

SERMON

What Makes You Happy? (Philippians 3:1-11)

There used to be an advert on the television which had the line in it, “I wanna be happy.” There was the woman wanting the nice house, the nice holiday, the nice car, but all the fella wanted was, “I wanna be happy.”

What makes you happy? What makes your world revolve? Some commentators on life say that there are only three things that really pull our chain, rock our boat, really make us happy. And those three things are Money, Sex and Power. Some do add Time as a fourth, but Time is something that we seem not to have too much of. Everyone is rushing, rushing, rushing, especially in this culture. When Sue and I were in Togo, West Africa and Banako, the African Pastor we were with, would say that he would pick us up in the morning at 8.00am. We got to know after a while that for Banako this could mean 7.30am or it could mean 9.00am, we just never really knew.

When we asked him about it he would say that this is because there are two sorts of time – there is world time and African time. I have found that since moving to Gants Hill that there is world time, African time and also Ashurst Drive Baptist Church time! I did notice with Banako that when we began to also be laisser faire with time like him, that he began arriving at the time he said because it was him that then wanted to get to somewhere on time because we might be meeting the President of his denomination.

Paul whoever mentions something to make us happy. Philippians 3:1 says

And that's about it, friends. Be glad in God!... (Philippians 3:1 MSG)

He says this in his letter to the church of God, his friends who live at Philippi. It is true that although he says “**And that's about it**”, we are only half way through the letter. So if I say “Finally” or “**And that's about it**” this morning, you will not know if I am saying finally or only half way through!

Paul says that our happiness should be in God and in him alone.

And that's about it, friends. Be glad in God!... (Philippians 3:1 MSG)

And then he goes on to say

even though we can list what many might think are impressive credentials. You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God's law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting Christians; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God's law Book.
(Philippians 3:4-6 MSG)

For Paul that list gave him money and power and sex. It was his comfort zone and we are of course happiest when we are in our comfort zone. In our culture today we seemed to be obsessed with job titles at times because the title gives us power, gives us status. Any guesses as to what this might be

"Wanted: executary. Excellent remunerative package."

Just to give another clue

"Wanted: executary. Excellent remunerative package. Must have short hand."

No longer is it a secretary, but an executary. To use the word secretary in some circles is the sign for the person requiring the wearing of a black hood to appear or the

- capital punishment operative

So today our industry is served by

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|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| • voice data executive | (telephonist) |
| • data storage specialist | (filing clerk) |
| • office logistics co-ordinator | (postroom worker) |

And the

- | | |
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| • Reprographics engineer | (photocopyist) |
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And then of course you may have your tea served by the

- catering supervisor

who if he or she spills it will call the

- hygiene supervisor

who will direct the

- Environment technician

to clean up the spill except of course if you happen to be a

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| • digital data executive | (keyboard operator) |
|--------------------------|---------------------|

- and the spill has ruined your keyboard

We live in a world where status is valued, apparently according to the articles that went with these new job titles, status can be valued over a pay rise. Give a person a new job title and they may forego a rise in salary!

Status gives us power, power over others. We like power, we like looking down on others, we like the kudos that goes with power. Lord Acton, a British historian of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries said

Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely

This was an observation that a person's sense of morality lessens as his or her power increases because power gets a hold of the person and they will do all they can to keep hat power – whatever it takes. For Paul he went around killing Christians because they were attacking Judaism, his religion, his way of life, or so he thought and this was also the basis of his power which is why he describes himself as a person who had

- **a legitimate birth**
- **was circumcised on the eighth day**
- **an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin**
- **a strict and devout adherent to God's law**

But maybe your thing is money. Your comfort zone is money. If you see the bank account drop below a certain amount, say £10,000, then the worry lines begin to appear. For others it is that they have to be cash rich. I know people who have to walk around with at least £100 in their wallet. Without this amount they feel naked – they want to feel the money. For others of course it is the debit and credit card, or credit and store cards that means that we have such a huge debt in this country.

