

Happy Are the Harassed

Overcoming the Me-Attitudes – Part 5

Matthew 5:9-12

Say That Again . . .

A man knew his wife’s birthday was coming soon, so he asked her—without appearing to be too interested in her answer—“Honey, if you could have one wish, what would you want?”

She thought for a moment, then laughed and said, “I’d love to be eight again.”

On the morning of her birthday, he woke her and off they went to a nearby Waffle House. After a huge waffle with strawberries and whipped cream, they headed to the local theme park. What a day they had! The Death Slide, the Cyclone Whip, the Screaming Loop, the Wall of Fear, the Double-Ring Ferris Wheel—she rode everything!

Five hours later she staggered out of the theme park with her husband—head reeling, stomach churning. Off to McDonald’s they went, where he ordered a Big Mac with fries and a thick chocolate milkshake. Afterwards, he plopped down money for the latest Disney animated movie, popcorn, Pepsi, and a bag of peanut M&Ms—topping off a day full of fabulous eight-year-old adventures.

Exhausted, she stumbled into the house late that evening with her husband and collapsed on the bed. He leaned over and softly whispered, “Well now, how’d you like being eight again?”

One eye opened in surprise and she moaned, “I meant my dress size!”

It’s one thing to think we heard someone, but it’s another thing to have been properly understood!

It is typical, is it not, for us to have to say to someone:

- “Oh, I thought you said that.”
- “I thought when you said this, you meant that.”
- “I didn’t think I heard you right when you said that, so I didn’t think you said it.”

How many husbands say, “Honey, I didn’t hear you say that.”

How many wives say, “I can’t believe you’re saying you didn’t hear me say that.”

No offense; don’t misunderstand me—these illustrations are purely hypothetical!

What God *Really* Said

Without a doubt, everyone has an opinion of what God says on just about everything . . . certainly on what pleases Him:

- If you do this, God will be pleased and you will be happy.
- If you don’t do this, God will be pleased and you will be happy.
- If you do this or don’t do that, God will *not* be pleased and you will *not* be happy.

Is God really that confusing on the subject of happiness?

I find it fascinating that as Jesus Christ began His first sermon, He could have said a lot of things about *a lot of things*. However, He began by clearing up the truth about happiness and the Christian life.

With nine statements, each beginning with the word *makarios*, which is defined as “true, genuine, sustained happiness,” Jesus Christ radically defines a life of true happiness.

We have uncovered, in the process of studying these statements, the principle that dying to self is the first and ongoing step toward happiness.

We have discovered that the *Blesseds* [Beatitudes] are the opposite of Me-attitudes.

Jesus Christ defined the path in Matthew chapter 5 by radically upending conventional religious wisdom. What the religious leaders and people of Christ’s day thought God had said was totally different from what God really meant.

For that reason, don’t misunderstand what God is saying about happiness! You think you heard Him, but let’s make sure.

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons of God.*

Matthew 5:9

“Happy are the peacemakers.”

Notice that Jesus Christ does not say, “Happy are the peaceful,” or “Happy are the undisturbed.”

Oh, no . . . in fact, the Lord uses a compound word:

- **peace:** much the same as the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means “wholeness or well-being”. When a Jew wished another person *shalom*, it was not just “have a nice and peaceful day”—it was a blessing for them to have a whole life.
- **maker:** demands that we understand that the person is not passive, but literally someone who negotiates peace.ⁱⁱ

By the way—notice that Christians who are peacemakers are called,

. . . sons of God.

The Lord uses the word *huios* (υιός) for sons, instead of the normal word *tekna* (τεκνα) for children. *Tekna* is the tender and affectionate term for little children. *Uios* is the term which speaks of dignity and honor.ⁱⁱⁱ

We literally bear the honor and dignity of God as we bring peace.

In the same vein, notice that peacemakers are not given the promise of peace. Peacemaking can distort

everything in our world. A godly person might stir up trouble! We might have a war!

Wherever the Apostle Paul went, there was either a revival or a riot!

The cross of Christ is the greatest example of making peace. And it cost the life of the Peacemaker. Peacemakers do not sacrifice truth nor gloss over sin. The Lord openly exposed sin and then He suffered for sin! His death brought us peace!^{iv}

Paul wrote,

*Therefore, since we have been justified
by faith, we have peace with God
through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

(Romans 5:1)

There was nothing cheap nor easy about this peace. Paul further discloses to the Colossians:

*For in [Christ] all the fullness of God
was pleased to dwell, and through Him
to reconcile to Himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,
making peace by the blood of His cross.*

Colossians 1:19-20

Christ made peace for us. Paul uses the same root words for Christ making peace that Christ used of us being peacemakers.^v

It will cost us. We will have to die to *self*.

