

All right, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad that you're here with us today. Wherever you are, whatever's going on in your life, whatever campus you're at, we are so glad you're here with us. Maybe somebody invited you. Maybe somebody brought you. Maybe you just kind of showed up and you're honestly not even sure why you're here. Well, I believe you're here for such a time as this because I believe Jesus is inviting you to Himself and He is inviting you to a good and beautiful life.

And we want to help you discover who you are, who God is, what you were created to do. And you picked a perfect time to come because last week we started a conversation on the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest message that has ever been preached. And we started it by simply declaring it over our lives. By simply speaking it out over us and listening to it the way the first audience would have heard it in its entirety without notes, without explanation, without understanding. Words that were simply spirit and life. Words that may have gone over our head but deep into our heart. Words that cause this fire inside of us to burn. Words that captivate and capture and stir and and take a hold of us. Words that convict and challenge, but also uplift and bring us this hope and this future.

You see, the Sermon on the Mount is probably the greatest thing that Jesus ever said. And yet, it is one of the least understood and one of the most misinterpreted things that Jesus has ever said. And you see in this one individual sermon all of these incredible things, all of these little ideas, thoughts, verses that you've had throughout the years, they're all in one message. Contained within that one message was the Beatitudes, salt and light, all of the you have heard it said but I say to you, the Lord's Prayer, the where your treasure is there your heart will be also, the seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and everything else will be added unto you, the speck and the plank, the ask, the seek, the knock, the narrow and the wide road, the build your life on the rock, not on the sand. All of that was contained in one message. They're not these individual fracked out things, they're all part of a larger invitation that Jesus offers us to a good and beautiful life in His name.

And if you don't know Jesus, when you hear the Sermon on the Mount, you have to ask yourself this question and wrestle through: Does this guy know what he's talking about? Does He have a grasp of reality? Does He know what is good and true and right? And is He worth following? And you need to consider your own life and then count the cost of following Him but also count the cost of not following Him. And is this worth it?

But if you do know Jesus and you say I'm a Christian, I'm a believer. I'm a disciple. I know Jesus. Then you have to listen to the Sermon on the Mount and you have to figure out how am I going to arrange my life around it? How am I going to order my life around it? How am I going to align my life with it? Because I've already decided He has a grasp on reality and He knows what is good and He knows what is true and He knows what is right and I've already counted the cost and decided He is the one that I follow.

So I can't take His words and push them to the side. I need to be confronted with them and wrestle with them and figure out how do I bring my life into alignment with this invitation that He offers me to a good and beautiful life.

And before we get into it and start wrestling through different things together, there's a couple things that I need to say to you up front that are incredibly important that you need to make sure you understand as we get started. And the first thing is simply this: I'm not going to answer all your questions. I just want to tell you that right up front. Like some of you are waiting. You have one line in one verse and you are waiting for me to give you the exact interpretation that agrees with how you have already interpreted it.

Yeah. No, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to answer all your questions. I'm not going to alleviate your tension with the text. I'm not going to give you full understanding of everything that's in there. No, actually, my hope for these next few weeks is we will create questions and we will create tension and there will be things that you realize you don't understand that cause you to wrestle with it. Why? Because the goal of teaching and preaching is not to answer all your questions. It's to help you seek Him. And He says when you seek Me with all your heart then you'll find Me. Sometimes when there is tension and there is questions and there is a lack of understanding that creates within us a motivation to actually seek Him with all our heart. So we're not going to answer all your questions. We're going to create some that hopefully drive you to Jesus.

The second thing is to best understand the Sermon on the Mount, it must be interpreted in community. The message was preached to a community in a community and its revelation is released in community. So, the point of the Sermon on the Mount is not to go away by yourself and decide what it says. No, it's to wrestle with the people of God. This is why you need a circle or a serve team or godly relationships or a conversation around the dinner table or in your living room talking about the things of God.

The third thing that I need you to understand is that your view of God will determine how you hear the entire Sermon on the Mount. Whatever you believe about God is exactly how you will hear what Jesus is trying to say to you. You say, "What does that mean?" Well, the mouth speaks of the overflow of the heart. So, whatever is in His heart is what He is going to say. And we know that is true. The only problem is, is the ear hears what the mind already believes. The ear hears what the mind already believes. You say, "What does that mean?" That means you will hear the Sermon on the Mount in alignment exactly with what you believe is already true about God. Psychology would call this confirmation bias. You have a bias, a belief about God, and you're looking to confirm it.

