

Sermon Notes

1/2/11

REFLECTIONS

Happy  
New  
Year!

The Pursuit of Happiness?



# REFLECTIONS

**Bang!** The starter at the track meet fires the pistol that initiates the race. The timers are measuring each runner's progress and will tell the eventual winner and runners-up how fast they have run. Some will record personal bests, others may have slipped backward and others will have maintained their usual times. All have run the race, each with a little different outcome. Some have finished with elation and others with disappointment or even despair. Life often imitates a race and even Paul the Apostle uses the race as a metaphor for his life. ***7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2Timothy 4:7-8 NKJ)*** Paul was looking forward to receiving the crown at the end of his life's race. It seems that we often measure our lives as we would a race.

Each new year brings with it the opportunities and challenges that each of us will face during the 12 months that follow its entrance. With the New Year's celebrations past and the year now underway, the questions begin to emerge, once again, about how we will approach the new year ahead of us. Will I make a number of resolutions that probably won't be realized or even considered after a few weeks? Will we finally take that vacation we've been putting off? Will we start new enterprises? It would seem that each January we go through a self-analysis as we look back over years past and face the new one. When it's all said and done, usually more gets said than done. All the great plans and resolutions get forgotten and we tend to fall back into our comfort zones and often repeat the same things that we promised not to repeat. Will it then actually be a happy new year?

The pursuit of happiness has been one of the founding ideals of our nation and is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. As the document begins it sets the stage for the separation from the British Empire and declares the basis for such a choice which is then enhanced with the values at stake. The statement of belief and values begins thus... ***"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"***.

In our time, the pursuit of happiness has been defined in many ways. Some would say it has to do with material wealth while others would look for it in relationships. Still others would seek happiness by acquiring power over those around them. Each pursuit seems to be focused on the basis of "If only I acquire.....I will be happy!" Most, however, even upon realizing the acquisition of what they thought would create happiness for them, find that it was an illusion. It seems that our "race" may not be a personal best after all.

Solomon pursued wealth, women, and power and yet when he had acquired wealth beyond measure and women from all over the world, he sums up his discovery about man's pursuits, which he declares to be only vanity and futility, when he writes... ***Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. 14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NKJ)*** He had everything that even modern day men still seek and yet he had to admit that it did not make him fulfilled and happy. He had indulged every whim, every desire, every lust, and had acquired power and fame, and still he was left to state clearly...***I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. (Ecclesiastes 1:14 NKJ)***

Have you every wondered what life might be like if suddenly you were wealthy beyond your wildest dreams? Have you imagined what it would be like if you could have anything and everything that your heart desired? Solomon lived that life and still discovered that it was all ***"grasping for the wind."*** Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 5 how we can be blessed (happy) and it is available to the poorest or wealthiest among men in Christ. He describes a life that can only be lived by His Spirit. He speaks of being poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, seeking for truth and righteousness, being merciful, being pure in heart, and being a peacemaker. He does not speak of wealth, power, or material goods. To have a truly happy new year is to ask Jesus to fill us with the Holy Spirit and to then live according to His Word. We will find true happiness when we are spiritually whole in Christ. We can never make enough resolutions to make this happen. Salvation can only be received by God's grace, through faith in the finished work of Christ. All other pursuits and efforts are vain and foolish. The pursuit of happiness begins, and is fulfilled, in Jesus. Happy New Year!

**Pastor Doug**