

All right. Hey everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. We're so glad that you're here with us. Wherever you are, whatever is going on in your life – we're so glad that you're here with us today. We are one church that meets at multiple campuses that carries the hope of Jesus to thousands of locations. So to our Denton campus today, I say to you, we are so proud of you and we are so grateful for you and the way that you are intentionally reaching and connecting people to Jesus. To our Gainesville campus, we say to you, we are so proud of you, so inspired by you. The way that you're serving all of Cooke County and the whole Red River Valley – you are intentionally helping people discover a Jesus-focused, Spirit-filled, life-giving life. To our Flower Mound campus, we are so proud of you for the way you are inviting and including people into your life – for the way you're saying, "Who else? Who else needs to be in my circle, on my serve team, in my group of friends, in my pod, in my life?" And you're making space for people who don't know Jesus. To our Lewisville campus, we say to you, we are so proud of you because you are reaching lost, lonely, and broken people and helping them discover the hope of Jesus. And to our online campus, we are so proud of you all over the world. You are coming together in community and inviting other people into it as you seek Jesus together. So come on, whatever campus you're at today, let's just give it up for each other.

See, we are a movement of hope for the city and beyond, which means we are a people on a journey. We are not a church that exists Sunday to Sunday, event to event, experience to experience. No, no, no. We're a people on a journey. Like we're going somewhere. We're doing something. We're becoming someone. And we've said for years that our church is a harbor of hope, a training center for life, and a family on mission. That this is a harbor of hope where people who have been beat by the storms of life can come in and find hope and be restored and be sent back out. That this is a training center where you can train and become and learn to do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did. And this is a family on mission – beloved sons and daughters – living on mission to release their Father's kingdom wherever they go.

And the interesting part about that is you get to decide which part you want to participate in. No one else gets to decide for you. You can make this whatever you want. This can be a harbor of hope and you can come and go whenever you want, whenever you need hope, which might be every week, every month, every year. I don't know. But you can decide, I'm going to come in when I need hope and then I'm going to go back out until life beats me down. Or you can decide that this is a training center for life. And in this season of my life, I'm training for me. I need to become a certain kind of person. I need to get over some habits and some hang-ups and some brokenness. So, I'm really focused on myself. Or you can decide that this is a family on mission – that this is my place. These are my people. This is what I'm doing and this is where I am going. Deep roots lead to a wide life. And until this becomes a family on mission, you're not really on the journey. Not because we don't want you to be, but because you got a lot of other things going. And there's something about getting to this place to say, "This is my people. This is my place. This is the journey that I'm on." Because once you catch that we're on a journey, it changes everything.

You see, we're a couple weeks into our journey of wrestling through the Sermon on the Mount. This is not just a Sunday to Sunday conversation. This is not just a when you show up and, and here it is. Like this is like we're actually like wrestling through this like we're, we're taking it somewhere. And when we do these longer, bigger series, it shows you practically that we're a people on a journey. And an individual week doesn't really do all that much. It will offer you hope. It will train you, but it is not the fullness of the journey that God offers you. See, we're, we're wrestling through this invitation to a good and beautiful life. What is the Sermon on the Mount? It is not rules and regulations. It is not a try harder, behave better, do more speech from Jesus. No, it is Jesus' invitation to you and I to a good and beautiful life. And we're journeying through it. We're wrestling through it. We're working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

And so, if you don't know Jesus, when you come to the Sermon on the Mount, you have to ask yourself this question: Does Jesus know what He's talking about? Does Jesus have a grasp of reality? Does He know what is good and true and right? And is He worth following? And if I follow him, where He's taking me? Is that even a place that I want to go? And so, you have to consider your ways and count the costs. Look at your life and determine whether or not it's going where you want it to go. And then, and then count the cost of what it costs to follow Jesus. But make sure you also count the cost of what it costs if you don't follow Jesus.

But if you are a Christian, a disciple, a believer, you say you've put your faith in Jesus, then you are now responsible – that's the word – you are now responsible to order your life around the Sermon on the Mount – to arrange your life around the Sermon on the Mount, to align your life with the Sermon on the Mount, because you have already decided that Jesus is who I'm following and I've surrendered my life to Him. And now if this is the most important message that He has ever preached, then it's got to become one of the most important things that I arrange my entire life around. You're now responsible for this revelation.

So this journey that we're on actually matters. And I told you that as we journey through this, there's a couple of really important things that you just need as reference points. One is I'm not going to answer all your questions. My intent is to actually create questions and to create some tension in your soul that will cause you to seek after Him. That the Sermon on the Mount is best interpreted in community. It was preached to a community in community and its revelation is released through community. So you need a circle, a serve team, godly relationships, a kitchen table conversation with other people who are working it out if you really want to grab it.

