

## **The Rev. Charlie Holt**

Well, you you're going to get credit today for, braving the great blizzard of 2026.

This will be the stuff of legends. You're going to be people talking about it decades from now. Remember that day then we went to church on January? Or was it the 31st? Is that what? Oh, February 1st back in 2026. So cold. But we did it. I had, some questions of whether we were going to cancel church and I said, no way.

This is the one day out of the year when some people get to pull out those fur coats and put them on. This is this is a fashion moment. We can't we can't cancel church will upset some people. So really glad that you're here. I want to talk about the Beatitudes, which are very beloved by a lot of people.

Some people actually have the Beatitudes memorized in much the same way that they memorize Psalm 23 and other things. And if you've done that, anybody have a memorized anybody have the Beatitudes memorized? Oh, you guys, come on. Oh, you do one person. But, these are worth memorizing. These are really great because, in some ways, they are just beloved in and of themselves.

They stand alone as, as just a great passage of Scripture to know and to bring comfort and reassurance. Many people read the Beatitudes at their weddings or at a funeral because of that reason. Like Psalm 23. But really, the Beatitudes are part of a larger context within the Gospel of Matthew, which is the very beginning, the opening salvo of a sermon that Jesus preaches called the sermon on the Mount.

It's a very famous sermon that Jesus preached to, his disciples and to the crowds. You can actually go to the place where Jesus preached the sermon on the Mount. We know exactly where it is. On the Sea of Galilee. There's a place along the Sea of Galilee, where there is a natural amphitheater in the side of what they call a mountain in Galilee.

But it's really a hill. But it's in the side of the hill that overlooks the Sea of Galilee. It's very beautiful. There is a, a convent there where a group of nuns keep up a beautiful gardens. There's, incredible citrus trees. It's a beautiful place, beautiful church. And, and I would encourage you to one day go there, but you can actually stand in the places where the crowds would have been, and, and, and you could project your voice in the natural amphitheaters is still there.

Just like Jesus did back 2000 years ago. The sermon on the Mount is one of five sermons that the Gospel of Matthew records of Jesus. Matthew was very structured in the way that he ordered his Gospels in some ways, it's the same as the gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke. There are a lot of similarities, which is why they call those the Synoptic Gospels, because Matthew, Mark and Luke are similar.

But there's also something unique about each. One of the Gospels in Matthew's Gospel was written to the Jewish audience. And so one of the unique things about Matthew's Gospel is he builds on the idea of five, the five books of Moses. He's writing to Jewish people. So. So he has five sermons of Jesus. There's the discipleship sermon, which is the sermon on the Mount.

There's the mission sermon, there's a church community sermon, there's an eschatological sermon, and I, I skipped one I can only remember for I don't know, do you know, there's one more, but I forgot, so the, so you have these five sermons and the sermon on the Mount is the discipleship sermon and what the Beatitudes are is really a portrait of the type of disciple that Jesus is, is looking for.

It's a personal portrait. it's a picture, if you will, of what a disciple is. And, and you can just imagine here Jesus would draw large crowds of people. And what he does in his preaching is he preaches in such a way that those who have the ears to hear it. This is a phrase that he would use.

Those who have the ears to hear it would hear, and those who did not have the ears to hear it would not hear. And the Beatitudes work that way. They are painting a picture of a disciple that when you hear yourself in the description of the of the eight Beatitudes, you will you will be open and available to sign up for discipleship.

And if you don't hear yourself in the Beatitudes, well, then you won't sign up. It's a way of weeding out the crowd, in a sense. So let's go through the, the Beatitudes. And I want to organize them in three ways. Now, this is and this is somewhat, anecdotal or arbitrary. I, I am not there are no headings in the Beatitudes that say this is the three categories of the different types.

Maybe there are others who might have a different way, but in this way I'm going to organize it in in our minds is the first is Jesus is presenting a character trait of openness to being a disciple. His disciples will have a teach ability, a humility to them, a quality that will make them want to sign up and to join in with the work of the Kingdom of God.

One of the big points of the gospel story is that Jesus is building a church. And what the word church fundamentally means is the called out ones. It's the Greek word *ecclesia*, which literally means called out. And we just we heard last week of the first disciples who were called out of the world in order to drop their nets.

