

Finding True Happiness

Matt 5:1-16

SS Lesson for 09/21/2008

Devotional Scripture: James 1:1-12

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The outline and detail of the lesson came from a previous SS Lesson (July 3, 2005). It examines **Spiritual Happiness**. The **study's aim** is to learn what Jesus considered the ideal attitude and character His followers should aspire to develop and how to obtain true spiritual happiness. The **study's application** is to develop Christlike attitudes and character and thereby achieve true happiness.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

When someone inherits a lot of money, others may say, "How fortunate!" When someone enjoys good health, many think, "What good genetics!" When someone is honored for an achievement, a typical response is, "How happy you must be!" The one word that sums up these responses is Congratulations! When the ancient Greeks expressed such ideas, they used the same word attributed to Jesus in the Beatitudes. We translate it "blessed." They used this word to congratulate parents on their children, to congratulate wise men on their knowledge, and to congratulate rich men on their wealth. For them, these were things of great value. Whenever we congratulate people, we are making a statement about values. If we congratulate people for being healthy or getting wealthy, we do so because we set high value on such things. By contrast, Jesus congratulated people based on a very different set of values. In his shocking appraisal of the human condition, he called people "blessed" who were poor in spirit and meek and persecuted. The challenge for followers of Christ is to embrace his values. We must stop admiring people for wealth or achievements that have no value in the sight of God. Instead, we must learn what things have true, eternal value. Then we will be a community of values—God's values. The Beatitudes form the introduction to the famous Sermon on the Mount. Jesus spoke these words on a mountain in Galilee during the second year of his ministry. Both Matthew 4:25 and Luke 6:17 state that large crowds followed Jesus at this time in his ministry. Jesus' fame as a miracle worker had spread throughout the region. People came from as far away as Tyre and Sidon to hear him teach and to be healed of their diseases. Their astonishment increased when they saw him command unclean spirits to depart from demon-possessed people. But Jesus had not come primarily to heal the sick and cast out demons. He had come to preach truth in light of the in-breaking kingdom of God. His Sermon on the Mount was both radical and reasonable; it was both spiritually idealistic and sensibly down-to-earth. His words may set ethical standards that are higher than we can personally reach in this life, but no one can claim that his standards are wrong.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Since each Gospel writer was presenting the account of Christ from a unique perspective, each evangelist stressed certain aspects of Jesus' teaching and ministry. Matthew's Gospel was directed toward a Jewish audience. We see this in the emphasis that Christ is the fulfillment of ancient prophecy. Some have suggested that Matthew was presenting Jesus as the new Moses. Just as there are five books of Moses (the Pentateuch, or Law), so there are five major sections in Matthew. Just as Moses received God's law on a mountain, so Christ delivered His new "law" from a mountain. Hence, Matthew 5 through 7 is called the Sermon on the Mount. It is also noteworthy that in this sermon there are numerous contrasts between how the law was understood by the rabbis and what Christ declared to be the true intent of the law. Jesus was interpreting the Mosaic law for His disciples in a way that would have seemed radical to His listeners. A beatitude is a declaration of blessedness. Beatitudes may be found in the Old Testament (Psalm 32:1-2). Other examples are Psalms 41:1 and 65:4. The main listing of beatitudes in the New Testament occurs in Matthew 5:1-12. Other examples are found in Matthew 11:6, 13:16, 16:17, and 24:46, and John 20:29. The beatitudes recorded in Luke 6:20-22 appear to be an abbreviated version of those found in Matthew 5:1-12.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Happiness Spiritually (Matt 5:1-6)

- 1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.
- 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:
- 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.
- 5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.
- 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

True Happiness (from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator)

The word "happiness" presents a picture of pleasure, delight, gladness, contentment, or exhilaration. A child receives a toy, a wife sees her husband return from a business trip, a long-lost friend is able to visit your home, all are joyful experiences. Success in academic pursuits and advancement in one's profession are also examples of what people call happiness and satisfaction. "Blessed" is the familiar New Testament term for happiness. The Beatitudes are the direct teaching of the Savior, and they demonstrate that happiness is not always related to a material entity or a happy occasion. In reality, Jesus' words illustrate that real happiness depends on how a person has responded to God's provisions for a happy life and how close he is to the Lord. There is no true and lasting happiness without having trusted in Christ as one's Savior and Lord. That type of happiness has eternal qualities, not just temporal ones.

