

CHAPTER ONE

Blessed Are the Beggars

Matthew 5:1-3

Happiness Is . . .

The magazine *Psychology Today* sent a survey to 52,000 of their subscribers, asking them to respond by telling how they found happiness or how they *believed* they would find happiness. Responses flooded in from all over the country.

Those replying from the poorer end of the economic scale dreamed of winning the lottery. This actually was the favored fantasy. Many respondents equated happiness with a winning lottery ticket.

Those people really need to take a closer look into the lives of lottery winners. I read of one individual who won nearly eight million dollars in the Pennsylvania lottery. Within a year his wife left him, winning alimony and child support that would eventually cost him about a million dollars; his landlady sued him for 30% of the winnings and won in court; his own brother and sister-in-law were indicted and imprisoned for trying to hire someone to kill him in an attempt to get his money.

Now there is one *happy* man!

Respondents to the magazine survey who were in the *wealthy* category complained that they did not have *enough* money to be truly happy. In fact, most of them complained of boredom.

Answers poured in from different geographical regions of the country as well. You might expect those living in Florida to be happier than those living in North Dakota, but that wasn't the case at all.

In the final summary, people *everywhere* were mixed up, tired, bored, angry, disillusioned, and

confused. In fact, one man wrote, "I have listed below the reason I *think* I've found happiness . . . please confirm if I have."

Frankly, it didn't matter who they were, how much money they made, or where they lived—they all wanted something more or something less/something different or something else!

That's what we call the "greener grass" myth which causes every honest person to admit to wondering if there is something out there in life that will bring lasting satisfaction.

William Barclay wrote, ". . . that is human happiness; it is something that is dependent on the chances and changes of life—something life might give, but that life might also [take away]."¹

So true! In reality, the word *happiness* betrays this same truth. *Happiness* has the middle-English root *hap*, which is also found in the word *happening*.

In other words, happiness depends on what happens! We are happy if certain things happen to us; if they do *not* happen, then our happiness vanishes like a mist.

I think it is ironic that the middle letter in the English word *happiness* is the letter *i*—and rightly so.

To most people, the state of being happy revolves around *I, me* and *my*:

- What's going to happen to *me*?

- What’s going to happen to *my* family—*my* health?
- What am *I* getting out of *my* job?
- What’s going to happen to *my* life’s savings?
- What’s going to happen to *my* plans—*my* dreams?

Happiness, to the human heart, is all about *me* and *mine*.

This means, then, that *we* are the greatest obstacle blocking the way to true, genuine, blessed living.

I find it fascinating that Jesus Christ’s first sermon recorded in Scripture, *The Sermon on the Mount*, identifies true, abiding happiness and how to discover it.

The Beatitudes “Supreme Happiness”

In this Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5, nine times in nine verses Jesus Christ will use the word *happiness*. It is translated *blessed*, from *makarios* (μακάριος), the Greek word that means *fortunate, blessed, or happy*.ⁱⁱ

Jesus Christ is going to turn it all upside down. He is going to “blow their minds.”

Just look through the first few statements Jesus makes about happiness in this chapter:

- **verse 3:** *Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .*
- **verse 4:** *Blessed are those who mourn . . .*
- **verse 10:** *Blessed are those who are persecuted . . .*

You’re thinking, “You’ve got to be kidding! These people sound like a bunch of losers—not winners.”

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching . . .

(Matthew 7:28).

There is little wonder that this was the result when Jesus finished preaching.

The people were amazed [from the Greek word *ekpleso* (εκπλησσω)]—they were beside themselves. The crowds were astounded by His teaching. Why?ⁱⁱⁱ

Matthew 7:29 explains:

. . . for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

The scribes quoted from tradition, quoted other scribes, and expounded on the words of famous rabbis and history.

Jesus Christ announces that the authority is He Himself! He says bold things to them, such as,

“You have heard that it was said . . .

But I say to you . . .” (Matthew 5:18, 21-22, 27-28, 31-34, 38-39, 43-44).

Furthermore, Jesus calls God His own Father and tells everyone what God thinks and how God actually feels about certain things (*Matthew 6:14-15; 7:10-11*).

Not only that, but Jesus refers to Himself as the final Judge who actually will determine who gets into heaven (*Matthew 7:21*).

It’s no surprise that the crowd was dumbfounded!

