

The Beautiful Life

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[0 : 00] Let's pray before we look at this passage. Our Lord and God, we ask now that you would give us eyes to see, ears to hear, that the Word of God would not go forth void, but in power, that you would pierce our hearts, that we would be broken, poor in spirit, and rebuilt, refreshed in the light of the Gospel.

Let's pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So in October, we start our series on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation at nighttime in October on the five solas of the Reformation with a few guest preachers.

Until then, we were doing stand-alone sermons at night. Last week, Derek looked at Matthew chapter 5 verse 13, you are the salt of the earth. So I thought I would make it a little bit of a series and do the beginning of Matthew chapter 5, the Beatitudes.

The word Beatitude is not an English word, it's a Latin word, and we borrowed it to describe what's happening here in Matthew chapter 5. It's because the word Beatitude means blessed or happiness and more modern lingo, and many describe the Beatitudes, though, many commentators, as the description of the beautiful life, of the most beautiful life, and that's because beauty happens at the intersection of goodness and truth, and Jesus Christ is the truth, and He's giving us in the Beatitudes a prescription of what the good life is like.

And so when the truth talks about the good life, there you have beauty, the beautiful life, truth, goodness, and beauty. And not only that, it doesn't just tell us about the beautiful life, it points us to something meaningful actually about the Lord's Supper.

[2 : 01] And so I just want to look at three things briefly with you to unveil those two points. First, we're going to look at the Sermon on the Mount in general, that it reveals who Jesus is, and then secondly, the Beatitudes specifically, they reveal the hope for a beautiful life, and then hopefully if we have time, thirdly, the prescription for a beautiful life from the Beatitudes.

So first, the Sermon on the Mount reveals who Jesus is. If you look at verse 1, seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain and He sat down with His disciples, and His disciples came to Him. This is Him going up on a mountain in the region of Galilee, next to the Sea of Galilee, and so far in the Book of Matthew, Jesus has basically said nothing.

There's been no direct speech that's come from Jesus' mouth up to this point in the Book of Matthew, except for Him calling a couple of people's names in the last chapter.

But then all of a sudden, Matthew gives us three chapters of nothing but Jesus' words. And the four chapters that are preceding this have been preparation for this moment, and the question that's coming from the Gospel, from all the Gospels, is who is Jesus?

[3 : 19] Who is this man? The man who has yet to speak in the Gospel so far. Matthew's Gospel was likely written for a Jewish audience.

It's a first-century book written 20-plus years after Jesus had resurrected from the dead and ascended. In the very first chapter, you get a picture of Him talking to His Jewish audience, saying, Jesus Christ, He's the Son of David.

He's the Son of Adam. But even more than that, before you get to the Sermon on the Mount, there's preparation for the reader, for us the reader, to come to understand who this guy is as we prepare to listen to the Sermon on the Mount.

And there are three significant moments in the first four chapters that tell you something pretty specific about Jesus. The first one is in chapter 1, verse 20.

It says this, when Joseph and Mary had departed, and Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Rise up, take this child and his mother and go down to Egypt and remain there until I tell you.

[4 : 21] And so he rose, he took the child and his mother by night and they went to Egypt and he remained there until the death of Herod. And this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. And here's the quote, out of Egypt I called my son.

And that's a quote from Hosea chapter 1. Out of Egypt I called my son. In Hosea chapter 1, who is the son that God called out of Egypt? And the answer, of course, is from Exodus.

It's Israel. It's the nation of Israel. That's his son that God had called out of Egypt. And now Matthew is giving Jesus the same idea, the same title, the same concept. Jesus is the son that God called out of Egypt.

Do you see the point? What Matthew is saying is Jesus is the new Israel. This boy, the son of Carpenter from Nazareth, he's the new Israel.

And then in the next chapter, why Egypt? Why did they have to go down to Egypt and then come up out of Egypt? And the answer we're given in chapter 2 is because of Herod. Because a king said to all of Israel that I'm going to kill your sons, two and under, your Hebrew boys.

