

## **“Kingdom Character: The Beatitudes” (part 1)**

Matthew 5:1-3

The Pursuit of Happiness is a 2006 American biographical film based on the true story of the now multi-millionaire Chris Gardner's nearly one-year struggle with homelessness in the early 1980's. The film stars actor Will Smith as Gardner, who plays the role of an on-and-off-homeless salesman who invests his life savings in portable bone density scanners which he is unsuccessful in marketing to doctors. While he is able to sell several of them, the time lag between the sales and his growing financial demands enrage his already bitter and alienated wife Linda, who works as a hotel maid. The lack of a stable financial state increasingly erodes their marriage.

One particular scene in the movie is quite interesting. In light of his struggles, Gardner says:

*“It was right then that I started thinking about Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence and the part about our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And I remember thinking: How did he know to put the ‘pursuit’ part in there? That maybe happiness is something that we can only pursue, and maybe we can actually never have it, no matter what.”*

Happiness is the number one driving desire of our American culture. This is even seen in our founding documents, such as the Declaration of Independence. Right alongside life and freedom, our founding fathers included the pursuit of happiness as an inalienable right.

But I wonder just how happy we really are?

According to an article posted in the Huffington Post a few months back, an online poll of 2,345 U.S. adults, conducted last month, used a series of questions to determine Americans' levels of contentment and life satisfaction. Overall, just 33 percent of Americans said that they were very happy, remaining consistent with happiness levels in 2011 but dropping from the 35 percent who reported being very happy in 2008 and 2009.

“Our happiness index offers insight into what’s on the minds of Americans today and is a reflection of the state of affairs in our country,” Regina Corso, Senior Vice President of the Harris Poll, said in a statement. “While the attitudes on the economy may be improving, we’re seeing that this is not translating into an improvement in overall happiness. [There are] sub-segments of the American population where ‘happiness’ has trended downward in the last couple years.”

Happiness is a highly sought, albeit elusive, prize. The desire for it is universal without exception.

The three chapters in Matthew 5-7 make up what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, a passage of Scripture so well-known that certain parts of it are known by lost and saved people alike.

Some have said that the Sermon on the Mount is the crescendo of Christ's teaching, and this first section may very well be the crescendo of the crescendo.

No less than nine times in the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount do we read the word "blessed." The word itself means "happy," though not in the sense that we are accustomed to. It is happiness that comes from another world, and is not of this world.

The happiness of the world is a superficial happiness that always depends upon one's circumstances. But the happiness spoken of here by Jesus is blessedness that does not depend upon circumstances, and it fills the soul with joy even in the midst of the most disappointing circumstances and events.

The opening section of the Sermon on the Mount records the passage known as the beatitudes. What are the "beatitudes?"

**A.M. Hunter** - *"The Beatitudes of Jesus describe the character of the men who, living under God's Fatherly rule made manifest in Jesus, enjoy happiness even here and now, though its perfection belongs to the heavenly world."*

The beatitudes are "beautiful attitudes" of the kingdom in which Jesus reveals to us the character of those who belong to Him. These, along with the rest of the sermon, show us kingdom character which clues us in on the secret of happiness.

A careful study will reveal that there are eight beatitudes. The first four focus on our relationship with God, while the second four deal with our relationship to our fellowman. Also, each of the eight build upon each other, giving a compelling progression as we read.

Within this passage of Scripture, Jesus deals with the subject of blessedness and explains how it is characteristic of those who are subjects of His kingdom.

**"Blessed"** - word is 'makarios' and literally means to be happy, fortunate, and blissful; approval of God upon one's life

This same word is used in Scripture to describe God Himself.

**1 Timothy 1:11** - **"According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust."**

**1 Timothy 6:15 - "He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords."**

The fullest meaning of the word speaks of inward contentedness that is not affected by circumstances. This the kind of happiness revealed through the Beatitudes that God desires for us, a state of joy and well-being that does not depend on temporary things and circumstances.

