

The Good Life - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Please take a seat. Well, today we're beginning a new series. And as we do, we come to the greatest sermon ever preached.

Just be clear, it's not going to be mine. It's Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We're only spending the next number of weeks working our way through what Jesus has to say in these great verses.

So why don't we pray again that God would help us to hear what he has to say. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for his willingness to go to the cross for us to die the death that we deserve so that we can be forgiven and put right with you.

And Father, we thank you that he rose again, that we might have new life. And we thank you, Father, that his words are recorded for us in this text. And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to have ears to hear and hearts that will put into practice the things we learn.

[1 : 03] And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I have a question for you, and it is this. What would living the good life look like for you?

So you've got to picture it. What would the good life look like for you? I wonder what you'd say.

Today, perhaps it would be sitting under an air conditioner or something like that.

For my son, however, he was lying back on a couch watching Star Wars. I think I've got a picture of him. Here he is. He's got his head behind his head, ice block in the other hand, watching Star Wars, the fan beside him, wearing his Collingwood shirt.

And most importantly, his sisters are nowhere to be seen. In fact, when he was like this, he actually said, oh, this is the good life. Well, for one parent, they said the good life was the kids sleeping through the night in their own bed, being able to wipe their own bottom and not fight with their siblings and not cry when they're told to eat their vegetables.

That was the good life for them. For an older person, the good life might involve, you know, doing a crossword on the morning and getting all the answers out. Then perhaps going out for a Devon's UT and, you know, perhaps visiting the doctor's surgery and being able to walk straight in without waiting.

[2 : 25] And then being told that your health is actually improving and now you need less pills rather than more. That might be the good life. Of course, society in general, the good or blessed life seems to revolve around having money and material possessions, living in a good location with a good amount of money, going on good holidays, enjoying good food and the like.

But as we come to Jesus's words at the beginning of this sermon, he says something rather different about the blessed life or the good life. But before we get to what he says, I want to do two things.

And they're points one and two on your outline. First, I want to show you the big picture of the sermon, the story so far. And then second, I want to show you the structure of these Beatitudes. And then we'll look at a few of them in detail. So we're kind of going from big and narrowing down as we go along. Now, we're not going to get through this text today, which is why the sermon is called The Good Life Part One.

So next week will be part two. But first, let me put it into context, which is point one in our outline. So if you've got your Bibles there, it would be really helpful to have them open and pick it up at actually chapter 4, verse 23.

[3 : 40] Chapter 4, verse 23.

See, what we have here is a summary of Jesus' ministry so far. And it says that he has been going around proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.

What is this good news? Well, it actually told us back in verse 17, which we didn't read. Verse 17 says that the good news is that the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, same thing, has come near.

Now, how has it come near? Well, because Jesus, the king, is here. And he is telling people how to enter this kingdom. They are to repent, which we've heard about this morning in the children's talk, actually.

Repent and believe the good news. And then they will go from being near the kingdom to being in the kingdom. Now, we need to remember that this would have been amazing news that Jesus was preaching to the Jews of his day.

[5 : 03] You see, they'd been waiting hundreds of years for God's kingdom to be restored. They longed for the time when God's kingdom would arrive. And Jesus is saying, it's here.

The promised kingdom, the ultimate good life has come near. What's more, Jesus backed up his preaching with miracles and gave glimpses of God's kingdom. What it would be like, where there would be no more hunger and sickness or demon possession and the like.

And so his preaching combined with his miracles drew massive crowds. Do you see verse 25 of chapter 4? It says, large crowds came from all over. On the next slide is a map just to show you. So you've got Jerusalem and Judea in the south. You've got Galilee at the top. They're coming everywhere, all sides from the south, from the north, from the east, on the other side of the Jordan. People are traveling weeks, literally weeks, to see Jesus and to hear Jesus. And it's at this point that Jesus sees these large crowds coming, these would-be disciples, that he goes up on a mountainside and calls his actual disciples to teach them about what it means to live in this kingdom he has been proclaiming.

[6 : 16] And so pick it up at chapter 5, verse 1. Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them. He said, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

You see what he's doing? He's teaching his disciples what this blessed life, what this good life in the kingdom looks like. But of course the crowds are still coming, aren't they? And in fact, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in chapter 7, verse 28, we read that when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching.

In other words, while Jesus is speaking directly to his disciples, the crowds are also listening in. And so if you are visiting today and curious about, you know, how a follower of Jesus lives, then you've come on a good day, because Jesus has you in mind, just as he had the crowds listening in, in mind too.

And Jesus begins his sermon then on the mountainside, which is with these so-called Beatitudes, which is point two on your outline. The word Beatitude just comes from the Latin word for blessed, and Jesus is really talking about those who have the blessed life, the good life.

