



from the desk of . . .

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**Blessings - 1**

## **A BLESSED ATTITUDE**

**Matthew 5:1-12**

I'm a John Lennon fan. (X) Of all the Beatles' songs, the ones that he wrote, are by far, my favorites. I also appreciate some of the insightful comments that he made, especially this one ...

"When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up.

I wrote down 'happy.'

They told me I didn't understand the assignment,  
& I told them they didn't understand life."

As Thomas Jefferson (X) was writing the Declaration of Independence he included the statement, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty & the pursuit of happiness."

To which Ben Franklin (X) would later comment ...

"The U.S. doesn't guarantee happiness, only the pursuit of it. You have to catch up with it yourself."

Over the past couple of weeks, we've said to other people, or they have said to us ... "Happy New Year."

What exacting are we wishing? ... Or more specifically, what would make us "happy"? ... That's a question that I posed, by way of e-mail, to the congregation last Tuesday.

Here are some of the responses I received:

- better health
- end of money concerns
- my children & grandchildren coming to faith
- feeling loved
- not having to rush around so much
- being able to help others
- my family's physical, mental, & emotional health
- a bulldog
- becoming more spiritual

How would you answer that question? ... This morning, & over the next couple of weeks, we're going to look at how Jesus responded.

His answer is what is known as the Beatitudes.

One Bible scholar refers to them as the "Be-happy-tudes". At the beginning of Jesus' Sermon On The Mount, He presents 8 statements that touch on how to experience Heavenly joy.

One of the books in my library is Hannah Whitall Smith's  
(X) "The Christian's Secret Of A Happy Life."

She wrote her book as the result of a comment that someone made to her:

"You Christians seem to have a religion that makes you miserable. You are like a man with a headache. He doesn't want to get rid of his head, but it hurts him to keep it. You cannot expect outsiders to seek very earnestly for anything so uncomfortable."

Now I can't speak for you, but over the years I've met some believers who, sadly, fit that very description to a tee. They exhibit no joy at all. They walk around with scowls on their faces.

We might term them "sourpusses."

It's no wonder they're ineffective witnesses ... who would want to be around them? ... I know I don't.

Well, in contrast to those kind of individuals, the opening words of the Sermon On The Mount offers hope. For Jesus began His 1<sup>st</sup> great sermon with 8 statements that contain the promise of the happiness & blessings of Heaven.

They're called "Beatitudes" ... & each begin with the word "μακάριος", often translated as "blessed" ... which is how most of us learned them. But the word actually means "happy." Certainly, it's not being "happy" in the world's sense; for that kind of happiness is superficial & depends on various positive outside circumstances.

Jesus has something else in mind.

So, listen now to *Good News from Jesus*, as recorded by *Matthew*, to you who have gathered here for worship at *C.C.R.M.*

Within your hearing comes the *Word of the Lord ...*

Jesus saw the crowds and went up a hill, where he sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them:

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor;  
the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

"Happy are those who mourn;  
God will comfort them!

"Happy are those who are humble;  
they will receive what God has promised!

"Happy are those whose greatest desire  
is to do what God requires;  
God will satisfy them fully!

"Happy are those who are merciful to others;  
God will be merciful to them!

"Happy are the pure in heart;  
they will see God!

"Happy are those who work for peace;  
God will call them his children!

"Happy are those who are persecuted  
because they do what God requires;  
the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!

"Happy are you when people assault you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted." (Matthew 5:1-12)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

To people who seem to face one problem after another, & are struggling to find happiness, the opening words of Jesus' Sermon On The Mount offers hope.

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor ...."

"Happy are those who mourn ...."

"Happy are those who are humble ...."

"Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires ...."

"Happy are those who are merciful to others ...."

"Happy are the pure in heart ...."

"Happy are those who work for peace ...."

"Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires ...."

Certainly, as we think about those 8 statements, we find situations that normally wouldn't result in happiness.

"Happy are those who mourn"?

So, Jesus must be referring to something that goes beyond worldly happiness.

And if that is so, then these must be character traits that will certainly make followers of Jesus stand out in a crowd. They're sort of like the "fruits of the spirit" ... love, joy, peace, patience kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, & self-control (*Galatians 5:22-23*) ... that we're to exhibit. This is how we're to live.

(Incidentally, most of the Beatitudes are the exact opposite of what we normally would want to do.

So, we need The Holy Spirit to be involved.)

Behavior must flow out of **belief**. Correct doctrine must always lead to Christlike **behavior**. (*James 2:18*)

So, while Jesus teaches content throughout the rest of the Sermon On The Mount:

- anger
- adultery
- divorce
- revenge
- prayer
- fasting
- judging

... these opening words deal with character traits. Jesus is emphasizing throughout His sermon that His disciples are to respond differently to daily problems than those who are in the world.

One Bible scholar points out that "blessed" is "an inner satisfaction & sufficiency that does not depend on outward circumstances for happiness."

Those who are "blessed" are "happily" living lives that are aligned with God.

It's as if God has put His stamp of approval on them.

