

The Beatitudes

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[0 : 00] Yes, that just, before we jump into this great material, start off with the practical things of life. I was going to do a talk on the Beatitudes a couple Sundays from today.

And so I had a bit of it underway and a few notions going off in a certain direction that Alexander called on Friday. So as I was telling someone earlier, I sat in a Starbucks yesterday and tried to firm up the notions.

So as this talk unfolds, you may charitably think to yourself, I wonder if this is the part where we move into the Starbucks time and it gets a bit vague and wandering.

But I hope it's not too wandering. The material is so good that even a speaker like me can't totally distort how profound a thing it is we're looking at.

It's the greatest text or to burn up someone, George Steiner talks about the greatest poetry, burns up any commentary you try to bring upon it. The commentary just at best just serves it a bit.

[1 : 06] So there we go, a bit of backdrop. And by way of an introduction, at Lent and at Easter, we're in Lent, but we're getting towards Easter now, we think about Jesus.

Always start a talk with something that no one can possibly disagree with. At Lent and Easter, we think about Jesus. Jesus dying and Jesus rising.

And this thinking, of course, is a call to participate in this what?

Well, there's various names for what we're called to participate in. If participate is the right word, we're called to look to this story. We're looking at it this morning at the earlier service, at this narrative it's often called, at this history.

If Tom Wright was here today, he'd be reminding us this is history. Don't forget, this great narrative is history. It is also at the same time, it's theology.

[2 : 18] And this is also a call to a way of life, isn't it? A way of being in the world. Lent and Easter is about everything in a sense, isn't it?

Israel's Messiah, her very meaning, her very identity in the mystery of Jesus dying and rising.

Participation is just there as we look at these great objective facts about Lent and Easter, dying and rising.

Participation is so strongly spoken of, a witness to by Paul. Paul talks about participation in the cross with a rhetoric that we come to take for granted, but it's so powerful.

Who can forget once they've read, I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. We take those words for granted, but what a rhetorician Paul was and is for the gospel.

[3 : 26] Making the gospel shine, making it memorable. I am crucified with Christ, he says. What does that mean? Nevertheless I live.

Of course, that's an ongoing theme in Paul, as I hope you're a lover of Paul in the New Testament. More broadly, you'll recall describing what apostolic ministry looks like to the confused and mixed up Corinthian church.

He says simply, you'll recall, dying and behold we live. Paul is telling the Corinthian church, there's a picture of what an apostolic ministry looks like.

They were in love with fancy teachers and people who dazzled them in many ways. But Paul says, no, an apostle is someone who dies, but behold we live.

We die, but God's grace keeps us going. Dying and behold we live. Lent is weakness. In the discussion time, you can tell me if these generalizations stand up to your good scrutiny.

[4 : 31] Lent is weakness. Easter is power. No? I hope that's generally true. Lent, weakness. Easter power.

Again, Paul describing the Lord, crucified in weakness, raised in power. Yes, Lent is weakness. Easter is power.

Lent and Easter, thinking about Jesus, and then a call to respond, to participate. A call, if you will, to recognize what's going on here and to listen to God speaking to us about who we are, what he's doing in saving us.

Now today, we want to have a look, as announced, at the Beatitudes. We'll see a connection here all along the way between Lent, Easter, and the Beatitudes.

He opened his mouth, and he taught them, is famous words that begin the Beatitudes. Here is teaching, and here is a call, a call to listen to Jesus as he speaks to us about ourselves.

[5 : 49] That little moment, just he opened his mouth. Some commentators tell you this is a kind of rabbinic formulation that says, he opened his mouth and taught them. Why say that?

Of course he opens his mouth. It means something like, here is this teacher's core teaching. Here's the real center of it all. He opened his mouth, and he taught them.

Here is, if you will, the central thing. Here is Jesus, and I hope we will see that this is the case. As we at Easter think about Jesus, and the Beatitudes, I'll sort of argue today, make this case.

It's not a big controversial thesis in any way. Here is Jesus, if you will, thinking about us. The interesting way, I think, to approach the Beatitudes.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus starts to tell his disciples who they are. I think this is who you are, says the Lord to his disciples. I'm thinking about you now.

