

# How to be Happy

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[ 0 : 00 ] Morning, folks. Good to see you. Just before we look at that part of God's word together, shall we just pray?! Lord, we thank you for the way that you've obviously already been at work leading up to today.

We thank you that your word has played a central part in helping Ezra and Rebecca come to know you for themselves. That's the word we're looking at now, Lord. And we pray that you would speak through it. And we ask that in Jesus' name. Amen.

It's a happy day, isn't it? I was thinking this week, and I asked ChatGPT, what is the one thing I need to be happy?

It's an interesting kind of question to ask a machine, isn't it? What's the one thing I need to be happy? I gave a very interesting answer. It said, the one thing that you need to be happy is alignment.

That's interesting, isn't it? Alignment between who you are, what you value, and how you live.

[ 1 : 23 ] And that alignment might show up as love, or purpose, or freedom, or growth, or connection. You know, whatever it looks like is whatever looks truest to you.

Happiness is alignment. It sounds plausible, doesn't it? It sounds plausible. But if you think about it, this is exactly the kind of conceptual up there, out there answer that a machine is going to give, isn't it?

There's not much content, really, if you think about that. Happiness is alignment. I can already see a big problem with that, with that idea, and you're looking at it.

The big problem with that idea is me. Because if ChatGPT is right, and happiness is alignment, then happiness requires consistency, doesn't it?

I have to consistently do the things that I know are right, that match who I am, that match my values. And I need to know why those things are right.

[ 2 : 24 ] And if I'm not consistent about it, I'm not going to be happy. And we all know that we are deeply inconsistent people, aren't we?

And I have to know why those values are right. And if I have to come up with that 100% complete and correct way of life, way of living, even if that's only the right way for me, if I have to make up those values, and I have to figure out how to achieve them, how likely am I to get that right?

I mean, maybe you're way ahead of me, guys, but is that possible for any of us? To come up with the right answer for ourselves, consistently live that way, always.

It's not looking good for alignment, is it? So, how to be happy? Well, right at the end of our text, there's an amazing claim.

An amazing claim. Off the back of that rescue that Jesus performs for this man, whom he frees from the demon. Jesus claims that he knows how we can be happy.

[ 3 : 41 ] Verse 27, 28 talk about being blessed. Blessed is just the Bible word for happiness. Jesus claims he knows. So, we're going to look through this event in the life of Jesus, and we're going to see what is this way to be happy that he's talking about.

Let's look at verse 14. Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute, and when the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke. Jesus does some amazing, doesn't he?

He releases this man from darkness, and he heals his disability, and he saves him, at the very least, from a life of social isolation, where he won't be with anyone else.

There's no happiness in that life, is there? And just like today, people in the event that we've just read about respond to Jesus in very different ways. So, we're going to look through, as Jesus addresses the three different responses that we see.

We're going to do that, looking at them one by one, building up to those final verses about happiness. So, here's response number one to Jesus.

[ 4 : 45 ] You're part of the problem. Look at verse 15. Some of them said, By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he's driving out demons. So, some people in the crowd are just thinking, this whole thing is just a little bit disturbing and abnormal.

It's all hoodoo. And I don't really want any part of it. In fact, Jesus isn't someone to follow. He's part of what's wrong with the world.

That's what's being said here. And, you know, people around us today say very similar things, don't they? Jesus isn't someone to follow because, you know, faith in Jesus, faith, it just causes problems.

It causes conflict. It's oppressive. It's controlling. Especially when you try and convince people of the truth of what you believe. No. It's part of the problem.

Now, if that was so, then, of course, you would expect, with the decline of Christian faith in the West, that we would have a more cohesive, happier, less problematic, less violent society, with more happiness.

[ 6 : 00 ] Has it resulted in that? Is that what has happened? Not by any measure. Not by any measure. If that were so, if Jesus is part of the problem, and religion is coercive and controlling and just leads to conflict, then the majority of the Christians you meet should strike you as being either gullible, you know, they're just misled, they've been taken in by something that's not true, they're being used, or power hungry.

They know it's not true. They're just in it for what they can get out of it. That's how the majority of Christians should strike us if this is true. Do they?

Do they strike you that way? No. So, Jesus responds. And he says, verse 17 through to 20, your thinking does not make sense.

It is not logical. Good and evil are not relative. They are not the same thing. They don't depend on your perspective or your choice. You can't be oppressive and controlling, and at the same time be truly dedicated in your heart to freeing people from oppression and control.

