

16 Av, 5775 (1/8/15) **What Would It Take to Make You Happy?** J. M. Terrett

VaEtchanan (and I pleaded) Shabbat Nachamu Time to Get it Right

Torah: Deut. 3:23-7:11

(1) **4:2:** *You shall add nothing to that which I prescribe to you and you shall take away nothing from it; but you shall observe the commandments of YHVH, your G-d, as I gave them to you.* The Torah is not a do it yourself, some assembly required endeavour. It requires nothing more, nor does it require that we lessen its impact. The first generation died in the wilderness because of partial obedience. Now on the plains of Moab, it was time to get it right.

(2) **4:13:** *He declared to you His covenant which he ordained that you should observe, which is the ten commandments; and He wrote them upon two tablets of stone.* The heart and the core of the Torah is the Ten Commandments (ten words). All and every subsequent commandment is but an application of one or more of the ten. G-d has got nothing else nor nothing less to say. They are the heart and the core of true authentic obedience, anything less means we are not getting it right.

(3) **5:15:** *You shall remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and that YHVH your G-d brought you out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm: this is why YHVH, your G-d, ordains that you keep the day of rest.* The reason for remembering the fourth commandment in Exodus was because of creation; here it is because of the exodus from Egypt. The Creator has intervened and delivered His people and the right way to celebrate this deliverance is through Sabbath rest.

(4) **6:25:** *And we shall have righteousness as our portion if we carefully put into practice all these commandments before YHVH our G-d as He has ordained us to.* The inheritance of Israel over and above the land, was righteousness and this inheritance is our calling as well. It is not just a righteousness based on doing what we personally feel is right, it is a righteousness based on obeying the commandments, and when we have this kind of obedience we are finally getting it right.

Haftarah: Is. 40:1-26

(5) **40:8:** *The grass withers and its flower falls, but the Word of the our G-d will stand forever.* Just as Israel was going into captivity, she is reminded of the eternal truths she is called to embrace and to share. Our situation may change radically, but His Word never changes and it is always able to change us radically. When we cling to it, we are finally getting it right.

(6) **40:26:** *Lift up your eyes and see! Who has created these things? Who has caused their hosts to walk in order? He calls them all by their name, by His great power and His powerful strength, and there is not one of them which is flawed.* With all the modern paganism of evolution, people falsely worship the big bang out of which our universe was supposed to have come and the primeval slime out of which our first ancestors are supposed to have crawled. Do not fall for any deficient, pagan view of either the creator or His creation - especially in our darkening foolish world; it is time to get it right.

Brit Chadashah: Matt. 23:31-39

(7) **23:37: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to you, how many times have I wanted to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you have not wanted it.** G-d will always love His people and will also love all people and He still wants to gather them under His wings - The Torah and the Messiah remain those wings and faith and obedience remain the means by which we take refuge under them. He is not a cruel, judgmental G-d waiting to smack everyone with a big stick or stomp on them as so many ants, He waits to redeem and heal and comfort all of us, but only when we take refuge under His wings. On the plains of Moab, it was time to get it right and on the plains of Edmonton it is also time to get it right.

(Angelo p. 175) **Ps. 90** Jewish Hero: Sarah

Sermon: What would it Take to make You Happy?

Passage: I Tim. 6:6-10: **Godliness with contentment is truly a source of great gain, for we have brought nothing with us into this world and it is evident that we shall take nothing with us when we leave. If, therefore, we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who wish to grow rich, fall into temptation, into a snare and into many senseless and pernicious desires which plunge men into ruin. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil and some, being possessed by it, have wandered far from the faith and have thrown themselves into many torments.**

We live in a global society which is focusing more and more upon wealth, pleasure and leisure, but with all of our choice destinations and time and labour saving gadgets, we still can't get no satisfaction. Even our burgeoning health care system is focused more on symptom relief than it is on combating disease and actually dealing with the causes of illness.

Globally, the economies of the world are producing more international and personal wealth than at any other time in human history and while poverty, sickness and hunger are still problems for many regions of the world, more effort is being made to increase wealth and satisfy pleasure than is being made to alleviate suffering across our planet.

We estimate our worth economically and measure it by GDP or GNP and most of the refugees who are flooding into North America and Europe are economic refugees, who want a better life. This is also the reason why the first settlers came to this continent and this is not a bad goal or even one which is born from actual materialism as much as it is a flight from poverty and in many cases a flight from violence and persecution. It is not wrong to want to move somewhere where you can raise your family in safety as you earn a good living, but is this enough of a life goal to bring about lasting happiness or satisfaction (or self-actualization)? Life outside of a personal faith in the Messiah is futile and effectively pointless.

Some economic pessimists claim that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, but the real problem in our society today is that the richer most people get economically, the poorer they become spiritually and the less satisfaction they derive from all their wealth and hard work. This gospel of prosperity has a firm hold among too many believers who actually loudly proclaim that godliness is a source of economic gain (name it and claim it) and they measure their spiritual worth in how many material goods they possess and they always want more.

