

The Good Life - Part 2

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Please take a seat. Let me pray for us before we unpack God's word together. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you again for your word and we thank you that we can meet together as your people to hear from it.

Father, we pray that you would help me to speak clearly, help us to listen well, but again, more than that, that we might live out what you tell us. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, last week we started looking at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Jesus starts his sermon by talking about the blessed or good life and we saw that it's not quite what the world says is good.

A friend of mine interviewed a group of people on the streets one time in preparation for his youth group talk on this and he interviewed young adults and so on and he said nine out of ten of these people said the good in life involved money and material possessions.

And of course, that's what magazine industry banks on, isn't it? They take photos of Hollywood stars and rich people and so on and society buys these magazines, not only because of the gossip, but also because that's what they aspire to.

[1 : 15] That's what they want. Speaking of Hollywood stars, I have some different friends who know the actor John Travolta. I don't know if you know who he is, but she works for Qantas and he's the ambassador for Qantas, so they know him through Qantas.

And now John, he loves flying. He even has one of his own Qantas aeroplanes. And John's home in the US looks like this on the next slide. Notice what's in the garage?

Not one plane, two planes. Planes, though, possessions and even popularity don't actually constitute the good life, says Jesus.

That's what we began to see last week. And so Jesus lists some Beatitudes which do constitute the blessed or the good life. And if you were here last week, you would have heard me say that these Beatitudes in verses 3 to 10 are grouped together as one group.

And so they describe one type of person rather than different types of people. And the tenses, whether it's present tense or future tense, also forms a structure which groups it together as one.

[2 : 28] In fact, in the Greek, it's even tighter than I showed you. And I was very impressed with Philip Jeweller who spotted this in the English. I didn't even see it in the English. He said, in the English, did you notice this? I went, oh no, it's all in the Greek.

This is what it looks like on the slide. Notice how the first and the last are together and then the next one, the next one, the next one. It forms a really tight structure. And the point of this is that all these Beatitudes belong together as one group where there is both a present fulfillment and a future fulfillment for the whole group.

And so we saw in verse 3 that the truly blessed person is one who is poor in spirit. Why are they blessed? Well, because theirs is the kingdom and not of this world, but the kingdom of God himself.

And it's theirs now in the present in part and in the future more fully. The blessed person is the one who mourns over the sinful state of themselves and the world.

Verse 4. Why are they blessed if they do that? Well, because they will find true comfort and not the comfort of leather lounges and fine food, which does not last, but the deep-seated comfort of the soul, which finds lasting contentment and joy.

[3 : 39] They'll find this through forgiveness that we have in Christ now. And they'll find it even more fully on the last day where there'll be no more sin, nor its effects like sickness, disease and death.

And so with that recap in mind, I want to unpack two more Beatitudes for us this morning before finishing with verses 13 to 16. That's what we're heading. And the first one I want to unpack is verse 6, which is those who hunger for righteousness.

Because righteousness is a key theme in Jesus' sermon. So we're at point 1, verse 6. Jesus says, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled.

Now, righteousness, of course, means living rightly. But what sort of right living is this? Is this personal right living? Or is it global right living?

Well, as we did last week, we need to look at the Old Testament to get a fuller picture, because that was the Bible Jesus grew up with, the Old Testament. That's what he came to fulfill. In fact, in Matthew 4, verse 14, it says he came to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah.

[4 : 47] And this beatitude seems to be echoing something in the book of Isaiah, actually. So please turn with me to Isaiah 51, and we'll just do this once this morning.

So it's page 733. Isaiah 51 is page 733. And as I read verse 1, see if you can hear echoes of those who hunger for righteousness, as Jesus put it.

Isaiah 51, verse 1 says, Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord. Does that sound familiar?

It's very familiar. Those who pursue or hunger for righteousness. It seems that this passage is in the mind of Jesus. And here it seems to be a personal righteousness, wanting to please or live rightly before God, seeking Him to please Him.

