

The title of this morning's sermon is, What does your key unlock?

A few weeks ago I put the bed cover on the back of my pickup truck. We were going to take an overnight trip with some of our grandchildren and we would need to keep the luggage, covered in the back. After I got it installed on the truck I got to thinking, I probably will need to lock it when we are off doing our stuff during the day. So of course the next thing that popped into my mind was, "I wonder where the key is for the lock on this cover is".

The key wasn't on the keyring with the other truck keys. Now, I don't know whether you have this situation or not, but we always seem to have piles of keys in various places around the house that was a fit to some lock at some time in our history, but who knows what they really do unlock. Well, I began to dig through the various places where I remembered seeing a collection of keys. Didn't seem to have much luck. However in one pile of keys I noticed an unusual looking key and when I dug it out of the pile I looked at it closely and on the side of the long part of the key, it said "Key to Happiness". I thought to myself, Hey this is really cool, I've found the key to happiness.

But you know that put me in an unusual situation. Rather than looking for a key to unlock a lock that I wanted to unlock, I now had a key to unlock something that would be really important to satisfaction in my life, happiness. But, there was a problem. I had no idea where the happiness lock was that the key would fit. Where could I find the lock that the key would fit, so that I could unlock and find happiness in my life. Where should I look?

Have you ever thought about that? If you had the key to happiness, where would you look to find what it would unlock?

Where do people today look for happiness? Where could the lock be that I could unlock with my key to happiness. Wealth, possessions, sensual pleasure, travel, control of other people. I went down to the barn to see if the key would fit anything down there. I found lots of stuff that I had accumulated over the years but most were rusty old stuff (toys) and other stuff covered with dirt dauber nests but nothing that the key would fit. So I decided I couldn't find happiness in those things. I looked around the house to see if there was a hidden room somewhere that the key would unlock and I would find happiness inside that room. Didn't

find anything. Then I thought about my family and friends, could the key to happiness unlock someone's heart.

When I thought about unlocking hearts, I finally realized that real happiness doesn't come from physical things but from things of the heart, spiritual things and decided I better look in the guide for spiritual relationships, God's word, the Bible. Maybe the Bible would contain something that my key to happiness would unlock.

You know if you do a Bible word search, typically you will only find the word happiness used in very few places, depending on the translation you search.

For example, in Isaiah 52:7 (ESV)

[7] How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

You know, I remember our preacher, when we were going to church in Long Beach California, using that verse in a sermon and then making the statement, "according to the Bible, if you want to see beautiful feet just look at your preachers feet." Because the Bible says, How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news

But what is Isaiah really saying here? He is saying that the GOOD News of the Gospel being proclaimed by someone, brings happiness to those who hear it and to those who respond to it with belief and faith.

Lamentations 3:17 (ESV) has some words of comfort as we try to find happiness in the Bible

[17] my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; [18] so I say, My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD." [19] Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! [20] My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. [21] But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: [22] The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; [23] they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. [24] "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

When we separate ourselves from the Lord, peace and happiness leave us and our soul is distressed. But when we remember that His love and mercies never leave us and when we return to Him it brings an incomparable contentment and peace to our spirit and soul.

In the (NIV)New Testament the only reference to happiness comes from the parable of the talents. When the master comes back and finds that his servants have used the talents he gave them wisely, the master makes the statement “Come and Share in your master’s happiness.”

What was the story about the talents teaching? The master gave three of his servants some money “talents” and left for a while. When he came back he asked each what they had done with the gifts. Two had invested them and used what he gave them and multiplied the investment. The third buried his and had not used it for any good. The two that had used and grown the master’s investment were commended and the master says to each, “Come and Share in your master’s happiness.” The one that had not used what the master had given him was told, “Matthew 25:26 (NIV)

[26] “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? [27] Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

[28] ““Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. [29] For everyone who has, will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. [30] And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Even though this parable had to do with money in the physical sense, the deeper spiritual meaning is telling us that God has given each one of us abilities which He expects us to use for His glory. If we use them in His service then he will tell us, “Come and Share in your master’s happiness.” So you see the Bible tells us one of the ways to use our key to happiness is to use the gifts that God has given us for His glory and we will get to share in His happiness. The added benefit is that His happiness is eternal and exceeds anything that our current limited imagination can conceive.

