

Happiness

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[0:00] This week we're coming in our study of J.C. Ryle's practical religion to his chapter entitled Happiness. And the Bible speaks a lot about happiness.

In Jesus' most famous sermon, he sat down and he spoke to his disciples about happiness. And he began by teaching them, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. And you're familiar with the rest of the sermon. Nine times Jesus says, Blessed, happy.

Happy are these people. Jesus wants us to be happy. Jesus wants you to be happy. He became a man of sorrows so that you could become one of these blessed ones that he talks about.

He was wounded for our transgressions. And the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. So he drank to the dregs the misery of our punishment so that we could walk away and have the joy of salvation.

[1:11] And so, while mourning and sorrow are a real part of the Christian life, and they're going to be a real part of the Christian life, no one should be mistaken and think that they have the last word.

Jesus died to make us happy. He died to make us happy in him. And happiness, it's a rare commodity in our culture. We are technologically advanced, aren't we?

We're leaps and bounds beyond anyone's imagination a hundred years ago. Everything is amazing. We fly across the continent in a number of hours, and it took men months to do it before.

Everything's amazing, and people are still not happy, are they? While science has grown leaps and bounds, happiness, contentment, and joy is as rare as ever.

They're rare commodities. So Ryle wants to set us straight on this matter of happiness. And he has three points. He has three points in his chapter, and we're just going to take those right from the chapter.

[2:20] The first is the absolute essentials of happiness. What is absolutely required for happiness? So we're going to first answer this by saying, what's not essential?

We're going to clear the debris away and see what you really don't need for real happiness. First Ryle says, true happiness is not a perfect freedom from sorrow and discomfort.

So at this time, in this world that we're living in, you are never going to be happy without some sorrow. Jesus himself said, blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are you when men persecute you. So happiness isn't going to depend on the fact that we don't have any sorrows, we don't have any complaints.

True happiness is always going to be attached to sorrow in this world. They're always going to go together. The curse lies heavy on everything.

[3:27] Work is hard. Sin is everywhere. There's sickness. There's futility. There's old age. There's evil. Satan is at work.

And so the highest happiness a man can hope for in this world is something that's going to be mixed. And we shouldn't expect otherwise. Because it's not going to happen.

We can't have complete, perfect happiness until sin is done away with. So happiness is not a freedom from pain and sorrow. Paul himself said that we're sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

So in this sad world, we're going to always carry with us sorrow and sadness, even with our joy.

There's going to be imperfection in our happiness.

But just because it's mixed doesn't mean it's not real. Just because it's mixed doesn't mean it's not real. There is real, true happiness to be found.

[4:27] But you're not going to find it alone. Where you find sorrow, there you can find happiness. Happiness. So happiness is not the perfect freedom from sorrow and pain.

Well, is it found in smiles and laughter? That's another possibility. That's what the world thinks when they think of happiness.

That they think of a person who's smiling and laughing. But happiness isn't that either. It might look the same, but it's not the same. If you want to see a wretched, miserable person, just follow that college student home from that Friday night party.

Watch them walk along the sidewalk to their dormitory. She looks so happy. She's smiling. She's giddy. She's laughing and cracking jokes.

But keep following her. It looks like happiness. But keep following her. Follow her into her dorm room. And watch her crash onto her bed. Miserable as can be. See, the student that has all the pleasures of the party can be perfectly miserable.

[5:36] She's discontent. And she says to herself, Why isn't this making me happy? Everyone else seems to be happy, but I'm not happy. What's wrong with me? Why does that make everyone else happy?

But even in a crowd, you can be so lonely and miserable. Now, there can be no doubt that a truly happy person is going to smile.

They're going to laugh. But even a joyful face, a smile, can hide a heartache. Proverbs says, Even in laughter, the heart may ache.

So, a smiling face, just because someone's smiling and laughing, doesn't tell us anything about whether they're really, truly happy or not. See, I can go to a florist and buy a bouquet of roses. And I can stick those roses in the ground. So, I have my stems of roses. And they can look like I planted roses. But I haven't.

[6:37] I don't have a rose plant. Those things will die soon enough. So, you can smile. And you can look happy. But you don't have the root of the matter in you. So, what's essential to happiness?

What is essential to happiness? It's not in smiles. It's not in freedom from sorrow and pain. What is essential to happiness?

