

Series: The Sermon on the Mount

A Kingdom like No Other

Matthew 5:1-12

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, September 14, 2025

We, okay, guys, come on. We like community here, but not that much, okay? Like, I mean, that is just a lot of community. No, I am just kidding. Favorite fall treats, does anyone want to share? I mean, I know you do not have that to share, but you tell us. What is it? Candy corn. So good. Love a good candy corn. Apple cider donuts. Yeah, Trader Joe's just had those out this week. I saw them. I saw them at Trader Joe's. All right, what else? Someone from over here. Something. Pie. Pot pie? Pecan pie. Pecan pie. Both good? Pecan's better, for sure. For sure, pecan over pumpkin, or what did I say? Pot pie. Whew, all right, I got a head cold today, so we are going to see how this goes. All right, lots of different fall treats. I will say, they are not sponsoring us or anything, but Trader Joe's has some amazing fall snacks. Like, we went there on Friday night for a movie night, and we walked out with way too much food, and I was like, oh, fall, all the fall stuff is here, and we just could not stop putting it into our basket. So, it is a dangerous place to go this time of year, a dangerous, dangerous place to go.

All right, so speaking of fall, today, we are talking about the good life. How is that for a transition, right? I love fall. Fall is how I would answer this question: "What does it mean to live the good life?" What does it mean to live the good life? I want you to right now, actually, and I know we just spent a lot of time talking to each other, but I want you to turn to your neighbor, and I want you to tell them how you would answer this question: "What does it mean to live the good life?" Ready? Go.

All right, someone, do not share your answer. I want you to share your neighbor's answer, all right? What did your neighbor say the good life is? Anyone care to shout it out? Just say, yep, right here, what is the good life? "Somebody I am sitting next to said, 'avoid doctors and lawyers.'" Someone you are sitting next to, who happens to be your husband, said, "avoid doctors and lawyers." Love it. That is so good. All right, right here, what is the good life, J.J.? A pot of chili, all right, yeah. A pot of chili, love it. That boy loves fall, I know. All right, someone else, someone out here in the middle. Yeah, what is the good life? "Retirement." Retirement, nice. Yeah, there are a bunch of people nodding along like, yep, that is the good life, love it. All right, and then one part, yep, I see the hand. "To have choices." To have choices, okay. That was his. Yeah, you have to have choices. It was not mine. It was his. Yeah. If people did not like it, I did not say it. Yeah. Have choices. I love it. That is awesome. There are so many different answers, so what is the good life? You might have an answer that is a little silly. You might have one that is a little serious.

I want you to think about this afternoon. Let's say you go home, and you are watching the Broncos game this afternoon around two o'clock. Yep. I thought I would get more than that, but that is fine, and as you are watching the Broncos game, it goes to commercial break, and there are going to be so many different messages coming through your television screen, trying to answer this question for you, right? So, Lexus, they are going to have an advertisement that comes on. They are going to try to convince you that the whole key to living the good life is luxury, that if you can get this luxurious car, then that is your

ticket to the good life, right? Apple Computers, they are going to tell you that if you can be more creative and more connected, you need our product, and that will lead you to the good life. Bud Light, they are going to tell you, you just need a couple of buddies and some good times, and that is the good life, right? If you get a little bored with the game, because let's say the Broncos are just destroying whoever they play, and you get on social media, and you start scrolling through Instagram, they are going to tell you that the image of a good life is a curated family, where everything always goes right, or the curated house, or a life of travel and adventure. There are so many different ways that the world tries to answer this question: "What does it mean to live the good life?"

We have our own localized version of that too here in Denver. The good life in Denver is no traffic on C-470 or I-25, right? Amen. No traffic. If all the out-of-towners are not here, and you can actually get up to the ski slopes in the time that it is supposed to take you because there are not too many people on the road. Maybe you have a cabin in the mountains, and it has got a hot tub overlooking the Rocky Mountains and that is the good life, right? It is like craft beer on a Friday night and then the Broncos beating the Chiefs on a Sunday afternoon, right? And if you have both of those, yeah, that is the good life. It is our local version of the good life. Now, here is the thing. We can have those answers, and the world can tell us what it means to live the good life, but when it actually comes down to it, do any of those things actually give us what we're looking for? I think many of us even know intuitively that all of the things we can list out about what the good life is supposed to look like, feels like it is missing something, feels like it is not quite delivering what it has promised, and it does not take like a sociologist to prove that point to you. Depression is at an all-time high. Anxiety, all time high. Loneliness, division, all-time highs. Right? So, we keep receiving these messages of what is the good life, and yet we are stuck feeling like something is missing. Well, what does that have to do with our new series on the Sermon on the Mount?

