

THE BEATITUDES

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INTRODUCTION

Man has a natural desire for happiness and seeks to fulfill this desire in many different ways. Some seek happiness in the things of the world, but happiness that is the product of the world is short lived. True happiness comes from God and lasts eternally. Jesus was sent into the world to provide happiness to mankind: ***“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”*** (Jno. 10:10).¹ Jesus came to enrich the lives of men by establishing the church in which man is brought to God. Jesus introduced the principles of Christianity in the Sermon on the Mount, specifically stating that those who exhibit certain characteristics, known as the “beatitudes” are blessed.

BLESSED

The word translated blessed, in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, is defined as “fortunate” or “well off,” and can also be translated as “happy.”¹ However, because there is a possibility of misunderstanding and thereby weakening the meaning of Jesus’ words, one must understand the difference between the happiness derived by outside influences and the happiness about which Jesus was speaking. Anyone can see that God has provided many great things that bring enjoyment to all men. Some receive great pleasure from recreational activities or achieving some great feat. Others delight in time spent with family or just enjoying the simple things in life such as a piece of blueberry or chocolate cake. As great as these things may be, the “happiness” they create is short lived and can be taken away at a moments notice. In fact all of these sources of happiness are limited by time or other outside influences such as injuries or death. Even the simple pleasure of a piece of cake can be quickly brought to a halt by dropping it on the ground. While God has made these and other enjoyments possible, if the happiness caused by them can be removed by any outside source, the happiness enjoyed is not the happiness or blessedness Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount.

The happiness Jesus is speaking about is “spiritual prosperity.” In other words, spiritual prosperity is something that cannot be taken away and is “independent of the ups and downs of one’s material lot in life”¹ Therefore, because there is such a tendency to picture happiness existing only as long as something is possessed or being experienced, blessed is a better translation of the word *makarios*, because Jesus is not speaking about something “at which men grasp, and, grasping, miss.”¹ This is the kind of happiness Peter described: ***“But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;”*** (1 Pet. 3:14). Unfortunately this state of being (once possessed by mankind) was lost because of sin.

THE NEED TO BE BLESSED

God’s precious book begins by giving an account of the six days in which the world was created (Gen. 1, 2). Toward the close of the creation week, God created ***“man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”*** (Gen. 1:27). God created man and enjoyed a beautiful relationship with him. God provided everything required to ensure the happiness of man in Eden. Adam was given food, as well as work to do (Gen. 1:29; 2:15), and he was provided with law and companionship (Gen. 2:16, 17; 2:18-25), “without these, there would be no happiness.”¹ The beauty of this relationship comes to a climax when man is confronted with his sin by God. In his account of this terrible event, Moses describes God,

“walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” (Gen. 3:8) painting a picture of familiarity and friendship. Truly Adam and Eve’s relationship with God in His garden “was one unsurpassed in beauty, peace, provision, and blessing.”¹

However, the bond of this relationship was broken when sin entered into the world. God had commanded Adam not to eat of the fruit of the ***“tree of the knowledge of good and evil”*** (Gen. 2:17). When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of this tree, they committed sin, and thus transgressed God’s law (1 Jno. 3:4). For this reason sin separated man from God and man was no longer in the blessed state in which he had been created. ***“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear”*** (Isa. 59:1, 2). For the next four thousand years man continued to be separated from God because of sin. ***“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”*** (Rom. 3:23). Though separated from man because of sin, God did not turn His back on His creation. When confronting Adam with his sin in the Garden, God gave a glimpse of the coming Savior of mankind, in His promise: ***“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”*** (Gen. 3:15). To carry out this plan God separated Abraham from his family (Gen. 12:1-3), and from Abraham and his family God created a great nation through which the Savior would come. God gave this nation the Law of Moses to prepare and to guide them until the Savior came and that law was taken away (Gal. 3:19). ***“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons”*** (Gal. 4:4, 5).

Jesus was sent into the world to die on the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Under the Law of Moses, thousands of animals were sacrificed for the sins of the Israelites and gallons upon gallons of blood were shed to forgive the Israelites of their sins. Yet all of the blood that was shed in these sacrifices could not pay the debt of sin in full:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

These sacrifices were offered and sins were forgiven in prospect of the sacrifice of Jesus, ***“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”*** (Jno. 1:29). When Jesus died on the cross His soul cleansing blood flowed backward through time forgiving all those who were faithful under the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations. The soul saving blood of Jesus also flowed into the future making salvation possible to all who obey the Gospel (Heb. 9:15).

The obedience required today includes: faith (Acts 8:37); repentance (Acts 2:38); confession (Acts 8:37); and baptism (Acts 2:38). Then and only then is one added to the church (Acts 2:47), no longer separated from God by sin, but reconciled unto Him by the blood of His Son (Rom. 5:8-10). These individuals, Christians, are the children of God. They have been brought back into the relationship that was once shared by God and man. Just as He did for Adam, God makes special provision for His children’s physical needs (Matt. 6:25-33) and companionship (1 Jno. 1:7-9). He has given them work to do (Matt. 5:16) and law by which to live (Jas. 1:25).¹ Jesus came into the world to make people blessed by shedding His blood on the cross and establishing His church, thereby reconciling man to God by obedience to the Gospel.¹ Men are truly blessed when they willingly “submit to Heaven’s will by developing and maintaining” the seven character traits with which Jesus introduced the Sermon on the Mount.¹