Peace Comes at a Price

Every time we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone, we are engaged in peacemaking. The world is in deep trouble at this very moment, whether realizing it or not; it is the enemy of heaven—and we beg the world to be reconciled to God.

Paul declares to the Corinthians,

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ,
God making his appeal through us.*

*We implore you on behalf of Christ,
be reconciled to God.*

II Corinthians 5:20

I have made enemies because of my testimony . . . have you?

Have you ever had anyone bawl you out, saying something like, “Who do you think you are, telling me I’m a sinner?”

Now, this doesn't mean we grab people by the nape of the neck and make them repeat, "I'm a dirty rotten sinner." Be that as it may, they eventually realize that is exactly what we are saying!

Have you ever had a door slammed in your face?

Have you ever been passed over for a promotion because you wouldn't laugh it up with the boys?

Have you ever been ridiculed for your faith in Christ?

Standing up as a child of God may mean you stand alone.

Peace May Be Hard-Won

I have read the biography of General Douglas MacArthur, the great general of World War II—depending on which author you are reading. Japanese soldiers had dug in on multiple dozens of islands and after the terms of surrender had been signed, many hadn't received that news. I read a few years ago—if you can imagine—it is believed that the last Japanese soldier from WW II has been found! For decades he had been isolated on an island; hiding out; living in fear in the jungle; not knowing that the war had ended. Equally tragic, I read that the Japanese government sent messengers to many of these islands to deliver the news: The war has ended . . . and some of them were shot and killed.

There is a parallel to this if you become a peacemaker: you may lose sleep; you may ruffle feathers; you may make enemies. You may sacrifice peacefulness in order to make peace.

On the other hand, if you are willing to share not only in the power of His resurrection but in the fellowship of the sufferings of the Son of God, you redeemed sons of God will engage in delivering the news that peace with God is now available through Jesus Christ.

I recommend to my seminary students that they read the short biography of Robert Chapman, the pastor of a small church in nineteenth-century England. He was a man deeply respected and considered by Charles Spurgeon as the saintliest man in England.

Yet, not everyone liked Robert Chapman. A grocer once became so infuriated by Chapman's open-air preaching that he spit on him. For a number of years the grocer continued to verbally attack him. Chapman never retaliated.

On one occasion Chapman's wealthy relatives came to visit. Since Robert was a single man his

entire life, they decided to cook for him, and asked where groceries could be purchased. Chapman insisted they go to a particular store. After purchasing a large amount of food, the request was made that it be delivered to the home of R. C. Chapman. The stunned grocer told the visitor that they must have come by accident to the wrong shop. "No," came the reply, "Mr. Chapman himself insisted that we come here."

When the grocer arrived with the delivery and Chapman answered the door, he broke down in tears at Chapman's graciousness and yielded his life that very afternoon to Jesus Christ.^{vi}

Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

Christ actually amplifies the results of being peacemakers in the final beatitude in Matthew 5:10-12.

*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.*

Truly happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Persecuted is passive in the Greek, indicating that the persecuted are giving permission; are willingly allowing themselves to be maligned, persecuted, hated, ignored—perhaps even incarcerated or killed.

And it is in the perfect tense which means that persecution is happening with continuing results.^{vii}

The word translated *persecuted* carries the thought of being chased or pursued. We could render it *harassed!*

Jesus Christ says, "Happy are the harassed," but notice that He adds, "for righteousness' sake."

Punishment Isn't Persecution

When we get pulled over for running a stop light, that is not persecution by the State. We cannot expect rewards in heaven for that.

When I was a kid, my friend and I would explore the woods near our subdivision in the summertime until it grew dark. There was an apartment complex on our way home, and the box that controlled the electricity for the entire building was downstairs. We would scout around to make sure no one was outside, then pull the lever that shut off the power, and run out into the open as the entire building went dark.

The last time we ever did it—and I do mean the *last* time—two guys, one dressed in army fatigues, happened to be standing on the balcony just above the wall where the switch was located. They heard the electrical arm slam down, saw the building grow dark, and watched two boys sprint out from underneath them.

Putting two and two together, they shouted, “Hey, you!” As we scrambled away from the building, I turned and saw one of the men leap over the balcony railing, land on his feet like Sylvester Stallone, and take off after us. If we had not outrun him, Colonial Baptist would never have been founded in 1986 . . . God knew that I needed to live!

If my friend and I had been caught, we would not have been persecuted—we would have been punished.

It is important to understand the difference between punishment and persecution.^{viii}

Persecution Brings Reward

Jesus Christ does not say, “Happy are those who make a nuisance of themselves. Happy are the lazy, the unethical, the sloppy, the irritating, and the arrogant.”

No, Jesus Christ says, “Happy are those who are harassed because of living godly lives!”