I would contend with you that this question is actually the question at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount. This is Jesus sitting down with his disciples and the crowds who are following him and saying, "You have been looking for the good life. You have been looking for the life that is full of promise and purpose and peace, and you are missing it, and this seventeen-minute sermon, the greatest sermon ever written or ever given, is the answer to that question." What does it mean? Yeah, amen. What does it mean to live the good life? And so over the next ten weeks, that is going to be what we are exploring together in our small groups, or on Wednesday night, or on Saturday night, or Sunday morning. We are going to be spending ten weeks walking with Jesus, line by line, through the greatest sermon ever given, answering that question. What does it mean to live the good life?

But before we get going with that today, we have to do a little bit of background work. I don't want to just jump straight into the Sermon on the Mount, because there are very particular historical, Biblical, and political contexts that are going on in Jesus' day that is leading into this moment, where 2,000 years ago, Jesus climbs onto the side of a mountain, sits down, and begins to preach, and so we've got to unpack a little bit of what's going on behind the scenes to understand the moment that Jesus is stepping into with this sermon, but before we do that, I need to give you two things. I want to give you the reason why, and I want to give you a warning about this series.

The why for this series, why would we spend ten weeks with a sermon that was written two thousand years ago? It is like, "Paul, don't you have any better material for us? You are the one who is

supposed to come up with a sermon every week. Why are we going back two thousand years to this really ancient sermon, and why would we spend ten weeks looking at this sermon?"

Now, I have already given it to you, but the why behind this series is Jesus is trying to answer that question, "What does it mean to live the good life?" Jonathan Pennington says it this way in his book, "The Sermon on the Mount for Human Flourishing." He says, "The Sermon on the Mount is not a random collection of why sayings." Okay, this is not like your fortune cookie when you get Chinese takeout. "It is not just a bunch of different things that are smashed together. It is a carefully crafted, unified whole, intended to set forth a vision of flourishing for God's people in the kingdom of God." What he is essentially saying here is that, and I do not know if you have actually thought about it this way before, I think sometimes I have this idea of Jesus as a teacher, and He was such a master teacher that He would just show up onto a scene, and He had a teaching just ready to go, and He did not need any time to prepare. He did not need any time to craft a sermon, and what he is saying is that if you think about the historical Jesus, He was probably going into these different places, and He was working on his material. He was crafting this vision of what it would look like for his followers, for the people of God, to flourish in this world and in the kingdom of God, and so it is not just a random bunch of teachings that have been smashed together. There is a purpose. There is an intent. There is a structure. It was carefully crafted and designed by Jesus to give us a map into what it looks like to get to the place that our hearts have always longed for. It is the blueprint to build your house on a foundation, your life on a foundation that will stand up against the chaos of this world, so that is the why. That is why we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear this teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus' answer to that question of what it means to live the good life is radically different from what the world tells us, and we need a counter message, and Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, he offers that.

So that is the why, but here is the warning. The Sermon on the Mount is going to mess with you. If I preach it well, and if our team of preachers preach it well and do what Jesus is actually doing in the sermon, it is going to mess you up, and I mean that in love, and it is doing that to me as I am studying the Sermon on the Mount for the last six months. What Jesus is doing in the Sermon on the Mount is He is pushing against all of our assumptions, and if you have assumptions about how you think the world is supposed to work and what it is supposed to look like, Jesus is going to challenge those assumptions. If you have beliefs that you hold dear to your heart, but they are actually blind spots in your life, Jesus is going to point those things out to you. It is impossible to read the Sermon on the Mount and not feel conviction, if we are reading it correctly. Sometimes there is this misunderstanding of the Sermon on the Mount that it is not actually for us now, that it is just for someday when Jesus returns, and this is what the kingdom will look like, but when Jesus sits down on the side of the mountain to teach the Sermon on the Mount, He is talking to His disciples. He is saying, "This is what it looks like to follow after me. This is what it looks like to become like me. This is the ethical standard that I am placing on you. This is how I am challenging you to love your neighbors, and it challenged so many of their understandings of what it meant to follow God in the moment.

