

The Good Life - Adam Smith

Matthew 5 verses 1 through 16 say, Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. 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.

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that in your word, Lord, we see not only who we should be, Lord, but who by grace through faith in Jesus, you say we can become. And so that's what I ask from you today. That you would not only teach us from your word, but you would transform our hearts, that we would put our faith, our trust, our hope in Christ, and that we would experience the power of the Spirit transforming us from who we once were to who we will forever be in your presence.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen, you may be seated. Well, what does it mean for you to live the good life? To ask it another way, what would have to be true of your life for you to honestly say, I'm living my best life today? What would you have to have? What would you be doing? What kinds of experiences would be present? Or maybe what would finally be gone? See, maybe there's something that you believe is missing in your life, something that you can't truly experience satisfaction until you attain or experience that thing.

Or maybe there's something present, but painful. It's frustrating, you're exhausted, and you're convinced that in order to experience the good life, that thing must no longer be there. Every person in every culture across every generation has wrestled with this question.

And the Jewish people in Jesus' day had an idea of what it meant for them. There was an ancient Jewish text called the Wisdom of Ben Sirach. It's not in scripture, but it was widely read in the first century and would have been in the backs of the minds of the people listening to Jesus.

I want to read a passage from the Wisdom of Ben Sirach so you can hear what he said is the blessed life. I can think of nine whom I would call blessed. And a tenth, my tongue proclaims, a man who can rejoice in his children, a man who lives to see the downfall of his foes.

Blessed is the one who lives with a sensible wife and the one who does not plow with ox and donkey together. Blessed is the one who does not sin with the tongue and the one who has not served an inferior. Blessed is the one who finds a friend and the one who speaks to attentive listeners.

How great is the one who finds wisdom, but none is superior to the one who fears the Lord. The fear of the Lord surpasses everything. To whom can we compare the one who has it? Not bad, right? Strong family, victory over enemies, social honor and influence, wisdom and faithfulness to God.

I mean, if you add homeownership, a white picket fence and a dog, you've now got the American dream. Except for speaking to attentive listeners. I know that for some of you, that is terrifying.

You do not want that. That is not your good life. What is your good life? If you're a Christian, you might call it life abundant.

The life that Christ has promised His people. If you're not religious, you might use words like fulfillment and happiness and peace and freedom. It's different language, but it's the same longing.

It's the same desire. And yet, if we're honest, the minute we start thinking about what that life would look like, we've experienced this tension in our hearts and in our minds. Because even when we're doing all of the right things, even when we're taking all the steps from the last successful self-help book we read, and we're doing all of the right things, and even though life may even look good on the outside, something still feels like it's missing.

You've got the house, you've got the job, you've got the girl, you've got the guy, you've got the family. Even if you can look at your life and say nothing is missing, you still know how easily it could all come crumbling down. Even the strongest good life is a house of cards.

Circumstances come along like the big bad wolf in a gentle breeze, and our lives can be shipwrecked in an instant. You know how fleeting happiness is. You could be having the best day of your life, and then one piece of news, one headline, one diagnosis can send your hour, your day, your year, an entire season of your life spiraling.

Some of us feel that tension, that pain quietly. Some of you are experiencing it in ways that

everyone who knows you knows what you're going through. There's got to be something more.

There's got to be something different, and it raises an uncomfortable question. What if the problem isn't simply that we just haven't attained the good life yet? Maybe you're like, hey, give me time. I'm getting there.

I'm working on it. It's going to come. It just hasn't come yet.

That's why I feel the tension. What if it's not that simple? What if the problem is that we've been seeking the wrong destination altogether? What if the problem is not our effort, but our aim, our direction in life? Because when Jesus opens his mouth to describe the blessed life, not as another philosopher, but as the king and creator of life, he says those we least expect, those that no one in society would ever call blessed, he says that's exactly who's blessed in the kingdom of God. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn. Listen, some of you feel so far from God's blessing because you feel like you have nothing to offer and you're grieving real tragedy in life. Jesus says that his eyes are on you, that he sees you and that he loves you and that you are a recipient of the blessing of God.

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst not for comfort, but for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are the persecuted.

