

The First Echo

Week 1 Echoes of the Kingdom

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

To start us out, I wanted to, you know, I worked really hard on this, guys. I wanted to get us, like, set in this, like, theological the tone. Right. I wanted to give you some inspiration. So, check this out.

I love the movie bridge, especially at heart, where he's in the cave and it's echoing and he's like, hello, how are you?

How are you? Oh, that's really mature. Having everything I say. I say I'm an idiot. You're an idiot.

We had originally planned this, you know, before we went on this this, kayaking trip. I thought I was going to be in a kayak by myself. So my friend was going to be the echo. And then I realized it was going to be Tom. I'm like, well, Tom has to be the echo, right? Echoes are weird, aren't they?

Like, they're not the original sound, but they're definitely real. Like you. You hear them and immediately, you know, something made that sound right. It caused that sound. Something, made a sound, and it bounced off something, and it made an impact. So we're going to imagine in that God's kingdom works that way. Like kindness in a cruel world.

Forgiveness when revenge makes more sense. Mercy when judgment feels justified. Peace when chaos surrounds. These are echoes of the kingdom. And the sermon on the Mount. Is Jesus standing at the center of history, proclaiming his proclaiming the heart of the kingdom. He's saying, hey guys, there is a new way to live. There is a new way to love.

There is a new way to be human. And every time that we live out Jesus's words, we send echoes into the world. Not at full volume, not yet, but the world hears it. And maybe the world will ask, where did that sound come from? Well, I'm going to invite, Matt out here now. And I want you to do a little.

Come on, come on out. Come on out and I'll move my stuff. Okay, so I need you to do a little bit of imagining. First of all, we need to imagine that we are Jesus's very first disciples. Right? We've just heard the sermon on the Mount. Okay, here we are. And now I need you to stretch your mind even further, because we're going to imagine Matt, is Jesus okay?

It's not too far with stretch. It's fine. It's fine. Okay, so we're the disciples. We just heard the sermon on the Mount, and now Jesus says this.

I know it might feel like just another day in Galilee. It may look like the scene of any other teaching. Just words carried in the wind. But it's not these words.

The ones I just spoke are not just for you. They will echo these words about being poor in spirit, about hungering for righteousness, about turning the other cheek. Loving your enemies, praying in secret. Trusting your father in heaven. They will spread outward far beyond this mountain. Far beyond Judea. People will write them down. They'll memorize them. Strangers and strange lands will whisper them in candlelight.

These words will cross oceans. Confront empires. And one day they'll be red in stone. Cathedrals, in quiet prison cells, in open fields, in underground churches. These words, my words will last. Not because they're clever. Definitely not because they're popular, but because they are the heartbeat of God's kingdom. And you? Yes, you will become the first echoes when you live them out, when you forgive.

When the world demands revenge. When you choose to serve. When you could gain power. When you bless those who curse you. That's when the world starts to hear it. The sound of a different kingdom still coming, still near. And someday someone far away. In a land and time you cannot imagine will say, where did that sound come from?

And the answer will be, it started here on this hill with him and with me.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to lean in and listen to Jesus's words. Because in these words of Jesus in the sermon on the Mount, we don't hear just the kingdom, what the kingdom will be like someday. We hear what it can sound like today. Echoes of the kingdom through us. And it's kind of like tuning an old radio.

Now, if you're much younger than I am, you might not understand this, but. But one day, in order to listen to music, right, you had a tune, the radio, and you just had this knob, and all you heard was static, and you just kept tuning it until suddenly a voice broke through. That's what the sermon on the Mount is like.

Jesus is broadcasting on a frequency of the Kingdom, and most people are not tuned into this. But for those who are, hear a voice that cuts through the noise of the world and it shows them a better way to live. And then once you're tuned in to that frequency, you begin to live differently and your whole life becomes an echo.