John Stott says it like this: "The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counterculture. It portrays the life of the kingdom and the lifestyle of those who submit to Jesus' rule," and what is his point here? It is that when you start to understand

what it looks like to live the lifestyle of Jesus and to submit to his rule and reign, you will start looking different than the culture around you, and so those places that you have maybe settled into comfort, the Sermon on the Mount is going to mess with those and unsettle you and make you uncomfortable. In the places that we have maybe washed our beliefs and made it a little bit more palatable to the world, Jesus is going to call us out on some of those areas. It is going to be a challenge to be in the Sermon on the Mount, and the last thing I will say to you is this, and I rarely do anything like this, is I actually want to challenge you for the next ten weeks to do everything you can to be with us on a Saturday night or a Sunday morning, because I firmly believe that this series is foundational to our church and who we want to be, and it is not because I am some gifted preacher or anything like that. It is because these words of Jesus matter, and if you feel like you have been missing something in your search for the good life, then this series is going to touch on that longing of your heart, and I believe that Jesus has the power to transform his people and those places in our lives, and so my challenge to you is that I know you are going to be sick at different points. I know that you are going to have work trips and join us online. Do everything you can to be here and to experience this teaching from Jesus, because I think it has the power to transform our hearts, our souls, our communities, and this church. So that is the challenge, okay?

All right. So that is the warning, and that is the vision of why, and this is the last thing I will say before we dive into this series, is the purpose of this series. I think a lot of times teachers come to people, and in some form or fashion, they try to flatter people to get them to listen to them. I mean, that is like every politician's goal is like, if I can just flatter these people enough, then they will get on my side, right? That is the way communication works, and what you need to understand is Jesus is not trying to flatter you with his words in this sermon. He is trying to transform you and to challenge you and to call you up and out to become more like Him and to learn what it means to live for others, and the purpose of this Sermon on the Mount is that anyone and everyone is welcome into the kingdom of God, but no one will leave unchanged. That is the challenge of the sermon, so as we dive into it, we have to understand a little bit of the context behind what Jesus was doing in the sermon.

Before the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has another sermon that He goes around preaching and giving to those who are following Him and those who are listening to Him. It is in Matthew 4:17, and it is just the story right before Jesus climbs up onto the side of a mountain to begin preaching, and this is what his message is, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." That is his whole sermon, and you are like, "Paul why can't you do one of those, like one line, that is it? That is all we need. That sounds like we can get out of here," and yeah even got some applause on that, like "Let's go," like "Just make it really simple, really clear. That is it." That is what Jesus was doing. He was trying to make it so abundantly clear what his mission was, what he was all about, what his purpose was, and what he said is that people need to repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

Now my fear is that when we hear that small sermon, other than wishing that our preachers would preach faster sermons, is that we mishear what Jesus means when He says "the kingdom of heaven," because I think that sometimes we hear this idea of kingdom of heaven, and we think about the place that we go after we die, and that what Jesus is saying in this moment is that salvation is coming, and if you repent and you believe in me, then you can go to heaven someday after you pass away, and while those things are true, that is not at all the message that Jesus is giving in this one-sentence sermon.

For the earliest followers of Jesus, for anyone in the first century who would have heard this message, they did not hear promises of one day going to heaven when you die. They heard something that was very practical, very concrete, very present, and very deeply political. When Jesus shows up on the scene, and He says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is coming near to you,” what He is saying is that God is invading the world with his kingdom now, that it is coming near now, in the present, and you have to think about the people who were in Israel at the time, where Jesus began preaching this message. I mean, they have been living under oppression and exile for centuries. Generations of followers of Yahweh have been crying out, asking for God to show up in power and in glory to set things right, to eliminate their enemies, to restore the land, to bring them back to the promised land, the place where they had always been promised that God would dwell with them, and they have not experienced that for generations. They are crying out, longing, “God, bring your kingdom near,” so when Jesus starts saying that the kingdom is coming near, what they would have heard is that God is coming near and that He is about to do what we have longed to see Him do. He is going to conquer and overthrow Caesar. He is going to usher in the good life that we have all been longing for, not someday when we die, but currently, now. We are about to experience the life that we have always longed for and always wanted to experience. It would have been like Jesus is dropping a political and theological bombshell in the ancient Near East in this moment. It had significant meaning for the people who heard it in that time and place. It was not some abstract concept. The kingdom coming near was meaning that Jesus was saying God was coming back to set things right, to bring the good life that everyone had been longing for, but Jesus is not the only one who had this belief at that time.

In fact, there were a lot of different groups of people that were proclaiming this message, “the kingdom of heaven is coming near.” Then they would have different answers for how you could experience life in the kingdom of heaven then. There are actually four different groups that were floating around during the time of Jesus. We are going to walk through each of them. Some of these groups are probably names and people that you are familiar with. You have heard of them before if you have read scripture. Even if you are not very familiar with them, you have probably heard of the Pharisees or the Sadducees. Maybe not so much the Zealots or the Essenes, but each of these different groups was walking around the same places that Jesus was going, and they were proclaiming, “the kingdom of heaven is coming,” but they were presenting a different message on how it would arrive.

So, take for instance, the Pharisees. They were approaching the people, and they were saying, “If you want to see the kingdom of heaven come to this world, if you want to experience the good life that you are looking for with Yahweh, then you need to obey, obey, obey. You need to follow all of the rules. You need to make sure that all of your moral legalism is lined up just the way it is supposed to be. If there are laws and God has said, ‘You need to do this thing,’ then you better be doing that thing, and if God has said, ‘Don’t do this thing,’ then you need to make sure that you never do that thing.” It was all about making sure if we could just get the right rules in place and have everybody follow the right rules and have this moral superiority where everybody else obeyed and did what we said, then God would fix the culture and the land and the people.

Now, we do not have any modern-day parallels to that at all, do we? I mean, there is no one that goes around thinking, “If we can just get everybody to follow the right rules and get on the same page

and do the right things and make sure they follow all of the things that we think are the things that they are supposed to follow, then that would just lead to the good life.” We see this in so many different places. Are you ready for maybe some toes to be stepped on and for Jesus to confront some areas in our culture? Because you might have people on the right, correct, who would say that in order for the good life to come, what we need to do is we just need to make sure that the Ten Commandments are back in every school classroom, and if we can just make everybody follow those rules and make sure that everybody knows those rules, then we would have the life that we are looking for. You might have people on the other side, on the left, and they might have their own set of rules. It is not about the Ten Commandments. Those are actually not helpful. Those are oppressive and mean and anti-God, if you really come to think about it. What we need is for everyone to just use the same language or the same pronouns, and if everybody could just follow the right rules about how we talk to each other and the language we use and making sure everyone follows and listens and does the exact same things and talks to people with the same amount of respect, then that would lead to the good life that we are looking for, and anyone who does not follow the rules, just kick them out. We just need to get rid of those people who will not follow our rules,” and what is the problem with that way? How is that working for us when everybody thinks they are morally superior to their neighbor, if they could just force all of their neighbors and all of their people and all of their enemies in their life to just follow the things that they believe are true? It is not producing the good life that we think it is.

The second group, the Sadducees, they were a group that they lived with this idea that if they could just compromise with Rome, then they might find the power and the good life that they are looking for. Because after all, Rome is in charge. They have the soldiers. They have the power. They have the might. They have the money, and so if we can just cozy up to the people in power and maybe pull back some of our beliefs, water down some of the things that we hold to, compromise our integrity, yes, but for the sake of more power to institute what we think needs to happen, then it is worth it. So, there was a group that had this moral integrity that they were willing to compromise, faithfulness that they were willing to compromise in order to try to see the good life happen through the people who were in power. “We are never going to be able to overthrow Rome, so let’s just join them, and yeah, we will have to go along with some of their trends and some of their beliefs and some of their things, but we do not want to upset them. We do not want to offend them, and so we will just cozy up and water down our stuff in order to have a little bit of power.” Again, no modern-day parallels, right?