[6 : 50] I'm going to describe you. You think about me. We, the church, thinks about Jesus at Lent and at Easter. The Beatitudes, again, here's just a focal, a little way of entry into them.

Jesus, here, is thinking about us, telling us who we are. He opened his mouth, and he taught them. Teaching says, obviously, consider this.

That's what a teacher does. A teacher opens his mouth, and her mouth, and says, consider this. In the Beatitudes, again, a theme, that I try to work at and understanding them.

In the Beatitudes, we are asked to consider who we are in the dying and rising one who teaches these Beatitudes, teaches these words of blessings.

Ethesis, this is a long introduction. We're still in the introduction. Ethesis, I don't know if you read Ethesis. Sometimes I find Ethesis boring.

[7 : 58] They sort of say, okay, let's talk about this case and that case, and what do you think? How would you live in this circumstance? But sometimes, Ethesis can say very interesting things.

Ethesis sometimes speak of the moral failure. I love this little phrase. It's a rather daunting phrase. Ethesis speak of the moral failure to attend to oneself.

The moral failure to attend to oneself. And furthermore, an ethicist like Oliver O'Donovan will associate this moral failure with the classical sin called sloth.

If we're slothful as we go through life, we're liable to commit the moral failure of not attending to ourselves.

There's a moral failure. There is a moral failure to attend to oneself, forgetting to attend to oneself. And this moral failure may become, according to Oliver O'Donovan, an ethicist that I have learned a lot from.

[9 : 14] I hope I've learned a lot from him. This moral failure may become, in my words, not his, but spiritually extreme, if you will. In the apocalyptic visions of the Old and New Testaments, writes Mr. O'Donovan, in the apocalyptic visions of the Old and New Testaments, there are those who, in their flight from self-awareness, self-awareness, cry to the hills, fall on us.

You recognize that language of Scripture. People cry out the presence of God to the mountains, to the hills, fall on us. That's a sentence worth, if I may say so, repeating.

In the apocalyptic visions of the Old and New Testaments, there are those who, in their flight from self-awareness, cry to the hills, fall on us. So understand it, what Mr. O'Donovan is telling us there, that God's presence, God's presence in judgment, is the revelation of who we are, or of who we are not, more precisely, perhaps.

And in that moment of revelation of knowing who we are, we would hide from the presence of the Lord, in whose presence it is no longer possible to hide from who you really are, as we've perhaps been in a flight from self-awareness.

This is a theme, of course, that you find throughout Scripture. In fact, it shows up first thing, if you will, in Scripture. After sin enters Eden, Adam and Eve, what did they do?

[11 : 04] They hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. They didn't want to be known by Him anymore in open fellowship. They hid from themselves.

Yeah, hid themselves from the presence. This is a theme you'll find repeated, I know you know better than I, often in the Christian tradition. One beautiful way it's been stated, it has never been stated more pungently, I would think, than by C.S. Lewis.

I don't recall where he says this, but you recall Lewis somewhere says, ah, man's search for God. Man's search for God, Lewis says, is the mouse searching for the cat.

We don't search for God. There's an industry of religious studies on secular university campuses that will put books in front of many students saying, ah, man's search for God, that's what the world's religions are all about.

Lewis wanted to take a crack at that. Man's search for God, it just doesn't happen. Cats, mouse, the mice don't search for the cat.

[12:14] We don't really want to find God. We do, Lewis could have expanded on that with some help from Calvin, I'm sure Lewis would not disagree with this for a moment, but what we search for are fake gods.

We seek out idols who give us false identities. We like that. That's religion. 99% of religion seek out idols that will give us a pleasing sense perhaps of who we are.

But it's not it's not searching for the living God. We just don't do that. We hide from God. We are often in a flight from self-awareness in the language of Professor O'Donovan.

So, this introduction is about to end. So, this morning, let us attend to ourselves, if you will.

you know, let us not hide from our Creator. Let us cease to seek out idols and let's learn to turn away from them.

[13:25] And, as the introduction ends, let this be our prayer as we continue. Lord, may you tell us this morning who we are.

Lord, tell us who we are in the Gospel. let us not flee from self-awareness anymore. Teach us who we are in this most famous introduction to your most famous of sermons, the Sermon on the Mount. May we attend to the Beatitudes, Lord, and may they teach us more about who we are and more about who you are, the one who has come to save us. Amen.

