

Happiness Is Circumstantial, But Joy Is Not!

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The United States Declaration of Independence gives three examples of inalienable rights—and I am sure 99% of you know what they are—which was given to all human beings by their Creator, and which governments are created to protect: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We start off in life with vague hopes and plans, but real life intrudes and gets in the way. We cannot know the details of the end outcome—though we are partners in shaping our futures—no matter how hard we try, we cannot flawlessly design and execute our plans. We can try to do the right thing and then accept the result, living each day as thankfully as possible.

With this in mind, when it comes to our happiness, being happy is a purposeful decision we make—it does not just happen. We have to make the decision to be happy, or to create a situation that makes us happy. Being happy is our responsibility, and it is not the responsibility of our government, parents, friends, family, or God. God commands us to be happy regardless of circumstance.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no revelation [that is no vision], the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

We choose to keep God's commandments, therefore that is a way of choosing to be happy.

Turn with me if you will please to Deuteronomy 16 and verse 13. We have read this already multiple times, but I would like to point out another aspect in the context here.

Deuteronomy 16:13-15 “You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in

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your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates [that is who is within your area of responsibility]. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice [so there is emphasis there].

Because we must choose to be happy by keeping God's commandments, we must choose to do the work needed ahead of time to make sure we are happy and joyful at the Feast. How do we do that? Part of the answer is right here in verse 15, “The Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.” The word “bless” here comes with the idea of happiness, and it comes from being spoken well of, which we will hear more about later. (We heard Ronny Graham defining, “blessing” several ways in his sermonette the day before yesterday, and I really appreciated that because it tied in with this sermon today, but we will get more to that later.)

So in this context, we are being told that God will bless us, make us joyful, speak well of us, if we are productive and work hard all year—thereby enabling us to have an abundance of second tithe. Saving our second tithe—as commanded by God—enables us to afford our own expenses, as well as those in need who do not have the increased income on which to tithe. Now the converted needy would be: widows, the retired, elderly, underemployed, or someone or family who has fallen on hard times—and although they would like to be able to tithe, do not have an increase from which to tithe from or not enough of an increase. So, this falls on all of us that you help make us all happy and joyful at the Feast by preparing all year long.

If you do not properly tithe of your increase, you can be sure that you are missing out on the happiness and joy of God's blessing. Offerings are given, as you are able. Tithing is a commanded ten percent of your increase. Just a brief review: first tithe is saved for the ministry and the administration of the church; the second tithe, for keeping the Feast of Tabernacles and other holy days; and third tithe (every third year on a seven year cycle) is for the needy. And remember that verse, “The Lord your God will bless you in all your

produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.” So, work and rejoicing are tied together, and one is necessary before the other.

God commands us to rejoice here at the Feast in verse 14, and then He re-emphasizes that we must *surely* rejoice. God *expects* us to be certainly happy. That is what the word “surely” means, “certainly”—it is certain that we will be happy and joyful at the Feast. So God gives us that promise, and that guarantee. The English word “surely” in the original Hebrew is meant to emphasize something that must be true about us—it must be true that we rejoice at the Feast. If you are not rejoicing at the Feast, something must be wrong with you as an individual (it is usually an attitude problem).

Turn with me to Leviticus 23 please. I would like you to notice something God did and told Moses to do as he began to instruct the Israelites in keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. This is something that we just breeze over when we read Scripture, without thinking about it, usually.

Leviticus 23:33-34 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the Lord.

What was going to be involved here? What were Moses and the children of Israel required to do first? They were required to hear; they were required to hear what was going to be said. So to paraphrase what God told Moses was, “Moses, hear what I have to say, and make sure the children of Israel hear what I am telling you, and what you are going to repeat to them.” In general, the Old Testament seems to value sound over sight—which I find very interesting and had not even thought of before until putting together this sermonette and reading a Thought Tools by Rabbi Daniel Lapin (who is very good at getting into the Hebrew, and showing us, and giving more detailed explanations of them in a practical sense).

