122. The Gospel of John—13:12-17

*“The Secret To A Happy Life”*

(A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier)

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In our study in John’s gospel we are currently in Chapter 13.

The scene is the upper room the night before Jesus’ crucifixion where He and His disciples are observing the Passover together.

Also, Jesus was using this time to give His disciples one last teaching before His death to encourage and instruct them for what lay ahead—after He would rise from the dead and return to the Father.

Last time we said that in the course of giving them this final discourse, the Lord Jesus says something that most Christians might be prone to read quickly and not think too much about—and yet it is something that is essential to living a happy, fulfilled life on earth.

And that’s why I’m calling this message—*“The Secret of a Happy Life.”*

**John 13:12-17 (NKJV)   
12  So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13  You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. 14  If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15  For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16  Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17  If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.**

The word for **‘blessed’** in verse 17 is the Greek word *markarios* which literally means—*“Oh how happy."*

It’s the same Greek word that Jesus used in giving the Beatitudes when 9 times He said, “Blessed”—

**Matthew 5:3-5 (NKJV)**   
3  "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4  Blessed *are* those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. 5  Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth…

The word *markarios* literally means *“Oh how happy"—*but not happiness as the world defines it.

This Greek word describes a person who has happiness which is rooted in the *heart* and not in outward circumstances—we would call it **‘joy’**.

You see our English word for ***happy*** is based on the old Anglo-Saxon word *hap*—which means *chance*, as in *“whatever happens”* or *“happenstance.”*

Earthly happiness is circumstantial—therefore, it is uncertain, temporary, and insecure because it changes with my circumstances. Whereas the ‘blessedness’ or *happiness* of the Christian life is not temporary or uncertain—it is solid and unshakable because it’s rooted in our relationship with Jesus which is permanent and unshakable!

That’s why (as someone has said) they are—“**Be**” attitudes not “**Do**” attitudes.

They are the inward attitudes that are found in the heart of the person who *is* a Christian. When a person has a changed heart it will overflow and produce a changed life—even as Jesus said, *"Cleanse the inside of the cup and it will overflow and cleanse the outside also."*

The reverse is *law* (religion) and leads to pure frustration because it tries to change people from the “outside” in, but only winds up producing ‘Pharisees’—those who appear righteous outwardly but inside their hearts are full of hypocrisy and uncleanness.

The Bible teaches that what produces a changed life is a *changed heart*—which only comes by receiving Jesus Christ into your heart as your Savior. That and that alone produces a changed life—because you can’t do what God wants you to do until you first are what God wants you to be.

The first step is becoming a new creation through Christ and receiving a new heart which then will produce a changed life.

And that's why the Beatitudes are presented *first* in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), it's because they are kingdom *attitudes* which then lead the kingdom *actions* (which Jesus begins to get into starting in verse 13 of chapter 5).

And so right up front, in the greatest sermon ever preached, the Lord wanted us to know that there will be great happiness in the hearts of all whose hearts are characterized by these attitudes.

This is the desire of God for all of us, that our hearts be filled with joy.

And this was the goal of Jesus’ teaching here—to bring about true happiness in the lives of His people not based on outward circumstance, which is the world's definition of happiness, but based on the inward attitudes of the heart when a person is born again.

And so, once again, this *blessedness* is a characteristic of God’s nature and is only available to those who are “in Him” or “in Christ” (2 Peter 1:4).

**There is no true blessedness or happiness apart from God and His Son Jesus Christ.**

So, when we talk about happiness, biblically speaking, we’re not talking about a superficial attitude based on circumstance—we’re talking about an inward attitude based upon the indwelling of God within us.

Please indulge me a little longer.

As we look at the Beatitudes (the foundation of happiness)—they seem almost paradoxical because they’re completely reversed from what *we* (and definitely the world) would have equated happiness with.

You see, as Jesus said, the really happy people are:

* The *poor* in spirit,
* The *mourners*,
* The *meek*,
* The *hungry* and the *thirsty*,
* The *merciful*,
* The *pure* in heart,
* The *peacemakers*,
* The *persecuted* and the *reviled*.

I think that most people, upon reading the words of Jesus spoken in the Beatitudes, would say to themselves—*“I don’t think I want that kind of happiness!"* That’s because to most people this whole thing sounds absolutely absurd.

One writer said*, "It's as if Jesus crept into the large display window of life and change all the price tags."*

The things we consider of little or no value Jesus assigns great value and worth to (like *humility,* and *servanthood*) and vice versa.

The Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal and have been endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, and that among these are the right to—

*“Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

And that means that each of us has the freedom to pursue our own personal definition of happiness.

And because so many people define happiness as being rich, successful, beautiful, famous and popular—that’s what they pursue because in their minds those things will bring them happiness. But let’s look at King Solomon for a minute—the most magnificent king that ever lived apart from the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

Here was a man who had everything this world had to offer.

