

Happiness According to Jesus

Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷ He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. ²⁰ Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you^[a] on account of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵ "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. (NRSV)

Lucas 6:17-26

¹⁷ Y descendió con ellos, y se detuvo en un lugar llano, en compañía de sus discípulos y de una gran multitud de gente de toda Judea, de Jerusalén y de la costa de Tiro y de Sidón, que había venido para oírle, y para ser sanados de sus enfermedades;
¹⁸ y los que habían sido atormentados de espíritus inmundos eran sanados.
¹⁹ Y toda la gente procuraba tocarle, porque poder salía de él y sanaba a todos.
²⁰ Y alzando los ojos hacia sus discípulos, decía: Bienaventurados vosotros los pobres, porque vuestro es el reino de Dios. ²¹ Bienaventurados los que ahora tenéis hambre, porque seréis saciados. Bienaventurados los que ahora lloráis, porque reiréis. ²² Bienaventurados seréis cuando los hombres os aborrezcan, y cuando os aparten de sí, y os vituperen, y desechen vuestro nombre como malo, por causa del Hijo del Hombre. ²³ Gozaos en aquel día, y alegraos, porque he aquí vuestro galardón es grande en los cielos; porque así hacían sus padres con los profetas. ²⁴ Mas ¡ay de vosotros, ricos! porque ya tenéis vuestro consuelo. ²⁵ ¡Ay de vosotros, los que ahora estáis saciados! porque tendréis hambre. ¡Ay de vosotros, los que ahora reís! porque lamentaréis y lloraréis. ²⁶ ¡Ay de vosotros, cuando todos los hombres hablen bien de vosotros! porque así hacían sus padres con los falsos profetas. (RV1960).

Prayer

Title: Happiness According to Jesus

I. Introduction

Can you “name” in silence something that will make you happy right now? (Silence)

What was it?

Let me start by making a confession: It will make me happy to be assured that at every step in my faith journey, I am at the right place, in God’s time, being faithful to the Gospel, and following Jesus’ servanthood model for ministry, simple like that! This statement makes me aware that happiness is both an event that can be experienced in each time or season of life and a journey for a lifetime. Thus, happiness is a journey and a destination.

What is in your mind and heart? What will make you happy?

May be health for yourself or somebody you love? Finding a job? A safe place to live? food, shelter, enough money to pay financial obligations? Some company? Peace. Hope. Love?

If you are a child or young person, what will make you happy? May be a safe covid-free school environment where you can play with your friends. Or new clothes, a smart phone/computer game/car? Or just a loving home where you can grow and thrive.

Sometimes might be a challenge to “name” what makes us happy, it all depends in how happiness is defined. For instance, according to some Jewish thinkers to be blessed (happy) means to increase in joy, in peacefulness. This definition is not that different from popular characterizations of happiness we watch in TV and social media. They measure happiness in terms of how popular, how many followers, and how many “likes” a person might have in their social media profiles. How similar and/or different are these popular characterizations of happiness to the ones we read in Scriptures?

II. Hebrew Context for Luke’s Narrative

Psalm 1

“Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
²but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.” NRSV

In this Psalm, let us review the Hebrew root words translated “happy” in our language.

“Blessed: There are two Hebrew words translated as "blessed." One is the verb *barak* meaning "to be blessed." The other is the noun *esher* meaning "happy," and is the word used in this passage. This noun is derived from the verb *ashar*, which means "to be straight."

<https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/psalms/studies-in-the-psalms-psalm-1.htm>

If you have Jewish fiends or relatives, or have visited a Synagogue, you might have heard,

Baruch Ata Adonai

“Almost every Jewish prayer, excluding the Shema, starts with the words “Baruch Ata Adonai” “...” אתה יי ברוך”– Blessed are You, our Lord. To welcome someone into your home you say already at the door, Blessed is the one who comes (Baruch Haba).”<https://seekingourgod.com/word-study-for-blessed-ps-11/>

Hebrew religious tradition in Scriptures reflects three complementary perspectives:

Priestly, Torah, and Prophetic. Priestly tradition teaches us about God’s holiness and the proper rituals we ought to perform to approach God and experience God’s presence and blessings. Psalm 1 is an example of the Torah tradition, which teaches us the importance of God’s commandments and the ethical way of life God’s people is called to live.

