

## 2. Happiness

Blessed the poor in spirit:  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven!

Matthew 5:3-12

### *Ideals*

Every human heart knows the longing for a happiness yet unattained. For that reason men, in contrast to animals, look expectantly to the future. Ideals, once conceived, bring about dissatisfaction, revolt and bitterness when they are not realized. Since many things turn out differently than we expected and since death is moving towards us, a layer of hardness, aggression, egotism and jealousy spreads over many human hearts. Deeply hidden the longing for a better happiness, another life, remains. Having originally come from Paradise people can never be totally happy in the present-day world, and on account of that they often make each other very unhappy.

Surprisingly, Jesus now begins His instruction to the people with a discussion about happiness. He knows that people, even when they are not unhappy, do not yet possess a happiness without blemishes. Before unmasking our shortcomings in oftentimes strong language, He speaks to our heart which restlessly longs for perfect happiness. A whole series of Beatitudes surrounds us with road signs pointing to real peace. Jesus wants to make men into His disciples because He wants to give them the unattainable. He is the Savior. His commandments bring happiness.

### *Happiness is divine*

Despite having rebelled against God and then having been expelled from Paradise, man nevertheless has a notion about a happy life, even though he doesn't have any idea of what it might be. Too often happiness is seen as a point at which all of our desires, wants and needs are satisfied (as if anybody lived on Easy Street!).

In the Beatitudes Jesus reminds us that we lost peace and happiness in Paradise. We can only recover them by relocating

the trail to God. Every Beatitude consists of two lines. The second line describes what kind of happiness we can expect with Jesus. Blessed, happy, are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is not the same thing as heaven. The kingdom of heaven is a term describing the place where heaven calls the tune. It is sometimes called the Kingdom of God: the area where He has the upper hand. The world of humanity has truly become a human's world, more and more turned away from God. But it won't remain that way. God will come again to subdue this rebellious province and place it under the authority of heaven. That had already been promised to our forefathers when they were expelled from Paradise, and this promise was often repeated in the Old Testament in all kinds of ways. Finally, John the Baptist arrived as the herald of the approaching kingdom of heaven. Now that Jesus appears the future is near. His death for the sins of men will lift the blockade. The time is now dawning in which men may once again inherit God's Paradise through faith. A new order will soon unfold: the never ending era of a humanity coming to full development through heavenly living on earth. Happy is the man who experiences that.

This desire for happiness does not cut us off from the earth. On the contrary, it reunites us on this planet with God: the only One really capable of making a man happy forever because He Himself is life, light and joy.

The concluding phrase of the first Beatitude determines the pitch of the one which immediately follows. A certain rounding-off is achieved in verse 10 while the same concluding phrase returns once again: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." People will never become happy by trying to leave heaven outside of things. Jesus brings us happiness by reconciling us to God in heaven.

Looking at the Beatitudes between verse 3 and verse 10, we discover that every second line gives a certain description of this kingdom of heaven. There people will be comforted: God is drying the tears which now sometimes flow without end.

Then we will inherit the earth: mother earth, torn open by changing world powers, can breathe again. When the meek rule, the lion and the lamb can lie down together.

Then we will be satisfied with righteousness: every human

existence falls short now, but then it will breathe only innocence.

We will be shown mercy: those who demanded their rights and sacrificed others to get them, will now come into a world in which everyone will pull themselves up by grace.

There we will see God: it isn't possible now. Even the sun is far too strong for our gaze, and we sometimes look down in the presence of a really good man. Imagine how much we will be changed when we see God Himself: pure life and light!

We shall also be called children of God: a new existence will start. No more human life in and of itself. God's name will be inscribed on their deeds. Our name will change from child of man to child of God.

That is the kingdom of heaven: that's happiness, and Jesus stands for that. The curse which lies over this life will be lifted. The veil of death will be taken away. Happy the disciples of Jesus: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

### *Happiness must grow*

People who demand their rights want happiness delivered today, immediately and already put together. They forget that happiness lives, and everything that lives grows. To be happy with the fruits, you first have to be happy with the seeds. They forget something else as well: sometimes happiness has to be restored because it was broken. That recovery needs time and sacrifice. A broken marriage can be made happy again, but the person who damaged it may not demand that happiness. He may work for it, hope for it. Having gone through difficult times it can still return like a gift, different and deeper. But this happiness does not grow without contrition and repentance.

Now this also applies to the real happiness which God gives. Having accumulated a record of guilt, we are, even in the best of circumstances only a tiny bit aware of the injustice and sorrow we have inflicted on our good Creator. Our understanding of that still has to ripen. But we are given the time for that. God does not move us from a corroded life into a perfect existence by the wave of a magic wand. He takes His time and follows a certain path. The restoration of happiness here demands growth in repentance and trust. Not as a precondition for receiving happiness but as the essential precondition for *being* happy. How can a life without contrition and belief ever be suitable ground for a divinely, happy life? Many prison inmates first have

to pass through a program of rehabilitation before taking their place in the society (which stands ready to receive them). When God's grace opens the gates to the kingdom of heaven for us, we must first undergo reeducation to make us mature enough for this happy world. In this regard the crucial factor is not the length, but rather the depth. To be really happy we have to be willing to change.