Amen. Ah, there. You've got it in front of you, so let's just look at Matthew 5, the famous opening words of Matthew 5.

Again, seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him and then these words again, which may be a kind of rabbinic formulation, saying, here's the core of what this rabbi wants to teach.

[14:32] And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others 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 so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. The Beatitudes famously beginning the famous Sermon on the Mount.

[15:42] I've come to think this past week as thinking about the Beatitudes maybe right, maybe wrong, but I tend to think, I have no authority to quote here, maybe I'm deficient in my attention to commentaries here, but I tend to think now that the first Beatitude is a kind of summarizing statement of them all.

Now that's maybe a bit of a stretch to get there, but it contains perhaps the very core sensibility that the entire Beatitudes want to evoke for us.

But that's neither here nor there, but I want to focus on the first one hoping perhaps that it does capture so much of the entire sensibility again of the Beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit again. Can you hear these kind of words too often? They have this power, they grab one's attention, forgive the cliché, it's better, they command attention.

Why don't you give them half a chance, I think. Blessed, blessed are the poor in spirit, says the Lord. Their is the kingdom of heaven.

[16:57] Blessed. And enjoying this, the Jerusalem Bible goes with happy. Wisely or unwisely, I'm still working on that one, it's growing on me.

It's a kind of saying to someone earlier, a bit of childlikeness in the word happy. Blessed, says the Lord. Happy, use both interchangeably.

Why don't translators sometimes, maybe some translations, string a few together. Blessed and happy and blissful. You'll notice on your handout, the second one is, his name will come to me, an older translator of the New Testament.

but, no, no, no, no, a modern, a modern Scotsman, a Scotsman. William Barclay, William Barclay is the second one.

Blessed, happy, happy, I like both, but, that's neither here nor there. Blessed, happy, blissful, something very good, if you will, are the poor in spirit.

[18:03] Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. I find that, again, beautiful, powerful in its own way, somehow beautiful, and at the same time, I don't think we can ignore this, at the same time, a bit enigmatic, is that the word?

Define enigmatic, in a while. A bit enigmatic. They're both compelling, they command attention, but they sort of, they take us to somewhere where we're not easily present.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, says the Lord to his disciples on the mount. Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. I wonder if they pause and just, why does he start there?

Attend to oneself, again, say the ethicist, maybe helps here. The self as poor in spirit. Do we sometimes, do you take the beatitudes and pray them?

I think maybe that's one thing we're called to do with the beatitudes. Am I Lord, am I Lord today in your presence, poor in spirit? Is that a way to quote, use the beatitudes?

[19:15] it might be a question as we're in Lent, as we head towards Easter, a question perhaps, pose questions to the beatitudes. I won't pretend, Lord, the surface is so beautiful, but I need to know more.

Was the Lord of glory, Lord, were you on the cross? Is that where you were really superbly, perfectly poor in spirit? is the Lord crucified in weakness?

Is that the final revelation of poverty of spirit? Christ crucified. Paul thought about Christ crucified all the time.

Is that where we see the final unfolding of poverty of spirit? For us, if so, for us, the Lord was poor in spirit.

at Lent, for instance, the prophets who we look to for so much information, that's not the right word, is it?

[20:20] So much meaning of the Lord's death and his resurrection. It's a prophet, like Isaiah, who tells us in at Lent we remember that it was the Lord's will to wound him.

The death of Jesus, the wounding of Jesus was intentional. It was the Lord's will to wound him. The God of Israel intended to wound the servant, the suffering servant.

It was the Lord's will to wound him. And of course, in the Christian meditation at Lent and Easter, we know that it was for us that he was wounded.

For us, he died. For us, he was wounded. Here's where I hope this is the case for us. It's been the case for me in the last little while.

Here's where thinking about the Beatitudes in the context of the whole mystery of the gospel as its scope is taken in by a little mind like mine so far along my life's way.

[21:25] I'm 69 years old now and I'm just taking baby steps and understanding it still, I know. I'm just getting there. here. We know that the Lord was, perhaps we can say he was poor in spirit.

