

# YOU CAN BE HAPPY!

By

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## **“Happy are the poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3).**

“Why can’t I be happy?” It was not so much a question as complaint, made by an attractive woman of almost thirty-five years. “The doctors say I’m in perfect health; I have a good husband and, although we’re not wealthy, I can have anything I want. Now why can’t I be happy?”

The complaint is heard a thousand times a day. The “pursuit of happiness”, that ill-conceived expression incorporated in the constitution as a national purpose, has become an obsession with millions.

There is not end to the evils compounded under the guise of this “pursuit”, children cannot wait to become independent of parental control; sweethearts cannot wait to be married before indulging in sex and parents cannot wait to possess all the gadgets ever invented, hence mothers abandon the home for work. Then they ask, “Why can’t I be happy?”

Happiness is just not to be found in the places where people generally seek it, neither does it come by being pursued. The clearest expressions concerning happiness are found in The Sermon On The Mount, usually called “The Beatitudes”: the term for Beatitude more appropriately translated “happy”. Jesus said, “Happy are the poor in spirit, for there is the Kingdom of heaven.”

There is significance in the fact that these are the first words of the first sermon preached by Jesus when He began His ministry. He understood perfectly the deceptions of Satan, which from the time of the Garden of Eden have blinded men’s eyes to the true source of happiness. As men envisioned the Kingdom of Heaven, what dreams they must have had of riches, pleasures, easy-living, freedom from every conflict, problem and pain. In the very first sentence Jesus cut from under them any grounds for such thinking. Who is really happy? They who are poor in spirit and who mourn, the meek and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart and — would you believe? — they who are persecuted.

Is there anything so contrary to Christ’s doctrine of happiness than this, that happiness is to be gained by pursuing pleasures in the world, by being hailed as successful, having material gain, and by being sensually excited?

Yet this is the impression promoted in the schools and to a large extent in many modern churches. The church that is “with it”, that demonstrates success, is the one that appeals to the young by promoting carnal pleasures of the world. Thirty-five years ago, if a church had a group of mini-skirted girls on the platform, swinging to the then popular eight-to-the bar music, it would have been considered disreputable by the whole community. As styles change, different worldly concepts appeal to youth, so today the appeal is by adopting the worldly manner of the unregenerate, the illiterate youth who howl to a jungle beat and become ecstatic over the Rolling Stones, Tom Jones and the mod de-generation.

On this subject Minister Irwin Son wrote in his church newsletter, "The Preview": "I am disturbed by a rapidly growing trend, even among the 'conservative, Bible-believing' brotherhood of Christian churches of adopting in church gathering the sound and fury of "mod" music ... I have no doubt but that this "mod" music has a powerful appeal to our Rock and Role oriented youth and will do much to increase the enrollment at our Bible colleges where it is featured. But I find it hard to believe that our Lord would endorse much of the "mod" sound as His. Who can be sure that He is not grieved that this beat (and swing), which has such strong appeal to the lusts of the flesh, despite the words which are designed to speak to the soul, has been embraced by some teachers of our youth whose moral and spiritual well-being is in enough serious jeopardy today without this added encumbrance?"

It is common in religious "crusades" to feature an entertainer who is heralded as famous in Hollywood or television. We would tell our neighbors that happiness is found in renouncing the world — "blessed are the poor in spirit, they who mourn, the persecuted" — and as proof we offer them the One who is honored, worshipped and glorified by the unredeemed! It is no wonder that the sober sinner, with an eye out for the light of God, gazes upon such activity by the church as ludicrous.

The "poor in spirit" are those who recognize their total and entire need before God, and therefore look to him for happiness. "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever would lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24). All around are those who have pampered their lives, who have chased all the rainbows, who have sipped the wine of life from every cup — and gutter — and who now are lost in a world that is unraveling, scared to death that before it flies apart they will never have found the real happiness they have been seeking. Like Solomon, after trying everything under the sun, they conclude that all is vanity.