The apostle Peter writes,

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

I Peter 4:12-13

This is the promised reward of the kingdom and the reward in heaven in Matthew 5.

Peter continues:

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed [makarios, which is the same word Christ used in His sermon, meaning “you are truly happy”], because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name [that is, in the name “Christian”].

I Peter 4:14-16

Notice also that Jesus Christ did not say, “Happy are those who are persecuted—period.” He said, “You can be truly happy as you share in suffering because you know your reward one day will be great.”

People around the world are making a decision to suffer for Christ when they choose the name *Christian*.

Fourteen former Muslims in Morocco made the decision to identify with Christ, their Lord. After the baptism of these fourteen converts in a secret cove along the water's edge, suddenly an observer leaped into the water, tears in his eyes, and declared he, too, wanted to be a follower of Christ and be baptized. The man—a Muslim himself—had been the interpreter for the training meetings that week. Before being baptized, he had to answer publicly the questions the others had answered before they were immersed:

- Do you renounce Islam, the Koran, Ramadan, and other teachings of the Muslim faith?
- Have you accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, and do you now believe in the Trinity—that Christ is equally God?
- Are you willing to be imprisoned; to be thrown out of your home for Christ?

Upon his positive response, he was baptized a follower of Jesus Christ.

No matter what happens to these fifteen, they know that they have true abiding happiness.

Happiness . . . and Heaven, Too

Eight statements in Matthew 5 spell out true happiness, in contrast to the world's definition.

1. **verse 3:** "Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually poverty stricken."
the world: "Happy are those who can say, 'I've got it made!'"
2. **verse 4:** "Happy are those who mourn over their sinful propensity."
the world: "Happy are those who never have to cry about anything."
3. **verse 5:** "Happy are those who refuse to retaliate."
the world: "Happy are those who know how to climb over everyone on their way to the top."
4. **verse 6:** "Happy are those who are famished for the things of God."
the world: "Happy are those who stuff themselves with the things of life!"
5. **verse 7:** "Happy are those who lend a hand to help."
the world: "You've gotta be kidding—happiness is never needing a handout."
6. **verse 8:** "Happy are those whose private purity is a daily resolution."
the world: "Oh, no—happiness is when your private life never makes it into the newspaper!"
7. **verse 9:** "Happy are those who make peace."
the world: "Happy are those who stir up trouble and fight."
8. **verses 10 & 11:** "Happy are those who are harassed for My sake."
the world: "Happy are the trouble-free."

You may not mean much to planet Earth, but take heart—one day you will rule the world.

Cassius Clay (*aka* Muhammad Ali) is the former three-time world heavyweight boxing champion—the Tiger Woods of the sport in his day; no one could match his skill for years.

Ali's face was on *Sports Illustrated* more times than any other athlete in its history. When he was "floating like a butterfly" and "stinging like a bee," he was on top of his profession and everyone knew it.

Gary Smith, a sports reporter, was invited to his estate to tour the grounds. Ali took the reporter into a refurbished barn which was located at the back of the property. It had been converted to showcase all of Ali's memorabilia, and was filled from floor to ceiling with pictures, articles, plaques, and trophies.

On one wall there were a number of magazine covers displaying his picture. The covers had been enlarged to life-size photographs, and framed in glass. As the reporter stood gaping in amazement, Ali walked over to the frames and peered at them. He was perturbed by the traces of droppings from the birds who still made their home in the barn and had no reason to respect their legendary host.

After mumbling under his breath, Ali shuffled to the doorway of the barn and stood staring out into space. Gary said, "Excuse me, what did you say?"

Ali repeated louder, this time not just to himself, "I was saying, 'I had the world—and it was nothin' . . . it was nothin'.'"

It's as if Jesus Christ says to those who follow Him, "Rarely making headlines, often underfoot and overlooked, you may not have the world now, but you will one day; you'll have the *new* world—and it will be something."

Just knowing that alone, according to Christ and His apostles, brings an abiding sense of happiness, even in the face of persecution . . . no matter what may come.

So let it come. One day you will have the world—and it will be something. *Wow!* Will it be something!

We have happiness now, but happiness and heaven . . . *forever!*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/20/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Charles Swindoll, *Job: Man of Heroic Endurance* (W Publishing, 2004), p. 98.

ⁱⁱ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon On the Mount* (Crossway Books, 2001), p. 62.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *Kingdom Living Here and Now* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 129.
- ^{iv} Warren Wiersbe, *Live Like a King* (Moody Press, 1976), p. 129.
- ^v Hughes, p. 64.
- ^{vi} Robert L. Peterson and Alexander Strauch, *Agape Leadership* (Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1991), p. 44.
- ^{vii} MacArthur, p. 159.
- ^{viii} Wiersbe, p. 138.