Music is more esteemed than visual arts. In fact, the Old Testament warns against “trusting eyes”—much preferring what you hear to what you see. Numbers 15:39 says, “that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your eyes are inclined.” So humanly, we are inclined to use our eyes and it is one of the reasons why you get so many people wanting us to go to video for our services, because it is the eyes that people want. Look

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at the millennials, they are giving up reading (hardly any of them are reading anymore, it is less than 50%), because they want the videos. So they are only watching videos, and not reading in many cases—that is a sad thing. But God says He wants us to hear because the eyes can be deceiving.

Deuteronomy 5:1 And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them.

So God indicates that ears are a better avenue for trustworthy information than eyes. But there is another difference between ears and eyes. What happens if we press pause while watching a movie? We see a freeze frame—a still picture with actors frozen, and whatever postures they were in at the instant that pause was pressed. And when we slice an instant of video, disconnected from the moments before and after, and still retain all meaningful visual images.

However, with sound it is different, if we press pause while we are listening to a song or a speech—all we hear is silence. Sound is meaningless when disconnected from the moments before and after it. Hearing also helps to connect us to others. If you had to make a horrible choice between having only sight or having only hearing, many people might instinctively choose sight. What do we do on our iPhones and our smartphones? We text, and we text, and we text. We do not talk anymore; we do not hear each other anymore. We do not hear the tones and the fluctuations in the warmth in speaking.

Yet biblical wisdom suggests that deafness is a worse affliction—blindness isolates one from things, but deafness isolates one from people. Our ability to make sense of sound depends on continuity of time, and continuity of time helps us be happy. Living in a sliced instant of disconnected time means that the pain, sadness, or humiliation we now endure overwhelms us with its sense of permanence. We remain frozen in our agony, where when we are hearing something there is a progression involved.

So notice what David asked for when he realized his great sin. Please turn with me to Psalm 51. This is a prayer of repentance “To the Chief Musician,

a Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”

Psalm 51:1-12 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

In verse 8, David asked God to make him hear joy and gladness, “That the bones you have broken may rejoice.” David is asking to hear God's voice of forgiveness, which would give David great comfort and relief, causing joy and rejoicing, ”Hearing, this is better than seeing it.” What if God just wrote it down and handed it to him, or he just wrote it down and handed it to God rather than speaking it, but David asked that, “God would help me hear joy and gladness.”

What he wished to hear was the kind of voice of God in pronouncing his pardon, not the voice of anger and condemnation. God now condemned him, the law condemned him, his own conscience condemned him. The result was anguish and sorrow, and the burden was so great and overpowering, that it was as if it had crushed him and broken all his bones. The feeling of God's displeasure and of His favor penetrates the whole person. David then asked God to let him once again rejoice in the knowledge of being right with God.

My description of this state of mind of happiness or joy may sometimes apply to both happiness and joy at the same time in the context of this sermon. But I want to try to focus on the positive difference between the two (try to separate them out a little and look at their characteristics). Perhaps we think that being happy this very instant is the most important thing, and so we miss out on the joy of planning and working for long term happiness. Many of us who have had children (which is many of us), we know that the children want it now (they want the instant gratification), and we hopefully grow out of that. But looking at the society, I do not think most people do.

Getting back to the hearing, our task is to choose happiness with the past, present, and future in mind. Happiness is a byproduct. It is never directly acquired and cannot be grateful unless there is something to be grateful for, nor happy unless there is something to be happy about. Happiness is a byproduct of growth. In light of this, the third chapter of Philippians is probably one of the most beloved chapters of Paul's letters. In it, he sets forth many of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian life and unveils—in stirring language—his own personal desire to know and serve Jesus Christ. It is interesting however, that these doctrines are included not so much for their own sake, but as a natural outgrowth of a challenge to the Christians at Philippi to be joyful—this was his goal. In Philippians 3 and verses 1 through 3 suggest that joy is founded to a very large degree on sound doctrine.

Philippians 3:1-2 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

In a sense, that is what we have been warned about in the last several messages since the beginning of the Feast. How horrible things are in the world, and that we need and have to have God's way of life to survive.

Philippians 3:3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

So many of us have experienced visits to Christian men and women who are confined to homes, hospitals, or nursing homes because of illness. And yet, these people in these locations give evidence of a superior joy, even in the midst of suffering. When you talk to them, they are cheerful, and they are happy, and they are thankful for their condition, or having somebody to take care of them, and all that. And you can actually leave them feeling uplifted, not in every case, but quite often you find that. Some are unable to care for themselves in simple ways, and at times they are in almost unbearable pain, yet they speak of the goodness and grace of God, not only to themselves but also to many others who were with them in their homes.

