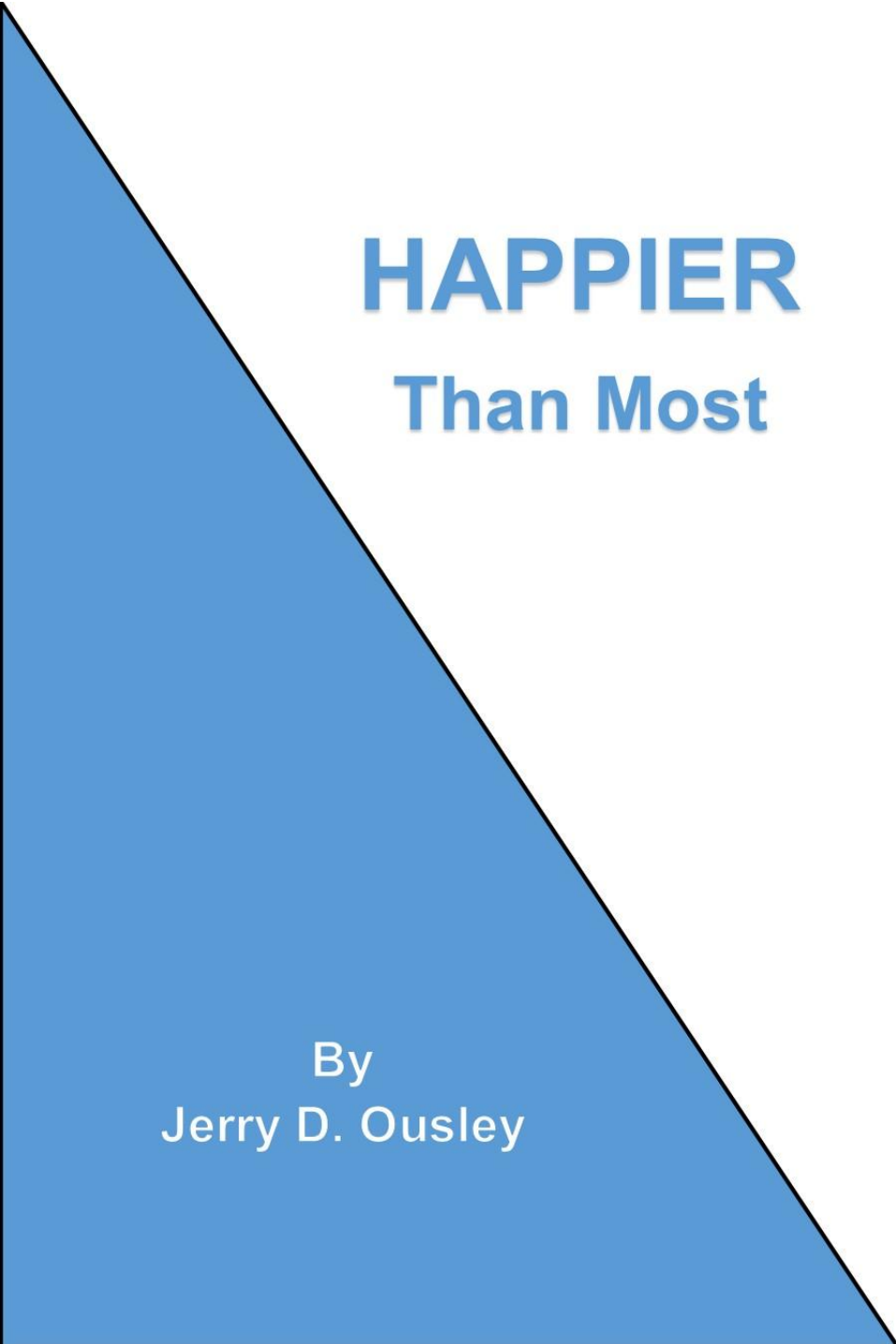




HAPPIER

Than Most

By
Jerry D. Ousley

HAPPIER THAN MOST

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Chapter 1

BE ATTITUDES

This world, bound by sin as it is, basically has only changed in light of knowledge and technology. When it comes to how we treat people, it has been the same since Adam and Eve traded their perfect world for a bite of forbidden fruit. The day they disobeyed God for their desire for what was forbidden, was the day the entire planet fell under the forced curse man thrust on God. Thrust on God? Yes. God had warned them. He had told them that if they ate from the one tree He had refused them, that they would die. And die they did. Oh, not right on the spot, physically at least. But their spiritual man that had been in contact with God the Father, shriveled away from God. So much so that when God came down to walk with them in the cool of the day, as His habit had been, that He no longer felt the connection with His prized creation, and so He called out, Adam, where are you? He knew the physical location of Adam, but his spirit had changed, had been pulled away, had, in a sense, died.

From that day forward man's physical body began to do so as well. Because of it, death was thrust into the world, not by God, not even by the devil who had tempted him, but by the sin of man. We did it. Just like Adam did on the first day of sin, we want to blame it on God. But the fault falls at our own feet.

Man's attitude changed. It now became the norm to interpret life-experiences on the side of negativity. We worry. We fret. We blame. We get angry. Unless we consciously force ourselves, we automatically go to the dark side.

In Matthew 5:1-12, Jesus addressed this very thing as a part of His great message we have come to call “The Sermon on the Mount.” Jesus talked of those things that had plagued man since his fall. Later in His message (Matthew 6:25-34) He said, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

What a message. It speaks directly to all those things we work so hard to possess. We spend our lives in toil and labor to put a roof over our heads, to put a decent meal on our table, to provide adequate clothing for ourselves and our families. If we want to own things, automobiles, fine furniture, our “toys,” luxuries and delicacies, we have to have an income. We have to make a way to pay for all those things we think we need.

What we don’t realize is just how expensive these things really are. Oh, we know the price. We have considered the expense and decide on what we think is worth it. But the real expenditure comes in the years of our lives spent standing behind a machine for someone else. Don’t get me wrong; I’m not condemning hard work. On the contrary, Paul was the example of hard labor in order to

support himself as he traveled and preached the Gospel. That is the way of this world we have made for ourselves. You see, even work, as good as it may be for us, was a part of the curse we caused God to enforce.

