

WHEELERBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Sunday Morning Sermon May 31, 2015

Are You Really Happy?

Matthew 5:1-12

So what do you believe would make you happy? Many would say it would be a certain number in their bank account. Others would say they would be happy if their children were happy and successful. A boat? A car? The better husband or wife. A certain vacation destination? A weight on the scale. The acceptance and approval of another person. A nice boss who appreciates your work. A certain living arrangement, a certain career or job, a certain kind of church, a level of health, the removal of a physical condition or pain, financial security.

I want to propose that happiness in life is a sense and feeling generated by personal perception. What does that mean? It means that your happiness isn't produced from what occurs. It comes from your perception of what occurs. Your perception is your interpretation and understanding of what's occurring. So it's not what occurs that causes your feelings, it's what you think and believe about what occurs that makes you feel the way that you do. Our great Savior, the Creator of the universe, provides his followers instruction on how His disciples are to perceive what occurs, and hence experience His blessing.

This morning, I want us to consider carefully the premier sermon of our Savior as he instructed his followers on how to understand true happiness. His instructions clash with typical thoughts and attitudes that people have about what creates happiness and blessing. The lesson will become apparent. As His disciples, we need to submit to His teaching and allow our thinking to be brought into conformity with the mind of Christ. So I invite you to carefully consider these lessons, and discover the changes needed in our thoughts, attitudes and actions to conform our attitude to His will for our lives as His children. This will bring true happiness, satisfaction and blessing to us and result in great glory to Him.

As we consider each of these attributes of a truly blessed person, you may sense a resistance, and even a rebellion toward this philosophy and view of the life. If that is the case, I encourage you to consider that God may have brought you here to show you your need for change. Though you may have a form of religious belief, and even consider yourself a spiritual person that follows God, you may not know the real Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Jesus said that those who know Him hear and recognize His voice. We are going to be listening to His words today. If you hear His voice calling to you through those words, and if the Holy Spirit begins to convince you that you need to change, I plead with you to set aside your pride, and humbly respond and ask Him to save you. He stands ready to accept those who humbly call on Him and ask Him to change their attitude and heart. It would be His joy and delight to welcome you into His kingdom and become your Savior.

So, let's begin by reading the passage together. Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 5:1-12.

Matthew 5:1-12

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them. He said:

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

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Look at verses 1 and 2. Out of the crowd of people, His disciples came to Him, and he taught them. It is Jesus teaching us that produces the change we need. The Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and pierces through our pretension and pride, exposes our need, and provides the means to change.

If you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and have been born again, then these beatitudes are a description of your new nature. As a citizen of the heavenly kingdom you are currently a stranger in this world. This world lives by different values, and certainly has a different understanding of life, happiness, fulfillment, success, and satisfaction. Though we might be truly saved, how much are we still being influenced and affected by the philosophy and message of the world? How is our thinking and attitudes and feelings being affected by this current age and culture? Where are we missing the fullness of His presence, joy, and blessing? It is through the enlightenment of His Word that we can be transformed into His image and grow in His grace. Let's pray for His help right now and ask Him to change us.

Verse 3 – Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus begins His message with quite a paradox. It seems logical that the ones who are spiritually rich are the ones that are blessed. If you asked the common person of that day who were the spiritually rich, they would likely point to the religious leaders of the day like the Pharisees and Sadducees. Today people would point to the pope, or those educated in theology and religion. Other would point to the gurus, and the monks, and the priests who have fully given their lives to the service of God. This culture is overall moving toward a broad acceptance of a generic inclusive spirituality. Eastern philosophy and meditation is popular. Many speak of a divine presence and spark of divinity in all living things. Spiritual terminology in vogue in many contexts. In other words, many report being very spiritually blessed and fulfilled.

