

**June 10, 2012**

**The Summer of Joy – “The Secret of Joy”**

**Ecclesiastes 5:19-20; 8:15**

Ecclesiastes 5:19-20, 8:15 (NIV)

When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work — this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart ... So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 5:19-20a (THE MESSAGE)

Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! God deals out joy in the present, the now.

In 2000 and again in 2004 (in 2004 with other members of our church) I went on work & witness trips in the Dominican Republic. On both occasions I visited a Batey. These are small villages of homes given to families who work in the sugarcane fields. On one occasion I stayed at a Batey with a family. The husband was both a Nazarene pastor, and a worker in the sugarcane fields.

These Bateys have no electric and no running water. Family members, usually the children go to a central water pump in their village, fill up pots, jugs, plastic containers and carry the water back to the home where it is poured in to a large cistern. Water from that cistern is used for bathing, cooking, and drinking.

The Batey homes have a dirt floor, and no windows, they may have an opening for a window, but nothing else (some of the better ones could have metal louvers, but no glass or screen). And each village has a central community out-house.

These were hard working people. They had none of our modern conveniences. Clothes were washed by hand, construction workers mixed and poured cement by hand. The pastor I stayed with worked six days, all day, in the sugarcane fields, for very little pay, and ran 2 churches, one in his village, and one in a nearby village.

I had never personally met poorer people than these people and I was struck with two thoughts one about me and one about them. I realized how wealthy I really was in comparison, and I realized that I had never met a more contented, happy people.

I am amazingly blessed, and so are you, by the bounty and work God gives us and the capacity to enjoy it; shouldn't we make the most of what God gives us? Why shouldn't we be as happy and content as they are? Yet, as much as we have in our country, we are not happy about it, and certainly not as happy and content as the people I met in the Batey of the Dominican Republic.

Look again at Eccl. 5:19: **When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work — this is a gift of God.**

According to Ecclesiastes, the key factor in happiness is not possessions, but the ability to enjoy what we have by accepting our lot - and this is a gift of God.

Whether rich or poor one can easily break the tenth commandment, to covet, which is not accepting ones lot. To covet is to crave what you do not and often cannot, have. In contrast, Paul said, Philippians 4:12a (NIV)

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.

The poor think, "if only I had more money, then I could be happy." Well, guess what the rich think the same thing! Or as Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NIV) puts it:  
**Whoever loves money never has money enough.**

For many it is not necessarily wealth that brings happiness, but the results of their work that they look to for happiness. But Ecclesiastes 1:3 (NCV) says happiness is not found there either:

**What do people really gain from all the hard work they do here on earth?**

It is not the results of our work that will bring happiness, but happiness in the midst of the work itself as Ecclesiastes 3:22 (NIV) points out:

**I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot.**

And if it is not wealth or a job that people covet, its power, romance, or something else they don't have. Yet, these things don't make people happy, if anything it adds to their anxiety, fears, and problems. So what do people need to be happy / joyful?

The book of Ecclesiastes ends like this: Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NLT)

**Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty.**

In other words, know God, revere / worship God and do what He says, that's it!

Paul learned this. In verse quoted before he continues to tell us his secret in  
Philippians 4:12a, 13 (NIV)

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every  
situation ... I can do everything through (Christ) who gives  
me strength.

Remember last week we asked, how can we be joyful always as the Bible says we can  
be? And the answer was the short phrase, “in the Lord” – the Bible says be joyful  
always “in the Lord.” We can’t be joyful always on our own, but “in the Lord” why  
not? Any happiness we produce ourselves will not last. Real happiness is “in the  
Lord.” No one can be joyful always without the Lord.

So what do you need to be happy? to be joyful always? Ecclesiastes has the answer and  
the answer is that you need nothing at all because joy is in the Lord and if you have the  
Lord than you have everything you need right now to be happy no matter what else you  
have or don’t have.

My father owned a coat factory at one time. It was his birthday and so there was an  
extended lunch break with catered food my dad paid for. After all the workers ate,  
some had gifts to give him. One woman handed him a box and as my dad began to  
open it she said, “Wait a minute, don’t you think you should say I shouldn’t have done  
this?” So, my dad said, “You shouldn’t have done it.” And the woman said, “that’s  
okay it’s nothing.” My dad, being my dad, took his time unwrapping the box and with  
each move he said, “you, know you should have.” He’d start to remove the bow, and  
stop and say, “you shouldn’t have.” Then He’d remove the bow, and say, “really, you  
shouldn’t have.” Then he’d rip off the wrapping paper and say it again. And when he  
was just about to open the box, but paused to again say, “you know really, you  
shouldn’t have.” And each time the woman through her laughter, and by the end tears  
of laughter streaming down her face would say, “it’s nothing, it’s nothing.” Well, he  
finally opened the box and it was... empty, and she said, “I told you it was nothing!”  
And my dad, with his quick wit, must have said something like, “well, thank you it’s  
exactly what I wanted.”

Is “nothing” exactly what you want to? For happiness doesn’t depend on having, or  
achieving, or anything in particular, but an attitude of the heart. Ecclesiastes turns us  
away from all the external things that we think will make us happy, in order to point us  
to the secret of true happiness, which he calls “a gift of God;” And if the secret of  
happiness is a gift of God than it is free and available to all. Ecclesiastes even gives the  
gift a name, he calls it our “lot.” Accept your lot in life as a gift, and be content with  
your lot is the secret of joy.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 (NIV)

So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for  
a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy

will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

The enemy of happiness is the thought that everything is meaningless. Ecclesiastes uses the phrase often, but only in the sense that life can't be figured out. Look at Ecclesiastes 8:17 (NIV)

No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.

The Bible commands us to rejoice always. There are things in this life that make us joyful, but to rejoice always? I mean that's beyond understand. If you are struggling with the meaninglessness of life I would say stop trying to figure it out and just enjoy what's right under your nose.

Ecclesiastes 6:9a (NLT)

Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have.

Or as the New Century Version puts it (NCV)

It is better to see what you have than to want more.

Enjoying what you have rather than desiring what you don't have is a gift, it is called accepting your lot, it is called contentment and it is the secret to joy. It is not what you see that matters, it matters how you see it. You've tried everything else, now try enjoying life exactly as it is. It's called accepting your lot in life.

Ecclesiastes teaches us to stop telling ourselves, "tomorrow I'll do this or that or I'll have this or that and then I'll be happy." James said this: James 4:13-14 (NIV)

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

That's how we live. Tomorrow I'll do this and it will make me happy, or when I have that I'll be happy. Nonsense. Be happy now! If you can't be joyful in the present moment, you never will. Joy isn't around the corner some where – it's here.

Three old men, Pete, Ed, and Joe, sat on a park bench. Pete says, "At my age I still feel wonderful!" The others want to know what his secret is. He reflected and said, "It's probable because twice a week my wife lets me do anything I want."

Ed says, "That's interesting, because I feel great too and it's probable because three times a week my wife lets me do anything I want to do."

At this point Pete and Ed notice a big smile on Joes face. “What are you so happy about?” They asked.

And with a deep sigh of joy Joe says, “My wife lets me do anything I want once a year. And today’s my day.”

Even though Joe only had one day a year to himself, he was still better off then his friends. Why? Because today’s his day!

Psalms 118:24 NIV

This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Rejoicing is not something that happens once a year, or even twice or three times a week. You are free to enjoy each day for what it is. Joy is for the present moment. Right now looking to this glorious day God has created, you can rejoice in it. Don’t put off happiness until tomorrow – it might not wait for you. The time to enjoy life is now. Because today’s your day!