

75 – The Secret to Happiness

John 13: 12-17; 20

It's counterintuitive. It doesn't make sense. You would think that the way to happiness would be by serving ourselves, but a self-centered life ends up being very depressing. At first it might seem to work, but as time goes on it produces anger. Life never seems to give us all we feel that we deserve and people seldom love us the way they should, so resentments build, leaving us angry. And that anger invariably drives people and happiness farther away, until, at some point, we realize that life will never give us the satisfaction we longed for. When that moment arrives there is a real danger that hopelessness may set in, and if it does we will look at the rest of our life and wish we didn't have to live it.

But there is a solution. We don't have to end up angry and depressed. Jesus says there is a way to find true happiness, the kind of happiness that only God can give. On that final evening, in the upper room, He showed His disciples the secret and then said, "If you've watched what I've done and understood what it means and then actually put that truth into practice you will find true happiness" (paraphrase). And what they had just watched Him do was to humbly serve them. So that's the secret: A life of humble service produces true happiness. But how? It just doesn't make sense, unless of course, God steps in and does a miracle. Let's try to "know these things," so we can "do them" and be "blessed."

His example/Our assignment (Jn 13:12-20)

• DBS (Sun-Tues, Sat)

Know these things

Where do we start? In the mind. It's first of all a change in attitude. Jesus said we have to "know these things" before we can "do these things." So as we reflect on what Jesus did and said that evening, we must ask ourselves, "What were the lessons He taught?" There were, at least, four.

- 1) I must get all hierarchical thinking out of my mind. If Jesus is willing to do the humblest forms of service, then I must be willing to do the same. No ministry is beneath me.
- 2) I must remember who I am in God's sight: I'm a sinner saved by grace. And I must always remember what He has done for me: He sent His Son to die to wash my sins away. I am no more deserving of honor or better than anyone else.
- 3) I must remove all self-righteousness from my heart and gladly help to restore believers who have been wounded or have fallen into sin. Just as Jesus continues to wash my feet by interceding for me before the Father, I must wash the feet of my brothers and sisters.
- 4) I must remember that the goal of my life is to represent Jesus well, not become admired or be thanked for my service. I am His representative. When people watch me I want them to see Jesus and be drawn to Him.

Do these things (v17)

The promise Jesus made that night is conditional. He said,
"If you know these things, you are blessed (happy) if you do these things."

Knowing is not the same as doing, and it's in the doing, not the knowing, that we experience happiness. It's in the actual process of serving that a deep work takes place within us. We are driven to desperation by the demands of service; we constantly sense our own inadequacies and feel overwhelmed by the challenges which confront us. And that suffering which comes with serving others drives us closer to God. It presses us deeper in prayer; it makes us hungry for a revelation from His Word and opens our ears in the midst of worship to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. Then as we do those things, we discover the reality of the promise that says, "You will seek Me and find [Me] when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13).

In other words, knowing the truths Jesus taught that evening and doing them produces a desperation which drives us to find a real relationship with God. Without Him we simply can't go on. When we're close to Him we are full of life because "in Him is life" (Jn 1:4). We feel whole, loved, peaceful, joyful, filled with hope for the future. We are receiving the "blessing" Jesus spoke about. This is the "happiness" He promised. In the course of this life of service our priorities radically change. We pursue an entirely different set of goals. The things that are important to God are what become important to us. We learn to live boldly because people are more important than our safety, and we treasure every day of our lives because there is so much to do for Jesus and so little time to do it. We love gathering with other believers because we can sense that we all belong to the same family, and it's invigorating to be with others who are serving the same Lord.

Without pursuing happiness we find ourselves happy, and that happiness comes from a very different Source than it used to. What made us happy in the past doesn't make us happy anymore. And what makes us happy now, we would never have understood before.



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Shalom

The happiness Jesus promises is very different from the world's, but it's very real. It's not a shallow, passing emotion. You might call it an "atmosphere" because it's the presence of God abiding with us and transforming every part of our lives. He provides, He protects, He guides, He fills us with love for one another so that, in time, as we actually do the selfless things He said to do, our circumstances and our relationships heal and mature until it feels like we are living in a different world. The word used in the Hebrew Bible for this wonderful sense of happiness is "shalom." It's that rich peace that comes when God lives among us. Everything changes. Chaos gives way to order, sorrow gives way to joy, confusion gives way to purpose, and strife gives way to love.

But shalom doesn't come by praying for it. It comes by doing something... for a long time. It comes by knowing what Jesus meant that evening and then doing it.

A life of service

Humans are born into this world focused on our own needs. To shift our attention outward, from self to others, requires a profound decision and then much vigilance to prevent ourselves from returning to old habits. A life of service is the result of countless decisions to put someone else's needs ahead of our own. And yes, of course, we have to set boundaries because there are always more needs than there is time or energy to meet them. But there is no escaping the fact that a selfless life is costly, and there are many obstacles. For example, a person who chooses to be selfless may, in time, feel moments of envy toward those who have lived for self and acquired an abundance of goods and pleasures. Caring for others also tends to bring with it an emotional burden. We can face surges of sorrow or worry for those we serve. And family members and friends who haven't chosen a selfless life usually do not understand why we do what we do. They may even despise us for "wasting" our lives and demand to know why we spend so much time caring for such people.

For those, and many other reasons, a life of service is not a painless life, but Jesus said it will be a blessed life in which the heart will find a mysterious peace and God's closeness will bring us great happiness.

The choice

For some of us, Jesus' words today are a reminder of why we're doing what we're doing. For others, He's holding a door open and calling to us, saying, "Follow Me, and I will lead you to the Source of happiness, I will teach you where to find what you've always been looking for." That change can start today. It's our choice.

Questions

- 1) Has God asked you to selflessly serve someone else? What has He asked you to do? What obstacles do you face?
- 2) Have you ever experienced the kind of happiness Jesus promises? What does it feel like?
- 3) Have the pressures of serving people driven you closer to God? What do you do when you need His help?