

The Pursuit of Happiness (Matthew 5:1-12)

Introduction: *Christian Culture and Counterculture*

Formerly, Christian virtues had permeated the culture and left their impression on everyone, Christian or not. Now, “self-promoting preachers lead self-indulgent congregations. Discipline, restraint, humility, sobriety, industry, and frugality are passé. Carnality and worldliness, ostentation and excess are typical. Back then, the Christian faith put its stamp on the culture. Now, the culture puts its stamp upon the Christian community” (Johnson, *When Grace Transforms*, pp. 7-8). Jesus therefore works from the inside out, focusing first on the *renewed heart*, and then as he goes on, the individual and the community that emerges from it.

1. The Pursuit of Happiness

The word can be translated “happy,” as long as we’re not thinking of an emotional state, but rather the condition of our life (see France, pp. 108-109). The word says more about how God feels about us than how we feel about ourselves. Nevertheless, it obviously carries with it the idea of a deep sense of happiness and gladness of heart: “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad” (Matt 5:12).

“It is as if Jesus is saying that life in the kingdom with him is a life of profound joy, a joy that no person and no circumstance can take away. And this blessedness is not reserved for some nebulous future. It is for now. It is the mark of those who have really surrendered to the King and tasted his grace, although of course there is a future to rejoice into” (Green, *Matthew*, pp. 89-90).

“If I were to ask you why you have believed in Christ, why you have become Christians, every man will truly answer, ‘for the sake of happiness’” (Augustine [Piper, p. 52]).

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves” (Pascal, *Pensees*, 148).

2. Overturning our Expectations

Happiness is a target that few people hit. The reason is both simple and Scriptural. People generally want happiness on terms other than those set forth by the Lord. “A man can no more extract blessedness out of sin than he can suck health out of poison” (Watson, *Beatitudes*, p. 33). Or as Bernard of Clairvaux put it: “There is no greater misery than false joys.” Conspicuously absent from this list are references to physical well-being or material possessions or the other things that people often long for.

“Human beings, as Pascal points out, are peculiar in that they avidly pursue ends they know will bring them no satisfaction; gorge themselves with food which cannot nourish and with pleasures which cannot please. I am a prime example” (Malcolm Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, p. 81).

Conclusion: *Are you truly happy or not?*

Such an utter reversal of values and commitment is absolutely basic to following Jesus. The ways of God will always seem upside down to the world for God brings down the proud but exalts the humble. In these beatitudes, Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, congratulates those whom the world most pities, or despises, and calls them, and them only, the truly happy ones (from Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture*, pp. 54-56). The question therefore is this: Are you truly happy or are you not?

Living as Slaves or Sons? (Gal 3:26—4:10)

Review: *Paul’s passion and purpose*

3:23, the law was our prison warden; 3:24, our tutor/pedagogue to lead us to Christ.

1. The Position of Sonship (Gal 3:26-29): *In Christ, we stand as children of God.*

A warm and loving relationship with a father is one of the most delightful of all relationships; but one of the most bitter is that of an unhappy slave with a demanding master. Paul draws upon this contrast to illustrate the Christian life. Here, the law acts as a guardian who controls an heir until the age of majority. The child lives as a slave rather than a freeman and an heir, even though he owns everything, because he is subject to the rule of others.

2. The Privileges of Sonship (Gal 4:1-10): *In Christ, we have the spirit of adoption and all of the privileges as members of God’s family.*

We experience *justification*—freedom from bondage to the law’s condemnation. We experience *adoption*—freedom to call upon God as our “Abba, Father.” We experience *sanctification*—freedom from the dominion of sin by the power of the Spirit. “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19).

Illustration: *The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:20-24)*

The Father clothed him (a robe), as we are clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27). The Father marked his freedom (sandals, slaves went barefoot). The Father acknowledged him as son (a ring). The Father provided the best for him (a fattened calf).

Application: *The Orphan vs. The Son/Daughter* (by Jack Miller, World Harvest Mission).

Feels alone; lacks a vital daily intimacy with God; a vacuum of self concern.	Has a growing assurance that “God is really my loving Heavenly Father” (I John 4:16)
Anxious over “needs”: friends, money, etc; “I’m all alone and nobody cares.” Has “little faith,” lots of fear, little ability to really trust God.	A daily working trust in God’s sovereign plan for his life as loving, wise and best. Believes God is good; has a growing confidence in His loving care; being freed from worry (Mt 6:25).
Proud; resists authority; not easily teachable; heart is not soft.	Has a soft (broken and contrite) heart. (Psalm 51:17); Teachable.
Tends to be ungrateful, complaining; bitter; critical spirit. Tears down others.	By the Spirit guides the tongue for edification, thanksgiving, encouragement. (Gal 5:22ff, etc.)
Gossips (confesses other people’s sins); needs to criticize others to feel secure; a “competent analyst” of others’ weaknesses.	Is able to freely confess his/her faults to others, doesn’t always have to be right; is finding that he/she is often wrong; is eager to grow.
Feels powerless to defeat the flesh; has no real “heart victory” over pet sins—yet has lost his/her sense of being sinful.	As he/she rests in Christ, he/she is seeing more and more victory over the flesh (Romans 8:1-9)—yet he/she sees himself/herself as sinful.
Is relatively prayerless; prayer is a “last resort,” and seldom in private.	Prayer is a vital part of the day, loves to talk to the Father. (I Thess. 5:16-18)
The Bible’s promises of spiritual power and joy mock him/her. “What has happened to all your joy?” (Galatians 4:15)	God’s promises of power and joy are beginning to describe him/her. (Rom. 15:13)
Lacks passion to share the gospel (since his/her Christian life is not really good news); or tends to be motivated by a sense of obligation and duty, not love. “All these years I’ve been slaving for you...” (Luke 15:29)	Has a desire to see people come to know Jesus the way he/she does, shares the gospel with others, even when not under the outward pressure of a (good) program. “. . .the love of Christ constrains us.” (2 Cor. 5:14)