Well, your soul must be satisfied. Your soul must be satisfied. Now, a cow and a horse, if you feed them and keep them warm, they're going to be happy as they can be.

But none of you are cows or horses. You have a soul. You have a conscience that needs satisfied. You have desires in your heart that need to be met if you're going to be happy.

So, there can be no happiness until your soul is satisfied. That's one of the first essentials. So, what is essential to happiness? Well, your happiness must be independent of this earth.

[7:45] This earth. Of this changing earth. If your happiness is built on something here. And present now. Then, I feel very sorry for you. I feel very sorry for you.

Because sooner or later, that happiness is going to wash away. It's like a sandcastle that you build on the beach. And there's your happiness. And you built it. And it looks so nice.

But in a few hours, the tide's going to come in. And your happiness is going to wash away. Everything on earth is a vapor.

And if our anchor of happiness is cast here. Then it won't last very long. So, what is essential to happiness?

J.C. Ryle says, You must look around. And everywhere you look, there must be peace. Now, what does he mean by that? Well, he just basically means that you can't look back in the past with nothing but regret and misery.

[8:52] You can't look at the past. And you can't look around to the present with guilt and fear. And you can't look forward into the future with anxiety.

If those are the things that are consuming you, then you can't be happy. There must be peace in the middle of who you are. Now, some people's happiness rests on their ability to ignore things.

They just ignore certain features about their life. And in that way, they can have some kind of happiness. What are some of the things that people ignore in order to be happy? Their conscience? What do you mean? Right. So, they're happy as long as they're ignoring their sin. What else?

Death. Death?

Okay, death. Yeah. I can be happy as long as I don't think that in 10, 25 years, whatever, I'm going to die.

[9:55] Oh, death. Debt? Oh. Well, yeah, that's different. That's different. Yeah.

Actually, that's what a lot of people in the world do. They have a lifestyle that's based on spending money they don't have. And as long as they can think, okay, someday I'll take care of that.

If I can ignore it for now, I can be happy. Debt. And then death. Yeah. Yeah. We don't need to say anymore. If you have to ignore death to be happy, then you're living with half the reality of life. Because life is going to end. You are going to die. What else do people ignore? To be happy. Difficulty?

What do you mean? Right. If you have problems with people, if you have a real problem, and some people just downright ignore it. They suppress it.

[10:58] They pretend it's like it's not there. But none of those things are really happiness. If your happiness is dependent on the fact that if I can ignore certain features of my life and my world to be happy, that's not real happiness.

Listen to what Ryle says as he sums this point up. To be truly happy, the wants of your soul and conscience must be satisfied. To be truly happy, your joy must be founded on something more than this world can give you.

To be truly happy, you must be able to look on every side, above, below, behind, before, and feel that all is right. This is real, sterling, genuine happiness.

So that's our first point. Those are some of the essentials. And that's sort of the groundwork. We're going to pick up those points later. The second point, what are some common... This is the second point.

What's some common mistakes that people make about the path to happiness? So, we're all walking along. We're walking along in this world.

[12:06] And we come to a crossroads. And we see up in the corner there's a sign. And on every sign, there's a direction. And it says, happiness this way. Happiness this way.

Happiness this way. But they're all pointed in different directions. Happiness. So, it's a problem.

How do you know which way is the right way to happiness?

There's all these supposed false different paths to happiness. So, let me ask you. What are some of the wrong ways that people try to pursue happiness?

What are some of the wrong ways that people think, If I just have this, then I can be happy. And what do you mean? Right. I think that is the actual core of why people are so miserable.

All the things that we're going to talk about after this have that as their center. They're trying to seek their own good. And in seeking their own good, they find that they're miserable.

[13:10] Because we weren't made for ourselves. We were made for God. So, what are some of the ways, based on what Lewis said, What are some of the ways that people try to please themselves?

That they think, if this can be done for me, then I can be happy. Dare. Avoid conflict. Yeah. Some people just walk through life in the passive way of, If no one can touch me, If I don't have to get into any arguments, then I can be happy.

What else? Buy lots of stuff. Buy lots of stuff. Yeah. Can we say, maybe, if I had money?

Money. And I mean, money. If I had the ability to buy whatever I want, then I could be happy. That's what drives the lottery. That's why so many people work.

They don't work for their needs. They don't work to please God. They work to have money so they can spend on themselves. And that's one of the most common lies of Satan. That if I have money, then I will be happy.

