

Matthew 5:3-12

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[0:00] Let me read this passage for us.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth.

Clap along if you know what happiness is to you. Clap along if you feel like that's what you want to do. So sings Pharrell Williams in his crazy popular, super stuck in your song head, Happy.

[1:23] You can even watch a 24-hour music video of this song at 24hoursofhappy.com. In fact, while I was writing the intro to this sermon, I got a little taste of 24hoursofhappy.com.

Over and over and over again, it goes. Now, the reason I want to start here is because I think Pharrell Williams' song is the perfect emblem of the fact that for many of us today, our great goal is simply to be happy.

I remember sitting across the table from a young couple once. We were sort of eating a meal together. And they were sharing with me some of their plans, some of their job plans. And frankly, their plans seemed pretty unwise.

So I was just asking them some questions, just trying to love them and help them think it through. And then eventually, the wife just said, I just want him to be happy. That's our great goal, happiness.

So much so that happiness, I think, even defines for us oftentimes what's true. After all, clap along if you feel that happiness is the truth. One person put it this way, and I think quite nicely.

[2:29] He said, most people today aren't on a truth quest. They're on a happiness quest. In other words, people aren't really trying to live their lives necessarily trying to figure out what's true or what's real.

No, they're trying to live their lives to get happiness. Now, of course, this cultural mindset that we share is problematic in all sorts of ways.

And the Bible puts some deep questions to it at a fundamental level. But perhaps, to our surprise, Jesus begins this sermon that we're studying this summer talking about happiness.

Blessed are those, he says, over and over and over again. Nine times drilling it into our heads. Blessed, that is, happy are those who...

In fact, this section of the sermon, as I mentioned before we started, is often just called the Beatitudes, which comes from the Latin word that just means blessed or happy. And in light of all that, I don't have to guess tonight whether you really care about what Jesus is saying here.

[3:37] Because I know you care. If you're sitting here in this time, in this place, and if you're breathing, you care about what Jesus is talking about here. Because I know that you and I order our lives 99.9% of the time on the basis of what's going to make me happy.

We are wired to seek happiness. And Jesus is saying, here it is. I'm going to tell you who's really blessed, who's really happy.

And yet, what he has to say surprises us the whole way down. Look at the structure of the passage.

There are eight blessings in verses 2 through 10. And then verses 11 and 12 sort of amplify the last one. So you've got eight statements, eight blessings, and the structure of each one of them is the same, right?

Blessed are the blank, for theirs is, or they shall, dot, dot, dot. And the first half of that structure tells us who. And the second half of that tells us why.

[4:45] Who is truly happy? Who is truly blessed? That's the first half of each statement. I mean, don't you want to know? That's pretty cool, right? The second half is why.

Why are they happy? Why are they the true owners of joy? And I actually want to begin, as we sort of study this for the next few minutes, with the why first.

And I want to start with the why first, even though it's the second half of these Beatitudes. Because often when we study this passage, we often spend all of our time honing in on the who. On the qualities or characteristics that Jesus lays out.

And we never get around to the second half, to the why. But in order to really get what Jesus is saying here, we have to see both. So let's start with the why.

And what you notice is the why is that it's all about God and his kingdom. Look at the first Beatitude and the last, verse 2 and verse 10.

[5:40] They're like bookends, summing up the whole. And what do they point us to? Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now when Jesus says kingdom of heaven, heaven here is a way of referring to God himself.

We sometimes speak like that, don't we? We often sort of say something like, well, what did the White House decide to do at the press conference? Which what we really sort of mean when we say that is what did the president decide to do, right? So when Jesus says the kingdom of heaven, he's talking about the kingdom of God who dwells in heaven.

And Jesus is saying that the real why of happiness, the real root of happiness, is the kingdom of God. He says you find it in God's rule, in his reign.

That's where happiness is. Now doesn't that seem immediately counterintuitive to us at first? Because I don't know about you, but I think our instinct is to think that my happiness lies in having my own way.