Jesus says that these are the evidence of a life blessed by God. Notice what's missing. No one is called blessed for being impressive, for being successful, for being comfortable, or for being in control of their lives.

Everything that we instinctively associate with blessing is absent. Now I wanna move through this list to make sure that we're understanding what Jesus actually means here. He says, blessed are the poor in spirit.

Spiritually bankrupt people who know that they bring nothing to the table before God. They contribute to nothing to their standing before God in righteousness. They aren't posturing strength.

They are desperate for grace. They know how desperate they are. They are weak and they are dependent.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn people brokenhearted over the deepest tragedy in creation. Sin in themselves, sin in others, sin in the world.

And instead of just being angry about it, they are crushed by it. They grieve what sin destroys, including lives headed for hell. Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the meek. Not the weak, but the self-controlled. Those who in the midst of chaotic circumstances don't use their strength to control their circumstances, but use their strength to control themselves in the midst of all circumstances.

Blessed are the meek. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. These are people so acquainted with injustice and wrongness that what they crave more than food and drink is for God to set things right.

It sounds noble, it is noble, but it's born out of an ache. They long for righteousness because in their lives they experience none of it. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The merciful are those who surrender their right to exact payback from their enemies. They move toward the guilty with brokenness and compassion rather than punishment. They're not trying to make them pay.

Blessed are the merciful. The pure in heart. Pure is as one substance and heart is the seat of our motivations and so they are not divided.

They don't have a distracted and divided motives. They're single-minded. There's no double agenda.

They are people whose deepest desire is for God himself. Blessed are the pure in heart. The peacemakers are not people who avoid conflict or keep the peace through passivity, but step into the work of reconciliation even when it costs them.

Blessed are not the peace keepers, but the peacemakers. And the persecuted, those who are slandered, opposed and made to suffer because they belong to Jesus and live by his kingdom. Blessed are those who are persecuted.

Scott McKnight, a biblical scholar asks, at what point in the Sermon on the Mount did people start raising their eyebrows? At what point did they begin to feel uneasy and at what point did they quietly decide to walk away? Maybe you're feeling the same way. How in the world are these desirable? Now, here's the thing. We live in a very different world than the one that Jesus was originally speaking into, and yet his words still land.

In many ways, our Western civilization has been profoundly shaped by the teachings of Jesus, has been profoundly shaped by the Sermon on the Mount, and shaped specifically by these beatitudes. And so we can appreciate humility in a way that the ancient world didn't. We can admire meekness in the way that the Greeks did not.

Their good life was about rising above others and above your vulnerabilities, not controlling yourself within them, but getting a handle on them. We believe, at least in principle, that someone's value doesn't vanish just because they're needy. We can respect people who are grieving and doing the real soul work of healing.

We can admire peacemaking. We can honor sacrifice. We have categories for these things.

We have space in our minds to understand them in a way that the ancient world didn't because our world was built on the teachings of Jesus. And yet, even though we can admire them in others, we don't naturally desire them for ourselves. Because poverty of any kind is painful.

Mourning is undesirable. We would rather be angry at the brokenness and injustice in the world because anger feels powerful. But grieving, mourning is vulnerable.

It feels like weakness, and we don't like weakness. Meekness gets taken advantage of. Hungering and thirsting is not something that we seek to be.

It's something that we seek to satisfy as quickly as possible. The merciful feel like a doormat. The pure in heart sound boring and like they're missing out.

Peacemaking is uncomfortable. We'd rather keep the peace and avoid confrontation and persecution. I mean, do we really need to talk about it? Right? Suffering and being slandered falsely isn't anywhere near anyone's definition of the good life.

Again, we can admire people who live this way. Missionary biographies are inspiring. Those who die for the things that they believe in are honored.

But it's not ever something that we desire for ourselves. The same is true for all these beatitudes. We admire them when we see them in others, but we don't naturally desire them for ourselves.

I certainly don't. It's okay to feel uneasy when looking into this text. And yet Jesus says that this is the good life.

He doesn't say this is the way to life. If you live this way, someday you'll find it. He says, blessed are these people.

They will experience the future blessing of God's kingdom someday, and we'll get into that. But these are those who are currently experiencing God's blessing. He says, blessed are they.

