

True Happiness Again?

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to look at this psalm for a few minutes. We've had a couple of psalms that we've done so far, and we're going to do some more leading up to the end of the year.

And if you remember that I mentioned at the first sermon we did that the book of psalms is split into five different books. It's subdivided into five books, and we're really just going to be taking a couple of psalms from each of the five books to take us towards the end of the year.

And Psalm 41 is the end of Book 1. And you'll see in your Bibles the next psalm begins under the title Book 2.

And it's interesting that each of the books of the book of psalms end with that ascription of praise and worship that I read at the beginning of the sermon service that was our call to worship.

And we read there just now verse 13, blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen. So we can see that there's a deliberate order that the collators of the book of psalms put in with this ending to each of the books.

[1 : 16] The book that we're looking at, Book 1, are mainly the psalms of David, not exclusively but mainly, and it would seem that they've mainly been written during his kingly reign.

There's lots of great truths, there's lots of great prayers, and it's the reality that we have in these psalms of a sinner who's saved by grace, and it ends in praise.

So on the surface, maybe you've read this psalm and you find it hard to connect with it. I find it hard to connect with some of the psalms.

And this is a psalm that in an initial reading, it's quite hard for a 21st century person to connect with on two levels.

Remember the first sermon we did was on Psalm 1 and 2, and it was about true happiness because it was the blessed person. The person who's blessed and blessing just means happiness, true happiness.

[2 : 22] Well this psalm also begins in the same way, blessed is the one who considers the poor, and it's got that same theme of true happiness. That's why I entitled the sermon, true happiness, again, question mark, because it seems to be about true happiness.

But it really doesn't fit in with our perception of true happiness, does it? It doesn't even fit in with our idea of blessing really, does it? This psalm's all about guilt and about opposition and about betrayal and about illness.

It actually couldn't be further from happiness in many ways. It's a miserable psalm. There's a lot of misery in it. And you think, well, where does that, I'm not sure if I can relate that, blessedness with the misery that seems to come out of this psalm.

David going through tremendous difficulty in opposition and betrayal and illness and sadness. I'm not sure how we link the two together, true happiness and his experience.

But also it's sometimes hard to connect with our own lives and our own experiences, because here's David and he's an ancient Near East king from thousands of years ago.

[3 : 35] And it's written in the Old Testament and it was written in Hebrew and Hebrew poetry. And it's difficult sometimes to make sense of. And the psalms, not just this one, but some of the other ones are stuff about sacrifice.

And I'm not sure if I get the culture and they talk about physical warfare. The language can be difficult and the geographical references. I don't get all of these things.

And so on a surface reading sometimes for us, it's difficult, isn't it, to maybe connect with the psalms. But I hope that we can get beyond that and see how much these psalms actually do impact our lives and our day to day living.

Because David is a shepherd king, okay? And he was one who battled in his life of faith in a sinful world. And many of the previous psalms are quite similar at that level.

But in God's eyes, David is just his child. He's just another believer who is inspired certainly to record his prayers and his heart feeling and to deliver God's inspired truth to all the generations.

[4 : 50] Because this was a public hymn that he was writing and a public prayer almost. It was to be given to the choir master, it was to be made known. And that in itself is tremendous, isn't it?

That this king and an ancient Near East king was very powerful and was kind of almost sometimes God-like, although David was different from that.

But here he is and he's very open-hearted with his own people, very vulnerable, he's very honest, he's very dependent and he's giving God the glory. And there's a great example there for us, not just as leaders, but all of us as Christians to be people who open our hearts and open our hearts to one another and are able to share our spiritual challenges, good times and bad times.

So David is the shepherd king and he speaks here again about true happiness. Blessed is the one who considers the poor. So I'm going to go through one or two of the things in this Psalm that seem contradictory but lead us to, in our lives, to understand what true happiness is.

The first is that true happiness comes to us when we show grace to others who need it. Blessed is the one who considers the poor.

[6 : 08] And that's his introductory statement and he's setting out this person of grace in the first few verses. One who helps the helpless, the poor here is a broader term for not just economic poverty but just poverty of spirit and need.

It's very similar to what Jesus says in Matthew 5 verse 7, blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. It's the same kind of thing. And David is setting this out as the ideal person of happiness.

And it's also, it's something he experiences in his own life and he shows, he shows grace. And true happiness for us is when we consider those who need grace, those who are poverty stricken. It might be economically, it might be emotionally, it might be spiritually, it might be in lots of different ways but we show grace to people who need grace.

