

Introduction

Is it possible to be happy and holy at the same time? I fear that many of us may have bought into the lie that if we want to have joy, we should not follow Christ. But nothing could be further from the truth.

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The Happiness of Holiness? Really? Do those words belong in the same phrase or sentence – happy and holy? Oh yes, I know, theologically, we agree that we should be holy and joyful, but something has occurred along the way that makes *happy holiness* seem like an oxymoron. Many people think, “Yes, I know I should be holy, but I want to be happy, I want to have fun, and if I pursue God in my life, then there goes all the fun and happiness.” Others grimly say, “Yes, I want holiness more than anything in my life, no matter what it costs.” Of course, what it often costs is our joy while we in dogged determination keep pursuing Christ with heavy burdens, sober expressions, and little love for the life God has given us.

Hello everyone and welcome to our broadcast today. I am looking forward to sharing these messages with you that we call The Happiness of Holiness. We believe that we can be happy and holy at the same time, that we should be happy and holy. We did not choose this title because it had a certain rhythm to it or because the key words began with “H.” We really believe it. In my experience, the happiest moments have been when I have totally surrendered to Christ, completely in the center of his will, and choosing what is right and good consistently. This experience has been captured in a book title that caught my attention recently. I walked into a Christian bookstore. Front and center was a new book by John Eldredge. I have read several of his books through the years and have benefited from them. This new book was called “The Utter Relief of Holiness.”

Let me read an excerpt from it.

“It may seem strange at first because I don’t believe most folks think of holiness as an utter relief. Hard perhaps, boring if we are honest, necessary like flossing, a level of spirituality we might attain to one day. But a relief? Look at it this way: Ask the anorexic young girl how she would feel if she simply no longer struggled with food, diet, exercise – if she simply never even gave it another thought. Ask the man consumed with jealousy how he would feel if he woke one day to discover that all he once felt jealous over was simply gone. Ask the raging person what it would be like to be free of rage or the alcoholic what it would be like to be completely free from addiction. Take the things you struggle with and ask yourself. ‘What would life be like if I never even struggle with this again?’ It would be an utter relief. An absolute utter relief.”

A great statement, don’t you agree? May I add, that in that relief there is something else? There is joy, there is happiness, the happiness of holiness. We will look at this topic in the next several broadcasts.

I think, one of the primary reasons why holiness and happiness do not go together for many is that we have so many wrong ideas of what holiness is. Eldredge mentioned in his book that he was giving a series of talks on the topic of holiness. He paused at one point and asked the audience, “What comes to your mind when you hear the word holiness.” Some of the responses were:

Boring - Self Denial – Disciplined – Unattainable – Striving – Separation – Hard

Some of these words are part of holiness as we will see. Discipline is part of it. Self-denial is part of it, and it can be hard, and we must separate from sinful behavior, but “boring?” Unattainable? And when we look at the list, the absence of words like joy, happiness, blessed, and love is striking. It would be like a Thanksgiving Meal; you have invited your children to come, and they said they would but when it is time for dinner no one shows up. The food is there. You are there. It is Thanksgiving Day, but the absence of loved ones around the table makes the delicious food on the table seem drab and tasteless, like a boxed dinner from the frozen food section at your store. That is the way holiness is, if there is no joy, no blessing, no love, no happiness.

It is time to look again at holiness. Remember, holiness is an attribute of God. He said, “You shall be holy because I am holy.” Seraphim and Cherubim worship before him continually saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty.” Perhaps our problem is we think of the holy God as a grim, frowning, unreachable old monarch on his throne who is constantly unhappy with our behavior. Well, we have certainly given him a lot to be unhappy about, a lot to get angry about, but remember, sin is not eternal. Sin had a beginning which means that before sin was, God was. Before anything dirty or ugly or painful or destructive entered the universe, God lived, and he lived in bliss and glory and joy.

Two verses in 1 Timothy reveal this to us. 1 Timothy 1:11 has a rich little phrase in it that is often overlooked. The phrase is, “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” How does this phrase describe God? He is the *blessed* God! That means he lives in a state of perpetual blessing and joy. The second phrase is found in 6:15-16 which calls him the “*blessed* and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light.”

Try to think of a day in your life where you were overflowing with blessing. You woke up refreshed. Everything went well at work. You got a raise and promotion. Your spouse is happy with you. The kids respect you and are doing well in school. Your life is overflowing with blessing. Imagine life being that way every day!

Now, imagine a Being whose existence is eternal and who lives in a state of perpetual blessing and joy. That’s God. That is the way God is. He is the blessed God. God is not eternally sad, grim, or upset. God is eternally joyful. Do you know why? It is because he is holy. Holiness brings happiness. And he has said to us, “you shall be holy because I am holy.” Perhaps we should expand this and say, “You shall be holy and happy because I am holy and happy. I want you to be like me. I want you to experience the joy that I experience.”

In 1 John 1:5 we find these words, “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.” What does this tell us about God? It tells us there are no shades of grey in him. There are no mixed motives. He is not 51% good and 49% bad. He is not even 99.9% good and 0.1% bad! He is light through and

through. He is righteous and pure and good through and through and that is why he is the blessed God.

When we gain an accurate vision of the character of God, of his holiness and happiness, then we will take a step in the right direction for our lives. God is not happy despite his holiness. God is happy because of his holiness. He wants the same for us.

Let us look at this from another angle. What is it that brings sadness in the world? I would like you to consider 1 Peter 1:4. This verse tells us about the inheritance awaiting us. It says our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away. But think about this passage in reverse. The inheritance the world offers is things that do perish, things that are defiled, and things that fade away. A family friend has been trying to lose weight. She had bought a couple of packages of bacon and she told my wife, “Kathy, I want to give this to you and Jonathan. If I open this package, I will eat the whole thing. I don’t want to do that.” Well, we admired her discipline and gladly received the bacon. The next morning, I remembered it was in the fridge. I opened it up and made a few pieces. Kathy came in a while later and made a couple for herself and she said, “Does this bacon taste a little strange to you?” I admitted it was a little sharp tasting but sometimes bacon can be that way and we both ate our pieces. Later that day, she called and said, “Jonathan, would you check the expiration date on that package of bacon?” And to my horror I discovered that we were eating bacon three months past the expiration date. No wonder I had a headache! The bacon was defiled. It was perishing and the joy of having some bacon and eggs in the morning quickly faded.

We live in a world where things perish, are defiled, and fade away because we live in a world that has been overwhelmed by sin. Our world has not just been tainted by sin, or just polluted by sin. Sin has overwhelmed it. Our world is like a body that gets a bacterial infection and if unchecked, the bacteria will multiply rapidly and bring death. This is our world – a world overwhelmed by sin that causes things to perish, to be defiled, and to fade away, and this is what brings unhappiness. Holiness does not bring unhappiness. Sin brings unhappiness. I am sure you can testify to that. I know I can.

We have bought into the lie that sin brings us happiness, that being independent of God brings us joy, that doing things our way and being in charge of our life is the path to fulfillment. When we buy into the lie, in big ways or small, we may experience short range pleasure, but we always reap long term sadness. God says, “I don’t want you to reap sadness, corruption, perishing, defilement.” I want you to reap joy.

Here is the description of our eternal home – the new earth – “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will no longer be any death; no longer any mourning, or crying, or pain.” Sadness will be banished for eternity. Do you know why? Because only holiness will exist because God’s lovely and beautiful character will permeate everything. Just as sin overwhelmed this creation, holiness will overwhelm that creation and the result will be utter relief and eternal joy.

This is God’s will for us and this is the topic for our series – The Happiness of Holiness. I hope you will join us for everyone!