So those whose happiness is founded on a rock will experience the same blows and sufferings that come to others, because faith does not provide exemption from suffering, but only from defeat at its hands (faith gives us the power to defeat these things). But underneath will still run the current of a deeper happiness, which nothing can shake nor take away. There is a joy that comes to us through pain (those of us who have God's Holy Spirit).

Jesus promised joy for those who followed Him, and the angel who announced Jesus' birth to the shepherd said, "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." In John 17:13, Jesus prayed to His Father, "That they may My joy fulfilled in themselves." This joy is the birthright of all true believers. Everyone who was baptized in this room has a birthright that includes that joy.

Joy is a supernatural delight in God and God's goodness, and it is very different from happiness. Every Christian virtue has its counterpart in a so-called "virtue of the world." The world has sex, Christians have love—true love. The world strives for security, Christians have trust. The world seeks self gratification, Christians to self-sacrifice. The paradoxes are unlimited as far as the differences between God's way of life and the world.

Helen Keller, the woman who was deaf and blind as a result of an illness, and also remained that way throughout her life, said:

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Many people have a wrong idea about what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.

And what is our worthy purpose? Is to be a good witness of God's way of life, to preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God?

Actually, we must lose ourselves in order to find true and enduring happiness. This means that we must rise above self-consciousness. After all, self-consciousness is just another term for self-centeredness. It means that we are putting ourselves first, and our thoughts and feelings, and letting everyone else come second. This is not practicing goodwill but working for a selfish reward.

True happiness is a hard thing, because it is achieved only by making others happy. The world seeks happiness (and the Christian's counterpart is joy). "Happiness" is the English-speaking world's translation of the Latin word *fortuna*. (I never use the word "unfortunately," "fortunately," or anything like that, because of its origin having to do with Roman mythology.) But the word itself specifically means something different, it is closely related to "chance." Thus, if things happen to work out in a way that we approved, we are happy. If they do not work out that way, then we are unhappy—and this is the world's view of happiness. However, it is not in life's chances, but in its choices that happiness is found or can be acquired.

Happiness is circumstantial, but joy is not. Joy is an inner quality of delight in God, and it is meant to spring up within the Christian in a way totally unrelated to the adversities or circumstantial blessings of this life. Sadly (sadly is the word I use instead of unfortunately) it is almost impossible to speak of the spiritual qualities of Christian joy, without saying at the same time that many of you and I fail to experience this joy, or you lose it after the initial joy of your calling. A circumstance gets you down, and instead of the victory a member of God's church you should experience—you suffer depression. We have all gone through this at some time or another, we have fallen into this situation. It is a sad condition, and it is doubly sad because it is true of many Christians.

But this should not be. Instead of depression there should be joy in the Lord that goes beyond our circumstances. No matter how much we are suffering, no matter how much things are going bad in our life, no matter how many financial problems we have—there still should always be that underlying joy. That view of the Kingdom and of heaven, of salvation and all of the great things that are in our future.

Isaiah 29:19 (ESV) The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

The “meek” there usually involves the idea of humility or virtuous suffering—and this is the humble who suffer patiently even though the suffering was not caused by them personally, necessarily.

How can godly joy be sustained? We seem to in human life, have stabbed at it or get it, and it comes and goes, and that type of thing. The answer is in God's Word, and we must follow it as if our life depends on it, which it does. If you are disciplined, you plan some exercise into your day. On the same day if we lack Christian joy, we need to adhere to God's remedy. So what is God's remedy? This remedy can be summed up in several principles.

The first principle is that you must begin by becoming a Christian—you are already a Christian because you have God's Holy Spirit. So you must re-evaluate your situation, look at yourself, and say, “But do I witness as a Christian? Do I look like a Christian?” and so on and so forth. We need to ask ourselves these on a regular basis. It may seem obvious to say this, but at least two groups of people need to face this directly.