Max Lucado (X) captures this idea in his book, "The Applause of Heaven". Listen to how he paraphrases the Beatitudes ...

God applauds the poor in spirit.  
 He cheers the mourners.  
 He favors the meek.  
 He smiles upon the hungry.  
 He honors the merciful.  
 He welcomes the pure in heart.  
 He claps for the peacemakers.  
 He rises to greet the persecuted.

I love that!

- I want to imagine that God is rooting for me!
- I want to imagine that He's smiling at my efforts!
- I want to imagine Him clapping at my work!

(Matthew 25:21)

If you want God's blessing more than anything else ... it's available. But 1<sup>st</sup> you must want to please Him above everything else. (Matthew 6:33)

How badly do you want His blessing? ...

Now, as I've already said ... we translate the word "μακάριος", as "blessed", which in reality means "happy."

And the 1<sup>st</sup> thing that we realize is that by its' own definition, Jesus was Himself most "happy". Think about that for a moment. ... Too often we refer to Him as "the man of sorrows." (Isaiah 53:4)

But, that's not the way I primarily envision Him. I see Jesus as a very positive, encouraging, uplifting individual. People would have enjoyed being around Him.

Listen to how Billy Graham puts it (X) ...

"If by happiness we mean serenity, confidence, contentment, peace, joy & soul-satisfaction, then Jesus was supremely 'happy.' We never read of His laughing, though I am sure He did. He was not given to pleasure-seeking, hilariousness, jokes or poking fun at others. ...

His happiness was not dependent on outward circumstances. He did not have to have an outward stimulus to make Him happy. He had learned a secret that allowed Him to live above the circumstances of life & fear of the future. He moved with calmness, certainty & serenity through the most trying circumstances - even death! ... Certainly, if anyone had genuine happiness & blessedness, it was Jesus."

Now, if Jesus was "happy" in this deep spiritual sense, then it follows that we too can be "happy".

For we are to live like Him. (1 John 2:6)

So, back to my original question ...  
"what would make us happy?" ...

The 1<sup>st</sup> thing we need to realize ... if we're to find true **happiness** we must not look for it in the **world's** way. We will never be truly "happy" until we give-up trying to find it **by our own efforts**.

We discover it in the way Jesus outlined it.

And according to Jesus, the way to happiness is found in a poverty of spirit, in a character that's marked by humbleness, in an honest desire to do what God wants, in mercy, in purity, in an effort to make peace.

And it even can be found in mourning! ...

Wouldn't it be great if we could experience the Beatitudes here at C.C.R.M. in 2018? We talk about resolutions at this time each year ... things we hope to accomplish through our own willpower.

And for the most part ...

by January 14<sup>th</sup> they've all fallen by the wayside.

But as a congregation, we should want to take Jesus' claims for our lives seriously. This is the kind of life we want to live. We want to experience His presence in our day-to-day activities. We want to respond spiritually.

During His life on earth Jesus never left people the same once He came in contact with them ... they were **changed** in some way.

They either became fully devoted disciples or enraged enemies. It's my prayer that as we study the Beatitudes we'll become more committed followers of our Lord.

Okay, let's put this sermon in context. Matthew 1&2 contain the Christmas story ... the angel's announcement, the birth, & the visit of the Magi. Then the holy family goes to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath.

And then they return to Nazareth.

Next, we're introduced to a man named John, who baptizes Jesus in chapter 3. Chapter 4 begins with the temptation of Jesus in the desert, & then concludes with a summary of His 3 main activities:

- Preaching. His 1<sup>st</sup> sermon is very short & to the point. "Turn away from your sins, because the Kingdom of heaven is near!" (Matthew 4:17)
- Calling. As Jesus builds his team, we read that 2 sets of brothers dropped everything & "went with him." (Matthew 4:22)
- Healing. As Jesus preached the Good News, He also healed the hurting. Matthew tells us that news about Jesus "spread through the whole country of Syria, so that people brought to him all those who were sick, suffering from all kinds of diseases & disorders: people with demons, & epileptics, & paralytics - & Jesus healed them all." (Matthew 4:24)

The result of all this was that, "large crowds" (Matthew 4:25) from all over the region followed Him wherever He went.

Which brings us to our Gospel lesson as Jesus prepares to preach His Sermon On The Mount. "Jesus saw the crowds." Actually, at this point, Jesus saw 2 distinct groups of people. The inner ring of committed disciples, & the outer loop, composed of the curious crowd.

Now Jesus loved to minister to the masses. At various points throughout His ministry we're told ... "as he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried & helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36)

And as Jesus preaches to them, we're told that the crowd was spellbound. "When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowd was amazed at the way he taught." (Matthew 7:28)

Once again, as we look at the content of His message, it's clear that while the crowd may have been listening, this sermon is primarily addressed to His disciples.

Actually, that's kind of like today's worship services. When we teach or preach about Jesus ... people listen gladly. (Mark 12:37) And that's good.

Seekers should always be welcome.

But the application of His message is for His followers ...  
His disciples.