Since there are so few uses of the word happiness in the Bible I got to thinking. Typically our earthly happiness is triggered by earthly things which bring about temporary joy and happiness. The Bible transcends those temporal things and deals in the perfect satisfaction that only comes from knowing and understanding what the Lord plans and has in store for us in the eternal realm. The Bible calls it and, this is from my King James upbringing, "The Peace that passeth all understanding."

In the NIV it reads from Philippians 4: [4] Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! [5] Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. [6] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [7] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Those verses sound to me as if they could unlock some overflowing eternal happiness into our lives by bringing the peace of God into it.

What are some of the words that God uses that could translate into happiness and be the keys that would unlock eternal happiness in our lives. Peace and contentment are two of those strong words that the Bible associates with happiness.

Even Job, whom we typically associate with grief, loss, trials, and severe tribulation in his life said in Job 36:10 (NIV)

[10] He (God) makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. [11] If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment.

Pretty comforting words from a man that had lost everything he owned and whose wife and friends kept telling him to "curse God and die". He knew the key to happiness (contentment) was the exact opposite of what he was being advised to do. The key to happiness for Job was repenting of evil, obeying God and drawing close to God by serving Him.

Paul can be our New Testament example of Christian contentment through the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 11:22 (NIV) Listen to what Paul had to say about his life since he had been preaching and teaching the gospel.

I have been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. [24] Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, [26] I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. [27] I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. [28] Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

[30] If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. [31] The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. [32] In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. [33] But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

What had Paul endured – exposed to death from prison – flogging – beaten with rods – stoned – shipwrecked – the people around him – false brothers – without food – cold, was severe. But Paul took pride in his physical weakness, because it showed to all those around him that his ability and power did not come from him but from God and the Holy Spirit working in and through him.

But in spite of all this Paul, in Philippians 4:10 (NIV) as he thanks the churches for their gifts to him says:

[10] I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. [11] I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. [12] I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every

situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. [13] I can do everything through him who gives me strength. [20] To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul had learned the secret to happiness and contentment. He just simply trusted the Lord no matter what the circumstances. The really neat thing about what Paul is saying is that contentment and trust in God, turns into worship when we realize what an awesome God we serve.

The other night on a TV Show called Country's Family Reunion "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" presentation, group of country music people were singing songs of faith and worshiping the Lord. A young lady named Teea Goans sang a song which nobody in the group had heard before and that she and her MeMaw used to sing. The chorus goes like this, "I know the Lord will Stand by me, "I know the Lord will Stand by me, for when He said, whosoever, that included me."

In her testimony after the song, she made a statement that showed how much she acknowledges that the Lord has blessed her and this is what she said. "The Lord has opened doors for me that I would never have knocked on." What a testimony. It ties right in to what the Bible says in James 4:2 You do not have, because you do not ask God. [3] When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives. Teea was saying that God's blessings to her have been so great, that she was even afraid to ask for something that exceptional.

Sometimes the love of our earthly possessions get in the way of our relationship with God and spoil our peace and contentment. In 1 Timothy 6:6 (NIV) Paul tells Timothy how loving money can get in the way.

Here is what Paul says and it ties right in to what we previously read about Paul's contentment:

[6] But godliness with contentment is great gain. [7] For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. [8] But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. [9] People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

That piece of scripture reminds me of the story about the guy who had it all figured out and how he could take some of the things of this world with him into heaven when he went. He decided that he would hang a bag of money in the attic and he told his wife I'll just grab it as I am on my way up to heaven. The day came when the man passed away and after a couple days his wife decided to go up in the attic and see if the bag of money was gone. As she lifted the door to the attic she could see that the bag was still there. At that point she said to herself, I told him he should have put it in the basement, but he wouldn't listen.