But we also have to remember at this point that Israel is in exile. They want to live for God, but they also are seeking God to restore the kingdom, as it was in Solomon's day and David's day, where everyone is living rightly before God.

[6 : 08] And so God assures them, He will restore the kingdom. He says in the rest of verse 1, Don't worry, look back at your history. Look to the rock from which you came from. Look to verse 2, Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth.

When I called him, he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many. In other words, don't worry, Israel. I've done it before. I've made you a great nation from one man.

If I can do that, I can restore the kingdom. I can bring about righteousness. And so he says in verse 3, the Lord will surely comfort Zion, and he will look with compassion on all her ruins.

He will make her deserts like the lush garden of Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her.

Thanksgiving and the sound of singing. See what's being said? God says, I can and will put all things right. And so righteousness here seems to be broader than just personal right living.

[7 : 15] It's seeing all things put right and all people living rightly before God. So verse 5, my righteousness draws near speedily. My salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations.

The islands will look to me and will wait in hope for my arm. And so lift up your eyes to the heavens. Look at the earth beneath. The heavens will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants die like flies.

But my salvation will last forever. My righteousness will never fail. You see, God is saying he will bring righteousness. And that will mean salvation for Israel and those who hope in God.

But it also means justice for the nations. And it will happen on that last day, when the earth disappears, or the heavens vanish like smoke.

And so when Jesus says this beatitude back in Matthew chapter 5, he has this kind of righteousness in mind, it seems. Those who pursue and hunger for righteousness are those who long to see themselves themselves, and the world, living rightly before God.

[8 : 28] In other words, they long to see God's kingdom come in full, and God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. It's really the flip side to those who mourn, isn't it?

As we mourn over our own sin, and the sinful state of the world, we are also to hunger for right living in our own lives, and in the world. Now, what does right living look like?

Well, firstly, it means coming to Jesus, who gives us righteousness. And so on the next slide, is a verse from Romans chapter 3. Paul writes, this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

You see, by believing in Jesus, we are put right with God. If you are here today, and you want to be sure that God will welcome you into heaven, and that you want to be sure that you are right with God, then you are to believe in Jesus.

That's it. Of course, hungering for righteousness doesn't stop there, though. Remember, Jesus is speaking to his disciples in this sermon, isn't he? In a sense, he is speaking to those who have already come to him.

[9 : 36] And so he says, hungering for righteousness secondly means living out that right standing that Jesus has already given us. To be what Jesus has already made us before God.

See, if we genuinely believe in Jesus, then we'll want to serve him. To live rightly before him. And that means doing the things that Jesus will talk about in the rest of the sermon. Like loving each other and even our enemies.

It will mean seeking to do the right thing when it comes to how we use our time. How we spend our money. What our priorities are. And it will mean praying for God's help in all these things.

I had a Bible study last Thursday night and we had a prayer time after the study and we asked for some prayer points. We had small groups and in my small group people kind of went around and prayed for various concerns like health and children and the like which are very good and proper things to pray for.

but then one of the guys added this in fact this was his only prayer point he said pray that God will help me and my family live for him. That's it that's all I want.

[10 : 44] I thought yeah he's heard it. This is someone who hungers after righteousness. But hungering after righteousness is not just coming to Jesus to be put right in the first place and then secondly living that out.

It's also thirdly to hunger for right living in the world. Do you remember what happened last Wednesday? I don't know if you heard about this story but a boy was killed on a cricket ground down at Tyab in Mornington Peninsula.

Did you hear about that? I missed the news and so Ian Wilson was telling me at Bible study the boy's father came onto the cricket ground and bashed his son to death with a cricket bat.

The boy was 11 years old. Where is the righteousness in that? And to complicate things the father had a mental illness. So when you hear stories like this how are we to respond?

I take it we are to mourn over the sinful state of this world where our fallen world has caused things like mental illnesses and where sin leads to unrighteous anger that kills 11 year old boys.

