



Sunday School for July 3, 2005.
Released on June 29, 2005.

"Experiencing True Happiness"

Printed Text: **Matthew 5:1-16.**
Devotional Reading: **Luke 6:17-23.**
Background Scripture: **Matthew 5:1-16.**

Time: A.D. 28.
Place: Mountain near Capernaum.

Matthew 5:1-16

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Today's Aim

Facts: to show that true piety is a matter of the heart.

Principle: to stress that a truly pious person will be more concerned about what God thinks of his faith than what man thinks.

Application: to urge students to find ways to exercise true piety in secret.

How to Say It

COLOSSIANS. Kuh-*losh*-unz.

CORINTHIANS. Ko-*rin*-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

ECCLESIASTES. Ik-*leez*-ee-*as*-teez (strong accent on *as*).

EPHESIANS. Ee-*fee*-zhunz.

EZRA. Ez-ruh.

GALATIANS. Guh-*lay*-shunz.

GALILEE. Gal-uh-lee.

ISAIAH. Eye-*zay*-uh.

JUDEA. Joo-*dee*-uh.

PHILIPPIANS. Fih-*lip*-ee-unz.

SANHEDRIN. San-huh-drun or San-*heed*-run.

Introduction

The waiter brings the meals steaming hot from the kitchen and places them dramatically on the table. He looks at each diner expectantly, hoping to see expressions of delight. Before he leaves, he pronounces the inevitable benediction: "Enjoy!"

Many seem to think that's how God should act. He should deliver all the pleasures of "the good life" on a silver platter and say, "Enjoy!" But the more that people try to find happiness in wealth, power, and sensual pleasures, the more they are tortured with inner unrest. With all the trappings of "the good life" around them, why can't people be happy? Why has God failed to deliver the happiness they really want?

When Jesus preached the most famous sermon in history, He laid out the basis of true happiness. In the Beatitudes, the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turned the usual ways of thinking upside down. Ignoring those who were complacent in their riches, Jesus commended those who knew their spiritual poverty. Spurning the proud and powerful, Jesus congratulated those who were gentle and merciful. Jesus emphasized character traits that have little value in the eyes of the world. But real happiness-eternal happiness-will be found only by those who believe in the values that Jesus taught.

Lesson Background

Matthew, who was also known as Levi (Matt. 9:9; Luke 5:27), was a tax collector who had left his business to follow Christ. He was one of the twelve apostles and in characteristic fashion humbly referred to himself as a tax collector, or publican (Matt. 10:3). We noted in an earlier lesson that Mark is a book of action that does not stress the lengthy discourses that Jesus some times used in His teaching. Matthew, however, included several lengthy discourses in his book. He also repeatedly used the phrase "kingdom of heaven" as he presented Jesus as the Messiah-King.

The first of the discourses in Matthew is what we know as the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5-7).

The Sermon on the Mount describes the kind of righteousness Jesus expects of His followers. It must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20) and will be realized fully in Christ's kingdom. It is also a standard we should strive for.

The Individual Heart (vs. 1-6)

1. Who was listening to Jesus at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, and how did that change? (v. 1)

The implication in verses 1 and 2 is that Jesus drew away from the multitudes in order to instruct His disciples privately. We must keep in mind that Jesus is at his popularity when he began the Sermon on the Mount. Crowds gathered around Jesus to see Him heal the sick (Matthew 4:23-25). They were also attracted to Jesus because they are "astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (7:28-29). Initially, only the disciples were with Jesus on the Mount. Because of Jesus' popularity, the crowds eventually found out that Jesus was teaching on the Mount, and they had a desire to listen to the Messiah. They were willing to climb the mountain in order to hear Jesus. As Christians, we should have the same zeal when it comes to God's Word. We should do whatever it takes to get into His Holy Word daily.

2. What three basic types of followers do we see in Jesus' ministry?

Jesus had many followers during his earthly ministry. The first group of followers is the twelve disciples handpicked by Jesus to take the gospel throughout the world. The second group of followers was a larger group of believers sometimes called

disciples as well. The third and final group is the multitudes that followed Jesus either out of curiosity or with some other motive.