But this was yet to come. Arresting the attention of the crowd at the very beginning of this sermon was the fact that Jesus claimed to know how to find that one elusive element of life that mankind has been chasing throughout all human history: true, lasting, genuine *happiness*.

Pursuing Happiness

We in America claim to know all about the pursuit of happiness. Benjamin Franklin made this insightful comment about our own Constitution that guarantees everyone “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” He wrote, “Please note that the Constitution only gives a people the right to *pursue* happiness; you have to catch it yourself.”^{iv}

The trouble is that sometimes we *think* we’ve caught happiness by the collar. But over time, it doesn’t measure up.

In New York City there are at least eight million cats . . . and counting. The city is basically concrete and steel, so when those who live there have a pet that dies, they can’t just go out into the back yard and bury it. The city charges a fee of fifty dollars to remove the carcass.

One rather enterprising woman thought, *I can render a service to people in the city and save them money*. She placed this ad in the newspaper: “When your pet cat dies, I’ll take care of it for you for only \$25.” Since this was half the price of the city fee, phone calls began coming in. But here’s how the business actually worked:

The woman would go to the local Salvation Army Thrift Store and buy an old suitcase for two or

three dollars. When someone called for her services, she went to the home and carefully placed the cat in the suitcase. She would then take a ride on the subway in the early evening—a perfect time for pickpockets and thieves—and place the suitcase near the door of the car. A thief would come by when the doors opened, steal the suitcase, and run out. She would yell, “Stop, thief!” What a surprise for the thief!^v

The truth is, the world is running after a suitcase thought to hold the key to happiness, but when opened, the contents never quite deliver what is expected.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ delivered the news of *how* and *where* people can actually find genuine, lasting happiness. And just so no one would miss it, He gave several poignant descriptions of *who* the people are who find it.

Finding Happiness

Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them . . . (Matthew 5:1-2).

The traditional posture of a rabbi while he was teaching was to be seated. When he sat and taught, it was official business.

Even to this day, we refer to a professor occupying a *chair*; in the academic world, a *chair* is endowed for the teaching of some aspect of learning. We understand that the *chairman* is the official spokesperson of a board or a committee.

The phrase “he opened His mouth” is a Greek expression used to describe serious, weighty statements.^{vi}

These statements by Jesus are called “Beatitudes” in most Bible outlines. The word plainly means *supreme happiness*.

Jesus Christ will deliver the surprising news that true happiness has nothing to do with an *external* situation—it has everything to do with an *internal* spirit.

What we discover in these beatitudes are the keys to overcoming *me*-attitudes—those which stand in the way of genuine happiness.

Happy Are the Poor in Spirit

The reason Christ’s first statement stunned the minds of the crowd and rocked their world is in Matthew 5:3, where Jesus said,

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

These people had been hearing from their rabbis for generations, “Blessed are the *perfect* in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

But Christ was saying, in effect, “Blessed are those who recognize they are *not* perfect in spirit.”

Now just what does “poor in spirit” mean?

The word translated *poor* is *ptochos*, which is extremely descriptive of someone facing total bankruptcy.

In the days of Christ this word would be used for a person who was “as poor as a beggar.”^{vii}

It referred to a kind of poverty so deep that the person needed help to just survive. Literally, he would be entirely dependent upon someone else for everything.^{viii}

Poverty of spirit, then, is an awareness that in ourselves there dwells no good thing (*Romans 7:18*), and we are completely and utterly dependent upon Christ for everything.

As a result, only the spiritually bankrupt inherit the kingdom of heaven—they are the ones who entrust their eternal future to Christ alone.

Spiritual Bankruptcy

Thomas Watson, a wonderful Puritan pastor (1620–1686), wrote on this text, “This signifies those who are brought to the sense of their sins, and seeing no goodness in themselves, despair in themselves and [appeal] wholly to the mercy of God in Christ.”

He went on to say, “Until we are poor in spirit we cannot receive grace, for we are swollen with self-excellency and self-sufficiency. If the hand be full of pebbles it cannot receive gold. Until we are poor in spirit, Christ is never precious. We only see our wants and never see Christ’s worth.”^{ix}

The world would say, “Happy is the man who is always right; blessed are those who have it all together.”

Yet, Christ effectively says, “But I say to you, blessed are those whose hands are empty—those who recognize their spiritual bankruptcy . . . they are the ones on the road to genuine happiness.”

