

What Will Make Us Happy?

John 4:1-26

March 29, 2020

As I prepare this message, all of you are in my thoughts and prayers. As you are well aware, Covid-19 has halted our nation to the point that we cannot even gather together to have worship services. I am thankful that the local and Federal governments are doing all they can to ensure the safety of all our citizens. My prayers are with all of them as well.

All of us want to be well and happy, no matter what we face in life. When it comes to happiness, everyone has different way of pursuing it. Some people think moving to a new town or new place to start their lives in a fresh new way would make them happy. The late American Actor and columnist, Will Rogers (1879-1935) once said that sometimes he got tired of being in the same old surroundings. He would wish to move to a new place and have a new beginning, not just a new home but a whole new city. So, he would pick a city, and before he moved, he would subscribe to a leading newspaper of that city, just to find out what was happening there. He would read that newspaper for about a month. After the month, he would always decide not to move. The news from the city was not any better than the news from his current place.¹

Some think if they had a different job, or a different career, or a different spouse they would be happy. If only I had this or that...if only I could find this or that... Many people are looking for happiness in different places, and many even in wrong places.

Happiness rarely comes from a change of locations, or a change of jobs or a change of careers, or a change of mates, or a change of situations of any kind. It is amazing how many people go through life looking for happiness in all the wrong places.

The woman in our story had married five times. We are not sure what happened to all her husbands. Was she divorced five times? Did all her husbands die? Did some of them die and some divorce her? We are not sure. But it seems that none of those marriages brought her happiness or fulfillment. Now she was living with a man without being married to him.

¹ From King Duncan's Sermon, "*Looking for Happiness in All the Wrong Places*", www.esermons.com

In the days of Jesus, it was very difficult for a woman to initiate a divorce. If a woman was divorced from her husband, most likely she was given a bill of divorce and was told to leave. Being divorced meant she was rejected by her husband.

In the case of the woman at the well, she probably experienced rejection from her husband more than once unless they were dead, and the one she was living with now was not even willing to marry her. She was used, and perhaps abused by them. Can you imagine how she must have felt about herself?

She might have been depressed. She must have felt sorry for herself. Like all other people, she was searching for love, acceptance, security, and happiness. Somehow, she was searching in all the wrong places. People do that.

Some people search for happiness in material possessions. Material possessions and wealth will not bring us happiness. They may give us a temporary joy, but this joy does not bring a lasting satisfaction. Psychologists call this temporary fulfillment: a “retail therapy.” But it really does not last very long, even if we buy the newest, latest, and the best. Soon, there will be something newer and better. Each item we buy will require maintenance. It adds new worries.

In stores, products they sell are measured in dollars and cents. To buy them, you are exchanging the time and life you have spent to earn that money. So, in a real sense, we don't buy things with money, we buy them with hours from our lives. If we buy the essential and necessary items, that would be okay. If we are buying non-essential items, we are basically exchanging our lives for them.

It would be better to redirect our desires to something else, something that is worth exchanging our lives for such as spending time with our family, building our knowledge and skills, learning to love deeply, growing in faith, etc. These things can bring us more fulfillment and happiness than material possessions.

Some people search for happiness in belonging to an exclusive group, whether that group is based on an economic level, an educational level or a type of career.

Every civilization and every culture or society has had its own exclusive groups and ruling classes. People want to be in those elite groups, because there are some benefits to being in those groups: people look up to you, they respect you;

you have a connection with the influential and powerful people. You get a sense of confidence that you belong to an exclusive group. People want to live in an expensive home or drive an expensive car, because they want to belong to an exclusive group that separates them from others.

Of course, we all want to belong. We all want to be accepted. There is nothing wrong with that. So, some people look for happiness in belonging to an exclusive group.

Some people look for happiness in the things they accomplish. A legendary tennis player Andre Agassi was almost unbeatable during his glory days in the 1990s and early 2000s. He is an eight-time grand slam champion and Olympic gold medalist. He is just an incredible tennis player. Because of his success, he earned tons of money, but in his 2009 book, Agassi revealed that his life as a tennis superstar was one that he hated. His success in tennis did not bring him happiness. It brought him misery. He said that despite his wealth and success, playing the game interfered with his personal relationships and he felt disconnected with his life. He then became very involved in philanthropy and was especially interested in education. He opened the Andre Agassi College Prep Academy in 2001. He said he found philanthropy and education much more fulfilling than his life as a tennis superstar.²

True fulfillment and lasting happiness are not found in the things we accumulate, or in the groups we belong to, or in the things we accomplish. They all give a sense of fulfillment and joy but they are temporary and do not last.

The woman at the well was seeking joy, happiness and fulfillment in many relationships. Unfortunately, she could not find a deep and genuine love, a real acceptance, and a true appreciation in any of her relationships but she had found an authentic, genuine caring and true compassion in Jesus.

The true source of lasting happiness and deep joy is in our relationship with the Lord. Jesus said to the woman, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst...”³ It is in our relationship with God that we find true security and happiness. God will never fail us. He will never reject us or abandon us. In God we find security and the love that lasts eternity.

² <https://www.therichest.com/expensive-lifestyle/12-rich-successful-people-who-were-miserable/>

³ John 4:13-14a.

In his book, *Healing Life's Hurts*, the author Ron Lee Davis tells a story about a young man named Philo. This story is about Philo and his relationship with Jesus. According to the story, Philo was the only son of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who ordered Christ's crucifixion. Even before Philo was born, Pilate had great ambitions for him. Pilate wanted a son who would one day be a great military leader, a son who would make him proud.

When Philo was born, however, Pilate's pride was crushed. Philo was born sick, weak and permanently crippled. As Philo was growing up, he was the object of his father's disappointment, hatred and bitterness. "You are not the son I wanted," was Pilate's constant reminder to his broken son.

As soon as Philo was old enough to leave home, he left the palace of his father and wandered alone in the countryside. There he heard about a preacher from Galilee who was preaching the message of love, healing the sick, making lame walk, giving sight to the blind, and feeding the hungry. The things he heard about him were incredible. So, Philo sought out Jesus.

When he met Jesus, Jesus healed him, not only physically but spiritually and emotionally. Philo was delivered from the resentment he had been carrying against his father. He had been a prisoner of his own resentment and anger but on the day he met the Lord, he was freed. He was able to forgive his father for all those years of making him feel like a person who should have never been born.

From that time on, Philo followed Jesus wherever he went. It is said that on the day when Jesus was crucified, Pilate's only son Philo was at the foot of the cross, weeping over the death of his Lord and friend. Philo, like millions of other people, had found true meaning and happiness in Christ.⁴

More than having great material possessions, more than finding our identity in exclusive groups, more than having great accomplishments, finding physical, emotional, and spiritual healing through Christ brings us a true and lasting fulfillment.

No matter what our life situation may be, let us open our hearts to the Lord. Even in the midst of fear of the coronavirus, let us come before the Lord with open hearts. He will give us the living water, and we will never thirst again.

⁴ From Ron Lee Davis's book, "Healing Life's Hurt"