For that reason each Beatitude consists of two lines: the second line points to the happiness, while the first line notes for whom this happiness is reserved. It is for the poor of spirit, the meek, the merciful and the persecuted. All of these descriptions point in the direction which we should now live. The road to heavenly happiness travels along the following stations: humbly hoping in God and unpretentiously loving our neighbor. Jesus does not describe these conditions for happiness as a kind of hurdle which we first have to clear. He does not say that we will be happy after having first passed a test of poverty and mercy. He simply says that we are already happy while underway as poor of spirit and persecuted. Happy because we are already standing on the road to a heavenly life. We are already growing in the right direction. Recovery has begun and God will insure a complete cure.

The most well-known exhortation is to be poor in spirit. This call applies to both rich and poor. Jesus uses a word that does not indicate the poor, but rather the destitute beggar. Beggars like this still exist, and in some lands there are scores of them. They beg for food. But very few people are spiritual beggars: when the angels look out of the windows in heaven, do they see many human hands and human souls held up begging to God? How many men have a deep sense of their total poverty and guilt before God and plead for His grace? Still, it has to begin here. Jesus pointed Israel in this direction. He came as a healer and they streamed to Him with pitiful cries for help: Have mercy on our crippled, blind and demon-possessed! and Jesus helps. But then leading the same people to His mountain He sits down in order to teach them that happiness will come when they turn to Him like beggars for their spirits and souls and not just for their physical ailments. Happiness from God, which can only be obtained by begging, is only for those who no longer seek happiness in themselves.

Following the first Beatitude about the poor in spirit come

three others which touch upon our relationship to God and another three which are concerned with our neighbor. In verse 4 Jesus calls those who mourn blessed. He uses a verb which is related to mourners. Jesus does not mean that it is pleasant to lose a loved one through death. He teaches us, in prosperity and adversity, a bearing which is necessary for real happiness. Not the attitude of the complacent who are very satisfied with themselves, but the bearing of those who are in mourning for their sins. John the Baptist already stated it clearly enough: we must repent of our sins when the Lord approaches. Jesus can now be short. Blessed are those who took John's appeal to heart. Blessed are those who are disappointed with themselves, who kneel before God in sackcloth and ashes: They have already started out on the road back to happiness.

In verse 5 Jesus calls the meek blessed. In this regard He does not have certain character types in mind, but those who do not seek to obtain their rights with insolence and violence. Having become humble, they let God lead their lives. The meek appear to get the worst of it in this life where only the fittest survive. But Jesus encourages them. The strongest will not end up on top, neither the most insolent, nor the most wicked: the future of the world is not booty which we can conquer but an inheritance which has to be willed to us. God designates the meek as the legal heirs of life. After all, they have expected it from Him and not from themselves.

In verse 6 Jesus terms as blessed those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. A lot of people might appear to be able to stand in line for this one. Doesn't every political party work towards righteousness on earth? But then we need to be careful not to overlook Jesus' choice of words. He uses an unfamiliar phrase: hunger and thirst. That refers to food and drink, things our own bodies need. Strangely enough, people outside of Paradise are always talking about righteousness, while hardly ever recognizing that their own lives are devoid of it. John the Baptist pointed that out, even to the religious pharisees. He taught the people that their own stomachs needed to be filled through a baptism of repentance: their lives lacked any righteousness. Many of John the Baptist's disciples are now sitting around Jesus, and He calls them blessed when they have discovered their unrighteousness and when they long for forgiveness and sanctification. They are standing on the road to happiness. For

happiness can only come back into the world via the hearts of the children of men: Not through revolution, nor through war, but through conversion to God.

The reality of this subjection and humble relationship of faith to God must be evident in a loving attitude towards our neighbors. In verse 7 to 9 Jesus gives the following characterizations: merciful (not returning evil for evil), pure of heart (dealing with one's neighbor on the basis of selfless motives), peacemaking (not asserting one's rights or causing strife). We have to bring these three words into our lives. Then it will become clear that we are really humble before God: why stumble over our neighbor's petty faults when so much more has been forgiven us? We are beginning to grow towards happiness: the heartbeat of all happiness is the love which is from and through God.

### *Happiness carries*

Jesus' words about persecution receive an extra, personal accent. He speaks more broadly about this when verse 10 is worked out in verses 11 and 12. Apparently nothing is finer than to be persecuted and hated for Jesus' sake. "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Why should this be an encouragement? Isn't it demoralizing that that opposition and insult will never end? On the contrary, these things will come to an end. The prophets said that one day the Savior would come, and they were persecuted on account of the hate for the coming Messiah. Now the promised Messiah does come: the hate bursting forth proves that with Jesus we are at the right address. His name may be slandered, but through it we know that the promised one is finally standing before us. Satan, who appeared to have won in Paradise, attacks Him violently. But now that He has come the issue is close to being settled. Winter is over: rejoice, summer is returning!

Jesus commands happiness, even in persecution. That seems strange. How can you order someone to be happy? His command truly shows that the final triumph is certain. The general who instructs his troops to raise the song of victory knows what he is doing. Fighting remains to be done, but the victory banners are already being unfurled. The command demands trust. In Jesus

and His Word. Just as the Beatitudes call for faith. Jesus does not change our lives behind our backs. He speaks to us with promises. Isn't that an intentional delay? No, for how could people be happy without first having lost the contorted bearing of unbelief?