

# LAWS FOR LIVING

## Matthew 5:1-12

Matthew goes out of his way to describe Jesus in terms that call to mind Israel's experiences in the Old Testament, even to the point of quoting Hosea 11:1, a passage that refers to Israel's exodus from Egypt, and applying it to Jesus. As we come to Matthew 5, that pattern continues. Dale Allison cites the work of M. D. Goulder to show some of these parallels (1997:307-8):

<b>Torah</b>	<b>Matthew</b>
Ten times contains the phrase: "There are the generations..."	Begins with a reference to the generations of Jesus.
Joseph has a dream in which he is represented by a star; he excels the wise men of Egypt.	Joseph has a dream and there is a special star; wise men appear.
Joseph takes old Israel down to Egypt.	Joseph takes the New Israel down to Egypt.
Pharaoh massacres infants.	Herod massacres infants.
The Israelites escape through the Red Sea	Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River.
Temptations in the wilderness for 40 years; the first temptation is for bread, the second is at Massah, the third is making the golden calf.	Temptations in the wilderness for 40 days and night; the first temptation is for bread, the second brings a quotation of Deut 6:16 which refers in its original context to Massah, and in response to the third temptation, Jesus quotes Deut 6:13 that concerns false gods.
The Israelites come to Mount Sinai and are given the law.	Jesus come to a mountain and gives His Sermon on the Mount.

I was in the bookstore the other day and I noticed a title. It has become increasingly popular as a title. Perhaps you've seen it. It was called, "The Idiot's Guide to..."

There is something about that title that appeals to me. Some of you would say, "Well,

that fits your intellectual makeup. And perhaps it does. Or perhaps imbedded in that title is a promise of simplicity. No frills. Just give me what I need to know in a way in which I can understand it.”

The Bible contains that kind of simplicity. And it tells us how to live our lives for the best possible results. In this chapter I would like to explore the question of how to be happy. After all, Jesus talked about that. And He made it the opening section of His most famous sermon ever preached. Let’s look at it.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

*“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive 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 have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.*

*“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:1-12).*

The first thing that you need to know is that the word “blessed” can be translated “happy” (the New American Standard gives it this translation in Romans 14:22). That means we could subtitle this section: “How to be Happy.”

## **1. HAPPINESS COMES WHEN YOU COME TO TERMS WITH YOUR SPIRITUAL POVERTY.**

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

What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”? That is a quality of which we do not speak. But if you take the words apart, it is really very simple to understand.

We know all about poverty. That is when you don’t have something. That is the lower end of the “have’s” and the “have nots.” Of course, we know that poverty can be a bit relative. When I say that, I’m not speaking of family relatives: “Where

there's a will, there's a relative". I'm referring to the truth that not all poverty is created equal. I saw that when Tom and I traveled to Moldova earlier this year. What we call poverty, they call normal. We call poverty when you have to do without certain luxuries. They call poverty when you have no food for an extended period of time.

The Greek language has a word to distinguish between the two types of poverty. In Greek, you can speak of someone who is poor and they have no money for any extra things. Or you can speak of someone who is completely impoverished and who is without even the basic necessities. It is the second type of poverty that Jesus describes in this verse.

Happy is the one who is not merely spiritually lower middle class. Rather happy are those who are spiritually bankrupt and destitute.

This goes beyond all normal reason. Why would Jesus say such a thing? Because it is only when you come to terms with the fact that you are spiritually bankrupt that you can even be saved. It is only then that God gives to you all of the riches that are in Christ Jesus.

On what are you depending for your salvation? If you were to stand before God this morning and He were to ask you why you should be allowed into heaven, to what would you point? If your answer was to have anything to do with your own goodness and spiritual worth, then you are lost. The only one who ever gets to heaven is the one who realizes that he doesn't deserve to be there. Christ didn't come to save good people. He came to save the lost. And you can only find His true happiness and blessings when you come to understand that you are spiritually impoverished.

Jesus is saying, "Happy is the man who is spiritually destitute, who has to come and plead for mercy, because it is that kind of man who enters the kingdom of heaven."

You will never enter the kingdom of heaven unless you have a sense of your own spiritual bankruptcy. You will never become a citizen of the kingdom unless you realize that you are unworthy. The kingdom is not for the self-sufficient. They have no reason to trust in Christ. God does not save the self-sufficient. He only saves those who have found their sufficiency in Christ.

God is looking for people who are poor in spirit. He seeks to bring forth this quality in our lives. A broken spirit is a spirit that He can use.

This process is not very pleasant. It is often painful. We cry out, “Why is the Lord putting me through this?” The answer is that God is preparing us. He is making us to be poor in spirit.

