

Have a Heart...A Merry One

INTRODUCTION:

1. Read Proverbs 15:13, 15; 17:22.
 - a. There's no debating, then, the value of a merry heart. Other translations use words like cheerful, joyful, glad.
 - b. Whatever it's called, I want it, and I'm sure you do, too.
2. Since sorrow was also mentioned in our reading, let's understand that sadness or sorrow is not ALL bad, and the fact is we cannot avoid it altogether, nor should we even try.
 - a. Read Proverbs 14:13.
 - b. Albert Barnes, in commenting on this passage says, "Sorrow of some kind either mingles itself with outward joy, or follows hard upon it."
 - c. So it's unavoidable, and it can also be quite helpful, even spiritually. "Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better" (Eccl. 7:3).
3. Because of its benefits, we need to be careful in dealing with those in sorrow.
 - a. Proverbs 25:20; 14:10.
4. But here's the problem: Sometimes we stay way too long in the depths of sorrow and discouragement, and that can be hazardous to our souls, and the souls of others. Here are just a few reasons:
 - a. It's hard to stay busy doing good when we're discouraged, because a "broken spirit dries the bones" (17:22) or saps our strength.
 - b. We're more vulnerable to false teachers, because they like to prey on the miserable.
 - c. We're also more vulnerable to the lusts of the flesh, looking for that "quick fix."
 - d. We're much more likely to cause strife among brethren, because in this state we tend to see everything in a negative light.
 - e. Our influence will be greatly diminished—no one likes to hang out with a joyless person, and they sure don't see us as someone to imitate.
 - f. For the same reasons, we may even turn some away from the truth.

BODY:

- I. So how do we maintain a joyful heart, even in the midst of what is sometimes unavoidable sorrow? Proverbs not only tells us the value of a merry heart; it also tells us how to keep it.
 - A. Find JOY in the truth, in the ways of the Lord.
 1. Not in what “seems right,” which may make us feel good temporarily, but in what is actually right.
 - a. Proverbs 14:12.
 2. Proverbs 14:14
 - a. ESV: “The backslider in heart will be filled with the **fruit** of his ways...”
 - b. Think prodigal son and anyone else who takes the same journey. He got his fill of his own ways and decided he was a whole lot better off in his father’s house.
 3. Proverbs 16:20.
 - a. What heeding the word does is keep us in fellowship with God, and that should always be a great source of joy.
 - b. “He who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him” (1 John 3:24).
 4. Proverbs 4:18 (the larger context contrasts the path of the wicked and the path of the just).
 - a. Lots of folks give up on this walk in the truth way too soon, because it can seem so restrictive in the beginning (and in some ways, it is).
 - b. But the longer we stay on it, the brighter the path grows. We appreciate more deeply the blessings we enjoy in the Lord.
 - B. Enjoy the fruit of our labors, which is most certainly a gift from God.
 1. Proverbs 13:12, 19.
 - a. Verse 12: When we finally obtain what we desire—what we’ve worked for, it’s brings great satisfaction and fulfillment.
 - b. Verse 19 is even more explicit.
 2. We know this to be true in the physical realm (12:11, 14).
 - a. Lazy person never gets to enjoy the fruit of his labor.

3. But the greatest satisfaction and joy comes in the spiritual realm.
 - a. In the good we can do our brethren. Proverbs 12:18, 25; 15:23; 16:24; 27:9.
 - b. In winning souls. Proverbs 11:30.
- C. Develop the twin virtues of gratitude and contentment.
 1. Proverbs 13:25.
 - a. A contrast between the contentment of the righteous, and the discontentment of the wicked.
 2. Proverbs 27:7.
 - a. We're not entitled to anything, so let's learn to be thankful for each and every "sweet" blessing—from the least to the greatest.
 3. Proverbs 30:15-16.
 - a. Who names their two daughters the same thing?
 - b. It's sad when we can't enjoy what we have now for thinking about what we would like to have. (nothing is ever "good enough").
 - c. "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire" (Eccl. 6:9).
 4. Gratitude and contentment—we'll never be merry without them, and what's worse, we'll lose our souls.
- D. Don't drink the poison of envy, which is opposed to the virtues we just discussed, and may just be the source of our unhappiness.
 1. Proverbs 14:30.
 - a. Read the story of King Saul and watch his bones rot away.
 - b. Don't be envious of others' possessions, talents, attention, etc.
 2. The antidote: "Rejoice with those who rejoice" (Romans 12:15).
- E. Rejoice in the hope of eternal life.
 1. Proverbs 23:17-18.
 2. We can't escape sorrow here, but we can there, and that prospect will surely sustain us through whatever difficulties we face in this life.

CONCLUSION:

1. Isaiah 35:8-10.