

Everybody wants to be happy. The pursuit of happiness was even enshrined in the Declaration of Independence that helped establish our very nation. Sarah Vowell, an American author and social commentator said, *“While I gave up God a long time ago, I never shook the habit of wanting to believe in something. So I replaced my creed of everlasting life with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”* Our world is filled with people who constantly test the waters of every stream that promises fulfillment to see if happiness really can be found there. And what do they find? Look to some of the world’s richest and most famous people and you’ll encounter some interesting observations. Actor Jim Carrey once said, *“I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.”* I’m not sure what Jim Carrey thinks the answer is, but he’s right that money and popularity and getting or becoming everything you want to get or become do not make one happy.

Yet even we Christians are tempted to strive for happiness through such things in this life. Is that where you’ve been living this past week? This past month? Walking the world’s well-worn paths which promise fulfillment, yet finding yourself somehow still so empty? Maybe this is how you’ve lived your entire life. Far too many of us have spent far too many days investigating paths of pride or pleasure that are entirely unable to fix the frustration we feel. Those paths do not satisfy. You know it’s true because you keep trying new things hoping that you’ll find the one thing that won’t end with you singing the Rolling Stones’ confession, *“I can’t get no satisfaction.”*

This is not a new experience for humanity. Generations come and go, and the pursuit of satisfaction or happiness for humanity continues. The ancient Hebrew author of Ecclesiastes wrote, *“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.’ But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, ‘It is mad,’ and of pleasure, ‘What use is it?’ I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.”*

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun” (Eccl. 2:1-11). In other words, I tried the paths of pleasure, achievement, and knowledge, and I still can't get no satisfaction.

Maybe God just doesn't care about the happiness of humanity. Are we to understand that the life we live in this world is just a bunch of suffering and that the blessing and the joy we long for are entirely reserved for the world to come? No. It is true that full and final blessing comes to man in the world to come and that we are to set our hopes fully on that day. But, praise God - that world has invaded this world through the ministry of God's Spirit. And all those who are born again by the Holy Spirit of God can begin, even now, to taste of the delights of heaven, regardless of how difficult the road we're presently on might be.

God has given us his Word to guide us into the blessed life of the age to come, but it is also a guide for how to live the truly blessed life in the here and now. In fact, in order to enjoy life today, we must be on the path that leads to eternal enjoyment and life. And that one blessed path has been paved for us by Jesus Christ and outlined for us in his Word. The book of Psalms addresses these things in a peculiar manner. It is a manual for the soul's pursuit of happiness or well-being. Now, the happiness God's Word leads us to enjoy is not the frothy and fleeting fancies that the flesh calls "fun," but an enduring delight in God himself and all his many benefits. Mark Futato, a professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, said it this way, *"the purpose of the book of Psalms is to instruct God's people in how to experience the abundant life for which God has created and redeemed them."* God made us to enjoy life to the full in communion with him. And that's the highpoint of our hopes regarding heaven. So if our greatest joy in heaven is going to be found in our relationship with God, then what could earth possibly offer us that would be better than that? Psalm 73:25 puts it this way, speaking of the Lord, *"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you."* Whether now or in eternity, enjoying God by glorifying him or glorifying him by enjoying him is the key that will unlock every ounce of true happiness you have the capacity to enjoy.

Now, as we approach Psalm 103 today, let's keep this in mind. What God has revealed to us in the Psalms are paths that lead to man's true joy, and they all center upon the communion we have with God in Jesus Christ. The various Psalms may all start in different places and address different life circumstances and emotional states, but they are all God-inspired and God-approved pathways for the child of God to travel.

Psalm 103 begins with the inscription, “*Of David,*” which likely means that this Psalm was written by King David. We don’t know anything else about the occasion that inspired David to write this Psalm. In fact, one of the outstanding features of this Psalm is its universality. It is the kind of Psalm that God’s people can sing at anytime because it is a magnification of the beauty of God and his saving benefits. And his character and work does not change, although we and our circumstances do. In the first five verses of Psalm 103, King David takes us down the path to happiness in God. It is a path that God, himself must lead us down, for as we have seen, no man can discover it without God’s help. And in these verses, we learn two things about the path of blessing God leads us down. It is paved by Christ with gospel stones and lined by us with rocks of remembrance.

(I) Christ paves our path to happiness in God with gospel stones. It is the way of believing, proclaiming, and rejoicing in the work that has gone before us and outside of us through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The gospel teaches us that God is holy and just, and that we are not. And it teaches us that at the end of time, we are all going to stand before him and give an account of our lives. And God, the holy and just Judge is going to declare our eternal destiny either on the basis of our own righteousness (or lack thereof) or he will judge us on the basis of someone else’s righteousness. The options are as distinct and final as heaven or hell.