The 'blessedness' spoken of in the Beatitudes is a characteristic of Jesus Himself, and it can only be characteristic of us as we share in His nature through a personal relationship with Him.

Before we dive into the Beatitudes themselves, I feel that some things need to be understood in an introductory sense about what it means to be truly blessed:

**First, Jesus DEFINES what true happiness is**

The world constantly bombards us with its own idea of what happiness is and how it can be obtained.

**Joseph F. Coughlin, *Director MIT AgeLab*, "Got Happiness? Where Marketing Meets the Science of Well-Being" (2-10-12):**

*"Are you happy? Have you noticed the number of companies that are no longer promising the best quality, experience or even the best price for a product or service as the reason to give them a try? Instead they appear to be offering something we used to think money couldn't buy -- happiness. Retailers, manufacturers, service providers all want you to know how they bring more than just "good things to life," they can make you happy too. Here are just a few examples:*

*Campbell's Soup is now making your happy place anywhere you have your soup. Offering a "smile in every spoonful" Campbell's is blending healthy with happiness. On a recent walk through Best Buy I read a commanding sign "Buyer Be Happy." Coca-Cola is offering more than refreshment, now I can -- "Open Happiness." And it is not just 'stuff' that promises to make me happy, services can be downright giddy too. Few people who fly often equate flying with happiness, but JetBlue brought enough innovation to its service that you don't just fly -- you "jet." Their promos onboard and on roadside billboards now promise you will "jet happy."*

*Happiness is far from new to marketing. Marketers have always used unstated but ever-present cues to elicit emotion to connect with and commit the consumer. Feeling down, 'retail therapy' will make you happy. Shopping for 'I gotta have' items will provide happy relief. Getting 'I wanna have' will produce happy satisfaction. Today there is the expressed promise of happiness*

*stamped on the ingredients label of nearly every product, service and experience. But marketers may be doing more than giving happiness a push, they may, in fact, be touching a powerful generational cord of personal well-being.”*

Go to any bookstore like Barnes & Noble or peruse Amazon.com and you will find a smorgasbord assortment of books on how to achieve happiness through self-help and self-improvement.

There is only one way to have lasting happiness--through a relationship with Jesus Christ and possessing His character.

In a sermon from this text, David Jeremiah has pointed out how amazing it is to consider what people do just to be happy:

- One man buys a dozen homes to be happy, while another man lives in seclusion as a hermit just to be happy
- One woman becomes a nun to be happy, while another woman becomes promiscuous
- One young man thinks happiness can be obtained through bodybuilding, while another young man searches for it by destroying his body with drugs
- One couple is convinced that happiness is found in having children, while another couple believes children would only get in the way of their happiness

Ask any ten different people and you will get ten different answers about what constitutes a happy life.

Christ's definition of happiness is very different than the world's definition. How so? Consider how the world and culture around us defines happiness:

- Acquiring POSSESSIONS bring happiness

The world says, “Blessed are you who acquire possessions, for they shall give you what you're looking for.”

**Illustration** - *“It took George Washington Vanderbilt several years and a ton of money to build the 250-room Biltmore House and estate with its 185,000 acres of property. Now, it is a museum.”*

- Buying PRODUCTS bring happiness

The world says, "Blessed are you who buy products, for they shall solve your every problem."

- Experiencing PLEASURES bring happiness

The world says, "Blessed are you who experience pleasure, for it will scratch your every itch and fulfill your every desire."

This explains why we live in such a sexualized and self-indulgent culture with its pornographic websites and loose lifestyles that promise to bring satisfaction to the one who indulges and partakes of its pleasure.

Our generation is the generation that pursues entertainment at any expense. People are seeking an escape from reality. In fact, the entire entertainment industry rests on this premise. Billions of dollars are spent every year on producing and purchasing entertainment. Some people track their year, not on the basis of months and seasons, but on sports: NASCAR in the spring, baseball in the summer, football in the fall, basketball in the winter.