And he's not wrong. So what are we missing? Again, at this point, it's really important that we talk about what Jesus is not doing. Okay, the beatitudes are not instructions for how to achieve the good life.

They're not steps that we need to take in order to experience the life that we want. It's not a self-help book. Jesus isn't offering us a ladder to climb.

He's holding up a mirror. The beatitudes are a revelation of who followers of Jesus are meant to be. And something happens when we look into that mirror.

We don't just see who we ought to be, but we begin to see how far we have fallen short. We

begin to realize that, yeah, I may say that I'm poor in spirit, but do I really believe that I offer nothing to God? Nothing? Even being here today and preparing a sermon, it's so tempting to be like, God, I've got it. Nothing.

I've got, I have nothing to give you. I have nothing to share with you of myself that could ever be meaningful to you. But God does.

And his word speaks through his people. I've got nothing to offer. Do you actually grieve over sin in yourself and in the world? Or is it easier to just be angry and critical of others? Are you trying feverishly to control your circumstances like a tornado in a hurricane, trying to fix the chaos by inner chaos? Or are you exercising your power to control yourself in the midst of the circumstances? How often do we hunger and thirst for security rather than righteousness? Are you merciful? Are you just saying you forgive people while cutting them out of your life and holding a grudge? Are you pure in heart, single-mindedly focused on Jesus or endlessly distracted? Do you make peace or just avoid conflict? Jesus holds up this mirror and the mirror doesn't shame us, but it does tell us the truth.

The Beatitudes show us who we are in light of who we ought to be. And here's the key. What Jesus is revealing is not just virtues that we should be living by.

He's exposing the values we're actually living for. See, virtues are principles. They're ways of behaving.

But values are destinations. Values are what we are aiming at. And you can live by all of the right principles and still end up in the wrong place if you're pursuing the wrong destination.

Let me put it to you like this. You and I could, after church, leave at the exact same time. We could pull out onto the 101 at the exact same time.

We could follow all of the same rules, the speed limits, lane designations, not following too close, resisting road rage. And we could drive for the exact same amount of time and end up in two entirely different places. Not because one of us got stuck in traffic, but because two hours north and you're in San Luis Obispo and two hours south and you're in LA.

I spent 15 years there. I know where I want to be. It's north.

Okay, I will take San Luis Obispo any day over LA. If we are headed two different directions, we can follow all of the same rules and not meet up at the end of the road. And I think that describes a lot of Christians and certainly describes seasons of my life.

You're driving morally. You're following Christian principles. You're trying to live the Beatitudes.

But if your destination of the good life looks more like the American dream than the kingdom of God, then no amount of spiritual discipline will get you where Jesus is leading. You can follow the Beatitudes as principles and still never experience the life that Jesus promised because the

Beatitudes are not designed to get you the life that you want. They're designed to reveal whether or not you actually desire a life in the kingdom of God.

And this is why discipleship feels stalled for so many people. Not because they're not sincere, not because they're not disciplined, but because they're trying to use Jesus to get to a destination that he never promised. In other words, if we're following Jesus, but still aiming for the American dream, which according to a recent article now costs \$5 million.

So good luck on that. We will always wonder why Jesus' way doesn't seem to work for us. And so the mirror looks deeper than our behavior, deeper than our participation in spiritual things.

And it reveals whether or not God and his kingdom are the things that we desire most. And if we're honest, it may be one of our desires, maybe higher on the list throughout various seasons and times of our lives. But for many of us, practically, when the rubber meets the road, the kingdom of God often comes up short in the race.

And so what hope do we have to experience the life that Jesus desires for us? Beatitudes are like a mirror. They reveal, expose our values, and they invite us to ask God for grace. See, what we need is a transformation of our hearts.

In order to desire the right things. Scripture says, delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Many of us read that and we say, these are the desires of my heart.

So I'm going to do all the Jesus things so that he gives me what he wants or what I want. But that's not what it says. If you delight yourself in the Lord, God will give your heart new desires.

And then he will satisfy those desires with himself. Because if you delight in the Lord and he gives you the desires of your heart, he gives you the very thing you delight in, which is him. Delight yourself in him and he will satisfy your desires with himself.

We can't do this on our own. We can't change our hearts. We can't change our desires.

