

“The Roots of Happiness”

Who Needs History?, Pt. 1

We are living in a very volatile moment in human history. Unique *to us*, perhaps, but certainly not unique *in* human history. There have always been eras when great technological changes have taken place in a relatively short period of time, and the result is massive social upheaval. Think about the 16th century, you had advances in seafaring ability that allowed ships to cross great distances in record times - it shrunk the world. You could engage with people that you previously didn't know *existed*. And of course, new people means new ways of looking at the world; new ideas.

Then the invention of the printing press allowed those new ideas to be spread just as rapidly. A book that would have been hand-copied over *weeks* could now be mass produced in *hours*. And advances in agriculture technology meant people actually had the time to begin to read some of these new ideas. Education began to be accessible to more than the aristocratic class. And what was the result of all this new technology that produced all of these new ideas? New ways of thinking. Which led to massive changes in philosophy, government, law and religion.

And what else do we know about these times of epoch change? Think about the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution...would you categorize them as times of peace, love and groovy vibes? Hmm, after the Reformation you had 100 years of Catholics and Protestants killing each other in Europe. The Enlightenment birthed bloody revolution both in the British Colonies of America and in France. The Industrial Revolution set the seeds for the Marxist-Capitalist conflicts that would turn the 1900's into the bloodiest century in human history.

By the way, this is all white, European history - just because we are ignorant of it, doesn't mean that the same patterns weren't happening in the Latin, Asian and African worlds. But here's the question, in these times of upheaval, what side do you land on? That determines what “history” means to you. There are terms that get thrown around in times of change like we are in today. Liberal or conservative? Progressive or traditional? You may define yourself by those very terms.

But history makes those words problematic. Let me give you an example, if someone today considered themselves “patriotic” - stand for the national anthem, respect the flag, all that - would they likely characterize themselves as traditional or progressive? Yeah, probably the former. And if somebody else thought that the current governing structure was oppressive and out of date, and protested for complete systemic change, well they would likely identify as the latter.

But here's the tricky thing about history. Deanna and I - inspired by the Hamilton musical - have gone back and are watching the HBO miniseries from a decade ago on John Adams. It's really fantastic. But of course, we're thinking a lot about the founding fathers - and mothers! So, we just said a "patriot" today has a lot of respect for "traditional" structures. But in 1776, if you were considered "traditional", it meant that you supported King George and believed that George Washington was a traitor. The actual American patriots were radically progressive in every way you can imagine. If you just stop and do some thinking, terminology is very fluid.

Not just history, but the Bible shows us how meaningless are words like "progressive" and "traditional" when they are weaponized. I had someone ask if our church was progressive. I have no idea what that means. I know about Methodist churches and Pentecostal churches and Baptist churches and Catholic churches. I have a book on US Denominations - over 220 listed - and not one called "progressive". Although I did find a couple of "primitive"! But I suspect that language is just another way of trying to tie the church to the idolatry of American nationalistic partisan politics that are so all encompassing in these tumultuous times.

But beyond the politics, there's a troubling trend regarding history in our world today. I'm an historian, I have the papers to prove it. And I find that most people have a very simplistic view of history. And once again, it's an equal opportunity offender. You have some people fighting to "preserve history" - because it's just always been that way - and other people saying that basically *everything* they did in the past was wrong - including those founding fathers - which of course means that whatever we are doing in the present is right. A view that I have always found pretty arrogant.

So it takes us back to our conundrum; which is "better", progress or tradition? Well, it's a nonsensical distinction. Is the Bible traditional or progressive? Depends on how you are looking at it. I mean, on the one hand, our faith is completely founded on an event that happened at one moment in history that we are constantly told to "remember". The central symbol of our faith - communion - instructs us to "do this in remembrance of me". The most sacred of Christian holy days - Easter Sunday - invites us to continually remember Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. And Jesus own deliverance ministry was based on the Hebrew Exodus that took place centuries before the cross - which faithful Jews remember each year at Passover. Of course the faith looks back.

But at the same time, Judaism and especially Christianity proved to be anything but traditional in their day. Roman pagans complained that Christianity was too “new” and didn’t take into account the gods of their fathers and grandfathers. The gospel opened up completely new ways of understanding what it meant to be in right standing with God - ways that were radically progressive in their inclusivity of all classes, genders and races.

