

When You're at the End of Your Rope **Matthew 5:3**

She has every reason to be bitter. Though talented, she went unrecognized for years. Prestigious opera circles closed their ranks when she tried to enter. American critics ignored her compelling voice. She was repeatedly rejected for parts for which she easily qualified. It was only after she went to Europe and won the hearts of tough-to-please European audiences that stateside opinion leaders acknowledged her talent. Not only has her professional life been a battle, her personal life has been marked by challenge. She is the mother of two handicapped children. Years ago, in order to escape the pace of New York City, she purchased a home on Martha's Vineyard.

It burned to the ground two days before she was to move in. Professional rejection. Personal setbacks. Perfect soil for the seeds of bitterness. A receptive field for the roots of resentment. But in this case, anger found no home. Her friends don't call her bitter; they call her "Bubbles." Beverly Sills. Internationally acclaimed opera singer. Retired director of the New York City Opera. Her phrases are sugared with laughter. Her face is softened with serenity. Upon interviewing her, Mike Wallace stated that "she is one of the most impressive—if not the most impressive—ladies I've ever interviewed.

How can a person handle such professional rejection and personal trauma and still be known as Bubbles?

"I choose to be cheerful," she says. "Years ago I knew I had little or no choice about success, circumstances, or even happiness; but I knew I could choose to be cheerful." What type of joy is this? What is this cheerfulness that dares to wink at adversity? What is this bird that sings while it is still dark? What is the source of this peace that defies pain?

8 times in Matthew 5 Jesus promises real happiness. He promises it to a very unlikely crowd. Interestingly, Jesus equates happiness with blessedness, fulfillment, and true joy.

How happy are you? I mean really happy!

Every person who's ever been born has pursued happiness, but not everyone has found it. If there's a country on this earth where people should be really happy, you would think it would be the United States of America. Never has there been a time when more people are trying to find happiness than today.

Our world is in a never-ending pursuit of happiness. We wonder if happiness still within our reach. Can there be a full, happy life in a world filled with pressure and problems? How can we be truly happy? We know an answer that the world doesn't talk about very much, and it's Jesus!

Jesus knew we would struggle to find real happiness. Matthew 5 begins the best-known sermon in the world called The Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:1 says, "*Jesus saw the crowds.*" Matthew 5:1

- "The poor in spirit" Beggars in God's soup kitchen.
- "Those who mourn" The ones who have loss and sorrow in abundance.
- "The meek" Pawnshop pianos played by Van Cliburn. (He's so good no one notices the missing keys.)
- "Those who hunger and thirst" Famished orphans who know the difference between a TV dinner and a Thanksgiving feast.
- "The merciful" Winners of the million-dollar lottery who share the prize with their enemies.
- "The pure in heart" Physicians who love lepers and escape infection.
- "The peacemakers" Architects who build bridges with wood from a Roman cross.
- "The persecuted" Those who manage to keep an eye on heaven while walking through hell on earth."

These are not the Beatitudes for this world. They read much differently don't; they?

Happy are the pushers, for they get on in the world.
Happy are the hard-boiled, for they never let life hurt them.
Happy are those who complain, for they get their own way. In the end.
Happy are the taskmasters for they get results.
Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world, for they know their way around.
Happy are the troublemakers, for they make people take notice of them.

The Bible's list of things that cause joy is almost counterintuitive. This is a happiness that can withstand the troubles that life can bring. If our happiness depends on what we have, all of that that can be taken away, because money can be lost, and friends can abandon us. But when your happiness depends on who you are, no one can take that away.

How do we get to be the kind of people that Jesus describes in The Beatitudes? None of us are naturally merciful and pure in heart. None of us are naturally peacemakers. These qualities are all the gift of God through the Holy Spirit to those who have accepted His Son, Jesus Christ. Too many people struggle all their lives to be happy, but they never find happiness, because they look for it in all the wrong places.

