

When You Believe in God but Pursue Happiness At Any Cost

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 November 2018

Preacher: Rev. Lydia Holder

[0 : 00] for Winnie the Pooh, it's honey. For Peter Rabbit, it's Mr. McGregor's carrots. For Popeye, it's spinach. For Shrek, it's his stinking swamp. So what makes you happy? What is it for you?

Maybe not a stinking swamp. We're looking at when we believe in God but pursue happiness, pursue those things, those desires that make us feel good, that make us feel warm inside, or maybe that make us feel really strong when we eat spinach. So what is it for you? What do you love to do? What makes you happy? What gives you that warm feeling inside?

Or maybe when you're really tired, actually, what is it that you grasp hold of? Or when you haven't seen people all week, what is it that you turn to for comfort? What do you pursue to give you that lift, that happiness, or that contentment? Maybe it's friends, family, or perhaps an item of new clothing, or some really tasty food, maybe chocolate.

Or maybe it's things that take you away from reality a little bit. Maybe getting really into a good book, imagining yourself in that story. Or maybe it's time in front of the TV to just relax and switch off, or maybe it's scrolling through your phone and looking at who's posted on their Facebook or something.

Maybe it's going to the pub for a drink or a few. It's about happiness. It's about looking for things that make us feel good. Did you know that on the Amazon website, where you can buy books and all sorts of other things, there are over 20,000 books on happiness just on the Amazon website alone.

[2 : 24] 20,000 books that talks about how to find happiness, how to pursue it, what happiness is, what it does to you. That's a lot of books to find. People seem to be really wanting this hot topic, wanting happiness. It's pretty common.

Okay, so when was the last time you properly belly laughed? Like tears streaming down your eyes, like turning in your stomach, like clenching, really laughing out loud. When was the last time you did that? What was it that made you really laugh? Did you know that apparently your body produces these sort of endorphins, these hormones like dopamine and serotonin when you laugh, when you belly laugh, or when you're shown love, or when you're affirmed, when you feel happy?

Your body produces these things that loves it, that gives you that kind of warm feeling inside. And I don't know, I think it's great that scientists have discovered this about our bodies.

They've managed to find out these things that give us that feeling of happiness. There's also their discovery that actually we can see what things that we desire for, but actually don't give us those feelings of happiness. Actually, we think they will, but they won't. They won't completely satisfy.

There's one, if I can be a bit science-y. If there are any scientists in the room, I apologise, because it might not be completely accurate. I don't know. But apparently, oxytocin is a hormone which is generated through the feeling of trust. So maybe spending time with loved ones in good relationships with people. And our researchers have also found that some of these things, these feelings of relating to others can be taken away when we try and take ourselves out of reality. So maybe through social media, or watching TV, or influencing ourselves by alcohol, this hormone that we desire for, we think we might get from these things, actually is not being fulfilled.

[4 : 58] And yet, we desire for more. We keep wanting more. So I don't know about you, but if I'm really honest, I can often find myself wanting just to switch off, just to relax, to watch TV, or to scroll on my phone and see what the next interesting thing might be.

But it never quite satisfies. Apparently, the average person spends more than eight hours a day on a screen of some sorts.

That might be TV, it might be your phone, it might be the computer, or something else. And social media is one of the fastest growing forms of communication, this desire to relate to people.

But the fix for happiness, the fix for desiring to relate, is never quite fulfilled, it's never quite satisfied, it's never completely face-to-face.

Now, I don't mean to bring us all down on this topic of happiness, but just perhaps hoping to bring your awareness to what we use our time doing.

[6 : 13] Sometimes it's good to be honest with ourselves about thinking about what we default to doing. The thing is, though, that God desires so much more for us than a feeling of switching off from reality, or a quick fix to make us feel a bit good.

Actually, God desires for us to be present. God has more for us than anything this world perhaps can offer.

Okay, picture with me perhaps a sandcastle. You get to build this sandcastle however you want it to be. You might want it to make it look like a gingerbread house that's all tasty and cosy and quaint, or maybe you make it grand with loads of shells around the edges, maybe there are columns and towers.

You can make it however you like, however you desire it to be. Something that you're proud of. Something that you've really gained and created around you that you are enticed towards.

But then the rain comes. The tide comes in. And it's washed away. It's formless.

[7 : 42] It's dust. It's sand. It's pretty useless. You see, we can go about our lives trying to bring all of these things around us that make us feel good.

Perhaps a nice car or a good house, some nice furniture, some nice clothes. Things that make us feel good about ourselves. But eventually, they're all going to fade away and be kind of threadbare and useless.

Cars don't last forever. You might have heard of the Bible story about the rich young ruler who asks Jesus, how can I get into heaven?

How can I do it? And Jesus turns around and says, well, it's easier for that camel over there that's laden with stuff to go through the eye of a needle, which is this tiny little door, than it is for you to enter the kingdom of heaven as a rich young ruler.

And we all know he goes away feeling saddened by this because he knows all of the things that he's collected over the years. Jesus is basically challenging him by saying, you can't expect to take all of your treasures with you.