So at Southwest Family we are committed to doing the hard work of maintaining the tension that is present in so many areas of the faith. And don’t think for a minute it isn’t hard work. It’s much easier to just create straw-man opponents and define ourselves by what we aren’t. It takes much more work - mental and spiritual - to mine the depths of the nuances of scripture to create a new world-changing identity in Jesus Christ. But that’s what is going to matter in the long run, when all of the debates of the moment are forgotten - to be replaced by new debates, I’m sure.

So what I want to do during this series is turn to the book of Psalms to demonstrate that the modern problems we have - well, maybe they’re not so modern after all. Can I tell you that if I hear one more time how “unprecedented” this pandemic is, I’m going to lose my mind. It is crazy to think that just because something doesn’t exist in the limits of our

experience that something just doesn’t exist. Read a book!

In fact, you can read *this* book. Because the Bible in so many places - but especially the Psalms gives us **ancient solutions** to our **modern problems**, demonstrating that we can in fact share this world with people who are divided from us, both by time and place.

I started our series on Habakkuk in the Spring with a quote by James Baldwin, it still applies; “You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was [books that] ~~Dostoevsky and Dickens~~ who taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who ever had been alive.”

So who needs the past? Who needs history? We *all* do. So let’s go back to the history of God’s people and explore their prayer book – the book of Psalms – that has for 3,000 years helped people find solutions to their deepest problems, troubles, and crises of being. We’re going to start with Psalm 1, and I promise we won’t do all 150, but we will start with number one. It’s one of the shorter in the collection.

Psalm 1

*1 Blessed is the one
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
2 Their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of
water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever they do prospers.
4 Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
6 For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Now, this verse is about several things, but at the top is what I think we would call the quest for happiness. “*Blessed is the one...*” How do we get the blessed life, the good life, the fulfilled life, the happy life? Let’s ask the question, in our modern, advanced age with all of our technology and with all of our knowledge base, have we *really* made progress when it comes to living a happy life?

All the magazines and the self-help books, they’re all about the problem: we’re not happy. How can we be happy? What’s the secret formula? What’s the “science of happiness”. I mean look, you have all of the music on your phone – not all of *your* music, all of *the* music! How can you not be happy? And yet, though our ancestors had few or no economic choices like we do, few or no political freedoms like we do, though they had no vacations, no health benefits, and such a short life expectancy, in spite of all of that, let’s ask ourselves, “Are we happier than they were?”

Most indications say no. After a spate of surprising celebrity suicides in 2018, the *Washington Post* ran a big article called “The Quest for Happiness May Be Killing Us.” I think *nobody* could make a case that we are any happier than they were, but you could make a very, very good case that they were happier than we. And as the article points out, it’s because we’re looking for happiness in all the wrong places.

I want to argue this morning that this ancient text, this first psalm, actually points us in the right direction. And so today the first question is... What does the Bible tell us about the issue of happiness? Now, Psalm 1 is, in a sense, the gatekeeper for the entire Bible and especially the entire book of Psalms.

It's often been considered by many students and scholars to be a kind of summary psalm for the whole book. Its principles are extremely basic to the scriptures. Someone called it the "moral calculus of the Bible". And I want us to look at four principles drawn out of this text that address the issue of why people are happy or not happy.

Number one, this text tells us that happiness is possible. The word "blessed", of course, means joyful. It means fulfilled. It means satisfied. "Blessed is the one ..." who *does* these things. And so the first thing we see from this text is that blessedness is possible. Happiness is possible. That may seem too basic, but that's a *staggering* statement. It's a statement that tests where you are. You see, unless you've had an unusually harsh childhood, almost all of us start out thinking happiness is **natural in life**. We think it's the default setting.

That's where we start, and as time goes on we migrate. And after a while, as we begin to see and experience more and more life, we begin to realize happiness isn't anywhere *near* as easy as we thought. In fact, after a while we begin to notice that *most* of the most successful people, most of the most experienced people, most of the most gifted people are the most *cynical* about the prospect of happiness.

Just think of the artists. Who wins the best picture Oscar? The happy movies or the sad movies? The great literature of the world is tragic literature. Look, here's Shakespeare. He wrote comedies, he wrote tragedies - here's *Much Ado About Nothing*, here's *Hamlet*, both wonderful plays. Is life more like *Much Ado About Nothing* or more like *Hamlet*? What do you think? See, your answer tells me how much of life you've actually experienced.