We also talked about how your view of God will determine how you hear the Sermon on the Mount – that the ear hears what the mind already believes. So your view of God will determine the tone of which you hear that which He's saying. So if you believe that God is good and loving and compassionate, then you will hear everything He's saying as good and loving and compassionate. But if you believe He is harsh and angry and distant and religious, then you will

hear the entire Sermon on the Mount as harsh and angry and distant and religious. My hope is for so many of us, not even that you get something out of the Sermon on the Mount, but that you discover where you have wrong beliefs about who God is because the ear hears what the mind already believes. It's called confirmation bias.

And then the last thing was this. I told you you're going to have to wrestle through what you believe a good and beautiful life looks like. What's a good and beautiful life? What is it? What does it look like? How would you define it if somebody asked you? Whether you realize it or not, you have a definition of a good and beautiful life. You maybe have never written it down. You may have never consciously thought about it. But make no mistake about it. Somewhere along the way, you picked up a belief of this is what a good and beautiful life looks like. This is why you arrange your life this way and order your life this way. This is why you do this but you don't do that. This is why you spend your time like this and not like that. This is why you use your money here but not there. And this is why when your life doesn't look like this but looks like this. This is your level of disappointment or discouragement. Why? Because you have a belief of what a good and beautiful life looks like. And so what is it? Is it significance? Is it success? Is it fame? Is it fortune? Is it comfort? Is it convenience? Is it entertainment? Is it looking a certain way? Is it family? Is it marriage? Is it parenting? Is it religion? Is it spirituality? Is it purpose? Is it work? I don't know. But somewhere somehow someone or something along the way formed within you this definition, this belief of what a good and beautiful life looks like.

The only question is, are you sure your definition is right? So we talked about last week and we invited you to think about it in the practice plan this week. What is a good and beautiful life? Because Jesus offers us a very different definition of what a good and beautiful life looks like. And it's the entire Sermon on the Mount. Jesus would say a good and beautiful life is a life lived in His kingdom. It's a life where we're loved and we love. It's a life where we live free as our Father's beloved sons and daughters in His unshakable kingdom. And, and He would define a good and beautiful life as a life that's lived from the heart where our internal reality matches our external reality and our external reality matches our internal reality. He would say a good and beautiful life is a life free of anger, free from rage and frustration and condemnation. It's a life free from lust and sexual immorality. It's a life free from lying and manipulating and a life of vengeance and getting people back.

He would define a good and beautiful life as a life where there's no performance to try to earn the approval of man. And we don't treasure the things of this world, but we're free to treasure the things of eternity. And we don't worry about anyone or anything because we live free in our Father's unshakable kingdom. And a good and beautiful life is a life that's free from judging and trying to conform others into our image and our likeness. Where we can talk with God and and take a narrow road that's in a different direction than everybody else. And where our heart actually produces the fruit of our life and we are living an interactive relationship with God and where we get to build our life on the rock where no matter what comes against us, we stand strong because we have an eternal life in the here and now. That's His definition.

Which is why He says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus had one message from that time on. Repent. Change your mind. Hey, consider the way you're living. Hey, think about where you're going and what you're doing. Are you sure it's good and beautiful? Because the kingdom of heaven has just showed up. A good and beautiful life is now available to anyone and everyone who wants it. So think, think deeply, think long and hard. Look at your life and decide whether or not it's going where you want it to go because I offer you a good and beautiful life.

And so, did you think about that at all this week? What's a good and beautiful life? And maybe to make it a little easy for you, break it down like this: What does a good and beautiful marriage look like? What's good and beautiful parenting look like? How about what's good and beautiful singleness or young adulting or empty nesting? What is, what does that look like? Or or or how about what does a good and beautiful body look like? But what does a good and beautiful work look like? Or good and beautiful ministry look like? Have you, have you thought about these things?

And as you age, is your life becoming more good and more beautiful? Just look at this. As you age – as time is going by – is your life becoming more good and more beautiful or not? According to your definition, are you going up and to the right? And if so, if you're going up and to the right, according to your definition, money, success, entertainment, comfort, convenience, whatever it may be, is it delivering what you hoped it would? As you move up that line, are you finding yourself experiencing more joy and more peace and more freedom and more hope or not? Is your life becoming more good and more beautiful as you age?

See, I think for a lot of us, we think that that's what the journey with Jesus is supposed to look like up and to the right – only easy or only things that have no hardship or wrestling through or working things out. But this is actually what the journey with Jesus of a good and beautiful life looks like. Why? Because we go from glory to glory, victory to victory, strength to strength, and we're moving forward. And our life is becoming more good and more beautiful. And even in our new valleys, they should be higher than our old highs because we're on a journey and we're becoming someone. Does this make sense to you? You have to wrestle with this and you have to decide what it looks like in your life and whether Jesus has any clue of what He's talking about.