The good news is that God the eternal Son, became man and lived a life of perfect righteousness before God the Father, by the power of God the Holy Spirit. And although he never sinned, our Savior bore all our sins upon himself and died on the cross, satisfying divine justice that was set to punish us for our sins. Christ died in our place so that we never have to suffer God’s wrath for our sins. And when Jesus received the reward for his perfect obedience in life and in death, he did not keep it for himself, but shares it with all those who call upon his name. Three days after he died, he rose from the grave and now offers that same resurrection life to all who would trust in him by the power of the Spirit which he sent. These truths are the stones themselves, set on the road before us to walk upon as God leads us in his happy way.

Do you know that power today? Do you know the love of God for you in Jesus Christ? Do you live with the hope of eternal life? Are you walking in his victory over sin in this present evil age? If not, then come to Jesus Christ. He offers eternal rest to all who put their trust in him. He provides everlasting blessedness for those who abandon all their efforts to discover happiness without the help of his blood. He will wash your sins away and unite you to himself by his Spirit so that you might possess all he is and all he has. Begin to rest the

weight of your body and soul upon the gospel truths proclaimed in the Word of God. They are the only stones that can bear your awful load in this life or the next.

The nuts and bolts of the gospel message are littered throughout these first five verses of Psalm 103. They're all over the Scriptures, of course. David proclaimed his faith in this good news when he sang of God's holy name. It is a holy God that David teaches us to sing to. Not a wishy-washy God who forgives because he doesn't care about righteousness or holiness. No, David affirmed the holiness of God, and yet, in his next breath, he also affirmed the fact of his iniquity. David also knew that his sin came with consequences. His iniquity led to diseases and destined him for the pit, the place of the dead who await final judgment and condemnation.

Now, the wisdom of the world would teach us that if you want to build a path to happiness, you have to pave it yourself with stones that sing your praises every time you step on them. You have to line the path with photoshopped portraits of yourself and all your best accomplishments, designed to remind you of how good you look and how wonderful you are while you're on your merry way. Happiness in the world is incompatible with having a sober assessment of yourself in the light of God's holiness. If you want a path of happiness to include some degree of honesty about your imperfections, well, then, it'll have to be lighted with the dim beams of other people's inferior performances, not God's brilliance. If you want to be happy in the world without insecurity that is, you'll have to surround yourself or fill your mind with the reputations of people who are uglier, meaner, dumber, and more depraved or dysfunctional than you are. The last thing you want to do to be honestly happy is to think about or spend time with those who are better than you. You would never want to be with God, or his perfect, do-gooder Son.

The world is dumfounded by the joy we know in worship when we confess our sins before one another and God himself —when we sing words like these, *“Kind and merciful God, we have sinned in your sight, we have all wandered far from your way...we have broken your laws and in conduct have veered from the norm”* The world knows nothing of the joy we have when we agree with God about our desperate need for forgiveness. Why? Because the world doesn't share our source of confidence and hope before God, a confidence and hope that does not rest upon us, but on Christ alone. When they imagine stepping out into the light and upon the gospel stones of confession and repentance, they doubt the ability of those stones to bear their weight. Those in the world can't understand our joy, because they refuse to believe the gospel. They refuse to believe that God's love for us made a way through the death and resurrection of Christ for him to maintain his perfect holiness and show us mercy at the same time. They refuse to believe that God loves us enough to be willing to do what

seems so undignified, to become man and then die while hanging naked and bloody on a tree. But that's precisely what God has done for us. We know it with great clarity now that Christ has come and the Gospel writers have recorded it all for us in the Scriptures. And that's why we can sing and rejoice while confessing our sins to God and to one another. Christ has set you free from hiding in your shame and regret and from lying to yourself about how bad you really aren't.

David knew these truths and freedoms too, but in a shadowy form, symbolized by the work of the high priest in the tabernacle, where David would have offered animals to be sacrificed in his place for his sins according to God's law. David knew delight in the sanctuary of God, where the altar was covered with blood and where the gore and stench testified to the ugliness and seriousness of his iniquity. David knew that God was the only one with the power to save, that salvation required one's life blood, that God was willing to accept a substitute on the sinner's behalf, and that the point of it all was reconciliation and fellowship with God himself. David had a real and living faith in the gospel. And that's why he was able to sing for joy with words that proclaimed his own desperate need for forgiveness, healing, redemption, mercy, and renewal. And because of this faith that God gave him, he benefitted from the saving benefits that all God's redeemed people enjoy in this life. The path of happiness in God that David leads us down is not just paved by Christ with gospel stones, but is lined by us with rocks of remembrance.