We have to consciously make ourselves react with good attitudes. I know from my own life. When I don't think, I answer with a bad attitude. There are times I react to something my wonderful wife says or does, with a negative or bad attitude. I hate myself when I do that. I don't want to speak a single harsh word to her. But honestly, sometimes I do. It is my fault. It is my own making. Even as a believer in Christ for nearly fifty-seven years, I still must make daily conscious decisions to have a good attitude.

Here is what Jesus offered to do when we seek Him about our attitudes. He said, "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 meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain 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 are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:3-12).

These are the attitudes we need to be. These are the be-attitudes. We fail, and sometimes miserably, when it comes to these attitudes. But Jesus told us that those who are seeking these things instead of the temporal things, will find them. They will because when we seek them in light of His gospel, we shall be filled, we will find and our Lord will indeed help us to be in these attitudes.

Over the following pages we will examine these attitudes, what they mean, what they bring and how to make them a part of our daily lives. Come with me on this journey.

Chapter 2

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

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

Blessed – to be made happy. The beatitudes, spoken

by Jesus, are part of those wonderful sayings that I like to call “Positive Negatives.” In other words, finding something positive from those negatives life throws across our paths. It happens more than you might think. It doesn’t feel natural because to the natural man, what we may have been taught, what has influenced our way of life, teaches us to depend on ourselves.

For instance, Jesus taught that only by denying ourselves could we hope to really find ourselves. He also taught that only by dying can we live, by being a servant is the only way to be a master – or teacher, by becoming insignificant can we hope to be great, and by being poor in spirit can we become a spiritual giant that inherits the kingdom of Heaven. Wow! This isn’t what the world teaches. No, it tells us that we must fight, scratch and push our way to the top.

But what we find in Christ isn’t that we are to be on top, but to acknowledge that only God can be on top. The world says that we must be better than others in order to be something in life. The world says that we must be proud and boastful to be the best. The world says that we should climb on the backs of others and push our way up.

Jesus, however, said that we were to be poor in spirit if we want to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. We don’t like the word “poor.” It indicates that we lack and that we are financially at the bottom of the pecking order. Being poor seems as though, while others seem

to have anything and everything their heart desires, we have to continually scrap the bottom of the barrel just to survive one more day.

And then, there's that word "spirit." Most people believe that we have a spirit. If they believe in ghosts then they believe in the human spirit. The Bible also tells us that God is a Spirit (John 4:24). Then the word "spirit" can also mean that we have an attitude about something, for instance, he had the attitude of victory.

So, what is Jesus saying here when He says "happy are those who are poor in spirit ..."? In order to understand what Jesus is saying in these beatitudes I believe we need to understand what Paul was saying when he wrote, "For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10). He had just finished talking about going through physical times of poverty, persecution, and suffering. He went through these things because he was taking the gospel to pagan nations. Some accepted and some rejected and in reaction to his preaching, had him beaten and at times left for dead. The complete text of that verse says, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." That sheds a whole new light on the subject. Paul told them that in the midst of those sufferings for the sake of Jesus Christ, he was weak in body, low in strength, but that this forced him to depend on Christ and in that dependance he was made strong.

There we go! Poor in spirit. Weak in our thinking. Beaten down, made to feel less, perhaps even trampled under the feet of those around us, all because we are believers in Christ. That could make us to feel poor in our spirit. You see, when we think we've got it all, we are in danger of losing it all. But when we come into the position where we turn our attention to God instead of our own power, then we are where God wants us. We have come to the place of full dependance on God.

God wants us to come to the place where we know we cannot depend on what we know, how physically strong we are, how much

we may have excelled over others, and see our spiritual poverty. We are all in spiritual poverty whether we know it or not. You see, no matter how spiritual we may seem to be on the outside, unless we are powered by the Holy Spirit – God's own Spirit, we are destitute.

Only when we realize our own inadequacy when it comes to spiritual things, and, well, really anything, can we then be made strong because we then come to really rely on God for our salvation. We can never, ever hope to save ourselves. Regardless how good we may be and think we are, we will never, on our own, be good enough. When we think we are, we are in danger of being truly at the bottom.

But when we know that and we give up our clawing and scratching to get to the top, and we become aware that we are really at the bottom, only then can God get our full attention and we can become happy – blessed, that we are poor in spirit because now, in Jesus Christ we can become rich in spirit and in Him and only in Him, have the Kingdom of God.

What is the Kingdom of God? It is that kingdom that exists currently in the hearts of born-again men and women. It is the kingdom that is made up of those who have come to know that the true king of the Earth is none other than Jesus Christ. For now, His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. We know that the day is approaching when He will set up a literal kingdom on this planet. But for now, the kingdom exists in us.

Does that make us immune to the evil in this earth? No, not hardly. In fact, it puts a huge target on our backs. One that the enemy – the devil – is constantly aiming at. But no matter how many arrows he shoots our way, if we hold on to Jesus Christ, if we realize that we are poor in spirit and that He is mighty in Spirit, and let Him guide us, then we, like Paul, can become strong in our weakness. We can become mighty warriors not by our own power, but only by His strong Spirit in our poor spirit.

We may be poverty stricken in this world, but when we know it, and we realize our own spiritual inadequacy, and then allow Jesus Christ to become our spiritual strength, we become a dynamo for God.

Chapter 3

THOSE WHO MOURN

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

What makes you cry? Could it be a tragic event – a personal one or just any event? Could it be sadness in your life, sickness, loss of a loved one, loss of income, or perhaps any kind of tragedy? Maybe you have been the subject of an abusive marriage, or your children, whom you have raised in church have rebelled against God and are deeply imbedded in sin.

Or, and this is especially true if you are female, maybe you cry because you have been given an unexpected gift, or your husband has done something unusually thoughtful and your tears stem from joy rather than sadness.

According to our physical anatomy, we cry when our emotions are triggered to the point that our tear glands, which are normally used to keep our eyes washed and clear, are over-filled and spill out from our eyes. That's what we call "crying."

And then there is mourning. Mourning includes crying but also includes loud sobbing, wailing, or other sounds that are triggered due to our emotions.