[5 : 32] And just like in Exodus chapter 1, when another king said, kill all the Hebrew boys, don't leave a single Hebrew boy alive that's two years old and under.

And at that stage in history, Moses was put in a basket that he might be protected from a king. And now Jesus Christ, a boy, two years and younger, is being protected from an evil king, a genocide. And so the point in Matthew 1, Jesus Christ is the new Israel. And then in Matthew chapter 2, Jesus Christ is the new and better Moses. He's reliving the life that Israel lived.

He's reliving the life that Moses lived. And then in the third, the final moment before this passage, chapter 4, as soon as he gets baptized, the spirit drives him out into the wilderness. The spirit drives him out of, he comes out of Egypt and the spirit drives him into the wilderness.

And how long is he there for? For 40 days. For 40 days. And so he's the son of the Exodus. And now he's in the wilderness just like the Israelites were.

[6 : 38] They were there for 40 years. He's there for 40 days. And what Matthew is telling us up to this point in the Sermon on the Mount is this is the better than Israel. This is the better than Moses.

This is the man who is reliving the life that Israel lived, but doing it in a way that they never could have. At every point in that instance, the Israelites grumble.

Jesus is reliving that life for them. Oftentimes the word, the kind of fancy word that gets used for what's happening here in Jesus' life is the word recapitulation. Jesus is recapitulating the life of Israel.

He's reliving it. He's going through exactly what they went through because the picture is, he's true Israel. And what that means is that he's becoming them for them. He's a substitute.

He's a substitute. That's what it's saying. He is what they can never be. He's doing what they can never do. He's their substitute. He's their mediator. He's come to represent them is the picture that Matthew is presenting.

[7 : 41] And now in Matthew chapter five, as we come to this passage, seeing the crowds, it says that he goes up onto the mountain and then he opens his mouth and he teaches.

He teaches law. He teaches ethics. He teaches what a kingdom life looks like. And in the same way that Israel came out of Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea. Another man, Moses, went up the mountain to be able to teach the Israelites what the law was.

He's doing what Moses did. He's reliving the life of Moses here. He's doing, but there's a difference. There's one major difference. And the difference is Moses went up the mountain to give Israel the law.

And the only way he could give Israel the law was by hearing the law from the mouth of God. He had to get the law from God in order to deliver the law to the people. And in this passage, Jesus goes up the mountain, he sits down and he simply opens his mouth.

He doesn't have to receive the law from God. He gives it. You see, so what do you think is this guy is a human? He is the recapitulation, the reliving of Israel and Moses and he's God.

[8 : 52] He has the authority of God, the speaker, the one who gave Moses the law at Sinai in Exodus chapter 19. Now, getting this as the identity of Jesus up to this point in the gospel is important for us because it's important for how we approach the Sermon on the Mount.

Because we are late moderns. We are people that live in the late modern era. And that means that we are people that are touched by the Enlightenment, touched by Enlightenment values, famously expressed by the French in liberty, equality, fraternity.

We are late moderns. We live in a world of democracy. And we live in a world of liberty, equality, fraternity. And when you live in that world, there's a particular idea of freedom that arises in the late modern world, that has arisen in the late modern world.

And it's this, that as long as you don't do harm to anyone else, you are totally free to live the way you want to live. It's called the harm principle.

Freedom in the modern world is defined this way at a popular level. As long as you don't do any harm to others, you are free to live the way that you want to live. Oftentimes in philosophy, this is called negative freedom.

[10:16] It's a freedom from. You're free from restraints. You have no restraints imposed on you. You're free to do what you want as long as you don't harm anybody else.

Aaron, Aaron Halt, who's a sociologist in Chicago in the mid-20th century, he put it like this. The modern mind, the modern Western mind says this, choice is a good thing in life.

It's the best thing in life. And the more of it we have, the better. But the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus, the authority coming to us and saying, this is what you are to do with your mind. This is what you are to do with your body.

And this is what you are to do with your emotions. And to late modern people with late modern sensibilities that have soaked in a definition of freedom that the modern world offers, that feels like a net closing in on us.