Matthew 5

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

² *Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:*

³ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.*

⁵ *Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.*

⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.*

⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.*

⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.*

⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.*

¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The word “blessed” comes from the Greek word “Macarios” in the original language and means “supremely blessed.” We could say happy, but it means more than happy. It means fulfilled, complete, congratulated, a joy that is self-contained.” It is independent from all circumstances that are surrounding it. Our English word “happiness” doesn’t do it justice. Happiness comes from the root word “hap” when means “chance.” It is based in circumstances. Human happiness comes from chance and changes in life. But this word “blessed” is untouchable and unstoppable. Jesus said this in John 16:22, “*No one will take your joy from you.*”

Jesus is talking to those who are living under the oppression of the Roman government, and they want Him to come and deliver them from their situation! God’s blessing is not given in order to get whatever we want. God’s blessing is given in the midst of whatever circumstance, whatever trial, or tribulation we are in. Jesus understands that if it doesn’t challenge you, it won’t change you. He understands that God’s strength comes not

from the comfort, but through the struggle. When I struggle, I gain strength, and when I gain strength, I step into the blessing of God.

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

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and His rule."
Matthew 5:3 (MSG)

You're blessed when you're finally at the end of your rope. When you realize you can't control and you can't hold on any longer and you let go, God catches you. It all comes down to surrender where I realize I'm not God, and I surrender control of area of my life to Him. The more you surrender your life to Christ, the more you experience the fulfillment that you're made for.

The word “poor” here is not just about lacking wealth, but it is about being desperately impoverished. Blessed are the desperately impoverished.

1. Let Go of My Insufficiencies and Embrace God’s All-Sufficiency

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...” Matthew 5:3

“Poor spirit” means “to lose your pride.”

We have become accustomed in our society to people asking for assistance in public. A person who is poor in spirit is a person who is begging on the inside.

This is a picture of someone who inwardly is begging because he is hungry and anxious and realizes he has nothing inside on which he can depend, so he reaches up his spiritual hands and begs for what God will give him.

We are the first generations of man actually expected to find happiness here on earth and our search for it has caused more unhappiness. If you believe only in the material world around you, and that this is your only chance at happiness, then you are not disappointed when the world does not give you a good measure of its riches. You are devastated, and that is where so many are today who have bet everything on happiness here and now, and yet here is Jesus in the greatest sermon ever preached, and the first words that come out of His lips are the words “happy.”

They were poor. They were dejected. Most of them were poorly dressed, pawns of an alien government. Their lives were without hope and expectation, and here comes Jesus saying, “Happy are you!” How could their miserable lives in any way be described as happy?

The Beatitudes are the first 96 words of the sermon on the Mount, where Jesus gives us the agenda for His Kingdom. It has been called a kingdom of tenses, the present and the future, where what God does within us now foreshadows what He will do for us someday.

There is a story in Luke 18:10 *“Two men who went up to the temple to pray, one was a Pharisee and the other tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed like this, “God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess. But the tax collector, stood at a distance afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*
Luke 18:10-14

Why did Jesus tell that story? He tells us in Luke 18:9. *“He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”* Luke 18:9

They trusted in themselves. They were not poor, because spiritually they had not understood in their own heart how desperately they needed God. That is what it means to be poor in spirit. It's an inward attitude of heart. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”*

2. Exchange our Emptiness for God's Fullness.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...” Matthew 5:3

Those who are poor in spirit will realize their emptiness apart from God. “Poor in spirit” is the opposite of everything that is summed up in the word “pride.”

The poor in spirit doesn't boast about his talents or their attainments because they know they have nothing that they did not receive. If he is gifted, it is because they are being given much.

In the Old Testament, you remember a haircut ruined Sampson's life. Sampson lost his power when his hair was cut off. He did not understand. He was going out to fight, and he got in the middle of the battle and realized he was powerless.

“Someone said that no man is so ignorant as he who knows nothing and knows not that he knows nothing. No man is so sick as he who has a fatal disease and is not aware of it. No man is so poor as he who is destitute and yet thinks he is rich.”

Jesus told another story about a man who had everything in life and, in a self-satisfied soliloquy one night, said to himself, *“I have so much goods laid up for many years. Take it easy drink and be merry, and Jesus said, you fool, this night thy soul shall be required of you.”* Luke 12:19

Jesus often skips to the addendum and said, *“He that lay up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”* Luke 12:21

In the book of Revelation, the Laodicean church was like this, and Jesus said this to that church, *“Because you say I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”* Revelation 3:17

It is a sad thing when a person is empty and they don't know it. A person who has poverty of spirit is a person who has the proper assessment of who they are inwardly without God, so that they can then find out all they can be with God. A person who does not have a poor spirit, who continually builds himself up and trusts in the outward things of life, is a person who will find it very difficult to ever humble himself and come to God seeking grace.

“Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.” Matthew 5:3 (GWT)

Jesus is saying those who find true happiness are those who realize they're helpless to change and need God's help. There are really only two types of people in the world. Those who know they need to change, and those who need to change but don't know it.

Jesus is saying true change starts when you realize you're powerless to change yourself.

3. I Admit my Powerlessness to Change Myself and Receive God's Power.

"For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3

There is a kingdom power to change your life. Some of us think, "I'm not totally powerless. My problems aren't that bad. I'm not powerless."

Do you ever know the right thing to do, but you don't do it?

Do you ever know that something is wrong, but you just do it anyway?

Are you ever in a situation where you know the truth, you should tell the truth, but you shade the truth and lie to make things easier on yourself?

Are you ever in a situation where you know should act unselfishly, but you act selfishly anyway?

Do you ever try to control or fix a problem or change another person, and things just get worse?

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:15,

"I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can't. I do what I don't want to-what I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking. But I can't help myself because I'm no longer doing it. It is sin inside me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things. I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn I can't make myself do right. I want to but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't; and when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway." Romans 7:15-19

We can all relate to the Apostle Paul. I do things that aren't good for me, that are self-destructive. I know the things that I need to do, but I don't do them, or I do them for a while then I fall back into the same negative habit pattern. I try to control circumstances that can't be controlled, and I just make things worse, and I just wear myself out with worry, which is worthless and it's unhealthy. I know it doesn't help control anything, but I still do it.

How do I break free and live for my true self? How can I have the power to really change? That's the question that Paul asked next in Romans 7:24. Eugene Peterson's *The Message* has a great translation,

"I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different." Romans 7:24

Paul says, "Christ died and rose again, not just to forgive us of our sins, but also to give us the power to change." Like Paul, I'm powerless to change on my own, because my sin nature's just too strong for me. I have to surrender control to Christ's power because He's already defeated sin and won the victory on the cross.

- Change Your Power Source.

When you're stuck, you have a choice. In pride, you can try to control everything, or you can surrender to God's power and God's control.

- Surrender Is The First Step To Real Change.

"... God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6b

Grace is the power to change. Pride keeps us stuck, but it's God's grace, when we bring it to Him, that we find the power to change. If you're broken and you realize that you don't have the power to change, you're the one that God wants to give His power to.

When we accept His grace, it sets us free to really change, to step into the light of His love and His forgiveness and receive His power. Satan wants to keep you from His grace, and he uses shame to do it. Shame causes us to step back into the dark, thinking, "I don't want to admit that." Satan uses shame to keep us from God's grace and God's power.

When you experience shame and guilt, bring it to the cross and experience God's grace. You just step right into it. When you step in the light of God's love and forgiveness, He gives you the power to change.

"Admit your sins to each other, and pray for each other so that you will be healed. Prayers offered by those who have God's approval are effective." James 5:16

The early days of bridge building were very dangerous. In fact, construction workers on bridges knew that they were working one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, being up on those scaffolds high in the air as the wind would blow and the scaffolding would sway. Newspapers called it the dance of danger, and engineers had even calculated the fatality rate. They had estimated there would be one life lost for every one million dollars spent. So, if the bridge cost forty million dollars, they knew that forty people would die in the construction. That's just the way it was until 1932 when the builders of the Golden Gate Bridge thought they could do better. They put in some safety measures, and the biggest safety measure that saved the most lives was very new to bridge building, but it was very old to the circus. It was a trapeze net. It cost \$130,000. It was sixty feet below the road bed of the bridge, and it went out on all the sides of the bridge, and the safety net was so successful that the newspapers kept a running score. Gate bridge safety net: 8/Lives lost: 0. They just kept a running tally. Nineteen men fell into the net, and their lives were saved. These guys were saved by the safety net, but another product of this safety net was that all the workers said that they were freed from the paralyzing fear of falling to their death, and they were much more effective and joyful in their work. That reminds me of God's safety net of grace. Jesus Christ is God's grace net. When you finally get so worn out you can't hold on any longer and you let go, God catches you in His grace net and holds you in His arms.

Grace is really the power to change. That grace net frees us from the paralyzing fear and puts us in an atmosphere where we can change with God's power. Not only does God catch us in the grace net when we let go of the bridge of control, but He begins that healing process as we let Him heal us and fill us up every day. The first step is to admit I'm powerless. He says He gives grace to the humble, those who admit that they need that grace, those who admit they need His power to change, and it's a daily process.

"I pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe Him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead..." Ephesians 1:19-20