

Happy Church (part 2)

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- [0 : 00] Well, we are going through the book, Happy Christian, Ten Ways to Be a Joyful Believer in a Gloomy World. Two weeks ago, we began studying Happy Church.
- It was the title of the book, or of the chapter, Happy Church. And remember, each chapter has an equation. And this week's equation, two weeks ago, was Christ more than Christ.
- Christ more than what equals happiness? Christ more than Christians. Now, again, we're not saying that Christians aren't important.
- That's obviously not what we're saying. But when it comes to doing church, being together, it's so important that we put Christ before Christians, that he weighs more, that we experience him more than even our fellow Christians.
- If we want to be happy. And the basic reason is, is that if our focus is on Christians, what is going to happen to us? What's going to happen, period?
- [1 : 13] We won't grow in Christ's likeness. What will happen to our joy? We'll be disappointed. We'll lose our joy.
- We're going to be disappointed because every Christian, even the best Christians, have blind spots and inconsistencies that sometimes baffle us, that sometimes confuse us, that upset us.
- You know, maybe when you're first born again, sometimes it can seem that in sort of this first bloom of Christian love, you're newly saved and you look out at those mature believers and it seems that they don't do anything wrong.
- They're angelic. And they're just what we want to be. They can do no wrong. But before long, you get close enough to them and they disappoint us.
- They disappoint us and we just see how wrong we are. Now, if you ask most people, most people out there in the world, what do they think of Christians?
- [2 : 29] If you ask, what do you think of Christians or what do you think of church? Why don't you go to church? What's probably the number one answer that you would hear? Anyone? They're hypocrites.
- They're hypocrites. Christians are just a bunch of hypocrites. And a lot of people who have left the church can say the same thing.
- They they've been burnt. They've been disappointed. They've seen the inconsistencies and they say, forget it.
- I don't want anything to do with it. I don't want anything to do with the church. Now, does anyone know? Does anyone know where A.W. Pink spent the last 20 years of his life?
- Does anyone know? Isabel. Was it the Isle of Lewis? What's that? He's buried there.
- [3 : 37] It's Isle of Lewis, Isle of White. I can't remember which one. But either way, he was on this very backwoods island in Great Britain.
- And so after years of speaking and teaching and preaching, Pink eventually gave up on trying to find a church where he could worship, where he could be a minister, where he could just participate.

He came to believe that there were just no churches where he could support the ministry. And so he stayed home. He stayed home with his wife.

And he wrote his magazine. And he sort of tried to pastor via the mail. Pink is very good and very helpful on many things, on most things.

But he was very wrong in this one. And you just can't tell me that there was not a single decent church where Christians were living with each other, loving each other, just teaching the basic truth about Jesus Christ.

[5 : 02] Pink gave up on the church. And I just want to say we can't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that.

You need the church. You need the – and I'm not talking the church universal. I'm talking about you need a specific church. And here you are.

You're at Grace Fellowship. You need this. And we need you. And so, yes, we're imperfect.

We're imperfect. And we don't have pretend sin. We don't have civilized sin. And when you live with us, you're going to have real mud splashed on you sometimes.

And it's going to upset you. And it's going to hurt. But you know what? We're not what we want to be. We're not what we want to be at all.

[6 : 04] And we're not what we're going to be either. And we're not going to be – and we're not what we used to be.

So my question this morning is how do you keep from going pink? How do you keep from going in that direction where you just get disillusioned and so cynical that you can't find anywhere that you can be happy?

So how do you stay happy in a not-yet-perfect church? How do you stay happy in a not-yet-perfect church? How can you get positive joy, be a happy Christian in the midst of a church that does have real problems?

That does have real problems. And the answer is what we saw is we need to keep two eyes on Jesus Christ. And maybe only be looking at our fellow brothers and sisters sort of out of the side.

But keep our focus on Jesus Christ. But we come back to that question, what about – how do you handle – what do you do with hypocrisy?

[7 : 19] What do you do with inconsistency? You can't pretend like it's not there. So what do we need to do with it? What do you do with Christians not living up to what they ought to be?

Because that's going to be a reality that you have to live with. Well, we need to look at that whole situation and Christians and their inconsistencies through the eyes of Jesus from a Christ – from a Christ-eyes perspective.

And we need to do that so that we have a better vision, a better way of looking at it than even what A.W. Pink did. Again, I'm not running him down, but I want to use him as an illustration of what we don't want to do.

