

## MISERABLE IS JOYFUL

### Acts 16

#### Kenny Chesney - Rich and Miserable (Lyric Video) ... 3:31

*We're too young until we're too old  
We're all lost on the yellow brick road  
We climb the ladder but the ladder just grows  
We're born, we work, we die, it's spiritual  
Enough is never enough  
American dream never wakes up  
Too much is never too much  
We won't be happy 'til we're rich and miserable*

We don't have to spend much time watching television or be on the media sights to determine what the world believes will bring joy and happiness ... right?

- You want real joy in your life ... drive a Mercedes Benz
- You want real joy in your life ... build a house in the Hamptons
- You want real joy in your life ... drink Budweiser
- You want real joy in your life ... get you an arm trophy
- You want real joy in your life ... get the best job in town

You know what the irony of the world's view of happiness or joy is ... it is only temporary! And ... it only makes one more miserable and unfulfilled!

An ancient King of Israel ... King Solomon tells us that very same thing in a book that he wrote ... **ECCLESIASTES**.

Matt Chandler once said about Solomon ... "Get this in your head, because you've got to get this. This man is the king of a very prosperous, wealthy, powerful nation. He has more wealth, power and fame than you will ever, ever, ever have. He is more educated. So, this is not some guy off the street. He is beyond us in education, wealth and power."

If there ever was one that experienced what the world sees as happiness and joy ... and finds that it is a dead-end road ... it is Solomon. He had everything this world could offer. And he found that it only brought misery.

Listen to how Solomon describes that in ... **ECCLESIASTES 2:10-11 ...** <sup>10</sup> | **denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil.** <sup>11</sup> **Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.**

The truth is ... everyone's lives who have tried to find joy as seen through the eyes of the world ... have ended up miserable. The world has it all wrong. They have missed the mark.

In his book titled **Papa Hemingway** ... A.E. Hotcher wrote ...

“The famous writer had won both the Nobel and the Pulitzer Prizes; he had a home in Idaho’s Sawtooth Mountains; an apartment in New York; a specially rigged yacht to fish the Gulf Stream; apartments available at the Ritz in Paris and at the Gritti in Venice; a sturdy marriage; and friends everywhere. Yet this literary genius put a shotgun to his head and killed himself.” Holy Contradictions ... pp.80-81

Listen ... **if you want to live the unhindered life** ... you will not find it in what the world has to offer! Their view of joy and happiness is skewed. It does not bring joy ... it brings misery.

Fortunately for us who are followers of Christ ... there is an alternative! God takes this world view of joy that leads to misery and flips it on its head. And what we can then have is joy even in the midst of misery!

Let me share a story from the Bible with you. You can find it in **ACTS 16**.

This true story is about two men ... Paul and Silas. They would go to the House of Prayer each day to spend time praying to God. Several times they were met by a young slave girl who had a demon that gave her the ability to predict the future. Each time they met her she would stir up a commotion by yelling ... **“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.”** Paul finally got his fill of it so he cast the demon out in the name of Jesus Christ.

So far so good ... right? Not really! The owners of the slave girl were making some big money off of her ability of fortune-telling. Paul cut off their funds. The owners grabbed Paul and Silas and drug them before the judges and trumped up some charges against them.

So, we have two foreigners before the court ... being charged of something they really did not do ... and no way out! Sounds pretty miserable ... right? It is about to get worse.

Listen to what it says in **ACTS 16:22-24** ... <sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

**So we have Paul and Silas in a pretty miserable situation ... but listen to how they react ...** **VERSE 25** ... <sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

They saw life from God's point of view ... not the world's! Even in the midst of misery they found joy! They knew that God had not forgotten them. They knew that God would take care of them. They had joy that was founded in hope!

God has a way of bringing joy into our lives no matter what the situation is! BUT ... for us to have that joy ... we have to live life from God's point of view!

Listen to what Jesus says in his famous sermon on the Mount ... **MATTHEW 5:11** ... <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad,

How God? How can we rejoice even in the midst of miserable situations? Jesus answers that question in that same famous sermon ... By focusing on the reward of being a Christ follower.

**Let me share with you three actions we must take if we want to find joy even in the midst of misery.**

**1 ... Focus on forgiveness not guilt**

Two Sunday nights ago in our Bible Study we were studying **ROMANS 5**. I want to share with you what **VERSES 8-10** says ... <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

If we spend our lives thinking about the things we are guilty of ... it would be a life of misery! The fact is that everyone of us have a lot in our lives to feel guilty about. BUT ... here is the good news ... here is how God flipped the world's view on its head ... right in the midst of that guilt ... he erased the foundation of that guilt and replaced it with forgiveness! Through his blood the sins are removed.

Did you notice what we are saved from ... God's wrath! God's wrath is a scary thing:

- In his wrath, he flooded the world and killed off every human being except for Noah's family
- In his wrath, he split the earth opened and swallowed up Korah and all that were associated with him
- In his wrath, God rained fire and Sulphur down from heaven and consumed the people in Sodom and Gomorrah for their homosexual sins
- And on that final Judgment Day, he will consume all the earth with fire and cast the wicked into eternal Hell.

You want to have joy in the midst of misery ... focus on the fact that as a Christ follower you are saved from that!

Joseph Carlson wrote a grand old chorus that many of you might remember ... here are the lyrics ...

If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy;  
Let Jesus come into your heart;  
If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy;  
Let Jesus come into your heart.  
Your sins He'll wash away,  
Your night He'll turn to day,  
Your life He'll make it over anew;

**2 ... Focus on our future not our present**

**1 PETER 1:3-9** ... <sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> **and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.** This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The world focuses on the present “live it up today because tomorrow we die.” BUT ... the Christ follower focuses on the future ... his or her eternal destiny! **When you know that the place where you are going is so grand ... you are willing to endure the trip no matter how difficult it might be!**

### **3 ... Focus on God's provision not abandonment**

Let me go back to our Paul and Silas story once more. When we left that story, they were in a pretty miserable situation and yet they were singing and praising God. But what happens after that is amazing! **ACTS 16:26** ... <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. Talk about God's provision! But there is something else that is even more amazing. Through the provision of God ... the jailer and his family came to know Christ as their Lord and Savior and were added to the family of God.

God's provision for you might not be as dramatic as this ... but let me tell you something that you can count on ... God does provide and brings you joy ... especially in the midst of misery

Listen to some of the provisions God offers us when things are not going so well ...

A love that can never be fathomed;

A life that can never die;  
A righteousness that can never be tarnished;  
A peace that can never be understood;  
A rest that can never be disturbed;  
A joy that can never be diminished;  
A hope that can never be disappointed;  
A glory that can never be clouded;  
A light that can never be darkened;  
A happiness that can never be interrupted;  
A strength that can never be enfeebled;  
A purity that can never be defiled;  
A beauty that can never be marred;  
A wisdom that can never be baffled;  
Resources that can never be exhausted.

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## CONCLUSION ...

From the world's point of view ... we have ...

*Enough is never enough*

*American dream never wakes up*

*Too much is never too much*

*We won't be happy 'til we're rich and miserable*

But God takes that point of view and flips it on its head ... and tells us that even in the midst of misery ... we can have joy!

Life seem miserable to you? Is it not offering enough to keep you happy? Maybe it is because you are looking at life from the wrong point of view. Maybe you need to start looking at life from God's point of view! And if you do ... you will find joy even in the midst of misery!