Maybe for you the thing is money which means you can buy that latest gizmo, that latest fashion, make sure the status symbols are all there. The song says

**Money makes the world go around
The world go around
The world go around
Money makes the world go around
It makes the world go 'round.**

**A mark, a yen, a buck, or a pound
A buck or a pound
A buck or a pound
Is all that makes the world go around,
That clinking clanking sound
Can make the world go 'round.**

*Money money money money money money
Money money money money money money
Money money money money money money
Money money*

If you happen To be rich,

Ooooh

And you feel like a night's entertainment,

Money

You can pay for a Gay escapade

*Money money
Money money
Money money
Money money*

If you happen to be rich,

Ooooh

And alone, and you need a companion

Money

You can ring-ting-a-ling for the maid.

If you happen to be rich

Ooooh

And you find you are Left by your lover,

Money

Though you moan and you groan quite a lot,

*Money money
Money money
Money money
Money money*

You can take it on the chin,

Ooooh

Call a cab, and begin

Money

To recover on your fourteen-carat yacht.

Money makes the world go around,

The world go around,

The world go around,

Money makes the world go around,

Of that we can be sure.

And in that song we see money, power and sex. In a recent survey which asked the question, “Why do ugly men get gorgeous looking girlfriends?” Why does Peter Stringfellow have a long line of 20 something models as girlfriends when he is in his fifties and sixties? The answer came back was that an ugly man was more likely to get the gorgeous girlfriend if his power, his status was elevated or his bank balance was high. Some of us of course need neither to attract a gorgeous wife!

But all this money, all this power, all this sex is nothing when we are old and lonely. One can be lonely in a large house with lots of money or in a small house with little money. In my time as a minister, I have noticed that for most people the only way to ensure that a lot of people come to your funeral is to die in your fifties. After that the number of people who attend the funeral drops off rapidly with age.

So “We wanna be happy” and what does Paul say about that, the money, sex and power?

The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I'm tearing up and throwing out with the trash--along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant--dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ--God's righteousness. I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.

(Philippians 3:7-11 MSG)

For Paul the way to happiness, to total fulfillment was **the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant--dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him.** (Philippians 3:8) or as another version puts it

“...the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ”

(Philippians 3:8 NIV)

Paul was prepared to throw everything out, just to know Jesus. To know Jesus is power. As he also says

I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power... (Philippians 3:10 MSG)

His resurrection power. This is the power that raised Jesus from the dead. This is the power that says that although I sin, although I go against God, because of the death of Jesus on that cross which we celebrate at Easter, that I can be forgiven. Earlier Pauline was baptised and in that baptism she died. She was put under the water in a symbolic act of death but then she was raised to life to go out into life as a new person, as a child of God. Paul puts it like this

When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country. Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the Cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life--no longer at sin's every beck and call! What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection. We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word. When Jesus died, he took sin down with him, but alive he brings God down to us. (Romans 6:4-10 MSG)

We have a new life with Christ knowing the power of that resurrection. The power to direct our lives, the power to overcome problems and difficulties, but this is not a power to give us money, status and sex. As we have read before Paul said

I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. (Philippians 3:10 MSG)

This last week on Tuesday, I went back to the church in Cambridgeshire where Sue and I were ministering before coming here. I went back to take a funeral of a lady whom I described as a Woman of God. It was not because she had everything, Money, Power and Sex. In a way, from a human standpoint she had none of those things. She was only 57, and she had suffered from Multiple Sclerosis for over 20 years and in the fifteen years that we knew her, we had seen her go from a woman who was working as a nurse on a care for the elderly ward to someone who was a wheelchair user, who could not feed herself, or even hold a cup whilst she drank through a straw. As for money, some years there was not enough family income to pay any tax. She was also in pain most of the time and at times asked the question 'Why me?' She never really gained an answer, but she knew Christ personally and is experiencing his resurrection power as now she is with him. She never gave up her faith on God because she knew **Christ personally, experience his resurrection power.**

Money, sex and power are so transient, but to **know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power** is for eternity. It is real and superior to what the world can offer.'

As you have heard the testimony of Pauline, or heard or sung something else, You have felt God speaking to you about being baptised, or becoming a Christian, to know Jesus personally. Do not leave it, but as I pray, do pray along with me and then tell someone else about your decision.