And so how do you look at Christians in their inconsistencies and maybe even sometimes in their hypocrisy through the eyes of Christ?

Well, I have a few things. First is realize that Jesus himself hates hypocrisy. It's not like you're the only one that has a problem with it.

[8 : 28] Jesus himself hates hypocrisy. So when Jesus was on earth, he took dead aim against the hypocrites. He was much easier and much softer, so to speak, much more wooing and inviting to the people that weren't pretending than the people that were.

And so you know what he said, Woe to you Pharisees. Woe to you teachers of the law. You hypocrites. You phonies.

You frauds. You're just fakes. And so Jesus hates hypocrisy. That's really the first place to start is to get yourself on the same emotional wavelength that Jesus just isn't okay with it either.

And so you don't have to be. Two, Jesus experienced hypocrisy. Jesus experienced inconsistencies. And I'm talking about both of those sorts of things.

There is a slight difference. But he saw, he experienced hypocrisy from his enemies and he saw great inconsistencies in his friends. So on the night that Jesus was betrayed, on this very last night, what did Peter say that he would do?

[9 : 43] What did Peter say he would do? I'll never, I'll never disown you. Three, four, five hours later.

What words are coming out of Peter's mouth now as he's standing around a fire in front of some servants? Do you remember what he said? I don't even know the man.

Talk about inconsistency. I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you. I don't even know him. Jesus stood in front of the Sanhedrin.

The highest court, the highest religious court in the land. And so there they are. They have their long robes and their beautiful, their beautiful tassels.

And there they are with all this pretend pious concern. We can't have this man blaspheming. And so under this guise of religious and pious concern, they murdered the son of God.

[10 : 50] They put to death Jesus. And so have you ever experienced just blatant hypocrisy or inconsistency? Jesus experienced that too. Jesus experienced that too.

Three, Jesus predicted hypocrisy in the church. He said, many will say, many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?

So there they are. People saying, Lord, Lord, professing that Jesus is their Lord. And yet he said, I don't know you. Paul said to the Ephesian elders, even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth.

In order to draw away disciples after them. So there's going to be false teachers. And there's also going to just be false disciples. And if there's false teachers and false disciples, you better believe there's going to be inconsistent teachers and inconsistent disciples.

So when you see sin in the church, Jesus isn't surprised. And we can't be shocked or surprised as if something strange has happened ourselves.

[12 : 09] Now, fourth, Jesus uses hypocrisy. So he not only is not surprised by it, but he has a positive use for the inconsistency or the hypocrisy of believers.

So why did he do it this way? Why would he do it this way where here we are living with people that aren't perfect yet? That aren't perfect.

Why does he allow sin to continue in the church? And why does he allow us to continue to experience that as painful as it is? Well, the answer is he has uses for it.

He's not like at a loss. He actually has a positive use for it. Let me ask you, where else are you going to learn virtues like patience?

Or compassion? Or humility? It's really kind of hard to grow in to use the grace of patience when everyone around you is just perfect, isn't it?

[13 : 16] I don't think in heaven we're going to be really called on to be patient because there's not going to be any reason to be patient with one another. Well, what else does Jesus use hypocrisy or inconsistency for?

Well, he uses it as a chance, as an opportunity for us to examine ourselves. Because when I see what someone else is doing that doesn't line up with the word of God, that is a prime opportunity for me to look at myself.

Not merely to look down on them, but to look at myself and say, OK, they have a speck in their eye. Maybe I have a plank coming out of mine that I need to deal with.

And that's good. So Jesus uses it to sanctify us, to humble us. Or sometimes we see someone just completely fall away. And they were walking with the Lord.

And now they're not walking with the Lord. Or we talked about a week or two ago, pastors out of the pulpit, out of the church. That does us good.

[14 : 31] It's not good in and of itself. But God uses that for good. It teaches us to say, I need to take heed lest I fall. It makes us more careful.

It makes us... And also just when we see that, hey, I am standing. That's an encouragement. When I was just in the same sort of situation that they were in.

And yet here I am by the grace of God still walking. God's grace is really at work in my life. That's an encouragement. So Jesus uses hypocrisy and inconsistency.

And finally, if we're going to be able to live happily in a church that is inconsistent with members that are inconsistent, we need to have this perspective.

We need to have this Christ-centered perspective and how he looks at it. And that finally ends with Jesus is one day going to end all of this hypocrisy.

