of-the-earth followers of Jesus Christ who lived to follow Jesus and love those around them the best they could. In every case, death is the end of a chapter is someone's earthly physical life, at least for now.

C. Yet, there's a profound difference between the death of someone who was not a follower of Jesus Christ and someone who was. In fact, for someone dies who's not a follower of Jesus, the death and burial process is most often sad and hopeless.

D. When someone dies who DID KNOW what it meant to follow Jesus - someone who was saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and who bore the fruit of the Spirit - death, while still sad and often tearful for those who remain behind, includes something ELSE as part of the experience: JOY! How that gets

expressed is different for each believer, but there's also a powerful witness to the resurrection of Jesus when a follower of Jesus dies.

- E. Why? Because the promises we have from scripture is true:
- i. "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live," John 11:25
 - ii. Or 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, " But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."
 - iii. Or, Jesus' words in John 16:22, "So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."
- F. There is life after death! Death, for those who are in Christ, may be sad for a moment, but, as Psalm 30:5 says, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning."
- G. If you were here for the first two messages in this series, you'll remember that our definition of happiness is not the fleeting giddiness that we sometimes experience when our sports team wins. Happiness is the outward manifestation of the deep joy we have in knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It's how our hearts express gratitude and humility into our faces!
- H. The first two secrets to happiness were **gratitude and humility**. When we're thankful for all we have, even in difficult circumstances, the joy in our hearts blossoms into happiness on our faces. Same goes for humility, as we bow our lives before God in worship and before others so they can thrive in Christ. We find joy that is expressed in happiness.
- I. Next week, we'll get to celebration, which we can always relate to happiness.
- J. But before we get there, we have one more stop to make: death. And it may seem very odd to relate death with happiness, but that's exactly what the Apostle Paul did in this letter to the Philippians. We will turn back to Paul's letter, chapter 3, where he writes this in verse 10, "I want to know Christ and

the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death...”

- K. If you're taking notes, here's where we're heading: **Happiness comes in my life when I am ready to be resurrected from the dead.**
- L. Now, as we'll see, that doesn't mean that the only way to be happy is to be dead. On the contrary, it's those who die every day to themselves and live for Christ in this life that are truly happy. We'll find out why.
- M. Let's open our bibles and turn to Philippians 3...verse 1...

2. Scripture

A. READ Philippians 3:1-11

- i. This whole section is about **contrast**...
 - a. ...between those who put trust in their flesh and those who put their trust in God.
 - b. ...between those who have confidence in their human status or accomplishments and those who place their confidence in God.
 - c. ...between those who mutilate their flesh to worship pagan gods and those who are circumcised and worship the One True God.
- ii. See, the term Paul uses for “flesh” in the Greek is sarx, which means the physical flesh...but it also denotes human nature apart from divine influence. This term flesh is a grand metaphor for anything that is not spiritual. Those who rely on the flesh are not relying on God. Paul warned the church to stay clear of the ones who are relying on anything but God for their status, even the Jewish religious leaders!
- iii. Paul used to be one of them. But now he's a follower of Jesus who has seen and heard the truth about God. Paul was a Jew. Paul was a religious leader Jew. He was born and raised in the strict adherence to the Jewish law... from the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, he said. Was a keeper of the Jewish law, with zeal...blameless under the law.
- iv. By all accounts, Paul was God's man, as a Jew!
- v. YET, he said, it's all (English accent) **rubbish!** It's garbage...it's loss, actually. It's less than zero...all the status he has because of his Jewish heritage and training actually now takes away from his life, **because** of Christ.
- vi. Compared to Jesus, NOTHING in Paul's FLESH mattered to Paul, not even his very life!
- vii. And it's all based on faith in Christ and not his heritage, his upbringing, his circumcision, his adherence to the law, his degrees, or anything else. It's all RUBBISH!

- viii. Paul was single-minded: to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in death.
- ix. He started in verse 1 with Rejoice in the Lord! And for Paul, joy lives itself out as happiness in his life by being like Christ in death and then, of course, in resurrection from the dead! But you can't get to resurrection until you make the journey through death.
- x. In other places, Paul made it clear that he'd rather physically die and be with Christ. But, he also wanted to keep living so he can share the Good News. So, this wasn't about physically dying, for Paul, but his death is death to his 'self' - his flesh (sarx) - so that his joy is in knowing that nothing in this life can ever kill his spirit or his everlasting life.
- xi. Happiness comes in my life when I am ready to be resurrected from the dead.
- xii. Let's read the next section...