On the cross, he almost perfected poverty of spirit. It was the Lord's will to wound him and yet we have to say, correct me if I'm wrong, I know we have clergy and smart Christians in this room.

It's kind of scary to talk to you people. I'm telling you. And yet this death, we have to say this on the basis as we look at the gospel, the whole mystery of the gospel, this death was an act of God's power.

That is something we have to take in as we look at this story of Lent and Easter, tie them in if you will with the Beatitudes. It's John's gospel that sees so deeply.

What does Jesus say in John's gospel about his life? He says, I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again.

[22 : 41] That's the voice of Jesus and John's gospel peculiarly. Not that there's any contradiction between the synoptic Jesus and the Johannine Jesus, but in John we remember that the Lord could say about his life, I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again.

John 10 verse 18, I'm not making that up. Here, again, remembering these boring ethicists, here is a call to awareness in the gospel, if you will.

I think Lent and Easter, the church's liturgies and the hymns and the poetry of it all, it strives to make us aware. Is that not the case? We try to become intensely aware of the mystery of the Lord dying and rising, being crucified with him, and yet saying, nevertheless, I live.

Here is a call, again, more specifically for gospel awareness. Paul says, as we said earlier, that he, Jesus, was crucified in weakness.

John witnesses, again, that the Lord could say, I have power to lay it down, my life. He was crucified in weakness, and yet, he lay his life down.

[24 : 07] He had power to lay it down. I just want you to put that together for me today. I've been trying to meditate on this and just trying to put it together.

He was crucified in weakness, is the witness of a mighty apostle. And a gospel writer, John's gospel says that Jesus says, I have power to lay my life down.

Is this a bit of a muddle, maybe, in the witness of the evangelist and the apostle? I would never believe it.

Am I, perhaps, what do the lawyers call it? Lawyers sometimes talk about shoveling smoke. I love that expression. Just sort of moving words around.

They don't get anywhere, but it's fancy talk. Just shoveling smoke. Or is the resolution of this, if there is a resolution to be done here, a kind of key to the Beatitudes and the good news itself?

[25 : 12] And a help, again, to pondering Lent and Easter. it's interesting to notice when you think these things through, as I do so lamely, this paradox, if paradox is the right word, Jim Packer, he was supposed to be talking today, I remember Jim, he always says he doesn't like the word paradox, he sort of just doesn't, he stacks off from paradoxes.

But this paradox about power and weakness, or a kind of dialectic, another fancy word, maybe we should use it, maybe we shouldn't. This clash of apparent opposites is noted, when you start to think about this kind of thing, this word of Paul about crucified and weakness, the word of John, that the Lord says, I have power to lay my life down.

This paradox, if that's what it is, is clearly noted by Paul. He says, again, Paul the rhetorician is always so amazing to me, I never want to take Paul for granted.

Paul says, you'll recall that the weakness of God, he says this to the Corinthian church, the weakness of God is stronger than men. We can't just take words like weakness and power from our daily habitual use of them and easily transplant them into gospel discourse.

Gospel discourse transforms what we mean by weakness and what we mean by power. The divine weakness and the divine power are apparently quite different than what we're used to.

[26 : 49] Maybe we're getting somewhere. Maybe we're not just shoveling smoke when we do this. The weakness of God, says Paul to the Corinthians. What daring rhetoric that is.

Does God have weakness in him, Paul? The weakness of God, says Paul, is stronger than men.

That's why when you go back to these amazing words, the Beatitudes, again, can you say them too often?

Blessed or happy are the poor in spirit, happy are the meek, happy are the gentle, happy blessed are those who mourn.

What words these are? The whole sensibility of the Beatitudes seems to invoke another kind of world altogether, I think. We take them for granted, and if we do, we don't grow into them enough.

They are another kind of world, another way, as we said earlier in the introduction. Beatitudes, are they not? They're an invitation to another way of being in the world. It's often said about them, surely, correctly, they turn everything upside down.

[28 : 01] No one expects that these things are really true. Lord, you're inviting me into another kind of strange world here in the Beatitudes.