But the good news is that God can. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is able to turn the eyes of our hearts from the lesser things of this world and onto Christ as our greatest treasure and our greatest desire. And he does this by giving us a picture of the good life.

Jesus Christ. Jesus is the good life. The only way we can read the Beatitudes and see them as good is when we stop looking to Jesus as a means of acquiring the lives that we want and start desiring the life that he lived above all else.

Jesus didn't say, I have a new way of living. He said, I am the way. He didn't say that I have something to offer the conversation about truth.

He said, no, I am the truth. And he didn't say, I have a better life for you. He said, I am the life.

Jesus is the good life and he fulfills the Beatitudes. When we read the Beatitudes, we're not just seeing a description of kingdom people. We're seeing a portrait of Christ himself that he is the one who is truly poor in spirit, emptying himself and taking on the form of a servant.

Jesus, he mourned. He was the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, weeping outside of Lazarus's tomb, even though he knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, weeping over Israel for their condition. But he knew he was going to die to bring them out of their oppression and into freedom.

Jesus is the meek one, possessing all power and yet never using it to protect himself. Didn't even use it to provide for himself when he was being tempted in the desert for 40 days by the devil. Wouldn't even turn the stone into bread because he hungered and thirsted for righteousness so deeply that he laid down his life to accomplish it.

Jesus is the merciful one, always moving towards the guilty with compassion in order to bring grace and healing. Jesus was pure in heart. He wasn't distracted.

He only did the will of his father. His only desire was to do what God wanted him to do. And he made peace, not by avoiding conflict, but by absorbing hostility, the hostility of sin and conflict with God into himself, into his own body on the cross.

This is who Jesus was, and he was persecuted for living this way. He was mocked and slandered and condemned and killed because Jesus is not only the picture of the good life. He's not only the fulfillment of the Beatitudes, but Jesus exchanges his life for yours.

Here's the good news of what Jesus has done for us. He lived the blessed life. The life that not only we can't achieve for ourselves, but the life that we don't even desire for ourselves, he accomplished that on our behalf.

And then he gives us his life when we trust him in faith. He exchanges his life for ours. He takes our sinful life and he gives us his righteous life.

He became poor so that you could become rich. He was rejected so that you could be welcomed. And he bore the curse of sin so that you could receive the blessing.

The good life only comes when we stop defining it for ourselves and begin receiving the life that Jesus gives. And Jesus promises that this way is not without reward. Not only future, but now he says, the poor in spirit are blessed for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Again, present tense, not theirs will be. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And in that kingdom now, we can experience these blessings.

But when that kingdom is fully consummated, when Christ returns and rules every square inch of this earth, those who are mourning will be blessed for they will be comforted. We get to experience that now in his presence, but someday fully when all is made complete. The meek

will inherit the earth.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. The merciful will receive mercy. The pure in heart will see God.

The peacemakers will be called sons of God. That word sons is not in reference to gender, but the son of something means that it reflects its character. Those who are peacemakers will reflect the character of God.

People will look at your life. When you stop avoiding conflict and making peace, they will look at your life and say, this is what God is like. This is how God lives.

And yeah, look at how the world treated God when he came in the flesh. He was rejected. He was arrested.

He was condemned and crucified and killed. But he was also raised. He was victorious.

Jesus is alive. The world mocked and ridiculed and crucified Jesus because his life didn't look like what they expected at all. But then God raised him from the dead, proving that Jesus' way is the only way that actually ever and eternally leads to life.

Only his way of life leads to life. The resurrection is God's vindication of everything Jesus ever said and taught and did and lived, which means that living this way will not only result in something beautiful later, resurrection life someday, but now. Not because we suddenly learn to love poverty or grief or suffering, but because this life is not all that there is.

And so you won't be trading joy for misery. You'll be trading a lesser joy for a far greater one in Christ, like the man Jesus spoke of who found the treasure hidden in the field, and then he went in his joy and sold all that he had and went and bought that field so that he could possess that treasure. We can endure sacrifices and hardships now because God guarantees a greater comfort and a greater joy that is to come and even guarantees that we have the opportunity in his presence to experience that now.

And so theologian Thomas Chalmers calls this the expulsive power of a new affection. We don't stop wanting the things that we want by trying harder not to want them. Our desires are only changed when they are replaced by something greater.