Having my rule, if you will. Getting what I want and when I want. I'll tell you how I can be happy if my kids go to bed exactly when I tell them to go to bed and they fall asleep immediately.

[6:50] Like a stone. Silent. Until at least 10 or 11 p.m. A.m. Whenever. Whenever they wake up. I don't care if they sleep all day, right? No, right?

Why do so many people think that money will make them happy, right? Because they think that money will allow them to get what they want and when they want. That will help them to actually exercise their will successfully.

To establish their own rule. To establish their own kingdom. But Jesus is saying that's not the way. Getting what you want actually won't make you happy.

Because you were made for God. And you were made for his rule. And you were made for his reign. You see, what the Old Testament looked forward to and longed for was just that.

The day when God would rule the earth. For the day when God would be king. And he would put an end to evil and injustice. And he would come and he would heal the brokenness of creation.

[7:53] And he would judge what's wrong with the world. And he would save his people from sin and death. God's sovereign, gracious, creation healing, soul satisfying reign.

That's the kingdom of God. And that's what most Jews in the lifetime of Jesus were looking for and longing for. For God to break in and make things right.

So consider how exciting it must have been. If you would have been around. And heard Jesus come to your village. And start preaching this message. Repent.

For the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of God is at hand. The world restoring reign of God is breaking in. Right now, Jesus says.

That the long awaited moment is here. So give up your agenda. And take on mine. Which is what repent really means. The world cup is happening this summer in Brazil.

[8:54] Right? Anybody a soccer fan here? And literally for years, Brazil has been preparing for and expecting the great time when they would host the world cup. When countries would gather to their country from around the world.

And when people all around the world would gather together in hundreds, thousands, and watch this great athletic contest. Of course, many of us are Americans here tonight.

So we probably have no idea what the world cup even is. Or why that's really exciting. But if you're here and you're from another country. My guess is that you get that sense of anticipation and excitement. Right? That something big is going to happen.

And it's going to involve the whole world. And there's going to be glory. And there's going to be spectacle. And there's going to be anticipation and celebration. And if that's true of the world cup of a soccer match.

Just imagine the kingdom of God. Look at how Jesus describes it in the second half of all these beatitudes. Those who are going to be part of the kingdom of God.

[9:55] They shall be comforted. They shall inherit the earth. They shall be satisfied. They shall receive mercy. They shall see God.

They shall be called sons and daughters of God. Now look. Take your best picture of happiness.

Your most extravagant one. What is it? Lots of money. A great job. Kids that always obey you. A perfect physique.

Long life. Great friends. Respect from your peers. And I challenge you. To put all that together into one. And then hold it up to what Jesus is talking about here.

Being included in the sovereign reign of God. Where there's comfort. At last. Where there's satisfaction.

[10:53] That doesn't go away. Where there's mercy. Does your picture of happiness involve mercy? Can your money forgive you? Where you become a son or daughter of God.

And inherit the earth. And where you see God. My wife and I just had our 10 year anniversary. And to celebrate that.

We did an overnight in Philadelphia. And we went to an art gallery there. That we had been meaning to see for a long time. Called the Barnes Foundation. And it was a lot of fun. We saw some really beautiful things.

It was great. We loved it. And you know. You can go to the art galleries downtown. In New Haven. And see some fabulous beautiful things. That will just stun you. For a few minutes.

Or for a few hours. And if you know. If you're really wealthy enough. If you get really wealthy enough. You can even buy a piece of art like that. And put it in your home. And you can contemplate it. For days and weeks on end.

[11:50] Or you could own a mountain villa. And get some of the most stunning views. Of the Rockies. Or the Alps. And you can behold. The most stunning. Awe inspiring. Soul shattering views.

In the whole world. Days on end. And friends. That will be child's play. Compared to seeing God. Those things are going to be like crayon.

On construction paper. Compared to viewing the one. Who created all things. And who owns and rules all things. And whose glory never fades.