Where do you go when you conclude there is nothing truly meaningful in life? Back to the stadium... Back to the shopping mall... Back to the mountains or the beach...

- Gaining POSITION brings happiness

The world says, "Blessed are you who gain position, for it will give your life the meaning that you crave."

People jockey and vie for position in the office because they are of the mindset that they can do a better job than the last guy, and his job will bring them the happiness that their job cannot.

No one wants to be a servant. Everyone wants to be a man of woman of clout because that's where the happiness is.

- Supreme POWER brings happiness

The world says, "Blessed are the powerful, for what they say goes."

Many seek some form of office in the name of making a difference, but their real motivation is a lust for power. They long to be a mover and a shaker, because in their thinking, that kind of power is what truly satisfies the soul.

- Other PEOPLE bring happiness

The world says, "Blessed are you who find what you're looking for in other people, for they shall be to you what you need them to be."

This explains why the divorce rate has climbed to an all-time high in our culture. Men and women get married thinking that another person would bring them happiness. When the happy tank runs low, they simply run out and find someone else to make them feel what they perceive their spouse is lacking.

- Being PRODUCTIVE brings happiness

The world says, "Blessed are you when you are productive, for this is fulfillment in life."

I'm all for being productive and not being lazy, but many take this to an extreme. They overwork and burn the candle at both ends, thinking that this leads to happiness. In reality, it only leads to fatigue and a burned up life.

- Recognized POPULARITY brings happiness

The world says, "Blessed are you when everyone knows your name and sings your praise, for this is the meaning of life."

This idea says that if everyone knows who we are, and if we can make it big and find stardom, than happiness will not be far behind.

**Mark Twain** - *"The world will lament you for an hour and forget you forever."*

If you don't believe this, then take a trip to a nearby cemetery where the graves of forgotten men and women remain in silence. Nobody remembers what they had, nobody remembers what they achieved, and nobody remembers who they were.

The one thing that matters for them is the one thing that matters for us now--whether or not we will seek our satisfaction from Jesus, for He alone brings meaning to life and defines true happiness.

### **Second, Jesus DESIRES for His followers to be truly happy**

Have you ever stopped to consider the fact that God longs for us to truly be happy? The fact that we long for fulfillment reveals this to be true. Stated another way, the fact that we desire to be happy reveals that God desires for us to be happy and fulfilled creatures.

He has created us this way.

Some people are of the mindset that Christians aren't supposed to be happy, and looking at them, they are a perfect postcard of that kind of philosophy.

Some believe that holiness and happiness cannot coexist.

- They never crack a smile
- They never laugh and cut up
- They look down on those who do

We should always take what we do seriously, but we should never take ourselves too seriously.

**John 10:10 - "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."**

**Nehemiah 8:10 - "The joy of the Lord is your strength."**

Jesus embodied what true happiness is and what it is supposed to look like. This is contrary to the way that many portray Him to be, as perpetually somber and expressionless. Jesus possessed His Father's joy, and as a result, He was joyful.

- He was right at home at a wedding celebration
- He reclined at supper with friends
- He was much sought after by others

Jesus knew what true happiness is, and His words in the Sermon on the Mount reveal that He wants us to know what it is and experience it as well.

**Third, Jesus DECLARES that happiness is inward, not outward**

Jesus' list of what constitutes happiness here in Matthew 5 does not include possessions, position, popularity, or anything that the world says is required.

The world says that happiness starts with outward circumstances, but Jesus says it starts inwardly.

There's no mention of one's station in life, no mention of money, no mention of work or wealth, friends, or standard of living on His list.

While these things may often accompany happiness, in no way do they ever produce it. In the Beatitudes, Jesus destroys the illusion that is so prevalent in our day about what happiness is. Jesus strikes at the notion that the kingdom is all about prosperity and power. In His day, people were looking for a kingdom but had all the wrong ideas about what it was. There was an outward focus, but His was an inward focus.