And as I was praying for some of you this week, I was just praying and I just felt like I had this word from the Lord. Some of you want to discard the entire Sermon on the Mount because you think Jesus is preaching it about your past. Some of us literally we hear the Sermon on the Mount and there's a line or two in there that addresses our past and it makes us uncomfortable and we just want to chuck the whole thing. But what I want to say to you is the Sermon on the Mount is not preached to your past. It's preached to your future. It is not a message of the past. It is a message of the future. Like let's just go ahead and say one of the hardest ones. The

whole thing about divorce in there. Some of you hear that and you want to chuck the whole thing because it brings guilt and shame and condemnation. Listen, He is not preaching to you about your past. He is preaching to you about your future. This is why it says, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This isn't about what was. This is about what can be. And I've never met anybody that has said divorce is good and beautiful. And yet, a good and beautiful God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and brings beauty from ashes. What does that mean? It wasn't preached to your past. It was an invitation to your future. And so this is renewing our mind about who He is and what He says and what He offers.

And so to understand the Sermon on the Mount, you have to understand its outline in its entirety. We think the Sermon on the Mount is a bunch of these individual statements that are kind of fracked up like a buffet and you just get to pick and choose like Golden Corral. I want a couple of these. I'll pass on – I don't know who's going to eat that. That's scary. I'll take a few more of these. No, that is not how the Sermon on the Mount works. You get it all or you get it none. And you get it in the order it was delivered.

And so a few weeks ago, I just spoke it over your life. Just lean in with me and let me just walk you through the order and what He does and how He does it. See, Jesus is preaching the kingdom and He is demonstrating the kingdom by healing people. So, He has healed all these sick people and the crowds show up and they sit down and in this crowd are lepers who have been healed and demon possessed people who have been set free and people that couldn't walk that now can and blind people that can now see and deaf people who can now hear. All these people who the kingdom of God just came upon because He was preaching it, declaring it, but He's also demonstrating it.

And then as they sit down, He begins to teach them the Sermon on the Mount. And He starts with the Beatitudes – the blessed. "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." And when Jesus starts that – blessed, happy, joyful, well off – a good and beautiful life is available to these kinds of people. Now, if you hear the Beatitudes as things you have to do, then it will shift how you read the rest of the entire Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes are not virtues you have to obtain to. It's not Christian character you have to aspire to. No, no, no. The Beatitudes are not a new version of law that now is a new form of Pharisaism that is now a new form of if you want to be blessed, you have to do this. That was the law. If you do, then I will. That's not what it is. Jesus is grace. What is He doing?

The blessed are invitations to the marginalized. They're invitations to people who have been left out of the kingdom. And He says they are now blessed because the kingdom of heaven is now available and accessible to them. Remember, they thought the kingdom was only going to come to men who were religious, elite people and that the Messiah was going to overthrow

the Roman government and give them back their nation state. And Jesus is blowing up their definition of who can get into the kingdom.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" – those who've got nothing going for them spiritually – the kingdom of heaven is now available to them. And it doesn't mean every person who's poor in spirit is blessed. It means every person who is poor in spirit can be blessed. It means the kingdom is now available and accessible to them if they want it. And it doesn't mean woe to every person who is rich. It simply means woe to any person that thinks their worldly wealth is what's going to give them a good and beautiful life. It's not about being poor or rich or being well fed or hungry or being comforted or mourning. It's about acknowledging that a good and beautiful life has nothing to do with the world realities around me. It has everything to do with that the fact that the kingdom of heaven is now available and accessible to anyone and everyone who wants it. That is good news. That is not a higher form of law. That is not a try harder behave better speech from Jesus. That is not if you want to be blessed you got to do all these things. He's like no no no. See these people right here? They're blessed because the kingdom is now available and accessible to them and they want it.

So He goes on to salt and light. And who is salt and light? The people who have now entered into the kingdom of heaven. They become living Beatitudes. They become a walking demonstration and a declaration of the kingdom.

And then He goes on to talk about how unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. What does that mean? If this is what the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were doing, and they were doing everything according to the letter of the law, you're telling me I got to do more than that? But think about it. It's not what He's saying. He's not saying do more of the same kind. What He is saying, unless you have a righteous heart, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees had righteous hands, but not a righteous heart. They honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from them. He's saying, if you want to enter the kingdom, it's not about the outward, it's about the inward and submitting and surrendering your kingdom to mine.

And then He goes on to deal with anger. He now assumes we've entered into His kingdom. And now in His kingdom, the first thing He deals with is anger. Anger is destructive. When He says, "When you say you fool, you'll be in danger of the fires of hell." He's not saying you're going to go to hell. He's saying you're in alignment with the kingdom of darkness and the fires of hell will send you and everyone around you. That there's no place for anger in the kingdom of God. What is anger and where does it come from? Okay, you're going to have to think with me today. Okay, what is anger and where does it come from? Anger comes from when our will is violated or we're afraid of about of what's about to happen. Anger comes from control and fear. It comes from when you do not do what I want done in my kingdom or when you do something in such a way that creates fear within me because you're threatening my kingdom.