C.S. Lewis gave this great image. At the end of the Chronicles of Narnia. What will life in God's future kingdom be like? In the new heavens. In the new earth. And he said that it will be one.

In which. We go further up. And we go further in. And it never gets old. Further up. And further in. And every day is as new as the one before.

[12:51] You see friend. No matter what you stake. Your happiness on in this life. It's not going to last. It will get old. Even the most incredible view. From the most illustrious villa.

On top of the most fabulously high mountain. Will grow old to your heart. Why? Because you were made for something greater.

You were made. To slake. The thirst of your heart. On a well of infinite happiness. You were made for God. And his kingdom.

You were made. To lose yourself. In him. Don't you get a taste of that? Have you ever sort of just seen. A skyline.

Or seen a piece of art. Where suddenly you just stop thinking about yourself for a second. And you just get caught up. In how majestic it is. And how wonderful it is. And I challenge you to find moments in your life.

[13:56] When you're actually losing yourself. In something that's beautiful. I challenge you to find a moment in your life. When you are more free. Than in that moment. Friends. What God is offering you.

In the kingdom to come. Is freedom. Like nothing you've ever experienced. When you lose yourself. In the thing. In the one. In the God. Who is glorious beyond comparison.

So friends. What's your agenda tonight? Where are you trying to find happiness? If you're like me.

My guess is that Jesus is blowing up. Your understanding. Of where happiness is to be found. And he's not doing it by just saying. Don't be happy. But by saying. Stop playing in the mud.

When he's calling you to a vacation at sea. Stop drinking broken cisterns. When there's a well of soul satisfying water. Stop living for a now. That's going to grow old.

[14:52] When there's a future. That will always be new. Stop living for your own little kingdom. And start living for God's kingdom.

Because God's kingdom is breaking in. Jesus says. In his own person. And it's continuing. Through the work of those. Who've united themselves to Christ with faith.

And it's going to come. In all of its fullness. When Jesus returns. So if that's the why of happiness. The kingdom of God. Now let's look at the who.

Who is it. That's actually participating. In this reality. That Jesus is talking about. Who is it that's actually got their hearts. Connected to that thing. That's coming. Now it's helpful to understand.

What Jesus says here. When we put it in the historical context. As we said. In the first century. Nearly every Jew in Palestine. Was looking forward. To the kingdom of God. To God's in-breaking power. That would sort of. Crush their enemies.

[15 : 54] And vindicate Israel. And sort of set them up. But different groups. Had different ideas. Of what it looked like. To actually live. In light of God's coming kingdom. There were some. Groups called zealots.

Who basically said. Look. If God's kingdom is coming. If the rain is coming. Let's help him out. By taking military action. Against our oppressors. That's the way. To show your identity. In the kingdom of God.

Or there were people called Pharisees. Who basically said. Look. If God's reign is coming. Let's follow God's law. As closely as possible. And be as ceremonially pure. As we can be. To prove. That we're on the inside.

And to sort of. Further God's case. And then there were people. Called Essenes. And they were sort of like. Modern day. Hyper fundamentalists. And their shtick. Was basically.

Look. If God's reign is coming. Let's get out. Of this corrupt society. And go live in the hills. In communes. And be really. Really meticulous. For our own laws. Because when God comes back. Everyone's going to get it.

[16 : 48] Except for us. And then there were the sort of. People who were basically. Just trying to stay on top. The Sadducees.

And the temple authorities. Who basically said. Look. If God's reign is coming. He's surely going to do it. Through the temple. So let's just do everything we can. To make sure. That we stay in power. And keep this sort of. Big.

Fraught. Machine. Going. And you know. What most of those ways. Had in common. And there are all sorts of ways. We can sort of point. To parallels today. To put it in a nutshell.

Everyone said. And what they all had in common. Was basically. When you look at it. They were all self-righteous. And they were all self-protecting.

With respect to God. There was just. An underlying current. Of self-righteousness. Now of course. Pharisees. Look.