God is doing a work in you. He is at work within you, bringing to the place where you will recognize your spiritual poverty. And when you come to that point, then you have become someone whom He can use.

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:17).*

What happens when you experience such a broken spirit and such a contrite heart? At such a time, you mourn over your lost condition. That brings us to our next point...

## **2. HAPPINESS COMES WHEN YOU MOURN OVER YOUR LOST CONDITION.**

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”  
(Matthew 5:4).*

Notice the tense of this verse. It is present tense. It doesn’t say: “Blessed are those who use to mourn but are now over it.” No. It says, “Happy is the one who is mourning now, for he will find comfort.”

What kind of mourning is this? I want to suggest that this describes the one who is mourning over his spiritual condition. These two verses go together.

Verse 3 describes the one who recognizes his spiritual poverty



Because of his spiritual poverty, he now mourns

This is not the sorrow of the world. The sorrow of the world is usually sorry only about getting caught. The world says, “I didn’t do anything wrong and I promise never to do it again.” This is a godly sorrow that brings about repentance.

*For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces regret. (2 Corinthians 7:10).*

The sorrow of the world produces death. This is illustrated in the case of Judas

Iscariot. He betrayed the Lord and then became sorry for his sin. But it was not a sorrow that produced repentance. It was not a sorrow that brought him back to God. Instead it drove him to commit suicide.

Godly sorrow is a sorrow over sin that brings us to the point where we turn to God and accept His forgiveness. This is a sorrow that brings life. And as a result, we find comfort in the arms of a Savior.

I love the story of the Prodigal Son. You know the story. He went from the love of a father to the stench of a pigsty. An inheritance squandered. A life wasted. Forlorn and dejected. And then he resolved to return home. We read about the speech he had prepared. He would recount his own unworthiness. He would offer to take the position of a humble servant. He would make amends. He must have recited that speech a hundred times on the road home.

He never got a chance to use it. His father was waiting and watching and came running to meet him. Before he could say a word, the father's arms were around him. Loving. Forgiving. Comforting.

Those arms were never stretched so wide as they were on the cross. They were stretched for us. Saving. Loving. Forgiving. Comforting. Welcoming us home.

You see, the Christian is one who mourns over his lost condition. But he doesn't remain in that attitude of mourning. Sorrow is turned to joy in the light of forgiveness. And the result is described by Jesus as happiness.

### **3. HAPPINESS COMES IN THE GENTLENESS OF UNDESERVEDNESS.**

*“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5).*

The first two qualities deal with how we see ourselves and in how we approach God. This one is more involved with how we deal with others.

What is it to be gentle? It is not a quality that we generally uphold. We live in the age of the macho, the strong, the daring. It is not a new phenomenon. The Jews who lived in Jesus's day were looking for a Messiah who would liberate them from the Roman Empire by the strength of his own power. They wanted a man's man. A king. A conqueror. But instead, He came in a spirit of gentleness.

*Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold your king is coming to you, GENTLE, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." (Matthew 21:5).*

Jesus did not ride into Jerusalem on a white stallion, leading His forces against the Roman Empire. And He doesn't work that way today, either. He comes in a spirit of gentleness.

And then He was arrested and dragged before the Sanhedrin and later before Pilate. He was falsely accused, mocked, beaten and humiliated. Yet through it all, He did nothing to protect Himself. Does this mean that He was cowardly or weak? Not at all! This was the same man who went into the Temple and who drove out all those who were dishonoring the house of God. This was the One who could halt a storm in its tracks with a single word.

This is gentleness. Never mistake gentleness with weakness. Gentleness stands up boldly to defend the cause of the Lord, but it suffers in silence when the attack is against self. That is because gentleness is more concerned with the welfare of others than it is with the welfare of self.

Do you want to be a disciple of Jesus? Then be gentle. It is the gentle who will inherit the earth. They don't have the earth right now. It is the strong who have the earth right now. But there is coming a day when it will be taken from the proud and the strong and it will be given to the gentle. You might ask, "How are the gentle going to manage that?" They won't. It will be the Lord who accomplishes this.

*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.*

*Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evildoing.*

*For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land.*

*Yet a little while and the wicked men will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there.*

*But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (Psalm 37:7-11).*

When you see the ungodly committing his evil, there is the temptation to become angry and to seek revenge, especially when that evil is directed against you. But we are to be gentle. We are to leave our anger behind. We are not to envy those

who have wronged us or to seek revenge.

What makes us gentle? It is when we realize that we are undeserving. It is when we realize that we do not have to stand up for our rights because we have no rights. It is when we realize that God had been so very gentle and gracious with us.