So if you believe God is good, everything you think He says will be good. If you believe He is love, then everything that He says you will hear as loving. If you believe He is compassionate, everything you will hear, you will hear compassionately. If you think He is gracious, then

everything you're going to hear, you're going to hear through a gracious lens. But if you think God is harsh, everything He says in the Sermon on the Mount, you will hear through the lens of harsh. If you think God is religious, then everything He says you will hear with a religious tone. If you think God is mean or distant or disconnected or doesn't care, then that's exactly how you will hear His words. The ear hears what the mind already believes. So here's what you have to think about. For some of you, it's not about getting anything out of the Sermon on the Mount. It's about actually realizing what do I believe about God? You will find yourself interpreting things that Jesus is saying in a good and beautiful way. You will be interpreting them in a religious or a harsh or an oppressive way. Maybe that's your aha in this series is that I have a wrong view of God and therefore I hear everything He says through my confirmation bias. My ear is hearing what my mind already believes about Him. This is why in worship, we're taking every one of these weeks and we're putting an attribute, a characteristic, a nature of God up to try to lift up our heads to renew our minds so that your mind, your ear can hear what your renewed mind already believes about Him, that if He is beautiful, and we just talked about that and looked at that and lifted our eyes to that, then let your ear now hear what your renewed mind already believes that everything He says is beautiful because that's who He is. Does that make sense to you?

And then the last thing is simply this: you're going to have to wrestle with what you believe a good and beautiful life looks like. As we go through these next few weeks, you're going to have to be confronted with your own personal definition of what is a good and beautiful life. In fact, if I asked you that right now, good and beautiful life, what is it? How would you define it? How would you describe it? If your children or your parents or your friends or your neighbors or a co-worker or a stranger just came up to you and said, "Hey, what is a good and beautiful life?" What would you say? You see, whether you realize it or not, you have a definition of a good and beautiful life. You maybe have never consciously thought about it. You may have never written it down in words. But make no mistake about it, you have a belief of what a good and beautiful life looks like. This is why you live your life in this direction. You have a vision of what a good and beautiful life looks like. So this is why you arrange things this way and order things this way. And this is why you use your money this way and your time this way. This is why you do this but you don't do that because somewhere along the way you picked up a belief of what a good and beautiful life is. So you're pursuing it. And that's why if this is what you believe and this is the reality of your life, this is your level of constant disappointment with the life that you're experiencing.

So the question is, is how would you define a good and beautiful life? Is it success? Is it significance? Is it fame? Is it fortune? Is it money? Is it comfort, convenience? Is it entertainment? Is it purpose? Is it marriage or children or religion or spirituality or the American dream? How would you define a good and beautiful life? Because somewhere, somehow, somewhere along the way of your life, someone or something conformed within you a definition of a good and beautiful life. And whoever you look to to define reality is who influences you. And whoever you look to to tell you what is good and true and right is who

you're actually following. So, what is your definition? And are you sure you have the right definition?

Because you have a definition of a good and beautiful life. But so does Jesus. And Jesus offers us a very different definition of what a good and beautiful life looks like. It's the entire Sermon on the Mount. See, Jesus would define a good and beautiful life as life lived in His kingdom. It's a life where we are loved and we love. It's a life where we live free as our Father's beloved sons or daughters in His unshakable kingdom. Jesus would define a good and beautiful life as a life lived from the heart. Where our internal realities match our external realities and our external realities match our internal realities. Jesus would say a good and beautiful life is a life that's free from anger, free from condemnation and rage and frustration. He would say good and beautiful life is a life that's free from lust and sexual immorality. He would say good and beautiful life is a life where we don't lie or manipulate to get what we want. It's where we are free from revenge and vengeance and we can forgive and love not only our neighbor but our enemies. Jesus would say a good and beautiful life is a life where we're not performing for the approval of man but live in deep relationship with God. He would say a good and beautiful life is the life that is free from greed, where we don't treasure the things of this world and try to hoard them and hide them and hang on to them with everything that we've got. He would say a good and beautiful life is a life free of worry. A life free of mental health and anxiety and depression and the spirit of fear. He would say a good and beautiful life is a life where we don't judge other people and try to conform them into our image and where we go a different way than everyone else is going. And we build our life on a rock where thereby we can withstand any and everything that comes against us because we are already living an eternal kind of life in the here and now.

That's His definition of a good and beautiful life. Which is why He says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In other words, change your mind. He shows up and He says change your mind. Hey, there is a totally different kind of life. A good and beautiful life that is now available to anyone and everyone who wants it. The question is, do you and Jesus have the same definition of a good and beautiful life? And as you age, is your life becoming more good and more beautiful?