Even if it is granted that these statements represent something desirable, are they, and surely Christians say amen, of course they are, the Lord teaches these things and commends them to us. Are they achievable? Is that the right word to believe about the Beatitudes? Are they achievable in any real sense? I think here it's worthwhile just pausing for a brief aside for people who are

interested in this kind of thing, but I think it's interesting generally.

There are voices in the world, and I think in our culture, they're becoming more prominent than they used to be. There are voices in the world, for sure, influential voices that contest, deeply contest, the desirability of the way of the Beatitudes.

These voices used to be muffled by the presence of Christendom, when the shadows of Christendom, the prestige of the Bible and the church was still kind of present, so he didn't want to openly attack that stronghold, but that stronghold is dissolving in our culture, quite clearly.

[29 : 28] It's not a controversial thing to say, and other voices now will be heard much more clearly. To invoke a big name from that camp would be the 19th century chap, Nietzsche, who's a very influential philosopher in our time, beneath the surface.

He surfaces in philosophical circles and other circles, and they take him very seriously. Nietzsche called the Beatitudes the most seductive lie that history has ever heard.

These words are seductive. Nietzsche feels tempted by them, but he considers them a seductive lie. The most seductive lie that history has ever heard.

Nietzsche called the Beatitudes that, but he said, no, no, Jesus. He liked to argue explicitly with Jesus in his books, you know, Nietzsche.

Sometimes unbelief is daring and can even teach us a thing or two. He took Jesus seriously in some sense. Christian theologians commend Nietzsche for his moral seriousness.

[30 : 46] But Nietzsche says, and this is another quote from him, no, no, Jesus, assert yourself. It is the arrogant that take over the earth. And he speaks for us all.

He speaks for a lot of people I've known. I remember I used to work for Reuters, a news agency, a lot of fairly sophisticated people. And I remember once, I wasn't going to share this, it just comes to mind, man, fairly sophisticated guy, and without saying this is from the Bible, or this is from anywhere from what he would have thought as the world of religion, I remember this over lunch, I just said to him, the context made it appropriate, it's the meek are going to inherit the earth.

And I'll never forget without even a moment of pondering, he laughed. I thought that was an honest response from a man of the world. What a ludicrous thing to believe that the meek will inherit the earth.

No way. No way, Jesus. You got it wrong. Assert yourself. It is the arrogant that take over the earth, Nietzsche says. And he wanted to be amongst the arrogant.

If there are gods, how could I stand not being a god, said Nietzsche. He wanted to be a god. That was his, what do you think of that self-awareness?

[32 : 13] He was in a flight from god, Nietzsche, but he was sort of self-consciously in a flight, I think. There are people, again, who contest the Beatitudes. You might find people in the church these days who might contest the Beatitudes.

I don't know. Are they, some people call them, I think there's some level of truth in this, are the Beatitudes councils of perfection, they're sometimes called.

Maybe the church, faltering badly at times, probably did believe that. Maybe monks and nuns, full-time mystics, can take on the Beatitudes, but they're not for ordinary believers.

They're set aside in a sense, in some measure, by being called councils of perfection. They may be, in fact, in a sense, councils of perfection properly understood.

Be ye, therefore, perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect, the Lord rather shockingly says to us. Be perfect. the critics, I think, at least do a kind of service here.

[33 : 24] They problematize the Beatitudes force, so we have to go back again and say, are we taking these seriously? What are the Beatitudes doing in the gospel? What are they for?

How are they taking hold of us, or are they taking hold of us in the life of the Christian, in the life of the church? they do appear, they emphasize again, perhaps the enigmatic character, I said that word earlier.

I went looking for a bit of defining of enigmatic, and there's so much, it's ridiculous, but just the enigmatic is often, say, well, enigmatic means mystifying, inexplicable, baffling, perplexing, delphic, I like that.

It's like an oracle, an oracular statement. The Cambridge Dictionary, I'm familiar with the OED, but the Cambridge Dictionary, I'm not too familiar with the Cambridge Dictionary, it says that enigmatic means just mysterious, impossible to understand completely.

Maybe the critics look at the Beatitudes and say, now listen, what do they really mean? Are you Christian serious about these words? They do seem otherworldly or strange.

[34 : 47] Again, Nietzsche would say they're crazy. He would say they're for weak people, and this is their only form of strength to get back at powerful people by trying to turn weakness into a virtue.