The words *in spirit* refer to the inner man, not the body.

The inner person begs for the strength of Christ; the inner man is humble and contrite of spirit and trembles at My word (*Isaiah 66:2*). The Lord saves those who are crushed in spirit (*Psalms 34:18*); the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise (*Psalms 51:17*).^x

This is fundamentally the difference between the hypocrite and the child of God. The hypocrite will boast in what he has *externally*; a true child of God mourns what he lacks *internally*.

A hypocrite is happy because he is so good. This is the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14, who went into the temple to pray and reminded God how *good* he was: he fasted; he tithed; he acted honorably. But the tax collector, who was also there, merely reminded God how *bad* he was and cried out like a bankrupt beggar, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (*Luke 18:13b*). This humble man inherited the kingdom of heaven.

Spiritual Solvency

I often have people say to me, “Stephen, there’s something wrong with me—I want to be like Christ, but I’m so unlike Him; I want to become holy, but I consistently fail to meet the mark of holiness. Can I feel this way and truly be a Christian?”

My answer usually begins with reminding them that the enemy of their soul would never make them aware of what they lack of Christ—the devil will always say you have enough of Him.

So this agony of spirit happens to be wonderful evidence of the work of Christ in your heart.

I remember reading this perspective for the first time, and, oh, how encouraging it was! It was, again, from the pen of Thomas Watson, the Puritan pastor, writing on this same text: “Christian, do you grieve that you are so bad? Do you go from moment to moment needing God’s supply? Do you complain to God that you lack grace? Do you complain that you need a broken heart; a thankful heart? This is a good sign . . . you are poor in spirit and the kingdom of heaven belongs to you.”^{xi}

Imagine Christ’s promise of the kingdom of heaven: “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This pronouncement is such fantastic news. It’s not a wish, but a reality—it’s theirs! And, by the way, the pronoun is emphatic, which can be translated *theirs alone*.

Who does the kingdom belong to? It belongs only to the poor in spirit. And it is a present tense verb. It belongs to the poor in spirit . . . *now*!

That means we are not just talking about the Millennial Kingdom [the thousand-year reign of Christ] but the kingdom of heaven; it’s yours *now*.

One author wrote, “There is a future Millennium in which the kingdom promises become full-blown, fully realized, but the kingdom has a present tense nuance. The reign of Christ in your life is now. His reign has a future Messianic aspect; but it has a “right now” aspect. We are, *right now*, a kingdom of priests. We are, *right now*, subjects of Jesus Christ.”^{xii}

I like the way another author put it: “The kingdom is grace and glory—grace now . . . glory later.”^{xiii}

The truth is that even after you are saved, you never outgrow this kind of spirit.^{xiv}

Then why do we so desperately try to get beyond our sense of total bankruptcy in spirit?

Go into the average Christian bookstore and look at what is pawned off on us. Book after book tells us how to win; how to conquer all frailties; how to rule without suffering; how to live without needs.

But have you ever seen books entitled:

How to Be a Nobody

How to Empty Yourself of Self

I’ve Discovered My Problem and It Was Me All Along!

How to Live for Something Other Than Myself

Warren Wiersbe put it this way: “The Beatitudes are attitudes that ought to be in the believer’s life. And we will rarely read of them, or be encouraged to act like them.”^{xv}

Surprising Pathways to Happiness

Three passages where this word *makarios*, or *blessed*, appears point the way to unexpected pathways that bring happiness.

1. Happiness is found through *commitment* when the will of God is confusing.

The angel came to Mary, a confused teenage girl. Mary was no super saint, but rather, someone who submitted to the confusing will of God.

Nevertheless, in her declaration of faith, Mary said, in Luke 1:48b,

. . . from now on all generations will call me blessed.

That word *blessed* is the same word used by Christ in His beatitude. Mary was indeed happy—totally dependent on God.

We might be tempted to say, “Sure, Mary was happy—she should be; she bore the Messiah.”

Yet, look at her life. Mary was on the run, having had one angelic warning after another. Later in life she, along with Joseph’s and her other children, became confused about the Lord’s identity and purpose. In fact, on one occasion she and her grown children came to take Christ away privately because they thought He had lost His mind (*Mark 3:21*).

After the resurrection though, she and Christ’s half-brothers understood and believed the truth of His claims, as we are told in Acts 1:14.