((II)) Psalm 103 teaches us that if we are to bear the blessings birthed along this boulevard, we must line the lane with rocks of remembrance. We must do what David does in this Psalm to enjoy present deliverance from the misery that sin brings upon us in this life. We must bless the Lord and forget not all his benefits. We must take each blessing received from Christ in hand and continually set them before us as we walk this road, so that they fill our field of vision and remind us to praise our God of grace. We are to do this every day in our prayer closets. We are to do this daily with our families. This is what we do every Lord's Day as we gather to worship our God in Spirit and in Truth. Let us together take in hand the benefits of Christ's redeeming work enumerated in verses 2-5 and fill our hearts with praise for what we have in him and not forget all his benefits.

a) What has Christ won for you? In him, the Lord forgives all your iniquity. There is nothing you have done that can't be covered by the blood of Christ. *"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: [in Isaiah 1:18] though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."* Sin stains. It leaves a mark of guilt. But no sin dyes your soul so dark that the blood of Christ can't wash it clean. If you have set the feet of your soul upon the gospel stones of Christ's sacrifice, God

has pardoned you of all your sins and accepts you as righteous in his holy sight - not because of any work you have done, but only because the Spirit of God has imputed the righteousness of Christ to you. Praise God! All your debt is washed away and the fear of condemnation is banished forever. *"The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."* Therefore, there is...no longer any condemnation for you (Rom. 8:1-2). Do not forget the forgiveness of sins you have in Jesus Christ. Set it before you every day. Line the pathways of your heart with reminders of this benefit divine. [...] But it is not alone. All the miserable effects your sin has upon your soul in this life have also been mitigated by God's grace.

b) The Lord heals all your diseases for Christ's sake. What diseases did David have in view? John Calvin taught that *"the medicine spoken of"* in verse three was *"the blotting out of guilt; and...the curing...of the corruptions inherent in our nature..."* The Lord does still heal us of bodily diseases, but the *"your"* of verses 3-5 refer to David's soul. What sicknesses has your sin brought upon your soul? Are you weighed down with guilt? God's Spirit is at work in you to give you lasting peace of conscience since your account with God no longer rests upon you, but upon the firm foundation of Christ's righteousness. Romans 5:1 teaches us that *"...since we have been justified by faith [and not works], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Are you burdened with your love of sin? Are you tangled in a web of deceit? The healing you need is found in Christ. When he delivered you from the covenant of works and into the covenant of grace, he removed the shackles of the law from you, and now, *"...sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace"* (Rom. 6:14). Bless the Lord! Christ knew no rest from the requirements of the law so that all your obedience might flourish and grow even though it isn't perfect. Remember saints, that Jesus obeyed perfectly so that God might delight in your imperfect obedience, offered with a conscience cleansed by Christ! [...] But Christ doesn't just remove the effects of sin in this life from you, he guarantees that death itself will not finally be your master.

c) No, united to Christ, your life has been redeemed from the pit. We don't consider this enough. Think of all the souls destined for hell—all those whose sin is no worse than yours, but who will not enjoy the deliverance promised to you who believe. What fate has Christ delivered you from by the Father's electing grace? Matthew 25:41 teaches us that on the last day, Christ himself *"will say to those [who fail to love him in this life], 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" And remember that, although angels make moral choices, none of them will get a second chance. In 2 Peter 2:4, we read that "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment."* We must offer up heaven-bound praise every day for the

abundance of grace, “*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*” as Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:9. And in Romans 8:11, he fills our hearts with hope for the resurrection, writing, “*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*” Even your body will be delivered from the power of death, and your resurrection will be glorious like Christ’s resurrection, redeemed from the pit.

d) And, by the steadfast love and mercy of the Lord, we who have been baptized into Christ have been crowned and exalted with him, seated with him in heavenly places. In Scripture, a crown is often an image used to depict one’s cause for boasting. Proverbs 12:4 says, “*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.*” Christ takes away your shame and replaces it with honor in the Father’s holy presence. Has your sin tempted you to think you have no cause for boasting anymore? God’s covenant love to you, the mercy that he has vowed to show you into eternity has rescued you. You can boast from morning ‘till night of the greatness of his faithfulness and bask in the riches of his sovereign Word. He will not break his promises. You will never come to shame if you boast in him. Let his love for you in Christ adorn your head like a crown. It is the only way of boasting with humility, for in Christ, we glory in God’s mercy, which reveals our great need. He has exalted us in a way that protects us from exalting ourselves. Bless his holy name! You have the daily privilege of rising up in the mercies of God, which are new every morning, without fear that he will seek to humble you for this boast we make. This is the joy of our worship in Christ before God together in this place. [...] And he will keep us in this place, sustained not by our strength, but by his grace.

e) In this life, the Lord will satisfy you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The eagle is a picture of strength, for it is lifted high upon the winds that it rests upon and is satisfied with the food it is able to catch from such heights. We may struggle in this life and flounder in our faith. But no matter how weak we have become, if we belong to Jesus, God will do good to us always. And if we wait upon the Lord, we will run down this path of blessing and not grow weary, we will walk in his way and not faint as Isaiah 40:31 says. We will know joy in the Holy Spirit and it will be our strength. We will possess an increase of God’s grace, and be enabled to persevere unto the end. Be sure of this, that “*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 1:6). For “*those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified*” as Paul taught us in Romans 8:30. It is as good as done.

Brothers and sisters, what can we say to these things? *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* No one! Walk on these gospel stones every day and line your way with remembrances of these solid rocks, the benefits of redemption. This is the path of happiness in God that all our hearts long to tread. May we follow in this way every day.