[15 : 27] And Jesus is going to end all the inconsistencies, both in ourself and in our brothers and sisters. It all has an expiration date.

I don't know what that expiration date is. It's not clearly labeled anywhere. But you know what? Jesus knows it. That day that he is going to end all sin in his people.

And so he's going to present to himself a beautiful bride without wrinkle or spot or any kind of blemish, but holy and blameless.

And we have to keep our eye on that end. Because the sin that you see presently in the church, presently in your brothers and sisters, presently in yourself, is not always going to be there.

Not going to be there forever. So we have to keep our eye on the end. It won't last forever. Now, again, let's go back to A.W. Pink.

[16 : 33] I'm not sure. Probably the situation in the churches was not as good as it is now. At least there were not as many faithful churches, perhaps.

Perhaps that's part of it. But I kind of have a suspicion that Pink was sort of focused more on the failings and then on the imperfections than on some of the good that was still there.

He lost sight of some of the bigger picture. He lost sight that Jesus was still at work in the church. Jesus hadn't taken a vacation in the 1940s and the 50s from building his church, from being with his people.

Jesus was still committed to the church. It's odd. In one of his articles he wrote called Present Day Evangelism, he complained about how bad and superficial the evangelism was in the church.

He called it, in his words, frothy superficiality, fleshly excitement, and worldly allurements. And, you know, that article is really full of good stuff, good perspective.

[17 : 52] But I do find it sort of ironic or sad that he complained about how everyone else was doing it. And yet he was a hermit the last 20 years of his life, basically.

Again, I don't want to run him down. But just to realize, and to take this as an example, it's easy to hurl criticism at people when you're not in the trenches with them.

It's easy to hurl criticism at others when you haven't really committed to loving and caring for them. And that means living with them. Sticking with them through thick and thin, for better or for worse.

A lot of that criticism was deserved. A lot of it was deserved. And a lot of it was appropriate. But to some degree, it was sort of like criticism from the peanut gallery.

And we just want to be careful. Jesus is down in the trenches with his people. We want to be down there with Jesus. In the trenches.

[19 : 05] Committed to his people. So, back to that question of how do we keep our joy when we are in the trenches?

How do we keep our joy? What does positive faith look like in an imperfect situation? How can we be happy at church?

Well, a number of things. First, you'll look for Christ in every Christian. You'll look for Christ in every Christian. Remember the equation is Christ more than Christians.

And so, what you want to do is instead of focusing yourself and your eyes on the Christian himself, you want to look at Christ. Where do I see Christ in that Christian? Now, obviously, everyone has, you know, the remnants of the devil's work in us.

And if we go looking for that, we can find it easy enough. But, but when you look at what Jesus is doing in every Christian, none of us are perfect yet.

[20 : 12] Yet, every, every Christian has somewhere, something in their lives that has the fingerprints of Jesus Christ on it. That they excel in.

That you see the grace of our Lord in them. And it's up to us to look for it and then to admire it, to be thankful for it.

And again, that's Philippians 4.8. We've gone to that passage a number of times. But whatever is true, noble, admirable, praiseworthy, look for those things.

Look for those things. So instead of looking for the bad and then look for the good. You know, as a, as a pastor, I probably get to see more of the bad than most of you do.

But, you know, I don't think of Grace Fellowship Church that way. That's just mostly bad. Or something like that. I really don't because I see lots of grace.

[21 : 17] lots of grace in you. I see things where you are growing and changing. And I see Christ's beauty in you.

And I could go through this room to every brother, every sister, and say, you know what? This is, this is beautiful. This is good. This is where Jesus, I see Jesus at work in you.

I could do that. And if I had time, that'd be a great thing. But, you know, you could too. You could too. So look for Jesus in your brothers and sisters.

Two, instead of complaining about people, you'll pray for them. Instead of complaining about people, you'll pray for them. It's, it's very easy for us to get out our saw and our tools and just start cutting down Christians.

Christians. And instead of doing that, you'll pray for them. Most of the time, your brothers and sisters in Christ, they don't really need, they don't need our criticism.

[22 : 26] They don't need our belittling or our disapproval or our disappointment. They need prayer. that's what's going to actually do them good.

That's what's actually going to do us good. And so, criticism, criticism destroys. It destroys their good name.

In some way, it destroys Christ's work in them, at least what we see of it. and it destroys our joy. It destroys our joy.