[11:19] It feels like restriction. It feels like limitation of the concept of freedom. And so under the modern guise of freedom, we're tempted to look at the Sermon on the Mount, to look at the law, to think of ethics, Christian ethics as restrictive.

That's something that's choking us out and closing in on us. But all I want to simply say at this point, the biblical idea of freedom, the biblical idea of living under authority, it's different from the modern world's definition of freedom.

And it's a definition of freedom we live under in the modern world that is brand new in history, that has just come upon us. Freedom is not freedom from restraint, according to the biblical idea.

Now, we already know this. Every one of us already knows this from experience. I really, I love donuts.

I've always loved donuts. When I was a kid, I used to just destroy donuts. And I wish I could all the time now. And on my birthday, in fact, my wife bought me a half dozen bacon maple donuts, especially made that literally had strips of bacon wrapped around the top of them.

[12:40] Unbelievable. And I would eat that every day. But you know that the modern definition of freedom, freedom from all restraint, freedom to do whatever you want, it doesn't even work because our own desires within us conflict with each other.

Our own desires limit our freedoms. When you're 18, if you want to eat donuts every day like I did, okay, that's fine. But when you're 30 and you go home to see your family, it starts to make a difference.

And when you're 40, there's more of a difference. And by the time you're 50, you go to the doctor because you eat maple bacon donuts all the time. And what does the doctor say? The doctor says to you, do you want to see your grandkids?

And you say, of course I want to see my grandkids. Well, then you better stop eating maple bacon donuts. And it's a silly point. But the point is that your desires constrict you, they limit you.

Sometimes they're set against one another. The desire to see your grandkids limits the way that you have to eat in life. You can't just eat the way you want to. You'll kill yourself, right? Our desires conflict with us.

[13:49] This idea of freedom doesn't work more seriously. More seriously than that. There was recently a French magazine, Lumanda, The World, a French novelist was asked this question by the interviewer, have you had the freedoms that you wanted in life?

And her answer was this, I was free until I fell in love with someone. You see, the modern notion of freedom, of being able to do whatever you feel, whatever you desire, no limits as long as you don't harm anyone else.

It's not compatible with the most basic human relationship. And that's loving another person. Loving another person demands that you give yourself up, that you lose your freedoms. There's no marriage without losing freedom, without denying self dependence, without giving up autonomy.

And that's why it's so difficult to have relationships in the modern world. While a relationship is so under constraint, because of this modern sense, there's a redefinition of freedom.

And so ultimately, the assumption of the Sermon on the Mount, the biblical idea is this, that no one in the modern sense of the term is free, because either you are enslaved by your sinful desires, you're under the authority of an evil slave master, or you're under the authority of a better master.

[15:16] And those are the only two options that the Bible presents. My family, I've said this one other time, I think, a couple of years ago, my extended family, they decided they were going to adopt a little girl from China some time ago.

And they went through the process, it was an extensive process, it's a big need in the world. There are lots of young girls, and orphanages is there, and so they wanted to do that ministry.

And they went, and they knew that they were going to get a little girl that had serious medical problems. And they didn't know what, but that's just the way things go. And they got there, and they came to pick her up.

And she needed a series of surgeries. And they came and they got her, they spent thousands upon thousands upon thousands of dollars for this little girl.

And when they got there, she hated them. She didn't want to touch them, she didn't want to be picked up by them, she ran away, she wanted to stay at the orphanage, she didn't want to get on the plane, the 15-hour journey was absolute misery, she felt like her freedoms had been taken away, like she was in a prison.

[16:36] For her, it was catastrophe, it was limitation. But look, my cousin, he's a doctor.

He could give her the only thing that she needed in all the world to live her life. The only path to freedom was to go under a different authority.

You see, true freedom, the greatest freedom, is not getting out from under authority, it's living under liberating authority. It's living under liberating authority. And what Matthew is saying is that Jesus Christ is the creator of the universe, then true freedom isn't having tons of choices, but being able to live under the authority of the creator, under the purpose that the creator has made the world to be. That's true freedom. So that's the first thing, two more things, and briefly. Secondly, the Beatitudes reveal the hope for a beautiful life.