True happiness is not something that comes as a result of favorable outward circumstances. Each of the Beatitudes describe inward character traits, not outward conditions.

Paul recognized this:

**Philippians 4:11-13 - “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

These were the words of a man, not who wrote from some island paradise, but from a Roman prison cell where he was bound with chains.

#### **Fourth, Jesus DESIGNATES happiness as a byproduct, not a goal**

The blessedness that Jesus speaks of in each of the Beatitudes is not what He intends us to seek; it is merely the byproduct. For instance, when He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” He intends for us to focus on being poor in spirit, and the byproduct of that is being blessed.

When we focus on happiness as the goal, we completely miss it.

**Malcolm Muggeridge** - *“There is something quite ridiculous, and even indecent, in an individual claiming to be happy; still more, a people or a nation making such a claim. The pursuit of happiness, included along with life and liberty in the American Declaration of Independence as an inalienable right, is without question the most [foolish] that could possibly be undertaken. The lamentable phrase--the pursuit of happiness--is responsible for a good part of the ills and miseries of the modern world. To pursue happiness, individually or collectively, as a conscious aim, is the surest way to miss it altogether...The Gadarene swine were doubtless in pursuit of happiness when they hurled themselves to destruction over the cliff...Where then does happiness lie? In forgetfulness, not indulgence, of the self.”*

The world says that happiness is found through the indulgence of the self. Jesus says it can only come through the forgetfulness of the self.

**Anonymous** - *“If more people would get a divorce from themselves, they might learn how to live more happily with someone else.”*

**Hebrews 12:14-** **“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”**

The pursuit of Jesus is our goal, not the pursuit of happiness. As I pursue Him, He brings happiness to my soul. As such:

- His provision is enough for my physical and material needs
- His presence is sufficient for my emotional needs
- His providence is perfect for my future needs

**John 15:11** - **“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”**

Jesus spoke these words the very night before He would experience the most shameful and torturous treatment any man has ever experienced. Does this make sense to you? Think of it-- the subject of His conversation before His crucifixion and death for sinners was His joy and happiness.

How should we then live?

**Hebrews 12:2-3** - **“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”**

In this passage known as the Beatitudes, Jesus will give to us the basic building blocks that are foundational to living a life of true blessedness or happiness.

The first beatitude is found in verse 3:

**v. 3** - **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

### **1. RECOGNITION of one’s spiritual need**

We should clear up any misconceptions about what it means to be poor in spirit.

First, to be poor in spirit has nothing to do with material wealth or possessions. A person can be wealthy yet still be poor in spirit. And equally so, a person can be materially poor but not poor in spirit.

To be poor in spirit is to be poor in the inward person, not in one's outward circumstances.

Second, to be poor in spirit is not the same thing as being poor-spirited. Someone who is poor-spirited is a person who lacks ambition or passion. It is someone who lacks confidence. This is not what Jesus is referring to.

**“Poor”** - *comes from a root word that means to cower and cringe like a beggar; someone who crouches about wretchedly begging*

This word speaks of a poverty so deep that the person must obtain his or her living by begging.

Poverty of spirit is a personal acknowledgement of one's spiritual bankruptcy. He is describing the attitude of repentance that is essential for one's salvation.

**Warren Wiersbe** - *“To be poor in spirit means to be humble, to have a correct estimate of oneself.”*

**Romans 12:3** - **“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”**

Before a person can ever be saved, he or she must first recognize their desperate need for a Savior. They come to the end of their own spiritual resources and realize that they are totally bankrupt.

## **2. RELIANCE upon the grace of God**

The beggar is fully dependent upon the giving of others; he cannot survive without help from the outside.