So, where you work, I want to ask you this. Where you work, where you're at work, are the critical people, the constant criticizers, are they the happy ones?

What have you, how do they come across? What do you find? they're unpleasant to be around. Are they good for morale?

[23 : 31] Are they good for productivity? Are they good for making them, you happy? Them happy? No. So, we don't want to be like that.

We don't want to be like that. We want to be looking for the good in people instead of just complaining about them, instead of just letting that come out. Instead, we want to take their weaknesses to the Lord and pray for them.

So, three, that's two. Instead of complaining, you pray. Three, how do you stay happy in the trenches? Believe it or not, you spend time with the inconsistent. You spend time with God's people.

You get close to them. You don't move away. You move toward them. I think if we could just boil this lesson and all of its practical concerns down to this point, that would be perfect.

This is what we need to do to be happy in the church is be involved, living, loving, being with them. Being with them.

[24 : 38] it's a lot more difficult to stew and to be angry when, with them and just complaining about them when you've sat down and you had a cup of coffee with them and you talked to them and you got to know them.

So, let me ask you this. When you get to know someone better, when you get to know someone better, what kind of things do you learn? Anything.

As you grow closer to them, what kind of things do you learn about them that maybe you didn't know about before? Their past. Their past. Do people's past have an effect on who they are and what they're like and how they think?

Yes. We, we too often think of just people as here they are, they just popped into my life in this present condition and, and then you know what I do?

I read my past, my experiences and then into their life and then I think like I don't understand why they are the way they are. I learn about their past.

[25 : 51] What else do I learn about? Their concerns. What do they care about? I can learn how to pray for them.

So what goes into that? Like what kind of things do I start to pray for them about? What their struggles are. Yeah. Their struggles. Their challenges.

That maybe life is not as good and as easy as it appears just as they're sitting here in the in the pew. too. So I'm learning about their challenges.

I'm learning about their past. I'm learning about their fears. I'm yeah dad. you're also learning what makes them happy.

Okay. I mean if you're dealing with people that are down or disgruntled, if you talk to them for a while you'll find out what pleases them.

[26 : 56] Okay. yeah. Yeah. Let me stop you there. That's another thing.

As you get to know someone, you find out that they're more like you than maybe what you thought. There's things that make you happy that make them happy. And you know what?

You find out that maybe you just completely misjudged them. I won't ask you to raise your hand if you've ever just completely misjudged someone. And then later on you found out, wow, if I knew what I knew now, back then, I would have been very different.

Contrary to popular opinion, familiarity doesn't generally breed contempt. Familiarity generally breeds affection.

You like the people that you're with. Scientists call it the familiarity principle or the exposure effect. So let me ask you, who here loves fermented shark?

[28 : 01] Anyone? If you're in Iceland though, that is a delicacy. Does anyone here like haggis? Isabel?

No. Sam, you raised your hand. You love it? You're from Britain. Exactly.

None of us like it. Sam likes it. He's exposed to it. I don't know, did you grow up with it? Yeah. Like, the idea of eating sheep stomach?

No good, right? Right. Right. we don't like them because we're not familiar with them.

We're not used to them. Spending time with people actually makes us like them and understand them better. Spending time with God's people has the same effect.

[29 : 03] you want to be a happy Christian? You want to be happy in church? Sort of the fleshly response is I want to do as little as possible with them.

And if I can just get far enough away and keep them at arm's distance, then finally maybe I'll be happy. In reality, the truth is exactly the opposite. You get in.

You move in. You get closer. So, move in. You want to be happy?

Get close to your brothers and sisters. Spend time with them. Get to know them. And actually, your happiness at church will increase.

Number four, you want to be happy at church? Be patient. Be patient. You know who I'm most patient with? Me.

[30 : 03] I'm most patient with me. I can find myself excusing all my actions and I don't like to trace my bad behavior to my bad character.

I just say, oh, it's something else, right? And what we need to do is show the same favor, the same grace that we show ourselves to other people.

Be patient with them. Be patient with them. It's such a shame when mature Christians look at new Christians or Christians with a different past, a different experience, and just write them off.

Or when mature older Christians look at younger Christians as sort of this cynicism. It's like, oh, what's wrong with them? Why won't they grow up? And when we do that, you know what we forget?

That I used to be a baby Christian. I used to be a teenage Christian, and maybe that's what I am. I forget that we're all works in progress.