Okay, so if you look down at verse two, Jesus opens his mouth and he teaches them saying, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[17:54] What the Beatitudes are describing is a particular type of person, and that particular type of person is a person who lives in the kingdom. It's a kingdom person who lives in the kingdom of God, where God is the king.

And so the question that's being presented to us is what kind of a person is a kingdom of God person? And the answer here begins with what commentators typically call the negative Beatitudes. And those are the first three. And the reason they're called the negative Beatitudes, if you just look at the grammar, at the words that are presented there, it says, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn and blessed are the meek.

In other words, happy, blessed is one who has poverty, poor, it's the language of poverty. It's the language of sorrow, blessed are the sorrowful.

And then thirdly, blessed are the meek. This is a peculiar Greek noun here, *prōtas*. When it's used for animals, it's used for being tamed, coming under the lion tamer.

[19:05] In other words, it means being powerless, being tamed, being shown that you have no power. And so here's the blessed life.

Poverty, sorrow, and powerlessness. Now, go be happy. That's the happy life. That's why these are called the negative Beatitudes.

What they're describing as a disposition, is a particular disposition of the heart. In order to understand what's happening here, you have to look carefully with me for just a moment at the structure, the way they're organized and what order they're organized.

And what commentators will often say is, what's happening here is that the process of faith is being described in the first four Beatitudes, the process of coming to faith.

So the first one, you must be poor in spirit. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? It means to admit that you have problems and that you don't have the solution for them.

[20:12] It means to be bankrupt. It means that you deny all sense of entitlement. It means that you don't have self-dependence or autonomy.

It's simple. It's to understand that you are full of sin. That's what it means to be poor in spirit. Now, the term in spirit is key for understanding the rest of the Beatitudes.

Something like this happens in the Lord's Prayer as well. In spirit is meant to be implied in the remainder of the Beatitudes at the end of every first clause.

So the Beatitudes are meant to be read like this. Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn in spirit, blessed are the meek in spirit, and so on and so forth.

In other words, in spirit is a controlling idea for the rest of the Beatitudes. It's letting you know that what he's talking about is something that's going on in the inside, something that's going on in the heart.

[21 : 18] So you have to be poor in spirit. Secondly, that means you must mourn, and this is not a reference to simply being sorrowful or sad all the time, but it's mourning in spirit.

What that means is that you're broken over your sin. It's specific. It's saying, blessed is the one who mourns because they are broken in spirit, who mourns over their sin.

G. K. Esterton says it like this. What the Beatitudes are saying in a nutshell, the problem of the universe is me. Or John Calvin at the opening, the very beginning of his institutes, his famous book on religion.

He says there are two conditions for being a Christian, for living a Christian life, for doing the Christian life, that you know God and that you know yourself. And when he says, when you wake up to who God is, who God really is, his perfections, his holiness, his majesty, then you wake up to who you are.

And that makes you mournful in spirit, broken, confessing, a confessing person that knows who they are. And then thirdly, blessed are those who are meek.

[22 : 30] And John Nolan, he's a commentator on this passage. He says it like this. This word here, this Greek word here means powerlessness. It means this, to go to God and yearn for a provision that is not your own, to look for hope that is outside of yourself.

And so in other words, the Beatitudes are saying that the first point of the Beatitudes is to show that there is a beautiful way to live. There is a beautiful type of person, and you can only become that person by first realizing that you aren't that person.

That's the point of the negative Beatitudes. And that's why the fourth Beatitude is there. So there's a transition from Beatitude 3 to Beatitude 4 from negative to positive.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. In other words, the only way to become blessed, the only way to become a blessed person, the person of the kingdom, is to look toward a righteousness that you don't have.

That's what the negative Beatitudes are pointing to when you get to the first positive Beatitude, to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Now, the language of hungering and thirsting is the language of desire.

[23 : 50] It's expressing what the human heart wants most. And so the question that it's asking you is, what do you want? What it's saying is it's not offering unlimited freedom, any answer to any of your desires, but it's offering a very specific, what do you want?