They were fishermen. And he says to them, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they drop their nets, and they become his disciples. That's what he's doing. He is calling people out of the world to become his disciples. So he's looking for people who are being who will be open to the call. So listen to the way he puts it.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus's announcement repent! The kingdom of heaven is at hand. And so a disciple is one who will be poor in spirit, not haughty, not proud, but teachable. And open. It doesn't necessarily mean poor in money. It could mean that you could have a poverty of spirit because you are poor and in money.

But what he's talking about is as a spiritual condition of poverty, that that when you think about yourself, you recognize your need, that you're not coming to Jesus with all of the answers or with all of the resources or with all of the all of all of what you need. You're not coming already satisfied and full. But what you're doing is you're coming to Jesus and you're saying you're the one that has the answers.

You're the one that can fill my cup and to provide for my every need. And I recognize you as the Messiah, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords is the one bringing the kingdom of heaven. And I need that. It's a poverty of spirit that recognizes that you have a need deep inside of your heart and your soul, for the kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. We live in a sinful and fallen world, and on one level, we mourn because we've lost people that we love to our great enemy, death. That's the way the Bible describes death is an it's an enemy of humanity. It's a part of the curse. It's an aspect of the fall that that we should we should not like, we should not embrace.

It's one of the things that the kingdom of heaven has come to fundamentally address is the problem of death. Jesus will die on a cross, yes, but he will rise from the dead three days later. And. And what the promise of Jesus is that one day he will take that great enemy of death and place it under his feet.

In fact, he says it will be the last enemy that he defeats is the enemy of death. And those of us who live in a sinful and fallen world are surrounded by a culture of death and brokenness and despair. And things are not the way that they are supposed to be. And those who are called to be disciples, they see that actually, a better way to put it is they feel it, they mourn it, they feel it deep within their hearts.

That and they even weep over it. That, that this world is broken and in desperate need of salvation and redemption and healing and life. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. This is one that I think is often misunderstood of the Beatitudes. The word in Greek for meek is not always translated as meek.

Throughout the New Testament. Sometimes it's translated as gentle. When I hear meek, I think weak, I think mousy, actually, I don't know what you think when you hear meek, but, what the word means is gentle. Jesus is saying those who are disciples will be gentle of spirit. My grandmother taught me that I needed to be a gentleman.

Did your mom teach you that, or your grandmother? Your grand father or grandparents or. Yes, you need to be a gentleman. And what does that mean to be a gentle person, a gentle woman or a gentle man? It means that you have power in your personhood. You have a strength about you. Maybe it's a physical strength or a mental strength.

Maybe you're really smart or whatever it is, but whatever that power that you have, it needs to be brought under control. Because if that power is not brought under control, you will abuse people. You will hurt people. You will take advantage of people. And so what is a gentleman is a man who has power, who has brought that under control.

He has been made meek, not in the sense of being weak, but in the sense of being gentle. So you treat women with respect. You open doors for people. You don't abuse animals and things like that. Right? You have the power to do that. You have the strength to do that. But you bring that under control and you make it meek.

And that's the kind of people that Jesus is looking for to be his disciples. And when you have these qualities that are they're building on themselves. He areas, you see what he's doing. He's listing these things out and he's calling people to himself. And they're and some people are going to see themselves in this and some people aren't.

I don't want to be meek. I want to be mean. I don't I don't grieve. You make yourself have a hard heart. I don't feel that kind of stuff. You know, I'm not poor in spirit. I'm. I'm prideful. I'm strong. I'm. I'm smart. You know, whatever it is, I'm full. I don't I don't need him. Well, you'll just opt yourself out of the process.

If that's if that's not the character of vulnerability and humility that the Lord is looking for. So the first is an openness to Jesus, the character of openness. And then you start to see the internal character of the spiritual fruit that will begin to manifest in the life of a disciple. And he says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

That goes back to seeing that the world is not the way it's supposed to be, that there is injustice, there's abuse, there's wrongs taking place in this world. There's corruption, and there's there

should be within the heart of a disciple, a longing and a desire. A hunger is the way he puts it to see things put right because things are not right.

And so he's looking for that spiritual fruit and character, but not just, justice warriors, but also people that understand the character of mercy, that know that that we all are sinners and fall short of the glory of God. And we need to breathe grace on one another and show mercy and compassion on those that have been captured by the power of evil and sin in this world.

That there needs to be a graciousness to the disciple that, that we would be pure in heart, that we would that we would long for holiness in our life. And he promises that those who have that characteristic trait of holiness and purity of heart, to renounce corruption, will, will see God because God is pure, he is holy.