And so then I will respond in anger, in rage, in frustration, in condemnation – whatever it may be. But what Jesus is teaching us is, hey, once you've entered the kingdom, that means you no longer have your own kingdom. Because the only way into the kingdom was to surrender your kingdom to His. And once your kingdom has been surrendered to His, you now no longer have a will to oversee or a kingdom to run or a kingdom to maintain. It's now about His kingdom coming and His will being done. So I don't have to be afraid or I don't have to control because He's now responsible for His kingdom. Our problem is is we want to enter in the kingdom and then still rule and reign over our own. And your will gets violated or you get afraid of what's going to happen. So you respond in anger. He says there's no place for that in the kingdom.

Then He goes on to lust. What is lust? Lust is using someone else to gratify my flesh. It's using someone else and, and objectifying them in such a way that brings a gratification to my flesh – to my sin nature. And I will use you emotionally or physically to gratify my own flesh. Jesus says in His kingdom, there's no place for lust because we are now people of love. We don't use you for our good. We now use our life for your good. And at its root, lust comes from this place of we were created for deep intimacy and communion and union with God. And when we don't have communion and intimacy and union with God, we will lust after other people and other things and try to use them for our own gratification to satisfy the desires of our flesh because we have a deep longing in our spirit – says but there's no place for that anymore in the kingdom.

Then He goes on to lying. And He says in the kingdom we no longer lie. We become people of truth. We become people of truth and we don't have to lie. Here's a question. Why do you lie? This is what, this is why so genius. He's trying to get to the root of these things. Why do you lie? We lie for two reasons: We lie to get what we want or to make sure we don't get what we don't want. Every lie in your life, that's why you lie – to get what you want or so that you don't get what you don't want. Your dad asks you, "Did you do your homework and you didn't do it?" And you lie and say, "Yes, I did." Why? Because you want to get what you want cuz he told you when you've completed your homework, I'll take you for ice cream. And you lie and say I did do it even when I didn't. Because you don't want to get what you don't want, which is the consequence for not doing your homework. Every lie in your life can be answered with one of those two. You're trying to get something you want or make sure you don't get something that you don't want. He then moves on. Are you tracking with me? You got, you got to track with me today. All right. I'm I don't I don't know that I've got you, but I'm just going to slow down and we'll see where it gets then. This is the outline and it matters. So, you got to think deeply.

He then moves on to vengeance and He says we're no longer a people of vengeance and unforgiveness and getting people back. That's the whole eye for eye and tooth for tooth thing. He says yeah, the law says eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Somebody smacks you on the right cheek, you're technically allowed to smack them back on the right cheek equal to the way that they hit you. The problem is is if someone hits you on the right cheek, you're allowed to hit them back on their right cheek, but you have to do it the same. The problem is is it's hard to

measure exactly the same fortitude. So, you probably went 10% higher. They now have a legal right to hit you back with that 10%. And so if I take your eye, you're allowed to take my eye. But in the process of taking my eye, you break my nose. I'm allowed to now break your nose. And in breaking your nose, I might also knock out one of your teeth. You're now allowed to take one of my teeth. And instead of getting one tooth, you might get two teeth. Jesus' whole point is you can live that way if you want. But at some point in time, one of the two of us is going to have to turn the other cheek and stop defending our self. Let the Lord be our defender. Refuse to hold on to unforgiveness, bitterness, and offense, and become people of love. Love is not a feeling. That's all right. Don't clap for that. You're like, "You've made me fight to get there. Don't be clapping now. I needed it earlier, not now." Love is not a feeling. Love is a choice. It's an action. Your good and your my will for your good.

He then goes on and He talks about three holy activities – giving, prayer, and fasting – but it's not really about giving, prayer, and fasting. While there's a lot you can learn about giving, prayer, and fasting – what is He talking about there? He's talking about pride. He's talking about vain glory. He's talking about motive. He says, "Hey, if your motive is to be seen by people so they think a certain way about you, that's fine. Just understand you've received your reward in full." If your motive is to do good things so other people see you and think or say or do something for you because of what you did, just understand you've received your reward in full. Reward – singular, one-time reward – getting them to think a certain way about you.

He said, "But in the kingdom, the motive isn't about other people rewarding us. The motive is about pleasing God." And if my motive is to please God, then if nobody sees me or everybody sees me, it doesn't matter because my Father will reward – ongoing, plural, continually reward – me for this life that I'm living with Him.

He then goes on to talk about treasures and He talks about we're not supposed to treasure the things of this earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Because if we treasure the things of this earth, we know they break down. They get stolen. They fall apart. They take a lot of energy and effort. We're supposed to treasure the things of heaven – His Word, His Spirit, His people, His presence, His kingdom, His life. And you are created to be a person that treasures. The human heart was made to treasure things. He's just saying, just make sure you treasure the right things. And you know what you treasure based on what you pursue, what you keep, and what you protect. How do you know what you treasure? What do you pursue? What do you keep? And what do you protect? That's what you treasure. And He says, "Money is a terrible god. Money will use you and abuse you. And it really offers you nothing in the end. And just so you're clear, you can't serve both money and me."