And there are two things I want you to notice about these Beatitudes. The first is the structure. So on the next slide, each Beatitude begins with a description of the blessed person and ends with a promise.

[7 : 42] So, for example, blessed are the X, because they Y. Okay? Now, the one in verse 11 is actually not a separate one. It's an extension of verse 10, about persecuted people.

So really what we have are eight Beatitudes from verses 3 to 10. But I want you to notice something as well on the structure on the slide. Do you notice that the first one and the last one have the same promise attached to it?

Do you see that? Verse 3, Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And in verse 10, Blessed are those who are persecuted, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Do you see how it's repeated at the beginning and the end? Now, what's the big deal about this?

Well, the first and last blessing kind of group the whole lot of them together as one group.

They kind of act like bookends, if you like. In other words, Jesus seems to be describing one type of person rather than eight different types of people. See, when I first read these Beatitudes, I'd go through the list and pick the one I thought was the easiest to do, and then see what kind of reward I'd get.

[8 : 50] So I'd go through the list. I like trying to keep the peace. And so, oh, blessed are the peacemakers. Yeah, I'll take that one. That means I'm a child of God. Yeah, I can live with that. Hungering for righteousness. Jesus, oh, sounds a bit too fanatical for me, so I'll just skip that one.

But it's not like that. These characteristics of the good life are a package deal, if you like. They are one group joined together by that first and last beatitude.

Jesus is talking about one type of kingdom person, not eight. And so we as Christians are to exhibit all these qualities if we are to live out the good life. That's the first thing. The second thing to notice is the tense of these promises, again on the slide.

You see, in verse 3, or the first and the last one, in verse 10, it says, there's is the kingdom. Do you notice that? Okay, what tense is that? I was never taught this at school, but you folks were.

What tense? Someone just call out. Present tense. Yeah, good. I'm going to do this a little bit through today's sermon because it's hot, all right? So, yeah, it's present tense. And what are all the ones, what's the tense of all the ones in the middle?

[9 : 55] Future tense. Yeah, that's right. Now, again, what's the point of all this? Well, I think it stops us from seeing these promises just as present or just as future.

It's actually both. They are both now, but not yet fully. Take, for example, the peacemakers of verse 9. It says, they will be called children or sons of God.

But aren't we already that now, if we believe in Jesus? Of course we are. You see, there's a now, but not yet. See, we are now the children of God if we believe in Jesus.

But we will be fully known to everyone as the children of God then when Jesus returns. For we will fully reflect the likeness of our Father and everyone will see it.

You see, both are in view, both now and not yet. Perhaps the best way to see this is to look at a few of these Beatitudes, which brings us to point three and the Beatitudes themselves. Let's have a look at the first one in verse 3.

[10 : 52] Jesus says, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now notice here the first one is about being poor in spirit.

That is, it's not about financial poverty, though those who are financially poor often find it easier to be poor in spirit as well. But being poor in spirit means having a humble attitude that recognises our sin and trusts in Jesus to save.

Now how did I get all that? Well, I got it from the Old Testament. You see, these Beatitudes, each one of them is drawn from the Old Testament. Jesus, what he says here is actually not new.

It's either a direct quote from the Old Testament or an allusion to it. What is new is the way that Jesus brings them together to describe the blessed person, the person with the good life.

And so to understand what each means, we need to look briefly back at the Old Testament. And you might remember from our first reading that it did mention the poor. It starts off like this in Isaiah 61.

[11 : 57] It says, You see, the poor here in Isaiah 61 are those in exile.

The broken hearted who mourn over Israel's sin and the judgment they are suffering. But they are also the ones who are trusting God's promises to save them and to restore the kingdom.

And the good news that Isaiah predicts is that God will send someone who's anointed by his spirit to proclaim good news to the poor. Now, this good news was that the year of God's favor is here at the year that God would bind up their broken hearts and free them from exile, forgive them and save them.

In other words, these poor in spirit are those who humbly recognize their own sin and trust in God's anointed one to save them. And in Matthew's gospel, if we'd read the earlier chapters, Jesus is anointed by the spirit at his baptism and not to make him God, of course, he already is.

But to identify him as this anointed one of Isaiah 61, who will come and preach the good news. And guess what? He does a chapter later. He comes preaching the good news of the kingdom, that it has come near.

[13 : 13] And so the poor in spirit then are those who recognize their spiritual poverty before God and trust in Jesus, God's chosen anointed one to save them. It reminds me of a line from a hymn.

I want to see if you can guess this hymn, see which hymn this comes from. The line is this. It says, nothing in my hand I bring, but simply to your cross I cling.

