

How can I have a happy life?

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Date: 11 May 2025

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[0 : 00] So if you have a Bible, perhaps you could turn with me to Matthew chapter 5. It's on page 968 if you're using a church Bible. We're beginning a study as a church on this sermon, the most famous sermon ever delivered by Jesus called the Sermon on the Mount.

We're looking at how he introduces the sermon in this section often known as the Beatitudes. And we're asking ourselves the question, how can I have a happy life?

Blaise Pascal, the famous thinker, once said, all men seek happiness. That is without exception. We're all looking for happiness. What does it mean?

The U.S. Declaration of Independence speaks about that right that people have to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Happiness. An American president, Ben Franklin, said, yes, we have the right to the pursuit, but each of us has to catch happiness ourselves.

So what is it that we're chasing when we think about happiness? If I was to ask the room, in the same way as I was to ask the children, we'd probably get a lot of different answers.

[1 : 14] What is happiness? For some of us, perhaps, it's about the connections that we have. I skimmed through, every year there's a thing called the World Happiness Report.

And this year, it was very much focusing on the ideas of caring and sharing. And happiness consists in the social connections that we have.

Deep relationships. Perhaps that's where we look for happiness. But that's not the only answer, is it? Because for some people, happiness lies in consuming.

Now, whether that's ice cream, whether that's a barbecue in the meadows, consumption is something we often think about as giving us happiness. Joy is a marketing tool.

93% of people, when asked, were on a quest for more joy. And so there's a whole load of advertising campaigns that became famous, especially in the early 2000s.

[2 : 18] People seeking, here's the way. If you're looking for more joy, what you need is to buy my product, to eat my foods. Maybe for us, though, happiness is connected to the cash in our pocket.

The council did some statistics in this neighborhood, so the south side Newington neighborhood. And 17% of people who were polled said that money is the best measure of a person's success and happiness.

So if you believe that, then that's obviously the thing that you're going to look to catch. We all seek happiness, and God has made us that way.

But the really important question becomes, well, what is that happiness? What is ultimate happiness? What is that thing that I'm going to give my life to? Or maybe to put it another way, who defines happiness for me?

Is it myself, or do I listen to someone else? And that takes us to this sermon, the most famous sermon ever preached, the most famous document on ethics and morality, I think, that the world has.

[3 : 27] And it begins with the question, what is the blessed life? What is the happy life according to God? And Jesus' answer is really striking. So one thing that you maybe noticed is that for Jesus, this life of blessing or happiness, it's about character.

Jesus talks about our heart, a way of life that's changed, because we've found salvation, because we've found Jesus. But happiness is also connected to the idea of covenant.

This whole idea of blessing is the blessing of a life where you know you're in a right relationship with God. You know that there is forgiveness and He is your Father.

Jesus says that's what the happy life looks like. And so we find in verses 1 and 2, Jesus going up on a mountainside and sitting down to teach.

Just like in the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus, you find Moses going up on a mountain to receive and then to give God's law. Here is Jesus up on a mountain delivering God's word about God's kingdom.

[4 : 37] Here is what it looks like to live under the rule of Jesus as God's king. And so for the next few months, we're going to think about this sermon, runs from chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew's gospel.

It's going to teach us. So whether we're a follower of Jesus, or whether we're curious about Christianity, it's going to teach us, what is it like to be a follower of Jesus? How is the kingdom of God a different way of life?

I imagine at different points this sermon, even if we're familiar with it, the words of Jesus are going to shock us. Because it's very much a counter-cultural message.

Jesus presents here, for example, a vision of happiness that's very different from expectations, very different to what most people are looking for today. And I hope as well that this sermon, the Sermon on the Mount will inspire us.

Because it shows us, the words of Jesus show us that the transforming power of God can absolutely change us, change our way of life, even change our idea of what is true happiness.

[5 : 48] So this morning for a few minutes, we're going to take the happiness question to Jesus, and we're going to listen to his answer. And we're going to do that thinking about three simple words, okay?

We're going to think about grace, and then we're going to think about God, and then we're going to think about glory. So if you remember those words, you'll hopefully remember where we're going.

So we're thinking first about grace. Blessed are the poor in spirit, Jesus begins, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. I wonder, there's a picture up there of what's known as recycled art.

And I wonder if you've ever seen either these small micro-enterprise projects in Africa or in Asia, where crafts people are able to turn old rubbish, recycled plastics and cans, into a piece of art that they can then sell.

With the eye and the skill of a craftsman, as something broken and worthless, can become something beautiful. And Jesus begins his reflections on the happy life here.