Happiness through being in the kingdom of Heaven (vs 3)

Being poor in spirit means having a spiritual need that I cannot supply (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

One who is poor in spirit feels deep within himself that he is spiritually poor and needy—with a need that he cannot supply for himself. The kingdom of heaven belongs to those poor in spirit, because they are willing to receive it. They are willing, even eager, to be ruled by Jesus the King. They exert themselves in doing His will, and they find joy in doing it.

Poor in spirit means humility (from the UBS Handbook Series)

Poor in spirit is understood by some few interpreters to mean "poor for the sake of their spirit." The reference would then be to persons who impoverish themselves for the sake of strengthening their spiritual condition. But it is more natural to take the Greek phrase following "poor" with the meaning "in the realm of," after the analogy of such expressions as "pure in heart" (Matt 5:8) or "humble in spirit" (Ps 34:18 RSV: "crushed in spirit"), rather than with the meaning of "for the sake of."

Only those who do the will of God will be in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7:21)

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Christians have been given the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 13:11)

11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

Unless we change and become like little children, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3-4)

3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Happiness through being comforted (vs 4)

Sorrow over spiritual shortcomings (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

The tax collector in Jesus' parable offers a perfect example of what this Beatitude means. He mourned over his sins; beating his breast (Luke 18:13) was the traditional expression of deep sorrow. He went home "justified," or forgiven (Luke 18:14). What blessed comfort!

Calling on God relieves sorrow because God is compassionate (Ps 116:3-5)

3 The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. 4 Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!" 5 The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.

God promises joy in the place of tears (Ps 126:5-6)

5 Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. 6 He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

God is the father of Compassion (2 Cor 1:3-4)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Happiness through inheriting the earth (vs 5)

Meekness is channeled strength (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Who are the meek? Words similar in meaning are *mild*, *gentle*, and *patient*. Meek people prefer to avoid conflict, but that does not mean that they are weak or cowardly. Students of Greek tell us that the Greek word for meek was used of a horse that was trained to pull a plow or carry a rider. A meek horse does not waste his strength in conflict, as a wild horse does when he is captured. Instead, his strength is channeled toward the accomplishment of a useful purpose. Likewise, a meek person desires to use his or her energy in God-pleasing tasks rather than in combat. In what way will the meek inherit the earth? Perhaps we should think of inheriting the earth as much more than just the enjoyment of material goods and wealth. There is also the sense of fulfillment and contentment that comes when one uses the resources of earth as the Creator intended them to be used. This is a blessing that those who use the earth's resources selfishly can never call their own. And when this old earth is replaced by a new one, the meek will enjoy that one even more (2 Peter 3:10-13).

Those that fear God will inherit the earth (Ps 25:12-13)

12 Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. 13 He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land.

Those whose hope is in God will inherit the earth (Ps 37:9)

9 For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

It is a blessing from God to inherit the earth (Ps 37:22)

22 those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off.

The righteous will inherit the earth (Ps 37:29)

29 the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.

Faith allows the inheritance of the earth (Rom 4:13)

13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

Happiness through being filled with righteousness (vs 6)

Hunger is a compulsion to obtain (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

A greater blessing than hunger for food is hunger after righteousness, or for righteousness. Hunger for food compels us to get some food; hunger for righteousness compels us to get some righteousness. How do we obtain righteousness? There are two ways. One is by simply doing right. We can try to keep that up every day, but it is not enough. So God has provided a second way to obtain righteousness—a way by which our righteousness can be made complete. Speaking of this better way, Paul wrote that he desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which would come from the law, but a righteousness that comes from God by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:9). So by God's gracious forgiveness, we can be filled with the righteousness of Christ. But that will not take place unless we are hungry and thirsty—unless we really want to be righteous.

A righteousness that comes through faith (Rom 3:22)

22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

A righteousness that comes from being under grace (Rom 6:12-14)

13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

A righteousness that comes from Christ being in me (Rom 8:10)

10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

A righteousness that comes from Jesus ending the penalty of sin (Rom 10:4)

4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

A righteousness that is part of the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17)

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

A righteousness that is part of the armor of God (Eph 6:14)

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

Happiness in Relationships with Others (Matt 5:7-12)

7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

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

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

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

Happiness through being merciful (vs 7)

Being merciful is grieving over the pain of others (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Merciful people are grieved by the grief or pain of others, and they do what they can to end it. Often, when those who have been merciful are in trouble, they will obtain mercy from others who are aware of their kindness. Best of all, God will bless them and show mercy to them.

Being merciful is having regard for the weak and troubled (Ps 41:1-3)

1 Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. 2 The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. 3 The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.

For the merciful, there is hope in troubled times (Ps 112:4)

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.

Not being merciful is sin (Prov 14:21)

He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

The type of fasting God desires includes being merciful to others (Isa 58:6-8)

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter--when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

Without being merciful to others, I will not receive mercy from God (Matt 6:14-15)

14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Mercy is commanded for Christians (Eph 4:32)

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13)

because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

Happiness through being pure in heart (vs 8)

Being pure in heart means that my motives are good (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Pure gold is solid gold all the way through; it is not mixed with anything cheaper. The pure in heart have hearts of solid good: their tastes, their thoughts, their desires, their motives are good. They do not value or desire anything evil.

Being pure in heart means motives and principals are aligned with God's word (from Barnes' Notes)

That is, whose minds, motives, and principles are pure; who seek not only to have the external actions correct, but who desire to be holy in heart, and who are so. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart

Pure in heart means to have integrity (1 Chron 29:17)

I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

Pure in heart means to walk blamelessly (Ps 15:2)

He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart

Pure in heart means to be purified of all that contaminates (2 Cor 7:1)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Pure in heart means to be sprinkled clean by the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:22)

let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Pure in heart means to be obedient to the truth of God's word (1 Peter 1:22)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

I should pray to God out of a pure heart (2 Tim 2:22)

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Happiness through being a peacemaker (vs 9)

Obedient peace with others (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

God is the greatest peacemaker of all. Our sins made us His enemies (Colossians 1:21); but instead of destroying us, He loved us and sent His only begotten Son to die in our place (Romans 5:8). When we believe in Jesus and obey Him, our sins are forgiven and we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). We then find a blessing in making and keeping peace with our Christian brothers and sisters and, if possible, with everyone (Romans 12:18).

As much as it is possible, I should live in peace with others (Rom 12:18-19)

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Being in unity promotes peace (2 Cor 13:11)

Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Fellowship with the Holy Spirit provides ability to live in peace with others (Phil 2:1-4)

1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of

selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

I must make every effort to live in peace (Heb 12:14)

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Happiness through being rewarded for enduring persecution (vs 10-12)

Persecution is mistreatment for serving God (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Jesus' life was faultless, yet evildoers were constantly plotting to kill Him (Matthew 26:3, 4; John 5:18; 7:1). He warned His disciples that they would be persecuted, too (John 15:20; 16:2). Here the general promise of verse 10 is applied to the disciples whom Jesus was teaching (vv. 1, 2). Is it not applicable to us as well? Notice, however, that there is no promise of blessing unless the persecution comes for Jesus' sake. If we suffer because we have done wrong, or because we have not been poor in spirit (v. 3) or meek (v. 5) or merciful (v. 7), then we have no blessing (cf. 1 Peter 4:15). The evil spoken against us must be false, not accurate. The persecution of God's people did not begin with Jesus and His disciples. God's prophets had been mistreated long before this. Consider such examples as Elijah (1 Kings 19:2, 13, 14), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:26, 27), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 37:15; 38:6).

Persecution for the sake of Jesus happens because those who persecute do not know God (John 15:20-21)

20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.

Persecution cannot separate me from the love of Jesus (Rom 8:35)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

I may be persecuted, but I will never be abandoned by God (2 Cor 4:8-9)

8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

The momentary persecutions experienced now are nothing compared to the glory that awaits (2 Cor 4:17)

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

I must count persecutions as joy because they aid in perseverance (James 1:2-3)

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

I must never be surprised by persecution (1 Peter 4:12-13)

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

In my persecution, I have not shed blood (Heb 12:4)

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Happiness in the World (Matt 5:13-16)

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Happiness through being the salt of the earth (vs 13)

No Substitute for Salt (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Many have been advised to reduce the amount of salt in their diets. This has led to the creation of salt substitutes. Most would agree that many of these substitutes really do not taste much like salt. People on a salt-free diet may adjust to them and use them, but most of us would find them unsatisfactory. The fact is, there just seems to be no substitute for salt. No other substance seems to be as versatile in adding flavor, preserving, and purifying. Just as there is no substitute for table salt, there is no substitute for those who are spiritually the salt of the earth. Their influence—your influence—cannot be replaced by anything else. If we Christians do not season the world with the grace of Christ, it will not be seasoned. You have an inescapable influence. You cannot avoid it. You can only determine if that influence will be for good or for bad, will lead people to Christ or will turn them away from Christ. It is a heavy responsibility, but Christ will help us. We need only yield ourselves to him in obedience and service. He will see to it that we become the salt for life—salt that preserves, that creates a thirst for God, and that heals the spiritual wounds of a broken world.

Good salt causes others to thirst after Jesus (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

As commonly used, salt has two purposes. First, it makes foods taste better. Almost any meat or vegetable dish is bland if the cook forgets to salt it. Only a little salt is needed, but it makes a big difference. Likewise Christians may be only a minority of the world's population, but they improve the flavor of the whole. Salt is also used to preserve foods. (Such use was much more common before there were refrigerators and freezers in homes and stores.) Seeing how much evil there is in the world, do you ever wonder why God hasn't destroyed it before now? Perhaps this old world is being preserved by the salt of the earth. God is giving you and me and the other Christians time to win yet more people to Christ and to eternal life (2 Peter 3:9). This brings to mind yet another application of the salt metaphor that some have suggested: just as salt makes us thirsty, Christians are meant to have such an impact that they make others thirsty for Christ.

Salt represents prayer, influence and example given by Christians (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Salt renders food pleasant and palatable, and preserves from putrefaction. So Christians, by their lives and instructions, are to keep the world from entire moral corruption. By bringing down the blessing of God in answer to their prayers, and by their influence and example, they save the world from universal vice and crime.

Salt represents the character and principles of Christians (from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary)

The character and principles of Christians, brought into close contact with it, are designed to arrest the festering corruption of humanity and season its insipidity. But how, it may be asked, are Christians to do this office for their fellow-men, if their righteousness only exasperate them, and recoil, in every form of persecution, upon themselves? The answer is, That is but the first and partial effect of their Christianity upon the world: though the great proportion would dislike and reject the truth, a small but noble band would receive and hold it fast; and in the struggle that

would ensue, one and another even of the opposing party would come over to His ranks, and at length the Gospel would carry all before it.

Happiness through being the light of the world (vs 14)

A light that comes from controlling what my eyes see (Luke 11:34-36)

34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. 35 See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. 36 Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you."

A light that comes from Jesus who is the light of men (John 1:3-5)

4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

A light that comes to those who walk in the light of Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12)

12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

A light that shines in my heart (2 Cor 4:3-6)

4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Happiness through doing good works (vs 15)

God created us to do good works (Eph 2:10)

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Good works are obvious (1 Tim 5:25)

25 In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.

Good works include being generous and willing to share (1 Tim 6:18)

18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

We should encourage each other to do good works (Heb 10:24)

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Good works comes from living a good life (1 Peter 2:12)

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

“There! Are you happy now?” We usually hear these words in a sarcastic tone; someone is obviously not going to be very happy. But in a more serious vein, the question really does need to be asked. To people whose lives have been focused on careers, on social standing, or on stock portfolios, we ask: Are you really happy now? Have worldly values brought true satisfaction? Or have you been left wondering where you can find a deeper level of satisfaction? The timeless teachings of Jesus show us eternal values. His Beatitudes may go against the current of modern society, but they are nonetheless true. Real happiness is found in spiritual blessedness. Each of the Beatitudes represents a shifting of priorities. They teach us to stop putting ourselves first. In the process of learning to live out these values, we will make an important discovery: We find lasting happiness only when we stop trying to please ourselves and start trying to please God. We find the blessed life only when we embrace God’s values instead of our own.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Light is a wonderful part of our physical world. We need light to survive. In fact, our whole world needs it. Light is among the first things God created (Gen. 1:3), a fact that should indeed tell us just how important it is. At this time of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, the amount of sunshine we enjoy each day is fading. It will keep fading until the first day of winter (on or about 21 December each year). Then it will once again begin to increase. The day after the winter solstice is a day of celebration for many. The Bible tells us that in heaven, there will be no night (Rev. 21:25; 22:5). It will be light all the time because the glory of God will shine always. Jesus likened our gospel witness for Him to light. This metaphor is certainly appropriate, for like the gospel, light is always a good thing. It may not always be appreciated (who has not been annoyed by a family member who turns the light on in the bedroom to wake him up!), but that is just our reaction to it. When Jesus told His disciples, "Let your light so shine," He was not using "let" in terms of permission. This is a command. We could translate it "Your light shall shine." Shining the light of the gospel is not an option—we must do it. The light of our witness may annoy others. Some unsaved people cannot stand the bright light of the gospel; it reveals their sin. That it does! But it can also point out our "good works." Just what good works was Jesus talking about? The world today is a mess. People are selfish, and very few look out for their fellow man. But as Christians, we can do something about this. For instance, what if you knew you were next in line at the sales register at a store in the mall but another woman stepped in very subtly (or not so subtly) to be the next to get assistance? What should you do? Yes, you have the right to insist that you were there first, but could this not be a small way to shine the light? There are some cases where our light will not always be recognized for what it is: a witness to the gospel. But that still does not get us off the hook in doing good works. For one thing, even a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name is something God blesses (cf. Matt. 10:42). We need to remember that we must get in the practice of doing good works. If we are not in the practice of doing good works, how will we do them when the time comes for our light to make the difference in an unsaved person's life so that he glorifies "your Father which is in heaven"? A few verses earlier, Jesus described Christian witnesses as the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). Then He noted that we are the "light of the world" (vs. 14). Our light is given to us so that it may shine (vs. 16). So may we shine the "light of the glorious gospel of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4) today and every day. The world needs the hope only Christ can give. Will you let your light shine?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. We will never find answers until we admit our needs to the Lord (Matt. 5:1-4)
2. A gentle spirit should characterize all our relationships (vs. 5)
3. Righteousness is revealed in gracious and merciful attitudes and actions (vs. 6-7)
4. If we truly know God's peace, we will share it with others (vs. 8-9)
5. We should rejoice in the opportunities persecution brings us to glorify God (vs. 10-12)
6. The world will not "see" the gospel unless they see it in us (vs. 13-16)

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Teaching the disciples (Matt. 5:1-2)

Jesus probably delivered this message, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. As was the practice of rabbis, Jesus sat down, and His disciples gathered around Him. The mention of the multitudes indicates that Jesus was teaching far more than merely the twelve chosen apostles and was motivated to speak by their gathering around Him. The previous chapter records that Jesus had spoken of the coming kingdom of heaven (Matt. 4:17). Jesus now addressed the question of who would qualify to enter that kingdom.

The blessed ones (Matt. 5:3-12)

Verses 3 through 11 make up the Beatitudes. Each of these statements begins with the phrase "blessed are" and describes a quality exhibited by God's people. Jesus began by teaching that the poor in spirit will be blessed. The poor in spirit are those who understand that there is nothing they can do of themselves to be right with God or to please Him. They must depend totally on God Himself. Thus, the kingdom of heaven will be made up of those who arrive there by trusting in God's grace. Jesus next promised that those who mourn will be comforted. These are the people who grieve over their sins and transgressions against God. The meek will be blessed because, in their humility, they have a true understanding of their position before God. In their reliance upon Him, they will be rewarded with the future kingdom on earth. The ones whose spiritual appetites can be satisfied only with true righteousness will be filled with the righteousness imputed by Christ to the believer. The merciful will be blessed. Those who know God's mercy are likewise ready to show it to others. There is an inherent blessing in sharing this mercy as well as a reward from God. The pure in heart will be blessed because, being pure, they are worthy to experience God on a personal level. Their purity is the holiness imputed to them in Christ; their sins have been forgiven, making them clean. The peacemakers are those who have found peace with God by reconciliation through Christ and who introduce this peace to others. They become children of God by imitation of their Father. Finally, Jesus pronounced a blessing upon those who are persecuted as the result of their righteous stand. Those who follow Christ will face persecution.

The role of the righteous (Matt. 5:13-16)

Jesus explained to the disciples that those who follow Him have the responsibility and the privilege of being salt and light in the midst of a lost world. As salt, they are to bring the flavor of righteousness to the world. Salt also creates thirst. The believer creates a spiritual thirst within unbelievers, motivating them to learn more about Christ. As light, they illuminate the truth of salvation in Christ so that others may turn to Him in faith. They serve as lights on the narrow path. As Jesus pointed out, light cannot be hidden. Their roles will be vital in reaching the lost. The believer is to carry out good works and make it clear that those works are done by the power of God so that He will receive all the glory and honor.