That is the first thing, is that we show grace. The second thing that leads to true happiness is a recognition that we need grace from God.

[7 : 24] And this Psalm is very much speaking about David's powerlessness. He's an ancient nearest king but he's exposing a deep sense of helplessness and powerlessness in his own life.

He speaks about his need of forgiveness because he needs grace from God because he's guilty. In verse 4 he says, As for me, O Lord, be gracious to me.

Heal me for I have sinned against you. So he has that sense of guilt and he needs grace. He needs grace because also he is opposed.

There's these terrible verses 5 to 8 where he speaks about his enemies who whisper and who lie and who wish he was dead and who don't want him there and who think he'll never get up from his bed of illness.

He's been faced with opposition and he needs God's grace and help. He's poverty stricken. He even knows he's rich as a king. He needs grace because he's sick physically.

[8 : 29] You know he speaks about that in the illness you restore him but he goes on later on to speak in verse 8 about a deadly thing being poured out on him.

Let him not rise up from where he lies and that's what his enemies are saying. He's sick. I'll be dyes. And so he's sick and he's praying physically for healing and he needs grace from God because he's been betrayed by his best friends.

So here's David who talks about true happiness when we show grace to those who need it but also true happiness when we recognize we need grace and almost the worst thing.

If you look back, if you have time, if you have time today sometime, go to 2 Samuel 15 and you'll get this. I don't know if this is exactly where the situation David is writing from but it could well be when he talks about being betrayed by someone who was very close to him because if you read in 2 Samuel 15, David who was the king was trying to be usurped by his son Absalom and his son Absalom took his David's closest confidant, closest counselor, Ahithophil onto his side and David was bruised and battered because Ahithophil was his closest counselor, one of his best friends and he betrayed him and he, the one who trusted him had raised up his heel against him and he was betrayed and so felt in great need.

So now maybe today, maybe David doesn't feel so unattainable or difficult to connect with. He doesn't feel maybe so much like an ancient Near East king in a land far away because we all can associate with these experiences in our lives and that's the beauty of the Bible for us to a greater or lesser degree maybe.

[10:41] But we can associate, can't we with that sense of guilt before God, maybe in our hearts, maybe in the choices we've made, maybe the way yesterday we treated somebody, the way we spoke about them, our behavior, maybe our lack of love and we come maybe today just sensing that we're a bit uncomfortable because we know God looks into our heart and we sense guilt and there's that sense of need.

Maybe it's also opposition. You may have opposition in your workplace. You may have opposition in your family. You may feel opposition just in the society around us.

Can I sense that? Often that sense of society being opposed to what is really deep and important in my own heart and we see that opposition maybe where lies become truth in our society.

We're seeing that, aren't we? And it's interesting, we've changed, the vocabulary's changed. We don't talk about lies anymore. We talk about misspeaking.

It's not such a thing as misspeaking, it's just lies. And we hear politicians saying all the time that they misspoke. Actually what they mean is that they lied usually.

[12:06] And that, we sense that, we sense the vile abuse of social media. We sense the darkness of many young men committing suicide in our society, unspoken of and not reaching the news and that spiritual kind of darkness and opposition.

It might not be personal but it's nonetheless very real. Sickness, you can associate with that. Illness. Depression.

Physical illness. Cancer. Weakness. We all sense that to greater or lesser degrees, even in our families or in our own lives. And it can leave us helpless.

And I hope no one has suffered betrayal from someone who's closest to them. But maybe there is someone who has experienced that deepest pain in our heart, like a heart attack, where someone we've loved and trusted stabs us in the back.

You see, humanity doesn't change and realities don't change. And we can associate, can't we, with that sense of needing God's grace and situations that are beyond our control or that have hurt us so deeply that we can't deal with ourselves and we need protection.

[13:27] So a mark of true happiness is recognizing that. Recognizing that we are people, not only who can show grace but who need grace from God on a daily basis.

Why? Can we show grace and know that we need grace? Because we receive grace. As believers, we've received grace from God.

And that is David's experience also in this Psalm. And it's important for us to be able to articulate that in our lives. Because it may...

Often our need is what drives us to a deeper appreciation of God's grace in our lives. And we want to remind ourselves of that this morning.

And so I invite you to remind yourself this morning of the grace you've been shown if you're a Christian. And if you're not a Christian, that you would consider the grace that's on offer to you that David speaks about in this Psalm.

[14:22] He speaks about, and he knows and trusts that God will forgive him. Be gracious to me. In verse 4 and verse 10, he prays this great prayer that he knows is answered by God, the divine forgiveness.