Blessed are the meek, happy the gentle. Wow. So, where does this leave us then? Again, the world will ignore the Beatitudes, I think, or sometimes with Nietzsche sneer at them, or is ever ready with the charge of hypocrisy?

That would be a pretty standard critique of Christians generally in the church frequently. Ah, yeah, the Beatitudes, but Christians never live up to them, so the Christians are hypocrites.

If you're a Christian and you've never been called a hypocrite, I wonder, what world have you been living in? We're all called hypocrites. We're hypocrites. That's our title.

Remember my pastor, Desmond Hunt, used to say, the great service that the church provides for the world is at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning, that was the standard time for church in the past, at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning, you know where all the hypocrites are.

[36 : 03] The church is just a wash in them. We've got the Beatitudes, we sort of say we believe in them, but do we realize, are they realized in our lives? What should be charged here, really, I'm being bold here, what really should be said about the Beatitudes, and this comes sort of, so we head towards the heart of this, if there is a heart of it, only grace, only divine grace could lead anyone to the life of the Beatitudes, I think.

The Beatitudes ask us, it's kind of a Lutheran point here, you know, Luther thought the law brings you to the point where you just say, I can't do it, and there's some truth, the whole Lutheran thing may not be totally true, but there's some truth in that, the law appalls you, I can't, I can't get there, Lord, and perhaps the Beatitudes, when we pray into them, think into them, perhaps they lead us to the point where we just say, only grace, only a divine act of grace would get me anywhere near living a life like the Beatitudes, the life the Beatitudes commend to me.

There was a St. Cyprian, 2nd century Christian, apparently he used to, when he taught ethics, the first thing he'd say to new converts or people who were inquiring about the church and its life, first thing he'd say to new converts, converts, I think this is very wise, he said, oh, the Christian way of life, get this straight now, it's impossible.

And then he'd turn and say, grace, just grace, know God's grace and live under the authority of his grace in the gospel and you'll start to make little baby steps, but first off, don't think you're going to march in and take hold and live that way.

it's impossible in a sense. After all, Jesus came into Galilee saying, the gospels tell us, repent, the kingdom of God is at hand.

[38 : 12] Now, the meek, the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of God, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus came just to teach, in a sense, this first beatitude according to this summarizing statement about the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus comes as his public ministry begins and says, repent, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. That's the chief announcement of Jesus according to the gospels.

That was his, here I am, this is what I'm about. And again, the first beatitude says to us, happy, blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom. There's got to be a connection here.

He comes to announce the kingdom, now he says to his disciples, blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom. There it is. So, now this muddle is getting us nowhere.

Remember, a lot of this, I was telling someone earlier, I worked on this in Starbucks yesterday with a 24 hours notice, so I said, I better get some help here. I need help.

[39 : 14] Look, I got a bit of a muddle of books in my place. I went looking for a bit of help here. First off, from a blessed memory, Bill D'Umbrell.

I don't know if you ever met Bill D'Umbrell. I think Bill has gone into glory now. I was very blessed in my own life by doing courses at Regent College, back just after the flood, I think it was, whenever that was.

Regent College, an Old Testament scholar speaks to the Beatitudes because, as you know, we don't have time to go into this today, it would be a good talk someday for someone to do. The Beatitudes are deeply embedded in the prophets.

If you go into Isaiah especially, you see that Jesus seems to unfold the heart of the prophetic witness in Israel in the Beatitudes.

I think that's why the last of the Beatitudes ends up saying, rejoice if you're persecuted because you're my follower because, don't forget, that's what happened to the prophets.

[40 : 23] It's a little key that the whole Beatitudes stuff, not much, but it's so profound, it's really a summation of the prophetic witness to Israel.

See especially, just read it now, see especially, if you're reading the Beatitudes, look up Isaiah 61, read them together. You see echoes all the time. Mr.

D'Umbrell, I mentioned him, writes this, like the Old Testament Torah, Torah is the heart of Israel's faith, like the Old Testament Torah, again, Mr.

