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**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Are Christians Supposed to Be Poor in Spirit?

Monday, June 12, 2017

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Of all the Beatitudes, this may be the most difficult for us as 21st century Americans to grasp because we can barely fathom what it means. We intrinsically believe that we deserve to be, if not rich, at least well off, and that anyone can have that American Dream. Furthermore, I equated spiritually poor with spiritually bankrupt, and they’re not the same at all.

I think that Saint Francis of Assisi was probably the one who really got this idea down pat. I imagine when he got to heaven, Jesus gave him a high five and said, “Yes! That’s what I’m talkin’ about!” Francis came from a very well-to-do family, and when he came back from being a prisoner of war in the 4th crusade, his father had amassed quite a fortune from taking advantage of the poor people who had struggled through the war. Perhaps because of the combination of war and seeing the greed of his father, Francis realized that the only way to be truly free and happy is to completely rely on God. So, he gave up all of his possessions, renounced his birthright, and devoted his life to God. In fact, the reason Franciscans wore a rope around their waist was because leather belts often were more like fanny packs and contained a man’s wallet.

When Francis read the Beatitudes, he saw that the call to be poor stood right at the beginning: “How blessed are the poor in spirit!” Therefore, Francis considered poverty to be the foundation of all other virtues – and this is brilliant. Francis saw that the other virtues receive the kingdom only in promise; poverty, however, is invested with heaven now! “Theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Present tense! Francis and his followers did not just preach the gospel, they lived it. They tried to live as closely to the way that Jesus lived as possible, and if you will recall, Jesus had no home, no possessions. By their example, they showed the world Christ and they lived in the kingdom of God.

I’m not saying we have to give up all our stuff and live as a wandering monk in order to be happy. What we do need to do is completely rely on God instead of external things for our happiness. People who are happy are completely dependent on God regardless of what they have. In this week’s sermon, Andy Stanley said, “The moment you put your trust in riches instead of your Heavenly Father, who richly provides, you become unhappy.” That is because it is then up to you to control outcomes which is impossible and too

much to handle. We cannot control outcomes, and when we struggle trying to do so, it makes us stressed, angry, and miserable. We are living closed-fisted instead of open-handed.

The happiest people are everywhere on the scale as far as things they possess. However, they have found satisfaction in the One who provides. They recognize that stuff will not make them happy. The kingdom of heaven is theirs now because they are poor in spirit.

What in your life do you think prevents you from living fully dependent on God?

What do you need to do to start living more dependent on God?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, help me to find satisfaction, happiness, and joy in you. I know that I am fully dependent on you, please help me to live this out. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

What Does It Mean to Be Meek?

Tuesday, June 13, 2017

Everyone likes an underdog story: the type where the character who is undervalued (and maybe a little quiet) surprisingly wins a fight or game, or saves the day. Think of Frodo in “The Lord of the Rings” - a tiny hobbit who is tasked with delivering a ring to Mount Doom to be destroyed. He faces foes who are bigger than him in size, power, and personality, but (spoiler alert) he is successful. Even still, supporting characters, like the warriors Aragorn and Legolas, are the ones to whom fans tend to give the most credit and value. They are bigger physically, more aware of their strength and power, and often they can be self-serving. Many blockbusters are about the strong, charismatic, extroverted characters who we have no doubt will come out on top. Think of Iron Man: a rich, famous, arrogant man who uses his resources to help fight villains and save people. He remains prideful and very aware of the power and impact he has. Not everyone likes him, but they know they need him, so he is nonetheless valued.

Though I don't think we will be tasked with journeying to destroy a ring or with creating a robotic exoskeleton to save the world, we can still learn from these characters, their traits, and how people react to them. Our culture values the strong, confident, outspoken, and proud. We are told to reach for the stars and follow our dreams because we should not let anyone tell us we can't. We've got to fight for our right to party. (Just had to throw that in there.) Nothing better illustrates our culture's fascination with pride than some of the self-help books out there. Titles like “You are a Bad***: How to Stop Doubting Your Greatness and Start Living an Awesome Life” are frequently displayed atop the best seller lists. These messages blatantly tell you that *you* are great, and because of your own greatness, you can be happy. It's as if to say, “Don't give credit to anyone else, your awesomeness is your own!” But Jesus teaches the opposite. He taught that those who know that their power comes from God are the ones who will be blessed and happy.

