

True Happiness

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

10 August, 2025

Children's Talk: Happiness that Lasts

Ice cream is really good, right? When you are given ice cream you eat it, and enjoy it, but then it's gone. If you want to enjoy ice cream again you have to wait until the next time you are given it. Now imagine someone thought to themselves, "hmmm, I really want to enjoy this ice cream forever. So every time someone gives me ice cream I'm going to put some of it in a box and then I'll never run out!" Would that plan work? No, because the ice cream would just melt, it doesn't last.

It is obvious that that kind of plan won't work for ice cream. But will it work for other things? Maybe if you have enough video games you'll never get bored of them. Maybe if you have money you'll never have to ask for something from your parents. Maybe if you have enough toys you'll never have to share. There are lots of things that we try to save up until we never grow tired of them or run out. But actually, all the things I just listed are like the ice cream: they don't last forever. The games become lame compared to the newest ones. Your money is spent. You grow tired of your toys.

Is there anything that you can save up and continue to enjoy forever, that you'll never run out of? Jesus says that there is. He says it in terms of treasure: there are some treasures that will not last, but there is another kind of treasure that lasts forever:

Do not treasure up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but treasure up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

If all someone cares up is gold and fine cloths, they will be disappointed, because it will eventually break down. But heavenly treasure lasts forever. If heavenly treasure

is what you care most about, no one can take that from you. So what do you think heavenly treasure is? How do you store up heavenly treasure?

Caring about games and money and toys is fine. But we have to remember that it will never make us happy forever. The things we need to care most about are the heavenly treasures that you just listed. If you focus on there things they will last in your heart for the rest of your life, and even onward in heaven. *Amen.*

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How happy do you feel when you are mourning a loss? How happy do you feel when you are desperate to figure out how to do your job with integrity? How happy do you feel when someone is attacking you brutally for doing the right thing? Probably, I would guess, not very happy. There are many things in life that are good to do but that don't make us happy. In fact, it can feel like there is a tension between what we want to do and what the Lord asks us to do, as if we have to make a choice between our own happiness and the Lord's commandments. In other words, we can be happy or we can do the right thing, but we can't have both.

Take the Sermon on the Mount as an example. This sermon is most well-known for its beautiful and comforting teachings, but if we look more closely, we also find that it is pretty daunting. Jesus basically calls us to what looks like a difficult life, fraught with challenges: He says that our righteousness must be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees, who were considered the litmus test for righteous living; He adds spiritual obligations onto the commandments, such as the one against murder: it's no longer enough to just not kill someone, we also may not kill their spirit, and so on; He asks us to take on the responsibility of being beacons of righteousness to the world, but to at the exact same time shun all praise and honour that might come with it. Even His teaching not to worry is challenging: have you ever had someone tell you to stop worrying when you were really worried about a loved one? It's terrible! So the whole Sermon on the Mount, as beautiful as it is, can also be summed up as deny yourself and look to the Lord.

That does not sound fun. Denying self sounds an awful lot like denying ourselves happiness, as if following the Lord means the death of joy. And so again,

we return to this apparent tension between our own happiness and following the Lord. I'm not trying to be a downer, just pointing out that embarking on spiritual growth is a daunting prospect; and, the Lord gets that. The Lord knows He is asking us to do something that is really hard for us to do. So at the outset He also tries to shift our perspective to see things a little differently. The Sermon on the Mount begins with a series of verses known as the beatitudes. You are probably used to hearing them as a list of blessings: "blessed are those who..." But "blessed" is not really the best word to use there. The Greek word really means "happy," but not just "happy" in the sense of being cheerful, but "happy" in a deeply spiritual way. It is the happiness of true contentment, peace, and success. So with that meaning of "happy" in mind, let's listen to how the Lord tries to shift our perspective on what it means to follow Him:

Happy are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
Happy are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.
Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.
Happy are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.
Happy are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.
Happy are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.
Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy 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)

The Lord's goal for all that follows, for His call that we be poor in spirit, that we mourn, that we make ourselves meek, that we hunger and thirst for righteousness, that we show mercy, that we become pure in heart, that we make peace with

enemies, and that we follow His commandments in spite of all persecution, is for our own happiness. In another place in the Gospel's Jesus says this simply with the words, "If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 10:10-11). Behind every command and instruction that the Lord gives us is the goal that our joy might be full.

