

# Happy Are the Harassed

Overcoming the Me-Attitudes – Part V

Matthew 5:9-12

## Introduction

One of my commentaries that I was reading a few months ago, included this rather funny story. A man knew his wife's birthday was just around the corner, so he asked her, without appearing to be too interested in her answer, "Honey, if you could have one wish, what would you want?"

She thought for a moment, then laughed and said, "I'd love to be eight again."

On the morning of her birthday, he got her up and off they went to a nearby Waffle House for waffles and whipped cream with a tall glass of milk. Next, they headed to the local theme park. What a day they had! He put her on every ride in the park. The Death Slide, the Cyclone Whip, the Screaming Loop, the Wall of Fear, the Double-Ring Ferris Wheel – everything they had, she rode. Five hours later she staggered out of the theme park with her husband – her head reeling, her stomach still churning. Off to McDonald's they went, where he ordered her a Big Mac with fries and a thick chocolate milk-shake. After that, they went to the latest Disney animated movie where they had popcorn and Pepsi and a bag of M&Ms – topping off the day full of fabulous eight-year-old adventures. Exhausted, she stumbled into the house late that evening with her husband and collapsed on the bed. He leaned over and softly whispered, "Well now, how'd you like being eight again?"

One eye opened in surprise and she moaned, "I meant my dress size."<sup>1</sup>

It is one thing to think we heard somebody and it is another thing to have properly understood.

It is typical, is it not, for us to have to say to someone:

- "Oh, I thought you said that."
- "I thought when you said this, you meant that."
- "I didn't think I heard you right when you said that, so I didn't think you said it."

How many husbands say, "Honey, I didn't hear you say that."

How many wives say, "I can't believe you're saying you didn't hear me say that."

These illustrations are purely hypothetical!

Without a doubt, everyone has an opinion on what God says on just about everything – certainly on what pleases Him.

- If you do this, God will be pleased and you will be happy.
- If you don't do this, God will be pleased and you will be happy.
- If you do this or don't do that, God will not be pleased and you will not be happy.

Is God really that confusing on the subject of happiness?

I find it fascinating that as Jesus Christ began His first sermon, He could have said a lot of things about a lot of things. However, He began by clearing up the truth about happiness and the Christian life.

With nine statements, each beginning with the word "makarios," which is defined as "true, genuine, sustained happiness," Jesus Christ radically defines a life of true happiness.

We have uncovered, in the process of studying these statements, the principle that dying to self is the first and ongoing step toward happiness.

We have discovered that the "Blesseds," or the Beatitudes, are the opposite of me-attitudes.

Jesus Christ defined the path in Matthew chapter 5 by radically upending conventional religious wisdom. What the religious leaders and people of Christ's day thought God had said was radically different than what God really meant.

So, do not misunderstand what God is saying about happiness! You think you heard Him, but let us make sure.

## Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Let us pick our study back up by going to Matthew 5:9.

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

“Happy are the peacemakers.”

Notice that Jesus Christ does not say, “Happy are the peaceful,” or “Happy are the undisturbed.”

Oh no. In fact, the Lord uses a compound word:

- **The first half of the word – “peace”** – meant much the same as the Hebrew word “shalom,” which means “wholeness or well-being”. When a Jew wished another person “shalom,” it was not just “have a nice and peaceful day,” it was a blessing for them to have a whole life.
- **The second part of the word – “maker”** – demands that we understand that the person is not passive, but literally someone who negotiates peace.<sup>ii</sup>

By the way, notice that Christians who are peacemakers are called,

... *sons of God*.

The Lord uses the word “huios (υιος)” for “sons,” instead of the normal word “tekna (τεκνα)” for children. “Tekna” is the tender and affectionate term for little children. “Uios” is the term which speaks of dignity and honor.<sup>iii</sup>

We literally bear the honor and dignity of God as we bring peace.

By the way, notice that peacemakers are not given the promise of peace. Peacemaking can mess up our world. A godly person might stir up trouble!

Everywhere the apostle Paul went he either caused a revival or a riot!

We might get war!

The cross of Christ is the greatest example of making peace. And it cost the life of the peacemaker, right? Instead of glossing over sin – peacemakers do not sacrifice truth, by the way – the Lord openly exposed sin and then He suffered for sin! His death brought us peace!<sup>iv</sup>

Paul wrote,

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)*

There was nothing cheap or easy about this peace.

Paul wrote further to the Colossians,

*For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*

*and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

*(Colossians 1:19-20)*

Christ made peace for us. Paul uses the same root words for Christ making peace that Christ used of us being peacemakers.<sup>v</sup>

It will cost. We will have to die to self.

Every time we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone, we are engaged in peace making. The world is in deep trouble at this very moment and whether they realize it not, they are the enemy of heaven – and we beg the world to be reconciled to God.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (II Corinthians 5:20)*

I have made enemies because of my testimony. Have you?

