

Devotional Thoughts :: 288 opinions about the way to happiness -watson

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(Thomas Watson, "The Beatitudes" 1660)

In what does happiness consist?

Millions of people mistake both the nature of happiness, and the way there. Some of the learned have noted 288 opinions about the way to happiness—and all have shot wide of the mark!

How do men thirst after the world—as if the pearl of happiness hung upon an earthly crown! "Oh," says one, "if I had but such an estate—then I would be happy! Had I but such a comfort—then I would sit down satisfied!" Well, God give us him that comfort and lets him suck the very juice out of it—but, alas, it falls short of his expectation. It cannot fill the emptiness and longing of his soul!

Happiness does not lie in the acquisition of worldly things. Happiness cannot by any chemistry—be extracted from the world. Christ does not say, 'Happy are the rich,' or 'Happy are the noble.' Yet too many idolize these things. How ready is man to terminate his happiness in external worldly things! If they have but worldly accommodations, they are ready to say with that brutish fool in the gospel, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years, take your ease—eat, drink and be merry!"

But alas! The tree of happiness does not grow in an earthly paradise. Has not God 'cursed the ground' because of sin? Yet many are digging for happiness here—as if they would fetch a blessing out of a curse! A man may as well think to extract oil out of a stone, or fire out of water—as happiness out of earthly things!

King Solomon had more worldly things than any man. His crown was hung full of jewels. He had treasures of gold. He had the flower and quintessence of all delights—sumptuous fare, stately edifices, vineyards, lands, all sorts of music to enchant and ravish the senses with joy. If there were any rarity—it was present in king Solomon's court. Thus did he bask in the perfumed waters of pleasure.

Never did the world cast a more smiling aspect upon any man! Yet when he comes to give his impartial verdict, he tells us that the world has 'vanity' written upon its frontispiece; and all those golden delights he enjoyed, were but a painted felicity—a glorious misery! "Behold! All was vanity!" Happiness is too noble and delicate a plant, to grow in this world's soil. Worldly joys are but sugared lies—pleasant deceits—which have not one grain of true happiness! Nothing on earth can satisfy the soul's desires!

"The world passes away!" (1 John 2:17). Worldly delights are winged. They may be compared to a flock of birds in the garden—which stay a little while—but when you come near to them—they take their flight and are gone! Just so, "riches make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven!" They are like a meteor which blazes—but soon burns out. They are like a castle made of snow—lying under the fiery beams of the sun. Worldly comforts are like tennis balls—which are bandied up and down from one to another. They are like a bouquet of flowers—which withers while you are smelling it. They are like ice—which melts away while it is in your hand.

Those things which do more vex than comfort—cannot make a man truly happy. As riches are compared to wind—to show their vanity; so they are compared to thorns—to show their vexation. Thorns are not more apt to tear our garments—than riches to tear our hearts! They are thorns in the gathering—and they prick with anxious care. They pierce the head with care of getting, so they wound the heart with fear of losing. Happiness is not to be fetched out of the earth! Worldly comforts cannot make you happy. You might live rich—and die cursed! You might treasure up an estate—and God might treasure up wrath!