The sermon on the Mount didn't all just happen at once. Rather, it was Jesus's most important words. And there's a lot of clues and evidence we have to support this, including some other teachings that we have in some of the other gospels, like Luke's account of Jesus's sermon on the plane. But for this series, we're going to focus on, Matthew's recording of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.

So this is Matthew, chapters five through seven. We're not going to hit everything over the sermon series, but I invite you to read Matthew five through seven, maybe multiple times over the course of the next few weeks. But today we're going to start at the very beginning. And it's actually the humblest place that we could start the Beatitudes.

So Matthew chapter five, starting with verse one and two, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to the mountain. And after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak. And he taught them, saying. Now just pause for one second, because these are really important words for us to understand. Jesus sitting down is an important thing for us to know, because that's what rabbis did in the ancient world.

When they were seriously teaching. Then other translations say that he opened his mouth and taught them. This isn't just a fancy way for us to say, he said. But rather, again, it's emphasizes that this is the utmost importance. And then Jesus goes on to give this series of blessings. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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 receive mercy. Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I chose the NIV version of this passage today, probably, because it's probably the most familiar for us. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. It sounds lovely and poetic, but is this how life actually works? I read this and I wonder, like, did Jesus get this wrong? Because if we're honest, some people mourn their entire lives and never feel comforted.

Some people hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice and die still longing for it. And the meek and the humble and the peacemakers inheriting the earth. Usually they're just pushed aside. So let's talk about what this word blessed actually means. I read an article recently about someone who didn't grow up in the church, but she had heard this word blessed used, and she thought it meant something like holy or favored.

Kind of like a spiritual stamp of approval. Or maybe just lucky, right? Just we use it as, oh, I'm so lucky. I'm so blessed. And so she started researching this book on unhappiness, and she started digging into the original languages of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek. And she

found something that surprised her. Then she discovered or discovered that the word we translate as blessed means happy.

Happy are those who mourn. Happy are those who are poor in spirit. Some translations, even use that those words instead of blessed are those. Now we use that word as people, right? We have the hashtag blessed filters on our social media, right? When we get a promotion or we go on a trip or we move into a new house or something, we are feeling grateful for, for what God has done for us.

We say, I'm hashtag blessed. But I'll tell you, I talked to a good friend this week. She called me up and she was in tears because her sister has just been diagnosed. With an aggressive cancer. And the prognosis is not good.

She has young kids at home. She's just a sweet, sweet person. But my friend and her sister, they're not posting hashtag blessed. They're not posting hashtag happy. They are mourning right now. They are grieving right now. But we consider ourselves blessed when things go our way. Now the word happy comes from the old root word hap, which means chance or luck.

And that makes sense to us, right? Our happiness depends on our circumstances. If things are going well, we're happy. If things are falling apart in our life, that happiness fades away. It's a fragile kind of thing. But the word that Jesus uses, Makarios in Greek, means something so much deeper than just happiness, the way we use it.

It's not about mood or luck or how life is going, but Makarios describes this deep sense of inner joy. It's a sense of well-being that doesn't depend on what's happening around us. It's the kind of joy that comes from knowing that we are loved by God, that we are held by God's grace, that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

So. So no matter what the diagnosis may be, no matter what bad news that we may get, we will remain held by God. Happy are those who mourn. So what is Jesus saying here? Jesus is not simply describing what people go through. He's not announcing something radical. He's not often reading a list of trace traits for us to succeed the way that we describe success.

He's proclaiming that God's kingdom operates on a totally different set of values. Author and Christian apologist G.K. Chesterton, Chesterton, once said this on first reading the sermon on the Mount, you feel that it turns everything upside down. But the second time you read it, you discover that it turns everything right side up and it's right side up, because that's how God intended the world to be.

So take this first beatitude, for example. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now there are actually two different Greek words for poor. One refers to someone who's just scraping by, barely making it, living it from living from paycheck to paycheck. But the word that Jesus uses is the other one, and it's much more extreme.