The first group is composed of those who are not Christians (we will start with them) and know it, but who think that the fruit of Christianity can be grown without the life of Christ. So if you are such a person (which most of you are not), you need to recognize that godly joy is spiritual in nature, and is only given to those who have surrendered their lives to Him. So if you are unbaptized—and you have not surrendered your life to Christ—you should deeply think about what you are going to need to do in the future as far as your baptism and your commitment to Jesus Christ, and so on, because you will never have that joy until you do that godly joy.

The second group is composed of those who are not Christians but who think they are. Therefore, they cannot understand their failure to experience the fruits of such commitment. They do not understand why they are frustrated and unhappy with trying to live God's way of life.

Turn with me please to II Peter 1. Before you become a Christian, you stand before God as one who has fallen short of His standards. But before you can become a Christian, you must be called by God.

II Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For those of you who are not baptized, this is the promise that you are going to get once you are. A person from the second group comes to Him with his good works and finds resolutions. He has his own insight in all his best character traits. But as he stands before God, he realizes that even the best of these things is imperfect, and thus a failure before God. He hears God say, “You come to Me with all that is human, but what is human is tainted by sin, and that is a foundation upon which I can't build, you must turn from it.” So, you must lay these things aside and count them as lost. That is your past life, your past habits, the past things you have done—those of you who have not gotten baptized and receive God's Holy Spirit.

Especially when we are first called, it is hard to admit that everything we do falls short of God's righteous standards, and we do not deserve anything from Him. But we realized that we go empty-handed to Him to receive what He has promised to give—through faith in Jesus Christ—and we go to him to receive His righteousness, by which we may be accounted righteous. So this was the first step we had to take to experience the joy that is to characterize God's way of life.

The second principle is this: If you are to experience God's joy, you must first know His righteousness and peace. This means that a life of holiness and trust are prerequisites. The order of these things is set forth in Romans 14.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So many Christians do not know the joy that could be there because their lives are not holy, and they do not trust God for their future. Some do not trust God regarding marriage. Instead of admitting that God's plan for them is best (whatever it may have been for them), they are intent on getting married. Their determination to get married leads them into many situations that clearly are not God's will for them. It led them into sin, they had their way but are not happy, and they are not experiencing God's joy.

Turn with me to Philippians 4. Sin keeps us from God, who is the source of joy. And anxiety also works against joy. Instead of sin and anxiety in their lives, believers in Jesus Christ should experience a life of holiness and peace, and they should realize God's peace as they submit all aspects of their future to Him.

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.

We all need this, every one of us. We need to have our hearts guarded, and our minds guarded by Jesus Christ—by the power of His Spirit.

The third step of a life of continuous supernatural joy is to steep ourselves in the teachings of the Bible. In the Scriptures, many times joy is associated with a mature knowledge of God's Word. David said,

Psalm 19:8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

We cannot even see correctly with our eyes, until we know the statutes of the Lord.

Psalm 119:14 I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as
much as in all riches.

That is a major comparison, is it not?—compared to all riches. Jesus said,

John 15:10-11 “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in
My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide
in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may
remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

These verses teach that joy is to be found in a knowledge of God's character and commandments, and that these are to be found in His Word. So if we are not having regular Bible study (if we are not looking at Scripture on a daily basis) then we are missing out on that joy. These verses teach us that joy is found in the knowledge of God's character and commandments, and that these are to be found in His Word. And if you have not known much of this joy, the reason may be a neglect of a study of Scripture.

What place should the Bible have in your life as a Christian? The place that it should have, is illustrated by an interesting Old Testament custom. Pious Jews wore a small device called a “frontlet” on their foreheads that contains some words of Scripture. And even though they memorize the Scripture, the frontlet was worn to remind them that God's Word was always to be the object of their deepest meditations, and the source of the principles by which they ordered their lives. The command to wear frontlets occurs three times in the Old Testament, and in each case, the practices related to one of the fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures. I am not saying that these three things must be done (that they are commanded to us), but I am just saying that this is what was traditionally done.

The first mention of this custom of frontlets is in Exodus 13. This chapter contains a summary of the events that took place in Egypt at the first Passover—which illustrates the way God would later pass over those whose sins were covered by the death of Jesus Christ, and deliver them from judgment. After a summation of these events, it says in verse 9, “It shall be a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the Lord law is to be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt.” The first doctrine that they were to have before their eyes was of the atonement of salvation through the shedding of blood.