- [9 : 09] It doesn't work like that. There's more for you than that. There's more for you than that. Wow. In the Christian Atheist, it says, we pursue happiness, but what if God doesn't desire happiness of us, but what if he desires actually more for us than what we understand as happiness, as a little hormone serotonin fix or oxytocin?
- The thing is, there's C.S. Lewis puts it like this. If we find ourselves with a desire for, sorry, if we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.
- In other words, we were made for more than this. So if we desire for happiness, for the good feeling that those hormones produce, what if there is something greater that satisfies long term for eternity?
- Okay, before you all get doom and gloom saddened, I'm going to suggest we look to the animal kingdom for help. Penguins, for example.
- Has anyone seen a penguin walk? Maybe in the zoo or on TV, or maybe you've been lucky enough to go out into the wild and find a penguin. Has anyone seen a penguin walk?
- [10 : 58] Don't they look ridiculous? Don't you think? They've got these massive flippers on their feet, and they're trying to waddle around. I mean, if you've ever worn flippers, you know you need to pick your knees up, but they can't pick their knees up, because it looks like they've got these trousers around their ankles, so they've got to kind of walk sideways, and then their arms can't, like, balance enough, because they can't lift them out wide enough, so they're kind of stuck around their arms, and they're so tall, it looks like they're going to fall over.
- They just look ridiculous. Sometimes I just think, God, what were you doing? Those poor penguins, they can't walk properly. They just look so silly, and they're falling over around the place.
- But then, have a look at this video. Penguins still waddle over the frosty landscape. They still fly gracefully through the freezing waters, though, as figure skaters, they leave something to be desired.
- When they dive into the water, they look so elegant, so free, so purposeful.
- They look incredible, they look incredible, as if they were really created for a purpose, to go down and to search for their food, to soar through the water.
- [13 : 03] Now, for us, we were created for a kingdom lifestyle, to swim elegantly, soaring in the presence of the one who created us.
- So our desires for happiness, the way the world sees it, will never completely satisfy. But, when we pursue Jesus, and the life that he calls us to live, we find purpose, we find belonging, we find our identity.
- It's as if we have these flippers that are holding us back here, but when we recognize it's for Jesus, they've got their purpose, they're ready to go.
- I want us to look at Jesus' teaching to his disciples in the Beatitudes. Now, these are talking about being abundantly blessed.
- In other words, finding this happiness, this deep joy within, not for earthly materials, but with an inheritance in Christ.
- [14 : 21] It's their happiness in Christ Jesus. Now, bear with me, I'm going to read them all out, and I'd love for you to, sort of, have a think, and let these words that Jesus talks, wash over you, and maybe there are particular ones, that you think, gosh, yeah, actually, wow.
- happy. And I'll change the word blessed to be happy for the sake of what we're talking about today. He says, happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Happy are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Happy are the meek, for they will inherit the earth, meek being those who are content with what they have.

Happy are those who hunger for thirst, and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Happy are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Happy are the pure in heart, for they will see God. happy are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

[15 : 43] Happy are those who are persecuted, because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now we can look at these, and think, okay, yes, that's a distant, and long reach of a thing, that I may never desire, or be able to achieve here, having the kingdom of heaven, or seeing God.

But actually, the fact is that Christ is here, in our midst today. That actually, as we change our orientation, to pursue happiness, in Christ, we find satisfaction.

It may not look like a, a full, flitty, fling, but actually, it's something that, roots a lot deeper, and lasts a lot longer.

When we are broken, and hurting, sometimes, the idea of someone, who's all happy, and bouncy, coming along to comfort us, just doesn't, doesn't quite, make it, does it?

It almost seems like, a bit of a mockery, you just want them to, go away, you don't understand, you're too happy, I'm not in that place. And actually, in that moment, Christ is not that person, Christ comes, and sits alongside us.

[17 : 15] He hurts with us, he experiences, the things that we experience. He understands, he relates. And with that, actually, we find something, that's not happiness, but it's a, a deep joy, knowing that there is, a God who cares, right next to us.

His presence, is rooted deeper, than, the comfort of, switching the TV on, or, scrolling through your phone. Christ speaks, truth, and he speaks, love, into our lives.

And as we, come to land, and think about, how this might affect us today, in our daily lives, there's a guy called, Aristotle, who's quite, a wise philosopher, back in the day.

And he says that, happiness, depends on ourselves. In other words, it's all about us. Which, I could argue, it doesn't, depend on ourselves, it's actually, Christ is the centre, of true happiness, like I was just saying.

But, that would then be, naive, to think that we have, no part to play, in this, happiness. Because actually, Christ made a way, for us to know, and live, in the everlasting life, that he has given us.

[18 : 50] But, we still have a conscience, we still have, a mind, and a given, free will, to choose, to choose him, who has already chosen us.

Actually, we can choose, to orientate, our lives, towards Jesus, towards happiness, in a, in a kingdom way.

So, how might we, do that today? What does, a kingdom happiness, orientated, towards Jesus, who is with us, in everything, what might that look like, for you today?

You might want to, think back to, earlier, when I asked you, what makes you happy? If it's, honey for Winnie the Pooh, what is it for you? Why don't you, ask yourselves, what does it look like, for Jesus, to be fulfilling, my happiness, in that moment, when I'm seeking, after those other things?

They may be good, in themselves, looking out, for friends and family, they are good things, but with Jesus, in the centre of them, they are so much better.

[20 : 01] So, as we pursue, happiness, let us pursue, Jesus first, let us hold on, to that goodness, that he gives us, truth and love, so that we can also, impart that good, deep joy, of Jesus, kingdom, happiness, to others, as well as, to ourselves.

for ourselves.