Then the next group, the Zealots, and they were a fascinating group. There was actually a follower of Jesus who was called Simon the Zealot, and these were the people who believed in revolution. They were the ones, they were actually called sicario, dagger men, because what they would do is they would sneak up to Roman soldiers or Roman senators or people in power that were governors, that kind of thing, and they would knife them in the back and kill them. They thought the way to having the kingdom arrive in this world was to essentially commit the same types of atrocities. “If Rome is going to stomp on us and knock our teeth out, then we are going to stomp on them and stomp their eyes out. We are going to return fire with fire. We are going to fight violence with violence. We are going to use all the same tactics, rage, fury, anger, just to eliminate our enemies.”

We see this all over our world, don't we? I mean, even this week, as some of the different things were happening in our world in Evergreen or with Charlie Kirk, you saw different people that were saying these sorts of things. "We just need to meet violence with violence," and one of the ways you see that playing out in our culture is any time an incident like Charlie Kirk's assassination happens, is that side is so quick to blame the other side, because they are the violent ones. They are the ones that their rhetoric is too strong, and then when the other side experiences violence, then they're very quick to point the finger at their enemies and say, "No, it is their fault," right? We just keep pointing the finger back and forth saying that it is their fault, things are getting out of hand, that things are getting so violent, it is their language, it is what they do, it is what they are pushing, and so maybe it is good, maybe it is better if those people are eliminated, and then we do not have to deal with them anymore. That is the answer that I legitimately have seen people offer up this week for how to solve the world's problems.

Then the next group, the final group, the Essenes, they withdraw into bubbles, and they just pull back, because the world is too corrupt. It is too evil. There is too much violence. There are too many terrible people out there. We can't change it, so let's just withdraw and go hide out and then wait for God to fix things, and I will be honest with you, that feels really tempting some weeks, doesn't it? Like, there are plenty of weeks when we have headlines in the news where it is like it would just be awesome, what if I and my family maybe a few friends, we just got a little place up in the mountains, maybe Buena Vista area, and we just created a commune, people we like, people we want, and we just can tune out everybody else, right? Like, there's an appeal sometimes to that way of life. Each of these different groups, as Jesus was going around proclaiming this idea that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, each of them had an answer for how they thought the kingdom of heaven would come to fruition, and so they would say that we just need to follow the rules, or if we could just cozy up to those in power, if we could just revolt and cause chaos and violence against our enemies, or if we could just withdraw to the safety of the people who look like us, think like us, and act like us, each of those things are the solution to how we could experience life in God's kingdom.

Here's the thing, it is we all know people who fit into these categories probably, and the temptation, I think, if we're honest with ourselves, is to look at this list of people and to see our enemies there. It is like, oh, you know those religious people that I hate? Like, they look like they're the Pharisees. You know that political party that I can't stand? They're the Sadducees. They are the ones who cozy up to power. Oh, man, like, let's talk about homeschoolers, right? They are just withdrawing from the world, and they are not doing what they are supposed to do. They are our enemy. They just need to be in the world, and the temptation is to look at the different groups and their solutions and to try to point the finger and say, they do not have it, they are getting it wrong, and that is not the way to do it, but here is the problem with that. It is the Sermon on the Mount, as Jesus is walking through why each of these different options is wrong, He is not giving us a microscope to study the sins of our enemies or those who disagree with us. The Sermon on the Mount is a mirror, asking you to look inward, and where do you look for the good life in this world by just adopting what this world offers you? Jesus is not giving us the option to look at other people and point the finger at them and say how they are screwing things up and they are not getting it right. Jesus is calling his people to look inward, and what is fascinating is Jesus does not say that you need to follow more rules. He does not say you need to cozy up with those in power. He definitely does not say

you need to commit acts of violence against those who disagree with you, and He definitely does not say you need to withdraw. What does Jesus say? How does He say the kingdom of heaven will arrive in you? He says, repent. He says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near,” and here is the challenge with that.