And then He goes on to worry. And He says, "You don't have to worry. Look at the birds of the air. My Father loves you and He takes care of you. You can trust Him. You weren't created to worry. You were created to worship – to seek first His kingdom. And so you understand you

can't worry and worship at the same time. So when you're worrying, you're not worshipping. You're not living this good and beautiful life in my kingdom. You don't have to live like that.

And then He goes on to judgment. And He says, "A good and beautiful life is free from judgment. We don't have to judge other people." Why do we judge other people? We judge other people for two reasons: to change them or to make us feel better about ourselves. Every time you're judging someone, it's for one of two reasons. You want to change them. I don't like what you're doing, how you're living, how you're acting, how you're talking. So, I'm going to judge you to change you. Or I feel really bad about myself. So, if I can put you down, I can lift myself up. I'm going to make myself feel better about myself. And Jesus says, there's no place for that anymore in the kingdom as people of love.

In fact, He goes on to say, "Don't give dogs what is sacred and don't throw your pearls to pigs." Is Jesus calling the people we judge dogs and pigs? No. What is He saying? Don't throw your pearls to pigs. What is a pearl? It's something that is unhelpful and unedible to a pig. You throw a pearl to a pig, a pig can't eat it, can't digest it. It offers them no value, no substance. So, at some point in time, the pig will trample it under feet and come after you. Okay. What is He saying? That when you offer all these pearls of wisdom that are – you think are – so great in your spirit of judgment to try to change people, it's not helpful to them. They can't receive it and digest it. So what'll happen? They'll trample that thing that you think is so great under feet and turn and tear you to pieces. They'll start a fight with you. How many times has that happened as you've tried to judge your spouse or your children or your parents or your friends?

And then He goes on to ask, seek, and knock, which we think is an arbitrary teaching about prayer, shoved right in the middle of the thing. Jesus is not arbitrary and this is not shoved. If we want people – this is still in the judgment section – to change, then what do we do? Yes, we ask God, but He's saying ask them. If you want someone to change, what do you do? You ask them. You seek after them. You knock on the door of your of their heart. That's why He finishes that section by saying, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." That feels like the most arbitrary line in the entire thing. It's not arbitrary at all. What Jesus is saying is, "Hey, if you want people to change, treat them the way you would want them to treat you when they want you to change. And how would you want it? You wouldn't want to be judged or have these pearls of wisdom thrown at you. You would just want them to ask and seek and knock."

Then He goes on to say to live the narrow way is going to be a different than everyone else in your life. So a good and beautiful life will not align with everyone else and what they're doing. Then He goes on to talk about a good tree and a good fruit that when your heart is good, your life will be good. But when your heart is bad, your life will be bad. And then He talks about that it's not all these things for God, but having an interactive relationship with Him. And then it's about living ultimately on the rock by aligning my life with Him. That is the order. That is the

function. That is how it all works. And you have to think about it in one larger narrative because this is what a good and beautiful life looks like – not what a good and beautiful moment looks like. Okay? So, are you with me? I got about a third of you. This is why I started by cheering all you campuses on. Come on. The whole point was I needed to give you something because I knew this – you're gonna be like all right, take a breath. Let it out. This is just so important.

So, I want to give you a couple thoughts quick now that I gave you that outline on how you can keep working out the Sermon on the Mount – the good and beautiful life in your own life. Cuz guess what? I'm not responsible for your good and beautiful life. You are. So, let me help you think about how Jesus offers what He offers and how you can align your life with it. First thing is this. The Sermon on the Mount is an invitation, not an obligation. Understand that everything I just walked through – some of you, that's the first time you ever heard it. That's okay. It's an invitation, not an obligation. This is not an obligation. It's not a demand. It's not controlling. It is not forced. It is not something you have to do. It is an invitation. Jesus says, "Listen, consider, think. Do you want what I offer?" Jesus never obligates anyone to follow Him. He never controls anyone to be His disciple. He never demands anyone to do what He is doing. He presents to you what is available in Him and offers it to you. And He will gradually, kindly, graciously, persistently keep inviting you for the rest of your life. But ultimately, it's an invitation, not an obligation. So you don't like any of it, don't do any of it.

And this is why He says, "Come, follow me, and I will make you." Is that an invitation or an obligation? It's really important how you interpret that. It's an invitation. Hey, Peter, come and follow me and I'll make you. You have to decide. Do you like what Jesus makes? Do you like how He lives His life? Do you like what He offers? Do you like the kind of people He makes? If not, don't take His invitation. But if you do, it's not an obligation. It's an invitation. And I accept it. And now I move down this path with Him. And I let Him make me into that which only He can make me into. It's an invitation. This is why He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I'm gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Is that an obligation or an invitation? Certainly not an obligation.