[17 : 42] They knew all about forgiveness. And they participated. In the temple sacrifices. They might not have been. Hardcore legalists. But they were still hoping. To mark themselves off. As the people of God. By what they did.

And how closely. They kept the commandments. And with respect. To other people. All of these groups. Were immensely self-protecting. Yes. They believed in generosity. And love. To an extent. But ultimately.

There was a line. And some people. Were on the far side. Of that line. And isn't it the same. With us today. Don't we think.

That with respect to God. I need to bring my resume. And with respect to others. I can only go so far. And certainly not. With those kind of people.

Do you see how radically different. Jesus' definition. Of kingdom people is. In these verses. Look at the first four Beatitudes. They talk about our relationship to God.

[18 : 40] And what do we see? Not self-righteousness. Right? But self-emptiness. They're poor in spirit. They know that they've got nothing.

In the spiritual bank account. But to buy God's favor. They're morally broke. And they know it. Those are the people. Who are in the kingdom. Jesus says. They're the people. Who mourn over their sin. They're not trying to cover it up.

They're not trying to excuse it. Their sin actually grieves them. And they're meek. That is. They aren't afraid to have others. Point out their failings. They're not proudly offended. When other people show them their faults.

And he says. They hunger and thirst for righteousness. They want to please God. More and more. In thought. And word. And deed. In public. In private. And they hunger for this. Because they know that they have a long way to go.

But they want it. Jesus says. The truly blessed. Those who are in the kingdom. Are those who come empty before God. Saying.

[19:38] Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to the cross I cling. As the old hymn goes. Before God. In other words. They're receivers.

That they receive all. With open hands. Dependent on God's grace. And if that's true. Don't you see. How these beatitudes.

Are not telling us. Here's how you earn a place. In God's kingdom. Be like this. How could they? Jesus says. That the very first sign. That you've been brought into the kingdom. Is knowing.

That you don't deserve. To be in the kingdom. But that God accepts you. Holy by grace. That's what kingdom people. Are going to look like. Their approach to God.

Is going to be one of humble. Reception. And dependence. But if we come before God. With emptiness. Then we go out to others. In fullness.

[20:31] Look at the second set of beatitudes. In verses 7 through 10. Our relationship to others. As kingdom people. Isn't one of self-protection. But self-giving. We're merciful. We're pure in heart. That is. We're truthful.

We're sincere. We're peacemakers. We're even persecuted. For righteousness sake. Which is Jesus then. Points it down. For my sake. And all these are costly acts.

Aren't they? All of them are bold. And courageous. And they're costly. To be merciful. Even when the other is being mean. And vindictive. To be pure in heart.

To be sincere. Even when it would be easier. To hide. Or to go with the flow. Or even lie. To be a peacemaker. To strive for reconciliation. And forgiveness.

Even when it would be a lot easier. To just be a peacekeeper. Right? Just avoid. Just keep the peace. No. Jesus says you're peacemakers. You go forward. With a mission of reconciliation.

[21:31] And to even be persecuted. Jesus says. To cut against the grain. Of culture. To even offend. When it would be easier.

To compromise. Or to bend. They're all hard. Right? But don't they all make sense? You see. These beatitudes. They're all interconnected.

They all flow into one another. You see. If I'm empty before God. If I. Come to him. Without any presumptions. Without any of my own.

Supposed righteousness. And if I come to him like that. And I receive his mercy. And grace. How could I not. Then be merciful. Towards others. How could not.

The more and more. I see. God's undeserved mercy. To me. Will that not. Change my heart. To go out. And be merciful. Towards anybody. How is it.

[22:26] That if I come. Empty handed. And have been made. His son or daughter. How could I not. Then go out. Into the world. And be a peacemaker. Not only.

Because I've been. Reconciled to God. When I don't deserve it. But because. I have an identity. Now that can't be shaken. By other people's approval. So I don't need. To keep the peace. I can actually go. And be proactively.