Those of us who are believers must be challenged to become more committed; & those of us who have yet come to faith need to hear about Jesus' love in a safe setting. It's both ... not an either/or situation.

"He went up a hill." Tradition says that this took place on a small mountain near Capernaum called the "Horns of Hattin." This area had a natural amphitheater so people would have been able to hear everything Jesus said.

Jesus had no permanent place to preach from like the scribes & Pharisees did, so He made use of a common hill. Some Bible scholars have suggested that Jesus deliberately used this "mountain" to draw a parallel between the message given to Moses & the one coming from the Messiah.

When the Law was given, God came down. (Exodus 19:9)  
Jesus "went up" to deliver His sermon. When the Commandments were dictated, thunder & lightning crashed through the stillness. (Exodus 19:18)

When Jesus spoke, people listened without fear or trembling. When the Law came, the people were told to keep their distance. (Exodus 19:12)

Now they are invited to draw near.

The next thing we're told is that Jesus "sat down." It was very common for rabbis back then to sit when they taught.

Another example of this is when Jesus was on the shore of Lake Gennesaret. And as normally was the case it wasn't long before a crowd gathered. So, Jesus got into Simon Peter's boat. They pushed "off a little from the shore. And we're told that ...

Jesus sat in the boat & taught the crowd." (Luke 5:3)

We see this also at one of the few occasions when Jesus went to the Temple. "All the people gather around him, & he sat down & began to teach them." (John 8:2)

This makes me think of a judge sitting on a bench, or a "professor's chair."

Next, we're told, "His disciples gathered around him." The word "disciple" literally means a "student" or "learner." In those days people didn't go to college. Instead, they became apprentices of those they wanted to learn from. If someone wanted to be a lawyer, they studied under an experienced lawyer. A shepherd hung out with shepherds. If you wanted to catch fish, you listened to fish stories from seasoned fishermen.

The basic point was to hang out with the teacher you wanted to be like. Which was the case of the 12, who left their careers in order to "study" under the Savior.

For 3½ years they watched, listened, observed ... & asked questions.

I see 3 attitudes exhibited in these 1<sup>st</sup> Christ followers that should be evident in our lives as well.

Let's start with ... **love** Jesus. At the end of the Gospel of John, Jesus asks Peter a question 3 different times: "Do you love me?" (John 21:15-17)

That's really the ultimate question, isn't it? ...  
Do you love Jesus? ...

Because the disciples were developing a love for their Master, they gathered around Him. They didn't want to miss anything He said, so they hung on His every word. If you & I say that we love Jesus, we will get as close to Him as we can. Okay, how do we do that? ...

We **spend time** with Him every day. This may mean that we'll have to free ourselves up from our crowded schedules. If this is going to happen, we're going to have to make it happen. We're as close to God as we want to be. So, if you want to be close to Jesus, then set up a time & place to read your Bible & pray every day.

Love Him more in 2018 by **servicing** those around us. How we treat others reflects how much we love Jesus. Remember His words? "I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me!" (Matthew 25:40)

Next, we **learn** from Jesus. After the crowds & disciples gathered around, & Jesus sat down  
"he began to teach them."

Here are 2 action steps. The truth of the matter is ... we learn about things that we're interested in & love. When I was a competitive runner, I learned everything I possibly could about how to do well in a race. I read books, I subscribed to magazines. I wanted to be the best runner I possibly could be.

What captures your interest or desire? ...

My prayer for me, for you, for C.C.R.M. is that Jesus becomes our #1 priority. And I know I've told you this 5,280 times over the years ... but in 2018, I urge you, as strongly as I possibly can ... study the Scriptures.

I know that some of you are reading your way through the Bible ... you will be blessed. Maybe for the rest of you, between now & Easter you could read each of the 4 Gospels. That's an achievable goal.

I also encourage you to come to the Adult S.S. class following worship. Or, attend one of our Bible studies.

And then, 3<sup>rdly</sup>, **live out** what you learn. If we say we love Jesus, we will do whatever it takes to get close to Him so that we can learn from Him. And our **learning** must be more than just **listening**, however. (James 1:22)

It must be lived out.

Imagine that you won the following prize in a contest: Each morning your bank would deposit \$86,400 into your account. However, there were certain rules:

- Everything that you didn't spend each day would be taken away from you
- The bank can end the game without warning; at any time it can say ... "The game is over!"

What would you do? ... You'd buy everything you wanted, right? ... Not only for yourself, but for all the people you love. You'd try to spend every cent.

Actually, this is the game of life. Each of us is in possession of such a 'magical' prize -  
we just can't seem to see it.

Each awakening morning, we receive 86,400 seconds as a gift of life, & when we go to sleep at night, any remaining time is not credited to us. What we haven't lived up to that day is forever lost. Yesterday is forever gone. Each morning the account is refilled, but the bank can dissolve our account at any time ... without warning.

What will you do with your 86,400 seconds? ...

Jesus wants us to be **happy**. But that happiness can only take place if we're walking with Him. So, as we study the Beatitudes, let's ask The Holy Spirit to make the truths found there a reality in our lives.

**MARANA THA**