D'Umbrell, Professor D'Umbrell has written, the Beatitudes, here's a wonderful, I think, deeply helpful, good thing to hear, the Beatitudes do not prescribe conditions that must be met before entering into the covenant, but conduct us into a flow of life from the grace of covenant acceptance. Bill could write complicated sentences, but that's worth just looking at. The Beatitudes are not something that you obey and they become a condition for getting into the kingdom of heaven.

[41 : 42] No, you're in God's kingdom and this is going to happen to you. That's what Jesus is teaching, according to Mr. D'Umbrell there. And it's a parallel with, he's saying that that's what the Torah did for Israel.

God just said, you're my people and this is how you'll be living. It starts with, you're mine. Jesus is not saying, live up to these things and then you'll go to heaven, you'll be in the kingdom.

He says, no, you're in the kingdom, now here's what's going to flow out of your life. You're blessed, you poor in spirit people, you gentle ones, you meek ones.

Yes, there it is. That's a good book, The Search for Order, Biblical Eschatology and Focus, Build Umbrella. We're the first hearers of the Beatitudes.

Again, you're running out of time here, but we're the first hearers of the Beatitudes. Think of people like Peter, if we can do this, I think, with some help as we look at the Beatitudes.

[42 : 48] Think of Peter, the kind of guy we know Peter was, James and John, remember those guys whose mother thought they should have the top places in the kingdom? Thomas may have been there on the hill of the Beatitudes.

Were they in any way in their lives in a flight from self-awareness? I think they probably were. They were sinners. They didn't have just a deep desire to, okay, God, show me who I am.

They wanted to hide from God in their own way as well. We all do. But on that blessed mount, they heard what again, Bill D'Umbrell calls eschatological blessings.

The Beatitudes, if we penetrate into them a bit more than is on their surface, with a bit of help, as I say, from an Old Testament scholar, a man of God, Bill D'Umbrell, says what the Lord is announcing here are eschatological blessings.

Here are free gifts, gifts that are going to unfold in very unexpected places. Places like you, the Lord is saying to his disciples on the mount.

[44 : 04] You, my disciples, the ones who deserted him, the ones who frequently show confusion, they grow very slowly as it's, oh, you of little faith, the Lord is always telling them.

But in this unexpected place, these blessings are now being conferred. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, right there in you guys, the ones who are receiving the kingdom, because Jesus is bringing it in.

The cross and the empty tomb are very unexpected places, if you will, for salvation. But that's where God worked out the mystery of salvation.

Again, I come back to Paul's amazing rhetoric. The cross and the resurrection, tell me if I'm wrong in the discussion time, the cross and the empty tomb, this is the foolishness of God.

The world doesn't think about a cross as the place where you go to find salvation. That's where you go to find, as Nietzsche would say, a guy who just didn't know what life was about.

[45 : 17] He, if you believe in meekness and lowliness, that's where you'll end up, Nietzsche would say. The arrogant inherit the earth. Guys who teach what Jesus taught, they end up on crosses.

You know, the Beatitudes are kind of turning the world upside down, aren't they? Lent, Easter, the Beatitudes, these are all, if you will, unlikely things, but the gospel is unlikely and it's at work in the world.

It's forming a church, it's forming a kingdom and that's why we're here today attending to, at this time of the year, we're attending to Lent and Easter.

The Beatitudes, I think, speak right into the heart of these things. Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of God.

God, just have a few little footnotes to add to this, because your meditation, your thoughts on Beatitudes are better than mine, I'm sure. Just, these, again, I said earlier, sort of half in humor, these are kind of notions about these divine words.

[46 : 31] I can't say anything that catches up to them. They just speak for themselves, their surface is profound, and as you try to live, pray, think into them, they become, I find, more and more profound.

I'm sure you've had that experience. Theologians, I said I was going to turn for a bit of help for getting my mind and heart, I hope, around the Beatitudes, I turn to build Umbrella, who I treasure as a teacher in the gospel.

Another voice I tend to a lot to is John Webster, is a theologian. Theologians sometimes, they sort of like, they put smelling salts underneath your nose, and you kind of go, whoops, where did that come from?

But then you realize, oh yeah, that's always been in front of me, I just needed someone to go, see, look, open your eyes. John Webster does that for me when he writes this.

Of course, Lent, the backdrop being, of course, Lent, Easter, a vision that helps us understand Lent and Easter, the Beatitudes, the mysterious teaching, it's about salvation.