When you have a vision of something more beautiful than what you were previously pursuing. And so when your heart changes, when Jesus and his kingdom become your highest value, Jesus says something astonishing. He says, you are the salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world. Again, not future tense. Today, Jesus declares that as you live for his kingdom, you already are salt and light.

He gives you a new identity and a new purpose in this world, that this world would experience you in a new kind of way as salt preserves and slows corruption and as salt heals, sterilizing

infection and as salt brings out the beauty and natural flavor that is in food. When you live in line with the kingdom of God, when you live as kingdom people, your presence in this world restrains decay, brings healing, and brings out the natural beauty of God's image in humanity. This is who Jesus says you are.

And he says you're the light of the world. Light exposes darkness. It reveals truth.

But light also represents God's presence. And as the light of the world, not because we are impressive, but we are the light of the world because we are reflecting God's light. Some people in this world will see that light and reject it.

But many will see it. They will see that light in you and in you they will see the life that they were made for. And they'll give glory to their Father in heaven.

And so here's the invitation for us today. Bringing this whole thing home, land in the plain. I suspect many of us fall into one of three camps.

I've certainly seen myself in these areas at different seasons of life. Some of you are trying to use Jesus to get the world and it's not working. Some of you want Jesus, but you're distracted, endlessly distracted by so many different desires, so many different ways to spend your time, so many different directions.

And some of you might be here and you don't yet want the kingdom of God, but you want to want it. Let me tell you something. If you want to want the kingdom of God, you are not far from it.

The apostle Paul says, the natural person does not desire the things of God for they are folly to him and they are spiritually discerned. If you can get a glimpse of the kingdom of God in the face of Jesus Christ and think to yourself, that is what I know is good and I don't know if I'm willing to lay down what I need to lay down in order to pursue that. But I want to be the kind of person that wants that.

That sounds to me like the Spirit of God in your life right now. And my encouragement to you would be not to hide that away, not to silence it, but to press in and ask the Spirit of God to transform your life, to transform your heart, to transform your desires, to say simply and honestly, I believe Jesus in who you are. I believe Jesus in what you have done for me in dying on the cross and rising from the dead and ascending into heaven.

And I believe that by your Spirit, you are speaking to my heart right now. And I confess that I desire so many things other than you. And I am powerless to desire you apart from your power.

Holy Spirit, change my heart. Give me new desires. Be my delight and satisfy my delight in your presence.

I want to know the good life in you. Come, Lord Jesus, and be with me, carry me, show me how

good you are, how beautiful you are. If you want to want the kingdom of God, if you want to want Christ in your life, then now's the time.

As we close our time in worship, we're gonna have prayer available on the sides. You can come up and get prayer. Just tell them, I want to want it.

And they'll pray for you. They've been praying for you this whole gathering in another room. They would love to lay hands on you and pray for you.

Come down to the carpets here. Get on your face and just say, God, I want to want it. I want to want you.

I want to want what you want for me. I don't know how to get there, but you do change my heart. Communion is available on the front and in the back.

You can come and grab the bread and the cup, the picture of Christ's body broken for you and his blood shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, proving to you as certainly as you taste the bread and drink the cup. Because of what Christ has done, the way into the good life has been blown open. And by his spirit, you walk into it.

And let's recognize that the most beautiful part of life, the greatest thing we have going for us is the presence of Jesus. And when we worship in this space with him together, he is here. And so let's worship because we know he's here and in his presence is our delight.

And so be encouraged. The good life is not found by what you achieve. It is found by who you have received and his name is Jesus.

And so let's go to him together today. Father, we ask that by your spirit, you would do exactly what we have been asking for, that you would change our hearts, not just to desire a life that looks like the Beatitudes, but to desire the presence of Jesus and for our lives to be conformed into his image. We expect because of your promises that when we gather and when we worship, you are here.

And so Holy Spirit, do this work in us. Lord, we anticipate how you want to meet with us in this place. We expect to meet you, not just in your word, but in worship and in prayer.

And so Holy Spirit come, take control of our time together. God, pour out your spirit on this place and do the work that only you can do. We ask it in Jesus' name and all God's people said, Amen.