I was listening to Chuck Swindoll a couple weeks ago and his message was on how to be a positive person no matter what comes along. He used the example from the story of Robinson Crusoe who was ship wrecked on an island and all alone. Robinson made up a list of items contrasting a negative attitude with a positive attitude and it gives us perspective on how, when we look at things, our attitude and perspective makes a lot of difference. Here is part of Robinson's list.

NEGATIVE: I am cast upon a horrible, desolate island, void of all hope of recovery.

POSITIVE: But I am alive, and not drowned, as all my ship's company was.

NEGATIVE: I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world to be miserable.

POSITIVE: But I am singled out too from all the ship's crew to be spared from death; and He that miraculously saved me from death, can deliver me from this condition.

NEGATIVE: I am divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banished from human society.

POSITIVE: But, I am not starved and perishing on a barren place, affording no sustenance.

NEGATIVE: I have no clothes to cover me.

POSITIVE: But I am in a hot climate, where if I had clothes I could hardly wear them.

NEGATIVE: I am without any defense or means to resist any violence of man or beast.

POSITIVE: But I am cast on an island, where I see no wild beasts to hurt me, as I saw on the coast of Africa; and what if I had been shipwrecked there?

NEGATIVE: I have no soul to speak to or relieve me.

POSITIVE: But God wonderfully sent the ship in near enough to the shore, that I have gotten out as many necessary things as will either supply my wants or enable me to supply myself, even as long as I live.

Isn't it amazing how the perspective on our situation can change things from negative to positive. It's up to you on how you look at things, are you a whiner or are you a positive person who tries to find happiness and contentment in all of the things around you. It's your choice. Your attitude is up to you.

Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonians can bring great comfort and peace to our lives, if we live by his instructions to the church in Thessalonica or as well to The Church at Round Top. I Thessalonians 5:12.

#### Final Instructions

[12] Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. [13] Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. [14] And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. [15] Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

[16] Be joyful always; [17] pray continually; [18] give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

[19] Do not put out the Spirit's fire; [20] do not treat prophecies with contempt. [21] Test everything. Hold on to the good. [22] Avoid every kind of evil.

[23] May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

[28] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Those words of Paul are as meaningful to us this morning as they were to those who lived in Thessalonica 2000 years ago. Remember God's truth does not change, no matter what some of the people in this country try to get us to believe. Truth that was pertinent 2000 years ago is still truth and pertinent today.

Another song that was presented on the "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting TV show made an impression on me. It was done by Gordon Mote, a blind vocalist and pianist and one of the song's writers Phil Johnson. The words went like this:

Are you tired of chasing pretty rainbows, Are you tired of spinning round and round. Wrap up all the shattered dreams of your life. At the feet of Jesus lay them down.

#### CHORUS

Give them all, Give them all, Give them all to Jesus

Shattered dreams, Wounded hearts, Broken toys

Give them all, Give them all, Give them all to Jesus

And he will turn your sorrow into joy

#### VERSE 2

He never said you'd only see sunshine, He never said there'd be no rain.

He only promised a heart full of singing, About the very things that once caused pain.

#### CHORUS

Give them all, Give them all, Give them all to Jesus

Shattered dreams, Wounded hearts, Broken toys

Give them all, Give them all, Give them all to Jesus

And he will turn your sorrow into joy.

The chorus of that song is powerful. It covers all things that trouble all ages of people. It covers our Shattered Dreams, Wounded hearts, broken toys and that is pretty much everything that we will experience from adult to child. And let's face it, some of us, that are pretty old, still let our broken toys cause us grief.

Where are you in your walk with the Lord. Are you tired of trying to unlock happiness in the things of this world? Have you found that the real key to happiness, contentment and peace is spiritual and outlined in God's word?

Happiness, peace and contentment will only come when you, just like the song said, give it all to Jesus.

As we ride along in this life that God has so graciously given to us, we need to ask a question. As brother Mike used to say "Contentment only happens when you finally climb out of the front seat, get in the back seat and let Jesus drive your bus. Who is driving your bus? The real key to happiness is to get in the back seat and let Jesus drive your bus.

Let's Pray

Communion:

1 Corinthians 11:23 (NIV)

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." [26] For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

[27] Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

[28] A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.