You cannot force your enemy to repent. You cannot force those who disagree with you to repent. The only person that you can enable or assist in repentance is you yourself, and so what Jesus is saying is that if you want to see the good life, if you want the world to experience the life that is available to them, the kingdom life that is coming near to them, it is not about making sure that everyone else follows the right rules or does the right things or getting rid of all your enemies or withdrawing into the safety of your own compound. It is looking into your heart, evaluating where you have gone astray, and repenting.

We talked about this idea of repentance a couple of weeks ago, where we were finishing up our King of Kings series, and we talked about this idea of repentance, that sometimes we get this idea that repentance is like saying sorry for your sins, or feeling guilt or shame for doing something wrong, but it actually misses the heart of what true repentance is. True repentance is walking one way, and then suddenly your perspective, your reality, your understanding of how the world works and what is good and what is wrong shifts, and you have to turn around, and you have to make a decision to go a different way. So, when Jesus shows up on the scene, and He says, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near,” He is not saying feel guilty about the bad things you have done or you have this sin that you need to work out, although those are part of the gospel. What He is saying is reality is changing, that I am drawing near. The Kingdom of Heaven is breaking in now. You need to stop chasing after the ways of this world that you think are getting you to the place that you want and turn around, because I am making something else happen in this world, that in me, the kingdom of heaven is arriving, and nothing is going to be the same again, so turn around and go back a different way.”

It is like let’s say you’re driving I-70, and you’re trying to get to the ski lift, and you are just cruising, trying to get to the weekend away in the mountains where you can just ski and have a good time, and suddenly, as you are coming up over I-70, you see the mountains, you also see a sign that says, “Turn around. There is an avalanche ahead. Road closed.” Now, if you see that sign, and you just keep driving down the road shouting like, “Freedom!” Like Braveheart, just trying to get to where you want to go, is that wise or is that foolish? Probably foolish, right? It seems like they are trying to tell you that, “Hey, I know you were looking for a good weekend in the mountains, but reality has changed. The road has been washed out. You should probably turn around and go a different way.” Now, some of you are probably sitting there like, I don’t know, man, I might just try to make it through and see if I can get there. I get that, you want your thing, but spiritually, if Jesus is saying that reality is shifting and changing and that you need to experience the life of the kingdom through repentance, through turning around, through changing your direction, because reality is changing.

The question for us as we enter into this series on the Sermon on the Mount is where in your life have you been just cruising along, looking for the good life, looking for the thing that you hope to experience in your life, and Jesus’ words are that flashing light that says you need to turn around, because reality is changing, and I am doing something different in the world, and all of the places where you thought you were going to experience the kingdom life and the good life that this world is offering up to you, they are actually leading you down a path of destruction, and it will not produce the life that you

want? So, turn around and follow after me. That is the message behind the Sermon on the Mount, because if we are honest with ourselves, some of us like to cling to the rules. Some of us compromise to keep influence. Some of us get angry and lash out at those who disagree with us, and some of us have retreated into safe bubbles, but Jesus calls us to something different. He says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Now, I want you to think back to this last week, and I want you to think of all the different solutions people offered for how the world is broken and how to fix it, and I think if you took a moment to reflect on what you heard on the different news channels or from the different social media people, you would hear a lot of answers that sound like the Pharisees or the Sadducees or the Zealots or the Essenes, but how many of us heard the message that we need to repent, that the way to actually seeing the world come to wholeness does not start with any of those solutions, but with us ourselves? The problem is Jesus does not allow us to point out the flaws in our enemies. He says we need to look at our own hearts, and that is so much more difficult. That is the challenge of the Sermon on the Mount. It is that it is a mirror, and we do not always like what we see in the mirror, but Jesus is not trying to flatter you. He is trying to transform you, and sometimes that means looking at the places that we might rather not look at.

I do not know about you, but I am so tired of hearing the solutions that this world offers. I just had to turn off the social platforms and the news this week, because it was the same thing over and over and over and over again. It is the same thing we have been saying since the last school shooting and since the last political opponent was assassinated. It is the same solutions, and I am tired of the world’s solutions, because they are not working. They are not working, so what would it look like for the church for you and for me to step into this countercultural place where we don’t offer the same solutions? We offer repentance of our own hearts, where we begin to look and act like Jesus, and that that is the first step to experiencing the good life and the life that we’ve always longed for, and the life that our hearts are crying out for, and the life that this world is desperate for begins with repentance.

