

## Happy Are the Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

**In our previous studies of happiness, we have seen that happiness begins with an absolute commitment to Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.** We have also seen that *happiness* begins with an *attitude*; therefore, *happiness is a choice*. As we continue our study on *happiness*, we will go to the Expert on the matter, and that is Jesus Christ Himself, as we study what is known as the Beatitudes.

**More than ever I am convinced that the Word of God has the answer to the basic needs of our personal lives.** In the words of Jesus we gain an understanding of the righteousness of God, and practical principles for Christian maturity. In the Beatitudes we learn how to enjoy inner happiness. The Sermon on the Mount does not present the way of salvation, but the way of righteousness.

**As we study the beatitudes, you will notice that every one of them has precisely the same form.** In the original language the beatitudes all begin this way, "Happy are those who..." William Barclay tells us the Greek word translated "Blessed" in the King James Version and "Happy." In other words, the only person who can be described as *truly happy* is the believer in a right relationship with Jesus Christ.

**The Greek construction of Matthew 5 teaches us the Beatitudes are not simple statements; they are exclamations!** Jesus is not speaking of a wishful glimpse of some future eternal sunset, He is speaking of a *happiness* that is for us in the *here and now*.

You will remember that Luke 2:10 tells us that when Jesus was born, the angels over Bethlehem announced "good news of great joy that will be for all the people." **Jesus ordained happiness by attending the**

**wedding at Cana.** The theme of His first sermon was happiness. The closing picture of Him, in the book of Revelation, portrays Him as a ***Bridegroom coming to claim His bride.*** The wedding reception lasts for seven years in the joyous splendor of heaven.

**Jesus came to offer us a joy that no man can take away from us.** A ***joy*** that takes us through our ***pain, our sorrow, our loss, our grief, our tears*** and our ***fears.*** A ***joy*** that is ***not affected*** by ***the change in fortunes, collapse of health, failure of our plans, disappointments of our ambitions*** or ***dreams in life.***

**But, if you will take a look at the average church congregation on any given Sunday morning.** They look like ***advance agents for a cyclone.*** Their ***faces are as droopy as saxophones.*** They look like ***Bible-carrying bulldogs baptized in lemon juice!***

**Most Christians go to work on Monday, saved, soured, sanctified and petrified.** They look at their co-workers and say, "Don't you want to know Jesus? Look at what He's done for me!"

**Don't be fooled: Christianity certainly involves hardship and discipline.** But it is founded on the ***solid rock of old-fashioned happiness.*** Jesus is in the happiness business. I am convinced ***if we lose our joy, we have lost our credibility in this unhappy world.***

**In our previous studies, we have learned that happiness begins with an absolute commitment to Christ.** There are always two groups of people that come to Church. Those who have made an ***absolute commitment to follow Jesus,*** and those ***religious folks who are committed to nothing.***

Jesus understood this truth, therefore, He says in Matthew 10:37-39, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not

worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it." **Jesus does not call us to a life of convenience.** He calls us to a life of **commitment.**

In Matthew 5:3 Jesus begins His lessons on happiness with these words, "Happy are the poor in spirit." The word that Jesus uses here for "poor" is a powerful word for "poverty." **It means that such a person would literally starve to death if he does not get immediate sustenance.** The person described is an *absolute pauper*, the lowest kind of *beggar*. His life depends on his begging for every item of food.

**Of course, Jesus was not speaking of physical needs, but spiritual poverty.** The truth of the matter is that we cannot even become Christians without a sense of our spiritual poverty. Every individual must come to a deep consciousness of his sinfulness and a realization that with Christ he is lost and does not know the Way, the Truth, and the Life. How different from the attitude of the Christians in Laodicea, who said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..."

**How many Christians today share that same point of view!** So much of the present-day church is saturated with the *Dr. Feelgood theology*. If it feels good, do it, and when it gets hard, get out!

**But that is not the message of Jesus Christ.** Everywhere He went there were *conflict*, *controversy*, and *conversion*. He was crucified as an insurrectionist considered too dangerous to live. He was not "gentle Jesus, meek and mild." **He was the voice of God in a world that was hard-of-hearing!**

Jesus began His teaching on happiness with what seemed to be a blaring contradiction, "Happy are the poor in spirit."