Matthew 5:5 (NIV)

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

This statement is so counterintuitive in today's society. Not many of us would naturally be inclined to encourage our children to go out there and be meek! Meekness, defined by Pastor Andy Stanley, is “a proper estimation or valuation of oneself within the context of God's creation and love.” The meek face the reality of who they are. They know they are *part* of God's creation, not the center of it. The New Living Translation uses the word “humble” in place

of meek. Famed author and Christian Apologist, C.S. Lewis defined humility as “not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.” So why do the meek/humble inherit the earth?

Psalm 131:1-3

¹Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp. ²Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me. ³O Israel, put your hope in the Lord – now and always.

The above passage speaks of learning to control and calm yourself, shifting focus from your needs to God. The meek/humble don't flaunt their strength, but that doesn't mean they don't have any. They may even be the strongest, for they are capable of controlling human nature's need for recognition. Because they are not so self-serving, they notice when others are in need, and they step up and help. They give credit for all of their successes and good works to God, knowing all of their power is from him. They know they need him in order to do anything. They are already living in God's kingdom and are blessed in this.

Do you find it hard to accept the idea that happiness is an outcome? How can meekness lead to happiness?

On a scale from meek (1) to prideful (10), where do you rate?

How might you get closer to meek?

In what areas do you struggle being quiet, gentle, and/or humble?

Prayer:

Dear God, help me to be humble. All of my goodness comes from you. With every success, let me not take the credit, but give all the glory to you. Help me focus on the joy that can come from controlling myself and limiting my innate desire for recognition. Any moment I try to build up my own importance, help me to transform that feeling into awe of you and submission to you. Amen.

Pursuing Righteousness Can Make You Happy.

Wednesday, June 14, 2017

C.S. Lewis wrote *“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”*

How many times have you felt like you were made for something else? I have often times felt like that, especially after something that I was pursuing didn't quite work out.

It is in those moments that I have to stop and ask myself what it is that I am pursuing and why I am pursuing it.

In other words, if I am attaching my happiness to an object or an experience, I am going to be overwhelmingly disappointed, and that is no way to live life.

We learned this week that the word “blessed” means fortunate or happy. Jesus teaches us some pretty unconventional ways to be happy in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-10). We like to attach our happiness to something tangible, when what we really need to do is realize that it is an outcome. Therefore, if it is an outcome, then we had better make a plan.

Our happiness can be compared to a computer code. It is like a series of “if-then” statements. If the **input** is _____, then the **outcome** will be happiness. Obviously, we are not robots or computers, and it tends to get a little messier. However, the logic is no doubt the same.

As you have read earlier this week, there are a few ways to achieve happiness. The one that we are going to focus on today though is found in Matthew 5:6.

Up to this point the methods have been about becoming empty, or getting rid of something.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit
2. Blessed are those who mourn
3. Blessed are the meek

Now we are focusing on being filled. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, **for they will be filled.** (Matthew 5:6)

We all have desires, ambitions, and goals. We all have things that we want to pursue. The problem is that we think those things are going to satisfy a longing inside of us that cannot be filled with the things of this world, no matter how hard we try.

A rich, happy, satisfying life only comes from a rich, happy, satisfying relationship with Jesus.

***“Happy or blessed are those with no guilt, no regret, and a clear conscience”
- Andy Stanley***

So how do we hunger and thirst for righteousness? What does that mean?

It means that we constantly seek what Jesus has to say. It means that we want to do the right thing.

It is a desire for the things of God, and it supersedes our desire for the things of this world.

In Matthew 4:4, Jesus has recently been baptized and is fasting in the desert for 40 days. Meanwhile, Satan approaches Jesus and tells him to turn some stones into bread so that he may eat because he is hungry. Jesus replies ***“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”***

1 Peter 2:2 tells us; ***“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...”***

Our food, our sustenance, our life source comes from our relationship with Jesus. This is how we become filled.

We, too, are tempted; we lust after temporary things that cause guilt, shame, discontentment, and an unsatisfied craving for more.