In stark contrast to the religious leaders of Palestine, as well as the spiritual elites of today, Jesus says the ones that are blessed are the spiritually poor! Destitute, needy, helpless, and wanting. Sinners. In fact, He says that only spiritual paupers will enter God's heaven. So how do you view yourself? Do you see yourself as a pretty spiritual person? The religious person is in a dangerous mindset. They often are following a system of belief and good works that gives them a false assurance of spiritual blessing and richness. The only way you can fit through the narrow gate that leads to heaven is by leaving all your spiritual riches behind. That means your ideas and techniques to connect with God. Your insight and wisdom of what is right and wrong. Your enlightenment, understanding, philosophy, and all else that would cause you to look at your spiritual condition and consider yourself ok and blessed. The fact is that you, like every other human being save one, are born into this world spiritually bankrupt, destitute, dead, and with a nature that rebels against the true and living God. We create our own concept of God, and then our own way to worship that God. Our religious practice and human values and self-righteousness are an offence and a stench in God's nostrils. What we all desperately need is for the true God to open our eyes so we can see helpless estate and danger so that we will beg and ask him to deliver and save us. We will beg and cry for His mercy and righteousness.

Luke 18:9-14

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Is 66:2b “These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.

Thus the Lord of the universe is saying if you want to enter heaven and be with Him for eternity, you must understand that you are spiritually destitute, sick, and poor. You must see that you deserve His judgment and condemnation based on your rebellion and pride. If you see yourself rightly, you will cry out for His help. Otherwise, you will go your own way and end up eternal death.

You may protest, “I know I'm not perfect, and I have certainly made some mistakes. I've even done some wrong things. But to say that I see myself as a sinner, a wicked person, a spiritual pauper with nothing good to offer God, honestly, I just don't see myself that way. I really believe I'm basically good. I am a spiritual person. I see the hand of God in my life and I am blessed. I pray. I take communion and I attend church. I try to help people and live by the golden rule. I even ask God to help me be even better. But to say that I'm spiritually poor, and as corrupt as a murderer, or child molester, or drug pusher, or thief, that's just not true.

Then my friend, I pray that God will open your eyes and show you your true heart and self, and see that at a very root level, you are no better than any other person. You are unclean. You are undone. You have broken the law of God. You are a transgressor. You are a rebel and have committed treason by refusing to submit yourself fully and unconditionally to the Lord of heaven, Jesus Christ. This all means that you are spiritually dead in your sins and bankrupt and facing God's judgment and wrath after you die. The truth is you are in major trouble and desperately need someone to rescue and save you from your condition.

If God is opening your eyes, and you seeing yourself as that lost and undone person, then I urge you to cry out to the Lord to save you from your sin and yourself. Weep and wail and plead for His mercy. The good news is that He came to save sinners. He died on the cross to take the judgment due sinners, to help those who cannot help themselves. Poor people. He became poor that we might be rich. If you see that you are poor in spirit, you will have the kingdom. And you will mourn.

Verse 4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

When we recognize our true condition and spiritual poverty, we mourn with deep regret and sadness. Our condition is so vile, and we have turned against our very Creator. And if we have such sorrow, Jesus, who is kind, and meek, and merciful, comes and brings us His comfort. Our inner turmoil and devastation over our utterly sinful state invokes the mercy, compassion, and comfort of the God Himself. He not only feels our pain and sorrow, He has provided a remedy by taking that guilt and punishment on the cross. Listen to the prophet Isaiah, speaking centuries before Jesus came to this earth:

Is 61:1-2

61 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,

God's very comfort and presence comes to those who are mourning. In God's kingdom, true happiness and blessedness is born out of a deep mourning and sorrow. Levity and lighthearted party humor are not true happiness. Sustained happiness and blessing is birthed from deep mourning and sorrow. Listen to James:

James 4: ⁴You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? ⁶But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." ⁷Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

The pathway to happiness, fulfillment, and contentment in God's kingdom humbling yourself before God in a true mourning and sadness over our sin. And for those who humble themselves, He promises to come and lift them up. This is yet another promise of God's salvation and help to those who cry to Him for help.

