



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen- July 5, 2022

The Lord be with you.

“We just want to be happy.”

I can't tell you how many times I've heard those words and meeting with couples were counseling or a meeting with individuals, when I ask what they want in life, what their goal in life is... Again and again, I hear the words, "We just want to be happy."

Well, on this day after Independence Day, after the Fourth of July, I'm still thinking about those words and the Declaration of Independence that says that we are endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now, it's those last words that I wanna think out loud with you for the next few moments. The pursuit of happiness. What did that mean? How did our nation's founders understand the pursuit of happiness? I think that's a key question for us today because, well, who doesn't want to be happy? Some years ago, I was visiting a friend who was in a drug and alcohol rehab center, and while I was there, I talked to a psychiatrist who worked there, he was from Germany. And he told me that when he came to United States of America and heard that we were a nation dedicated to the pursuit of happiness, he said that he knew he was going to have a lot of work because he said that people who are dedicated to pursuing happiness are gonna be a lot of unhappy people.

But you know what our founders talked about the pursuit of happiness, they did not think of happiness as most people today think of happiness. Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, and other founders when they talked about the pursuit of happiness, they were actually talking about the pursuit of virtue. Because they believe that virtue and happiness go together. For you see, they came from a long line of ethical thinkers who equated happiness with virtuous living. They thought of happiness as being good rather than feeling good. Let me see if I can illustrate. Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to a neighbor William Short Jefferson wrote the words, he said, "Virtue is the foundation of happiness." That tells you a lot about the pursuit of happiness, as Jefferson and the other founders of our nation, they believe that the practice of virtue would be essential to the happiness of those young United States of America.

I think it's interesting that Jefferson actually borrowed the phrase, the pursuit of happiness. He borrowed it from the English philosopher John Locke who distinguished between real happiness and imaginary happiness. John Locke said that a robber celebrating his robbery with friends at the pub, that he is happy, but not really happy. It was imaginary happiness. His happiness was without any true pleasure. I tell you what- watching evening of network television and read the news or just to listen in on ordinary conversations, and you will see that we are a culture dedicated to the pursuit of imaginary happiness. Not real happiness, but happiness that lasts for about a moment because it



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is not happiness build on virtue.

Now, let me take you to scripture, as I like to do. I take you to a Scripture that speaks about the pursuit of happiness that is built on the pursuit of virtue. I'm looking at 1 Peter Chapter 3, verses 10 and 11, as Peter is writing to Christians who are facing persecution under Emperor Nero. And Peter writes it in for Peter, Chapter 3, verse 10, "For those who desire in life and desire to see good days, for those who desire a life and to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit. Let them turn away from evil and do good, let them seek peace and pursue it. So Peter is saying that if we desire life and we desire to see good days, he says, keep your tongue from evil, keep your lips from speaking deceit.

You know, I think that's God's Word for us at a time when we hear so much rage and so much evil speaking in our culture. God says, Don't do that. And then God says, seek peace and pursue it. So at this time, as our nation... Well, it feels like we're at a tipping point. We seem at a crossroads, let us keep our tongues from evil, and let us seek peace and pursue it.

So I pray for you and me today. I pray for our nation. I pray with Francis of Assisi. Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there was doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there was darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy. Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. It is in dying that we are born to eternal life. That seems happiness that is built on virtue. So just some thoughts for you today about pursuing real happiness.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler.

Thank you for listening, until next time.