**Blessed, not Happy**

Aristotle taught the driving force of human action is happiness. Thomas Jefferson claimed God endowed every human with the right to pursue happiness. We have such a love affair with happiness some Christians think Jesus’s opening to the Sermon on the Mount explains how to be happy. I’m no Greek scholar. For all I know, in some contexts the word translated nine times in Matthew 5:3-11 can mean “happy.” But that is not what it means in that passage.

“Happy,” derived from the root “hap,” which means good luck, connotes an internal feeling of pleasure arising from chance happenings. “Blessed,” however, is the joyous contentment resulting from receiving a purposeful blessing. “Happy” is the serendipitous by-product or good fortune that comes and goes based on circumstance. “Blessed” is the constancy of God’s favor which provides a bedrock of constant joy. “Happy” stresses the good feelings of euphoria someone may have based on what is happening to them. “Blessed” stresses the gift certainly received no matter how the person feels about it. “Happy” highlights the receiver and his/her response. “Blessed” highlights the Giver and His purpose.

Don’t misunderstand. I have no doubt the blessed will experience happiness as they fully recognize the true gift within their blessings. Jesus, however, is not highlighting the happiness, He is highlighting the blessing. He is not highlighting our feelings, He is highlighting God’s favor.

What is the take away? We must not, like so many who claim Christianity, use this passage to baptize the pursuit of happiness. It is tempting to be relevant to our culture by capitalizing on the pursuit of happiness, saying, “Yes, pursue happiness, but pursue it this way.” I know it is tempting because I can pull out old sermons in which I said that exact thing. The problem is we will not accomplish God’s goals by pursuing them the world’s way. Jesus’s goal in these statements is not our happiness, and if we twist them to be about our happiness, we won’t be pursuing God’s gifts, but chasing our own tail. In the end, we will receive neither the happiness we seek nor the blessings God offers. We will wear ourselves out in circular pursuit and accomplish nothing of lasting value.

Jesus is not offering us happiness, He is offering us something better—God-given blessings. They may produce happiness in us, but that isn’t the goal. The goal is the blessings. The poor in spirit and persecuted are not blessed because they are happy, but because they receive the kingdom of heaven. Those who mourn are not blessed because in the end their mourning is changed to happiness, but because it is God who comforts them. The meek aren’t blessed because they receive happiness, but because they inherit the earth/land. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness aren’t blessed because they get to be happy, but because God satisfies their hunger.

God is not hoping we will pursue happiness; He is directing us to pursue His kingdom and righteousness (see also Matthew 6:33), the comfort that comes from Him, His presence, His fatherhood, His mercy, His inheritance. He is not using happiness as the manipulative carrot to get us to pursue those other things, and neither should we. He wants us to understand what a blessing His gifts are. Jesus didn’t die to give us happiness; He died to give us His kingdom, His comfort, His inheritance, His satisfaction to our hunger, His mercy, His presence, His adoption. Why would we settle for mere circumstantial happiness when we can have these blessings?