[6 : 55] A happy life discovers the power of God's grace to bring beauty from brokenness. The brokenness of verse 3, blessed are the poor in spirit.

Those who are broken and know that they've come to an end of themselves and have learned to totally depend on God. That that idea that we have the ability and we have the answers by ourselves, that's been broken in their life.

Verse 4, blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who feel a sense of brokenness over the sin in our life and the suffering and the sorrow that it brings.

Verse 5, blessed are the meek. Pride has been broken. Self-reliance is gone, replaced by humility.

Being willing to be small before God. But do you notice how in Jesus' hands, by God's grace, brokenness can be turned into something beautiful.

[8 : 10] What's the beauty that God's grace brings? Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The follower of Jesus enjoys life in the kingdom of God, life with God now, with the promise of that for eternity.

Blessed are those who mourn. Here's the beauty. For they will be comforted. The beautiful truth of knowing we are forgiven and reconciled to God.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. There's this beautiful message of being remade in the image of the Lord Jesus, so that one day, we will rule in a world made new with Him.

See how this is a very different message of happiness compared to the world. Our society might say something like, blessed are the rich and powerful, because everything they could ever want.

Blessed are the comfortable and the entertained, because pleasure is right there at their fingertips. Or blessed are the ones who are true to themselves and make themselves number one, because nothing and no one holds them back.

[9 : 23] So often our ideas about happiness, if they're not shaped by the Bible, will be about now, rather than be about the future. Our ideas of happiness will tend to be centered on the self.

It's the idea of big me. And we miss the wonder of a big God. So to believe what Jesus teaches, that this is the way to the happy life, is an uphill battle.

And it's a daily uphill battle. And to live this way, we need God's grace. In all of the Beatitudes, Jesus is painting a portrait.

Here is a life, here is a character of a person who has been saved by God's free kindness to us in the Lord Jesus. Here is the picture of a life of someone who's been changed and they're enjoying life with Jesus.

And maybe even as we were reading this description, we were thinking, well, that seems impossible. My life seems so far away from that. All I see, all I sense is my own brokenness.

[10 : 36] Or perhaps we look around and we struggle to believe that God could change anyone else because all we see is there brokenness. And what we need to see and what Jesus gives us a vision of is the God of grace who is the master craftsman, who is able and who is working his people into the image of Jesus, who is transforming hearts and he is working this process that will be complete in the kingdom of heaven.

And Jesus says to us, the happy life is a life of depending on God. It's a life of repenting of sin.

It's a life of humbling ourselves before God. And he promises this brings future blessings into our present. That we can live knowing we're in the family of God.

We can live free of guilt with the comfort of forgiveness. And we can live with security because of a promised inheritance. And all because of God's grace.

Not because of something we've done to earn it or deserve it. I think Jesus wonderfully pictures this for us in maybe the most famous story he told. The story of the prodigal son.

[11 : 56] And that story of the son who rebelled against his father wanted nothing to do with his father. Said, Father I can't wait till you're dead. Give me my share of the money. And he went off and he wasted his money.

And eventually he hit rock bottom. He got to that point where he was poor in spirit. Where he did mourn over his sin. And he came to his senses.

I'm going to go home. And I'm going to confess. And as he went home what did he find? He found a father offering a joyful welcome. He found that he was restored to the family.

That riches and honour became his. That he found literally his famine turned to a feast. And all because of God's grace.

Ray Ortlund is a Bible teacher from the States and he's got a book. A new book called Good News at Rock Bottom. It doesn't sound like good news does it?

[12 : 58] But the good news when we find ourselves at rock bottom he says is that Jesus meets us there. When our life gets hard and discouraging when we find ourselves with that sense of our own poverty and mourning Jesus meets us there to show us grace.

one of our mission partners working in Columbia is Manuel many of us know him well and I was speaking with him this week and he was speaking about the joy that he has in his everyday ministry of seeing the beauty of what happens when God's truth breaks in to a person's life where instead of despair now there's hope.

where instead of being just wrecked by guilt now there's an understanding of the gospel of forgiveness. He talked about the joy of being a spectator of God's powerful transforming work.

Our God is a God of grace who can bring beauty where there was brokenness. I wonder today have we found are we living in this happiness because we know this God.

So that's grace. That's our first word. The second word very basic is the word God. Verse 6 here's another one of our Beatitudes. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.

[14 : 32] I met a friend last week who I hadn't seen for many years. He's French and we were chatting about life and how things were and we concluded after a while by observing that happiness is a cup of French coffee and a nice warm croissant to start the day.