Have you ever had anyone tell you off, saying something like, “Who do you think you are, telling me I’m a sinner?”

Now, this does not mean we grab people by the nap of the neck and make them repeat, “I’m a dirty rotten sinner.” However, eventually they realize that is exactly what we are saying they are!

Have you ever had a door slammed in your face?

Have you ever been passed over for a promotion because you would not laugh it up with the boys?

Have you ever been ridiculed for your faith in Christ?

Standing up as a son of God may mean you stand alone.

I am in the middle of reading the biography of General Douglas MacArthur, the great general of World War II, depending on which author you are reading. The Japanese soldiers had dug in on dozens and dozens of islands and after the peace treaty had been signed, many of them had not received the news. In fact, I read that about fifteen years ago, if you can imagine, they believe they found the last Japanese soldier. For decades he had been isolated on an island, hiding out, still living in fear in the jungle, not knowing that peace had come. Equally tragic, I have read, the Japanese government enlisted messengers and sent them to many of these islands to deliver the news of peace, and some of them were shot and killed.

There is a parallel to this. You might lose sleep if you become a peacemaker. You might ruffle feathers. You might make enemies. You might lose

sleep as you engage in the mess of someone's life. You might sacrifice peacefulness in order to make peace.

However, if you are willing to share not only in the power of His resurrection, but in the fellowship of the sufferings of the Son of God, you redeemed sons of God will engage in delivering the news that peace with God is now available through Jesus Christ.

I recommend to my seminary students that they read the short biography of Robert Chapman, the pastor of a small church in nineteenth century England. He was a man deeply respected and considered by Charles Spurgeon as the saintliest man in England.

However, not everyone liked Robert Chapman. A grocer once became so infuriated by Chapman's open air preaching that he spit on him. For a number of years, the grocer continued to verbally attack Chapman. Chapman never retaliated. In fact, on one occasion, some of Chapman's wealthy relatives came to visit him. Robert was single his entire life, and they decided to cook for him while they visited. They asked where they could purchase groceries and Chapman insisted they go to this particular store. They did and purchased a large amount of food and then asked that it be delivered to the home of R. C. Chapman. The stunned grocer told the visitor that they must have come by accident to the wrong shop. "No," they said, "Mr. Chapman insisted that we come here." When the grocer arrived and Chapman answered the door, the grocer broke down in tears at Chapman's graciousness and ended up yielding his life that very afternoon to Jesus Christ.<sup>vi</sup>

## **Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake**

The final beatitude is repeated and expanded in Matthew 5:10-12. In fact, Christ actually amplifies the results of being peacemakers.

Notice that Christ says,

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*

*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Truly happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

"Persecuted" is passive in the Greek, indicating that the persecuted are giving permission; are willingly allowing themselves to be maligned, persecuted, hated, ignored, perhaps even incarcerated or killed.

And it is in the perfect tense which means that persecution is happening with continuing results.<sup>vii</sup>

The word translated "persecuted" has the idea of being chased or pursued. We could render it "harassed"!

Jesus Christ says, "Happy are the harassed," but notice that He adds, "for righteousness' sake."

When we get pulled over for running a stop light, that is not persecution by the state. We cannot expect rewards in heaven for that.

When I was a kid, in the summer time my friend and I would explore some woods near our subdivision until it grew dark. There was an apartment complex on our way home, and downstairs there was the electrical box that ran the electricity for the entire apartment building – and it was controlled by a big handle. We would scout around to make sure no one was out downstairs, and then pull that lever and run out into the open as the entire building went dark. The last time we did it, two guys, one of them dressed in army fatigues, happened to be standing on the balcony just above where we ran out. They heard the electrical arm slam down, saw the building grow dark, and two kids sprint out underneath them. They put two and two together and we heard, "Hey you." As we sprinted away from the building, I turned around and saw one of the guys leap over the balcony railing, land on his feet like Sylvester Stallone, and take off after us. If we had not outrun him, you would have had a different pastor. God knew I needed to live.

It is important to understand the difference between punishment and persecution.<sup>viii</sup>

If my friend and I had been caught, we would not have been persecuted, we would have been tortured – I mean punished.

I am here today because we outran the guy and we never did it again.

Jesus Christ does not say, "Happy are those who make a nuisance of themselves. Happy are the lazy, the unethical, the sloppy, the irritating and the arrogant."

No. Jesus Christy says, "Happy are those who are harassed because they live godly lives!"

The apostle Peter writes,

***Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.***

***But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.***

***(I Peter 4:12-13)***

By the way, this is the promised reward in Matthew 5 of the kingdom and the reward in heaven.

Peter goes on in to write,

***If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed ["makarios," which is the same word Christ used in His sermon, meaning "you are truly happy"], because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.***

***But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.***

***Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name [that is, in the name "Christian"].***

***(I Peter 4:14-16)***

Notice also that Jesus Christ did not say, "Happy are those who are persecuted – period." He said, "You can be truly happy as you share in suffering because you know your reward one day will be great."