The second time the frontlets are mentioned is here in Deuteronomy 6.

Deuteronomy 6:4-8 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”

The content includes a summary of the character and requirements of God. And the second great doctrine is the nature of God and our responsibility to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength.

Turn with me please over to Deuteronomy 11. The third mention of frontlets occurs five chapters later here.

Deuteronomy 11:18 “Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”

See, this is not commanded to literally do this, but it says, as frontlets—as a sign. So what we do, should be what this represents. In this chapter, God is setting forth the principle by which He will bless the life of any individual or nation, and the principle of his obedience—where there is no obedience, He will send judgment.

Deuteronomy 11:19-21 “You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.”

So obedience is to characterize all our lives as God's people. This is not something new (you have known that all along), but we have to emphasize it because God emphasizes it throughout the Scripture.

In this life, neither you nor I will ever master all the great truths of Scripture. The Word of God is inexhaustible—like God Himself—and if our joy depended on such mastery we would never actually experience it. Instead, our joy depends on our relationship to God and our life with Him. But if we are living His way of life, this joy will be ours.

However, if there is to be the joy in the Christian life that there should be, there must be a deep and growing experience of the basic truth upon which that life is founded. It means we should take these basic truths and live them, apply them in our lives every day. We can hear and we can like what we hear, and we can say, “Oh, that’s such a nice word.”—but if we do not apply them in our lives are totally useless.

We must understand the nature of the atonement made for us by Christ. We must strive to know God better and to love Him, and we must attempt to live obediently before Him as His children.

Please turn with me to Romans 15. Now we must understand the nature of the atonement made for us by Christ, and we must strive to know God better and to love Him. There is a great deal of unrest in this world, because the world does not live this way—the way that we are trying to live. There will always be unrest for those who do not submit to God, and know Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, there is no true peace, no joy, and no real happiness. People get a new smartphone, and they think they are happy (for the moment). They see a football game and they think they are happy (until their team loses or one of their favorite players does not play as well as they wanted them to). It

is so superficial out there. This should never be the case with a Christian. If you are a Christian, you should draw close to God—you *must* feed on Scripture. Paul says here,

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have to have God's Holy Spirit to receive that permanent joy—that ongoing joy, that underlying joy that is always with us.

It often seems to the world that Christians have a religion that makes you miserable. I have heard this by people that are in the world complaining about such things, and I understand that we have our aches and pains, and we are miserable, in a sense, in the pain that we have, but we must rise above that. I once had a pastor in Worldwide (back in the 70s) tell us in the Spokesman's Club, "You know, sometimes you just have to rise above the way you feel and perform the duty at hand." He was speaking about people saying, "I don't feel like speaking. I don't feel like giving a speech, or giving a sermonette... (on and on, and on)." No matter how we feel, if we can get up there, we must do it (unless we are contagious). So the world looks at us as if we have ongoing headaches, like a person who does not want to get rid of his head, but it hurts him to keep it.

So we cannot expect outsiders to seek very earnestly for anything so uncomfortable, and this is a proof that God must call a person to His truth and miraculously open his closed mind—a mind that sees Christianity as uncomfortable and even painful as we suffer through Jesus Christ, but sees it as entirely worth it. And because they are miserable, they have little to offer a world that is desperately and often hopelessly searching for happiness.

Nevertheless, Christians do suffer, even though through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they may sense that true happiness is their birthright as members of the Family of God. Even though we sense that, and we know that, we still have moments where we are just somewhat miserable where it is not from the pain. To such a world and to all unhappy Christians, the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount give hope, because Jesus began His first great sermon with the promise of the joy of heaven.

Matthew 5:3-12 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

In fact, this is what we should read and look at whenever we feel miserable. Whenever we think, “Well, that joy isn't there.”

Matthew 5:4-12 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

If you think about it, if a worldly person reads the first half of the first phrase of every one of these verses, he is going to say, “I'm not so sure I want that,” but we have the promise that follows. In this sermon, the word “blessed” means joy or joyful—not in the world sense, of course, because the happiness of the world is a superficial happiness that depends upon circumstances. The joy spoken of in Matthew 5 does not depend on circumstances, and fills the soul with joy even in the midst of the most depressing events (like the death of a loved one).