[47 : 47] What else is it about if not salvation? But John Webster says this, it's a short little sentence, but it grabbed my attention the other day. The salvation of creatures is a great affair.

So far, who disagrees? I agree. The salvation of creatures is a great affair. but not the greatest.

Okay, John, you've got my attention. After all, he's got a title like Lady Margaret, Professor of Divinity at Oxford. I mean, guys like that must know what they're talking about.

The late John Webster. The salvation of creatures is a great affair, but he says not the greatest. What is the greatest?

greatest. The greatest is the majesty, which is the greatest, the greatest is the, is God's majesty and its proclamation. Our salvation is a great thing, but it's not the greatest thing, says this learned theologian.

[48 : 56] The greatest thing is it's, it's that it reveals God's power and that power is going to be promulgated throughout the creation, throughout the cosmos, Paul says in Ephesians and Colossians, doesn't he?

Our salvation is a great affair, he writes, but not the greatest, the greatest which is God's majesty and its promulgation. And he hammers home the point, as a wise theologian should do, by quoting scripture.

He saved them for his name's sake that he might make known his mighty power. Psalm 106, verse 8.

He, God saved Israel. That's a great affair. But it was to show the world his mighty power, his mighty grace, his mighty goodness, if you will.

Isn't that amazing? That our salvation is rooted in God's character. God loves you because God loves you. God loves you. Not in anything we can do, but God wants to give us.

[50 : 08] Webster goes on to quote theologians like Thomas Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards, saying, you won't really believe that God loves you until you really start getting that straight. That God's love for you is rooted in God, not in anything you can do.

A theme we hear, but you got to work at believing. God loves you because God loves in freedom. He just loves you. He's saving you. Your salvation is a great affair, but it's not the greatest thing. It's God revealing his power and his majesty to save you. Isn't that wonderful? Crucified in weakness, raised in power, happy the poor in spirit, theirs is the place of heaven's reign because God has decided in sovereign grace to save you.

He just loves you in freedom. So he goes up onto a hill, the Lord's son, and says, blessed are you. The kingdom of heaven is yours. You poor in spirit, you gentle ones, you meek ones, you merciful ones, you pure in heart ones, you peacemakers.

These things are eschatological gifts. I just give them to you. The kingdom is yours. And these things will flow out of the life of the church and the believer in time.

[51 : 29] At its end, this paragraph and then time for conversation, at its end, it's just so simple. I tried to summarize my own notes towards some thoughts about Lent, Easter, and the Beatitudes.

It's all this is. He saves us in majesty. Jesus Christ emptied himself, became poor in spirit. Did he not? Heaven's majesty is Jesus Christ. He emptied himself, Paul says in Philippians 2. In other words, he became poor in spirit, if you will.

And then he saves by dying and rising. And now we become creatures again, saved by God, revealing his majesty and making us poor in spirit, ready now for heaven's rule.

It's all so simple. It's all so simple. One of the old Scottish writers, McLeod, I can't remember his name, Duncan McLeod, just says, you know, the gospel is just God saying to you, delight in me. [52 : 52] I'm your God. You turn to God and learn to delight in him. You're saved. God just wants you to be a creature again in his presence. Because he has saved you through his son, Jesus.

Just turn to me and delight in me. I've saved you. What more do we need to hear? These things are so simple. Done such not to parade humility.

These words, they defy comment. I really have that sense. I can't catch up with poverty of spirit. Meekness, gentleness, hungering and thirsting for goodness.

Merciful, pure in heart. Persecuted for righteousness' sake. A peacemaker. These are the ways of the people in God's kingdom. These aren't conditions for entry.

They're gifts to us from the one who went up on a hill and taught his disciples. There's the heart of it all. There's an approach to something like the heart of it all. Let me say a word of prayer.

[53 : 55] And then I yearn for your good response. Lord, we thank you for that. You are our Lord and you are our teacher. We adore you, Lord, as our teacher.

You have divine things to say to us. May we be open and meek and teachable in the presence of your divine teaching. May they bring us closer and closer to yourself.

Lord, that's all we ever want to do is to be closer to you. And our God and Father, we pray in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen.