

Matthew 5:1-12

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 June 2023

Preacher: Reuben Hunter

[0 : 00] Please take your seats and turn, if you will, in your copies of God's Word to Matthew 5. The passage that was read for us a few moments ago.

! The Sermon on the Mount. The word sermon certainly has negative connotations today. Certainly that's the case outside the church, but also increasingly inside the church as well.

You can attend lots of churches across this country that say that they believe the Bible, are committed to the Bible, and are committed to sermons. They don't like the Word, so they call them Bible talks or that kind of thing.

We say, you see, we're told at least that we don't like the format. But a monologue delivered with instruction about what to do, delivered with authority.

We say that, and yet there has been an explosion across the world in the popularity of monologues, delivered with authority, telling you how to do certain things.

[1 : 07] From TED Talks, to podcasts, to vodcasts and vlogs and all those other things. The entire product is a person speaking with authority, telling you what to do.

And people are signing up for this, left, right, and center. In the corporate world, actually, people will pay thousands of pounds to have their preacher of choice come and deliver their sermon.

I think part of the growth of that is an acknowledgement that we need help in order to live well in this world. The current trending topics on TED, how to rebuild a broken state, what makes a good life, lessons from the longest study on happiness.

My podcast feed, recent podcasts, Unlocking the Science of Longevity, 19 Harsh Truths About Human Nature, Italy's Forgotten Reformation.

That one's not so popular. It didn't have so many downloads. These and other themes downloaded thousands, even millions of times. What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness.

[2 : 16] Forty-five million people have watched that. We're willing to listen because we know we don't have all the answers to living well in the world. Now, there are voices everywhere.

With all of these voices around us, preaching the sermons that they have to offer. How do we decide which speaker to listen to? We decide, I think, on the basis of two categories.

The first is the credibility of the speaker. And the second is the relevance of the topic. We'll listen to somebody that we think has something important to say, and we'll listen if we think that their topic has something important to say to us.

Now, there may be other reasons why we would listen, but these, I think, are the main ones. So, as we turn to our passage this morning, to something as well known as the Sermon on the Mount, there is a danger that we might think initially, well, we know what it says.

It's really familiar in the life of the church and also actually in our culture. Judge not lest ye be judged. You know, back in the 300 odd years ago, that's how people spoke.

[3 : 17] Those kinds of phrases are part of discourse. We think we know what it says. Or, of course, you might be here this morning. You're standing, as it were, looking into the Christian faith.

You're assessing what you think of it, and you don't care what it says, actually, because it belongs to a religious world, and you're not really that interested in it. But consider the speaker for a moment.

It's Jesus. Okay, that might be enough for most of us, I suspect, this morning. We know that Jesus is a good man to listen to. But I want you to see that Matthew has actually taken time up to this point in his gospel to establish Jesus' credibility in everything that he has said so far.

He could have actually started his gospel at chapter 5, verse 1. Jesus sitting down to preach this sermon. But he didn't do that. We're five chapters in. He started in chapter 1 by taking time to tell us

about Jesus' birth and how he is descended from King David.

In chapter 2, he's recognized by King Herod as a threat to his sovereignty. And so he has to be taken away to safety. Herod wants to get rid of him. Chapter 3, when he's baptized, you remember that voice from heaven?

[4 : 32] Declares him to be, This is my son. He is the Son of God. But it is that title that was ascribed to the king in Psalm 2. And then in chapter 4, he's gone into the wilderness.

He has overcome the assault of Satan. And he has gained power to announce with certainty. Chapter 4, verse 17. If you just look over back a few verses, he is God's king, bringing in God's kingdom.

And he can declare that with authority. And then just in case we're not sure, at the end of chapter 4, he demonstrates his power over sickness and affliction by healing anybody who came near to prove that he's God's king and he's worth following.

So can you see, as he speaks, Matthew has taken time to demonstrate the credibility of the one who is speaking. He wants us to know that Jesus is God's king.

And our passage this morning, the Beatitudes, it is bookended by references to the kingdom. Do you see verse 3? Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[5 : 38] And at the end, verse 9, persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Here is the king speaking about his kingdom.

His kingdom in the present and his kingdom as it will extend into the future. But he isn't just shown to be God's king. 5 verse 1, it's significant that he's on a mountain.

He goes up to a mountain. Why has Matthew told us that? Because mountains in the Bible are also significant. You can trace it all the way through. Mountains are where God and man meet. It's where life-shaking, earth-shaking things happen.

The most notable example, Mount Sinai. Moses receives the law from God and is tasked with making God's Word known. The early readers of this, we are supposed to read this and we're supposed to hear an echo of that.

Here is God's ministry of revelation being given to his king. God's king bringing God's revelation. Will you listen?

[6 : 47] Matthew is teasing it up so that we will say, here's somebody we should listen to. And I want to suggest to you that whatever you believe, this sermon is for you. Have a look again at verse 1.

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. Two groups of people. Crowds and disciples. This isn't just a pep talk for religious folk.

Whatever you believe this morning, you are in one of those two groups. You're either in the crowds, looking on, assessing what you make of Jesus, but not yet committed to him. Or you are a disciple. You are someone who follows him. I want you to see that the Sermon on the Mount is for you.

Whoever you are, whatever you believe, wherever you've come from, the Sermon on the Mount is for you.

But I want to suggest that that's especially the case when we consider the second category. The second category by where we assess whether or not we listen, and that is the relevance of the topic.

[7 : 49] The relevance is repeated nine times in those verses. Now, later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will go on to speak of issues of anger and lust and divorce, honesty, truth, money, anxiety, and wisdom.

All very relevant. Who doesn't need help in these areas? We all do. That's what drives the self-help downloads. That's why people listen. He's speaking to these issues.

But the repeated word, it's as plain as a nose in your face, the repeated word is blessed. Jesus starts the Sermon talking about the blessing of God.

Now, I want to suggest that there is nothing more relevant to any of us than that. This is something that we all of us long for.

This is something that in the deepest parts of our being, we desire to live in the favor and acceptance of God. And the reason for that is, that is what we were made for.

[8 : 55] That is why you were created, to live in the love and the favor and the acceptance of God. The restlessness in your heart and mine was made to find peace only in one place, and that is in relationship with the God who made you.

Now, Christians have done a good job of making the blessed word sound a bit bland or worse, perhaps a bit cliché.

Well, I was blessed. That was a real blessing. Oh, I'm blessed. There was a time when hashtag blessed was a thing in social media. What that does is it completely evacuates the word of its substance.

Now, partly that overuse, I mean, it's okay to use it if you're feeling that, you know, God has blessed you in a particular way, of course, that's the right language to use, but it's important that we don't just see it as a cliché.

Part of the reason, though, why we've kind of got confused about it is because the original word in the Greek, makarios, is hard to translate across to English in a way that captures the full sense of the word.

[10:10] It has a breadth of meaning. It can mean happy. It can mean fortunate or favored. And there's a sense of each of those here.

But if we bring together how the word is used all the way through the Bible and its Hebrew equivalent in the Old Testament, with the context of the day in which this gospel was written, the Greek wisdom, virtue, tradition of the day, and we consider the future focus that the sermon has, the New Testament scholar Jonathan Pennington argues that the best translation is flourishing. Flourishing. So I want to suggest that what Jesus is doing in this sermon is holding out a vision of the good life. Here is the good life.

That is what those restless hearts that we have are looking for. Isn't that what the advertisers are trying to sell us? Isn't that why they spend billions and billions of pounds to try and project a vision of something that their product will give us, the good life?

If you have this thing, then you'll be happy. Then you'll be blessed. Next, this morning, God's King is our speaker and He gives us both a description of and an invitation into this life of flourishing that characterizes the kingdom of God.

[11:39] Two points. Point number one, description, a description of true flourishing. Now, I don't know how you've approached the Beatitudes in the past.

Perhaps you've thought about them as a standard to reach. If I can become meek, well then I'll inherit the earth. It's a kind of ladder from your repentance all the way up to perfection.

You think you can do that and you think that that's the way you should kind of aim to apply them into your life or perhaps more likely if you're like me, you'll see them as an impossible standard that you can't reach.

That would be the way I would lean. And then it leaves you in despair. So you look at them and you think, if I can become meek then I'll inherit the earth. I'm going to get after that and I'm definitely going to succeed.

Or you think, if I can become meek then I'll inherit the earth. And you think, I'll never become meek. Oh, well, there's nothing here for me. But the Beatitudes, I want to suggest, are not at first statements of what we are to do.

[12:43] They are a description of what we are in Christ. They are a description of the character of a true disciple. They are a declaration, if you like, of our status in this new kingdom that Jesus has brought in.

Think of it like this. Jesus is looking at you and He's pointing and He's saying, flourishing. Flourishing. If you're in Christ, He's saying, this is the good life. Now that's a shock, isn't it? It's a shock because what He describes as flourishing isn't what we think when the Word is mentioned. Verse 3, flourishing are the poor in spirit.

Poor in spirit isn't talking about the state of our bank accounts. It's talking about poverty of spirit in relation to how you view yourself and how you view God.

The confession of sin that we used earlier on page 3 of the handout, I commend that to you. Take that home, stick it on your fridge, and meditate on that this week. Those are great descriptions of what these things mean.

[13:52] Each of the Beatitudes. I'm sure Paul came up with that himself. It looks like all his own work. Those are good things to meditate on.

Expand the descriptions of what I'm talking about here. But poverty of spirit is about how you relate in terms of your view of yourself and of God. It's a recognition that we are dust.

And we're fully dependent on others. And ultimately, fully dependent on God for our existence. Look, we like to think of ourselves as self-sufficient.

What did it say? We confessed it earlier. We have been proud in spirit and flitted with our own self-sufficiency. If there is a cardinal virtue in 21st century Westernism, it is...

Western culture, Westernism, is that a thing? Anyway, it is self-sufficiency. Listen to any number of those self-help downloads, and they are all about becoming strong in yourself on the basis of thinking more sort of positively about things or adopting particular ways of life so that you can present in a way that is more self-sufficient.

[15 : 01] The one thing in life that should take the feet out from under us on that thought is thinking about sleep.

When you go to bed at night, I know some of you with little ones would love to be able to think about sleep. You dream about sleep. It's all you think about. But if you think about what's actually happening, you have no control.

You close your eyes and you trust yourself to the sovereign care of God. Sleep is an act of worship. God keeps your heart going.

God gives you every breath through the night. You're not even aware that it's happening. And He's the one that opens your eyes in the morning if they open. Poverty of spirit acknowledges that debt. We are dependent when we're little. Boys and girls, you're dependent on your parents for everything. As we grow, we're always dependent on others. And ultimately, we're dependent on our God.

[16 : 05] Poverty of spirit acknowledges that debt. And it recognizes even more than that that it goes deeper. The debt is deeper. In fact, it goes to the point of bankruptcy before God because of our sin. Here's the thing.

When we see others, when we see ourselves like that, it changes the way that we see others. We don't look up. We don't look down because we're not proud.

Flourishing are the poor in spirit. Verse 4, Flourishing are those who mourn. This isn't just a word to the bereaved. That wouldn't make sense ultimately in the context. But the background here is Isaiah 61 where the people of God are mourning.

They're mourning over their sin and the consequences of that sin. and they are longing for the future that God has promised them. Christians don't pretend that their lives are all together. Christians don't hide from the consequences of sin or shift the blame for those things to other people. We lean into repentance. That's what it means to be a Christian. You are a repenting person which in turn invites the blessing of God.

[17 : 21] Verse 5, Flourishing are the meek. This word is used in Psalm 37 where the meek are those who wait for the Lord when times are hard.

In the midst of struggle, we wait for You, Lord. We look to You, Lord. We don't try and take matters into our own hands. We accept God's providence in the pain and we look to Him.

Meekness is releasing your grip on your means and your connections and your self-sufficiency and looking to God. Jesus describes those who are marked by these traits as flourishing.

It might not look like it to others. It might not always feel like it to us. But that is how Jesus describes you if you're in relationship with Him.

And the reason for this is seen in the second half of each of those verses. The first half of each beatitude can't be separated from the second. The reason those who are poor in spirit are flourishing is because they are citizens of the kingdom.

[18 : 29] The reason those who mourn are flourishing is because they enjoy the comfort of God, the nearness of His care, and the certainty of those things in their fullness on that future day in glory.

The reason that the meek are flourishing is because they know their place before a holy God. And however hard things get, they wait on His good providence knowing that one day they will inherit the earth.

What an inheritance! And so it goes with each of the Beatitudes. When you look at all that is not right with the world and you groan, oh, come Lord Jesus.

When you see poverty and injustice on your news feed and your heart breaks another bit, when you decide in life that you're going to set aside your ego and submit yourself to the providence of God in your life, you are flourishing in His sight.

That is actually what it looks like to hunger and thirst for righteousness. To grieve and mourn over sin in your own life and in the world. To submit your life to God's providential care.

[19 : 46] And to pray and long for that future day in glory. That is what it looks like to hunger and thirst for righteousness. And so, because of that, as a citizen of the kingdom, one day you will be satisfied.

One day, God's righteousness, that day when God's righteousness reigns in all things, all your discontent will vanish. The pure in heart will see God. And the peacemakers will be called sons of God.

When you are a citizen of the kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ, these qualities, these characteristics will mark your life. We want to see them grow.

We want to nurture them. We want to cultivate them by faith. But they will mark your life. And though, we see it increasingly, the culture will despise you. Let's be honest.

Who looks at poverty of spirit? Who looks at mourning over sin? Who looks at pursuing a pure heart and thinks that you're living your best life? Who in our culture goes yay to all those things?

[20 : 59] Very few. So we're despised for living like this. But look again. Even that is a mark of flourishing. Verse 10. It's the one characteristic that Jesus repeats probably because it's so hard to believe.

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. That looks like madness to the world.

Jonathan Pennington says this, Is there any worse suffering than being attacked and slandered and being cut off from community precisely when one is innocent, true, and living according to God's righteousness?

No. Yet Jesus claims this is true flourishing because these are the inheritors of God's kingdom and recipients of a great reward.

Because of this true promise, those suffering in this state can actually rejoice and be glad and have a taste of flourishing now. Do you see how encouraging and how strengthening this is?

[22 : 15] In the face of persecution, you can rejoice. Not just grit your teeth. Not just, oh, I've got to get through this.

But rejoice. Rejoice. At school, when you get a hard time from those around you because you're a Christian. When those in your class laugh at you and mock you because of your Christian views. Rejoice. Smile. Thank them for their assault. When you get disciplined and work because you won't join in the great pronoun delusion.

Or you're just going about your business perfectly happy with the lanyard that you always use. And now you've been called into a meeting with HR. Rejoice. It sounds crazy.

But Jesus is saying, and we need to remember this in these days, Jesus is saying that in His economy, a life lived in the pursuit of righteousness is a flourishing, blessed life.

[23 : 23] This is what it means for you to be the person that you were created to be. Even in the struggle, this is what it means for you to be the person that God wants you to be where you are as you live for the age to come.

So the Beatitudes are a description of true flourishing. But they're not just that. Their positioning in the sermon and the evocative way, I suppose, that they describe the life of the kingdom, it serves to draw us in.

We're supposed to read these things and to choose this life and to pursue and to grow in these qualities more and more. They're there to draw us in to say, come, come, come.

This is the good life. So in that sense, they serve as, secondly, point number two, an invitation into true flourishing. If they, first of all, are a description of it, secondly, they are an invitation into true flourishing.

Jesus is calling us into a way of life. What He's doing, He's showing us a kingdom where there is comfort, an amazing inheritance, satisfaction, mercy, and joy in knowing and seeing God.

[24 : 35] It is a spectacular vision of a life that is good in the truest sense of the word. Now, there is a present aspect to this.

You become a citizen of God's kingdom when you humble yourself before Him, when you put your faith in His Son, when you receive His salvation. At that point, yours is the kingdom of heaven. At

that point, you see God by faith.

In fact, speaking of that present experience, Sinclair Ferguson, he describes his experience of knowing the peace of God and then seeking to be a peacemaker himself.

He says this, quote, I frequently experience this at the Lord's Supper. I don't think it's a strange Scottish emotion, but because at the Lord's Supper we have these physical expressions, physical expressions that through Jesus Christ we have peace with God and we've been reconciled to Him. What I would like to do at the end of the service is just to go around the congregation hugging everyone and saying to them, let's live in this peace. If you have anything against me, pardon me. If I have anything against you, I freely forgive you.

[25 : 46] We have tasted this peace and so we want to become peacemakers. I like that. When we gather in worship, as we do like this this morning, we do get a foretaste of these things.

When we come to the Lord's table in particular, that sense of putting right wrongs before we come, that sense of being united as one body, we do taste those things.

And yet, it will always have a sense of feeling incomplete. Because our full experience of this flourishing, your full experience of your sonship, lies in the future.

There is a tension until Christ consummates His kingdom and sets the world to rights. And that's why this point is so important.

Because between now and then, there is a struggle. There is hardship and persecution. Verses 10 and 11.

[26 : 55] Because these values contrast sharply with the values of the world that we live in. I've said already, our society encourages self-promotion.

We are champions of self-confidence. We live in a culture that is increasingly proud and harsh and ambitious and self-serving.

And the invitation into the kingdom and to a life of flourishing is an invitation to self-denial. Each of these traits, each of these qualities and characteristics reflect the same selfless attitude.