* He had prestige and power—as well as riches and fame more than anyone who has ever lived.
* He dined on the finest foods, wore the finest clothes, and lived in the finest palace.
* He had thousands of servants to attend to his every need and hundreds of wives and concubines so that his pleasure knew no bounds
* He was the wisest and most intelligent man that ever lived (apart from Jesus) so much so that people came from all over the known world just to sit and hear his wisdom—I mean Solomon had it all!

If outward circumstances truly make a person happy—then Solomon should've been the happiest man on the face of the earth.

But instead we see him write in the book of Ecclesiastes over and over again*, "Vanity, vanity everything in life is emptiness and vanity."* (summarize the book of Ecclesiastes).

Jesus put it this way, *"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."*

We would do well to listen to Jesus, after all—He made us and knows what will make us happy.

And through these Beatitudes He is basically saying that it's pure foolishness to think you can fill up the void in your soul with the junk of this world—and yet how many people are feverishly trying to do that very thing?

*“If your marriage is lousy—go on an expensive vacation or buy a new car; If you're unhappy at your job—go shopping, you'll feel better.”*

The whole advertising industry is based on this principle that if you’re unhappy in any area of your life—product ‘ABC’ or ‘XYZ’ will bring you that happiness. And on and on it goes as so many are pursuing feverishly the elusive concept of happiness!

What they don’t realize in their pursuit of happiness is that—true happiness is not found in a *possession* or in a *pleasure*—it’s found in a Person—Jesus Christ! That is because true happiness comes when a person’s empty heart is filled—but understand, you can’t fill an empty heart with anything this fallen world has to offer.

As one author put it, *“Jesus has come into the world to announce to man that—the tree of happiness doesn’t grow in the cursed earth.”*

Only Jesus can fill up an empty heart and make a person truly *happy*—as a ‘by-product’ (a ‘fruit’) of that relationship with Him.

But if this is true—then why are so many Christians depressed and unhappy in their Christian lives?

That’s a great question—and to answer it we need to go back to John 13.

The key to living a ‘happy’ (joyful) life is first to receive Jesus into your heart and be born again—that’s true, that’s where it starts.

But then to experience the happiness Jesus spoke of in the Beatitudes on a daily basis we must listen to, take to heart and obey His words in John 13 verse 17:

**John 13:17 (NKJV)**   
17  If you know these things, blessed [‘O how happy’] are you if you do them.

***“If I know and do what things!?”***

Well again, context is important.

As we come to the last night Jesus would spend with His disciples before His crucifixion, He wants to reinforce some of the more important principles He had already taught them—one of them being the importance of servanthood.

The Lord’s comments on servanthood were not new—He had taught them that greatness in the Kingdom of God was based on them becoming lowly servants and not worldly lords (Matthew 20:25-28).

The problem was they had not taken that teaching to heart—why do I say that?

Because, as we said last time—what led Jesus to stop in the middle of the Passover Seder with His disciples and start washing their feet was that they began to argue among themselves as to who was going to be greatest in the Kingdom they believed Jesus was about to establish (Luke 22:24).

Earlier Jesus had *taught* them the principle of greatness in God’s Kingdom thru His words (Matt.20:25-28)—now He *demonstrates* for them the principle of greatness by His example (John 13:4-17).

And once again, as I said to open this message—in the course of giving them this final discourse, the Lord Jesus (the One Who created us and knows us better than anyone) gives them the secret to living a happy, fulfilled life on earth.

Right after washing the disciple’s feet (the lowliest job of the lowliest servant), we read:

**John 13:12-17 (NKJV)   
12  So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13  You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. 14  If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15  For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16  Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17  If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.**

In other words, the secret to living a happy and fulfilled life is—becoming a servant to others. The byproduct of serving others is that you experience happiness (joy).

* Message to missionaries sent by telegraph—‘OTHERS’

Somehow our modern American Christianity has moved from being ‘Christ-centered’ and ‘others-centered’ to being self-centered—maybe that’s the big reason so many Christians seem empty and unhappy inside.

The problem in our society is that so many are pursuing happiness as a direct pursuit not realizing—it is a by-product of knowing Jesus and being a servant to all.

This is especially true with this Millennial generation.

There has never been a generation in American history that has been less ‘churched’ and more self-focused than Millennials (1981 to 1995)—although, Generation Z (1995 to 2015) is in hot pursuit.

The tragedy is, it has led to the exact opposite of everything in life that makes life worth living—the joy, the peace, the purpose, fulfillment…etc.

