

## Victory of the Lamb – AHA Series – Blessings in Disguise

January 29, 2017 – Pastor Bill Limmer

The Declaration of Independence includes: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. (You know that is not in the Bible right?) Some of you will know this, some of you will not know this because you are generationally challenged, meaning you have not lived that long: The 1970's the show, The Partridge Family opened with the song, "Come on get happy." In the late 1980's Bobby McPherin had a song entitled "Don't Worry be Happy." In the early 2000's Will Smith starred in a movie called the Pursuit of Happiness. Just a handful of years ago, Pharrell Williams released song called Happy. And about 40 years ago McDonalds introduced the Happy Meal. And ever since that time happy meals have been found at the shrine of the Golden Arches. Each generation looks for happiness. Everybody wants to be happy. Everybody is on a happiness quest. For many happiness is measured in moments. Experiences. It is elusive. Unsustainable? What about you? What makes you happy? Thanks for all who participated in my Facebook happiness request. And the winner is coffee! Here is a thought: Could it be that you and I have been looking for happiness in all the wrong places. Like in Packer victories, high paying jobs and bank accounts, knowledge, athletic accomplishments, awards and acknowledgements, FB likes and reactions, and Twitter followers and retweets. As you know, not even the Happy Meal always brings happiness because the happy meal can be made or broken because of that ridiculous ten cent toy inside. I know you know that is truth. And then that toy that can be so demanded on by those little people who ride in those backseat car seats lose that toy within a month, with in a day, sometimes before the restaurant on wheels, known as the family van or car even gets home.

Jesus gets that we want to be happy and more than that Jesus wants us to be blessed. Raise your hand if you think you are blessed. Raise your hand if you want to be blessed even more. Good news, Jesus wants to bless us even more. And so Jesus begins what is widely regarded as the greatest sermon ever given with 8 statements of true happiness and blessing. Those of us who have hung around at church for a long time call them the beatitudes. You ever heard of that? The word blessed means made, pronounced or considered happy, fortunate, favored, prosperous in the sight of God and his kingdom versus the kingdom of the world. And that is an AHA moment. There is a difference between what our world says will bring happiness and blessing and what God says will bring happiness and blessing. Jesus says we will be blessed by the things that upon first blush are not appealing to our human nature We might say that these are blessing in disguise. As we look at these blessings keep in mind that Jesus spoke these words to his disciples who already knew that the way to heaven is by grace through faith in Jesus. That's important to remember because so many people think that the (beatitudes) words we are studying today teach us how to be saved when they really illustrate how the saved are to be. They are blessings in disguise. They are paradoxes – like less is more. Bitter sweet. Run slower to be faster.

It was a beautiful setting at least if you like mountains and cool breezes and panoramic views. As Jesus begins saying: Matthew 5:3 **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Right away our antenna's go up because of that word poor right. The American dream is to be rich. And if we are not rich, or on the pathway to being rich, we have been blowing it, or the world is unfair at best or at worst we are losers. As if wealth were a sign of significance, goodness, or intelligence and not a gift from God. But these words are not even talking about physical wealth. They are talking about our

spiritual life. And it says blessed are the poor in spirit. That doesn't sound good spiritually either does it. But here we are, and guess what, the best of us here, whoever of us that is, is spiritually impoverished and that does bode well for the rest of us does it. You see what we have to offer our poor choice of words; our half-hearted attempts at piety; our busy schedules which push God to the fringes if not out; our judgmentalism; our secret life that is not so secret to God; our inconsistent pray life; our disdain and hateful thoughts like the ones we have when someone posts something on FB that is contrary to our political view; our self-righteousness.

What we have to offer God is the empty cup is that is ourselves. This is exemplified by the tax collector in the back corner of the Temple crying out: God, be merciful to me a sinner. Poverty of spirit is not self hate. It is not a confession that a person is ontologically insignificant, or personally without value, for that would be untrue. It is rather a confession that we are sinful, rebellious and that our moral virtues have holes all in them. We cannot fulfill God's standards ourselves. We must come to him acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy, emptying ourselves of self-righteousness, moral esteem and personal vainglory. Standing before God with our righteousness is like trying to buy the most beautiful mansion with \$100 trillion Zimbabwean banknote. It is useless. The Zimbabwean dollar has been rendered as having no value. Recognizing our spiritual poverty is a blessing in disguise because it leads us to not trust in ourselves but to trust in God. And when we find the spiritual cup of ourselves empty before God – perfect. You see if we have our cup and we have it filled with all the things we think are good we have little or no room for God. But if the cup of ourselves is empty it is available to be filled by Him with Him. And Jesus continues:

**Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.** The hunger and thirst we are talking about here is like the teenage who comes home from school who hasn't had anything to eat in like two or three hours. They are famished. They raid the refrigerator, the cupboards, the girl scouts cookies. Nothing is safe they are so hungry. Or the kind of hunger we experience when we didn't sleep well so we snoozed alarmed it until the last possible moment. We had not time for breakfast. Work was so busy we didn't have time for lunch. And now it is supper time and we are hungry. Give me something to eat. The righteousness talked about here is not some form of obsolete Victorian prudishness, or narrow minded legalism. The spiritual hunger and thirst is more than seeking spiritual maturity, real happiness, the Spirit's power, or effective witnessing skills. It is more than crisscrossing the country from one conference and speaker to another. That is all about spiritual experience and isn't bad but it is not about righteousness. What is talked about here is a hunger and thirst for righteousness that is a pattern of life and conformity to God's will. We want our life to live in harmony with God's Word because it is the revelation of God himself. We want to be righteous not simply because we fear God, but because righteousness has become the most eminently desirable thing in the world. And the result? We are filled with righteousness by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, from Adalia's baptism to our celebration of the Lord's Supper in a few minutes. It is a built in cycle of growth easy to understand. The more a we pursue conformity to God's will led by the Holy Spirit, the more attractive the goal becomes and the greater advances made. It is a blessing in disguise. Because this righteousness is not a righteousness of our own but a righteous that comes from God. God fills us with himself and that leads us to live in love as He did. Jesus goes on:

**Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.** Peacemakers. Today as we look at the news it appears that we have a lot of rights marchers and rights makers but not a lot of peace marchers or peacemakers. Sides, at best, seemingly digging in their heels, talking past

each other, listening to respond instead listening to understand, and sharpening their tongue for the next blast of someone's apparent incongruent thinking. A friend had this paraphrase of Ecc. 7:9 Control your temper for anger labels you a fool. Within the total biblical framework, the greatest peacemaker is Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Ironically, the greatest peace ever given came through the greatest violence ever doled out. With the country's leader fearful of a riot, he gave in to the people. The result is Jesus becoming poor so that we might become rich, Jesus filling us with his righteousness in exchange for our sins, Jesus bringing us peace with God in the midst of our sinful hostility and hate. The result is his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The result is the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Jesus gave the traditional Jewish greeting new meaning when he after his resurrection he said to the disciple who were locked away and safe from everybody but Jesus: Peace be with you. He makes peace between God and man by removing sin, the ground of alienation, he makes peace between and man and man by both removing sin and by bringing people into a right relationship with God said: The cross is a blessing in disguise. The good news of Jesus Christ is the greatest peacemaking message, and the Christian who shares his faith is fundamentally a peacemaker. The Christian role as peacemaker extends not only to the spreading of the gospel but to the lessening of tensions, seeking solutions, ensuring that communication is understood.

Jesus the greatest peacemaker continues: **Matthew 5:12a Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,** You understand what that means right. The pursuit of happiness is what Jesus has already accomplished for you. It's yours. Be blessed!