We buy into the lie that “stuff,” “a new _____,” or “more _____” will make us happy.

Jesus tells us in John 15:5: ***“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”***

We are told to abide or remain in him, and only then will we produce good fruit, the fruit of the spirit, which is where true happiness is. It is the outcome of remaining in him.

Psalm 1 is my favorite scripture in the Bible, my life verse. I have it memorized. When I am faced with any decision or experience during the day, I can use it as a gauge or lens to filter all of my actions through. It is how I can be sure that I am doing the right thing.

¹“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.

²But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.

³They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.

⁴But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.

⁵They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly.

⁶For the Lord watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

It is essentially giving a contrast of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and those who hunger and thirst for the things of this world. This scripture really exposes what our motives are rather than our feelings; it divides the truth from a lie.

Doing the right thing isn't always easy, or popular. Other people might even tell you something is right, but you can always determine truth by seeking God and being filled by him rather than things that don't satisfy.

What do you hunger and thirst for? Are you trying to fill yourself with something other than righteousness?

Do you have a verse that you can filter all of your decisions through? If not, find one, write it down, and commit it to memory.

Read Psalm 1. What stands out do you? What does it mean to delight in the law of the Lord?

Have you ever thought of scripture as food? Or the Holy Spirit as living water? Does it really fill you up?

Prayer:

Lord, create in me a hunger and thirst for you. I eagerly desire you. Help me to take my thoughts and decisions captive and seek your counsel. Like Psalm 51:12 says, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you." Amen.

An Incredible Act of Mercy.

Thursday, June 15, 2017

In the summer of 1986, NYPD Officer Steven McDonald began what would be a life-altering shift. After chasing some suspicious looking young people in an area that had experienced a slew of bike thefts and other small crimes, McDonald and his partner caught up with the teenagers. McDonald [writes](#),

While questioning them, I noticed a bulge in the pant leg of the youngest boy - it looked like he might have a gun tucked into one of his socks. I bent down to examine it. As I did, I felt someone move over me, and as I looked up, the taller of the three (he turned out to be 15) was pointing a gun at my head. Before I knew what was happening, there was a deafening explosion, the muzzle flashed, and a bullet struck me above my right eye. I remember the reddish-orange flame that jumped from the barrel, the smell of the gunpowder, and the smoke. I fell backward, and the boy shot me a second time, hitting me in the throat. Then, as I lay on the ground, he stood over me and shot me a third time. I was in pain; I was numb; I knew I was dying, and I didn't want to die. It was terrifying. My partner was yelling into his police radio: "Ten Thirteen Central! Ten Thirteen!" and when I heard that code, I knew I was in a very bad way. Then I closed my eyes...

Has someone ever done something to hurt you? If you've been breathing air for any amount of time your answer will most likely be "yes, of course!"

Most of us haven't experienced the kind of attack Officer McDonald did, but we've felt pain caused by another person more than a few times.

This past weekend, Andy Stanley continued the series, "What Makes You Happy?" with his answer: Plan For It.

Yes, he told us that to be happy we need to plan for it.

Doesn't this seem crazy?!

With so many other factors contributing to our happiness outside of our control, how can it be up to us to be happy?

In Matthew 5, we come across the Sermon on the Mount. Part of this sermon - from which Stanley draws his answer - is called the Beatitudes. Here, Jesus lists types of people and how they are blessed.

Stanley substitutes the term happy for blessed and thus answers the question, “What makes you happy?”

One particular group of people are quite striking. The merciful. Of them, Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Here, Jesus makes *giving* mercy the requirement for *receiving* mercy. Simply put, you can’t receive mercy if you don’t give it.

Theologian and philosopher Dallas Willard wrote, “It is not psychologically possible for us really to know God’s [mercy] for us and at the same time be hardhearted toward others.” This is not an either/or. We cannot expect to receive mercy from God when we are unwilling to give it to others.

Obviously, giving mercy isn’t just an exercise in obedience. Instead, in offering mercy to others, we are growing closer to God and thus experiencing happiness. Theologian and Minister Alan Barnes explained this when he [wrote](#), “Nowhere do we imitate God more than in showing mercy. In nothing does God delight more than in the exercise of mercy.”