In many modern congregations, becoming emotional is viewed as a sign of weakness. Probably, that attitude stems from the opposite side of the scale which encourages uncontrolled emotions. This group claims that they couldn't control themselves because of the power of God. In reality, when we examine scripture, we will discover that anyone who actually encountered the presence

of God reacted with some kind of emotion. You won't find an example of wildly uncontrolled emotion, but without doubt, there was emotional expression. I've often said and continue to believe that the presence of God will in some way affect our emotions. That isn't wrong. Allowing those motions to go unchecked and uncontrolled is wrong. But rightful, orderly emotional display is not wrong.

More often than not, that emotion will include the shedding of tears and sometimes mourning. Personally, I can testify that when I actually realized that my own sin was what caused Jesus to die in my place, and what He died for caused me to weep uncontrollably. I realized that my only fate destined me for eternal destruction in hell, and Jesus died and was resurrected to free me from that otherwise sure and certain fate.

In the beatitudes, Jesus said that those who mourn are actually blessed, because they will find comfort. How? Just as I experienced the revelation of my sure eternal fate because of my sin, so must everyone who comes to Christ. Despite what anyone may claim or believe, if we have not repented and believed in Christ to the point that we are willing to make a change in our lives, then we are destined for hell. Aside from Jesus Christ, there is no other way out. We are doomed. If anything should cause us to mourn, that should be it. We have no power to change our fate otherwise.

Once we have made the decision to accept the sacrifice Christ provided and allow our old sinful nature to be buried in His death and then be resurrected a new creation in His resurrection, then a new life begins.

However, there are still times of mourning going on. You may be disappointed because you were told that Jesus heals but for some reason, He has chosen to not heal you. Maybe you have been praying long and hard for a son or daughter who is lost in sin and it seems no matter how long or how intense your prayers for them becomes, still there are no signs of an answer from the Almighty. These are but two examples of a multitude of reasons we mourn.

But consider this; our mourning also indicates that we care. Our caring is exactly what God wants from us. One day, our mourning will be turned into joy. That's because God answers prayer. He always answers prayer. It may not occur in the way we expect, and it may not happen when we expect. We live in a world of instant everything. We pray and expect God to do something about it right then. It would be nice if that was the way it worked, if we could somehow manipulate God into doing what we want Him to do. But God isn't a genie who emerges when we "rub the magic lamp." He doesn't sit around waiting for us to give Him an order. That's because we are not in control. We like to think we are, even if it only exists in our subconscious.

Sometimes God does answer prayer miraculously and immediately. God can certainly do it. But in conjunction to His power, He is also all knowing. He knows when we can handle what we are asking for, if it is in our best interest, and exactly the right moment we actually need it. These are all very important factors.

We also must realize that we, at times, ask for things amiss – when it really isn't in line with what we need or what God's will may be. James 4:3 says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." In those cases the answer may be a final and decisive "No."

When we have asked for what is God's heart, and what will benefit the Kingdom of God, believing and not doubting, with heartfelt sincerity (which, by the way, may be visualized when we mourn), God will answer. Never forget that, those who mourn for all the right reasons, will be blessed – made happy – because they will be comforted in the answer God gives. Don't ever stop crying!

Chapter 4

THE MEEK

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

We don't like the word, "meek." It portrays a gentle person as weak, frail, and unable to defend himself. We often view meekness as being one who will never get ahead in life because they aren't aggressive enough.

I had watched a movie called "The Simple Life of Noah Dearborn." In it, Sidney Potier had played the character, Noah Dearborn, who was a simple man keeping to himself, working as a carpenter and taking great pride in his work. He didn't use power tools and, even though it was much harder than the carpenters who took shortcuts, his simplistic ways had brought him much peace and consequently had lived to be over one hundred.

Sometime after this I was in training for a job that I thought was customer service, but in reality, was a sales job. At one point, one of the leaders of the company stood before the class and asked what we expected to accomplish in a career with their company. I thought of this beloved movie and expressed that I would like to live peaceably and successfully as Noah Dearborn had done. I was bluntly told, "While that may sound good, you won't find that here. The only way you will get ahead here is to work harder than everyone else, make a lot of sales and push your way up." In other words, meekness wouldn't fly.

He was right. I didn't last long with that company because, while I excelled in being compassionate with customers with a

genuine desire to help them with their problems, I didn't make a lot of sales, and was denied periodic raises because of it.

The Greek word translated "meek" is "praus." It is defined as mildness of disposition, gentleness of spirit and being meek. It in no way indicates that someone who is gentle or meek, is weak. Actually, one who has the courage to be gentle and meek is, underneath, a much stronger and stable individual than one who lets his emotions run rampant with aggression. This word is used two more times in the New Testament, first in description of Jesus, as He rode into Jerusalem just before His last Passover celebration. It was a quotation of Zechariah 9:9 which said, "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" (Matthew 21:5). It describes Jesus as meek.

The third time comes from 1 Peter 3:4. Peter writes about our outward adorning stating that the outward appearance is not nearly as important as our inward appearance. He wasn't saying that we weren't supposed to look good but that what was coming from our hearts was much more attractive than our outward display. He wrote: "...rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

It is our gentleness that displays peace in our hearts. You can scream and shout at people to come to the Lord, but it is the gentle prodding of the Holy Spirit that actually wins them over. A quiet spirit will steadily be more attractive than one who shouts at you.

Sometimes the meek may seem to be passed over. The meek don't get the pretty girls, until those pretty girls realize that the loud and exiting men may seem appealing on the surface, but when it comes to tenderness, they lack and are really more undesirable. The gentle man makes the best husband in the long run.

The screaming, shouting preacher may win a few souls by scaring people into the Kingdom, but the meek who demonstrate the

love of God in gentleness will win souls with their witness. That's not to say that there's anything wrong with the loud preacher, as long as he is preaching the gospel. But in today's world we tend to think that the loud guy has more anointing than the quiet, gentle guy. That is the farthest thing from the truth. It isn't in the delivery of words but in the truth of the words.

The meek will treat his neighbors with kindness, not hate. Even when that neighbor doesn't seem to be very lovely, yet the meek man loves. The meek man doesn't boast and flaunt himself over others, but gently loves, gently leads, and gently accomplishes what God places in his heart to accomplish.

No, folks; meekness is not weakness. Gentleness does not make one a "sissy." In fact, in the long run it accomplishes more, with longer lasting results, and takes the greater man.