But can you see how your view of God determines how you hear it? If you think He's a demanding God, you hear that as an obligation. Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I'll give you rest. Gosh, I've told you guys where it is. That is literally how some of you hear that in your heart. Hey, are you weary and burdened? Do you want a life that's easy and light? I'll offer you a totally different reality. Here's what it looks like. Here's how it works. Come with me and watch what will happen. For many are invited, but few are chosen. You know what that means? Everyone is invited to the good and beautiful life. Blessed are the anyone in this world because the kingdom is available and accessible to them, but only a few choose it. The question is are you one who chooses it? It's an invitation, not an obligation.

Second thing is this: the Sermon on the Mount is for you, not someone else. What does that mean? That means when we hear the Sermon on the Mount, we get very excited because we hope the people in our life will also be in the room to hear it as well. We hear it and we think, "Oh, I sure hope my wife is hearing the passage on worry cuz I'm really tired of the constant worrying." Well, don't worry, buddy. She's thinking, "I hope my husband is hearing that passage about not loving money cuz he is greedy and controlled by his money." And then and then don't worry students cuz your parents are sitting there and they're probably thinking about you. Oh, I hope they hear the passage about lying because I'm tired of this lying. And then we think, I hope my dad hears the part about not being angry because he just rages and just like flies off the handle. And I hope my mom, man, I hope she hears the part I'm judging cuz man, she is such a judging and controlling person. And I hope, I hope that man in my life hears that part about lust because that pornography, it really makes me feel really bad. But the Sermon on the Mount isn't Jesus preaching to them – it's Jesus preaching to you. It's not about them actually at all. It's totally available and accessible to them. But when He's preaching it, He's not preaching it to them. He's preaching it to you.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye.' When all the while there is a plank in your eye? You hypocrite." Do you hear that as you hypocrite or do you hear it as you hypocrite? You're being an actor, a player, a poser, and I have so much more for you. Let's get the plank out of your eye, and then you can see clearly to help them get the speck out of their eye. The problem is is if you don't deal with the plank in your eye, you will weaponize the Sermon on the Mount. And it will be a bunch of bullets that you just get to shoot at people. And some of you have been so hurt and wounded in the past by the Sermon on the Mount because someone with a plank in their eye took one verse of Jesus, put it in a tone that didn't match His heart, and sent it into your life in Jesus' name. Healing and freedom to you for something that happened a week ago or 30 years ago because that's not the heart of God. Because that wasn't for you that way. No, no, that was for them. He was trying to help them take the plank out of their eye. He's trying to help you take the plank out of your eye. This isn't about everybody else. This is about who do you want to be and what kind of life do you want to let Him make in you?

And I love when He says, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them." How often do we live as an expert of the law? And don't think the law is rules and regulations. Think the law of way things work. Oh, I'm an expert in the law. I know exactly how you can lose weight, and I know exactly how you could get a better job, and I know exactly how you could get rid of that attitude, and I know exactly. When did we become experts in the law instead of people of love? And here's how you know. You're an expert in the law when you won't lift one finger to help. You're a person of love when you use both hands to pick up the

burden to help them move forward in life. This isn't about them. This is about you. Will you hear it that way?

The third thing is the Sermon on the Mount is ordered and the order matters. Okay. Jesus is not giving you these arbitrary buffet Golden Corral things that you get to pick and choose from. No, He is wisdom personified. He's not just wise. He is wisdom personified. His thoughts are higher. His ways are higher. So what He says is genius. How he says it is genius. And the order He says it is genius. And our problem is we forget that it's ordered. And we try to take one verse out of the middle somewhere and apply it to our life because we're struggling in that area and it don't work. So then we think the whole thing doesn't work. But we've missed the order. Like see if you can catch this. We take the worry verse and we sit there and we know we worry and we're not supposed to worry and so we got to get rid of the worry. But the problem actually isn't the worry. The problem is is that you didn't work out the thing that came right before it. Which is what do you treasure? One of the reasons we worry is because we treasure the wrong things. We treasure things of earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. So I'm constantly worried about these things that I'm treasuring falling apart. And so it's not a worry problem, it's a treasure problem.

And the reason I have a treasure problem is not because I have a treasure problem. It's because I haven't worked on the thing before. It is winning the approval of man. I have a treasure problem. I treasure the things of this earth. Why? Because I want the approval of man. I want man to think a certain way about me. So I treasure the wrong things. And the reason I think poorly or or try to win the approval of man with pride and vain glory is not because of that. It's because I haven't worked on the thing before it. I haven't become a person of love. So, I'm not able to love my enemy, let alone my neighbor. I am not living goodwill towards you. My will is to get good out of you. And the reason I can't figure out how to love my neighbor and my enemy is not because I haven't worked that out. It's because I haven't figured out how to not be a person that lies. How to not be a person that uses my words for my good – my words to get what I want. No, my words are meant to be for your good. And the reason I have a problem with lying is not because I have a problem lying. It's cuz I back up one more and I haven't worked out lust. I still am using people for my own gratification and my own selfish desires. And the reason I have problem with lust is not because lust. It's because of the anger issue that I've unresolved. Why? Because I've never actually surrendered my kingdom to his. So I claim His kingdom, but I still rule over mine, which is really the problem before it, which is I didn't enter it with my heart. I entered it with my hands, which is the problem before it. I have a wrong view of who is blessed.