Working. Towards forgiveness. And reconciliation. Even when it costs something. Because I know. I can't lose. What's really. Important. My relationship. With God.

How can I not. Go out into the world. If that's true. Full of mercy. And purity. And peacemaking. And even to be able. To face persecution. You see how they're.

Interconnected. How could I not. Go out that way. Because my heart's. Been changed. Because I've been. Filled by grace. So friend.

[23:25] As we bring it to a close. Let me just ask you this. Has your heart. Been changed. Have you tasted. His grace. In Christ. Christ. Maybe you're asking. How. How does that come about.

Here's how. It comes about. By realizing. That these beatitudes. Ultimately describe. Not just. A picture. Of a Christian. But they ultimately.

Describe. The person of Christ. Friends. Isn't it true. That he was merciful. And abundantly so. And pure in heart. When did he ever. Speak a word. That was.

Full of guile. Or deceit. Utterly pure in heart. When did he not. Welcome. Sinners to the table. With him. He was merciful. He was meek. When did he ever.

Try to assert. His own authority. Forcefully. Over others. Was he not. Gentle. And strong. In all of his dealings. He lived his whole life. In perfect righteousness.

[24:21] Lived in complete. Humble dependence. Upon God the Father. Our small group. Has been studying. The Gospel of Luke. And it's amazing. When you go through. The Gospel of Luke. How often Jesus. Is praying. To the Father.

And the Holy Spirit. In utter dependence. Seeking his will. Seeking his way. And yet. Jesus too. Was persecuted.

And at infinite cost. He became the ultimate. Peacemaker. Between you. And God. You see. With the Father.

Before time began. Jesus knew. Infinite joy. He was. Supremely blessed. He was. Infinitely happy. And nothing. Could harm that. Nothing. Could touch that.

God didn't create the world. Because he needed something. To entertain him. God was. Infinitely happy. In himself. And yet. Jesus was willing. To give that up. And to come to earth.

[25:16] And die on the cross. And to there. Be made. Ultimately poor. To be stripped. Of all he had. And to mourn. And to hunger.

And to thirst. And to do all that. For the sake of. An even greater joy. That he would give up. His joy.

His blessing. For the even greater joy. Of bringing you. Into the kingdom. And friends. If you come to him. With empty hands.

He'll fill you with his spirit. With his joy. With his blessing. And he'll make you. A part of his kingdom. And seal you for it. And then you'll know happiness. Happiness that won't spoil.

Or fade. Or go away. But one that will grow. As you walk this life with him. And friends. If that's already you. If you've already given your life to Christ.

[26:12] If you've already gotten a taste. Of that blessedness. Of that kingdom. That Jesus is speaking about here. Then let me suggest this week. That you take one. Of these eight beatitudes. Just one of them. And meditate on it this week.

Maybe even memorize it. Just get it down. Into your heart. And let the Holy Spirit. Begin to use it. In your heart. And what will happen is.

Is that the spirit. Will start to use. That word. That you're meditating on. To show you more of Jesus. To show you more of how Christ. Is the one. Who is really. Who this beatitude is about.

And the spirit. Will take that beatitude. And it'll start to. Stir up your affections. For the kingdom of God. For what it means to see God. For what it means to be. Truly satisfied. Or comforted.

And then the spirit. Will also start to stir you. And to shape you. And to lead you. More and more. Into Christ likeness. And that's where happiness is found.

[27 : 09] In being made like him. Let's pray together. Jesus we pray that we would know. What it means.

To be recipients of your grace. To be brought into your kingdom. And God we pray. That by your spirit. We become more and more those. Who are empty before you.

And yet full towards others. God give us deep longing. For your kingdom. And Lord make us into people. Who are. Poor in spirit.

Who mourn. Who are meek. Who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And out of that God are merciful. And who are pure in heart. And who are peacemakers. God and who even are able to withstand persecution.

For righteousness sake. Lord make it so. Not for our sake. But for your glory sake. We pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.