If you're like over the age of 35, I really want you to think about that question. As you're aging every year, is your life becoming more good and more beautiful, or not? You see, the reason Jesus offers us a good and beautiful life is because He is a good and beautiful God and He rules a good and beautiful kingdom. And you do who you are and you can only give what you have. And because He is good and beautiful, the only thing He can offer you are things that are good and beautiful. See, God is good. It's not just something that He does. It's actually His character. It's nature. Give thanks to the Lord for He is, His love endures forever. He's good. It's actually who He is. It's His very character, His nature. What does it mean for something to be good? It means it's true. It means it's right. It means it's as it should be. It means it's healthy, and whole. It means it's abundant and generous and full of life and full of love. I would define

goodness for you as self-giving love. I say God is good. What does that mean? He is self-giving love. He is good, but He's also beautiful.

Have you ever stopped to think about the fact that the Scriptures tell us that God is beautiful? that it's actually His character. It's actually His nature. It's actually what He is like. One thing... I seek... to behold the beauty of the Lord. Do you believe the Lord is beautiful? And if so, then what is beauty like? Beauty is radiant. It's vibrant. It's glorious. It's majestic. It's creative. It's fruitful. It's different. It's other. It's holy. It's holy.

All throughout Scripture, when it talks about the beauty of God, it talks about the beauty of His holiness. See, we think holiness is about what we can or can't do. That is not what holiness is. Holiness is the beauty of the Lord. It's beautiful. Why? Because it's pure. There's no impurities. There's no contagions. There's there's there's no there's nothing to to taint it, to mar it, to stain it, to disfigure it. No, it's it's perfect in every way.

And so what I want you to understand if that is God is good and He is beautiful, then at the center of the universe, at the center of all creation is goodness and beauty. At the center of all creation is a self-giving love that is holy. And when we turn towards it, we receive His self-giving love and His holiness, His goodness and His beauty. But when we turn away from God, we lose the goodness and the beauty that He freely offers and we lose His self-giving love and we lose His holiness. And we go out and try to do things our own way. And this is where we get in trouble. Because instead of living a good and beautiful life, we end up with a very bad and ugly life. Now, I know those words feel very strong when I say it like that. So, let me reinterpret them for you. How about just an unhealthy and a broken life? Isn't that what sin is?

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Sin. What does that mean? To miss the mark, to turn our back on God, to go our own way, to do our own thing. We've sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Here's the interesting thing. If you've fallen short of the glory of God, it means you were created for it. It means you were made for the glory of God. What is the glory of God? His goodness and His beauty. You were made for a good and beautiful life. But what sin does is it causes us to turn our back on God and to say no, I'm going to live my own life and I'll define good and beauty. Thank you very much. And in the process we end up with this very unhealthy and very broken life. And the interesting thing about it is we spend so much of our lives defending sin. How how much of your life how much of the people around you to sit there and defend sin? We are its greatest defenders. Oh, it's not that big of a deal. Oh, you know, everybody does it. They're just kids. It's just I I did that when I was their age, too. It's just a little thing. You know, I had to do that to close the business deal. I have to provide for my family. It's not that big of a deal. I mean, yeah, I've struggled this since I was a kid, but but it's better than what it used to be. We defend sin as if it's the purpose of our life. And yet, ironically, we all inherently know that sin is not good and beautiful. We inherently know that it is unhealthy and broken.

Let me prove it to you. When we engage in sin, we are not proud of it, are we? We're embarrassed. We're ashamed. We want to hide it. We don't want anybody to know about it. We want to put it in the closet. We want to keep it in the dark. We don't, we don't want anybody to be aware of what we've been doing, of what we're like, of what we think, of what we say. That's why we call deeds done in the darkness. Why? Because we're embarrassed. Inherently, we know this is not natural. This is not normal. This goes against the grain of creation. And this is why when we sin, what happens? We immediately feel guilty. We feel convicted. We feel ashamed. We feel broken. Oh, it may taste really sweet going in, but it becomes really bitter and really sour really fast. And we become exhausted and weary and wore out.

Listen, if sin was good and beautiful, then why not do it, do it all the way and do it proudly? If we're defending a little bit of sin, then man, then send it. Just go for it, right? I mean, just take the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, "Don't be angry." I'm going for it. I'm going to start killing the people that get in my way. If it's good and beautiful, they're in your way. Send it.

Lust. Why don't we just satisfy our lust with anyone, any way, any time, whenever we feel like it. Let's just I mean, if it's good, then let's just do it. Divorce. Why don't we just divorce our spouse when they just irritate us the way they brush their teeth? I'm we're done. Just just send it. You know, why don't we be real proud and just send it when we're like, you know what? We're just going to lie. I'm never going to tell the truth. I'm going to manipulate every conversation to get what I want. And I'm never going to forgive other people. I'm going to get vengeance, not only on my enemy, I'm going to go get what belongs to my neighbor. I mean, let's be proud of this. And then, hey, you know what? I'm going to perform for people because I want them to think very highly of me. So, I'm just going to tell you, hey, I'm a people pleaser. Just want you to know I'm a people pleaser. And my whole goal is to get everyone around me to like me in life. And and you know what? I'm going to be greedy, and I'm going to hide and I'm going to hoard and I'm going to hate and I'm going to do everything I can to treasure the things of this earth. And I'm going to grab them with all that I've got cuz that's a good and beautiful life. And you know what? I am worried and I'm proud of my mental health and I'm proud of my anxiety and I'm proud of my depression and I'm pr proud of my spirit of fear. It's pretty awesome. It is the best path of life I've been able to find. So, I'm just going to go ahead and tell you how amazing it is and go into it with all that I've got. And I'm going to judge other people and I'm going to judge them until they behave like the way that I want them. And I'm just going to tell you straight up, I'm here to judge you. I'm here to make you what I want you to be. And you know what? I'm never going to go a different way. I'm going to go everyone else is going because that's, you know, the life is like just jump off the cliff with all the other sheep. And I'm going to build my life on sand cuz it's comfortable and cushy and I hope there's a a nice sun and a warm breeze.

If it's good and beautiful, then do it and be proud of it and tell your kids that's the life they should live and tell your parents that's the life they should live and tell the other people in your

life that's the life they should live. If it's good and beautiful, then do it. But inherently, we know it's not good and beautiful. So why do we defend the little version of it when sin is sin, and it's just as unhealthy and broken whether it's in the seed form or in the fruit form? Whether it's small or whether it's big. Come on, think about it like this. Have you ever seen anybody in anger, in a rage, a fit of rage? There is nothing good and beautiful about that. Have you ever watched a man just lustfully stare at a woman? There is nothing good and beautiful about that. Have you ever seen somebody hold on to bitterness with everything they've got? There is nothing good and beautiful about that. Have you ever seen someone be so greedy that their entire life is about their possessions and their money? Oh, that is not good nor beautiful. Have you ever seen someone struggle with such a mental health challenge that worry, anxiety, depression, the spirit of fear is literally taking them down? That that is not good or beautiful. Judging is, are you catching what I'm saying?

It's ugly in others. It is repulsive in myself. And the problem is, is I'm very quick to look at it in others and very slow to acknowledge it in me. But if I'm ever going to get to a good and beautiful life, then I have to first actually acknowledge what a good and beautiful life is and what a good and beautiful life isn't. And I can't justify all the unhealthy, broken parts of my life as if somehow, somehow they're a part of this good and beautiful larger construct that Jesus offers me. Are you with me on this? See, Romans chapter 1 gives us this really interesting passage that's basically if you want an unhealthy and broken life, here's your plan. Ready? Cuz some of you are like, I don't good and beautiful. I'm, I'm okay. Unhealthy and broken, here's your plan.

"For all they knew, although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... They... exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts... He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey disobey their parents. They are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless."

Okay, ready? Six steps in two minutes on how to live an unhealthy and broken life. First thing is this. Just turn away from God. Turn away from God. Although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him. What does that mean? That just means they turned their back on God. They turned away from God. I'm going to be my own God and I'm going to go my way. Thank you very much.

Second thing is you get lost. But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. You turn your back on God. There's no light. You're now lost. You've lost grip of reality, of what is real, of what is true, of what is right. And you're heading down your own path.

Third thing is you create your own idols. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like the things of this earth. You were created to worship. So you will have an idol of some kind. You will choose a god of some kind. We will make an image in our image in the things of this world, a pleasure... something. But you will start worshipping an idol.

Fourth thing is God lets you go. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desire of their hearts... In other words, God says if that's where you want to go, I'm going to let you go. We think the wrath of God is God coming down and smiting you in your brokenness. The wrath of God is simply God letting you go in the direction you've decided to go without Him. That's where wrath lies because you've turned away from self-giving love and holiness. And the only thing that's left is a life without self-giving love and holiness. Bad and ugly. And then what happens? We pursue pleasure at all costs. He gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done. The whole thing is now I pursue pleasure with everything I've got. And then what happens?

The sixth thing, sin reigns. Sin reigns. Sin rules and reigns over your life. It becomes the highest influencing agent. And I'm not even going to reread all those things. That's the life you're left with when sin is your god and rules and reigns over you. That, my friends, is a bad and ugly life. That's not just unhealthy and broken. That is a bad and ugly life. Are you with me on this? So this is why when Jesus shows up on the scene and offers a different way, it is mindblowing. He shows up on the scene and He says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." From that time on, Jesus had one message. 30 years of hiddenness. He shows up and He's got one message. And the message is repent. Change your mind. Change your thinking. Consider how you're living your life. Make a new plan because there is a good and beautiful life that is now available to anyone and everyone who wants it. The only message Jesus preached was about the kingdom of heaven. That it was available that way it was at hand. Jesus didn't start it. He didn't begin it. It's everlasting. It always has been. It always will be. But when Jesus came, He brought it and made it available to the least deserving, least expecting people.

Now you have to ask yourself the question, what is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is not church or religion. The kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God. It's where God's will is done. It's the with-God life. It's another kind of life. It's life from above. It's interactive relationship, eternal life in the here and now. And if God is a king, he then has a kingdom. And kings rule over their kingdoms. Stay with me because this is important. Rule over their kingdoms with words and actions. Every king has a kingdom, a domain where what they say and what they do is done. And wherever a king speaks and acts and things submit and surrender to his words and his actions, that's a part of his kingdom. Wherever he speaks and acts and things do not submit to his words and his actions, that is not a part of his kingdom. Now we know Jesus is Lord of all. He's the King of all. In Him all things hold together. But for a period of time, He has created us in His image and His likeness. And He has given each one of us a kingdom or a queendom. A place where we rule over. And what we say, our words and our actions is what takes place. You have a kingdom. You say I don't have a king. I have... You have

a kingdom. Your body is your kingdom. Your words and your actions rule over your body. You may have the kingdom of your room, the kingdom of your business, the kingdom of your family, the kingdom of your house. It's why old men go out and meticulously manicure their lawn. Because why? Because they have a kingdom that they're ruling and reigning over. And by golly, it will submit to my will. It's why old women tend to put plastic covers on their furniture and keep their house meticulously. Why? Because by golly, there will be no dust or dirt in this house. It's why children, if you go and mess with their toys, they react. Why? Because that's their kingdom. They have say over those toys.

So, you've been given a say, words, and actions, rulership over your life. And you get to decide whether or not to go do it on your own or submit it and surrender it to the kingdom of heaven. You get to decide to go do your own way – unhealthy and broken. I'm going to do me. Thank you very much. Or Jesus invites you to bring your kingdom that is unhealthy and broken on its own and submit it to His goodness and to His beauty. A good and beautiful God invites you into a good and beautiful kingdom so you can have a good and beautiful life. If He is good and beautiful, then wherever He rules, good and beauty reigns. The problem is, is we have all these areas that are not submitted and surrendered to Him as King. And that's why there's no goodness and no beauty within them.

So Jesus comes and He starts preaching this message. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And some of you are like, what does this have to do with the Sermon on the Mount? Everything. Ready?

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about Him spread all over Syria and people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed, and He healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed Him." Can you see it? Here's where the Sermon on the Mount starts. "Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside, sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them, saying... "

So Jesus shows up. He begins to preach the message of the kingdom of heaven. Repent for the kingdom is at hand. And what does He do? He starts preaching it, but also demonstrating it. He's declaring that the kingdom is available, but He's demonstrating by healing lost, lonely, and broken people and immediately by touching them bringing them into His kingdom. The people that the rest of the people thought had no chance, no chance with God and no chance with His kingdom are the ones that He is going around touching, healing, setting free and bringing them in. It says, "Now when He saw the crowds..." Okay, that's how the Sermon on the Mount starts. You can't just jump in and be like, well, what does Jesus mean by this one? Now, when He saw the crowds, who are the crowds? The crowds of all the people He's just been healing. Contained within that crowd is the leper He just healed, the demon-possessed

person He just set free, the blind person who can now see, the mute person who can now talk, the paralytic who can now walk, the person who couldn't hear that now can hear, contained within all of this. He sees the crowd, all these people that the kingdom of God just came upon.

And then He starts by saying the Beatitudes: "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." The only problem is, is we jump right into the Beatitudes without understanding the context. He's been preaching that the kingdom of heaven is available for anyone and everyone who wants it. He's been demonstrating it by bringing forth the power and authority to drive out every sickness, every disease, every demon. And contained with all the people that are sitting right there in front of Him that everyone else can see. They're like, that's Joe. We haven't been able to touch him in 15 years cuz he was a leper. He is now sitting next to my sister. I hope the healing worked.

They can see all these people sitting there. So He starts the Beatitudes. Okay. Blessed are the blessed... happy. Hang on. Go back. Not yet. Blessed, happy, joyful, well off. The good and beautiful life is now available to... that's that's what that means. You have two ways that you can interpret the Beatitudes. One is to interpret the Beatitudes as virtue virtues to obtain to, as characters that I must pursue and become in my life if I want to be blessed. Blessed are the... there's a condition to be blessed. So is it a virtue that I need to obtain? Is it a quality I need to uh uh become? Is it a character that I need to take on?

Or you can see the Beatitudes as invitations to the marginalized, as declarations that the least deserving, least expecting people that we can all now see in our midst have now been brought into the kingdom of God. The problem is, is if you interpret the Beatitudes as things you have to do, then is it good news? Isn't the whole difference between law and grace was the law was what I had to do to be blessed? Grace is what He has done. I am now blessed. So if the Beatitudes are this I have to do these things to become blessed, happy, joyful, well off, have a good and beautiful life, then just understand out of the gate Jesus is introducing a new form of legalism, a new form of being a Pharisee. Oh, you think Moses was hard? I'm going to show you from my first line how hard this actually is. That doesn't sound like Jesus, does it? But the ear hears what the mind already believes. And the reason that's the primary way we interpret the Beatitudes is because it shows us how much of our mind still lives under the law and believes that we are blessed based on what we do, not blessed based on who He is and what He has done.

So, so, so you can look at it as virtues to obtain to, which is a new form of legalism. Or you can see this as these declarations of Jesus basically saying the kingdom of heaven is now available to everyone. To everyone. So remember, they were all waiting for the kingdom to come, but they thought the kingdom was available to elite men who were righteous and lived religious lives. There ain't an elite man that was righteous living a religious life that just got touched and experienced the healing of the kingdom of heaven in that group. It's completely different

reality that Jesus is saying these people are now a part of the kingdom of heaven. So the same way He goes on later to say, "You have heard it said but I say to you..." That's the Beatitudes. You have heard it said that this is the good life. But I say to you, no, this is the good and beautiful life because this person is now welcome in My kingdom. Are you with me on this?

So, let me try to go through these quick because I know some of you that just blew up how you've interpreted it your entire life and you're like woop woop woop, all the things. That's fine. Just think about it. Okay. What does He say? Okay, Garrett, here we go. Ready?

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

It's the first thing He says in the Sermon on the Mount to a crowd of people He has been preaching the kingdom's availability to and demonstrating its power by healing them and setting them free. Blessed, happy, joyful, well off, the good and beautiful life is available to those who are poor in spirit. Who are the people that are poor in spirit? People that are spiritually bankrupt. People that have no faith. They have no hope. They have no love. They have no relationship with God. They're far from God. They're lost, lonely, and broken. Nothing about their spirit or their soul or their life is healthy and whole. And yet Jesus shows up and says they, those ones, the ones none of you think can get in. Yeah. No. They're blessed because in Me they are welcome into the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Who are people that mourn? People that have on undergone great tragedies and hardships. People who are broken. People who have lost loved ones and watch their life fall apart in front of their eyes – who have lost their business, lost their hopes, lost their dreams, lost their house. They they they have this deep brokenness inside of them. None of us would look at that kind of person and say they're blessed. And yet Jesus says they're blessed because in the kingdom of heaven they shall be comforted and things will be made right.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

We interpret meek as just this kind of humble posture. The meek is the person who gets bullied. The meek is the person who who can't stand up for themselves. They're they're always in the background. They're stepped on, stepped over, looked past, looked over. They don't have what's in them to go and make it happen and go make things happen for themselves. And yet Jesus looks at them and says oh yeah, in My kingdom they have a great inheritance. So they're blessed. They're well off. They're welcomed in.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

What does it mean to be hungry or thirsty? Not like you're hungry for lunch in an hour. Like hunger, thirst. It's a, it's a situation of great need. Blessed are people who are desperate for righteousness, things to be made right. This is the mom who is desperate for her wayward son to be brought back home. This is the dad who is desperate for his marriage to be reconciled. This is the person who has the situation or the circumstance or the storm or the trial or the tragedy and everything is wrong and everything is coming against them. Yeah. Jesus says they're blessed because in His kingdom all things will be made right and their desires will be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy."

What does it mean to be merciful? Well, think about it. To be merciful means you have had to have great wrongs done against you. To be merciful means, oh, you've undergone great trauma and great abuse and rejection and betrayal and people have exposed you and gossiped about you and slandered you and done you wrong. None of us would say that kind of person is blessed. And yet Jesus says in My kingdom they're blessed and they will receive great mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

What's the pure in heart? This is where some of you are like, no see that's a virtue we're supposed to obtain to. Jesus wouldn't pick one out of the list to say obtain to this one. All the rest of these are inclusions. What's the pure in heart? This is the perfectionist. They want to dot every i, cross every t. They need to do everything right. And they live with this mindset of like, is it enough? Am I enough? Am I good? Did I do good? Did I get it right? Are you good? Did you do good? Did you get it right? The perfectionist life is an exhausting way to live. And Jesus says oh yeah, in My kingdom, they're blessed because they're going to see God. Guess what? They're seeing God right now as they look at My face.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

What does it mean to be a peacemaker? This is a person who is stuck in between great conflict. This is the single mom stuck in between her children and her ex-husband trying to work it all out. This is the dad trying to bring relationship back together from his family that has been fractured and divided. This is the friend that is trying to hold two groups of people and pull them back together in the midst of the evil and the brokenness and the vileness. Yeah, none of us would think that person's blessed, but Jesus says they are because in the kingdom they are called sons and daughters of God. They are brought in.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

This is the person just trying to do the right thing and everyone and everything comes against them. Jesus says the kingdom belongs to them.

And then His last one is He says, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me."

Who's He talking to there? The disciples. He's basically saying hey guys, you're blessed, too, cuz I know everyone thinks you're crazy for going in with Me. But guess what? The kingdom now belongs to you. If there was ever a group that was poor in spirit that shouldn't have got brought in, it was the disciples, the tax collectors, the zealots, Peter.

So, can you see how what Jesus is doing is trying to help us rethink about what we believe a blessed life looks like? Because we believe a blessed life looks like having everything the world offers. He says it doesn't matter what you have in this world. If you have Me and My kingdom, you are blessed. You are well off. And you do have a good and beautiful life regardless of the situations around you. This is why in Matthew 6 or Luke 6, He says same kind of Sermon on the Mount.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets."

Okay, what do I do with that? Woe to me if I am rich? See, if that's true, then if the Beatitudes, because this is in the Beatitudes run in Luke, if the Beatitudes are virtues to obtain to, then I need to really take this to heart and I need to realize that I can never be rich. I need to give away everything I have and become poor. I should never eat anything because I'm only blessed if I'm hungry. I should never laugh in under any situation or any circumstance. And if anybody ever compliments me, I need to shut it down because it's going to ruin my blessing. Does that make sense? Because if that's true, then you should literally give away everything you have, never eat food, have no comfort, never let anybody... Do you catch what I'm saying? Because if you had to do these things to be blessed, then you need to go put yourself in places where you can mourn. So go put yourself in tragedy. If you need to do these things to to to become that, then you know what? Then you need to be poor in spirit. And he's a that's of the heart. Okay. Well, Luke flat out says, "Blessed are the poor." He doesn't add in spirit. So, so which is it? Blessed are the peacemakers. That means I got to go throw myself into conflict. Where do I find conflict? Think about what Jesus is trying to do here. He's not saying your blessing is based on whether you're rich or poor, whether you're well fed or hungry. What He's saying is your blessing comes when you realize you are desperately in need of the kingdom of God. The problem is is when we're rich and well fed and comforted and people speak well of us, we don't think we need God. He's not saying the kingdom doesn't belong to the rich. He's saying, no, how hard though it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven because they think they have the good life. When we use that term, "the good life," just stop and ask

yourself from now on, maybe this is a little implant in your head. When you hear oh, they're living "the good life." Notice it is never once referred to anything having to do with faith or spirit or heart. "The good life" in our language only refers to the things of this world – comfort, convenience, fame, fortune, ease, entertainment. And Jesus would say woe to you. Woe to you because you don't realize how far from the kingdom you actually are.

Does this make sense to you? This is not an exhaustive list. The Beatitudes are not these things we need to obtain to nor the end of the list. You can make up your own. Some of you are going to go and be like, John said we can make up our own Bible verses. No. States of blessedness. Blessed are the lonely, for they will be given a family. Blessed are those who have been forgotten about, for they will be brought to the front of the line and included. And blessed are the old, for they have a future full of hope. But you can come up with your own woes, too. Woe to those who think they have everything, for they have nothing. Woe to those who look really good on the outside because they are empty on the inside. Woe to those who are content with American Christianity. For this then truly is as good as it gets.

Can you see how your interpretation of the Beatitudes will change how you read the rest of the Sermon on the Mount? Because if it starts with laws to obtain to, virtues I must become, characteristics I need to have to be blessed, that's just a new form of Phariseism. It's just a new legal burden that none of us will be able to carry. But if Jesus is looking at people in the crowd who everyone thought would always be left out and says that one, that one, that one, that one, they're blessed. They're well off because they know they need Me and I am here to bring them home.