Jesus said, in that great "Sermon on the Mount" that the meek would inherit the earth. What did He mean by that? It meant that by their perseverance, and mild spirit, they would live their lives in salvation, living a witness to others, quietly bringing others to Christ, and gently living for Jesus. In the end, they would inherit the earth.

But we know that this earth is doomed to destruction. Because of sin in this world it will be destroyed. Yes, that is true. Peter also said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." (2 Peter 3:10). So why would anyone want to inherit that?

No one would. But we also know from the Book of Revelation that a New Heaven and a New Earth is coming (see Revelation 21). That's the one to inherit. And that's the one Jesus meant would be inherited by the meek.

If you aren't meek (and actually, even in the gentlest of us there are times of 'unmeekness' if that's even a word), we can be

made meek by accepting Christ. You see, we, by nature, aren't meek at all. We need Jesus to give us that gentle, quiet spirit. And He will. When we accept His free gift of salvation and come to Him, we too can be made gentle and meek.

Don't you think it would be a good idea to do that? You can do it right now. Pray to Him. Ask Him to forgive you of your sinful nature. Allow Him to come into your life, fill you with His Spirit and presence, and you too can be meek enough to inherit the coming New Earth. That's exciting. That's a great promise. That's an attitude that we can really afford to be.

Chapter 5

THE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY FOR GOD

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

Have you ever been really hungry? Now I don't mean

kind of hungry, I mean past the stage where your stomach hurts and you are starting to feel weak. Not just a longing that says, "Gee, I'd sure like to have a hamburger tonight," but the kind of hunger in which your body is wasting away in need of nourishment.

What about thirsty? Have you ever been denied water so that you feel you could drink a gallon? Have you ever worked for so long in the sun that your tongue becomes swollen with thirst? Now that is real thirst. They say that the human body can only survive around three days without water. I heard a man by the name of Brad Stine recently, and he spoke about water. He said, we are rich because we take for granted that we can walk over to the water faucet, turn the knob and out comes clean, fresh water. In many places on our planet people walk for hours to get a bucket of dirty water. We don't really know what that is like.

Most of us in this country don't know what real hunger and thirst is. We get uncomfortable after Sunday Meeting because we haven't had breakfast yet. Or perhaps our throats get a little dry. But most of us don't know or have ever known real hunger and real thirst. I met a man once who hadn't eaten or slept for three days. He was at his wits end. We had been working at our church building that day. My wife had to work so the kids were with me. We had planned to quit at noon and the other men had already left. I was preparing to lock up when a man in dirty clothing showed up at the door. He was desperate. He told me that he had been to a number of other

churches in our town that day and either no one was there or he had been turned away because he was from out of town and not a member of their congregation.

My wife had gotten home from work by then so I told him to wait in front of the building until I could take my children home, and then I would return and help him. He was desperate and didn't believe me when I told him that I would be back. I promised him that I would. So I took the kids home and when I returned, he wasn't there. In his mistrust he was looking for another church. I found him walking along a street, pulled over and invited him to get into the car. I took him to a motel that was near several restaurants, got him a room for the night and gave him money to eat on. He was extremely grateful. I don't tell this story to my credit. I am nothing aside from Jesus Christ. I am selfish in myself. I am greedy in my nature. But Christ in me knew that this was the right thing to do. This story is an example of how desperate a person can become when they really get hungry and thirsty.

In the text, Jesus was using physical hunger and physical thirst to illustrate how we must become in Him. Psalm 42:1 says, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God." In like manner, Psalm 143:6 says, "I spread out my hands to You; my soul longs for You like a thirsty land." The running deer, in fatigue and weakness, pants for a drink and longs to get to the brook for a drink. A land that is deprived of water for a long period of time can flourish with life after a quenching rain. That is how we need to long after God and His righteousness.

Literally, our text in Matthew 5:6 could read: "Blessed (to be made happier than most) are the ones who crave, eagerly desire, and painfully feel their want to the justice, virtue and acceptance of God because they will be satisfied and fattened." That's when we know we are a true believer; when we want the presence of God within us so bad that it is like we are starving and dying of thirst to be near Him, to feel Him in our lives.

We want to be worthy of God. We thirst and hunger for His righteousness, His perfection, His acceptance. But we can't, not in ourselves anyway. We can only come to Him by way of His Son, Jesus Christ. He alone was the perfect sacrifice for our sin that will fill that hunger and thirst for God. His resurrection brought freedom from death, hell and the grave. Only the work done by Jesus can reverse that awful curse that God was forced to place on the Earth because of the sin of man.

When we get that kind of longing, that deep desire, for God in our lives, in our homes, in our work and in our daily routine, and we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and the only way to get to God, Jesus said that we shall be filled. Our deep longing, that nagging crave that won't go away will be fulfilled. We shall be filled.

Until we come to Jesus Christ, we have that unfulfilled passion ever present inside us. We try one thing after another to satisfy it. But nothing seems to work. Oh, it may seem to satisfy for a moment, but then it returns with more fury than ever. We try one thing after another, only to experience one failure after another.

But I tell you today, when you accept Christ, when you come to Jesus, when you forever find peace with God by committing your life to Him, you will find that longing. You will, in your imperfection, find the perfection of God.

You can be blessed in that longing. That craving is actually a good thing because it will lead you to God if you follow it in all honesty and sincerity. Many stop short of finding the answer. They settle for one thing or the other, and still find no relief. But if you continue looking, seeking, and knocking, you will find because God will lead you to Him.

Go ahead, satisfy that crave in Jesus Christ!

Chapter 6

MERCY MAKES US HAPPIER THAN MOST

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”
(Matthew 5:7)

What makes us happy? A new house? A new car? A

great deal of money? Lots of friends? How about a snow day? (man, that would be nice considering that at the time of this writing the heat index is over a hundred!) Of course, these things and many others I haven't listed can give us temporary happiness. I remember one Christmas where our son wanted a certain toy very much. He was only two or three at the time. We got it for him and when he tore it open, he was ecstatic – for about half an hour. When that time passed, we looked over and the toy was laying on the floor and he was playing with the box. Happiness caused by things only lasts for a moment.

The word “blessed” in the verse literally means “happier than most.” We hear that and the first thing that comes to our minds is “happier than most other people.” While that can be true, I wonder if more often it means happier than most other things.