Indeed, there is something of a flow. Did you notice that as you go through? Blessed are the poor in spirit. As you see yourself accurately before God, what happens?

You mourn for your sin. It's part of why the worship service is organized the way that it is. We sing these songs of the majesty and the character and the perfection of God.

[28 : 07] And what does that do? It causes us to see ourselves as we truly are. And so we move to confess our sins. We mourn when we are poor in spirit.

And as you mourn for your sin, there's a brokenness then that grows up. And a right brokenness is characterized by a desire to live a righteous life.

That's what happens, isn't it? When we mourn over our sin, we resolve with God's help to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to live differently, to put that sin to death.

What then happens is that knowing in Christ that we've been given the righteousness of God as a gift, we look at ourselves and we think, oh, there I go again. I've failed again. And Christ says, you're righteous in me.

I give this to you as a gift. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. When you know that you've been given that right standing as a gift, when you know that you've experienced His mercy, it makes you a merciful person to others, makes you one who longs to live to please God.

[29 : 28] That is, gives you a pure heart. Such a person having given peace with God through Christ will live, will seek to live at peace with others and want others to know this peace, even those who persecute them.

Here is the paradox of the kingdom, the path of true flourishing. is walked in selflessness. Get yourself out of the way.

At home, in your relationships, in work, get off the me train. So difficult, the culture is telling us to go completely the opposite way.

Live for yourself. That's where true flourishing lies. Put yourself at the center of everything. No! That is the way to dissatisfaction and death. Get yourself out of the way.

And the more that we embrace this pattern for our lives, the more we will flourish. flourish. And here's the reason that we know this. Because the most fully human person that has ever lived, the most vivid example of human flourishing that has ever been was the one who embodied these beatitudes perfectly.

[30 : 52] The Lord Jesus Christ, the one who was gentle and lowly in heart. That's meekness. The one who humbled himself down from heaven to earth in order to win peace with God for all who would trust Him.

To live like this is to live like Jesus. And that is to live therefore in the epicenter of the blessing of God. It is to live life in all its fullness.

But also, inevitably, it is to live life in the crosshairs of persecution. We've touched on it already. Belonging to Jesus means that we should expect to suffer as He did. And the question is, are you prepared for this? Does your Christian life have a category marked obedience no matter what the cost?

Or a category marked conviction no matter what they say? This is where the Beatitudes end. And on the one hand, it's the hardest bit to stomach, but on the other hand, I want us to see that these verses put steel in our spine as we seek to live for Christ in our day, wherever He has placed us.

[32 : 10] When you're misrepresented, when you are reviled, when you're lied about because you follow Christ, you do not need to worry. It was this way for the prophets, it was this way for Christ Himself, and it will be this way for all who will flourish in the sight of God.

So rejoice. When you get a hard time because you say or do dumb things, don't rejoice. Change your behavior.

He's not talking about that. But when you get a hard time from your colleagues or your friends, even your family, because you are living your life for Jesus, give the burden of it to the Lord. And remember his verdict on this situation.

Blessed. You're flourishing. He has you where he wants you. It's okay. And we will only do this if we place our happiness beyond this world.

If we calibrate our definition of flourishing to Christ's. You know, if we think flourishing involves having a lifestyle that our magazine or the blog or the Instagram feed of choice preaches to us about, if we're getting our definition of flourishing from the sermons that come to us that way, then joy will always, always elude us.

[33 : 33] It'll come and it'll go. Because when we get some of it, it won't satisfy and when trials come, they will crush us. Because we think flourishing is this picture that's normally always made up.

But if we see flourishing, if we calibrate our definition of flourishing to Christ's as these qualities of the soul, not as external things that we might want to have, but as qualities of the soul, we can rejoice whatever is going on around us.

However hard it is, when we lose our job, or our health, or our reputation, or anything else, we don't get defensive, we don't get angry, and we don't despair, we receive it from the Lord with confidence, and we can even have joy in the midst of the pain because we know it's from God's good hand, and it's always, always, always, only temporary.

There will be, in a little while, comfort, satisfaction. We'll see God, and nothing else will matter. let's pray. Let's pray. Our Father, and our God, we praise you.

[35 : 01] for the Lord Jesus Christ, and the life of flourishing that he has purchased for us. And amidst conflict that we feel with our sinful hearts, with a world that is opposed to you, and with all of the struggles of life in a broken world, God, we thank you that in obedience to Christ, in union with him, we have a life of true flourishing.

Help us to live in the light of that this week, we pray, because we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's sing. The church is