

## JESUS WANTS US TO ENJOY TRUE HAPPINESS!

Luke 15:11-32

Dear Christians one of the all rejoice. Recognize those words? They come from Hymn 377.

That makes a good springboard for our sermon today. We are reviewing the well-known parable of the Lost Son. Really, that the parable speaks about two sons. They both need to be justified, that is, made right and righteous in the eyes of their father. Without being properly justified, there can be no happiness. Both sons try different approaches to seek happiness. Both failed. Jesus does not want us to fail.

### “JESUS WANTS US TO ENJOY TRUE HAPPINESS!”

- 1 It cannot come from things
- 2 It cannot come from within
- 3 It only comes from the Father

#### 1

Happiness. We all want it. We will try many different things to get it. Most often people will take the approach of the younger son. “If I have enough things I want, then I will be happy.”

**Father, give me my share of the estate.** “I want to go off and enjoy life while I’m still young enough to enjoy it.” Oh how often this attitude has been played out among us. The younger son thought that life revolved around all the fun things people can do with a little money in hand. He was what we call a party animal.

He put as much distance between himself and his family as he could to make sure his father and brother could not control or influence him away from his determination to party hearty.

This sad scene is played out in generation after generation. There are always some who turned their backs both upon family and church and head out on their own. The only goal is to have fun. No thought to future consequences. There is no willingness to understand the harm they are doing to the health of body and soul. No concern that they are opening themselves up to possible chronic and even fatal diseases was such a foolish lifestyle. The natural desire to start your own life is often combined with the love for fun that the devil knows all too well how to exploit on us. This foolishness can come upon us at any age.

It is an illusion. Oh, it may last a while. It did for this young man as long as he had some money left. But he wasted it. He did nothing to earn more. And after it was gone, the economy took a turn for the worse. Famine hit where he was living. He had no money to buy food. His former friends ran off looking for someone else to sponge off. They dropped him faster than yesterday’s news. He had a reality check.

Finally he began to realize that he was fooling himself. He had been living in empty, unproductive life with nothing to show for it. Even the servants back home were better off than he was. Their lives may not have been exciting, but they certainly were happy. They knew they would not run short of what they needed.

Our Lord Jesus lived this perfectly in our place. He understood the purpose of life is to glorify the Father. Everything Jesus did had that goal in mind. **John 4:34 My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.**

Jesus had happiness in service to his heavenly Father and those around him. Trying to be happy by owning and using things is an empty way of life.

#### 2

That empty way of life comes also from centering on yourself as the answer. The older brother was just as wrongheaded as the younger one. The older brother looked at service work, but for all the wrong reasons. He was not doing what he did to please his father. He did it to pad his resume. **Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.**

He had the Cat-In-The-Hat syndrome. “Look at me! Look at me! Look at me now!” The older brother ended up with a sour disposition. He thought he was underappreciated. He had look within and approved of himself. He took the Pharisee approach to life. “I’m better than that person. Look what I do.”

Making yourself and your behavior as a yardstick for measuring happiness doesn’t work either. As soon as you think you are not properly recognized for your work, you act upset and offended.

The apostle Paul admitted that he had tried it. He out-Phariseed many Pharisees. It brought him no joy. He was only an angry young man bent on hurting others. He did not understand that God’s service calls for showing love, understanding and compassion.

The older brother's way of seeking happiness is much more dangerous. It is easy to see when things let you down. But no one wants to admit that he let himself down. The blame is shifted to other people. They don't appreciate what you do. They don't say just how great you are. Life sours for you. There is no joy and happiness in what you do, because everything is being done for selfish reasons. It is still so common today.

Some may give large gifts, and then get their nose out of joint because, "I wasn't properly recognized." Why did they give those gifts? To honor God? To help others? Or to make a name for themselves? The first two are Christian reasons. They will bring satisfaction. The third is the wrong reason. It leads to bitterness. Not everyone is going to notice you the way you think you should be noticed. Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:3-4: **But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.** Concentrate on serving, not being noticed. This again is what our Savior did perfectly in our place. True happiness cannot come from ourselves. It comes from serving our Maker.

### 3

How can we properly serve our maker? By nature we are greedy like the younger son, or improperly proud of ourselves like the older son. How do we get past those inborn sinful attitudes?

Think about Old Testament Israel. The people were mostly farmers. When the crops came in, that was when they presented their offerings to the Lord in the form of a percentage of the crops. How did the Lord want them to view this? He told them to celebrate with the festival as they brought their offerings. It was to be a happy time, rejoicing that the Lord had provided for them with earthly blessings to care for their need.

The Lord does not want a warped Three Musketeers approach, "All for me and me for all," of the Lost Son. The Lord does not want the Cat-in-the-Hat tooting your own horn of the sourpuss older son. He wants repentant souls rejoicing in his mercy. Penitent people, happy and willing to be a real part of the family instead of a selfish brat or a stuffed shirt snob.

As we consider how to express our love for the Lord with our annual commitments, may the joy of our forgiveness in Christ keep us from falling into the sinful and misery producing attitudes that infected these two sons.

By God's grace may we end up recognizing such sins and joining the younger son in returning to the Lord with repentance. **When he came to his senses, he said, ... I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.**

We also want to be caught up in the best kind of celebration of all – knowing we also are forgiven and are a real part of the heavenly family through the blood of Christ our Lord. **"Quick! Put the best robe and bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is followed."** Amen