Is life really like *Much Ado About Nothing*, where in the end everybody is happy, and everybody gets the person they want to marry, and even the person who everybody thinks is dead is alive? Or is life more like *Hamlet*, with everybody dying disappointed and miserable in the last scene? Listen, you need the literature of *Much Ado About Nothing* to get through life. It's a wonderful play, but when you stand in the presence of *Hamlet*, you know you're standing in the presence of a much more profound mirror of what things are like.

Or think of *Macbeth* with its famous summary, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." You say, "Well, that's awfully, awfully bleak." Fine, but 9 out of 10 dentists agree, that's art! So is life more like *Much Ado About Nothing* or more like *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*?

I would suggest that we actually have four kinds of people. We have the people who think *happiness is natural*, as long as you don't screw it up. You're either very young, or you're very inexperienced, or you've had an unbelievably charmed life...so far. And over in this corner, we have the people who think *happiness is unachievable*. They tend to be the best thinkers. And in the middle, most of us are actually *migrating from one to the other*, and we're kind of too busy to really notice how tragic and dangerous life is until it kind of comes up and grabs us. And then there is the fourth group: *the people who understand what the Bible says*. One of them is described in this psalm.

The Bible says, and Christians who understand what the Bible says believe, happiness is neither natural nor unachievable; but it's possible. It's possible to be in this world a fundamentally and consistently happy person. That's the first principle. It's a radical statement. And right away, the question you ought to be asking therefore is, "If happiness is possible, why do so few people have it?" And the answer of the Bible in so many places – including this text - is because people seek it incorrectly.

And the next two points are two common mistakes that virtually everybody falls into unless God comes and opens their eyes to it, and therefore, we're never happy. The first mistake, and the **second** point of the message is that **real happiness** - the happiness that is offered by God and described by the Bible - **is a fundamental happiness not a superficial happiness**. You see, **v. 3** tells us the happy person, the blessed person, "...*is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither...*" Now look at that. What a wonderful metaphor. This tree is subject to seasons. It's not *always* fruitful. It's not *always* blossoming.

It's subject to seasons: winter or a very dry summer. It feels them. It's not always bearing fruit. It's not always productive. It's not always looking green and wonderful, and *yet* this particular tree is unlike many other trees because it has been planted on the riverbank. Its roots have access to a constant and unremitting stream of water that is there even when the heat comes, that is there even when the drought comes. That's the image. What's the point? The first major mistake we make is we try to find our happiness in circumstances. The first major mistake we make is we think happiness is found in the externals.

You see, a tree that survives on rain, that's fine...as long as there is rain. A happy life that thrives on your career or your family or your health is fine...as long as your career and your family and your health are cooperating. But what if there ain't no rain? What happens to the tree in the times of draught? Rain is circumstantial, but if you are planted by a river, your roots run deep. And so you see, happiness never consists in what happens *to* you but by *what you are*. Your happiness does not consist in what happens to you but in what you are.

Put it another way, the Bible consistently tells us a Christian is not just a religious person, not just a *nice* person, not simply somebody who is doing good things. A Christian is someone who has been planted and rooted into something other than themselves. That's the reason why the Bible talks about salvation as being "born again" – it's like you're replanted in different soil. And now those divine nutrients have become a part of us. We are rooted into God.

We're going to look at that next week because we're going to come back to Psalm 1 and ask ourselves, "What does it mean to be planted?" A Christian is not the chaff which has no root. A Christian is a tree. And something has planted you; trees can't plant themselves. Something has come and planted you in new soil and now there is a power. Now there is an

outlook. Now there is an *understanding* that wasn't there before, and *that* is from where you draw, and that is where the happiness comes from.

Do you see what I mean by saying it is fundamental? The tree experiences affliction. It hurts. Drought's no fun for anybody. It's affected by it. It doesn't always bear fruit, and yet its leaf never withers. There is a balance here. There is something here people don't understand unless you really dig in. The classic New Testament passage on this is **1 Peter 1:6**, "*In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*" The word "grief" means in deep distress and turmoil.

And yet, it doesn't say, "You *used* to rejoice, but right now you're in trials." It doesn't say, "You're rejoicing because you're *avoiding* trials." Two present tenses: you *are* in deep joy even though you *are* in absolutely deep distress. How could that be? Well, the metaphor is right here. Here is a tree in a drought...no fruit. Hurting. Thirsty. Grieved in a sense, and yet its leaf doesn't wither. It's an evergreen tree, because its roots are down into something else – rain or no rain.