#### **4. HAPPINESS COMES IN WANTING RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (Matthew 5:6).*

Notice what this passage does not say. It does not say, blessed is the man who is righteous. That is the way that the Pharisees would have worded it. The Pharisees taught that it would make you happy to be righteous. Their entire religious system was centered around becoming righteous by doing good works and abstaining from bad works.

But Jesus didn't say that. He said, “Happy is the man who hungers and thirsts for the righteousness that he doesn't have.” It is only the one who realizes that his own righteousness is lacking who has reckoned to him the righteousness of another.

This is the doctrine of justification. It can be summed up in three points.

- (1) God is righteous.
- (2) God demands righteousness.
- (3) God freely provides in Christ what He demands.

If you have come in faith to Jesus, trusting Him alone as your Lord and as your Savior, then something wonderful has taken place.

Your sins were credited to Jesus upon the cross. He was judged as a guilty sinner. This does not mean that He began to sin, but rather He was credited with your sins. God looked upon Him and judged Him in your place.

But that is not all. That is only the beginning of justification. The other part is that the righteousness of Jesus was credited to you. That does not mean that you actually became righteous any more than that He became a sinner. But you have been reckoned with and credited with the very righteousness of Jesus. God looks

upon you and judges you as though you had the very character of Christ.

And on the basis of that judgment, God makes a declaration about you. He says, "You are hereby righteous."

We have already mentioned the story of the prodigal son. When he was hungry, he went to the pigs, but when he was starving, he went to the Father. This is the question that you face; how hungry are you?

## **5. HAPPINESS COMES IN MERCY.**

*"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." (Matthew 5:7).*

Mercy is part and parcel with forgiveness. Forgiven people forgive. And people who have been shown mercy are themselves merciful.

Jesus told the story of a man who was in great debt. His debt was equal to the entire national debt. Insurmountable. Without hope of ever paying it off. They didn't have the same bankruptcy laws back then. To go bankrupt meant losing everything - even your wife and children. Even your own freedom.

And to make matters worse, this man was in debt to the king. He was in debt to one who could force the issue.

One day he was called to account. He went before the king. And much to his surprise, the king issued him a royal pardon. Debt free! The debt was forgiven. A great weight was lifted off his shoulders. Release. He walked out with a new spring in his step. Life was wonderful! A new beginning.

But who should he run into but Amos. And that reminded him of something. Amos owed him money. Quite a long time ago, Amos had borrowed \$26.41 from him and hadn't paid it back.

"Where is my money? What do you mean that you don't have it on you? We'll just see about that! I've learned all of the in's and out's about the judicial system and I know the right strings to pull. Off you go now and just see if anyone will be able to do anything about it!"

"What's that? The King? I should have forgiven Amos in the same way I was

forgiven?”

*For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matthew 6:14-15).*

This could not be any clearer. The way in which you forgive others is in direct proportion to the way in which you will be forgiven.

Forgiven people forgive. And people who have been shown mercy are themselves merciful.

You might be thinking, “But John, I haven’t always shown mercy toward others. What should I do?” You go to the Lord and seek His forgiveness. And then you resolve that you will forgive that one who has wronged you and that you will be merciful, even as you have been shown mercy.

## **6. HAPPINESS COMES IN A PURE HEART.**

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8).*

God is invisible. That means He is unseeable. When we speak of “seeing God” we are speaking of finding ourselves in His manifested presence. Moses wanted to see God.

*Then Moses said, “I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!” <sup>19</sup> And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.”*

*But He said, “You cannot see My face, for NO MAN CAN SEE ME AND LIVE.” (Exodus 33:18-20).*

Not even Moses was permitted to see the face of God. The Lord closed him up in a cleft of the rock and passed by and Moses was permitted just a glimpse of the afterglow of God. Moses could not see God. But we are told here that those who are pure in heart shall see the Lord. There is coming a day when we shall see the unseeable.

*Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:2-3).*

We have been rendered pure through the death of Christ. His sacrifice did what all of the ritual washings of the religions of the world could never do. We have been purified. And now, because we have been purified, we seek to purify ourselves.

Is this a contradiction? Not at all. We have already been purified in a LEGAL sense. We have entered into union with Christ through faith and so we have been given a new identity. When God looks at us, it is as though He were looking at Christ.

But I am not like Christ in my condition. I still wrestle with the problem of sin. Therefore God is working in my life to make me like Christ. I am being purified on a day by day basis. I am working out the truth of my salvation as it is God who works in me both to work and to will.

But one of these days that will all change. There will come a day when that process will be completed. It will be on that day that I shall see God.

I used to go before the Lord and I used to pray the prayer that Moses prayed, "Lord show me Your glory!"