Anyone know that one? Rock of Ages. Someone over there, I didn't quite see it. If I had a lolly, I'd throw it that way. Yeah, Rock of Ages. But that's what it means to be poor in spirit.

Nothing in my hand I bring. I've got nothing to offer you, God, except my sin. Simply to your cross I cling for salvation. That's what it means to be poor in spirit.

That's what it means to live the good life. But why is it good? Well, because of the rest of verse 3. For Jesus says, those who are poor in spirit, well, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[14:18] They are part of God's kingdom now. With all the spiritual blessings that go with it. Of course, we are still physically in Doncaster. We still have these bodies which get sick and decay.

I hurt myself just the other day, actually. And one of my family members said, oh, you old man. It was my wife. But this is the now but not yet tension I was talking about.

We are in the kingdom now, spiritually, but not yet physically. The kingdom has come now in part, but not yet fully. Now, this does not mean what we have now is not very good.

It simply means there's much, much more to come. You see, we must not forget what we already have, though. For we belong to the kingdom now. And that comes with all sorts of amazing things. We have forgiveness of our sins, past, present, future. If we mess up, God will forgive us. If we humbly repent. That's incredibly comforting. Clean slates.

[15:23] It's a great blessing. We have the assurance for the future that no matter what happens in this life, Jesus has secured glory for us in the next life. And that glory will far outweigh anything we endure now, including hot days.

That's great assurance. And being in the kingdom now means we are already God's children, even if we're not called that by everyone else. And so God is our loving father now, which means he will never leave us nor forsake us.

But rather, God is always for us. As a father is for his earthly child. Working for our best interests. As Paul writes in Romans, if God is for us, who can be against us?

If he did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with Jesus, graciously give us all things to bring us home to heaven? We actually do have great things now. We mustn't forget how much we have. David Dula actually told me a story of a lady, not at our church, but at a different church.

[16:29] And she was rather down one day, suffering from a bit of depression, I understand. And so she decided to sit down and think about all the good things in her life to try and snap out of this kind of melancholy.

And so she started, she got a pen and paper and started to write a list. And the first thing she wrote down was child of God. And then she paused, thought about it, and then put down the pen and realised just how much she had already.

You see, being part of the kingdom now is living the good life. We just have to measure good by what God and Jesus say, rather than what the world says.

Because what the world says is good is often a lie. And then if we do that, if we measure good by what Jesus says, then we'll see just how good a life we have. If we are poor in spirit.

And so I wonder if you are here today, are you poor in spirit? Have you come humbly before God, acknowledging your own sin? And trusting in Jesus to save you?

[17:33] If you haven't, then you're not really living the good life. But if you have, then do you see, despite the horrible things we have to endure in this life, we are actually living the good life, the blessed life, says Jesus.

Well, we need to move a bit more quickly now and consider a couple of other of these beatitudes. So verse four, blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

What does it mean here to mourn? Well, this type of mourning is not just over sickness and death or in persecution and injustice, though they are right things to mourn over.

But it's also mourning over the thing that stands behind them all, namely sin. In other words, Jesus is talking about those who grieve over sin and its effects, its consequences.

It's mourning over the sinful state of affairs we see or experience. For example, do you remember the story in Genesis? I won't tell you which story. But God looked down and saw that there was wickedness and evil and the inclination of people's hearts was only evil all the time.

[18:42] And then the text says, and the Lord was grieved. Does anyone remember what story that comes from? Noah and the flood. Yep. Well done. Okay. The Lord was grieved over wickedness, over sin, you see.

That's the kind of mourning Jesus has on view. Of course, the more immediate background to this beatitude is the sinful state of Israel. It went from being the glorious kingdom under King David and King Solomon to being destroyed and the people in exile all because of sin.

And so those who mourn are those who grieve over Israel's sin and its consequences of exile, destruction. I mean, that's what the whole book of Lamentations is about in the Old Testament. You know, it's a lament, hence its name, Lamentations. Mourning, in other words, over Israel's sin and its consequences. Longing for God to bring comfort and restore those once glorious kingdom. And it's what God promised in our first reading. So come back with me to Isaiah 61 this time. It's page 744. I might do a bit of Bible flicking to try and help us keep focused.

[20 : 00] See if you can pick up the mourning and the comforting language. So chapter 61 verse 1 has already talked about the Lord's anointed proclaiming good news to the poor.

And then it continues in verse 1. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty again instead of ashes of the exile and destruction, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

You see the language of mourning and comfort there? Jesus is saying those who mourn initially are those who mourned over Israel and the exile.

And he's saying those who mourn will be comforted because Jesus is here to bring forgiveness for sin. And he's here to restore God's kingdom now in part and fully later, where there would be no more suffering, no more brokenheartedness, no more sickness or death or persecution or injustice. And that's what Jesus is talking about here. And for us, I wonder whether we still mourn over sin that we see. Whether it's sin in the world.