This morning I want to discuss this problem with you and want to do so as follows. First, I

want to define authentic godliness as a source of true and authentic gain. Then I want to explore the spiritual (personal, cultural) damage which materialism causes as it ravages the lives of unsuspecting believers. I want to conclude with a discussion of the role which wealth should play in the life of a spiritually contented, godly believer.

Authentic godliness first understands that divine ownership extends to all the materials goods of this planet - He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and even our very breath is on loan from Him. This frees us from the false understanding that we have final ownership over anything in this life and that to seek to own or to finally procure anything in this world is foolish, because we are merely given temporary stewardship over anything which comes into our possession. Authentic spirituality sees that ownership is merely stewardship and seeks to be faithful in this stewardship, because the earth is the L-rd's and the fullness thereof. The only true riches in this life are spiritual, not carnal or material.

Authentic spirituality is not anti-material, it is just anti-materialistic and it sees the pursuit of godliness and contentment as its main goal. This does not mean that authentically spiritual people do not have goals or that they do not strive to better themselves and earn a decent living, it just means that we distinguish between a primary objective (godliness and contentment) and a secondary objective (the things of this world).

Knowing G-d personally and walking according to the dictates of the Scriptures needs to remain our primary focus, whether we dwell in the slums of the third world, or in the jungles of the Amazon – or in the wilds of Alberta. You see, it is not even a question of determining how much we should own as much as it is a question of how we view the ownership of all that we have. Should we have one car or two? Should we own a fur coat and plan a vacation in the Caribbean? There is only one absolute guiding feature or discipline in how we deal with our possessions and our income be they ever so small or ever so big and that is the tithe.

It is a way of making our possessions kosher – a way of circumcising them and of practically dedicating them to the L-rd – because ten percent of a little is equal to ten percent of a lot. Authentic spirituality holds onto the things of this world very lightly and can say with Job – the L-rd gives and the L-rd takes away – blessed be the name of the L-rd today.

The Scriptures say that just as hell and destruction are never full, so the eyes of man are never satisfied, unless they have acquired godliness with contentment. Authentic godliness focuses everything we have and everything we do towards the L-rd. It measures our true worth in the spiritual gold, silver and precious jewels we are using to build our spiritual house upon the foundation of His word and avoids polluting it with any carnal hay, wood or stubble. Authentic godliness makes spirituality the singular main focus of our lives and avoids being caught up the rat race of always wanting more and more materially.

Wealth and power have always been great temptations for believers, both Jewish and Gentile and greed and materialism have ravaged the lives of those who have succumbed to them. In the early part of the last century, most ministerial outreaches functioned on a minimal budget and did not actively acquire extensive funds or properties. With the advent of first the radio and then television (and now the internet), too many ministries have amassed fortunes and massive properties. Mega churches measure their worth in the billions and fund raising seems to be their major focus, rather than ministry or outreach. This is a snare.

Part of the blame needs to fall on believers who give indiscriminately, while they neglect their local congregations, but another part of the blame is the materialism which has made too many inroads into the Gospel and has turned many outreaches into greedy money making machines with their hands out instead of raised. Where are your hands?

When John warned us about idolatry and Mathew warned us about mammon, we need to do all that we can not to be chocked by the cares, the pleasures and the riches of this life. Believers can become good Christian entrepreneurs and making a profit is not the enemy, but living for profit can become the enemy as we neglect our inner life, our families and our community. We are to live for Him according to His Word, nothing less is good enough.

Finally, wealth can be a means of service to the L-rd, because the Scriptures say that the wealthy need to be rich in good deeds. There is a strand of Christian thinking which identifies poverty as the only true lifestyle for authentic believers to adopt and this is as false as those who identify wealth as the sign of a victorious believer. A strong, victorious believer holds lightly to those things over which we have been given temporary stewardship and uses them to express a faith in the L-rd under whose true ownership all things fall.

An authentic believer knows how to be content both in extreme poverty and great wealth and spends their life energy and wealth in the pursuit of godliness, full of generosity and humility, putting the L-rd first, whether their life is to be lived in the lap of luxury with lots of disposable income or very simply with just enough to live on. For believers, it is not how much we have or do not have, but how well we serve the L-rd with what we have and do not have.

What will it take to make you happy? There is only one way to be truly happy, both in the long run and in the short run and that is to have a firm grip on godliness and contentment, whether we have a massive financial portfolio or not. Are you contented paying your tithe? The love of money is the enemy, not money as is, but the desire to get rich as a primary life goal. I have known people who have gotten rich and have found great happiness and contentment in the process; I have also known others whose lives have unravelled because they have been snared by materialism. I have known people who have lived below the poverty line and have become full of bitterness and anger because they wanted more than they could honestly earn.

How much we earn and what we possess should never be the source of our happiness. Serving the L-rd with all that we possess, full of contentment, should be our only source of happiness as we wander through this fleeting life on our way to our final home - how is your packing for this awesome journey doing? Be happy in Him, make Him your portfolio. Amen.