

Epiphany 4; February 1 & 2, 2026

Matthew 5:1-12

Blessed!

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands. (Don't worry, I'm not going to sing the whole song.) But it does bring up the question that is raised in our text this morning. *What does it take to be happy/blessed?* That is a big question.

In order to find an answer to that question, I asked AI this question: *"What are some recent studies that show what does it take to be happy?"*

Here are some answers that I was given:

- Strong relationships are the biggest predictor of long-term happiness. Supportive relationships matter more than money, fame, or achievement. People with deep connections to family, friends, and community tend to be happier.
- Quality of relationships predicts happiness into old age.
- Trust – in people and institutions – with greater well-being. When you feel safe and connected, your mental load lightens and happiness increases.
- Money can reduce stress when it provides security, but more income doesn't guarantee more happiness.
- Spending money on experiences, gifts, and charity tends to make people happier than buying "stuff."
- Small daily practices (kindness, gratitude, physical activity) make a difference.

What does it take to be happy? It must have been strange and, maybe, even a little shocking for the crowds to hear the words of Jesus' sermon.

- The poor in spirit are blessed.
- Those who mourn are blessed.
- The gentle are blessed.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed.
- The merciful are blessed.
- The pure in heart are blessed.
- The peacemakers are blessed.
- Those who are persecuted are blessed.

So, how do those two lists match up with your perception of happiness? From what we see, the people who are blessed are those who are strong, who are proud, who do not care about righteousness, who are merciless, who are harsh, imposing, and demanding, who are impervious to problems, and who cause strife and make war. If you can do all those things, you can achieve happiness. I imagine that the people, who were listening to Jesus preach his Sermon on the Mount, felt the same way. So, let's take a quick look at Jesus' words.

First: Please don't misunderstand me. God certainly can work to bless people with material things. It's good to give him thanks and praise when he does. The problem, however, is when we limit our thanks and praise only toward the only good things that people obtain in life. We consider someone blessed only when they achieve something that looks like the American dream. What happens when we don't?

Let's start with the first word that Jesus speaks. **"Blessed!"** First words are important. Think of the young couple who are waiting to hear the first word they speak. Will it be "mama" or "papa" or "grandpa?" Then the child says "grandma." It sometimes is hilarious to watch. Think of the person who is at their first grief group. The leader is going around the circle and asking everyone to share their story of loss. What will your first word be? Think of the person who is standing in front of a large group to receive an award at work, and you are terrified.

What will your words be? After all, you only get one first impression. What happens when everything seems to be turning upside down in our life, where do we find happiness? You are not sure what to say or whether you are going to be able to hold it together when you say it. But, at some point, you are going to speak and say your first words.

Jesus gathers his disciples around him. There are so many disciples that he goes up a mountain and sits down to teach them. I can imagine that the crowd grows silent as Jesus prepares to speak. People wait. Jesus waits. It's a moment of first words. "**Blessed**," Jesus says. "**Blessed**." That was the first word of Jesus in what is known as his sermon on the mount. Let's take a brief look at the words that Jesus speaks.

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The word that Jesus uses for "**poor**" means being completely destitute. It means being so poor that you are completely dependent on someone else. When we realize that just how poor we really are without Jesus, we realize just how rich we are in him. There is nothing we can do to earn eternal life. We are completely dependent on him. Heaven is ours through the blood of Jesus.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

The image that Jesus uses in the word "**mourn**" is an image of someone who has endured a loss of someone who is the dearest person to them. It is at that time of feeling alone and devastated, that Jesus reminds us that for that believer who has died, they are being comforted in the joys of heaven. You have that same comfort as well. For mourning turns into comfort – an unimaginable joy that the world cannot understand. When we look into our hearts and see the sin that we can't get rid of, we are also comforted that God has washed us clean.

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

When we hear the word "**meek**," we think of "weak." God is really saying the opposite. Followers of Jesus trust the strength that only comes through Jesus, not us. In Christ we have everything. We get to live this balanced life fully aware of our weaknesses, but know that because of our relationship with God, we can have complete trust in him.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Christians want to "**hunger**" and "**thirst**" for righteousness. We want to be right with God. When we trust in Jesus, we live thankful lives for him. Crave his words and promises that only he can give.

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

"**Merciful**" people join other people to help them in the suffering and experiences that they may be going through. It really means to do life together with them. That's what Jesus did. He came to do life with us so that we can spend an eternity in heaven in his mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

There is no one here this morning who can have pure hearts by themselves. Imagine the person who hasn't showered in a month (not sure I want to), they are going to stink. We stink before God, but with his blood, he scrubs away our sins. Because of his cleaning of our heart, we are pure before God for an eternity.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

There will never be peace on earth on this side of heaven. But with Jesus we have peace with God. We are called the sons of God. Share that peace. No sight on earth is more peaceful than God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

God's people have always been persecuted following Jesus. With God on our side, how can we not be blessed.

A few minutes ago, we saw a little skit talking about being disciples of Jesus. As we follow him in our lives, it is so different than following others in the world. Being a disciple of Jesus, means the weaker you are, the stronger God is in your life. The weaker you are now, the more ready you are to trust in a future reward with him. This is the way that God likes to work. He chooses you for him.

Trust him and then you can sing: *If you are happy, clap your hands...* for eternity. In Jesus, you are "**Blessed**." Amen.