Now it's all well and good to say that if we lead good lives it will make us miserable here but we'll get heaven as a reward after we die. There is a sort of truth in that: when we die we do leave behind the misery of the world and enter a place where our inner goodness comes forth joyfully. But note that the beatitudes did not say "happy *will be*..." but "happy *are*...." There is something of heavenly happiness that we get in the here and now when we follow the Lord, even when it appears that we will have to give up a degree of happiness in order to follow Him. The key is to see that even as one kind of happiness dies it is replaced by a truer happiness. This is what the Lord is talking about when He warns against amassing treasure on earth, and urges us to amass heavenly treasure (Matthew 6:19-21). He finishes these statements with the words, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In other words, doing good is not just an investment in our future happiness after death. Doing good is building up a treasure in our hearts.

Consider the man who has amassed wealth by scamming his customers and colleagues. He can delight in his material gains as much as he likes; and to admit his crimes and repent would mean losing a lifestyle he loves and losing everything that makes him who he is. But as long as he holds tightly on to that external pleasure, he will not know the joy of trust in his relationships; he will not know the

contentment of a life well lived; he will be unable to rest easy in a clear conscience, free from the judgment of others, knowing in his heart that if nothing else, he has nothing to feel guilty for. In short, by holding onto one form of happiness, he has cheated himself of another, and to achieve the greater happiness requires the death of the lesser. This is always the case with evil: no matter how enjoyable it feels in the moment, it eats away and damages us from within.

The only way to attain this happiness is to put aside selfishness. The teachings of the New Church explain that beforehand, as we contemplate taking this step, it is almost impossible to believe that it will lead to greater happiness:

For heavenly peace enters in when the desires that spring from self-love and love of the world are removed; for those desires take peace away, molesting a person inwardly and causing him at length to consider rest to consist in unrest and peace in molestations, because he considers delight to consist in evil desires. All the time a person is subject to these desires he cannot by any means know what peace is; indeed during all that time he believes that such peace is of no worth. (*Secrets of Heaven* §5662)

The Lord wants nothing more than to give us eternal happiness, and yet to us it seems like what He offers is of no worth. It's like a child refusing to stop eating fast food when someone is offering a delicious home-cooked meal because he cannot imagine it would be better, in spite of never having tasted it.

This idea that denying self and following the Lord leads to greater happiness is not an academic one. It has real impact on the choices we make. So many times we choose to remain stuck in our sin because we believe that to let go of it would mean the end of our happiness. But consider like this: what are you holding on to that is keeping you from receiving the happiness that the Lord is trying to give you? What are you afraid of losing? Is it enjoyment? Safety? Comfort? Friends? The ability to be yourself? The backlash of criticism that might come your way? The Lord does not say that we can avoid these things. The reason giving up sin is hard is

because it really does mean giving up something that feels good. It will hurt. It will be sad. You will mourn that you can no longer behave as you could before. If that is the only future we can see for ourselves of course we are not going to take that leap.

And that's why the Lord offers this other perspective: the truth that when we let go of the evils that we love, we will discover a joy that we have never known before. Hold fast to that truth. Don't let your natural instincts or other people or society or anyone else convince you otherwise. Know that as happiness fades from your life it will be replaced by a deeper spiritual peace, if you are willing. When you are in pain and feel like you cannot take it anymore, don't think it means you are heading the wrong direction. That heavenly joy is just around the corner. Keep going! Don't give up just as you are about to achieve success! Let the old you die. Let the Lord build you up anew, overflowing with joy. For,

Happy 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 5:11-12)

Amen.