Only a relationship with God through the blood of Jesus Christ will make us happier than most – most others who don't know Christ and most other things that we could fill our lives with. That's because the happiness found in Jesus is a lasting happiness – one that never goes away as long as we hold to it.

We can be happy throughout temptation, persecution, and trials. We can be happy when we are sick. We can even be happy when we face death. We are made to be happy in temptation because when we do as Paul said, and resist the devil in the

temptation, we will be delivered from it. We can be happy throughout persecution because we know that Christ was persecuted worse than we will ever be and His sacrifice has paved the way for us to be happy even when in persecution. We can be happy during trials because we know the legal outcome – Jesus is our lawyer, judge and jury. And we can even be happy when facing death because we know that through Christ, we have a much better place to be.

We can lose sight of that happiness when we get ourselves tangled up in our temporary concerns – things that we think make us unhappy. On the surface I suppose they do, but we can learn to be happy through anything we face if we don't lose sight of Jesus. It can be devastating to us if we don't keep our eyes on Jesus, but it only happens when we lose sight of our hope in God.

It's difficult for me to think of mercy without thinking about the story of the unmerciful servant as found in Matthew 18:22-34. As the parable goes, a man had decided to settle all the debts owed him. One individual owed in excess of 10,000 talents. In today's money that would be such an extravagant amount that it would be hopeless to repay. The master passed sentence that the man should be sold, along with his wife and children in payment of the debt. The man fell before the master and begged for more time to repay his loan. The master knew that the man would never be able to repay it and so in compassion and mercy, he forgave the man's debt – all of it. He wiped his slate clean! Because the master was merciful to him, the man found himself out of debt. What a great feeling that should have been.

But instead of feeling grateful he went straight to another man who owed him a hundred denarii – around ten bucks. He too begged for more time to repay his debt but the servant who had just been forgiven of such a great amount grabbed him by the throat demanding his money. When his fellow servant couldn't come up with the money the unmerciful servant had his debtor thrown into prison until he could work off his debt.

When the merciful master heard of the man's ingratitude, he changed his mind and had him thrown into prison until he could pay it all back – a life sentence!

Then we read of the tax collector in Luke 18:13. While praying in the temple a Pharisee bragged to God about how holy he was and how he sacrificed to God. He added, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even this tax collector!" But the tax collector the Pharisee referred to stood also praying, and wouldn't even lift his head but said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Jesus said in verse 14, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus also said in Luke 6:36, "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." We are told to show mercy to others, simply because of the great mercy shown us by God. When we don't, we are just as guilty as the unmerciful servant in Jesus' story. Showing mercy means that we are owed, but we forgive. Sometimes we must show mercy in a conflict with others. It is better (in most cases) to concede, showing mercy to the other individual, than to demand their apologies. When we don't show mercy, and we insist on justice, then we take away our happiness as well as the right to forgiveness (Luke 6:37). Unforgiveness will rob us of mercy.

Mercy means that we are forgiven even when we are guilty. Showing mercy on others, in like manner, means that we show mercy to them even when they are also guilty. It requires that we have compassion on others – love that identifies with how others feel regardless circumstance.

It may require pity. We don't like that term. It makes us feel like someone else looks down on our inability. However, we better be glad that God feels pity on us for if He didn't, we'd be in awful shape in our pride! God does pity us and we are truly a pitiful creature next to Him. Only when we realize that we are destitute and to be pitied can we find peace with God.

God will give us mercy. All we must do is to humble ourselves and acknowledge that we are in need of it. The unmerciful servant in the story was lifted up in pride, even when mercy was extended to him. In his anger and pride, he was unmerciful to his fellow servant. When we act unmerciful to others then we are guilty of the very same thing.

It goes against the grain that has been so deeply imbedded into us, but that is what God wants to do – To uproot those weeds in our lives that we have become so used to. When the weeds are out of our lives then we can grow into a beautiful flower garden that is full of mercy because we have been extended mercy from the Master! It makes us, as merciful, happier than most!

Chapter 7

THE 100% HEART

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

We put our feet into it. The water was the clearest I had ever seen. It was cool but not cold. It was also deeper than it appeared. Even though it came up about half way of your shin, looking through it you could see every pebble lying at the bottom. It was the purest creek I ever remember seeing. Our children were young and we had vacationed in the Smokey Mountains. Driving through them we saw the stream running beside the road and decided to pull over and investigate it. I'm glad we did because it stamped an eternal memory in my mind, as I watched our children and my wife wade that pure and clear water. I too removed my shoes and socks and sampled it. Because it was a mountain stream the speed with which the water descended nearly made you lose balance. But it was a great experience that I will always cherish.

Purity – I remember a commercial that used to be on TV when I was young. Perhaps you remember it too. It advertised a product called Borax and it was said to be 99 and 9/10ths pure – Pure of additives or defects. But not 100%. In the beginning, God made everything pure. The Earth and all its greenery was 100% pure. The animal life was 100% pure. There were no hunters, neither in man or beast, who watched and waited to take prey for their dinner. There were no thorns or thistles to cut as one made their way through the growth. It was perfect – 100% perfect. God makes nothing less than 100%.

After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and was expelled, things changed. Now nothing was literally 100%. To make things

worse, everything man touched and tried to improved only succeeded in become something less. Very little, if any was pure.

So when Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart ...” it seemed an impossibility. Where could you hope to find one who was pure in heart? The heart – the seat of our being. We use the word “heart” to describe it. In Jewish scripture it was the bowels, or liver. It would sound funny to us if it read, “Blessed are the pure in their bowels,” or “Blessed are the pure in liver,” but the literal meaning is still the same. Pure in what makes us human.

In order to really understand what Jesus was talking about in this passage, we should also look at something else He said. In Matthew 15:18 He said, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart and they defile a man.” He spoke these words in answer to Peter’s question. Earlier, He had been speaking to a multitude and had said, “Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” (Matthew 15:10-11). Peter had later told Jesus that this had offended the Pharisees. They were offended because they emphasized the cleansing of the outward body. They put the greater importance on dietary rules and laws and on outward cleanliness. Jesus was telling them that what came out of man’s mouth defiled him much more than what he put in it.

