

Minister's Message – October 2013

Contentment

Hardly a week goes by without someone in the media talking about happiness. Since 2001 we have had an annual happiness survey, and given ourselves a happiness index. This leads to the question of what makes us happy, and the old question, 'Can money buy happiness?' The answer is always, 'Well no, but ...' Despite being told this, we go on believing that more money will make us happier. And so we go on and on, around and around, asking this question but never believing the answer. Is it that we are not asking the right question? What is happiness anyway?

Not surprisingly, the word 'happy' is rarely found in the Bible. Rather, we find on page after page the word 'blessed' – see the Sermon on the Mount. Maybe we should be saying 'have a blessed birthday' rather than 'have a happy birthday'! The word 'blessed' has a sense of being grateful for the things we have rather than looking to things we do not have. The word 'blessed' means that someone has blessed us. We do not say we are blessed when we work hard and buy things for ourselves. We say we earned it and we deserve it.

There is another word that is rarely heard these days. It is in the dictionary but you will not find it in the media or in many conversations. It is the word 'content'. It is found in the Bible more often than the word 'happy'. The apostle Paul was in prison without charge when he wrote, 'I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content' (Philippians 4:11). Not many prisoners would rate highly on the happiness index. But Paul was content.

Contentment comes from a sense of sufficiency and satisfaction – two more words that we rarely hear today. Does anyone say they have sufficient and need nothing more? Contentment means to be satisfied with who you are, where you are, and what you have – and even to be thankful for such things.

Contentment does not come from comparing ourselves to other people. Many people are happy because they see others who are worse off. They are happy when they can give to others. It is good to give to others but this should not make us proud or happy. The problem is that there will be others who are better off than us, and when we think of them we will not be content. We'll want what they have, which is coveting not contentment.

'Godliness with contentment is great gain' (1 Timothy 6:6). What great advice! Many think of 'great gain' in terms of money, of winning the lottery, of getting a good tax return or of getting higher pay. But this is not what this advice is about. This advice is given in the context of saying that the desire to get rich is fraught with danger. The desire to get happiness through material things is fraught with danger. Instead, the Bible says that if we have food and clothes we should be content (1 Timothy 6:8). Contentment comes from focussing not on self, or on other people, but on God.

Godliness means to be focussed on God, who made all things and is in control of all things. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). God will supply all our needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). God gives, and he also takes away. Job learnt this. That is why, when he lost all his property, all his family, and all his health, he did not commit suicide as his wife advised, but looked to God. He was a God-fearing man. He could be content like the apostle Paul.

Are you content? How would you feel if you suffered like Job or Paul? Both men looked to God and committed their way to God. They learned to be content. Forget about trying to be happy. Learn to be content in every situation and remember that godliness with contentment is great gain.