

What makes you happy? Turn to your neighbor this morning and tell them what makes you happy.

Now let me pose a question to you: Do you want to be happy or do you want to be blessed?

Happiness is often dependent upon the events that are going on around us. If things are going our way we are happy; if things are headed south so is our happiness.

But being blessed has nothing to do with the events that are going on around us. As Christians we are blessed, all the time! "God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good."

Being blessed is simply knowing and experiencing the favor of God. That doesn't mean that you have everything, that life is perfect, that you have no problems; to be blessed means that you know God is with you- as we said last week about being content- whether you have plenty or are in want.

When God established his relationship with Abraham; God promised to bless Abraham and through Abraham to bless all people. Genesis 12:1-3

God's intent is to bless us. That doesn't mean that we will have all the things that we think are required to be happy. But it does mean that we will be blessed- that whatever the circumstance we know that we have the favor of God in our life.

As Christians we believe that God blesses his people, but at times we pursue happiness at the expense of that blessing. And as a result of believing that we should be happy, and that God wants us to be happy; we often pursue happiness at the expense of blessing.

Abraham would be a good example of this. Abraham knew that God had promised to bless him, to make Abraham a great nation and to bless all the peoples of the earth through Abraham. But when Abraham and Sarah were getting past the childbearing years; and Abraham and Sarah had no children; Abraham and Sarah put their own plan into action; having Abraham become a father through Sarah's servant, Hagar.

Abraham is like us. When we believe that the end justifies the means; then we sadly short-circuit the blessings that God wants us to experience. We sacrifice the long-term blessings for the immediate desire of our happiness.

We are not the first people to live in the gap where we sacrifice the blessing for the immediate. The scriptures are full of examples of individuals who sacrificed God's blessings for more immediate passions.

One such person was a man named Esau. Esau was a hunter. He spent long days out in the fields in search of food. One day he came home hungry, no actually he came home famished! When he arrived he was greeted by his brother Jacob who was something of a homebody compared to Esau.

Now Jacob had spent the day making a big pot of stew. So when Esau rushed in all famished he wanted to eat. Jacob was willing to feed Esau if he had something to trade. So Esau traded his birthright-his inheritance and the blessing of his father- for a pot of stew.

There is another famous story about a man who put his immediate happiness ahead of God's long-term blessings. King David was home from war and spent some time on the roof of his palace. As he surveyed his kingdom David spotted something. There on another roof top was this hot chick taking a bath! David was king, but he was also a man, and when the two are combined it spelled trouble for David.

David called for Bathsheba to be brought to him. He let his passions run wild. Adultery led to an elaborate cover up that eventually meant the death of Bathsheba's husband. David traded his integrity for a night of passion and the murder of his friend.

One other story; this time about a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira. They were part of the early church in Jerusalem. All around them were examples of how these early disciples of Jesus were selling everything and giving the proceeds to the needs of others. Caught up in the moving of God's Spirit they sold their property. Sounds good up to this point!

But Ananias and Sapphira were not sure they could trust God to provide (last week's sermon). So they concocted a plan to deceive the apostles by keeping a portion of the money and telling a lie about the actual selling price. When Ananias brought the money to Peter his lie was revealed. And at that moment Ananias dropped dead.

Realizing her husband had not returned, Sapphira went looking for him (maybe she didn't trust him with the money, after all she was part of this ploy). When she arrived where Peter and the others were gathered she was confronted with telling the truth or keeping up the lie. She chose poorly. And just as the men who had buried her husband returned she dropped dead.

Here are three examples in scripture of people who sought their immediate happiness over the blessing of God. They gave in to the desire of their flesh rather than being obedient to the Spirit of God.

For Esau the stew was what he needed at the moment. Esau didn't value his birthright; something that would bless him in the future. Esau was focused on the need of the moment- his stomach trumped the Spirit!

Like Esau we try to buy happiness. We feel like we need something immediately and we are willing to sacrifice the long term over the short term. And advertisers know this basic instinct so they play to it. In an effort to appeal to our base desires they peddle the new and improved must-have items. We attempt to buy happiness but often find that the happiness is short lived- like a bowl of stew. We get hungry again.

Even Solomon the wisest man who ever lived understood the temporary nature of things. Having sought to find happiness and pleasure in everything under the sun Solomon said it was all meaningless.

¹⁰ I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
 I refused my heart no pleasure.
 My heart took delight in all my labor,
 and this was the reward for all my toil.
¹¹ Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
 and what I had toiled to achieve,
 everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
 nothing was gained under the sun.

Like David we often pursue happiness down the wrong path by making unwise decisions. There is something about the pursuit of happiness that causes a disconnect between our beliefs and our actions. We think that we deserve it, no one will ever know. Soon we are covering up with one unwise decision after another. Our unwise choices trump the wisdom of the Spirit!

And Ananias and Sapphira literally fulfilled what Proverbs 14:12 says: There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. We think we know what is best for us but we only demonstrate our ignorance by pursuing a short-term happiness.

My guess is that you and I know people who like Esau, David, and Ananias and Sapphira traded the blessings of God for our immediate happiness. We could all probably think of our own situations where this is true also. Thankfully, God can redeem those situations; as God did with David.

So how do we close the gap? How do we begin to live in a way that we understand that being blessed is better than being happy?

We need to ask ourselves if our choices for happiness are helping us to develop godly character. Does this choice honor God and honor others? Does this honor my commitment to Jesus Christ? Does this help me develop more of the character of Jesus? Does this pursuit honor others?

And we need to give pause to every decision and ask ourselves am I seeking short-term pleasure or long-term blessing?

We need to start controlling our thoughts. We need to develop kind of an alarm system that warns us with questions like:

Where is this thought or idea coming from?

Will this get me where I want to go in life?

Where will this lead me? What are the consequences?

Does it make you feel guilty?

When you are ruled by your appetites like Esau and David, then your happiness will be one long roller coaster ride with ups and downs and twists and turns.

But it doesn't have to be that way! Paul in Galatians 5 put it simply: "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

I can't begin to imagine what our lives would be like if each of us as Christians lived by the Spirit and didn't gratify the desires of the sinful nature. We would stop missing out on the blessing of God and instead see God move in spectacular ways.

Do you have a bowl of stew in your life that can impact your whole future?