Note, He didn’t say that we shouldn’t be clean. He wasn’t criticizing dietary caution. He merely used the example to show that man’s heart is not pure and what comes out of it, especially through our mouths – what we speak – is evidence of that impurity. Returning to Matthew 5:8, Jesus was in essence saying that the one who was 100% pure in heart was made to be happy (blessed) because that person would see God.

That’s a big deal. Some in the Bible saw visitations of God in human form. The theological term is “theophanies” – the appearance of God in human form. Moses was allowed to see the back parts of God’s glory. He was told to get behind a rock. As God passed by, He placed His hand on the rock to protect Moses. When He was

almost passed, He removed His hand allowing only the hinder part of His glory to be seen by Moses. From that single, momentary event, Moses face glowed so brightly for a period of time that he had to wear a veil over his face to protect the people from the brilliant light that illuminated from his face.

John wrote, first in his Gospel – John 1:18 and then in his first letter – 1 John 4:12, that “No one has seen God at any time.” By that he means that no one has seen the full glory of God because man in his fallen, human form could not be exposed to the full glory of God and live to talk about it. It isn’t that God is a mean God but that He is so pure that the brilliance of His glory would kill anything less than being just as pure as He is.

Seems impossible doesn’t it? Eliphaz, one of Job’s friends, echoed it when he asked, “Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?” (Job 4:17). The obvious answer is, “Of course not.” But if that is the case, how then can we ever hope to become pure in heart?

We may think that we are pure. We can justify ourselves by saying that we are as pure as a human can be. But can we ever be pure enough in ourselves to see God? Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16:2, “All the ways of man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirits.” In other words, we may think we are pure but God looks at what is coming from inside us – the hidden things in us.

It is then impossible for us to be pure in heart, pure enough to see God anyway. How can we ever hope to be truly pure in heart? Paul wrote in Titus 1:15, “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.” Ah, so now we are getting somewhere. Nothing is pure to the defiled and unbelieving. That stands to reason that to be pure we have to be undefiled and believing.

But there is only one way for that to happen. To be pure in heart to the point that we can see God, we must be re-created. We must leave this body that is defiled with sin, the sin we have naturally

without Christ. We are all sinners. We have all fallen short of God and His glory. We all are defiled. Jesus came to make us new – to make us new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15). We are re-made, or as Jesus put it to Nicodemus, Born again (John 3:3). Our old man becomes dead in sin and we are given a new man who is alive in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:15, Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10).

There is, however, only one way to do that. Yes, Jesus is our Savior. Yes, it is by His work accomplished through death and resurrection that we can bury the old man and have a new man raised in Him. He did the work. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves because we are not worthy. We cannot hope to be pure enough to see God in ourselves. Without Christ we never will be.

But one thing we must do is to believe. It is like getting a gift on your birthday. The party was great; the food was good and now it's time for presents. These are gifts that we didn't earn but that people are giving to us because they love and care for us. But they don't belong to us until we believe that they are for us and we reach out and take them. And so we must do with the free gift of grace given us by Jesus Christ. We have done nothing to earn it. No good work, no good deed, no moral life will come even close to being worthy of salvation. It only comes through Jesus. When we realize that and believe – Believe to the point that we are ready to do something – Believe without any doubt that what Jesus did is real and really for us – then and only then can we reach out and receive that gift.

When we do, the work of Jesus cleanses us from sin. We are forgiven. We are made clean. He gives us that pure heart that is worthy to see God. That's the only way.

The questions hang in the air waiting a response. Do you want this purity? Do you want to see God? Are you ready to give up your old man – your old sinful self that is worthy only of death, hell and the grave – and let Christ make you reborn – a new creation in

Christ Jesus? If so, then you can be made happy because of this new found pureness in your heart, and you will one day see God!

Chapter 8

AN OCEAN OF PEACE

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

*I*t was the year, 1520. The Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Megellan, and his brave men had skillfully navigated some of the most dangerous, stormy waters in the world, around Cape Horn – the most Southern tip of mainland South America. Finally emerging past the cape, leaving the Atlantic side, they sailed into a new ocean (at least it was new to them) and after the life-threatening voyage, suddenly the waters were calm. They proclaimed it Pacific, which means “peaceful” and thus the Pacific Ocean had a name.

I’m certain that, during the days in the thrashing waters and great swells and waves that nearly capsized the ship on which they depended for life, he and his men longed, prayed and hoped for peace. Unless one experienced it, I can’t imagine how they must have felt when the waters were calm once again.

We may not be sailing in a wooden ship through treacherous waters, but our lives reflect many of the same feelings these men experienced. We long for peace. We dream of it, hope for it, fight for it and some even die for it. Unfortunately, our world has not known real, true and lasting peace since Adam yielded to his wife, who yielded to the serpent that was the devil in disguise. That act of disobedience to God – Yielding to what his heart had really wanted to do all along (at least that’s what I believe), cost not only Adam and Eve, but every descendant from that day forward, as well as the life, land and existence of our entire planet. We want to lay blame on Adam, but in fact, he was only doing what each one of us would have done had we been in his place. Oh, we might think we would have

done things differently. But even if we were in his position knowing what we know now, we'd be trying to come up with a way to get a bite of that forbidden fruit without suffering what all of mankind and the world has suffered as a consequence. That's because, despite all of our variance in physical appearance and mental makeup, we are all indeed basically the same.

Since that day we have been trying to have some kind of peace in our lives. Men want peace. The problem is that we really don't know how to get it. Wars have been waged in the name of peace – “If we conquer all, then we will have peace.” The peace most want hinges on one thing – “Will it bring peace in favor of me?” If it doesn't then peace is non-existent – A hard truth but nonetheless, the truth. We want peace but, on our terms, and each of our terms are different.

It's hard for me to think of peace without thinking of beauty pageants. I haven't seen one in many years but back in my younger days it seemed that nearly every contestant, when interviewed on stage, wished for one thing. It may have been in different forms, but when the peel was removed it was all basically the same answer; each wanted world peace. A world that had retired from war. One in which all of mankind lived together in harmony, and at one with life on our planet and in our universe. Despite all those wishes for world peace it seems to me that each year has actually led us farther and farther from that goal. We talk of peace. In our hearts we may long for peace. But in practice, there can never be peace, not at least, on man's terms. On the voyage of life we are stalemated in the stormy cape. There is no way out and all we can hope for, it seems, is a smooth and painless death. In the world we have made for ourselves it just may be the only recourse to finding peace.