So there's an internal character of spiritual fruit that makes up the disciple. And then there's this external character and our relationship to the world as disciples. And he says, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. And blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Here's the nexus of our external ministry and mission in the world, at the heart of what we're called to be as ministers in this world are peacemakers.

I, I love this verse. This is one of my favorite verses in all of Scripture. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. I can think of no other scripture passage except maybe one in Paul's letters where he says, that we have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. This is the marching orders in the mission of the Christian is to be ambassadors of reconciliation and peacemaking in this world.

That God is through us as the people of the church, through his disciples, making his appeal of love and mercy and grace to the world. He is reconciling the world to himself through us. Wow. There's a difference between being a peacemaker and a peace keeper. By the way, a dictator is a peacekeeper. Do you ever know that you live in a country where there's dictators and you toe the line and you don't, you don't get out of line and you keep the peace.

Don't you? Why? Because of the sword. He's got an army, and he will keep you behaving and staying calm and carrying on. But. But you're keeping a peace. That is a lie. There's no freedom in that. I like. I like living in the country that we live because we have freedom to, and that and that creates a lot of chaos and conflicts as we see in our society today.

And this is always been the case, you know, somebody was lamenting to me about how bad things are in our country. And I'm like, well, it's no different than it was ten years ago or 20 years ago, or 30 years ago, or 40 years ago, or 50 years ago or whatever. Just name the decade. This country is constantly has turmoil and political conflicts and controversies, and one of the reasons why is because in some ways, we are not governed by dictators, that we are free people that are constantly having to work out our conflicts and our differences among each other in among one another.

And we try to do it without going to civil war with one another, which we have done before. Wasn't good. But we have the benefit of a system of government that enables us to work towards peace with one another and make peace by speaking truth to one another. It's a gift of the United States. Actually, we don't live in a dictatorship.

Some families are peace keeping families. You don't get out of line, don't say anything bad about one of your relatives, or bring up some uncomfortable or inconvenient truth because it will disrupt the applecart. And if you know mom hears you talking like that, or dad hears you talking like that, you're really going to upset some things. And we got to keep the peace.

And so we all buy into and live the lie so as to keep the peace and not get to the bitter reality or the bitter equilibrium. Families have the same kind of dynamics as countries sometimes. And what a peacemaker does is it, on one hand embraces the truth and on the other hand embraces the ministry of reconciliation and love, and holds those two things in tension.

We speak the truth and love so that we may in all things grow up into Christ, into the fullness of maturity. And so blessed are those who are about the business of being mature people. But here's the rub. And this is the nexus of the of the Beatitudes. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

But then comes the next part of that external relationship to the world. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for you will be inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said with every beatitude, the gulf is widened between the disciples and the people of this world, and the call to come forth, to come out to be the church will increasingly become manifest.

And Jesus will go on to say in the sermon on the Mount that you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And if you lose your saltiness and you put your light under a bushel, you're of no value to the kingdom. So be the salt, be the light. But guess what that's going to mean.

You're going to get persecuted because this world is about peace keeping and not peacemaking. It doesn't want the applecart upset. And as soon as Christians begin to behave like Christians, the world will take notice that you are changing the equilibrium and bringing about a new reality, by the way that you're living your life. And so Jesus says, blessed are those who are persecuted.

And you might think as you're hearing this, it's like, the military says we're looking for a few good men, right? A few good women. Who wants to sign up for the battle and, and, everybody might say, this doesn't sound very fun. I thought you said this was blessed. Blessed are those, blessed are those, blessed are those.

And then you get to this persecution part. I don't know if I want to sign up for that, but that's the Christian disciple. And what does Jesus say? Rejoice. Cheer up. Why? Because great is your reward in heaven for picking up your cross and following him.

You were just join the great roster of the people of God that have gone before. Blessed are those who are persecuted for my name's sake. You'll be like one of the prophets. Jesus says. So here's the question. I'll end with this is this Beatitudes? Is this the life that you want to sign up for? Is this is the sovereign summons of the Lord.



He's calling you to be a disciple. And there's the portrait of what a disciple looks like. Do you find yourself in that description? Do you want to embrace the blessing and the significance and the meaning that he is presenting before you? Do you find yourself and that list or not mean that's he's weeding out the crowd and what he's saying is, follow me.