People around the world are making a decision to suffer for Christ when they choose the name Christian.

David Williams, our Outreach Pastor, sent an email to me about a pastor friend who watched new believers being baptized in Morocco. Fourteen former Muslims were now identifying with Christ their Lord. In a secret cove along the water's edge, as they finished baptizing these fourteen converts, suddenly an observer leaped into the water with tears filing his eyes declaring he too wanted to be a follower of Christ and be baptized. This man had been the interpreter for the training meetings that week – a Muslim himself. In order to be baptized, he had to answer publicly the questions the others had answered before they were immersed – three questions:

1. Do you renounce Islam, the Koran, Ramadan and other teaching?

2. Have you accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior and do you believe now in the Trinity, the Christ is equally God?
3. Are you willing to be imprisoned, to be thrown out of your home for Christ?

Upon his positive response, he was baptized, a follower of Jesus Christ.

No matter what happens to these fifteen – they know that they have true abiding happiness.

## Conclusion

Let us rehearse the nine statements, in Matthew 5, that define true happiness that are in contrast to the world's efforts to find happiness.

- In **verse 3**, Jesus Christ basically said, "Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually poverty stricken," while the world says, "Happy are those who can say, 'I've got it made!'"
- In **verse 4**, Jesus Christ effectively said, "Blessed are those who mourn over their sinful propensity," while the world says, "Happy are those who never have to cry about anything."
- In **verse 5**, the Lord effectively said, "Blessed are those who refuse to retaliate," while the world declares, "Happy are those who know how to climb over everyone on their way to the top."
- In **verse 6**, Jesus Christ said, "Happy are those who are famished for the things of God," while the world says, "Happy are those who stuff themselves with the things of life!"
- In **verse 7**, the Lord effectively said, "Happy are those who lend a hand to help," while the world says, "You've gotta be kidding – happiness is never needing a handout."
- In **verse 8**, Jesus Christ shocked His world by saying, "The happy person is one whose private purity is a daily resolution," while the world says, "Oh no, happiness is when your private life never makes it into the newspaper."
- In **verse 9**, the world says, "Happy are those who know how to tear into pieces," while Jesus Christ said, "Happy are those who make peace."
- Finally, in **verses 10 and 11**, the world concludes their list of me-attitudes by summarizing it all with, "Happy are the

trouble free,” while Jesus Christ said, “Happy are the harassed for My sake.”

You might not mean much to planet earth, but take heart, one day you will rule the world.

Many of you are old enough to have watched Cassius Clay (aka Muhammad Ali) box. Former three-time world heavyweight boxing champion – the Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods of his sport – no one could match his skill for years.

Ali’s face was on *Sports Illustrated* more times than any other athlete in its history. When he was floating like a butterfly and stinging like a bee, he was on top of his profession and everyone knew it. But that was a long time ago.

Gary Smith, a sportswriter, went to Ali’s country estate to interview him. Gary was met at the door by a bent figure with slurred speech – a combination of Parkinson’s disease and too many punches. Ali escorted Gary out to a barn that had become his museum of sorts. It was filled with mementos – trophies, life-sized pictures of him punching the air and holding championship belts over his head. As they got closer, Gary noticed on these large pictures lining the barn wall – life-sized pictures capturing Ali at his greatest moments – there were white streaks. Pigeons that nested in the barn had made their contribution. Ali noticed too and scowled up at them.

Almost as an act of closure, Ali shuffled over to the wall and one by one, turned them toward the barn wall. He finally finished and went to the open barn door where he gazed out over the countryside, muttering something under his breath.

Gary said, “Excuse me, what did you say?”

Ali repeated louder, this time not just to himself, “I was saying, ‘I had the world – and it was nothin’... it was nothin’.’”

It is as if Jesus Christ says to those who follow Him, “Rarely making headlines, often underfoot and overlooked, you might not ever have the world now, but you will one day have the new world – and it will be something.”

Just knowing that alone, according to Jesus Christ and His apostles, has the ability to bring an abiding sense of happiness, no matter what may come.

So let it come. One day, you will have the world – and it will be something. Man, will it be something!

We have happiness now – happiness and heaven forever!

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<sup>i</sup> Charles Swindoll, Job: Man of Heroic Endurance (W Publishing, 2004), p. 98.

<sup>ii</sup> R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon On the Mount (Crossway Books, 2001), p. 62.

<sup>iii</sup> John MacArthur, Kingdom Living Here and Now (Moody Press, 1980), p. 129.

<sup>iv</sup> Warren Wiersbe, Live Like a King (Moody Press, 1976), p. 129.

<sup>v</sup> Hughes, p. 64.

<sup>vi</sup> Robert L. Peterson and Alexander Strauch, Agape Leadership (Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1991), p. 44.

<sup>vii</sup> MacArthur, p. 159.

<sup>viii</sup> Wiersbe, p. 138.