True hunger, true thirst for the beautiful life, for the blessed life is wanting righteousness. In other words, it's wanting God as master.

It's important to not fail to see that what this is saying, what this is calling you to, what this is calling human beings to, is to lose yourself.

It's to lose your freedom. It's to completely come under authority. It's to lose any notion of the modern idea of freedom. It's to come under total authority and it's serious.

It's big time. It's to become something you're not. It's to lose your freedoms and to come under total authority. Now, why the metaphor of food and drink here?

[25 : 05] It says hunger and thirst for righteousness. Why the metaphor for food and drink? The reason I think that it puts this in the language of hunger and thirsting for righteousness is because Matthew is picking up on a theme that's developed from the very first chapter of the Bible, from Genesis, the first story of the Bible, Genesis chapter 3 all the way through at the very beginning.

The serpent comes to Adam and Eve and offers them freedom, freedom from God, autonomy, self dependence through the concept of food.

In other words, whether you're going to obey God or be your own master depends on what you choose to eat and drink in Genesis chapter 3. Derek Kidner, one commentator, he puts it like this,

the woman, Eve, she took and she ate.

She hungered and she thirsted for a freedom she had not been given. So simple was her act, so hard was its undoing.

It destroyed the world in the moment of taking and eating. And that means a good way to know who you are.

[26 : 24] A good way to know what you truly want is to ask yourself, what do I want in the quiet spaces of life? When nobody else is around me, when I am all on my own, what is it that my heart calls for the most?

What are my desires in those moments when I'm free to act without being seen? And that tells it, what are we hunger and thirst for in that moment? That's the key, that's the clue.

The question is, how do you get desire, hunger, thirst, craving in your soul for righteousness?

That's what the Beatitude is asking us to ask.

And the answer, again, is filtered throughout the entire, by using the concept of hungering and thirsting, the concept of eating and drinking throughout the whole Bible.

Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Genesis 3 frames the blessed life in terms of food and drink, of hungering and thirsting, of wanting the good, of craving it, of being your satisfaction, your water, your food, your bread.

[27 : 33] But then it picks up on it throughout the entire Old Testament, Psalm 22. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? Isaiah 55, which we did our call to worship, come to the waters.

You who thirst, you who thirst for fulfillment, you who thirst for better life, come, eat bread, drink water. If you are truly hungry, if you are truly thirsty, come drink from the river of life.

And extends the same thing John picks up on it in the book of Revelation, quoting Isaiah 55. But then in the Gospels, in John chapter 7, Jesus turns to all the people in Galilee and says, on the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up, he cries out, if anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. I have the water, I am the river of life.

If anyone is hungry, come and eat. And of course, the ultimate fulfillment of this craving comes to us in Matthew chapter 26.

Jesus sits down, not on a mountain, but at a table. And he asks the disciples, are you hungry? Are you thirsty?

[28 : 53] Eat my body. Drink my blood. This is the blood of the covenant that's being poured out for you.

Jesus had to eat and drink, death, wrath, and blood, so that we could share the meal of the promise.

And what's happening at the meal of the promise, the communion meal, is that God is pledging himself to change you. He's promising that by his spirit he will come and he will reorient your desires.

He will make you into a person that hungers and thirsts for righteousness. By the spirit, that's why we call the Lord's Supper a means of grace. It's a space in which the spirit acts on us to change our desires.

Derek Kidner, the commentator on Genesis, he put the whole picture this way to repeat part of the quote I read before. Eve, she took an ape, so simple the act, so hard was its undoing.

[29 : 59] God tasted poverty and death, so that take and eat can now become verbs of salvation instead of verbs of death.

And that means that Jesus is the better than Israel. He's the better than Moses. He is the hope for the world. He became Israel for us so that you could come and partake of the communion meal tonight.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the gospel. We thank you for the cross. We thank you for the righteousness of Christ that is for us.

And we ask, O Lord, that as we come to the table, you would reshape our desires that we would want you more. And we ask for this in Christ's name. Amen.