

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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Program Number 249
Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
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World Headquarters: The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri

The Sermon: WICKEDNESS NEVER WAS HAPPINESS

Scripture: Book of Mormon, Alma 19:73-75.

Do not suppose, because it has been spoken concerning restoration, that ye shall be restored from sin to happiness. Behold I say unto you, Wickedness never was happiness. And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.

Wickedness never was happiness.

Christianity has often been regarded by those who have never tried it, as a religion of restriction, of repression, of self-denial and austerity. It is quite frequently believed that if you are a good Christian you can't have any fun or joy or pleasure. It is assumed that trying to live "above the world" is unnatural and impossible, and that the true way to be happy is to "let yourself go," exercise no restrictions of repressions, and have a good time "doing what comes naturally."

Before we discuss this concept, it would be well to define what we mean by happiness or pleasure. There are many different kinds, and many different levels of happiness. There are pleasures of the body and of its several senses -- the kind of happiness that results from a good meal and a full stomach, or the satisfaction of curling up in a warm comfortable bed. There are pleasures of the mind, such as reading a good and stimulating book, or solving a challenging problem. There are pleasures of the ear, such as are found in the harmonies of good music. There are pleasures of the spirit, such as the exaltation that accompanies fervent prayer or a moving worship service. There are some pleasures that endure. There are some pleasures which are fleeting, ephemeral, transitory, and useless because they do not endure. There are some pleasures -- for example those to be had from intoxicants, narcotics, and other habit-forming drugs, which tear down and destroy the physical body and the moral fiber of man. Other pleasures build or nourish or strengthen the physical body, enliven the soul, and contribute to the moral and spiritual welfare of man.

May we conclude then, that true pleasure is that kind which does not harm ourselves or anyone else, which does not deprive anyone of that which is necessary, which contributes something permanent and enduring to physical, mental, moral, or spiritual well-being, and which does not serve just one side of our nature at the expense of others.

Wickedness very often gives the illusion of happiness. It brings a low grade of deceitful pleasure that may seem good at the time, but which sooner or later turns to dust and ashes in the mouth. Many a man has spent all his life in gratifying the cravings of appetite, only to discover that long abuse of his stomach has made it necessary to eat nothing but crackers and milk out of consideration for his ulcers. Many a prodigal son has gone into a far country and spent his substance on riotous living, and then discovered that with his money and his friends gone, his time irretrievably wasted, and his health permanently ruined, he was not really happy at all.

It is possible to fool yourself up to a certain point -- to persuade yourself that you are happy when you aren't. No matter what arguments you use, however, the sub-conscious mind, the policeman-conscience within, is not fooled. No matter how gay and frivolous you are outside, and no matter how riotously you seem to be enjoying yourself, the things of which your conscience disapproves will still keep you disturbed, divided against yourself, and unhappy within. The hatreds, the guilts, the angers, fears, and remorse within your soul will break through even the most incessant revelry and merri-

ment, to cause a deep-seated unhappiness, weariness with life, and even physical illness which the doctors are unable to explain or to cure in physical terms alone. Many qualified physicians and psychiatrists today are saying that all the way from forty to ninety per cent of humanity's physical ills are psychosomatic in origin; that is, they originate in the mind, in the soul, in the emotions, rather than from purely physical causes.

What is a "natural" man? In one sense it is a man who simply lets himself go, and caters to his own appetites and lusts. It is a man who in the language of scripture, is "carnal, sensual, and devilish," and a rebel against God. We call this kind of man "natural" because it is natural for fallen men to behave sinfully. But fallen man is not natural. He is not as God made him in the beginning. The truly natural man is one who lives in harmony with Nature -- his own best and highest nature, the nature of the universe in which he lives, and the nature of God in whose image he was originally created. Fallen, sinful man, doing what comes naturally to his fallen, unnatural nature, is always at cross purposes with himself, with God, with his neighbor, and even with his environment; and therefore he is inevitably unhappy, frustrated, and sick in body, mind, and spirit, because he is not truly natural at all.

As first created, man was made to be a citizen of the kingdom of God. The laws of the kingdom were placed within him. They are the laws by which body, mind, and spirit operate. The laws of the kingdom are written deep within the nerves and muscles and fibers of every organ of every human body. They are written in every brain cell. Even in those who try to be wicked, these laws of the kingdom are written. When any man tries to flout the laws of the kingdom, or to live contrary to them, he lives in opposition to himself. He is in conflict with Nature. He is at cross purposes with God. In the very nature of things he cannot be happy in his unnatural actions; and if he continues them long enough, he destroys himself.

If we accept his concept of what is

natural and what is unnatural, Jesus was the most natural man who ever lived. He never was out of harmony with God, or with himself, or with his natural environment. He never needed to apologize; he had no regrets, no remorse, no need of repentance, no need to reconsider and re-adjust his life or his actions to reality, because in all things he was without sin.

Sin is unnatural. It is an attempt to live against the laws of your own being, the laws of your own nature, the laws of the physical and spiritual world in which you live. All these laws are the laws of God -- the laws of God's kingdom. He who attempts to break them only finds himself broken by them. If sin were natural, it would nourish and stimulate life. On the contrary, sin always disrupts and destroys life. It divides man from himself, man from his neighbor, and man from God. It brings mental and physical disease and suffering. Therefore, we repeat, sin is unnatural. Only righteousness is healthy; only righteousness preserves and strengthens all aspects of human life.

Wickedness never was happiness. The man who without repentance goes on giving way to wickedness and sin may fool himself into thinking he is having fun in this life by being carnal, sensual, devilish, rebellious, selfish, unkind, contentious, hateful, intolerant, cruel, ruthless, and depraved. But some day the man who seeks happiness in wickedly ignoring the laws of the kingdom will have to stand before God. There he will have a bright recollection of all his guilt. He will know that the omniscient God knows all that guilt, too. He will be stripped of all hypocrisy, sham, pretense, and alibis as he stands in the pure light that streams from God's throne. He will have no defense. He will see the infinite difference between his own sin and God's holy, righteous, perfection. No matter how happy he thought he was in this life, do you suppose that such a man can be happy in that day, and through eternity? Then, if not before, he will be constrained to confess that wickedness never was happiness, that happiness is found only in obedience to all the laws of the kingdom of God.