There are people in the church who don't get this. There are people in the church who say, when some terribly tragedy has happened to you, "You're a Christian? Well, smile and praise God. Don't let it get to you." I will go so far as to say, not only is that radically unbiblical, but it's incredibly unhealthy. If you actually find Christians who go through tragedy with very few tears and without very much grief, that's *not* God's peace. That's not the joy we're talking about here. That's a kind of brainwashing.

The tree, because it's going through a season of dryness, has to pull even more out of the depths of its roots. The tree, *because* it's going through dryness, has to put its roots even deeper down and draw even harder on the ground water. And anyone in this room who has ever actually gotten this fundamental happiness knows that is exactly what happens. I tell you that you don't know what it's like to rejoice in the Lord unless you're suffering. There is something about the drought and about the fruitlessness of your life that makes you, if you're a Christian, put your roots down into God in a way you didn't before.

Happiness that the Bible talks about is fundamental happiness not superficial happiness. Happiness is not based on circumstances. It's *not* brought about by controlling your *environment* but by controlling your *allegiances*.

Which brings us to the third point. This text teaches us there *is* a happiness, that is possible. There is a happiness that is fundamental, not superficial. It's based on what you are, not on your circumstances. If you seek it in your circumstances, you will always be unhappy. Back and forth. Manic.

Third, and this is the height of wisdom, Happiness can never be found directly. **Happiness is *always* and *only* a byproduct of seeking something else more than happiness.** See whenever you see the word "blessed" in the Bible it never, ever says, "Blessed is the one who seeks blessedness. Blessed is the one who hungers and thirsts after blessedness." Never! Never, ever. What does Jesus say? **Matthew 5:6**, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*"

Seek happiness or seek righteousness? Which should you? If you seek righteousness more than happiness you'll get both. If you seek happiness more than righteousness you'll get neither. The teaching of the text is the person who is happy is always the one who has stopped trying so hard to be happy. The person who sat down and said, "What am I really living for? What are my fundamental allegiances?"

In the next chapter of Matthew, Jesus addresses people who are anxious about the necessities of their life and he says, don't worry so much about those things, **Matthew 6:33**, "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" He's saying the reason you're unhappy is because you've made something else your highest priority. Your loves are disordered. If happiness gets out of order, you'll never achieve it.

For instance... Why is it that sometimes you cheat? Why is it that sometimes you lie? Think about this. Why is it that sometimes you break your promises? Why is it that sometimes you have standards and you break them? Why? Because the normal and natural habit of our hearts is to say, "I believe in principles. Honesty is a good idea. I believe in purity. I believe in integrity. All these principles are very good, but sometimes you have to make an exception." What do you mean?

It means there is one principle that is over all the other principles, and that is, "I have to be happy. Oh, I believe in telling the truth, but not if I'm going to have to lose my job over it. Because then I wouldn't be happy. I believe in moral integrity, but not if I'm going to lose that girl over it. I want to be happy." You see, you are demonstrating a hierarchy of moral values.

You "believe" in a lot of things, but what's at the pinnacle? Even if you'd never say it with your words, your actions, your priorities, say, "The top priority I'm seeking is my happiness. Everything else comes second and third. The kingdom of God is great, but first seek happiness. Honesty is great, but first seek happiness." And the Bible says, it's counterintuitive, you'll never find happiness that way. Jesus says if you seek happiness it will *always* escape you; it will always elude you. Always.

If you make your *number one priority* a successful career, you'll never have it because you will be killed by the anxiety. You'll just be too desperate. You'll just be trying to hard. If you make a happy marriage your number one priority, you will never have it. It's disordered loves and the marriage cannot stand that kind of pressure.

Let me put it another way. Is God committed to your happiness? Absolutely, and yet if you come to Him to make you happy, you're coming to a false god. If you say, "Well, I'm interested in this Christianity, and maybe I'll come and sign up *if* I can see it will help me reach my goals and make me happy." You're not coming to God; you're coming to a butler. God is not your life coach. Either God exists or He doesn't exist. If He doesn't exist you can't come to Him for happiness, right? But if he *does* exist, you have to realize you must come to Him because He created you, and therefore, He owns you.