[14:21] And it's funny, because everyone really knows that it doesn't make you happy. They really know. If you talk to pretty much anyone, one-on-one, they would say, Oh yeah, I know, money doesn't make me happy.

But they still want it. They still somehow think that that's the way to be happy. So, if you're poor and you're unhappy, you think, If I had a few more dollars, I would be happy.

And if you're a millionaire, you think, If I just had another million, then I would be happy. There's lots and lots of millionaires and billionaires right now that are completely miserable and they're sick over the Bernie Madoff scandal.

They've lost their millions. Their tens of millions. And they're worried sick over it. They still have so much money, but they're sick over what they've lost.

So, a couple millionaires have killed themselves. A French investor jumped off a building and killed himself. Their great riches didn't keep them from ruin.

[15:27] And it actually drove them to misery. So, where else do people pursue happiness? Debt. Right.

Yeah. I didn't think of that. That's true. In our culture, this is a culture that worships youth and appearance.

And so many people buy into the fact that if I can be young and pretty, then I'll be happy. That's not true. What else?

Mike. Right. By building up their esteem and prestige perspective in the eyes of others. Right. A lot of people think that if I can have more people under me than over me, then I'll be happy.

So, basically, we could say rank and greatness. If I can be great in this world, if I can be powerful, if I can be the president, if I can be a senator, if I could be the CEO, then I would be happy.

[16 : 35] And that's just so foolish. It's so foolish. You ask a CEO what he wants, really, and he'd probably say, I want to be some guy down the line that doesn't have to worry about so much.

The guy that works on the assembly plant and the assembly line, he has his one or two parts to worry about, and then the CEO has the whole company to worry about. The guy on the assembly line has to worry about pleasing one boss.

And then that CEO, he has 10,000 stockholders to answer to. There's no happiness in being great. And you could ask Solomon in Ecclesiastes.

He pursues, he has this experiment. I want to find out how I can be happy. And the very fact that he has to do this experiment shows us that the crown, being the greatest king in Israelite history, didn't satisfy his heart.

And so what did he find at the end of his investigation? What did he find? What did he say? It's all vanity.

[17 : 45] It's meaningless. It's chasing after the wind. Some people try to pursue happiness through education and learning. They think, if I can be educated, that's the philosophy of the modern educational movement.

If we can make people educated and smart, then we can make them happy. But, I'm sure Aaron Shavey could answer this. If you have a PhD, it doesn't make you any happier.

It doesn't make you any happier. How about the American dream? What's the American dream? Own a house.

Own a house? What else? What's after owning a house? Two and a half kids. You need that half child, don't you?

Yeah. Yeah. Two and a half kids. I work for 30 years at my job. And then I go to Florida. And I play golf.

[18 : 53] And I pick up seashells. And I play softball in the evening. I finally get to retire. That's happiness. I've been to Florida.

I've met some people from Florida. And they're not any happier than people in Indiana that are working. The only perfect people that have ever been perfectly happy were Adam and Eve in the garden.

And they had work to do. So work is not the enemy of happiness. Ryle gives a really long quote from a lady who had everything in this world.

She was wealthy. She was very educated. She was very popular. She had everything that you wanted. She was a mistress, a consort to King Louis XV.

And so she spent her day in idleness, in pleasure, in pomp, people bowing down to her. She was educated and refined. And her name was Madame de Pompidou, which is a really great name.

[19 : 59] She's actually very well known in Europe. Several movies have been made about her because she lives such an extravagant lifestyle. But listen to what she says. And listen to the things that didn't make her happy.

Okay? She says, I'm always gloomy and often so unreasonably. The kindness of the king, the regard of the courtiers, the attachment of my domestics, and the fidelity of a large number of friends.

Motives like those, which ought to make me happy, affect me no longer. I have no longer inclinations for all which once pleased me. I've caused my house at Paris to be magnificently furnished.

Well, it pleased me for two days. My residence at Bellevue is charming, and I alone cannot endure it. Benevolent people relate to me all the news and adventures of Paris.

And they think I listen, but after they're done talking, I ask them, what did you say? In a word, I do not live.

[21:06] I am dead before my time. I have no interest in the world. Everything conspires to embitter my life. My life is a continual death.

You say, what a wretch. How wretched she must be. She has houses, and kings, and gossip, and friends, and wealth, and power, and money.