Let me close it for you with this. Try to put it all together. The best way I can try to illustrate this for you because I realize it's a repenting. That's thinking different... is the story of the prodigal son. Jesus tells a story of a father who has two sons. One day one of the sons comes to him and basically says I wish you were dead. I want my inheritance now. I want to go live my life. So with a broken heart, the father gives the boy his inheritance. And he turns his back on his father and he goes out and he lives what he thinks is the good life – parties, prostitutes, wild living. Eventually, the money runs out. The friends all leave, and he finds himself in a pig pen, longing for the food of pigs. That sure sounds like Romans 1, doesn't it? Turned his back on his father. Got lost. Lost sight of reality. He had no light. So, he wasn't true, sure anymore. What was good and true was right. He created an idol. The idol was his own pleasure. The father let him go. Let him go with his own free will, where he wanted. He pursued pleasure with all cost until what? Sin reigned. And he found himself in a pig pen longing for the food of pigs. But he comes to his senses, it says, and he thinks if I go back, maybe I can slave away in my father's kingdom for the rest of my life just to earn my keep. And as he's coming back, father sees him a long way off, filled with compassion, runs, grabs his son. His son starts his little I'm going to do better speech. He stops it. He hugs him. He kisses him, gives him a robe, a ring of sandals, brings him in the house, kills the fattened calf, throws an incredible party, and all the while the older brother is outside. And when he hears what's happening, the father goes out to get the

older brother to bring him in, too. And the older brother is disgusted. You brought him back into this house. All these years I've been slaving for all these years I've done all the things right, and you're going to bring him in? And the father pleads with the older brother saying come back, we must celebrate. Come back in. Have a heart. And the story ends with him never coming in.

That's the Beatitudes, my friends. Blessed are the prodigal sons, for they shall be welcomed back home. Woe to the older brothers for they shall forever be left outside. That's what Jesus is talking about at the beginning of the Beatitudes. And you say what do I do with that? You think different. If the kingdom of heaven is available to them, then guess what? It's available to me. And if the good and beautiful life is available to them, then guess what? It's available to every part of my life. And if the good and beautiful life has been made available to them, then I should start treating them like it's actually true instead of woe to them. Stay away from them. They're dirty. They're broken. They're lost. They're scary. Oh, and and you're so clean? I'm I'm glad you look really good on the outside, but inside?

Hey, blessed is the addict, for he will be set free in Jesus' name. Blessed are the sick, for they shall be healed in Jesus' name. Blessed are the left out, for they will be included before you. It's why Jesus says to the Pharisees, hey, just so you know, the sinners and prostitutes and tax collectors, yeah, they're entering the kingdom before you. Why? Because they're blessed. Why? Their worldly state isn't what we're talking about. Their heavenly state, their spiritual state, their eternal state, because they know they need God. The more you have in this world, the more you need to be aware that you don't become the woe to you person. Because it's really easy when you're rich and well fed and comforted and think you got everything everything the world offers. If you got everything the world offers, oh, make sure you have everything the kingdom offers. Cuz it's very hard to be desperate for God when you've got everything. It's very easy to be desperate for God when you got nothing. That's the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. That the kingdom of God, the good and beautiful life is no longer left for the religious, the elite, the perfect, the pretty, the wealthy, the strong, the brave, the successful, the significant, the influencer. No, it is now available to anyone and everyone who wants it. Anyone who acknowledges. I want that kind of life and I want that kind of forgiveness and I want that kind of freedom. And it's available to me.

Let your ear hear what the renewed mind believes. That the kingdom belongs to everyone. That includes you. Do you want it?

So, close your eyes. Let me just give you a moment. Just what is the Holy Spirit trying to say to you? God is here and He's speaking. So, can you just take a moment to listen?

I just sense that today there is a great invitation like there was that first day. For us to respond to a good and beautiful life to take our kingdom that we try so hard to rule and reign over to get "the good life" going within it. But Jesus comes and He speaks and He draws and He

"What is a Good and Beautiful Life?"
September 27, 2026 | Pastor John Stickl

invites and He says a real, a true, an authentic, good and beautiful life is available to anyone and everyone who wants it. Today is the day of salvation because today the kingdom of God is at hand. Meaning what? Close within reach... if you will let Him offer it to you, and realize that I am blessed, not because of anything in this world, but because Jesus and His kingdom came to me in spite of me turning my back on Him and sin reigning over my life. He came to say happy, joyful, well off, the good and beautiful life is available in My name. So Jesus, may we respond to You. Help renew our minds, and may we think rightly about You, what You say, and what You offer in Jesus' name. Amen.