Verse 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

The truly happy and blessed person is a meek person. Meekness manifests itself in a mild, gentle, forbearing, controlled and submissive attitude. The opposite of meekness is being fierce, prone to anger, and being a difficult, mean person. This again is so counterintuitive to the world's definition of those who are successful. In the world, it is the assertive, brash, bossy, angry person who dominates and wins. The truth is that God will give the eternal rule and reign of this earth to his own submissive, kind, gentle, merciful, and forgiving people. Meekness is not cowardice. It is a powerful expression of self-control that is based in a submission to God as the One who is sovereign and in control. It is also a recognition that the He alone is the ultimate judge and avenger, and that He will as a just judge right all wrongs. A meek person never takes attempts to take God's role of avenger and judge. Even Jesus, when He was here on this earth, left the judgment of His enemies in the hands of His heavenly Father. Be not mistaken. There is a day of judgment coming, when every wrong will be righted, and every sin will be judged, and where everyone will give a full account for every action, word, and thought. But as a member of His kingdom, I leave the sovereign King to do His job, and I submit willingly and joyfully to His reign and accept what He chooses to send into my life. I recognize He has the right to use my life as He deems best, and my role is to love Him first, then everyone else including my enemies, and to be a person that shows longsuffering and mercy versus judgment and revenge. Since I have been forgiven of so much, I freely forgive others. Since I have been loved unconditionally, I love others the same way. This is what it means to be meek. When I cease my striving to run the world, and trying to manipulate and force my own agenda, and willingly submit to God's sovereign rule, I am blessed and happy, and will ultimately be given this earth as an inheritance.

Verse 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The truly blessed and happy person has a deep yearning and desire for righteousness. He knows that he is spiritually poor and destitute and lacks righteousness, so he looks by faith to God for a righteousness that can only come from Him.

The apostle Paul writes about this hunger for this righteousness in the book of Philippians. He was concerned that his spiritual children in Philippi were being misled by self-righteous false teachers and their systems of works. After talking about his own "impressive" resume of religious works and efforts, he says this:

Philippians 3:7-11

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through

faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Do you hear Paul's thirst, his hunger, his passion, his desire? It was to know Jesus and His power, and His suffering, and to be more like Him. He counted his own goodness and religion as human dung. He knew that the righteousness needed to make him right with God could only come from God on the basis of faith, and not his religious effort and works. This man knew he was spiritually poor. He had shed many tears and mourned over his own sin. He certainly was meek as he willingly accepted suffering for the gospel as God's plan for his life as he identified with Christ and preached the gospel. His hunger and thirst was for the nature of Jesus to be reproduced in his life. His great joy was the anticipation of awakening one day and being fully like his Savior in His resurrection. Does such a desire and passion live within you? Do you thirst to really know Christ deeply, to be just like Him as when He faced suffering? The promise is that you hunger and thirst for such things, you will be fully satisfied and quenched. True happiness and blessedness is found in that desire and pursuit of our righteous Savior, and the assurance that when we see Him we will be like Him.

Verse 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

If you know Christ, you have experienced God's mercy. You have the inner peace and joy of knowing that you are released from the dreadful anticipation of the judgment and wrath of God for your sins. And because you have received such release, you are a merciful person. One of the disturbing aspects of biblical counseling is that I talk with people that say they know Christ as their Savior but find it very difficult to forgive other people. This ought not be. The scriptures are very direct in warning of the terrible consequence of holding hard feelings and grudges toward anyone. We are called to complete and utter forgiveness of others. We are to do good to even our enemies, and pray for those who harm us.

Listen to Psalm 103:8-10

⁸The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

We are to reflect the nature of our heavenly Father, who shows kindness and mercy even to those who despise Him and hate Him. The truly saved person is blessed because as one who will be shown mercy in the day of judgement, he now is merciful to everyone. If you lack a merciful spirit, you have every reason to check and see if you really know Christ.

Verse 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

When God opens our eyes to see ourselves, we see our poverty of spirit, and mourn, and humbly ask for mercy. And God grants us forgiveness and mercy and brings us a new nature, a pure heart that loves Him and loves others. We can now see Him. We now comprehend that this righteous, sovereign, fearful, holy judge is full of love and compassion. We experience and

comprehend His nature because our sin has been removed and we can see Him clearly. We have a high priest that brings us into His very presence. What bliss! What happiness! What joy! What blessing. And if we sin, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous One, who cleanses and purifies us and maintains that relationship and union with God. We see Him now by faith, but even greater it will be when we see Him face to face. Only because we have been washed and purified. What greater joy could there be? What earthly delight can even compare? We are truly blessed. And even now, because we have been purified, we can experience a deep love for one another that the world can never know. Is this not a motivation to pursue that deeper love each and every day!!