It's happiness isn't it? Even talking about it served to increase appetite and can't wait for the next trip because that means the next taste. Right at the center of the Beatitudes Jesus connects these ideas of happiness and hunger.

And what he says to us here is that a happy life has discovered a new appetite for God. That his worship his ways his will that's the appetite that we want to be filled.

Bruce Springsteen is a great singer songwriter and a great psychologist. He said everybody has a hungry heart. And that's a really good point.

I think that's a biblical point. We are all looking for something to satisfy us. And sometimes we have those great moments of joy when we find ourselves saying this is it this is the thing.

[15 : 52] This is what I was made for. This is the person who makes me feel happy. It can come in lots of different ways. It might be a role or a responsibility that we have in our workplace. It might be a subject that we come to study and we get really into it.

It might be a new friendship or a relationship. It might be the place that we live the home that we make. If you've ever had that experience again it's because this is how we were made.

We were made for joy. We were made to be worshippers. God has made us that we would build our life around something.

And the Bible teaches us actually that the one thing to build our life on is God and life with Him.

That knowing God that would be the great goal that would lead us to sacrifice joyfully to commit wholeheartedly the goal that directs our lives.

[16 : 57] But our human problem is that while we are all made to worship and ultimately to worship God our heart curves inward. So instead of worship going up to God so often it comes back into ourselves and so we find ourselves redirecting our worship.

So we're still looking for happiness we're still looking for an ultimate thing but now we've taken God out of the picture. And so we might find ourselves following the message of the ad campaigns or the message of culture.

You know just you do you or be whatever you want and just you know get as much as you can because that's what life's all about. Those hungry hearts of ours they're often too easily satisfied.

What we fill our lives with is often far more me-centered than it is God-centered. And when we've lived that way I expect like me you find it leaves us with a sense of emptiness.

I'm spending I'm consuming I'm sacrificing but it never seems enough it never feels enough the joy never seems to last. There is no lasting satisfaction because we were made for more.

[18 : 14] It's that God-shaped hole. And so Jesus has come to change our appetite and to teach us about the appetite that we should look to satisfy.

And again this is not what naturally drives our lives. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.

What does Jesus mean? That what we want more than anything is to be right with God and to stay right with God day by day.

That's what I'm hungry for. to couple it with verse seven blessed to the merciful for they will be shown mercy by God's grace.

Here's the appetite I want to pursue to do God's will and to do God's work. To pursue life with God living God's way and to show mercy to others.

[19 : 16] Jesus is saying there is a happiness to be found when we come to an end of ourselves and when our hearts are turned up and out when we look outside ourselves to Jesus Christ.

When that happens we find that he does meet our needs. We are satisfied. We are filled with God's glory.

We see the glory of God and he has shown us mercy so he helps us to show mercy to others. So Jesus here in the Beatitudes he's giving us this glorious picture of a heart and a life restored to God's original creation design.

And you know if God worked this in us and if God by his spirit worked the truth of his word into our hearts we would be a transformed people. We would be a community known for our joy in Jesus because he would be who we'd be hungry for.

We would want more of God's word. Your coming to worship would be a great joy as well as being a duty. We would be eager to spend time with God in prayer.

[20 : 39] We would love to gather together with God's people to worship. We would be so excited about the joy of sharing fellowship and getting to serve alongside brothers and sisters in Christ.

Do we believe that God can change our hearts that way to make us that community? Again, maybe we see naturally this is an uphill battle because our hearts are so easily satisfied and you think about the time that we live in.

We live in what's known as the age of distraction. Maybe especially for those who are younger. Modern technology can keep us constantly busy, always connected, always entertained, always distracted.

How often do we find ourselves with that sense of regret? man, I've just spent ages settling for the equivalent of junk food when Jesus invites us to come to the feast.

We need to pray that we would want to give time and attention to Scripture and to our Savior instead of to endless scrolling. That just as cultivating a healthy diet physically is a battle for so many of us, spiritually we need to understand we are in a battle for our hearts.

[22 : 03] That we would taste and see that God is good. Jesus' words challenge us.

If we're Christians, is this my appetite? Think about how we've spent our time in this past week. Does it reflect a hunger and thirst for righteousness?

To what extent am I letting Jesus' words shape how I parent or my approach to work or to study? Am I committing to a church community that will help me to grow this healthy appetite?

Even ask the question, where do these eight character traits fit in my list of priorities? Do I want to look like this by God's grace?