The idea being conveyed is, “Blessed are those who are so desperately poor in spiritual resources that they realize they must have help from outside sources.” Being bankrupt of all spiritual resources, they rely upon God's grace and provision on their behalf.

**Anonymous** - *“Evangelism is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”*

**Ephesians 2:8-9** - **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**

No one will ever sing their own praise in eternity; we will only sing the praise of the One who provided grace for a bunch of beggars who so desperately needed it.

### **3. REJECTION of personal pride**

Since poverty of spirit means recognition of one's spiritual need and reliance upon God's grace, then naturally it would also involve a rejection of personal pride.

Since poverty of spirit is the personal acknowledgement I make about my own spiritual bankruptcy, it cannot be obtained any other way than rejecting all of my own personal pride.

Pride is perhaps the most dangerous as well as the most subtle sin. It is also the one thing that tops the list of things that God hates most.

**Proverbs 6:16-19 - "These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren."**

A proud look tops the list because all of the other sins come from a proud heart.

Pride is the anti-God attitude that exalts the self.

**Proverbs 16:19 - "Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud."**

**Isaiah 57:15 - "For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."**

**Isaiah 66:1-2 - "Thus says the Lord: Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that You will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist, says the Lord. But one this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."**

Those who reject pride and are truly poor in spirit are those who show such an attitude through humility and obedience to God's Word.

**John Wesley** - *“He has a deep sense of the loathsome leprosy of sin in which he brought with him from his mother’s womb, which overspreads his whole soul, and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof.”*

Poverty of spirit is the polar opposite of the proud selfishness and self-sufficiency of today’s world.

**Cheryl K. Chumley, The Washington Times (4-16-14)** - *“Michael Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York City, said it’s his work for more gun control — along with his anti-smoking and healthy eating campaigns — that have won him God’s favor and a sure spot behind the Pearly Gates. His exact words, made in context of discussing his smoking cessation and anti-obesity pushes, as well as his concerted crackdowns on private gun ownership, to the New York Times were: “I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I’m not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It’s not even close.”*

What Mr. Bloomberg fails to understand is that without being poor in spirit and turning from his own personal pride and trusting Jesus Christ, he won’t make it in. It’s not even close.

#### **4. RESULTS in true spiritual wealth**

To be poor in spirit means recognizing one’s spiritual need, relying upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ, rejecting all pride, which alone results in true spiritual wealth.

In each of the beatitudes, the blessing that is spoken of is contingent upon the condition that is specified.

The idea is that the kingdom of heaven ONLY belongs to those who are poor in spirit. Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for THEIRS is the kingdom of heaven.”

The word “theirs” is emphatic, meaning theirs in the sense of theirs alone. This excludes all others who approach God in any other way than being poor in spirit.

This means that such an attitude is essential before a person will ever be saved; no one can ever know Jesus without being poor in spirit.

- As long as you don’t see your spiritual poverty, you can’t know Him
- As long as you rely on your own supply and not His grace, you can’t know Him
- As long as pride controls your attitude, you can’t know Him

I can only know Him by first of all being poor in spirit.

Like all gospel truth, this is paradoxical truth which says that the way to be rich is to be poor.

The Sermon on the Mount does not reveal the character that God expects in order for us to be accepted by Him. That would negate the work of Christ on our behalf. The Sermon on the Mount reveals the character He expects from His own because they have already been accepted by Him.

**David Platt** - *"We are not accepted by God because of anything we do. We are accepted by God completely and totally because of a perfect Savior who has died a bloody death in our place and who has risen again in victory. Yes, we pray for our enemies, we love those who persecute us, and we follow the Golden Rule. But we do these things not in order to earn acceptance before our God, but because we have acceptance by God and we want to glorify Him in everything we do."*

Jesus is not teaching mere moralism here. Moralism is religion without the cross. Instead, He is teaching what the subjects of His kingdom look like once they have been changed by the gospel of His death and resurrection. It is His work in their hearts showing up through their lives.