I Peter 1:22

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Verse 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.

We are a happy and blessed people because we have been given a mission and calling. We are called to be ambassadors and agents of peace. Our Savior is the Prince of Peace. He is the one that has torn down the wall of enmity between us and God, and has made the way for us to be born into God's family and become His children. And now as His children, He give us the message of peace with God through Jesus Christ to all sinners who will confess their sin and cry for mercy, and He fills our live with the peace of the Holy Spirit so that we can live in His family in unity and peace with one another. He even often brings reconciliation and healing to people though our ministry and response. We are happy and blessed because we have an inner peace that passes understanding, and we have an outward expression of peace as our ministry, purpose and calling.

Verse 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This verse is the most paradoxical of all. We are happy and blessed when others hate us, despise us, abuse us, reject us, and persecute and even kill us. This persecution and attack us a clear evidence that we belong to another kingdom. Our happiness is most exaggerated when we are privileged to be so identified with our Lord and Savior that we bear the same persecution and suffering that He did. Our Lord left heaven to come to this earth for one purpose....to suffer at the hands of wicked men for a righteous cause. That cause was the redemption and forgiveness of God's chosen people. As God's chosen people, we participate in that suffering when we are persecuted for our associating with the righteous One. What a deep privilege and joy, so suffer and die for the One who suffered and died for you!!! It is such a joy that it will cause gladness of heart and a leaping for joy. It cannot be reasoned or explained. It is just an expression of true blessing and happiness that transcends the brevity and temporal nature of this life. The eternal rewards and honor attached with such suffering are not worthy to be compared with the suffering and pain. Listen to Peter as he reflects on this truth.

I Peter 4:12-14

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are

insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

So that brings me three sets of questions designed to cause us to reflect on the truth. Here they are.

FIRST

1. Being totally honest with yourself and before God, have you recognized your utter poverty of spirit and lack of righteousness? Have you truly seen yourself as a lost, depraved sinner under the judgment and wrath of God and in need of a Savior? If not, ask God to open your eyes to see the truth about yourself. If you see your spiritual poverty, and if you long for a righteousness that you do not have, come to Christ, and partake of this bread of life that alone can satisfy. Drink from this well that will quench that thirst. Come and be saved. Forsake your dead religious beliefs and works, and come to Christ. He will receive you and forgive you and you will become God's child.

SECOND

2. As a believer, have you been looking for happiness and fulfillment in earthly pursuits? Have you believed the false story that your lack of happiness is because you don't have enough money, or that someone doesn't respect you or appreciate you or love you? Do you believe your depression and unhappiness is because you need to love yourself? I encourage you to reject these lies of the world, and believe the truth. The truth is that if you really know Christ, you are one of the happiest, most blessed people in the world. You have been forgiven and accepted by the Creator of the universe. He has adopted you as His child. He has a glorious and wonderful purpose to perform in and through your life for His glory. He has given you everything that you will ever need, and even more than that. You are headed to an eternal existence in His presence that will be free of all sorrow and suffering and tears. You currently have been given the power and enablement to love Him and love others deeply, and to forgive everyone that has ever hurt or abused you. You are legally free and justified, and He is actively at work in your life to bring you to maturity. And one day you will see Him, in a moment you will be transformed to be just like Him. Finally, He has promised to personally be with you through every trial and difficulty that you are facing, and is in control of every detail, working it all together for your good and His glory. My encouragement is to quit searching for happiness. If you know Christ, you already have it. Open your eyes and see it, and accept your blessing in Christ right now!!

LAST

3. Finally, I encourage all of us to boldly proclaim the good news of this kingdom. Many will reject it and call us foolish and crazy. But some will hear it and believe it and be added to our number. We are truly a happy and blessed people. Praise be to God the Father, and to His Son, in the love and fellowship of the blessed Holy Spirit. Let's pray. Amen.