The Beatitudes of Jesus Christ describe the character of the Christian who lives in God's way of life, made manifest in Jesus, and joy even now though its perfection will be realized in God's Kingdom. In contrast, people are always searching for happiness. They are not content for the happiness of the moment alone, but want a happiness that endures not only for tomorrow, but one that will comfort their memory of the past as well.

Here in the Beatitudes, Jesus has given us the answer to the mystery of joy: happiness is not an end in itself. Why be humble of spirit? Why hunger and thirst after righteousness? Why be merciful and pure in heart just to be

happy? Not at all. We are happy as we do these things because the doing of them brings us into a true and active fellowship with God.

The word “blessed” has an interesting background in the English language. In the days of the origin of the English language, when Anglo Saxon was in use and a number of related dialects (or competing for prominence as the common speech), there were more than 30 forms of the old English word for “blessed.” I will give you three of them: “bloedsian,” “bledsian,” and “bletsian” (which are meaningless to us right now). These words were based on the old English noun “blod,” meaning blood (of course, you probably already figured that out). And they were altered in time to become our word “blest” or “blessed.”

At this period of the history of the English language, a thing was considered blessed when it was set apart to God by a blood ritual, and the word then referred to a consecration or sanctification (there you get the blood part of it). We use the word in this way when we speak of the prayer used before meals as a blessing, because in our prayer we consecrate the food and ourselves to God's service. That is what we should be doing when we ask God's blessing on the meal.

In time, the word “blessed” in its early forms came to be used as a translation for the Latin word *benedicere*. Thus a new meaning was added to the word, *bendecire*, which in its turn, had been used to translate the Greek word *eulogein*, meant to speak well of something or someone, or to eulogize. It was always used in the Latin Bible for the eulogizing or praising of God, and when people sing God's praises, they bless Him. Thus, the word is used in this second sense in verses like Luke 1:68 where it says, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people.” And we have several hymns that have that use in it.

A third meaning of “blessed” arose from the fact that the words “blessed” and “blest” were similar to (in spelling and pronunciation to another ancient English word) the word “bliss,” and therefore came in time to assimilate into its meaning also. So we know this because eventually writers began to spell the word “blessed” with an “i” or with a “y” instead of with an “e,” and the word “blessed” or “blissed” was the result. Blissed meant happy or joyful.

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At this stage of its development, blessed meant either consecration, praise, or happiness, and blissed became a term for spiritual joy. You can get confused very easily, going through some of this. I thought that was interesting. So, “Somebody is blissful” used to mean that you had a spiritual joy.

When this happened, a new word was called in to express nonreligious joy—the word “blithe.” And so in 1746 AD, we find a poet writing to a former friend, and he says, “I trust that we shall meet on blithier days.”

It is the third use of the word “blessed” that occurs in the Sermon on the Mount. So when Jesus spoke these words, He was telling His listeners how they could be deeply spiritual, and profoundly happy or joyful, and how they could maintain this happiness even in the midst of life's disappointments and hard times.

We must realize that by its own definition, Jesus was Himself supremely happy. And beyond that, joyous. He had serenity, confidence, contentment, peace, and joy. He probably laughed at appropriate times in a proper way, and He did not pleasure-seek, act silly, or roast others.

His happiness was not dependent on outward circumstances. He did not crave an outward stimulus to make Him happy like the world does with drugs and alcohol. He had learned a secret that allowed Him to live above the circumstances of life, and above the fear of the future. He reacted with calmness, certainty, and serenity through the most trying circumstances—torture and death even. The Beatitudes are a portrait of Jesus Christ, who was poor in spirit, but who possessed the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul describes Him as humble.

Philippians 2:8-10 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth.

Jesus Christ was one who mourned and yet was comforted and the 22nd Psalm describes it. The subheading on this chapter in my Bible says: “The

Suffering, Praise, and Posterity of the Messiah. To the Chief Musician. Set to
“The Deer of the Dawn.” A Psalm of David.”

Psalm 22:1-8 My God, My God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted You and were not ashamed. But I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, “He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him.”