Jesus spent much of his time instructing His twelve disciples. However, there were others who were eavesdropping in what Jesus was teaching his disciples. Also, there were times when Jesus instructed the multitude as well.

3. What is the true meaning of "blessed" in the Beatitudes?

The word "blessed" occurs at the beginning of verses 3 through 11, which are commonly called the Beatitudes. The word "blessed" literally means "happy," but it is far more than simply a surface emotion. In the Greek language, the word translated "blessed" describes people who are in an enviable position. It is a deep sense of being blessed by God, which leads to genuine contentment and peace in the heart.

4. What does "poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3) refer to, and how does mourning tie in with it?

Many readers misinterpret verse 3 when it says "Blessed are the poor in spirit." They often think that it is God's will for them to live life with a broken spirit. Although there are times when God must break our spirit to make us more like Jesus, this verse has nothing to do with that mentality.

Here, "poor in spirit" refers to our merit with God. As stated in previous lessons, we are sinners by nature, and there is nothing that we can do to make ourselves right with God except through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Those who are "poor in spirit" recognizes this fact, and acknowledges that he or she is not worthy of heaven. It is this attitude that leads a person to salvation through Jesus Christ. Those who are "poor in spirit" have a humble spirit. There is no room for pride.

Those who are "poor in spirit" mourn because they can't earn heaven by themselves. They are in spiritual poverty and they are sorrowful over it. They recognize the sin problem and the bankruptcy it caused in their spirits. This mourning leads to repentance. They will be comforted because of their repentance from sin and their forgiveness of their sins (e.g. Ezra 10:6; Psalms 51:4; 119:136).

5. What is meekness, and what is a meek person like? (v.5)

Often, the world equates meekness with weakness. As stated in earlier lessons, meekness is strength under control. A meek person can be someone who has tremendous power, but he or she is mature and gracious enough to use that power positively and constructively. A meek person never uses power negatively and destructively.

A meek person is someone who recognizes the authority God has given him or her and is free to use it. This person submits completely to God and uses the authority

according as God desires. Moses and Paul were meek (cf. Num. 12:3; II Cor. 10:1), and both were strong leaders under the hand of God.

Throughout the Bible, God is very meek. In particular, there were at least two instances in which God could have eliminated the human race. In the Garden of Eden, God had the power to destroy Adam and Eve on the spot for their disobedience instead of simply driving them out of the garden and allowing them to multiply (Gen. 3). Also, God had the power to destroy Noah and his family along with the rest of the wicked people in his day because of sin, but God honored Noah and his family's attempt at righteousness and spared those individuals from the flood (Gen 5-6). These two examples show that God is a meek God.

6. What does it mean to "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (v. 6)?

We all understand what it means to be hungry and thirsty in the physical sense. When we're hungry, we generally don't hesitate to eat unless we're on a diet. Likewise, when we're thirsty, we generally don't hesitate to get something to drink. We have to eat food and drink liquids (especially water) for our existence in this physical world. When we are very hungry or very thirsty, then food and water becomes the center of our thoughts and the focus of our determination because our body desperately needs food and water to survive.

Righteousness is defined as being right with God. When it comes to righteousness, we should have a desire for righteousness just like our desire for food in the physical. We should act like our eternal existence depends on righteousness. We need to be right with God for our spiritual survival. We can't live with God in eternity without righteousness. We should have a desire to be more righteous on a daily basis.

Relationships with Others

7. What is it about us that keeps us from being naturally merciful, and why should showing mercy be important to us?

Jesus commands us in Luke 6:36 to "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." We must remember that God is merciful and we should be thankful that He extended mercy to those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Mercy means withholding something that another person deserves. We deserve to burn in hell and eternal separation from God, but God had mercy on mankind to give us the opportunity to escape that punishment by accepting the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ through faith.

Naturally, we are selfish beings. We don't like for others to wrong us. When someone wrongs us, we want them to hurt just as they hurt us (usually more). The righteous attitude is one of forgiving. We must forgive others just as God has forgiven us (Matt. 6:12). It is not always easy to forgive others, especially if a person has severely wronged another. We must remember that God gives us the heart and strength to forgive everyone. He cleanses our hearts so that we will have a willing heart to forgive even those who are unforgivable in the natural.