Listen to a letter that was published not long ago from one such millennial—the title of which is, *“Millennials, the Dying Children”:*

*“I am one of the oldest millennials. Something terrifying is happening to us…*

*The oldest of us are rapidly closing in on 40. We are the least married, least fertile generation in history. Really, only 30% of people under 40 are married!...*

*We started coming of age in 2003, and economic conditions were nowhere close to as bad as the 1930s, 40s, or 70s, when people had little trouble marrying and procreating. Yet here we are, aging out of our ability to enjoy childhood, feeling death creep up on us. The video games have grown boring. The TV marathons are suffocating. The candy tastes like ashes in our mouths. We're committing suicide and consuming antidepressants at record rates. We try to accumulate even more, and it fails to make us happy. We don't know why, and we don't know how we got here.*

*Well, I'll tell you.*

*My entire life, the only message I got from school, church, college, and the media was that every decision I made, from what degree to pursue, to where I lived, to whether to marry, was with the goal of having a maximally pleasurable life. True, as someone raised in a conservative church, I was warned against fornication and substance abuse—but these were framed in terms of interfering with the good life.*

*In the 1990s, there was no difference between Christians and non-Christians in that general outlook. Both Christian and non-Christians were equally horrified at the notion that a bright young woman might not end up "maximizing her potential," which meant putting 40 hours a week into a cubicle. Both warned her against getting married too young, because marriage could cut short a promising career. Evangelicals, for their part, indulged in a pious fiction that the unmarried 25-year-olds in the church were all virgins, but still, everyone agreed that the proper way to treat the world is as your playground...*

*It's sad to watch my generation collapse into nihilism and fear as our bodies begin the process of dying. The men become bug men* (the Urban Dictionary defines ‘bug man’ as—‘the rootless, [lifeless](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=lifeless), metropolitan drones who have a permanent thousand-yard stare due to an existence void of any meaning other than waiting for the next iPhone.’)

*It's sad to watch my generation collapse into nihilism and fear as our bodies begin the process of dying. The men become bug men, living to consume, filling shelf after shelf with toys their adult brains can't find amusement in, because they know of nothing else to do. The women are in a panic, desperately trying to hold onto their evaporating youth, trying to prove to themselves that a woman can be just as sexy and alluring at 35 as she could at 23…*

*Now my generation is absolutely miserable, because we're reaching that age where your brain shifts modes from "consume and copulate" to "prepare your offspring for adulthood," and we don't understand that's what is actually happening. Women of my generation have been told their entire lives that loneliness is a psychological disorder, that children are parasites, and that exhausting yourself for 40 hours a week at work is the meaning of life. It turns out that continuing to live as though you were a teenager does not in fact bequeath eternal youth…*

*For my generation, there is not really a path back out. All the social institutions of this country have been detonated in the quest for money and self, or via the hysterical condemnation of every kind of organic social relation as "sexist" or "racist."*

*In the cities, nobody knows anybody. Professional associations and social clubs are borderline nonexistent. Nobody knows or cares about anyone, and nobody knows how to start. It's so sick and twisted that my generation uses the word "community" to refer to people who buy the same consumer products—like going to see a movie means you're part of the "Star Wars community." Even churches have been consolidated into massive theme parks where anonymous masses of people go to be entertained…*

*Millennials need to accept that the values inculcated in us were a load of horse crap. I don't see that happening, as we're mostly upset that we can't live the idyllic lives of self-indulgence the Boomers promised us* (parents of Millennials). *Even suggesting that divorce should be harder, marriage should be younger, and women were built to be mothers, not office drones, causes the average Millennial to dissolve into hysterical outrage. We're the generation that thinks having a country is racist and the most important thing about space exploration is making sure hijab-clad Muslimas are a part of it. So, we're probably not going to snap out of it. We'll be buried in Batman coffins, surrounded by our Xbox games...”*

**This is a generation crying out for help.**

In some ways, this letter reminds me of the words of Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes where he finally realized that a life lived for this life only, will only lead to frustration and futility—and the constant realization that everything in that kind of life is *“emptiness and vanity”.*

Well, that’s true if it’s a life lived *‘under the sun’* (life apart from God)—instead of a life lived ‘*in the Son*.’

You see, if we will accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior—God will place us ‘in Christ’ and seat us with Jesus in the heavenlies where we will have an eternal perspective of life.

Only that perspective of life will allow us to live for God and not for self—and lead to an ‘others’ centered life.

This is the secret to a ‘happy’ life!

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If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower, and not an earth-dweller— please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.  
  
Reach out to us [here](http://www.ccelkgrove.org/next-steps).  
Want to know more? Click [here](http://www.ccelkgrove.org/abcs).

Join Pastor Phil Ballmaier of Calvary Chapel Elk Grove as he shares from the Gospel of John. Jesus is just hours from the Cross and He has vital truths He wants to share with His disciples. What would be your most important truths to share?