

LIVING HAPPILY EVER-AFTER, MT.5:1-12

Once Upon A Time #1

◆ Once upon a time, there lived a king and queen who had everything in the world they wanted, except one thing. They had no children. They wished and wished for a son or a daughter. At last a beautiful baby daughter was born and they were as happy as can be...The wedding of the prince and princess was celebrated with all splendor, and they lived happily ever after. (Sleeping Beauty)

◆ Once upon a time. And so go the fairy tales. Have you ever noticed that they tend to end happily ever after? The bad giant is destroyed. The genie saves the day. Snow White marries a prince. The ugly duckling turns into a beautiful swan. Peter Pan vanquishes Captain Hook. Cinderella marries the prince. Jack climbs a beanstalk and gets riches from bad giants. A pirate gets reformed. The wood choppers industrious son climbs the glass hill and marries the princess. Animals learn lessons. Grasshoppers learn from ants. Poor beggar Aladdin marries the princess. What do we learn? 1) Everyone wants a story to end happily. 2) Happiness involves a Princes or a Princesses. (maybe not))

◆ When it comes to happiness and God, there seems to me to be two extremes people learn toward:

◆ 1) There are those of ascetic and austere nature who say life is no laughing matter. Some of these folks are almost sure grumpiness is next to godliness and if you like it it must be wrong.

◆ Taking it out of context they quote James: "Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter into mourning and your joy to gloom. Puritanism is often misunderstood this way as being

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“the haunting fear that somewhere, somehow, somebody may be happy.”

◆2) The other camp we might call the shiny, happy folks. They think that life is good, God wants us to be happy all the time. Hakuna matata, Pumba my good fellow. Don't worry. Be happy.

◆Where might you fall on that continuum? Is God all about happiness? Or is God all about seriousness, and the expense of happiness? I hope to guide us carefully through this valley, for there is not really so much disjunction between a good God and our insatiable quest for a “happily ever-after.”

◆Did you know that...

◆1. True Happiness is my moral obligation

◆A. Morality, as you know, is that which conforms to the good standards of God. God consistently urges his human creatures to live according to his good standards to his glory, and our benefit. In essence, happiness is his command.

◆*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4, NIV).*

◆What did God tell Adam and Eve in the garden? Here are millions of joys and delights, fruit of every tree. You may eat of every one! Oh yes, and be “fruitful” yourselves (if you know what I mean!!).

◆Out of all that, there was only one thing they were to keep away from. Now does that sound like a kill-joy God to you?

◆God created Rocky Mountains and Caribbean pools. Does that sound like a God who needs people to boss around?

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◆ *Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalms 37:4, NIV)*

◆ Contrary to the picture of Jesus that often appear in Time Magazine, our text shows us a Jesus instructing us in how to be blessed and happy. It's not wishful thinking, and hopes for someday when our prince comes. It's both now, and then. "Blessed are" is in the present tense! Lets get that clear.

◆2. True happiness is better understood as blessedness.

◆A. Lets make a distinction. True happiness, or what I'm calling "blessedness", has nothing to do with...

◆1) the right circumstances

◆ Single people can be happy. Married people can be happy. People with mother-in-laws can be happy (or so the reasoning would go). College students can be happy. Kindergarteners can be happy. Even teenagers, when not in the presence of their parents, have been observed as happy!

◆ I know happy people with cancer (Craig Tinklenberg). And happy people with diabetes (Amy Moser). They're both dead now. But they were happy even in miserable circumstances that eventually took their lives.

◆2) abundant supply

◆ The National Opinion Research Center found in the 1950s that one third of Americans described themselves as "very happy". Our national wealth, I'm sure you will agree, has greatly increased since then. Today more than half of High School graduates advance to

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college. Typical new homes exceed 23000 square feet. There are more cars and trucks in the US than there are licensed drivers. All this and the number of happy people in America today has not changed a bit! In fact, clinical depression is 3-10 times more common today than back then.

◆ 3) your emotions:

◆ If you've been part of a Christian church for any significant time, I am certain that you, like me, have known people in extreme grief, say over the death of a loved one, who in the same breath as their sobs of pain, also affirm that they are indeed very blessed.

◆ True happiness does not require a certain set of emotions or giddy excitement.

◆ B. Greg Lafferty puts it like this: "To be blessed means to be approved by God. It is to sense his smile of approval upon you, his love and affection. Blessedness is to appreciate your worth in his eyes....It is not from human resources, but divine."