That, that's how the whole thing works. So, this is why you're like, "Why do you have to – why is this so long?" Cuz, cuz you have to see it all. You have to see it all or it doesn't work. And the problem is, is we want to cherrypick these one and two things and it doesn't work. The order matters. How are you going to walk the narrow road if you haven't worked out fear of man? It's impossible. Why? Because then you got to go everywhere – where everyone else goes, so they

think a certain way of you. How are you going to work out loving your enemy if you haven't worked out your anger issues? It's literally impossible. How are you going to get rid of your worry if you haven't figured out that you treasure the wrong things? So, what you have to do is go back.

In fact, when Jesus says, "We've entered the kingdom," the first thing He starts with is anger and lust. Do you realize if you worked out anger and lust, you wouldn't have to preach the rest of the Sermon on the Mount? The first two things He addresses with violence and sex – anger and lust. If you got rid of those two things, you wouldn't have to preach the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. It would all take care of itself. Why does divorce come right after anger and lust? Because if there was no anger and there was no lust, how much divorce would there be? It's not about divorce. It's about being a person that's free of lust and a person that's free of anger that lives deeply in God's kingdom.

And so, wherever you find yourself struggling in the order you look at it, but don't fix it. Ask yourself the question. Just go back one section and think of the macro topic. Have I worked that one out? And if I haven't worked that one out, don't fix that one. Go back one more. And if I haven't got that one, go back one more. And you trace it all the way back. And you say, "Okay, so if I trace it all the way back and I get to anger or lust, what do then I do?" Well, here's what you do. You intend to change. You would decide in your heart that that is an unhealthy and broken life and I don't want it. I want the good and beautiful life that Jesus offers me. I refuse to treasure lust or anger or whatever it is in my heart. I intend to change. Then I confess and repent to both God and people. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all righteousness and confess your sins to one another and pray for each other that you may be healed. And then you don't do it by direct effort. You do the things that Jesus did so you can do the things that Jesus did. Which means I don't get rid of anger by saying I'm not going to be angry. No, it means I arranged my life the way Jesus arranged His by being a person of prayer and meditation and Scripture and community and generosity. And we will talk all about this later in this series. But I need to give you this understanding. It is ordered. And the order matters. And if you take the dessert at the end of the golden buffet thing without picking up your broccoli along the way, it just ain't going to work.

Fourth thing is it's about changing your beliefs, not your behaviors. The entire Sermon on the Mount is not about your behaviors. We read it as a, as a treaty on, on our behaviors. It's not about your behaviors. He literally said, "You have heard it said, but I say to you." What does that mean? It means change your belief. Blessed are the – and then He says these people that no one would ever think are blessed. That's not a behavior. That's a belief. He says the narrow way – the way that no one else is living – yeah, that's the way to life. That's not a behavior. That's a belief. He's trying to change your thinking. Why? Because your thinking drives your life. Right thinking, right living. Wrong thinking, wrong living. Why does Jesus' message – His main message – "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repent. What does that

mean? Change your mind – think differently. He doesn't say behave better cuz the kingdom just showed up. Hey, dad's home. Get it together, kids. That's how some of you hear it. Cuz your mind hear – your ear hears what your mind already believes. It's not what He's saying. What is He saying? Think differently. The good and beautiful life is here. It's at hand. It's available now. Do you want it?

This is why Romans tells us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." Don't think like they think, even though it's been shaped in you for your whole life, but be transformed, changed by the renewing of your mind. If you think differently, your whole life will go differently. Then and only then will you be able to test and approve what God's will is. His good, pleasing, and perfect will. In other words, then and only then will you live the good and beautiful life. The good and beautiful life is not available with broken thinking. It's only available through a renewed mind. This is why Proverbs says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." As he thinks, so is he. Your life goes the way of your thoughts. Jesus isn't trying to change your beliefs or your behaviors. He's trying to change your beliefs. Does this make sense to you?

This is why even when the word law is used, we think law of like the government sitting in a building somewhere making up dumb rules and regulations that we all have to follow. When, when He uses the word law, it's meaning the way things actually are – the way the kingdom was created, the grain of creation – not rules and regulations. The law – like the law of gravity. You believe it. So you don't jump out of a plane. The law of compounding interest. You believe it. That's why you save for retirement. The law of sowing and reaping. You know if you don't put something in the ground, you're not going to get anything out of it. You got to sow so you can reap. What are those? Those are not rules and regulations. It's a representation of the way things actually are. The Sermon on the Mount is a representation of the way things actually are. That's what He's trying to show you.