Jesus is flipping all of these paradigms upside down, and He is changing the conversation, and I think people that were following Jesus in his day, they were tired of the solutions of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Zealots, and the Essenes too, just like you and me, and they were saying, “This is not working. This has not produced what we want, so what is the answer?” and you see that in all of the people who are following after Jesus, all of the people who are drawn to Him and his message. The last thing that we are told before Jesus goes up and sits on the side of a mountain is this: “Jesus went through Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about Him spread all over Syria, and people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and He healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed Him.” What is Matthew saying? He is saying everyone wanted to hear this message that Jesus was proclaiming. He was proclaiming the message of the kingdom of heaven, that the kingdom of heaven is coming, and then He backed that up by healing and making whole the world around him, and people were desperate for that, and so they followed Him to no end, and the people who were following Him were the broken, the outcast, the marginalized, the people who were told that they had been cursed by God because they were sick or paralyzed or in need of healing, the people who were

experiencing depression mentally and spiritually, the people who were longing for something different. Those are the people that follow Jesus, and what is fascinating about Jesus is to that group of people, to his disciples and this group of outcasts, Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount, and the first word out of his lips, you know it, is “blessed,” is that the people are blessed, that group of people.

Now we have this misunderstanding about that word, and this is the last thing I will say, and then we are going to close. “Blessed” in Hebrew, there are two different ways of understanding “blessed.” One word means God’s active favor to bestow life in abundance and prosperity, so a way to think about that is if you are looking at someone, and you say, “I hope God blesses that person. I hope God makes their life better,” you are praying for that first word of blessing. God show up and do the miraculous and make things better in their life, so me, as a Cowboys fan, right? You might be looking at me and saying like, “God, I just hope you bless Paul. That is the only way he could be happy in his relationship with the Cowboys. You need to show up, and you need to do something, because no one else is going to ever solve that problem,” right? That is that idea of blessed.

The second way of “blessed” is this, a state of flourishing, the good life, enviable well-being. That is like me looking at you Broncos fans, and seeing, oh man, like Mile High Stadium on a Sunday afternoon, two o’clock, it is that cool, crisp fall air, 65 degrees. You look at the scoreboard, and it is 37 to five, you are beating the Chiefs, and I look at that, and I think, “Man, that is the good life. I want some of that for me,” right? You see the two, the difference? One is God showing up and doing something for those people, and the other is they are just experiencing the abundance and blessing of the life that is available to them. Now, which do you think Jesus uses when He begins talking about the Beatitudes, when He begins preaching that the downtrodden, the outcast, the marginalized, the cursed are blessed? It is the second one, and I think what we often assume when we read the Beatitudes is that Jesus is saying, “Oh, don’t worry, life is hard now, but someday God will bless you.” That is not what He is saying at all. What He is saying to the poor in spirit, to the meek, to those who are thirsting after righteousness, to the pure in heart, to the peacemakers, is that you may not realize that life may be hard for you, but you are actually living the good life, that you are actually experiencing life in the kingdom of God, a totally different meaning

So, to close our time today, I want to actually invite you to stand, and we are going to read together the Beatitudes that Jesus said. We are actually going to finish this sermon on the Sermon on the Mount by reading the Beatitudes, and in light of everything that we have talked about, I want you to hear Jesus’ words in a new light, that as He stands up on the side of a mountain and looks out at his disciples, his followers, those who have been outcast and pushed aside and have been marginalized and told that they are cursed, and you may feel the heaviness and the weariness of this world today. You may count yourself among the mourning or the poor in spirit today. I want you to imagine sitting with Jesus on the side of the hill in the heat of the day, the dust on your clothes, and the longing of your story and of your heart. I want you to hear these words from Jesus in a fresh way.

“Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up onto a mountainside, and He sat down, and his disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them, and He said, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy, and blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God, and blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets.”

41:13 minutes

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