She was absolutely miserable. Well, we can't just say that it's the rich and the powerful that are unhappy in this world. If we go up to Wyatt, or some rural town, and we go into, you know, we look at the idyllic setting of farmhouses, and some sentimentalists might think, ah, this is where real happiness can be found.

The simple life. And we make our way into those farmhouses, and what do we find? Do we find happiness? No, you find anxiety, and envy, and slander, and disobedient children.

In a word, you find sin. And you find great unhappiness. So happiness isn't in the simple life either. So what can we do after hearing all that?

[22:23] What can we do after we hear that lady's testimony, and we think about how really unhappy people are? We should feel very sorry for the lost.

They pursue happiness. That's what they want, and they don't have it. They're miserable for all their pursuit. They search, and they search for it, and at the end of the day, they come up with nothing. We should feel sorry for them. Our third point is this. What is the way to be really happy? What is the way to be really happy?

And this is a way that's open to all. You can be a king. You can be a slave. You can be an assembly line worker. You can be a CEO. You can be a senator.

You can be a president. And you can be happy. None are excluded. The only people that are excluded are those who don't want to walk on the path. So there's no other path.

[23:25] We've looked at all those. There's no other path to happiness. And this is the only path. And every truly happy person has walked on this path. And you can find kings there.

Kings who didn't find their happiness in their power. So what is the path to happiness? J.C. Ryle says, it is to be a real, thoroughgoing, true-hearted Christian.

Does that surprise you? It's to be a real, thoroughgoing, true-hearted Christian. We saw that last week. Zeal is good for us.

Zeal is good for our hearts. And it makes us happy. Zeal can make us holy. And the only happy people are holy people. So, are Christians exempt from the problems of this world?

I'm not. We're weak like other men. We're sick like other men. We have problems like other men. The world changes around us just as much as it changes around anyone else.

[24:32] But, underneath all that, there is true happiness in a Christian's heart. There's real, solid joy. So why is a Christian the only truly happy person?

Now, we're going to go back and talk about what we talked about before. Because his soul's desires have been met. His conscience is at peace with God. Paul says, therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the Christian knows peace because the blood of Christ has covered his sins. And so, he is no longer at war.

There's no condemnation for him. Our consciences can't accuse us. We have a righteousness that's not our own, but in one sense, it is our own.

We are as righteous as we can be. We have actually become the righteousness of God. So we are, in fact, as righteous as God himself in justification.

[25:42] through our justification, we find fulfillment because where sin had shattered our relationship with God, the gospel brings us together.

Jesus Christ brings us together. And we were meant to have a relationship with God. We were meant to live face-to-face with God. And we find happiness there.

Everyone knows they were meant for God. Everyone feels that they were meant for God. And it is the Christian who has been brought close. So our relationship with God is restored.

And that means that Christians could look all around them and find peace and be really happy.

There's problems, yes. There's sin, yes. But underneath that, there's peace.

We can look back in the past. And there's sin back there. But our sin isn't counted against us.

There's no condemnation in the future waiting for us.

[26:43] When we die, we will not face God's wrath. But we will face His smile. So Christian, you can be happy for another reason.

Because your happiness is not anchored in this world. Your happiness is in heaven. Your happiness is in heaven.

We talked about that. One of the essential ingredients for happiness is that the source of our happiness can't change. Because if it's subject to change, then one day we'll lose it.

But our happiness is found in Jesus Christ. And does Jesus Christ change? No. Yesterday, today, forever, He's the same.

And so our happiness never dies. It never gets sick. It never grows weak. Our happiness is forever the same. And so, here's a Christian stockbroker.

[27:46] Okay? He makes his money buying and selling stock. Okay? Now, in the last year, he's seen, he has seen his portfolio cut in half.

So, he's lost half of his wealth. But his happiness is not in money. His happiness is in heaven. It's where Jesus is.

So, where his treasure is, that's where his happiness is going to be. And his treasure is not stored up in the New York Stock Exchange. It's stored up in heaven. And so, while his colleagues are miserable, they're pondering suicide, they're sinking into depression, his happiness is green and alive.

It's growing. And, Christians, you can be happy too because your treasures are in heaven. And no one can touch them there and you can't lose them. Now, Christians, you can be happy because you're in the right place.

You're in the right place. And what I mean is that you've found your proper place in this world. If you want to see an unhappy family, you'll see children disobeying their parents.