[11 : 51] But not only are we to mourn but we're also on the flip side to hunger for a time where there will be righteousness worldwide. And so again I was encouraged as we prayed last Thursday night that we prayed not only for this family but we prayed that God would make more Christians who would live rightly before him and that Jesus might return and put all things right on that last day.

But why is hungering for this righteousness for this right living the good life? Why is it a good thing? Well because Jesus says in verse 6 we will be filled. That is we will find true fulfilment and satisfaction.

I don't know what it is you look for satisfaction in in life whether it's food or a movie or going camping or walking or whatever it is. But all of those things provide short term fulfilment don't they?

You have to keep doing them again. But hungering for righteousness and finding it in Jesus brings a long lasting sense of peace. a sense of relief a sense of hope which lasts every day.

As we hunger to live rightly before God we have that peace that God is working in us that he will never leave us nor forsake us. And if we mess up we have the relief of knowing that God will forgive us if we repent.

[13 : 13] And even as we suffer or see those around us suffering we have the certain hope that Jesus will return and put all things right. He will establish a home of righteousness. We will find even greater fulfilment and satisfaction.

You see hungering for righteousness is living the good life because it brings true fulfilment now and even fuller fulfilment later. So will you keep hungering for righteousness?

Well that's the first beatitude that I want to unpack and as you can see there's quite a bit in each one. So let's skip down to the last one in verse 10. And in some ways this is the most shocking of all of them.

Have a look at what Jesus says of the good life in verse 10. He says blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now when you think good life you don't normally think persecution do you? But that's what Jesus is saying. And because it's not what you'd expect he actually expands on it in verses 11 and 12.

[14 : 17] He says blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I notice by the way that persecution is not just physical it includes emotional and social you know insults and the like which is what we're more likely to experience but also notice how Jesus changes the reason for persecution in verse 10 he says the reason for persecution is because of righteousness do you see that?

But then in verse 11 it changes to because of me at the end of verse 11 in other words Jesus is equating living righteousness with following him the two go together you see you cannot live righteous lives without following Jesus.

There's a man called Hugh Mackay who's a reasonably well known social commentator he's a trained psychologist and last year he released this book *The Good Life* and then after 40 years of research he says that the things people think make a good life like money and material possessions don't actually work because when people get them they just want more the contented and fulfillment contentment rather and fulfillment doesn't last he says rather it's about right relationships and he mentions things from this part of the Bible now Hugh is definitely not a Christian far from it but he actually mentions things from this part of the Bible like the fact that we should forgive one another and we should practice the golden rule as he calls it or as other people have called it to do to others what you would have them do to do which is exactly what Jesus will go on to say the problem though Hugh wants the morals of Jesus without the person of Jesus he's saying we should do these things but don't worry about the

God stuff the problem with that though is that Jesus is equating the right life the good life with following him you can't separate them they go together even if that means persecution but Jesus also changes his language from speaking generally in verse 10 about blessed are those who are persecuted to speaking particularly to his disciples in verse 11 saying blessed are you when you are persecuted do you see that why does he do that well I take it so that they don't miss this beatitude in particular that's why he expands on it so they don't miss this one it's kind of like the parents giving some general instructions to the kids saying now kids don't forget this and this and make sure you don't forget this it's almost like he's honing in on this one why are they not to miss this one in particular because this is the one where the rubber hits the road this is the one where following Jesus well you could be tempted not to follow him anymore you see following Jesus means you will sometimes stand out you'll be different to those who follow the world and that will sometimes bring persecution which is not fun all the other beatitudes we can control but persecution is something done to us and the only way we can control it is by not following Jesus by not standing out and becoming a target now that's tempting because persecution is not fun and so Jesus addresses these disciples directly so that they remembered you are blessed when you are persecuted for me why because yours is the kingdom of heaven and great will your reward be so keep following me even when persecution comes earlier last year my son

[18:18] Tim was asked why he had his eyes closed before a spelling test at school and he replied to his classmate that he was praying spelling is not his best subject you see so he thought he better pray but he came home really upset because several of the kids in his class started teasing him because this was not what they were used to he stood out as different and so they called him stupid for believing in God and how dumb to pray and so on in fact even yesterday he was recalling these comments that happened last year and the teasing continued for some time now it broke my heart when I heard this persecution is not easy but I tell you what I also rejoiced for he was living the good life for great will his reward in heaven be do you believe that we had to keep following Jesus and stand out even if it means persecution because standing out it can not only bring persecution but it can also bring others to praise

God have a look at verse 13 you are the salt of the earth but if salt loses its saltiness how can it be made salty again it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under foot you are the light of the world a town built on a hill cannot be hidden neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house in the same way let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven Jesus is saying here we are to be salt of the earth now people kind of have all kind of ideas of what about what this means but when you see three images put together to make one point which is verse 16 then all images all three images have to have something in common because it all makes the same point and so what does salt light and a city on a hill all have in common well they're distinctive they stand out by their very nature they stand out salt stands out it has a distinctive flavor doesn't it you always know if a meal has too much salt in it and if it loses its saltiness or is diluted then it is no longer distinctive light stands out that's the whole point of putting the light on so it stands out and gives light so you can see if you put it under a bowl then it can't do its job of standing out and giving light and a city on a hill by its very position stands out it cannot be hidden and so says Jesus you disciples are to stand out just like salt light and a town on a hill but how they to stand out well it says by doing good works as we follow Jesus see verse 16 in the same way let your light shine before others in other words stand out that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven but did you notice there that these good works are not any old good works you know like saying hello or helping someone with their bag and so on if you do nice things like that people will generally praise us not God rather these are the spirit inspired good works the good works that we do only because we follow Jesus and wouldn't normally do things that show us we are living kingdom lives that will lead people to praise God and just as a queen of Sheba praised God when she saw God's kingdom in full and it's all its glory as we leave kingdom lives and reflect the values of the kingdom and do spirit inspired works then people somehow or other will recognize that God is at work in us that we are different even different to normal nice people and in the rest of the sermon Jesus will unpack this kingdom living and the good works that we are to do that make us different they are things like having a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees the things like not just avoiding physical murder but controlling our anger and seeking peace when others wouldn't it's not just avoiding adultery with your bodies but it's avoiding it with your eyes and minds even though others wouldn't as they watch TV and so on it's speaking the truth when others wouldn't because oh it's just a white lie doesn't matter it's loving even our enemies when others wouldn't this is how we stand out as different these are the spirit inspired good works that will make us stand out not just as nice people but as God's people and lead people to praise Him it's kind of like the Salvation Army motto you know thank God for the salvos well our lives that'll lead people to thank God for us or perhaps instead ask us why it is we do what we do and then we can point them to Christ that they may praise God as a believer themselves you see this is part of how the disciples were to be fishes of men do remember that Jesus called them to fish for people and part of that meant standing out as

followers of christ well in the coming weeks we'll unpack some of those things and i'll share with you some true stories about how this works in life but for now let's wrap up this is the kingdom life that the disciples of christ are called to live and it's not going to always be easy but it will be worth it when john revolter came to australia he was booked into a hotel in sydney and our friend said that uh quantus paid five thousand dollars a night for his hotel must have been pretty good um he actually though had to fly home for the birth of one of his children and so our friends actually got to stay in the hotel room itself quantus had already paid so they stayed and uh my friend said to me afterwards when i asked him how it was he said yeah it was it was pretty good and john seems like a pretty nice guy but i tell you what i wouldn't trade places for him ever what do you mean and he said he doesn't have jesus why not of course you see he may have the world at his feet but he does not have the kingdom he does not have the truly good life that brings much deeper peace and comfort now and much much more later may god help us to keep living the truly good life standing out as we follow christ let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for the these words of jesus which remind us what the blessed life what the good life looks like and although it is different to what we are told by the world we pray that you would help us to listen and to put into practice these words and so live the truly blessed life standing out as different so that others may see and praise not us but you and we pray these things in jesus name amen