Psalm 22:19-24 But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard. [Getting back to the hearing].

It is possible to find verses that identify each statement of character in the Beatitudes with Jesus—to show that He is the meek one, the one who hungered and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker, and the one persecuted for righteousness' sake, and so on. Jesus was rejoicing in this deep spiritual sense, then it follows that we too can be joyful. Is not His Spirit in us? And if it is in us, it is a joyful Spirit. Yes, there is a time to mourn, the time to laugh, but the ongoing joy is always there, because the Spirit is there. But we do not access it, but we should try. And the way we try to do that is the way I have been explaining to the whole sermon.

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For purposes of this sermon: happiness is temporary, and joy is eternal. That is the general category of which I am speaking from. Now, if we are to find this happiness and joy, we must not look for it in the world's ways. The world looks for happiness through money, but there is no real happiness there. A man thinks he will be happy if he has saved \$10,000, and when he gets his \$10,000, he begins to think in terms of \$50,000, and then \$100,000. (I do not know about you, but it seems like God wipes out my savings account before I get very far, but we have to save—it is a biblical principle).

If his affluence continues to increase (this man who has the \$100,000), then he wishes he could become a millionaire, and after that he starts on his second million, and his third, and his fourth, and it is never-ending. His frantic pursuit of money indicates that he is searching for something, but that the money itself has failed to supply it. Happiness does not come through wealth; poverty and wealth have both failed to bring happiness. J. Paul Getty said he would give up his millions or billions for one good marriage, it did not matter to him.

In our frantic search for happiness, we assume it resides in something that we can possess or manipulate: a spacious home, trending clothes, powerful automobiles, or a huge bank account. We think of expensive vacations, costly amusements, but we are sorely mistaken. That will not bring happiness (that will bring a thrill *for the moment*). Happiness does not depend on external things at all, but upon our inward mode of dealing with them.

So, we can be happy in this life. But how do we face things? How do we deal with them? I have been telling myself (especially back when I was strictly in business) that there is no such thing as a problem, only solutions. I tell myself that over and over again. It really did change my attitude around. That is not correct in all situations, but that certainly helped me. And so every time somebody says, “We have a problem.” “No, no, no! How many solutions do we have?”—and it works, it helps.

If we have material comforts and at the same time possess happiness, it means that our happiness stems from within ourselves, therefore it is temporary. Some people try to find happiness through fame, but fame does

not guarantee happiness either. In fact, the most miserable people must be in Hollywood, or in Nashville. Another person thinks he will be happy with power. So he runs for the office of mayor, and wins. Immediately, he thinks about being governor, and once he is governor, he turns his eye on the presidency. Power does not satisfy the heart either.

If we are to find true happiness and joy, we must not seek it in the world's way. We must look for it in the way outlined by Jesus Christ. And according to Jesus, the way that happiness and joy is found in a purity of spirit; and a character that is marked by meekness; and in a hunger and a thirst for righteousness, in mercy, in purity, and a desire to make peace. I think that would help those of you who are on Facebook, to do this last thing: to have a desire to make peace. And maybe some of that friction would go away.

Jesus lived these things, and because He lived them, we too can find true happiness and joy. Now look at these characteristics as a whole of what happiness consists of: The secret of happiness and joy consists of at least three things.

First, we must recognize that we will never get anywhere in our search for happiness or joy until we give up trying to find it by our own efforts, and receive it instead as God's free gift. This means that God is the source of all spiritual blessings, and in this—as in all things—we must look to Him. James presents this simple truth clearly here.

James 1:16-17 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above [and that spiritual joy is a gift], and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Certainly the first effect the Beatitudes have on those who understand them is to turn their minds to God, our heavenly Father.

Second, we must realize that the blessing of God in an individual life begins with forgiveness of sins. When David wanted to speak of the joy of the believers in the Old Testament times, he wrote here in Psalm 32. The caption

here in my Bible is, “The Joy of Forgiveness. A Psalm of David. A Contemplation.” And that is what we are to do with these scriptures, just contemplate them.

Psalm 32:1-2 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Psalm 32:10-11 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him. [The opposite of joy is not sorrow; it is unbelief]. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

That is quite an emphasis—three times—glad, rejoice, shout for joy. And who is getting that? Who is able to do that all the time? The upright in heart. Paul, years later, quoted these verses as a description of the initial joy that comes to a person who believes in Jesus Christ.