And so, if Jesus has come doing superhuman good, we can't just dismiss that as part of the problem. Verse 20, If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

[ 7 : 34 ] See what Jesus says? If this power is real, it means God is at hand and his finger is at work. What then?

See, if your thinking is not logical, if it doesn't make sense, your objection, then something else is driving your thinking, isn't it? Some other interest or objective, which that finger will eventually be placed on.

You see, the way to be happy then is not to shoot the cow because the milk has gone bad, right? To dismiss Christ as part of the problem because of some of the things done in his name.

The answer to being happy is not to find justifications for not confronting the questions which Jesus raises for all of us here today. That accusation that Jesus is part of the problem does not make sense.

And the alternative is that the finger of God is at work here. That brings us to the second response to Jesus. Prove it. Look at verse 16.

[ 8 : 42 ] Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. Short translation, if you're God, prove it. Which, if you think about it, is a really odd thing to say.

Since they've just seen with their own eyes not only Jesus, but Jesus releasing this man from darkness and healing that disability.

But there it is. That's what they say. Prove it. And again, that's not an uncommon reaction today, is it? You'd need to produce a miracle to prove that Jesus is God, that God exists if you expect me to follow him.

Well, it's a little bit like this, isn't it? Sorry, the photo's probably not very clear. God, why won't you show me a miracle? And those of us who live in this world and see these beautiful things around us, we're thinking, it's right there.

It's all around you. The beauty of the world speaks of the existence of God. The fine tuning of the universe. Did you know, physicists like Roger Penrose have estimated that the chances of the conditions being right for something like the Big Bang, and that then leading to a universe which is

suitable for human life, are something like one in ten to the power of 10,123.

[10:08] Now that is unbelievable. And of course the more immediate proof is right in front of you here today, isn't it?

Rebecca and Eze for a start. God is at work. Jesus has changed them. Like he's changed so many people who sit here today, from people who don't follow him, don't believe him, don't know him, into people who do.

Jesus is pointing out really that the demand for proof, just like in this story, is often a smokescreen. And it hides an unwillingness to deal with Jesus' claims.

I'd rather have a comfortable position on the fence. See, that's what's really going on. And Jesus sees this. And what does he say? Verse 23. Whoever is not with me is against me.

And whoever does not gather with me scatters. He cannot be moderately Christian, you see.

Because a Christian is someone who is united to Jesus Christ.

[11:21] You either are, or you're not. Jesus says, there are only those who have declared for me, like Rebecca and Eze, and those who have not.

There is no fence. In fact, Jesus warns those of us, like me, who like to think that our house is in order. All the bills are always paid on time.

Things are neatly packaged, proved. No loose ends. All the bad habits safely hidden away. He warns us. Verses 24 to 26.

What Jesus says there, do you remember? He says, when an impure spirit comes out of somebody, and goes away somewhere, and the person who it was in cleans house, well, that evil spirit then comes back with seven others worse than itself.

And the beginning of that person's situation was actually not that bad compared to where they are now. See how Jesus uses that picture of the miracle he has just done to point out the danger for us.

[12:32] He says, even an orderly human heart still needs a tenant. If it's not Jesus, then who?

See, the way to be happy is not to be sceptical and to hold the truth at arm's length. To wait for proof of everything. Because, of course, we all know that the best things in life, like love, sacrifice for someone else, peace, that slow, steady work at building good things, they can't really be proved, can they?

Not in the way that someone demands proof. Life's not really about proof, is it? It's about right, wrong, good, evil, love, happiness.

They can't be scientifically demonstrated. All of these things require faith. In fact, Jesus says what they really require is trusting obedience.

Kind of like we knew that our parents knew best, right? We trusted them, that they loved us, that they would do the right thing for us. Not because we had all the knowledge that they had, so we knew that when they made a choice it was the right one.

[13:50] No, we trusted and obeyed because we believed they knew best. That brings us to response number three. Let's look at verse 27.

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you. This is brave, isn't it? This is the one voice in the crowd there.

The one person who's willing to go against the grain. That takes courage to praise Jesus in front of everybody, to identify with him in that public way. That's what Rebecca and Isaiah have done.

And what does she say? She says, happiness, Jesus, must be being part of your family. Imagine being your mother, being that close to you. Close to you. And Jesus responds, yes. Yes, you are right.