[31 : 09] I'm a work in progress. They're a work in progress. Jesus doesn't write off any of his blood-bought brothers or sisters. Our Father in Heaven doesn't write off any of his children and put them in the lost cause category.

He's patient with them, and we need to have the same patience if we're going to be happy. If we're impatient with each other, like get your act together and get it together now, we are going to become a bunch of old, grouchy Christians.

But if we're patient, we'll be like those loving grandparents that get sweeter and sweeter with time. Their hearts just get bigger and bigger. We want to be like that. Last week I asked you, or two weeks ago I asked you, to think about what you see of God's grace at Grace Fellowship Church.

I wanted you to think about, you know, whatever problems we have, those are real, but you know what else we have? We have places where God is at work. God is helping us.

We want to look at our brothers and sisters and see what is true, what is noble, what is admirable, and look at those things and admire them.

[32 : 36] And when we do that, whose work are we admiring? We're admiring the Lord's work in them. And so that's what I want to do just in the last six, seven minutes here.

I want to ask you, what do you see of the Lord's work here that God is doing and it's good and it should make us happy?

And Roger, I'm going to get to you in a minute, but keep your hand going. and I want to begin. I love how you guys are caring and sharing with those who are hurt.

I'm just thinking, you know, having 10 or 11 people who ever go sing at Sharon's, Lori and Linda, spending all your time, a lot of your time, with Sharon.

That's beautiful. wonderful. That's God's grace at work, and that's wonderful. I love how you love to hear the word preached. You're like the Thessalonians who receive it not as the word of men.

[33 : 47] And Pastor John and I, we know better than all of you, we're just men. And when we preach, we're just men preaching, but you receive it as the word of God, and that is good.

I also want to say, you are a generous church. In the last five or six years, our giving towards missions has gone from, it's now up to over a third of our budget goes to other ministries.

And so we have 10, 15 missionaries and missions that we are working at, that you're involved in, and that's because of what God is doing in you.

And so that's beautiful. So, Roger, your turn. I think that blessed means is seeing how we hang out after a service, go on for an hour.

I mean, when people have to go around flickering lights to get us out, we lost track of time, fellowship, that's such a blessing. Amen. What else?

[34 : 52] Evie? I'm grateful for the women who are faithful to work in the nurseries so that are periods and have some undivided attention to spending here in God's Word.

Amen. There's more. Roger. I'm thankful for men who are still willing to go to work when work is a hard place to go, and love for God and their families.

It's beautiful, isn't it? Get up and put your boots on and go to work. Steve? I really appreciate the grace and humility that I've experienced as I confess my sin.

I don't get cut down or judged, but there's a humility to come alongside. I don't see that elsewhere.

Amen. Beautiful. Dan? I think what's been rich for us these six years, you certainly see it in trials, but when I hear from you all your desire to submit to God's sovereignty, obviously that goes beyond trials, but you certainly see it in trials, but just the submission to the Lord and His sovereignty is humbling and refreshing and encouraging.

[36 : 07] We're natural rebels, aren't we? Natural for us to say, no, I don't want that. That's amazing grace. What else? Anyone?

Stand. Willingness to serve in clean church, in all the service areas that we have, that people have a very willing attitude to jump through the know.

Amen. Susie? I'm grateful for the many opportunities that we have during the week to get together. It's a blessing for the time.

Amen. Tom? The more that I rub shoulders with people from other churches, the ongoing unity here is just wonderful.

Amazing. What else? Carol? People for the young ladies who are involved with us ladies who are of age.

[37 : 06] Like they come to prayer meeting, they pray, they sit and talk with ladies who are not their age. That's just a huge encouragement. Amen. It's a huge encouragement.

Anyone else? Lord? Everybody here is such prayer warriors and we don't find that everywhere and I appreciate that. Yeah. Yeah. mom.

Mom? I'm thankful that we have the truth preached to us and we trust you and we know that comes from the Lord.

Nikki? Okay. So, should we be a happy church? Should we be a happy church?

Like we have grace and unity and love and concern and what else did we cover here? And we just got started. Should we be a happy church?

[38 : 21] Yeah, we should be. So let's be a happy church, brothers and sisters, and let's love each other deeply and let's go in the joy of the Lord. God is at work here. The Lord Jesus has shed abroad his grace and we're all living examples of it.

We're dismissed. Thank you.