

Spirit-Filled Pastor Shares the Foundation for True Happiness

In the wake of the pandemic and all its collateral damage many of us assumed we would never be happy again. After all, clearly our world has changed and we can never go back to the way things were. In a classic case of proving an old adage true, we didn't realize what we had until we lost it. Even if we have not experienced the devastating loss and crippling effects afflicting so many of our neighbors, we may feel guilty for enjoying the blessings we have. We wonder how we can be happy if so many others are hurting, suffering, grieving.

Now, as we move forward and shift from surviving to thriving, it's a good time to rethink what true happiness is all about. While countless books, seminars, retreats, programs and gurus want to share the secret to happiness with you, there's a much simpler path: the one Jesus revealed during His time on earth. In fact, Jesus came to earth and lived as a man in order that you and I could be happy. His teachings provide a foundation for true happiness, which He assumed was the desire of every man, woman and child.

Redefining Happy

In His teaching best known as the Sermon on the Mount, Christ starts with a series of statements that reveal a great deal about the essence of happiness. Usually called the Beatitudes, these declarations all begin with a blessing: "Blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are the meek ... blessed are the pure in heart" and so on (Matt. 5:3-10, NIV). In just a little over 100 words, Jesus uses the Greek word *makarios*, which usually gets translated as "blessed," nine times.

Perhaps a more simple and direct translation of *makarios* is our word happy. Originally the Greeks coined their word in reference to the carefree, ethereal life enjoyed by their fabled gods of Greek mythology. At the time Jesus repeated it in His sermon, *makarios* was a word frequently used to describe the wealthy and well established, as opposed to the poor and working class.

Before an audience of thousands of these very people, Jesus chose a word they would likely never use to describe themselves. They were surely shocked to hear this word applied to their situations. Counterintuitive and even illogical based on their experience, Jesus' message was that their suffering was not in vain, that their struggles were not futile endeavors. Surely it was shocking for them to hear:

"Happy are the poor in spirit.

Happy are those who mourn.

Happy are the meek.

Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice.

Happy are the merciful.

Happy are the pure in heart.

Happy are the peacemakers.

Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness.

Happy are you when others revile you and utter falsehoods against you ... Rejoice and be glad" (Matt. 5:3-12).

Simply put, Jesus revealed a stunning concept: Anyone could be happy.

Jesus was not promising pie-in-the-sky emotional highs or cruel incentives to suffer in self-righteous silence. No, He was sharing the essence of the gospel, the Good News that

God's love and forgiveness extended to everyone, not just the powerful, educated, wealthy and famous. This news turned the shame and contempt lobbied by the elite echelons into badges of honor. Jesus contrasted the worldly kinds of happiness contingent on money, possessions, power, beauty, sex appeal and popularity with a kind that was permanent, eternal, unchanging—the kind that would permit the apostle Paul to say:

“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:11b-13).

Christ claimed His followers would be known by their love. He told the crowds of people that they were blessed with happiness just as they were—without any of the worldly requisites. Jesus said He came to bring us a full, abundant life, one brimming with joy, peace and contentment as we fulfill our God-given purpose. A happy life even in the midst of a pandemic, unemployment, economic recession and the losses so many have endured. A happiness founded on the living hope of our faith in Him. {eo}

Excerpted from chapter 5 of From Survive to Thrive by Sam Rodriguez.