

Matthew 5. What would it take to make you happy? They asked that question of 52,000 Americans in *Psychology Today*. These were their answers: friends or social life; job; being in love; recognition and success; sex; personal growth; good financial situation; having a house or apartment; being attractive and beautiful; the city I live in; my religion; recreation and exercise; being a parent, marriage; your partner's happiness. The interesting things about this is most of the attempts to find happiness are through external situations instead of internal.

The popular idea of happiness is this: having the right circumstances. It's what I call "when and then" thinking. "When I get out of school, then I'll be happy." "When I get a job, then I'll be happy." "When I get married, then I'll be happy." "When I have kids, then I'll be happy." "When the kids leave home, then I'll be happy;"

The popular idea of happiness is having the right circumstances. But God's way to happiness is having the right attitude. In Matthew 5 we have the opening lines of Jesus' famous Sermon the Mount, 8 positive statements about happiness called the beatitudes. They do not tell you how to be happy, but rather describe the happiness that already belongs to believers. Today then lets sing, "Don't Worry, Be Happy!"

First off, A Poor Christian is a Happy Christian. The Bible says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." How can being poor bring a smile to your face. Tell me.

What's the difference between being rich and being poor? The scribes and the Pharisees in the crowd that day....would consider themselves rich in spirit. Rich in spiritual knowledge; rich in spiritual piety; affluent in spiritual activity....raising the spiritual bar very high and managing to leap over it almost every time. They were rich in spirit--they didn't need anything from Jesus. They had manufactured enough righteousness in and of their own human willpower to say, "We don't need whatever he's talking about. We're rich in spirit.

There was another group....represented in the crowd that day, and they were poor in spirit. They were people who knew they were not members of the spiritual honors society....they were people who knew they were not setting righteousness records every week at work....they were ones who knew they were not too impressive: spiritually, morally, ethically--in fact, there were people in the crowd that day who sort of hung their heads low....realizing their spiritual net worth was downright scandalous. It was to those people.... that Jesus said, "Divine blessing is coming today to those of you who are spiritually bankrupt....because I'm announcing to you today," Jesus says, "The doors of my kingdom--get this!--....are wide open to the likes....of you."

So my friend, recognize your spiritual poverty, your sinfulness and unworthiness in the sight of God. Realize you sin daily and deserve nothing but punishment. Admit your best efforts to keep the ten commandments fall miserably short. Not a spiritual penny in your pocket. But wait, God gives you the kingdom. You are rich before God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus gave you his righteousness and died for your and my sins. This message rocks as teens would say. "Is it possible? Is it really possible....that someone with my grades could get into Harvard? Yes, it is, You are truly blessed. You are spiritually poor, but God gives you His kingdom. So don't worry, be Happy!

The second beatitude that Jesus speaks says, "Blessed are you those who mourn, for they will be comforted. In my ministry I have seen a whole lot of mourning amongst

Christians. I have witnessed the sudden death of babies, teenagers and young adults. I have witnessed the utter pain and sorrow, when a couple divorces, and children long afterward for years for mom and dad somehow to get back together again. I have watched people that I love and care for in this congregation slowly be eaten away by cancer. Or I look at some of the dumb and stupid things I have done wrong in my life. I weep as I look at my own sins, and what they have brought about, as well as what sin's sin's presence has done in this world.