So, if you are under the impression that happiness only occurs in the lives of those who clearly understand what God is doing with them—think again.

Imagine that for most of Mary’s life she never lived down the accusation of fornication (*John 8:41*). Still, she was *committed* to the will of God even when it didn’t seem to make much sense and found, through dependency on God, true happiness.

This route to happiness is *commitment* to Christ, even when His will is confusing.

2. Happiness is found through *persistence* when the will of God is painful.

James writes,

Behold, we consider those blessed [makarios or supremely happy] who remained steadfast . . . (James 5:11).

The context of this paragraph in James deals with happiness in, of all things, suffering.

John Calvin’s sermon on this text reminded his listeners that the world would say a happy person is one who is *free* of pain. But Christ says a happy person is one who persists in following God in spite of pain.^{xvi}

A large part of the reason for this is because that person who persists through pain is one who develops total and utter dependency on Christ, and in Him finds true satisfaction. In reality, circumstances may not change—but the believer does.

So we find another course to happiness is *persistence* in following Christ, even when His will is painful.

3. Happiness is found through *obedience* when the will of God is obvious.

Revelation 1:3 says, and I paraphrase,

Blessed are all those who read and hear and obey the words of this prophecy—those who keep what is written in it.

You may say, “Okay, if I obey, I’ll be blessed—I get it.” But do you really get the *whole* concept? What about those not-so-obvious directives from God? You’ll find examples of those who obeyed God’s commands without seeing or knowing the end result in Hebrews 11:

- *By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household . . .*
- *By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance . . .*
- *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac . . .*
- *By faith he [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king . . .*
- *By faith they [the Israelites] passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land . . .*
- *By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient . . .*
- *. . . Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel and the prophets . . .*
- *. . . others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection . . .*
- *. . . and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned . . .*
- *sawn in two . . . tempted . . . put to death with the sword . . .*
- *All these died in faith, without receiving*

the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.
Hebrews 11:13, 16

Commitment—when the will of God is *confusing*.

Persistence—when the will of God is *painful*.

Obedience—when the will of God is *obvious*.

These three are surprising pathways to happiness.

The Inheritance of Beggars

Joni Eareckson Tada, the quadriplegic who has impacted the lives of so many people with her testimony, wrote in a magazine article of being a

speaker at a Christian women's conference. One woman said, "Joni, you always look so together, so happy in your wheelchair. I wish that I had your joy!"

Joni responded, "I don't do it. In fact, let me tell you how I woke up this morning. This is my average day: After my husband Ken leaves for work at 6 a.m., I am alone until I hear the front door open at 7:00 a.m. That is when a friend arrives to get me up. While I listen to her make coffee, I pray, 'Lord, my friend will soon give me a bath, get me dressed, sit me up in my chair, brush my hair and teeth, and send me out the door. I don't have the strength to face this routine one more time. I have no resources. I don't have a smile to take into this day. But You do. May I have Yours?' So . . . whatever joy you see today was hard-won this morning. [And in reality, it is only what I begged from God today.]"^{xvii}

This is why beggars are the truly happy ones. They have abandoned themselves to the all-sufficient resources of God's grace.

Blessed are the [bankrupt beggars] . . .

Oh, and don't forget—they have also inherited the kingdom of heaven!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/2/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John MacArthur, *Kingdom Living Here and Now* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 26.

ⁱⁱ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

^{iv} Robert J. Morgan, *Thomas Nelson's Complete Book of Stories* (Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 406.

^v Scott Wenig, #182, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>.

^{vi} MacArthur, p. 37.

^{vii} Rienecker and Rogers, p. 12.

^{viii} R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Crossway, 2001), p. 19.

^{ix} Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes* (Banner of Truth, 1985 ed. of 1660 ed.), p. 42.

^x MacArthur, p. 45.

^{xi} Watson, p. 46.

^{xii} MacArthur, p. 49.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*, p. 50.

^{xiv} Hughes, p. 21.

^{xv} Warren Wiersbe, *Live Like a King* (Moody, 1976), p. 22.

^{xvi} John Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes* translated by Robert White (Banner of Truth Trust, 2006 ed. of 1560 ed.).

^{xvii} Joni Eareckson Tada, "Joy Hard-Won," *Decision* (Mar. 2000), p. 12.