It's the word for someone who has nothing complete, destitute, no resources, no backup plan, no safety net. And in Jewish tradition, it goes even further because this word of poor carried even more layers. It started out by just being financially poor and then included people who were poor, therefore powerless, and then people who ho were poor. Therefore powerless, therefore oppressed.

And then finally described somebody who had absolutely nothing left in this world. And so they put their entire trust in God. That's what Jesus is talking about when he says poor in spirit. It's it's not about financial poverty. It's about spiritual poverty, a kind of humility that knows we can't save ourselves. It's about admitting that we're not self-sufficient and recognizing that everything good, everything lasting, comes from God.

And this beatitude, this first one, sets the tone for the entire rest of the sermon on the Mount. It's not just a list of things to do. It's a way of being. It's a transformation that happens within us, inside of us. How we see ourselves, how we relate to God, and how we live in a world that often moves in a totally different direction.

So to be poor in spirit means recognizing our spiritual need, that we can't reach God on our own, that we're completely dependent on God's grace. Then the beautiful part is this when we come to God empty handed, God meets us there with love. And that's the foundation for the entire rest of the kingdom of God. That's the foundation for what heaven looks like.

Later on in the same sermon, in the same sermon on the Mount, Jesus will tell us to do things like love our enemies and turn the other cheek and forgive others. These things are hard to do, but the only way we can do it is to rely on God's grace, not our own strength. And it starts with deep humility, the kind that says, I can't do this on my own.

God, I need you. That's why this fall here at horizons, we hope to launch a new recovery support group. And honestly, the recovery journey mirrors this first beatitude in a powerful way. Because no matter what, what someone is recovering from, whether it be an addiction from alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, overeating, even anxiety or unhealthy patterns of chasing the American dream or, or even you can think about grief in this way.

The three first steps of the recovery program are the same. In step one is admitting that I'm powerless, that my life has become unmanageable. That's the first step. The second step is believing that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity. And then step three of the recovery process is making a decision to turn my will and my life over to God.

As I understand God that's poor in spirit, in action. It's the moment we let go of trying to fix ourselves and open our hands, and receive only from what God can give. Now, some of the blessings in the Beatitudes Jesus talks about, or are things that we can intentionally practice. We can try to show mercy and be humble and, work for peace.

We can try to do things more like this, but other things that Jesus mentioned, or being poor in spirit and mourning and grieving. These moments often find us in the hardest parts of life, but every one of the Beatitudes, every one of the blessings, points us to the same truth that the kingdom of God isn't for the strong.

It's not for those who have everything all, all together. It's not for the self-reliant, but rather it's for the humble, the broken, the open hearted. It's for those who know they need God. That's who heaven is for. So I want to read you the next line of G.K. Chesterton quote. He says, first, on first reading the sermon on the Mount, you feel that it turns everything upside down.

But the second time you read it, you discover that it turns everything right side up. Then he says this the first time you read it, you feel that it is impossible. The second time you feel that nothing else is possible. So if you are feeling worn out, or you are feeling like you're trying to do it all on your own, this is your invitation to stop striving and start surrendering.

Jesus said, blessed are the poor in spirit. Not blessed are the ones who have it all together, but blessed are the ones who know they need God. That's where the kingdom of heaven begins. Now I will admit that I have this fear and I really struggled with this message I had to. We had a picnic last week. I had two weeks to put this message together and I kept talking to Tom.

I'm like, Tom, like, I just, I don't know, there's something missing in my sermon. I and I realized it is this fear that I have and I fear that that that that we that we will hear Jesus's words today and we'll say, oh, those are great words. Those are lovely words. But I fear that we will never surrender.

I fear that for us, for fear as a collective people, I fear that for myself I fear will I change when I walk out of here? After hearing Jesus's words of what? What it means to inherit the kingdom of heaven? Are we really going to let Jesus's words, the sermon on the Mount, the heart of what he's trying to teach us, just slip us by?

So I have a big prayer for us over the next several weeks, as we dig into more words of Jesus that we will start acting like people who need God in every aspect of our lives.