[21 : 30] I mean, you only have to turn on the news to see that, don't you? Or whether it's sin in our own lives. Do we grieve over that? Not literally cry perhaps, but do we grieve like God grieves?

Do we take it seriously? I was speaking with a friend of mine from an old church some time ago, back when I was his pastor. And I remember we were in the car. I was driving. He was in the passenger seat next to me.

And he was in tears, in literal tears, because he had slipped up on the weekend and he'd actually sworn in front of someone. Now, I'm not excusing him, but on the grand scheme of things, that's not that bad.

But he was in tears over it. You see, he was a guy who took sin seriously and even mourned over it in his own life. And being able to reassure him of the forgiveness we have in Jesus was a great privilege for me.

But it was an even greater comfort for him. It meant life was good again. And this helped me see something about this beatitude. That is, we'll only see how good Christ's comfort is if we understand how bad sin is.

[22 : 43] If we become blasé about sin, either in our own lives or the world, then this beatitude doesn't seem all that good, really. But if we understand how serious sin is, then this beatitude is music to our ears.

Indeed, it is living the good life. For those who mourn will find comfort, comfort from forgiveness now in our lives. And when Jesus returns, find even greater comfort in his kingdom, where there will be no more sin and no more effects of sin like death and disease and suffering.

What about verse 5? I was going to plan on a couple more, but we might make this the last one just because of the heat. Have a look at verse 5 there. He says, Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

So who are the meek? Are they physically weak and timid? People who are a bit mousy? I typed in meek into a Google search and this is what I came up. A couple of slides on.

Thanks, Tina. There it is. Okay. It's not all that exciting. There wasn't meant to be a big pause.

Anyway, when people think of meek, you know, meek and mousy and timid, you know, is that what meek means?

[24 : 00] Well, no, it doesn't. Rather, we need to look back at the Old Testament and see what it's talking about. And this time I want you to turn to Psalm 37. We'll get you to turn there.

Keep you active. Psalm 37, page 556. In verse 1, it says, Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong because like the grass, they will soon wither.

Like green plants, they will soon die away. Rather, verse 3, Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in him and he will do this. He will make your righteousness reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.

Do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath. Do not fret. It only leads to evil. For those who are evil will be destroyed.

[25 : 19] But those who hope in the Lord will inherit the earth. A little while and the wicked will be no more. Though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity.

Do you notice who the meek are in this passage? The meek are those who are not weak. No. The weak are those who are strong and have a strong faith in God.

Those who do not fret at what they see around them or what they experience around them. But those who put their hope in the Lord. For they will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity. And this would have been particularly relevant to the Jews living in Jesus' day. For the Romans were the wicked ones who had invaded their land, you see. But kingdom living is about trusting God, knowing that one day he will judge them and will give those who meekly trust him the promised heavenly land.

Of course, this is also relevant for us in our time because the wicked will still seem to prosper today, won't they? And that includes... And sometimes Christians will suffer.

[26 : 28] And that includes us. Sometimes because we are Christians, we will miss out on things in this life while the wicked will seem to get ahead. I know people in this church, in this congregation, the one before, who have suffered greatly because of non-Christian family members who have persecuted them or made life difficult for them.

Yet they continue to trust in God, clinging to Christ and his promises. They are the meek. And the promise is they will inherit the earth.

And now, in the sense that we've been raised with Christ now and seated in the heavenly realms, now in part and fully on the last day when Christ returns. You see, the meek, despite what we endure, continue to trust God wholeheartedly and look forward to the day of Christ's return.

Jesus says, Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Well, we've done pretty well. Thank you for sticking with me. I was planning to do another one, but we might leave it there and continue for part two next week.

But I do hope you've been able to see that living the good life is different to what the world says. It's not watching Star Wars on TV or having kids who never fight, though that would be nice.

[27 : 48] It's not growing old and having your health get better instead of worse, which would be brilliant if that was the case. No, it's mourning over sin and its effects. It's meekly trusting in God despite the wicked.

It's being poor in spirit because then ours is the kingdom of heaven. For then we will have comfort now in a real way and look forward to having even more comfort fully on the last day.

And so the question I want to leave you with is, will you continue to live this good life? Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for these words of Jesus.

Father, we pray that you would help us believe them. For we are told six days a week that the good life is very different to the one that Jesus just described.

So Father, help us to believe what Jesus has said. Help us to be those who are poor in spirit and cling to Christ. Help us to be those who take sin seriously and help us to be the meek who continue to trust you completely.

[29 : 01] Father, help us in these things we pray that we might continue to live the good life for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.