◆ So to be truly happy/blessed means to know & feel that you have a present and future hope in God.

◆ The Westminster Catechism got it very right, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

◆ *I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure for ever; nothing can be added to it and nothing*

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taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. (Ecclesiastes 3:12-14, NIV).

◆C. Therefore, if we are perpetually melancholy, and habitually glum, or constantly bored – we had better take action and address it, because it is our sacred duty to be happy in God!

◆This happiness is not a superficial cheerfulness. The fruit of the Spirit is joy, not perkiness. It is something deeper than a bubbly satisfaction with how your day is going.

◆Nor are we saying that G wants us to have whatever it is that happens to tickle our pleasure bone -be it a gay relationships or the acquisition of another cottage.

◆Blessedness is rather the state of receiving and realizing the favor and grace of God such that we are filled up with meaning, security, and hope, regardless of circumstance, wealth or emotions.

◆**3. True Happiness increases as my attention to God and his ways increases.**

◆*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalms 16:11, NIV).*

◆Did you catch that phrase “eternal pleasures”? What is that? Isn’t it awfully reminiscent of “happily-ever-after”? So then David is advising us that “happily ever after” is to be found at the right hand of God.

◆It would follow then that if I am not very happy (in the joy and blessed sense that transcends circumstance) then chances are I may be looking to false gods in some fashion for the peace of my soul. Chances are that I have not made significant space for God in my schedule and routine. Or

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chances are that I have frankly chosen other things apart from God as my sources of security: things like how much money I make, or how many hours I work, or what pleasures I indulge in.

◆ Think about it for a minute.

◆ When you are worried about, say, your future, what do you think about? Where does your mind turn? Your stocks? Your job advancement?

◆ When you are bored or generally displeased with life, what do you start thinking about?

◆ The answer doesn't start with sex therapy, or even marital counseling. It doesn't start with viagra or prozac. It doesn't start with a job change. Now some of those things may be involved but blessedness starts with attention to, and the attention of God.

◆ Blessedness is not something you can produce for yourself. You must receive it from one who can give it. Otherwise the beatitudes would just be another eight commandments we have to keep to reach our own salvation.

◆4. True happiness can be learned

◆ Blessedness is not just a fortunate state into which we drift. It is a choice, a mindset. There is an art to happiness, which is what Jesus is pointing to in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes lay out the path to happiness in logical fashion. There are eight beatitudes—eight character qualities,—that result in the favor or blessing of God (or our happiness.) Or maybe we should

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say, they result in our awareness of the blessing of God, because often we ARE blessed but don't see it.

- ◆ You are blessed when you are poor in spirit.
 - ◆ You are blessed when you mourn.
 - ◆ You are blessed when you are meek.
 - ◆ You are blessed when you hunger for righteousness.
 - ◆ You are blessed when you are merciful.
 - ◆ You are blessed when your heart is pure.
 - ◆ You are blessed when you make peace.
 - ◆ You are blessed when your are persecuted for being godly.
- ◆ Don't ask God to bless what you're doing. Ask him to help you do what he is blessing!
- ◆ Best-selling author Michael G. Moriarty writes about an incident where Larry King, the CNN interviewer and radio/TV personality, tells of a visit to Miami's Joe Robbie Stadium before a spring training game.
- ◆ "King said manager Tommy Lasorda was introducing him to players and having a good time. They walked past Eddie Murray at first base and Lasorda said, 'Hey, Eddie, how you doing?' Murray replied simply, 'Okay.' At that, Lasorda went wild. 'Okay? Okay? Two million dollars a year. It's March. There ain't a cloud in the sky. You're standing there wearing a major-league uniform. You're thirty-three years old, you're going to the Hall of Fame, and you're saying okay? You say, "Great, Tommy!" ' Murray, looking at Lasorda like he was a maniac, seemed at a loss for words. Lasorda tried again, 'You say it: "I feel great!" ' So Eddie started saying, 'I feel great!' "

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◆ He was making a choice to see his blessing.

◆ **Conclusion:**

◆ Is it wrong to seek joy, blessedness?

◆ "The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ. And nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire." —C. S. Lewis

◆ In coming weeks we will study being happy and blessed through the secrets in each beatitude one at a time. We'll be letting some fairy tale characters challenge our thinking about what it means to life happily ever after. One thing is clear, everyone is looking for happiness. Our Constitution even refers to it!

◆ God intends for us to be happy people. It's one of the reasons he created us. It's one of the reasons he sent his son to our planet: "that you might have life abundantly."