As for me, I said, oh Lord, be gracious to me and heal me. And he says the same thing in verse 10, but you, oh Lord, be gracious to me. So he knows that showing grace is because he's received grace himself and forgiveness.

And you know that's the greatest thing this morning for us all, is that we know the divine forgiveness. From the only one who can forgive us ultimately, because we are accountable to him, the judge of all mankind.

You receive forgiveness and freedom and hope and peace when you call out and cry out to the living God for forgiveness. He is only too willing.

He is only too ready. He doesn't demand anything from us, but simply that sense of need and that sense of awareness that before him we are guilty and he is only too willing to forgive.

[15 : 32] But also not only divine forgiveness, but also divine deliverance and protection. In verse 2 he says, the Lord protect him and keeps him alive.

And in verse 11 he says, by this I know you will delight me. My enemy will not shout and triumph over me. And so David is aware that he needs God's protection from, in his case, physical enemies, his son as well, if that's the context.

But also spiritual enemies. Now we can also know and we believe it's important to pray for deliverance and protection spiritually, particularly from our spiritual enemies and particularly from being swamped by the darkness sometimes of ethics and morality that are very different from Jesus Christ's.

He promises as we trust him to protect us and to know victory. Now when I was in holiday last week I read a very old book.

I saw one that Glenness had recently read and gave us to read. And many of you will know it. It's called The Hiding Place, Corrie Ten Boom. It's a very famous Christian book.

[16 : 49] But I'd forgotten how good it was or how traumatic it was. It was very traumatic as Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch woman who protected Jews and put them in a hiding place in her house from the Nazi invasion and taking the Jews away to extermination camps.

She herself ended up with her sister Betsy in a prisoner of war camp in Germany. And you wouldn't believe the brutality and the awfulness of the surroundings that she was.

And I was gobsmacked reading it again. I'd forgotten how horrific it was. And I've often thought, as I've read it, how could God, how could they possibly stay believing in the utter evil and darkness and inhumanity of these times and of these experiences?

And what I learned, reminded myself and was learned afresh was that they didn't take on the weight of trying to change the whole world and the whole situation.

They simply sought to bring love and light into the hate and the darkness of their experience and pray for God's...

[18 : 14] And God protect... And you know the interesting thing is God protected them, but Betsy died in a concentration camp and Corrie lived. But he protected them both.

He protected them both because there's always a time when we go to meet our maker, but in her life she was protected, in her death she was protected, and Corrie in her life and in her freedom and then later as an old woman in death she was protected.

There's divine protection. Also divine healing. Verse 8, he speaks about that. Or verse 3, rather, he talks about this, blessed man is the person who is restored to full health.

Now we know that there is not there, that true happiness is not about always recovering from physical illness. We know that from the Bible.

We know it can happen. We know God will do miracles. We know He will give people gifts of healing and that people will be healed. But we also know that there's a deeper spiritual impact that this verse and also the verses we were looking at on Wednesday night about Jesus healing miracles point towards spiritual healing which will one day also involve full physical health in the new heavens and the new earth.

[19 : 42] But as a Christian today, being truly happy is recognizing that you are on that road to spiritual, you're spiritually healthy.

He is doing a healing work in us. He has redeemed us. He's brought us back to life and if you allow Him to, He is healing your heart every day, sometimes even through suffering and through illness.

He is healing our hearts. And that's a hugely important recognition that we don't become Christians and then just stay the same for the rest of our lives. He is dealing with the cancer of sin in our hearts every day and making us whole and making us more ready for being like Him day to day.

Really soul, mind, emotions, heart. We have to allow Him and His Holy Spirit to do that. Healing.

And the last thing in terms of linking these up with the need that He had, and remember we talked about betrayal, He also knows divine presence, divine presence.

A hithifal if that was the historical background betrayed Him, but He knows in His life God's friendship. You have upheld me, verse 12, because of my integrity and set me in your presence forever.

[21 : 02] Presence is very important in terms of company, in terms of friendship. And He knows that although He's been betrayed by His closest friend, He has got a Savior, He's got a God, whose friendship and whose presence is with Him forever.

It's amazing that He could say that without the knowledge that we have of Jesus and the Holy Spirit and everything else in His life, and there's much that's prophetic in what He says.

But in your life and in mine, when friendships fail, when you have a deep sense of darkness or betrayal or isolation or aloneness, we can know the deep happiness is Christians of His presence, of His embrace, of His nearness in our lives of the Holy Spirit.