The happiness Jesus promised cannot be found by pursuing it in all directions, slaving and saving to buy more gadgets, with minds fixed on pleasure, material possessions and meeting the world's standards. In fact, the greater the variety of things that engage our attention, the less chance we have for happiness. As Jesus said to Martha, "One thing is needful", and that is **concentration of the purpose of God.**

To understand true happiness we need to look at Jesus Himself. No one ever depicted Him as pleasure-loving and fun-seeking. I can't imagine Him trying to squeeze all the gusto out of life at a hilarious party. But in every situation He is the figure who shines forth as the one who was unworried and without fear. He was never frustrated, running down blind alleys and up dead-end streets. He was the one person always filled with peace. He knew where He was going. (In spite of lies now circulated by modern authors that Jesus concocted the idea of His Messiah-ship and then failed to bring it off and died for the failure.) He knew from the beginning that He was destined to die for the sins of His people. He understood the shame, disgrace and pain better than anyone, yet He remained at peace. In this sense Jesus was poor in spirit, for He made His life totally subject to the Father's will.

We, as His disciples, are to live in the same condition: before God we are void of everything; our lives are in His hands "who works all things after the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11). It is the willingness to allow God to truly make us in His own image, renouncing the hidden things of shame in the world (II Cor. 4:2), denying self and humbly submitting to God (James 4:10 that gives peace. It is the very opposite of the

arrogant attitude generated by modern education which holds that we are the product of evolution and find fulfillment in self-assertiveness and the establishment of our own laws and rules.

Happiness begins when we reach this point: poor in spirit. There is where we recognize that we are without God and without hope because of sin, and hence there is where we turn to Christ who paid the penalty for sin in His own death. From that point on life is lived with an eternal purpose. None of this whining about “Who am I?” and “What are we here for?” That we hear from the mangy mod crowd. The poor in spirit is clay in the hands of the Great Potter, who has revealed His purpose to “purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). The poor in spirit gladly submits to Him “Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory” (Phil 3:21). Like Christ, he knows where he is going. For nothing can thwart the work of God to give immortality in a new creation to those submitted to Him.

To be poor in spirit is to be aware of the power of God in one’s life, “both to will and to work for His good pleasure” knowing that “all things work together for good to them that are called according to His purpose” (Phil. 2:13, Rom. 8:28). If we know anything about God at all, we know that His work is not only good, but is the very best possible. That’s happiness, to be one in whom God is working the miracle of total redemption to eternal glory in His own image.

This kind of happiness is not marred by the loss of things nor failure to attain worldly recognition. It cannot be thwarted by physical infirmity nor by the opposition from the outside — Happy are the persecuted. There are no regrets, hangovers, nor sense of a vacuum, as repeatedly occurs for those who are engaged in the worldly “pursuit of happiness.” In my own experience the happiest people I have known have not been those with wealth, and health, surrounded with pleasure. Right off there comes to mind Anna Mahaffey, an aged widow who has been blind all her life, but who never fails to point out that God’s blessings are abundant. I think of Anna Veeder another widow, confined to a wheel chair for many years, suffering physical pain and facing personal sorrows, yet always radiating the light of the glory of Christ in whom she lives. Happy are the poor in spirit.

It is a sad thing to see Christians seeking in many ways to obey Christ, but at the same time trying to find happiness on the world’s level. They not only fail to enjoy that which gives temporary joy to sinners, but they never attain the happiness Christ offers. While seeking the best of two worlds, they receive only the husks of both and the joys of neither.

You **can** be happy. But watch that first step, it is a big one. It takes you all the way down: poverty of spirit, destitute of true holiness, repentant, totally dependent upon the Savior, no confidence whatever in the flesh, no place in the sun at all as far as the world is concerned, humbled to the dust, poor in spirit. Then the transforming power of God begins. Happy are you!

Happy are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Happy are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

Happy are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Happy are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Happy are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Happy are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.  
Happy are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the  
Kingdom of Heaven.

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