God's Maybe one way this word will hit us is that we'll ask God today, give me a new appetite for you and for your word, that we wouldn't be satisfied with less than a joyful life in Jesus.

[23 : 17] Okay, so we thought about grace, and we thought about God. The one last word that we're going to think about is the word glory. glory. And that takes us to verse 8, and this beatitude, blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Just to return to the idea of the moment of finding the one, the one person or the one thing, that thing that makes me happy, when we make that discovery, what happens in our lives?

We understand that we find the one, it changes us. We will then find ourselves sacrificing for the sake of that person, and we will do it gladly.

We will spend our energies and our resources for that job that we love. We'll sacrifice easily.

We will commit our lives to that person or that thing, and the people around us know it. our identity becomes shaped by the one.

[24 : 33] Now, why does that happen? Because it does happen, doesn't it? Well, it's all to do with this idea of glory. The biblical word glory is the idea of something having weight, weightiness in our lives.

That boyfriend or that girlfriend, that sport or that hobby, that job, it comes to have weight in our life. And when Jesus says, blessed to the pure in heart, for they will see God, he's saying, a happy life has discovered ultimate glory in Jesus and his gospel.

Jesus has ultimate weight. And that gives us joy when we discover it. love. The idea of blessed to the pure in heart, that's a theme from Psalm 24.

In Psalm 24, we have this idea of the person who is pure in heart, and that heart is not undecided on the worship question.

The happy heart knows God is Lord, he deserves worship, I'm not going to settle for a God substitute, I'm not going to settle for anything less.

[25 : 50] So the happy heart is not undecided, and the happy heart is undivided. To be pure in heart, it is to be undivided.

God and his glory, that's the target I'm going to aim for with laser-like precision. That's the goal I'm going to follow and to sacrifice for. And by God's grace, he works in our hearts, so we come to see Jesus is a glorious saviour.

The good news that sinful people like us can have peace with God through what Jesus did on the cross, that's glorious. That God would show us mercy, though we don't deserve it, that's wonderful and glorious.

It's the best message, it's the happiest news we'll ever hear. So much so, verse 10 to 12, not even persecution will be enough to steal that joy away or make us give up Jesus.

The pure heart wills one thing, nothing will get in the way of Jesus. You'll think about maybe if you go to the theatre, you go to watch a sporting event and you end up sitting behind the person with the, he's really tall, or you sit behind a pillar, you know the frustration of having an obstructed view.

[27 : 14] The Christian won't tolerate an obstructed view of Jesus. We want to see his glory. Think about Zacchaeus. Wonderful story of Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was a very small man and a very hated man. He knew Jesus was coming through his time, he wanted to see Jesus. The crowd wouldn't let him get through, so what he did, what no man of his age and status would do, he climbed a tree.

He faced the hatred of the crowd because he wanted to see Jesus. He wanted an unobstructed view of Jesus, the King of glory, and when he saw it, he discovered Jesus, invite him, show him hospitality, and show him saving grace.

He was changed because he had that desire in his heart to see the glory of Jesus. This is the ultimate reward. verse 8, blessed to the pure in heart for they will see God.

How do we see God? We see God in Jesus. Jesus makes the glory of God visible. And what we need is for God by his grace to open our eyes to the glory and the beauty of Jesus so we would live for him with real happiness.

[28 : 32] happiness. See, at the end of the day, these beatitudes, as much as God is working in our character to make us more and more like this, they're also at the same time a perfect portrait of the perfect character of Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus climbing a hill. The story of Jesus will climax with Jesus going up another hill, the hill of Calvary, the place of the cross.

And as we look to that hill, there we see Jesus, the one who was persecuted for righteousness sake. We see Jesus humble himself to pursue the Father's will, willingly making himself nothing to go on God's rescue mission.

for sinners. We see the pure heart of Jesus, determined to carry out that plan to clean our sin-stained heart.

We see Jesus mourning over sin as he prepared to go up that hill, but we know that as he dies and rises.

[29 : 59] He can give us the joy of forgiveness as he bore the penalty for sin on our behalf. Jesus came as the ultimate peacemaker, making peace by his blood shed on the cross.

Jesus is the ultimate one who shows us mercy. He meets our deepest need in his life and death and resurrection.

resurrection. Jesus is the one who takes God's curse so that you and I can live this blessed life in him and with God.

Jesus suffered and died so that you and I could live a truly happy life today and for all eternity because we know him as Savior and God as our Father.

Father. And as we let the glory of Jesus capture our hearts, that's when he transforms our lives, making something beautiful out of something broken, causing us to long for and to live for the glory of God.

[31 : 13] Amen.