

I'm Rich! I'm Saved! I'm Happy!

Miserable Christians...isn't that a misnomer? Yet I see it far too often. Little joy. Little rejoicing. Misery most of the time. Something has gone terribly wrong.

The horrible agony of the cross looms. This ghastly means of execution is within hours, and Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11). Paul and Silas endure a painful beating with rods, "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and **the prisoners were listening to them.**" Do not miss the significance of this verse. Their behavior contributed to a great opportunity to teach and the result of salvation for the Philippian jailer and his family (Acts 16:22-34).

Two important things are missing in the life of the *miserable Christian* – 1) Contentment; 2) Perspective. And the second relates to the first. Misery must issue from dissatisfaction with one's circumstances. The dissatisfaction is the result of an askew perspective which leads to faulty expectations. The dissatisfaction emanates from a self-focus and a worldly-focus. When too much weight or importance is attached to events in this world, our whole disposition is affected. One loses sight of the bigger picture—things in the spirit realm—and focuses too much attention on the physical realm which is "passing away" (1 John 2:17).

If our hope is truly beyond this world, then we can cope when our favorite sports team loses (and mine do way too often for my liking, but what a minor thing this really is in relation to the big picture), we are struggling to make ends meet or even when you suffer injustice and/or mistreatment. Many experience their greatest struggles in the area of joy when they believe someone has done them wrong. It's even worse when this person claims to be a Christian. Spouses disappoint us at times too. Children, parents, other family members could potentially upset us by their words and actions. When those closest to us in this world are the source of emotional injury, a tailspin into misery often ensues. The best of earthly relationships will occasionally disappoint.

We must not depend on external things for our happiness. Temporal setbacks and circumstance sadness must quickly give way to the joy of our hope. Do not the beatitudes teach us this (Matthew 5:3-12)? Believers mourn, but they also are comforted. And who relishes the thought of bodily persecution, insults and false accusations? But the Messiah's kingdom is all about turning sorrow and sadness into gladness and rejoicing (Isaiah 35:10). The kingdom is ours. We have Him. Our reward is great. ...no matter what this world, the devil, His allies or even misbehaving or unthinking believers dish out.

Constant misery is also an indication of inadequate fellowship with God. God provides a solution for our temporal troubles (Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7). In the context of "be anxious for nothing," we have instruction about rejoicing (4:4), contentment (4:11,12) and the source of strength (4:13). Ongoing misery should be an indication of one's need to seek God's face. "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face continually" (Psalm 105:4; see also Psalm 27:7-9).

Since the cause of misery is so often self-focus, set yourself to the task of assisting someone else. Focus on others. Decide to make someone else's day by some kind word or deed. Determine to lift another's

spirit. You will likely find your own lifted in the process. Removing the focus from oneself and placing it on God and others will minimize our hurt and unhappiness. Benevolence toward another is a quick lesson in perspective. Everybody experiences difficulties of some kind and some have many greater difficulties than I do. **The circumstances of many are far worse than my own.** Realizing this truth should contribute to a better perspective.

Without a doubt, it's one of my favorite verses in all of the hymns we sing...verse 3 of "The Lord Has Been Mindful of Me." The title of this article is derived from it. "I'm rich! I'm saved! I am happy! I've health and prosperity! I've friends! I have doors ever open! The Lord has been mindful of me!" Now, that's a verse with a lot of exclamation points! I believe L.O. Sanderson wanted us to give those words extra exuberance and emphasis as we sing them. The whole song should be a daily meditation for a believer who is struggling to experience joy. "He blesses and blesses again...How excellent is His name!"

In the midst of your pain...

When life seems to be handing you its worst...

When discouragement abounds...

When despair grips your soul...

Remember, **the prisoners are listening!**

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