And the Lord answers, "You're not ready yet. But you wait and you abide in Me as the character of My Son is formed in you. You're not ready yet, but you will be."

## **7. HAPPINESS COMES IN MAKING PEACE.**

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."  
(Matthew 5:9).*

The presence of a peacemaker denotes the need for a peacemaker. You only need a peacemaker when there is a threat of war.

I understand that there is a gun which is called by this name - a Peacemaker. It allows the beneficiary of the bullet to rest in peace. Someone described peace as

that fleeting instant when everyone stops to reload. That is peace on the world's terms.

But we are speaking here of the spiritual. A peacemaker is one who bring peace between men and God. We have such a ministry of peacemaking - a ministry of reconciliation.

*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*

*Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).*

We have a high and lofty position. We have been appointed to the position of ambassador of Christ. It is our job to represent the Lord here upon earth. We are no longer citizens of the world. Our citizenship is in the Kingdom of Heaven.

These two realms are at war. There is open warfare between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of heaven. We don't fight this war with physical weapons, or even at the election booths. The weapons of our warfare are spiritual in nature.

- The breastplate of righteousness
- The shield of faith
- The gospel of peace
- The helmet of salvation
- The sword of God's Word

And our military objective is nothing less than the salvation of men's souls. The world attempts all sorts of strategies for peace. But true peace comes through being poor in spirit and from mourning over sins and from having a gentle and forgiving spirit and from hungering and thirsting for righteousness and from being pure in heart.

## **8. HAPPINESS COMES IN BEING PERSECUTED FOR THE RIGHT REASON.**

*"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of*

*righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:10-12).*

Notice how we move from peace to persecution. The response of the world to the gospel of peace will be open warfare. As a result, the Christian is both a peacemaker as well as a troublemaker.

This is not inconsistent. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, said that the result of His ministry would be contention and division.

*“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; <sup>36</sup> and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.” (Matthew 10:34-36).*

Christianity has divided families. It has separated parents from children. It has resulted in the most intense persecutions.

Why is this? I think that it is because the Christian who is filled with the Spirit is manifesting righteousness before an unrighteous world.

You see, the world likes to think that it really is not all that bad. It has adopted a standard of relative righteousness. It grades itself on the curve. It says that as long as you are not too bad then your sins do not matter. When it finds itself involved in certain sins, it merely redefines sin so that it will remain acceptable to its own standards.

But the Bible never lowers the standard of righteousness. God sets the standard. He IS the standard of His own demands. And the Christian is one who accepts God’s standards, who recognizes that he can never meet them in himself and who trusts in Jesus Christ as a Savior who met the standard in our place.

The world and its false set of standards is condemned by this. Faced with condemnation over its sinful condition, it can do one of two things:

- (1) Repent and turn to the Lord for forgiveness.
- (2) Reject God’s truth and try to deny it and to destroy it.

The history of the church is a history of persecution. Sometimes that persecution is verbal or social and sometimes it goes to the point of shedding blood. But whatever the form, there will be persecution.

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; <sup>13</sup> but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.*

*If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are **blessed** [happy], because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Peter 4:12-14).*

Notice what is said in verse 14. You can be happy [*makarios*] when you are persecuted for the sake of Christ. Why does this make you happy? Because this is one of the evidences that the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

*Blessed [happy] is the man who perseveres under trial, for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him (James 1:12).*

What is the crown of life? You might be thinking that it sounds a lot like a reference to eternal life. And you would be correct.

Do you want the crown of life? The way is difficult. It involves seeing yourself as God sees you. It involves recognizing your spiritual poverty. And mourning over your sins. And coming to terms with your undeservedness. And hungering and thirsting for the righteousness that only God can provide. And in partaking of the mercy of God. And in seeking the purity of Christ. And when you do that, you cannot help but to share with others the gospel of peace. And that will result in persecution.

× × × × × × × × × × × × × × × × ×

We've been looking at the various ways in which happiness comes. But we could sum it all up in one single statement. Happiness comes in Christ. He is the answer to your soul's desire.

I like the bumper sticker that says, "Jesus is the answer, but what is the question?" The truth is that it doesn't matter what is the question. He is the answer to all of the major questions of life.

A rather vain student went to his professor and asked him a very technical theological

question. The professor thought for a moment and then replied, “Jesus is the answer to your question!” “Jesus?” exclaimed the student. “What kind of answer is that? That doesn’t answer my question at all!”

“That,” answer the professor, “ is because you are asking the wrong question.”

Do you know Him? If you don’t then maybe it is because you’ve been asking the wrong question. Until you do come to know Him, you will never know true and lasting happiness. The delight of deliverance. The romance of the redeemed. The song of salvation. And the happiness of the holy.