**What was Jesus saying?** What does "poor in spirit" mean to us today? **It does not mean being a trembly lipped religious doormat.** It

does not mean being a pious introvert trying to blend into the wallpaper. It does not mean being someone with no self-esteem who crawls, cringes and cries through life.

Jesus is simply saying, "Happy are the broken in spirit." Happy are those people who allow the hand of God to crush their fleshy nature so that they are no longer conformed to this world but are transformed into the glorious image of Christ. Happy are those who allow the hand of the Master to change their imperfections into a vessel of honor pleasing to Him.

Before the power of the atom could be unleashed, science had to devise a way to "smash" it. Before a *grape* can be made into fine wine, it must be crushed. On the vine, it's a thing of *beauty*. But after it's crushed, it's a thing of *blessing*.

Jesus lists broken in spirit as the number one priority in the pursuit of happiness. Only when the fleshy nature is crushed and the inner poison removed can there be complete healing and a new beginning. Anything else is just new patches sewn over old cloth. It is merely new wine in old wine-skins. It is simply a futile religious charade that guarantees nothing but everlasting frustration.

Happiness never comes to the proud. In James 4:6 the Bible tells us that God opposes the proud. Romans 1:29-30 lists some of the most despicable people on the face of the earth as "filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity," those "full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice," and refers to those he calls the "arrogant and boastful." In other words, the proud!

Being broken in spirit was utter rubbish to the Romans. They worshipped the gods of power. To the equally proud Jews, being poor in spirit was the last thing in the world to do to be happy.

**How are we to identify those who are broken in spirit and those who are diseased with pride?** Three illustrations in the Bible nail it down for us.

**The first is Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the tax collector.** Luke 18:11-13 gives us the account of two men went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed, "God I thank You that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector." The tax collector, standing at a distance, "would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner." And in verse 14 Jesus makes this statement, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalteth himself must be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Ladies and gentlemen, God cannot do what He wants to do in your life until you are willing to deal with your proud sin.

**The second illustration is found in the parable of the prodigal son and his older brother.** Luke 15:11-32 gives us the story of the two sons. The *prodigal* went into the far country and broke all the rules. **He lost his good name, he wasted his father's fortune, and all his worthless friends turned their backs on him.** He found himself living in a *pigsty*. Then, the Bible says in verse 17 he "came to his senses" and said, "I will go back to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned..."

**And he did.** He shook off the slime and began the long journey home, rehearsing his speech of repentance. His father saw him coming from a long distance and ran to him and embraced him. There were tears of reunion and restoration.

**A family party was planned to celebrate the return of a son who had been considered as good as dead.** Everyone was happy - except the prodigal's older brother. This proud, religious sourpuss was angry!

He whined, "Father, I have stayed home like a good boy and kept all the rules. When did you give me a party? Now that this son of yours has come home bankrupt after living with harlots, you reward him with a celebration!" **The canker in his voice reflected the rot in his soul.** Listen very carefully, **if the sin of selfishness is in your life, it will always surface someplace.** Regardless of how hard you try to hide it selfishness always raises its ugly head in your life.

**The third illustration is the account of Jesus the night before His crucifixion.** The disciples had been **jockeying for position in the new kingdom.** The mother of James and John had been putting on a full-court press to get her boys in top positions of the administration.

**It came time to wash their dirty feet.** The only one who had the power to stoop low and take on the menial task was the Son of God. Why? **Because He was the only one in the room not bound in pride.** He was the only one with a **servant's heart.**

**Listen to me today, God never plays our religious games.** Jesus picked up a youngster and addressed His **hardened adult audience** this way in Matthew 18:3-4, "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

**We flood through the doors of our churches every Sunday - proud, religious, cold, resentful, unteachable, hurting and hateful. Searching for happiness.** But we can find it only when we allow the **loving hand of God to break us and remake us into vessels that please Him.**