And to *not* come to Him and obey Him would be an injustice. And so the only way to come to God rightly, the real God, is to come without conditions and to say, “Forget happiness. I owe you everything. And whatever I get in return is icing on the cake of what you’ve already done for me.”

There are only two ways to come to God. You can come to God on the basis of saying, “I owe you everything; you owe me nothing,” *or* you can come on the basis of saying, “I’m going to follow you, but then you owe me a lot.” And the only way for you to know which one you are is to see what happens in the bad seasons. The strength of the tree is proved in the drought.

When things go wrong, do you get upset and say, “What good did it do me to come to church? What good did it do me to read the Bible?” Do you know what that shows? You came to God on the basis of saying, “Let’s make a deal” In other words you’re saying, “My number one priority is happiness, and I’m using God as a way to get there” as opposed to saying, “My number one priority is to serve God, and if happiness happens, great. To the degree it happens, great. But what I really must have is the presence of God.”

And here is the irony: the less you’re concerned about your happiness and the more you’re concerned about God, the happier you get. And you can’t manipulate this by the way! You can’t say, “Ok, I’ve got it now. I come to God, and I say ‘You’re all I need, baby.’” You cannot smooth talk the omnipotent and omniscient Lord of the universe. He knows your heart. C.S. Lewis, “Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.” Happiness is a byproduct of some greater pursuit.

So, happiness is possible. Why don’t more people have it? Because, first, we look for it in circumstances and secondly, because we go after it directly and we make *it* the non-negotiable. We say, “I’d like to serve God,” or “I’d like to be a good citizen,” or “I’d like to obey the Ten Commandments, but the non-negotiable is my happiness.” As long as the non-negotiable is the happiness, you’ll *never* get it. It has to be a byproduct of making something else non-negotiable. It *has* to work that way.

Fourth and finally, Happiness is not something that happens to you, it is something you choose. It’s not passive, it’s active. You notice the Psalm starts off with a negative. “*Blessed is the one who does not...*” That proves that if you want to be happy, you have to, first, see things you’re doing wrong and make a change of allegiance. Look at the whole thing, and notice the three verbs, (v.1) “*Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.*”

Three things. To “*walk* in the counsel of the wicked” is talking about the mind, the intellect. – who’s advice are you listening to? Then it talks about “*standing* in the way of sinners”, which is the behavior. So thinking what the wicked think, doing what the wicked do. And then finally, it talks about “*sitting* in the seat of the mockers”. In Semitic language, where you sit is where you belong. Think about our Congress, what does it mean to “cross over the aisle”? Why is that significant? Because the Republicans sit on one side of the chamber and Democrats sit on the other. You can tell your allegiance by where you sit. By who you sit with.

And so this psalm is telling us that if you want to be happy, there’s a negative and positive side. Negatively, you have to find out who you belong to. Everybody has to be converted, which means at some point you have to see that something else besides God is what owns you. Something else owns you. Other things own you. You’re sitting with the wrong team.

Listen, here is how Paul identifies the people he’s sitting with – his fellow Christians – **(2 Corinthians 4:8-9)** “*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*” What is he saying? We’re like that tree that is subject to seasons. Harvest is followed by winter. But we have *roots*.

It’s not pretending that Spring is here in the middle of a January blizzard, no. Listen, if my career unexpectedly goes into the toilet because everyone is suddenly too afraid to leave the house and buy my product – yeah, that’s rotten. I’m not going to pretend it’s not. If I’m standing at the altar and the person I’m supposed to marry doesn’t even show up, am I supposed to be happy about that? No. Why? I *should* feel downcast, because these are desires God gave me: to be happily married, to be vocationally fulfilled. So yeah, I’m sad...but I’m not crushed. Yeah, I’m mad...but I don’t despair of life.

Paul says there is a difference between trusting in your spouse and making your spouse your trust. Right? There is a difference between owning something and having it own you - sitting in it, putting all of your weight on it. And listen, just because you’re a Christian, doesn’t mean you automatically get that mindset. You have to choose where your allegiance belongs. Choose where you’re going to sit.

If there is anybody here who says, “I’ve been a Christian for a long time, and I know I’m not a fundamentally and consistently happy person,” then you have to ask yourself this question: Who really calls the shots in your life? What owns you? What do you *belong* to? What are the fundamental *allegiances* of your life - the things you *listen* to, the things you *walk* in, the things you *sit* in?