It's very interesting, the word that they use for counselor, for a hithifal, David's betraying friend, he was called David's counselor, who was supposed to be there to help and advise and be with Him and always stick with Him.

He betrayed Him. But we have a counselor, the Holy Spirit, who is sent to us because of Jesus' ascension, sent into our hearts. He will never leave us.

[22 : 20] He will not betray us. And He is with us and His nearness is there and we belong in His family home with Jesus Christ, our elder brother.

And we have His presence forever. Now very briefly in conclusion, how can we be sure of this? True happiness which is showing grace to those in need because we are in need ourselves and because we've received grace from God in our need.

How can we be sure of that in our lives? Because here is David and he is a shepherd king who had battled in a sinful world.

But we know that he points forward to the greater king, to King Christ, King Jesus, who is the shepherd king who didn't battle in the sinful world but battled for a sinful world.

And he is David's savior and he's our savior today. And we remember that because that's very important because of his experience, we can know true happiness.

[23 : 31] He knew our guilt, isn't it? That's why we can know forgiveness. He had no deliverance, he faced the wrath of God, so that we can be forgiven and so we can know integrity.

You know what David says there in verse 12, you have helped me because of my integrity. You know what the word there integrity comes from? It's the same root word as breastplate, like what covered your heart.

And we can know integrity because Jesus' righteousness covers our heart and we can know forgiveness.

He experienced our guilt, he experienced brutal opposition, didn't he, in his life all the time. Jesus knew nothing but opposition almost from most people.

But much more importantly in his death, he knew the spiritual forces of hell ranged against him as he battled and won the victory over evil and death.

[24 : 32] He also knew the reality of disease and sickness. Isaiah 53 speaks about him, knowing our frailty and knowing our sickness.

And he took that on himself in order to claim wholeness and healing for us. Christ became weak. Christ became sick freely. So that we can ultimately know eternal health and healing.

And of course, and you're all waiting for this, he knew betrayal. So much so that Jesus quotes this Psalm in John chapter 13.

Look at that, John chapter 13 and verse 18, when Jesus is washing the disciples' feet.

He said, if you know these things, blessed are you, there's the blessed again, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you. I know whom I have chosen, but the Scripture will be fulfilled, this Psalm.

[25 : 46] He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me. I am telling you this now before it takes place. So Jesus takes what happened to David and he applies it ultimately to himself.

A greater and more devastating betrayal than a hithifal was Judas. Judas, Judas, Judas. Why? Why did you betray the perfect Son of God for a few pounds? Why would you do that? But of course, he knew a deeper forsakenness even than that on the cross when God the Father turned his back on him as he poured out his wrath willingly and Christ received it willingly on our behalf and was under the power of death and then rose again so that we can know friendship and that no betrayal and no forsakenness.

So that's that Psalm. I hope it's a little bit more attainable to us sometimes when we've unpacked it and seen that God is the same God.

Take the conclusion, blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen. Amen and amen, that declaration that these are true words and in the harsh realities of our lives that maybe we're struggling with just now.

[27 : 21] We can know Jesus as our great foundation, our great life, our great friend, our great future, our great forgiver and we can praise our God. Why? Because he's from everlasting to everlasting.

That means that you are before his face just as much as David is before his face and we're all just people and we can just kind of get rid of some of the things that make it difficult for us to understand and recognize that the Bible just speaks about people before a holy God and we're all the same and we all need Him.

He's not transient, He's not passing or time bound. That's why He can relate to the ancient shepherd king and to me and to you in our lives because we all need Him because we're all dying without His grace.

That we are living with His love and with His forgiveness. It's the most important truth in the universe. Remember that. Let's pray. Father God, help us today to remember who You are. Help us to remember that we don't have in the Psalms or in the Bible any kind of prescription of happiness that is light and fluffy and unrealistic and trouble free.

[28 : 42] But remind us that true happiness is recognizing the grace we've received and showing it to others. It is recognizing we need You every day like David.

It's recognizing that You are so willing to give us grace and be kind and loving as we come and acknowledge You are our only hope.

And recognizing and knowing that You are the greater David, that You are the greater shepherd king, that You are the king of kings and the Lord of lords.

You're ascended to the right hand of the Father. And all the turmoil and trouble that we face in this world is under Your sovereign knowledge and will one day be brought to that sovereign conclusion of renewal and of judgment.

So Lord, may we have that perspective as we go into our week and may each of us throw ourselves in need, in prayer, independence and in trust on the living God through Jesus and no healing and wholeness progressively as we deal with the sins that lie in the corners, the untouched corners of our hearts.

[30 : 04] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.