Sin is a horrible barrier that divides a person from God. But for the unbelievers, sin is somewhat like a great black umbrella that keeps him from the showers of blessing—that is the unbeliever. Oh, he can walk about under the umbrella hunting for puddles, but they will always be muddy and he will not be satisfied. That is the effect it has on the unbelievers: it is like a black umbrella over them, they can never find that joy (they can find muddy water). Instead of this, he must ask God to remove the umbrella—as God has promised to do—because anyone who will trust in Christ's death and resurrection will thereby be placed under the direct flow of joy.

Third, we are to study the practical means by which Jesus Christ will introduce us to the life of true happiness and joy, and how we are to avail ourselves of it. The life of the Sermon on the Mount is the life of Jesus, and the life of Jesus is communicated to the Christian by the Spirit of God. The reason why no believer—no member of God's church—can find an excuse to fail to live a joyous life is because the fountain is flowing, and there is plenty of water for every believer who will reach for it. God has the purpose and the power, but He will not overpower us with more than we can use.

Love cannot be commanded, and He wants us to love Him. So He encourages us to by creating all the qualities which go with emptiness and frustration. But when we ask Him to go ahead and do His work—out comes the obstacles which keep Him from filling us with it, and in comes the power of the Holy Spirit, so that life immediately takes on abounding quality. There is no abounding without the pressure of His power behind it. So in order for us to have abounding love, we must have God's Holy Spirit. And sometimes we push it behind us (we push it to the back part of our mind it seems), at least that is a way that we frustrate God, so to speak. Nothing can overflow from us until we have first been filled, and we cannot be filled until His power comes in with the enabling.

Recognize the fact that happiness and joy come from God, and learn that the first step to God's happiness and joy is the forgiveness of sin, and we find it practically through the enabling power of God's Spirit. So finding happiness is as simple as that: people will seek for it through money, fame, power, love, and security in every way but this: Jesus said,

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you [which of course includes joy].

The righteous are called on to acknowledge and praise the righteous Lord with gladness because of our blessings of joy and spiritual prosperity. Psalm 97 is a song of praise to the sovereign Lord.

Psalm 97:1 The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad!

See, once Jesus Christ returns and sets up God's Kingdom on earth, not only will people, not only will spirit beings, but all of the physical creation will rejoice. And how does that rejoice? It is going to become abundant. The flowers will be more beautiful, the lands will be plentiful, the animals will have a changed nature, and on and on and on.

Psalm 97:2-12 Clouds and darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings light the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the people see His glory. Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, who boast of idols. Worship Him, all you gods. Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice because of Your judgments, O Lord. For You, Lord, are most high above all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods. You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.

In this paragraph, God's people are called saints, the righteous, the upright in heart—and all of these names speak of a life devoted to God. We should love Him, obey Him (and we can obey Him by what it says there—by hating evil), and rejoice in Him, and give thanks to Him for all His mercies. After all, He protects His people, delivers them, gives them light for their path, and puts gladness in their hearts—our hearts. After all, He protects His people entirely.

The image in verse 11 is that of a sower. The Lord plants light like seeds so that His people will not always walk in darkness, and what He plants will eventually bear fruit. Sowing is a frequent metaphor in Scripture for the deeds of both God and people. The psalm begins with a universal revelation of God's glory in verses 2-6 with dramatic flashes of lightning. But it ends with His light quietly shining on the path of His people. Some see the image as that of the dawn with the morning light diffused along the ground, as though the Lord were planting it like a seed in front of us as we go.

Turn with me for a final scripture to Psalm 16. But God also shows joy with that light that He puts in our path, because when we walk in the light, we also have joy in the Lord. And God's people have their dark days when life is

difficult, but there are always seeds of light and joy to accompany us along the way—God is always with us.

Psalm 16:8-11 I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in Sheol [that is the grave], nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

So is there any reason at all for any of us to not be joyful, especially through this entire Feast? I mean, we are out of our element. But who cares what goes wrong, in one sense. God is there to make it right. So everything is good, and everything is joyous here.