You have to start with the negative. You can't be happy unless you see, "Blessed is the one who does *not*...I have to turn away from things that have me by the heart, that have control of my mind. I have to turn away from things I belong to." And even if you're a Christian by saying, "Well, I believe all these things," you can still be operating on the old ways. And if you are not fundamentally happy, the profound analysis of this point is you are still sitting in some other seat than at God's table.

The Christian finds the nuance between shallow brainwashing and cynical despair. Look at Jesus Christ. He had great peace, great joy, and the perfect relationship with the Father, yet he was always weeping. There you have it. "...a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief..." yet never in despair. And if you are in despair - if life isn't worth living - it means you're sitting in some other seat.

That's the negative, but then there is the positive. **V.2**, "*Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.* Now, the trouble with these words, "the law of the Lord", is many people think, "Oh, well that means he's looking at the part of the Bible where the rules are." No. The words, "law of the Lord", are not talking about the part of the Bible where you find the rules; it's talking about the *whole message* of the Bible as your rule of life. This is not a man who says, "Oh, yes. The laws

of God. Honesty is the best policy, and I want to get on in life so I'm going to be honest."

That's not what he is saying. His *delight* is in the law of the Lord. He can't stop thinking about it. Day and night, all the time. What is he looking at? He's looking at the essential message of the Bible. What is *the* essential message of the Bible? That the great, powerful God sent His Son to die for you, so that great God can become your Father.

We just finished six weeks on the parable of the prodigal son – it's all about this. When the son has left the father and his life begins to fall apart, he comes back and he doesn't ask for happiness. Do you remember? In Luke 15, the young rebel comes back and says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and against you. Just make me a servant. I don't deserve comfort. I don't deserve happiness. I owe you." Then what happens?

The minute he comes to the father and says, "You don't have to be my father anymore; just be my king," the king turns into a father, and he says, "Get out the robe. Put a ring on him. Put my robe on him. Kill the fatted calf. We're going to have a party. My *son* has returned!" And that message, that in Jesus Christ this great King becomes your Father, is what you have to delight in.

And if you look carefully right after it says, “But their delight is in the law of the Lord ...”, then it talks about being a tree that puts down its roots into the river, what is the river? What is the source of the water down deep? It’s the law of the Lord. He’s delighting in it day and night. That’s how they keep their leaves green even in the heat. Do you know how to do that? Christian friends, do *you* know how to do that?

You know a flute is a beautiful instrument, but it might as well be a metal pipe if you don’t know how to play it. Do you know how to *play* the gospel? Do you know how to rehearse its beauties? Do you know how to talk to yourself about Luke 15, about the Prodigal God? Do you know how to think about and rehearse the beauties of it until it makes your heart sing? Do you delight in it day and night? If you do, you’ll be like Jesus, often crying.

I tell you the gospel makes you a **sadder** person and a **happier** person at the same time. You get more sensitive. You know, one of the ways non-Christians have to deal with life, because they don’t have this great consolation, is they deny how hard life is. Just never talk about death. It’s like if you don’t have the money to fix your car, you just ignore that new knock coming from the engine. “Everything is fine. Everything is clean. It will be all right. That could never happen. I’m sure it could never happen.”

Are you kidding? Don’t you see? When you become a Christian, you get this consolation, and it allows you to be honest and no longer repress how hard life is. You *feel* the pain of the world more than you did before, but you have a joy and a consolation. “This world is a mess. It’s so broken by sin. And so was I, but my sins have been forgiven and one day this world will be healed as well and I’m going to go live with God forever in a new heaven and a new earth.” You’re happier *and* sadder at the same time. The happiness overwhelms the sadness. *That’s* what it means to be a Christian, and it comes by learning to play the gospel: listening to it, singing it to yourself, meditating on it day and night.

That’s the only way you put your roots down and deal with the heat. Are you doing that? Can you do that? You can be happy. It’s possible. Don’t look to circumstances. Don’t seek it directly. Don’t make it your life’s goal. Instead, look at what you really, really are living for and accept and admit your need for the great gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and learn to delight in that and to play it and to listen to it day and night.

And it won't keep the storms away. And it won't ensure it's never winter. And it won't prevent droughts from ever taking place. It won't keep you from a global pandemic! But it *will* turn you into a mighty tree with deep roots. Roots that stretch down into the ancient sources of power that can never be taken away. And that kind of tree can find peace and joy and blessing. Happy little tree! You...need...this. Come and get it.

Let's pray....