Jesus knew these things when He gave His sermon on the mountain that day. He introduced it by talking about things that would make us happy, in fact, happier than most. That's the true meaning of the word “blessed.” To be happier than most. That's what all of mankind wants after all. Near the end of His list of things that would make us happier than most was being what He termed, a

peacemaker. “Happier than most are the peacemakers ...” We would like to think that we are peacemakers. Unless we are mentally deranged, nearly every man and woman wants to be a peacemaker, but, as we have already said, on our own terms. Our way is the best way. If only the entire world could think like me, then all would be at rest. Would it though?

Because, you see, to be a peacemaker, we have to have peace first of all within us. Are we really at peace? Can we truthfully say that we get along with everyone else? Is it our claim that we have no conflict within? That we hate no one? That we don’t want at least one to get his or her just reward for “what they did to me?”

Deeper yet, are we really at peace with ourselves? Can we say without a twinge of doubt that we like everything about ourselves? Are we satisfied with how we look, how we dress, what we have? If we are honest with ourselves, the answer is always “no.” Why? Because we haven’t completely yielded to the full peace Jesus Christ came to offer.

That is where we must start in order to qualify as a peacemaker. We can’t always successfully negotiate peace with others, whether we are just settling an argument between us and someone else, or whether we are in a position to negotiate peace with people groups, and even nations. A select few have been given peace awards for helping to settle treaties between warring nations and I say “Bravo” and “Hats off” to those folks. Yet, at some point down the line, in nearly every case, peace is only dependent on those involved keeping the treaty. In many instances, at some point one or the other – or perhaps both, break the treaty and what they were supposed to have peace over is suddenly right back in the open.

Real, true, lasting peace begins in each of our hearts – the seat of our emotions, what makes us up. We must first make peace with ourselves and that can’t possibly happen on a permanent basis without making peace with God. We began this discussion talking about the loss of that peace when mankind, through Adam, sinned

and rebelled against God. That has to be restored. They tried to make that happen throughout the entire Old Testament. Only a very select few achieved that standing, and even then, there were some flaws. David was called “a man after God’s heart.” Yet he failed on several occasions. Yes, he asked for forgiveness and it was granted to him by God, yet he still failed. Moses was called “a friend of God.” He was allowed to see the hinder parts of the glory of God. Yet, in a moment of anger, he disobeyed God and for that single act was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land after spending a little over forty years of his life to get there. Noah was one of the last men on Earth to obey God and He had the man build an ark to save him and his family, along with a select representation of life so as to repopulate the world when it was all over. But shortly after leaving the ark, he planted a vineyard, made wine and got drunk. Even though these great men had special relationships with God, they still failed to have full and complete peace in their lives.

And so we come to the solution. God in the flesh – Immanuel (see Matthew 1:23), came to us as a baby born of a virgin. He alone was not guilty of the sin of Adam. He alone was not tainted with the failure of men. Of all the billions of people born on this planet after Adam, He alone lived a sinless life. And so, He alone was the only perfect sacrifice that could finally bring peace – Peace to this planet, peace to all of creation and peace to the individual hearts of men and women. He allowed Himself to be crucified as the sacrifice to pay the ultimate penalty for our sin. That penalty as first spoken in the book of beginnings – the Book of Genesis – is death. God told man that if he sinned and disobeyed Him, that he would die. And so we have been dying ever since. Each one of us except for Enoch and Elijah have faced the final result of that curse – death. The problem is, that the sacrifice that would finally pay for our failure had to be resurrected. We can’t do that. We can’t die and then bring ourselves back from the grave.

But Jesus did. He died as the final sacrifice – the sacrifice in our place, then on the third day, He arose, victor over sin, death, the grave and hell itself. He became the only One who could actually restore peace.

When we believe in Him; when we accept His free gift of salvation, then and only then can we begin to become a peacemaker. We must first make peace with ourselves. We have to accept ourselves as the failures we are. We see that we are no better than anyone else living on this third rock from the sun. No matter our social status, how much wealth we have accumulated, what our name is, or the color of our skin, we are all the same. We all need the same sinless sacrifice to be restored to God.

Then we can begin to be peacemakers. We make peace with ourselves first. When we have found peace in our own lives, then we can begin to live that peace in front of others, not to flaunt ourselves as being better, but to show that peace really can be achieved. Real peace, true peacemaking is infectious. It becomes an influence that is rare and others see it and want it. We have the privilege then, of telling them how to find it. Not by being like us, but by being like Jesus. That's the peacemaker – One who can tell the world that Jesus is the only way of finding true peace.

He went on to say that the peacemaker, who is happier than most will be called a son of God. That's powerful. We can't earn that title. We can only achieve it by finding peace within through Christ Jesus. When we do, then we can guide others into also becoming sons of God.

Do you want that peace? Do you long to be a peacemaker? I know you do.

The ocean of peace, the pacific that I'm speaking of isn't a body of water. It is the Body of Christ!

Chapter 9

FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:10)

Here, in the country in which I live, the United States of

America, we don't really know a whole lot about persecution. Oh, we write about it. We talk about it. We do that because it is found in the Bible. We have to remember that in the early days of the Church, pagan worship ran rampant. The Romans, who were in control of most of the world at that time, worshipped many gods. The Jewish idea of one invisible God was tolerated, but when Christians came along, disrupting their pagan system of worship, and making converts of their followers, it wasn't tolerated and so persecution was severe.

Remember the incident in Acts 16 where the girl followed after Paul and Silas crying out that they were "the servants of the Most High God who proclaim to us the way of salvation?" (Acts 16:17). Paul recognized the evil spirit controlling her and turned and cast it out. Her owners had used the demonic powers in her to tell fortunes and suddenly their source of income had been taken away. It was things like that which sparked very severe persecution of Christians. They freed the captives of demonic spirits, and taught people how the One and only true God wanted to free them from slavery to sin, and were accused because of it.

But we don't see those things happening here in our "Home of the Brave and Land of the Free" – YET. Be aware, for it may be coming and sooner than you might think.