But Jesus comes to us today and puts a smile on our faces. Jesus says, "I have good news for anyone crying over sin....you can find comfort, and forgiveness, and true soul consolation in my kingdom. And if you're fighting back tears of sorrow over loss or physical pain or emotional distress or loneliness or alienation or rejection, I just want to say again as tenderly as I can, `I have good news for you today: you're gonna find comfort and soul consolation in my kingdom, so mourners...."mourners....come on in, the kingdom doors are wide open to you." I will wipe every tear from your eyes. I will provide you with comfort and strength in every tribulation, and finally eternal life in Heaven. There's a metaphor in Psalm 56:8 of God having a bottle with your name on it and with my name on it....Every tear that we've ever shed has been gently collected and put in that bottle where God can see it....and be involved with it. And sort of be in that suffering moment with us. He treasures our tears and knows....how difficult they are. And he says, "I would never just let any of your tears fall to the ground and evaporate into dirt....because I know how soul-wrenching sorrow can be so I collect every tear; I put it in a bottle; i'm there with ya--in it, through it. Ya know there are stamp collectors in the world; there are baseball card collectors in the world....you might think of God as a tear collector. Don't Worry, be happy! You will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. A Christian who loves Jesus is be meek. Now meek doesn't mean is a whimper. Meek means gentle-spirited types; tender types. People who don't push and shove to get to the front of lines. People who don't step on other people to get to the top at work. People who don't try to take twelve items through a ten-item express lane at the supermarket. A meek Christian endures mistreatment without retaliating. Like Jesus, they are willing to leave the matter of vengeance in God's hands. They turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. And guess what, we inherit the earth. It is for our sake the earth is preserved and not destroyed. It is for our benefit that God directs the affairs of men and nations. God makes sure that all things work together for good for us. And oneday, we will inherit a new heaven and new earth.

The fourth beatitude here today is, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." So often you and I eat the wrong things in the physical realm. We eat food not because we are hungry, but just because it is something to do, to calm our nerves. But Jesus is not talking about physical hunger here, but rather spiritual hunger. He wants his children to hunger after righteousness. These hungry Christians are concerned about being righteous, righteous through faith in Jesus. These hungry Christians are concerned about living righteous and god-pleasing lives.

They know how to satisfy their spiritual hunger and thirst. They know the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life, and they drink deeply of the living water that He provides. In other words, they make faithful use of the means of grace, the Gospel of Christ in Word and Sacraments. They like to make the Word of God part of their daily

routine. They love to assemble regularly with fellow believers to hear God's Word proclaimed. They know God forgives their sins day by day, and that they will stand among the righteous on the day of Judgment. God makes sure we are filled and satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Showing mercy means not giving someone what they deserve. You and I deserve God's punishment for our sins, and yet He forgives us and saves us for the sake of Jesus. We too want to be merciful to those who sin against us and to all who are in need. We want to be like the Samaritan who stopped to bind up the wounds of the Jew he found half dead along the road. Although, Jews and Samaritans ordinarily despised each other, this Samaritan saw only a person in need, and he helped him. Similar situation when there is a natural disaster like a the Tsunami. Let's say when it happens, most people there are Muslims. They deny the Triune God. They deny Jesus as Savior. Why help them? Simply because as Christians, we are merciful. We see those people as simply people in need, and we help them. Smile be happy! Christians are a merciful bunch.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Christians who are pure in heart speak and act without ulterior motives or concealed selfish interests. What you see in them is what you get from them. What they say, they mean. What they promise, they will do. Pure in heart Christians realize their hearts are naturally unclean, so they need constant cleansing from Christ. So they ask the Holy Spirit to create a clean heart in me o God and to renew a right spirit within me. Oneday, we pure in heart Christians will see God. We will stand before him in the Judgment, and we will dwell in his presence for all eternity.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." Christians actively strive to make peace where there is enmity or hostility. They offer their services as mediators between warring nations or quarreling relatives, or hostile neighbors. They strive to live in peace with everyone. But that doesn't mean that they will not stand up for the truth of God's Word, if circumstances warrant it. Although peace is desirable, peace at any price is not acceptable. We know the peace we have with God through Jesus Christ. We want to offer that peace to all people. Remember who we are, Sons of God. Don't worry, be happy.

Jesus finishes up his 8 marks of a Christian with the words, Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of God." Expect to suffer at times for saying and doing what is right. That is what happened to Jesus, so you and I must not expect any better treatment. Remember too, there will be an additional reward of Grace to the Christian that stands for the truth of God's Word. It will be in addition to the salvation that is theirs by Christ's merits alone. These rewards will be pleasant surprises to all who receive them. So then, no "when and then thinking". No thinking, if I just had this, I would be happy. A smile can be on your face right now, and everyday. Just read this text. You are indeed truly Blessed!