

# TO BE BLESSED/HAPPY/BLISSFUL

Mt 5:3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11; Dt 7:12-15; Ps 1:1-6

## I. TERMS DEFINING/DESCRIBING a STATE OF BEING (*makarioi*)

- A. Blessed: made holy; consecrated; endowed with divine favor & protection; “permanent state of felicity”
- B. Happy: feeling/showing pleasure, contentment; fortunate; often due to “happenings” to us
- C. Blissful: extremely happy, euphoric
- D. Joyous: full of happiness & joy
- E. Contented: satisfied with attaining end
- F. Peaceful: OT concern for *shalom*; at ease with world; absence of conflict
- G. Flourishing: attaining potential; realizing capacities; exercising gifts; becoming all designed to be.

## II. HISTORIC CENTRALITY OF QUEST

- A. Greek concern (*eudaemonia*), amply evident in Plato’s *Dialogues*, Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Cicero’s works
- B. Christian perspective, set forth in Augustine’s *On the Happy Life*
  - 1. “It must be something,” I remarked, “that ever remains, and is neither dependent upon fate nor subject to any mishap. For, whatever is mortal and transitory we cannot possess whenever we wish it, and as long as we wish to have it.”
  - 2. “Therefore,” I concluded, “whoever possesses God is happy.”
  - 3. “This, then, is the full satisfaction of souls, this the happy life: to recognize piously and completely the One through whom you are led to the truth, the nature of the truth you enjoy, and the bond that connects you with the supreme measure.”
- C. Boethius’s *On the Consolation of Philosophy* masterful discussion, central text for centuries & still worthwhile—as evident in Rick Kennedy’s *Winds of Santa Ana*
- D. Medieval Scholastic emphasis explained by Thomas Aquinas in *Treatise on the Happy Life*; “Nothing created has ever been able to fill the heart of man. God alone can fill it infinitely.”
- E. Ubiquitous utilitarian “greatest good (e.g. pleasure) for greatest number”—Bentham & Mill, John Rawls & Peter Singer; progressive (naturalistic/materialistic) consensus
- F. Modern discussions: J. Budziszewski’s *How or How Not to Be Happy*

## III. PARTIAL (perhaps even somewhat essential) ASPECTS (Dt 7:12-15)

- A. Personal: a primary concern for us as individuals
  - 1. Health—precious, perhaps greatest limited good; Jesus often healed; UN: “Health is Happiness”
  - 2. Wealth—minimal (how minimal?), always important; OT celebrates
  - 3. Property—one’s own place to tend, defend (evident in Abraham’s quest for “promised land” and in 2 of 10 Commandments (don’t steal & don’t covet))
  - 4. Pleasure—always good if merely a component of a true good
    - a. Physical—senses need stroking; Epicurean perspective
    - b. Mental—mind needs satisfaction
  - 5. Austerity/Self-discipline—denying pleasure (e.g. Stoics) rather pleasurable! Duty above all (Kant)
  - 6. Fame—recognition of being important, from toddler to old-timer; “It is pleasing to be pointed at with the finger and to have it said, ‘There he is.’”
  - 7. Power—ability to properly control aspects of life; Lord Acton: “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.”
  - 8. Virtue—doing right (Aristotle).
- B. Social: as social creatures we need proper relationships
  - 1. Love & Marriage—“not good to be alone;” Eros value, romance enchantment
  - 2. Family—progeny & heirs important
  - 3. Neighbors—working, socializing
  - 4. Church—fellowship of believers
  - 5. State—political entity sufficient for protection, allegiance—utopian fantasies—“ain’t no perfect world”

## IV. ULTIMATE ANSWER: ONLY GOD FULLY SATISFIES

- A. Infinite hunger for happiness only quelled by Infinite Being
  - 1. Nature implants nothing in vain—thus longing for “more” points to something beyond
  - 2. Partial satisfactions amidst all “goods” promoting happiness indicates ultimate Happiness
- B. Non-material Soul needs GOD WHO IS SPIRIT
- C. Thus “blessed” in Beatitudes primarily re ultimate rightness with God & ways whereby to attain it.