B. READ Philippians 3:12-21

- i. Here's the upside-down thing about being a follower of Jesus Christ:
 - a. Death is life. Life is death.
 - b. We live on this earth and are citizens of a country (or two), but, actually, our real citizenship is in the Kingdom of God.
 - c. When our bodies die, they WILL live again.
 - d. If we allow ourselves to die to self while we are living, then we will live with Christ when we die.
 - e. By giving up all things that don't last, we gain all things that DO last.
 - ii. It's crazy! But it's an incredible TRUTH that plants joy in our hearts and brings smiles to our faces.
 - iii. See, we have nothing to fear! Because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead resides IN you and me!
 - iv. Paul wrote in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
 - v. Paul also said back in Philippians 1:21: "For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain."
- C. Death is death for those who are not in Christ Jesus. And I have to say, it's sad and hopeless.
- D. Yet, for those in Christ Jesus, death is gain because death is then life everlasting.

- E. Paul was asking the church to press on, forgetting what was behind and straining forward to what lies ahead for them.
- F. And the thing that lies ahead is death! But death is gain and leads to life!

3. Application

- A. Happiness comes in my life when I am ready to be resurrected from the dead.
- B. Do you believe that? Truly...do you believe that, church?
- C. Because this truth is not only at the foundation of the Good News about Jesus Christ, but it's the launching pad for a life that's filled with the joy of the Lord that gets expressed in our lives as happiness.
- D. And...are you ready to die every day in order for your life to exhibit the joy of the Lord?
- E. If I had to give us some application today, it would be this:
 - i. #1 - **Spend some time thinking about your own death.**
 - a. "Wow! Pastor Steve, that's not something I want to do." That's fair.
 - b. Yet, aren't we assured that in Christ, those who die will live?
 - c. If I'm so uncomfortable with even the thought of my own physical death, then that's an invitation from the Holy Spirit to spend some time letting God work on my faith.
 - d. Jesus spent time thinking about his own death. He didn't always like what the Spirit revealed - like in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - e. Yet, he was not so afraid to die that he used the power he had as God to avoid it. In fact, two weeks ago we read Philippians 2 where Paul wrote that Jesus was obedient to death - even death on a cross.
 - f. This is not a morbid fascination with your own death. This is looking THROUGH it to the glory that comes in resurrection!
 - g. Think about your own death and allow the joy of resurrection to well up in you!
 - ii. #2 - In order for happiness to come through death, **deny yourself daily and take up your cross.**
 - a. Jesus said to his disciples (and you), "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."
 - b. "Coming after Jesus" means following Jesus. We don't just follow Jesus' commands and teachings, church. We follow HIM...all the way to death and resurrection.

- c. So, if you have the ultimate promise that you will experience resurrection from the dead, then Jesus call to deny yourself and take up your cross is your mission.
 - d. Denying yourself means letting YOUR fleshly desires die and yielding your will to Jesus' will and way. Practice that every day and when you get to the death and resurrection part, you'll be ready for EVERYTHING Jesus wants to give you forever.
- iii. #3 - Finally, **live today knowing that resurrection power is in you** and will raise your mortal body to life when you physically die.
- a. Happiness comes into my life when I'm READY to be resurrected from the dead.
 - b. Are you ready to be resurrected? Are you living your life TODAY with the full assurance and hope that when you die and Jesus returns, you will live, physically and spiritually, forever?
 - c. That's the promise we have. That's the future in which we place our hope!
 - d. That's can and should impact every decision you make, every response to every trial, every small act of love and forgiveness.
 - e. There is JOY and HAPPINESS that floods in when we KNOW that death is just a doorway into resurrection life!
 - f. Live today knowing that your future is secure in Christ! You have nothing to lose!

4. Conclusion

- A. The secrets to happiness are gratitude, humility, death, and celebration.
- B. Next week, we'll get to celebration, as we not only celebrate together what God has done, but as we celebrate our new church home and all the God has in store for our future!
- C. Death is not the end for those who are in Christ Jesus. Are you READY to be resurrected from the dead? Are you filled with JOY knowing that you will share in Christ's death and resurrection? It's the only way to live happy!
- D. Share the Good News about Jesus with those in your life so that THEY TOO can be filled with the joy that leads to happiness to be alive with no fear of death.
- E. And SMILE! God loves you! And so do I!
- F. Let's pray...