Yes, you are right. Being in my family, close to me, is happiness. Because blessedness is happiness, isn't it? But this isn't just any kind of happiness. This is God's happiness.

[14:57] This isn't the feeling you get after you downed a can of monster. Right? This isn't the kind of in-loveness feeling you have at the beginning of a relationship. It's not that giddiness that you get either after being just a little bit naughty and getting away with it.

It's not that. It's not temporary. It's not frivolous. It's not chemically induced. This is divine contentment. This is happiness that always chimes with the way that things ought to be.

This is settled. This is wrapped up in what is good permanently. This is being able to say always, it is well with my soul. Do you have that kind of happiness?

So if you have Jesus, you have it. Because actually getting happiness is not about how at all. It's about who.

Because happiness isn't a concept or an objective like alignment. It's a person. It's God. For God is happy. God is happy.

[16:08] That's what the Bible says about God. It says God is blessed. He is happy. Because he is God. And because he is all that he is completely and perfectly.

That means he is completely and perfectly happy. He is the happy God. Can you imagine being family with someone like that? Amazing.

Yes, my family is happy. But don't miss the point. Says Jesus. Look at verse 28. He replies, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.

He says happy are those who have heard the good news. What God says about me, Jesus Christ. And have believed it. Why? Because they are my family.

My family. If you were to flick back to Luke chapter 8 verse 21. Just a couple of chapters back. It's a little story. Chapter 8 starting at verse 19. Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him.

[17:12] But they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to see you. What does he reply? My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word.

And put it into practice. See, those who listen to God's word, they're his family. And it's his family that are happy. So what is the good news?

We've skirted around that a little bit, haven't we? What is the word of God? What message is Jesus talking about here? Well, it's a little bit like this. In June 1975, a squad of Palestinian militants from the Arab Liberation Front infiltrated the community of Kuffar Yuval.

And they took several residents hostage. And the situation escalated until there was a standoff with Israeli forces. There was a man called Yaakov Mordecai.

He was a soldier in the Golani Brigade. And he was on his way to work when he learned that his wife, Simcha, and their 11-year-old son were among the hostages. He was determined to rescue them.

[18:23] So he returned to the village. And despite the fact that he wasn't part of the official rescue operation, he joins it. He volunteers. And he led the charge into the house.

And he neutralized two of the militants. And then he was tragically killed by a grenade thrown by one of the attackers. And his wife, Simcha, was also fatally wounded.

But Yaakov's courageous actions and his intimate knowledge of the house meant that the remaining hostages, including his baby son, were freed.

What's all this got to do with what we've just read? Do you remember when Nathan read the story that Jesus told about the strong man who defends his house?

Until the stronger man comes along and takes his weapons away. Jesus is the stronger man.

Jesus, like Yaakov, storms the house in which we are held hostage.

[19:28] By our sin, by Satan, maybe even by ourselves. Because, of course, if yourself is your master, then you have a master who's never happy.

Jesus, on the cross, completely overpowers our captors. He is the one who buys our freedom with his life. Sacrificing himself so that we might live.

Rising again so that we know that all he has said and done is true. So, yes, my family are happy, says Jesus. But don't miss the point.

Be happy. Be part of my family. Trust my work for your behalf. That will mean happiness because then your sins are forgiven.

What does the Bible say? Happy is the man whose sins the Lord does not hold against him. See, if our sins are forgiven, then we can be with the God of happiness forever. The secret of happiness is knowing and trusting Jesus Christ.

[20:37] Because he defines what happiness is. He says, to be part of my family, you need to trust what I have done for you. Come to the cross. Say sorry for what you have done wrong.

Receive that new life that was pictured in our baptisms today. Be reunited with the God of joy. One of my favourite theologians, Herman Bavinck, says this.

Life without blessedness, that is, life without the happiness of God, is not worthy of the name.

Rebecca Neza, you have that happiness.

In fact, anybody who has Jesus here today has that happiness. And in fact, anybody who is here today can have that happiness. If you put your faith in the Lord Jesus.

If you obey his word. The word of the one who died that you might have joy. Amen. Let's just pray.  
Lord, we thank you that you are the happy God.

[ 21 : 43 ] We thank you that you made it crystal clear that you want us to share in your happiness.  
And that there is a way for that to be true. Thank you that you have made the way by your death on  
the cross.

Thank you that we may be part of your family if we trust and follow you. In Jesus name. Amen.  
Amen. Amen.