We sometimes like to think that sickness is persecution. Perhaps because somewhere down the line, because of our lack of persecution, our conscience was eased by thinking at least we are persecuted that way. But not so. Oh, if God would so choose, He can use sickness to get our attention. Always remember that God is God and He can do whatever He wants to. But for the most part, sickness is a result of the curse placed on this Earth because of man's sin. Sickness is our fault. I'm not saying that you are sick because of your own doing, but I am saying that germs and disease exist because of our sin which forced God to place the curse on the Earth. That is not persecution.

Some may claim that their financial difficulties are a form of persecution. Sorry, but they're not. Once again, more often than not, financial difficulties are a result of our own faulty decisions. We've made bad investments, or we mismanaged our money. We spent too much on entertainment instead of putting some away in savings. Folks, I'm not on the devil's side, but we aren't being persecuted when we are at fault.

We are occasionally persecuted in today's world by being called "narrow minded" or "feeble minded." Many who don't believe in God feel that way. They will accuse those of us who trust in God as being weak and needing God as a crutch. But, in reality, whether it's drugs, alcohol or some other habit, are they not also crutches? Let's face it, in one way or another we all need a crutch to get through life. Isn't it better to have God, Who is real and really cares, rather than something temporary in this life?

But these things are not the point. Jesus said that blessed (happier than most) are those who are persecuted FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE. It isn't mishaps in life, or natural things that happen, but when we are laughed at, ridiculed, tortured or beaten, or even treated unfairly only because we believe in Jesus Christ.

We could simply define "righteousness" as "right ness." What is right. Our world is quickly turning today. What used to be called

“right” is now, in many circles, considered to be old fashioned; out of date. That “rightness” is quickly being replaced by things that we used to think were wrong. We see it on TV. We see it on the news. Those things that the Bible calls “sin” are more and more being celebrated as right and normal.

When we take a stand against it, just like what happened to Paul and Silas, we find ourselves the outcast, the one who puts a riff in what everyone else wants to do. “The majority must be right.” “Everyone is doing it.” But that isn’t always the case. God is perfect and right and He does not change. Those who stand in His precepts and His will are right regardless if they are the majority or the minority. Standing for righteousness rubs those who don’t the wrong way.

Then we need to remember that our “righteousness” is like filthy, dirty rags. We can never hope to be righteous in ourselves. Our righteousness will always get us into trouble. That’s because our righteousness is based on rules – what we can and cannot do – and comparing our goodness to that of others. That isn’t righteousness. That is self-justification and pride.

Our “right-ness” can only come through Jesus Christ. We have given up ourselves and surrendered to God. We realize that we will never be good enough and so we deny our awful, sinful selves and allow the Holy Spirit, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to become our righteousness. In that light, we could read this verse something like this, “Happier than most are those who are chased after in a hostile manner (in order to harass, trouble and molest) who are surrendered to Jesus Christ and allow Him to be our righteousness ...”

So, when we are persecuted for the sake of true righteousness – the righteousness of Christ in us, then we are made happy because then ours is the kingdom of heaven. That kingdom begins in the hearts of men. Right now, that kingdom exists inside us and in a spiritual realm. Jesus is away preparing the permanent, physical kingdom right now (John 14:2-3). Until He returns to take us away to this permanent kingdom, the kingdom of Heaven resides

in the hearts and lives of Christians – Those who are truly changed, not just by teaching, or convincing, but because we have allowed the Holy Spirit to guide us and have come to know and have faith in Jesus Christ. We currently have a kingdom which Jesus explained to Pilate when He told him, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” (John 18:36).

Jesus said that those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, inherit and are a part of the kingdom of Heaven. We don’t seek persecution to get into the kingdom. It is a consequence of being persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Since our righteousness is imperfect and nowhere near the standard it should be, it is not just because we believe in Christ but because of Christ. Our persecution is really coming from the devil in attempt to destroy the Church and ultimately Christ. The devil is strongly opposed to the kingdom of Heaven. He can never be a part of it and so he doesn’t want anyone else to be a part of it. He wants all people to accept the new morality that is sweeping over this world – justifying and accepting the sin of man as okay because we just can’t help it. Instead of standing for righteousness, we justify sin, make it sound not so harsh and make it acceptable and normal.

That is happening right now. On TV, in the movies, on the nightly news, in our public schools and in politics. Sin is being accepted as normal and good. Men are told to love others. Yes, we are to love others, but the definition of love has never been to accept any wrong doing of others as okay. We are sinning ourselves when we tell people that God understands their hearts and their sin and that they are okay.

Sin is never okay. Sin cannot be tolerated by God along side His righteousness. We must proclaim the righteousness of God, not to condemn men but to let them know that there is an answer. It is so they can understand that turning from their sin and being washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ, they can be free from sin and they can take on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

This is what the world doesn't want to hear. More and more denominations and congregations across the world are accepting sin as normal and part of people. They are being patted on the back and welcomed into their fellowship without acknowledging that they must seek to be free from sin. I'm not saying that we should put those people out of our congregations but that we need to let them know in no uncertain terms that they must flee sin and turn to Christ. Let them sit in our pews. Love them and welcome them, but don't patronize them into thinking that they are okay. We are all sinners and we all need to be saved by the free gift of salvation given through Jesus Christ. To present it in any other way is to make what Jesus Christ did for us to be for nothing.

Since the world doesn't want to be submissive to the gospel of Jesus Christ, those who do, and who proclaim the truth, have become the persecuted. Right now it is only through ridicule, especially in our country. But more and more, groups are taking control and if we don't open our eyes, the day is soon coming when the freedom to proclaim the gospel will no longer be tolerated. Don't fool yourselves. There are those currently in political office who would begin that persecution right away if they could. The day is coming, and Christians who are following after the righteousness of Christ see it. But always remember, that those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Verses 11-12 of Matthew 5 go on to say, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Jesus was letting us know that the persecution we may receive, whether from the public, from political influence, or even from those who profess to be a part of the Church but are in reality are those who are pushing away the truth of the gospel, that we will be rewarded for our faith. In fact, rejoice and be very glad for our reward is great. Those gone before – the prophets who proclaimed the truth against popular opinion, were severely persecuted even to death. But the reward after our physical life is great.

Don't lose hope. Don't despair. Don't think that you are by yourself. There are many who hold to the truth. Don't you want to be one of them? It may be unpopular. It will cause you ridicule. It could, one day, cost you your physical life. But remember that physical kingdom that Christ is preparing? It will be yours.