So, what is mercy? What does it mean to be merciful? Stanley defined merciful as ***relationally generous***.

When we are merciful, we are generous to people, even to those who seemingly don’t deserve it.

Officer McDonald’s story didn’t end in death, but for many, it would be close enough. He ended up being paralyzed from the neck down.

Most people, myself included, would feel all the negative emotions at once toward their attacker. Hatred, jealousy, bitterness, anger, etc. We wouldn’t blame Officer McDonald if he had chosen that route. But he didn’t.

Instead, six months after the incident, just after his wife gave birth to their son, Conor, McDonald encountered God. He writes,

To me, Conor’s birth was like a message from God that I should live, and live differently. And it was clear to me that I had to respond to that message. I prayed that I would be changed, that the person I was would be replaced by something new.

That prayer was answered with a desire to forgive the young man who shot me. I wanted to free myself of all the negative, destructive emotions that his act of violence had unleashed in me: anger, bitterness, hatred, and other feelings. I needed to free myself of those emotions so that I could love my wife and our child and those around us.

McDonald forgave his assailant, Shavod Jones. It wasn't instantaneous, but he did it. Why?

I forgave Shavod because I believe the only thing worse than receiving a bullet in my spine would have been to nurture revenge in my heart. Such an attitude would have extended my injury to my soul, hurting my wife, son, and others even more. It's bad enough that the physical effects are permanent, but at least I can choose to prevent spiritual injury.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Steven McDonald died on January 10th of this year. Imagine the mercy being rained on him by his Father in heaven. If we could talk to Steven right now, he'd probably tell us that his suffering on earth pales in comparison to the joy he is experiencing from his all-merciful Father. May we all show mercy to those around us. Jesus' promise is that when we do, we will then receive mercy.

Why do you think it is so difficult for us to show others mercy?

Are there people in your life that you need to forgive?

What can you do today to show mercy?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I want to be close to you. I know you've offered me mercy upon mercy through the death of your Son, Jesus. I know that this mercy is undeserved and that you call me to give that to others. Help me, Father, because this is difficult. I know that I should, and the joy I'll experience will be incomprehensible. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

For extra reading, check out Matthew 18:23-35.

This post was written by Andy Rectenwald, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Following Jesus May Cause Persecution, but It Also Makes You Happy.

Friday, June 16, 2017

Think back to a time you had to make a decision. Not just any decision, but one that left you with two choices, one clearly good and the other clearly bad. Maybe it was back in junior high when your best friend forgot to study for a test and wanted to cheat off of yours. Or, it could have been in your job when you overheard coworkers gossiping about others and invited you to join. Whatever you decided, there was a cost. If you didn't help your friend on his test, he would stop hanging out with you. If you didn't join in on the gossip, your coworkers might talk about you, too.

In Matthew 5, Jesus teaches the crowd and his disciples about living a life as a follower. Jesus begins his teachings with "Blessed." Blessed refers to the ultimate wellbeing and spiritual joy of those who share in the salvation of the kingdom of God. But it's not as simple as we would like to think. In verse 10, he says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is explaining that we will ultimately be happy by being persecuted for doing the right thing, making the right decision, or saying the right words. Andy Stanley makes a great point by saying, **"You are going to suffer for doing the right or wrong thing but you can only be happy on one end of the equation."** Either way, each decision comes with a cost.

Jesus goes on to say in verses 11 and 12, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of ME. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (capitalization mine). Making the right decision based on your faith in Jesus Christ is going to give you happiness and peace with yourself and God. "If you suffer for doing the wrong thing, you won't have peace with yourself or with God" (Stanley). We will be persecuted, made fun of, and mistreated because of our faith, but rejoice in that, because a reward is coming for being faithful and defending the gospel.

Jesus says in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" He is telling us we will absolutely be on the frontlines of difficulties and in the midst of hard decisions, but it is worth it. We will eventually reap the reward of happiness. It's a process, not an immediate

outcome. Jesus has overcome the world, and while the battles are not over, we already have victory.

What difficult decision are you currently facing? What are the costs?

What steps can you make toward the right decision?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for your promise of peace and happiness when making the right decisions for you and for our faith. Help me to make the right decisions in the future and to stand firm in you. Amen.