

Pastor Bill Sass – Sermon for Sunday, February 7, 2021

Mark 1:29-39

### **“Priorities”**

What would it take to make you happy? Wealth? Fame? Popularity? More times than not, the teachings of Jesus run counter to messages the world gives us about happiness. But Jesus’ teachings were consistent with His life. From the beginning of His ministry, crowds surrounded him everywhere He went. His disciples thought it was great. They couldn’t understand why Jesus didn’t share their excitement. According to worldly standards, Jesus was a smashing success, an overnight sensation, a hit. His picture was on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, as they say. The disciples were trapped into thinking that more was better. They thought this was what Jesus wanted. There were times they didn’t understand Jesus at all. If wealth and fame and acceptance don’t bring happiness, where are they to be found?

HAPPINESS BEGINS WITH A TOUCH. Jesus was visiting in the home of Simon Peter. Simon’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. Without anyone saying a word about her illness, Jesus went over to her, touched her and lifted her up. Immediately, she was healed. Notice that Jesus never said a word. He just touched her. We are not told how long she was sick in bed, or her condition. All we are told is that Jesus touched her, and made her well. It is a miracle. Notice what happened next. Immediately, she got up and began serving Jesus and His disciples. Having been sick in bed, she must have been weak, but when Jesus touched her, she felt strength she had never felt before. She got up out of bed, and began serving Him. This was her way of saying thanks. But it began with the Master’s touch.

This is a point that must be made. Happiness is not simply an option we exercise. People who buy self-help books on how to be happy are going to be disappointed. Happiness begins with a touch—a touch of the Master’s hand.

W.E. Sangster was asked if he would find time to cheer up a young man recuperating from a nervous breakdown. Sangster promised to do his best. He sought the young man out, and began to help him, but it was hard work. “This is

a gray world.” The young man said, “I see no purpose in it. It is dull, meaningless, and evil. Its pleasures soon pass. Its pains endure. I seriously ask myself the question: ‘Is life worth living?’”

Sangster saw him once or twice a week for nearly two months. Every conversation was the same—nothing seemed to improve. Then, something happened to that young man. He fell in love. Head over heels in love! On the day his engagement was announced, he came to see Sangster, and began conversation with words something like this: “This is a lovely world. Come out into the garden, and listen to that little bird singing, fit to burst its heart. Isn’t it a glorious morning? How good it is, to be alive!”

The young man did not will himself to that change of attitude. It was not a choice he made. Something happened to him within. He fell in love.

So it is, when we experience Christ’s presence in our lives. The world seems to change. But it isn’t the world at all. We are changed by a touch.

HAPPINESS ALSO COMES WHEN WE DISCOVER THE POWER OF PRAYER. An unwritten motto of our culture is that the busier we are, the happier we are. So, we strive to be busy. It’s a mistake. Consider Jesus’ approach.

By night fall, word had spread throughout the town that Jesus was there and He had power to heal people. By dusk, Mark says the whole city was at Simon’s house looking for Jesus. They brought their sick, “with various diseases,” hoping He would be able to heal them. The disciples had never seen such a crowd. With all those people, Jesus must have been exhausted. It was probably late when they all left. Yet early the next morning, before anyone in the house woke up, Jesus left in search of a lonely place, a place where the crowds would be unable to find Him, so He could be alone to pray. Jesus, who had given so much of Himself to others, needed some time alone with the Father. He had given so much and needed some time to receive. That’s also true of us. Some people are so superficial when it comes to their understanding of prayer. “Hey, Father,” said a man talking to a priest. “You got it all wrong about this God stuff. He doesn’t exist. I oughta know.”

“Why’s that, my son?” asked the priest.

“Well,” the man said, “when I was ice-fishing in the Arctic, far from the nearest village, a blizzard blew up with wind and blinding snow. I was a goner. So, I got down on my knees, and prayed real hard, begging God for help.”

“And did He help you?” asked the priest.

“Heck no,” said the man. “God didn’t lift a finger. Some Eskimo appeared out of nowhere, and showed me the way.”

Prayer is a potent force in the life of the believer. It is so potent that some followers of Christ have devoted their lives to nothing else.

FINALLY, HAPPINESS IS GETTING OUT PRIORITIES IN ORDER. We need to take inventory of our lives to determine what’s important, and what is not. Certainly, Jesus did.

That next morning, when Simon and the other disciples awoke, they discovered Jesus was nowhere to be found. Perhaps they panicked a bit. They actively searched until they chased Him down. They interrupted His prayer time.

“Everyone is searching for you,” Simon tells him. To this Jesus answers, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do.” Jesus would not be side-tracked by adulation of the crowds. He knew where He was headed. Nothing else mattered.

Gorman Williams spent most of his life as a missionary to India. In 1945 he purchased tickets for a long-awaited vacation back to the United states. He counted down the months and days until he would be home. A few days before he was to leave, he heard about some Jews who had escaped the wrath of the Nazis. They had traveled by boat to India seeking refuge. Since it was a time of global war, the Indian government denied their request to immigrate. They were granted permission to stay for a short time in the lofts of buildings near the dock. Their living conditions were wretched. But it was better than being sent to the concentration camp in Germany.

It was Christmas Eve when Gorman Williams heard about the plight of these Jews. Immediately, he went to the dock, entered the first building and called out, “Merry Christmas! What would you like for Christmas?” The response was slow. “We’re Jewish,” someone called out. “I know,” Williams said, “but what would

you like for Christmas?" The weary Jews, fearful for their very lives, replied, "We would like some German pastries."

At that point, Gorman Williams sold his ticket to the United State, and purchased more German pastries than anyone had ever seen. He brought lots and lots of them and carried them in large baskets.

Later, he told this story to a group of students. One brash, judgmental young man reprimanded him. "You shouldn't have done that," he said, "they were not even Christians." "No, they weren't," the wise missionary quietly replied, but I am." Gorman Williams had his priorities in order.

What would it take to make you happy? Every study I have seen on the subject indicates that people actively engaged in serving God are far happier than the general population. That does not surprise me. Happiness is the touch of the Master's hand. Happiness is discovering the power of prayer. Happiness is having your priorities in order.

AMEN!!

"S.D.G."