[29:01] If you want to see an unhappy marriage, you'll see the wife leading the husband. If you want to see an unhappy class of students, you'll see the teacher or the students telling the teacher what to do instead of the other way around.

We were meant to live in the authority structures that God has set up. We were meant to live under His authority. We were made to live under God, under God's rules, under God's direction.

And only a Christian does that. Only a Christian is in the right place. He knows what he was meant for. We were meant to obey God and do His will.

And there we find joy. Finally, Christian, you can be happy because you have Jesus Christ.

You have Jesus Christ. Listen to what Ryle says about Jesus. He alone can give the Comforter who abides forever. He is the Son.

[30:06] Without Him, men never feel warm. He is the light. Without Him, men are always in the dark. He is the bread. Without Him, men are always starving.

He is the living water. Without Him, men are always a thirst. give them what you like. Place them where you please. Surround them with all the comforts you can imagine.

It makes no difference. Separate from Christ, a man cannot be happy. So how happy should you be? You have Christ.

And I ask you, what makes you to differ from the unhappy person? Were you smart and you figured out happiness? Did you choose Him or did He choose you?

What is the difference? Well, God was merciful. He was gracious to you. So grace sought you out when you were dead set against God. You were dead set against the real way of happiness.

[31:11] And He grabbed you and He turned you around. He saved us from our sins. And He saved us from our future, which was torment and hell.

And He saved us from those. He saved us from wasting our lives on things that are pointless. That men pursue every day that is absolutely pointless.

He saves us from wasting our life. Grace gives us Jesus Christ. And He sets us on the path and He shows us how to be happy forever and ever.

So, Ryle wants us to be happy. He shows us how to be happy. And He finishes with a few hints on how to increase our happiness.

Do you want to be happier than you are? We have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. That should make us want to taste and see more.

[32:09] It's not wrong to want to be more happy. So, He gives us hints. Hint number one is this. Labor to grow in grace.

Labor to grow in grace. Happiness is a living plant. And as holiness grows, as grace grows, happiness grows.

And so, the holiest man is always going to be the happiest man. And so, make it your aim to grow in grace. So, pursue holiness. Pursue communion with Christ.

Pursue more fellowship with your brothers and sisters. Pursue this life that Christ has given to us. If you want to be happier, use the means of grace.

And they're the same and they're not new, but they answer our need for happiness. If you want to be happier, read your Bible more. If you want to be happier, pray more.

[33:06] Hint number two. Labor to be more thankful. Labor to be more thankful. Well, how can you make yourself more thankful? How can you make yourself more thankful?

Well, if you want to know more happiness, look at your sin. Take a good, long, hard look at it and realize that that sin is forgiven. Look at your weakness and then look at God's strength for you. Look at your need and see how everything has been provided for you in Christ. Look at your fear and then look at how his promises meet every one of your fears.

So, you thank God for the gospel. You thank God for his promises and for his power and for his provisions. And you thank God for Christ. And when you're doing that, you'll make yourself more happy.

You'll be happier. Hint three, do good. Do good. Jesus said, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

[34:13] So, happiness comes from sacrificial giving. And not only giving money, but giving of yourself. If you want to be happy, you'll find someone who needs served and you'll serve them.

You'll find someone who needs encouraged and you encourage them. And you don't complain that no one else is doing it. You get up and you do it yourself. And you'll find that as you're doing it, you'll meet Jesus Christ there.

Because Jesus Christ goes about doing good. And so, you'll meet him there. And you'll meet God there. God the Father. He is good and everything he does is good.

And so, when you're doing good, God will meet you and give you joy. God blesses those who serve. And so, if you want to be happy, find something to do and do it with all your heart for the Lord and you will be happy.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we ask that you would give us grace, that you would forgive us for our sin, forgive us for our sin of not being happy in Jesus.

[35:25] Jesus. You've told us to rejoice in the Lord. And we've rejoiced in other things. We haven't rejoiced at all like we should.

And that is sin. And we pray that you would forgive us. Father, we pray that you would grant us the Holy Spirit to see our sin and to see our Savior.

Savior, that the gospel would make us truly happy people, that we would shine like stars in this crooked and depraved generation that we live in, that they seek happiness and they can't find it.

So will you help us to be a testimony to them of the true joy that we have found in Jesus Christ. And may that be for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.