

Minister's Message – September 2008

Joy

Happiness, like love, is something we all seek. It is difficult to define, but still we seek it. It is very elusive, but still we seek it. Newspaper columnists occasionally do 'happiness surveys' asking people if they are happy and what makes them happy. The subject of money usually comes up and people think that if they had more money they would be happier. Then they talk to someone who won the lottery some time ago, only to find they are now living a miserable life. A new job, a new house, or even a new partner, are often sought in attempts to find happiness. But where can happiness be found?

It was midnight in the inner cell of a prison when the apostle Paul and his friend Silas began to sing praises to God. They had been arrested, beaten and put into stocks without charge or opportunity of defence. They might have felt angry and very sorrow for themselves – but no! they were singing! Did these men have some secret for their joy?

Paul was again in prison when he wrote a letter to friends at Philippi. This letter is amazing because it is about rejoicing. *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!* (Philippians 4:4). How could Paul talk about rejoicing when he was in chains? What was Paul's secret?

Paul tells us that he had learned to be content in whatever state he was in (Philippians 4:11). In another letter he writes *godliness with contentment is great gain* (I Timothy 6:6). In that letter he talks about money and how many come to grief rather than happiness because of a love of money. We see this again and again. There was news this week of a millionaire who died in his burning mansion after shooting his wife and himself. But do we learn from such examples?

Many people rob themselves of joy by focusing on what other people have and they don't, rather than being thankful for the things they do have. Covetousness rather than contentment! 'Covet' is a word we rarely hear these days – even 'keeping up with the Joneses' is not heard much. Rather we hear 'this can be yours, it can be yours today, why wait'. There is nothing wrong, so we are told, with wanting what your neighbour has – even if it means greater debt. But to covet is to sin – see the 10th commandment.

Paul was content. Why? 'Godliness with contentment' he wrote. He believed God loved him and cared for him. He listened to the words of Jesus that God feeds the birds of the air and so he cares for you. *My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:19).

Finally note that Paul wrote 'rejoice in the Lord' right after telling his brothers that their names were written in the book of life. Jesus told his disciples to rejoice because their names were written in heaven – they had just told Jesus about the miracles they had done (Luke 10:20). Knowing you are saved from sin and death, and have a glorious home in heaven is reason a plenty to be content and rejoice in the Lord always.

*Happiness is to know the Saviour
Living a life within God's favour,
Having a change in my behaviour
Happiness is the Lord.*

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon DD.