8. What are the characteristics of a peacemaker?

The Prince of peace commends those who are peacemakers. While the gospel will of necessity create divisions at times (Luke 14:26), we should never seek conflict. Peace is a sign that a person is a child of God. A person who is a peacemaker is first at peace with God. The peacemaker lives in peace with others and helps others find peace. The peacemaker realizes that the best way to lead others to peace is through a saving faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus gives peace that the world can never give (John 16:33). We should strive to be peacemakers. We should not promote conflict with other believers. As Christians, our job is to share peace with the world.

9. Why should we rejoice when we are persecuted for being followers of Jesus?

We must remember that Jesus is referring to persecution because of our stand for righteousness, not for any sin that we've committed. Many students experience persecution at school; many adults experience persecution in the workforce. Many unsaved people have animosity for those who profess to believe in Christ. Satan promotes the persecution of God's children in his campaign against everything God stands for.

As Christians, we must recognize that this world is not our home. We are merely travelers who are simply passing through here. Our real home is in Heaven with our God. We know that Christ suffered the greatest persecution on this earth, and we must expect to take up our cross and follow Him. This persecution in this world is a sign that this world is not our home and that Heaven is our real home.

Many times, Christians expect to live the Christian life trouble free. Some of us expect to live with all the comforts of this world. We don't want to suffer at all. We want life handed to us in a silver platter. For the Christian who wishes to live this kind of life on this earth, Jesus disappoints them. All Christians will go through some form of persecution for their faith, but Jesus will not leave us alone. We can call on Him to comfort us while we're going through tough times. We can be happy while we're going through trials and tribulations. **Thank God that our happiness does not depend on our circumstances!!!**

Relationships with the World

10. What effect should we have on this world? (vs. 13-16)

Jesus calls believers "the salt of the earth" (v. 13) and "the light of the world" (v. 14). Salt has several purposes. It adds flavor, causes thirst, preserves food, melts ice, and helps heal wounds. As Christians, we have an opportunity to make a tremendous impact on the people we know. When we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we should provide spiritual flavor and have the unsaved thirst for the joy of life that we possess. We must maintain and preserve godliness in the midst of a dark, godless society. Our warmth should melt those hardened and resistant hearts and encourage them to come to God. We must remain caring and make sure our

hearts are warm; otherwise, we will become like salt which has lost its flavor, useless for anything except to be trampled on.

Jesus also calls us "the light of the world." We are a light of this world because we know the truth, and we have the ability to share this truth with others. Light enables us to see reality and it lights our path so that we can walk without stumbling. If we do not shed light on other believers, then we are like light hidden under a basket. It's been lit, but it is of no use to anyone present. Also this light is a waste of resources as well. Any Christian who does not have a testimony is wasting the time God has given him or her; this person is useless to the Savior and those near him who are separated from God. We should always strive to share the Good news about Jesus Christ to anyone we come in contact with. We need to show the world the path to God.

Conclusion

Jesus demonstrated the virtues that bring true happiness. He showed that satisfaction comes from giving, not from getting. He showed that contentment comes from "who you are" before God on the inside, not "what you have" on the outside.

Beyond contentment in this life there is final happiness, eternal bliss in Heaven. Perhaps this final lesson from Jesus is the most important of all. True happiness will finally be gained when we are able to look beyond our present trials and see the ultimate satisfaction that only God can give. When we hear the Savior say, "Well done" (Matthew 25:21), we will know what happiness really is.

Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, forgive us for ignoring Your truths and making our own futile attempts to gain happiness. Thank You for caring about us enough to send Your Son, who taught us Your truth and modeled the true life. Help us to be committed to following what He said and how He lived. Help us to be salt and light in the world. May we repent when we fall short. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought to Remember

It is a blessed and happy thing to be a follower of Jesus.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Next week, we seek to understand the nature of true piety in the sight of God. Study Background Scripture: Matthew 6:1-34.

Lesson Summarized By

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