Jeremiah is an example of the Hebrew prophetic tradition, which in a nutshell, is God’s loving Word -that might sound like a thunder- calling God’s people to get back to the Torah. **All these three traditions tell us where happiness comes from, what is happiness, and how we can be happy.**

III. The Gospel: Luke 6: 17-26

In our Gospel narrative today, if we are attentive to Jesus’ words and what these words tell us about God, we hear a happy Jesus. Jesus said in Luke 6:45 “⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.” Therefore, this Sermon on the Plain is a happy sermon according to Jesus and preaches about happiness...how we humans can be happy.

Martin Luther said that the narratives of Jesus’ life and ministry, what we call “gospels,” proclaim one single Gospel, and the proclaimer of this Gospel is Jesus of Nazareth. In Luke’s chapter 6, the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus spoke four beatitudes and started all four with the word “blessed,” which we have already stated, can be translated “happy.”

Happy are you who are poor... *for yours is the kingdom of God*

Happy are you who are hungry now...

Happy are you who weep now...

Happy are you when people hate you...

The graphic that introduced the title of our sermon today seems to contradict the atmosphere of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, which is happiness. At best it reflects better the Woes, exclamation of grief, lament, and denunciation. How can we explain Jesus' expressions of grief and lament in a happy sermon? Let us hear,

Woe to you who are rich... *for you have received your consolation.*

Woe to you who are full now...

Woe to you who are laughing now...

Woe to you when all speak well of you...

woe

ὠαὶ (ouai)

Interjection. Woe!, alas!, uttered in grief or denunciation. A primary exclamation of grief; 'woe'.
<https://biblehub.com/luke/6-24.htm>

Let us visualize for a moment Jesus' audience according to Luke, ¹⁷ He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. (NRSV).

The Woes, as harsh as they might sound, are Jesus loving calling to happiness, and invitation to hear the Gospel of God's love and forgiveness. Like Jesus' audience, we can picture ourselves in at least one blessing and one lament in Jesus' sermon. **We might not consider ourselves poor or rich, nor hated or enjoying an impeccable reputation, but we all have wept and laughed...**a key to interpret Jesus words is "now."

According to Jesus both happiness and lament come from God, are expressions of God's calling us to trust Him and stop thinking and acting as if we could be happy apart from God. This is in essence the Gospel of Jesus.

The first blessing is an affirmation to the poor, *they belong to the Kingdom of God.* The "door" to God's Kingdom is open to the poor and to all who want to enter...and this open door is what we call Grace.

In contrast, in the first Woe Jesus laments the rich *have received your consolation.* The reference is to self-comfort, self-satisfaction, human comfort, what a rich person was looking for, what it has been earned.

Though is such a gentle and loving calling, that this lament becomes an invitation to enter the Kingdom of God in the same way the poor has been affirmed. Therefore, according to Jesus being happy (blessed) has nothing to do with being poor or rich but entering the Kingdom of God open to all by God's grace.

Conclusion

According to Martin Luther, in What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (p.95),

Happiness is nothing else than “to have a proper grasp of the Gospel, of the overwhelming goodness of God. This is the great fire of the love of God for us, whereby the heart and conscience become happy, secure, and content.” Further, Luther states,

“Now, when you have Christ as the foundation and chief blessing of your salvation, then the other part follows: that you take him as your example, giving yourself in service to your neighbor just as you see that Christ has given himself for you. See, there faith and love move forward, God’s command is fulfilled, and a person is happy and fearless to do and to suffer all things.”

In my words, happy persons according to Jesus are the ones who move on, keep going, who advance, to arrive to a God’s *place*, in God’s *time*, to *proclaim the Gospel* by words and deeds; loving and serving their neighbors in need...and by these standards, Grace is a happy congregation.

Amen.

Grace Lutheran Church
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