

Genuine Happiness

Several years ago, a beer commercial aired featuring well-built, handsome men alongside beautifully bikini-clad women; frolicking on the beach long after the sun went down. They were advertising beer, but they were marketing something else.

Advertisers understand people's desire for happiness, so they often link their product to happiness and satisfaction; and they are absolutely right. Every human being deeply desires happiness and satisfaction. However, to believe that beer drinking, beach frolicking, beautiful body types or the pursuits of pleasure, power, prestige or prosperity can satisfy those desires is a falsehood. C. S. Lewis says it like this:

"Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desires, there is such a thing as sex. And if I find within myself a desire of which no experience in this world can satisfy, the only probable explanation is that I was made for something in another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy the desire, it doesn't mean that the universe is a fraud, that I have failed or that things have failed. Probably the earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy, but only to arouse it. It suggests the real thing." — C. S. Lewis

The "real thing" is the God-created desires satisfied exclusively by the Creator. The "real thing" is the hunger and thirst of one's soul being filled only by Jesus Christ. Happiness will never be experienced in seeking it directly. No matter how much freedom, time, and money we expend on the pursuit of happiness, it cannot be found. Happiness is the by-product of something far greater than human endeavors.

In Jesus' fourth beatitude, He teaches us the source of "genuine happiness" or "blessedness": *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled"* (Matthew 5:6). Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are those who seek for blessedness", but rather *"blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."* Genuine happiness, soul-satisfaction and inward contentment are found in "righteousness."

The problem with the word "righteousness" is that it has been corrupted and caricatured as self-righteousness. When many people think of "righteousness", they think of church rules and religious regulations — "the church lady." Sadly, the church itself has not always accurately portrayed the cause of "righteousness." Mark Twain once said, "Having spent considerable time with religious people, I can understand why Jesus liked to be with tax collectors and sinners."

"Righteousness", in a biblical sense, simply means, "to be right, to be approved, or to be accepted." If your daughter tries out for a sports team, she awaits the outcome—is she accepted or not? Psychologists tell us that our identity, our own self-esteem, is rooted in our righteousness or acceptability. The Bible would go beyond the psychological need for approval to a deeper spiritual need to be accepted by God, our Maker. In fact, the Bible, human history, and your spiritual journey, witness to the reality that the soul's hunger and spiritual thirst for genuine happiness can never be satisfied until we know that we are right with God—fully accepted by Him.

However, the problem is, *"There is no one righteous, not even one"* (Romans 3:10). A coach selects your daughter for his sports team based on her performance level. But not one human being can stand before a Holy God solely on good performance. *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"* (Romans. 3:23). *"Therefore, since sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin, death came to all men because all sinned"* (Romans 5:12). Simply put, we are neither right nor approved by God.

Take heart! The gospel of Christ proclaims that through faith in Christ, His perfect life, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, we can be approved and accepted by God. God's approval is not based on our performance but Christ's performance. *"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God"* (I Peter 3:18). *"God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God"* (II Corinthians. 5:21).

Too many Christians know this truth theologically but not experientially. We are accepted by God. Our happiness is not in the pursuit of happiness, but in Christ. Oh, the freedom in living the gospel. If our identity is in our acceptability, let us preach to ourselves that we have been approved by a Holy God. Do we know what that means for us? We are right with God. We are free to experience genuine happiness. Our souls' hungers and spiritual thirsts are satisfied in Christ. *"Seek first God's Kingdom and righteousness and He will add many things to your life"* (Matthew 6:33). C.S. Lewis says it this way, "Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither."

We are completely free from basing our identity and self-esteem on others' approval. We are accepted by God Himself. We can say with the Apostle Paul, *"I care very little if I am judged by you or any human court; indeed I do not even judge myself... It is the Lord who judges me"* (I Corinthian. 4:3, 4). And what is His verdict? *"Therefore is now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ"* (Romans. 8:1). We are His delight, *"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba Father'"* (Galatians 4:6).