Which brings me to the last thing and it's this: The Sermon on the Mount is a description of who Jesus is, not a demand of what you have to do. The entire Sermon on the Mount is a description of the character and nature of Jesus. It is not a demand. It's not a demand. It's not about here's the greatest – Sermon on the Mount isn't even about you. You say, "What does that mean?" Well, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom of heaven is not a place. It's a person. The kingdom of heaven is not a place you go when you die. It's a reality you enter into when you become included in Christ. And Jesus isn't in the kingdom. The kingdom is in Jesus. Scripture tells us, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating, drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." Meaning God is not in the kingdom. The kingdom is in God. The good and beautiful kingdom is not a place where God lives. The good and beautiful kingdom is who God is and it's flowing out of His good and His beauty. It's His nature. It's His reality. So when Jesus presents the Sermon on the Mount, it is a declaration. It is a declaration of His character and His nature and what the kingdom of God actually looks like is all about Him.

So you ready? The Beatitudes – blessed – Jesus is the blessed one who blesses everyone and everything who wants it.

Salt and light – Jesus is the transforming agent, the preservative, the flavor of this world. And He is the light of the world. In Him was life and that life was the light of man. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. When He talks about having a righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, He is the righteous one and in Him is everything that is good and true and right. In Him there is nothing bad or wrong or false.

Anger – oh yeah, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love, maintaining love and faithfulness to thousands. Lust – oh yeah, He doesn't lust over anyone or anything, but He loves us the way the Father loves Him. Divorce – oh yeah, He's the one who will never leave you nor forsake you nor abandon you. He won't abuse you. He won't abandon you nor commit adultery ever against you.

Lying – that's right. He is truth in and of itself. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is grace and truth. He can only say things that are true because He is truth itself. Vengeance – oh yeah, He is the forgiving God. And He demonstrated His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, while we were enemies, while we were hostile with God, He laid down His life for us. And He has forgiven you as far as the east is from the west. He has removed your transgressions from you. He has forgiven your wickedness and remembers your sins no more. That's why He is the perfect and the holy one. Oh yeah.

Vain glory and pride – yeah, He's got none of it because He's not doing anything to be seen by you. He only goes where He sees the Father going, says what He hears the Father saying, does what He sees the Father doing. And the Father has rewarded Him for all eternity with the name that is above every name. Oh yeah.

Treasure – oh yeah. Guess what? He is the treasure that is hidden in the field. And when we realize it, we will sell everything we've got and joy to go get it. And not only that, He doesn't treasure the things of this earth. He treasures the things of heaven, which means He treasures you, which means you are the thing He pursues, keeps, and protects with everything He's got. Oh yeah.

Worry – He doesn't worry. Why doesn't He worry? Cuz He's a beloved Son living free in His Father's kingdom. And He completely trusts and depends on Him. Oh yeah.

Judgment – oh yeah, He was the one who was judged on the cross in our place so that we wouldn't have to be judged. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we would become the righteousness of God. Yeah, that's right. He was judged even though He did nothing wrong. So you would never have to be judged. And yes, He is the judge. But He

judges from a throne of grace. And His foundations are justice and righteousness. And with that grace, He will make all things right in your life.

And oh yeah, asking, seeking, knocking – yeah, He is the great high priest sitting at the right hand of the Father interceding, praying, asking God to move in your life in profound and powerful ways every moment of every day that you are alive. And He is the narrow gate that leads to an ever widening life. And make a good tree good and its fruit will be good. Oh yeah, He is the vine and you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, I will bear much fruit through your life. He is the good roots that will create good fruit in your life. And oh yeah, He is the Father's will, perfect theology representing who God is. And He is the eternal rock on which you are created and called to build your life upon. And you will never be shaken cuz His kingdom isn't shaken cuz He's not shaken.

The Sermon on the Mount is not about you. It's not about you. It's not about you. It's about Jesus. And when you see Jesus and you have enough interest to listen to what Jesus is trying to say to you and you have enough thought to realize maybe my life isn't as good and beautiful as I think it is. Maybe there's something better? Then that's what I get included in. And when I get included into that kind of God and that kind of kingdom, that starts to become my kind of life. You think the Sermon on the Mount is try harder, do better, behave more. Jesus is saying, "This is who I am. And if you yoke up with Me, you get included in Me. You follow Me. Yeah, I'll make that's the kind of person I'll make you into. So you won't have to sit there and say, "Don't be angry. Don't be angry. Don't be angry. Don't look at her. Don't look at her. Don't look at her. Stop judging. Stop judging. Stop what? Stop worrying." You can do that life. Or you can change your thinking and realize the good and beautiful God has made a good and beautiful kingdom available for my unhealthy and broken life. And it now can be as good and as beautiful as His kingdom and as He is. Because when I enter in, I get crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live. It's He who lives within me. No longer my will but His. His kingdom comes. Ah, as He is, so I am. 1 John 4, as He is, so we are. When I enter in, as He is – as that whole reality is – so is mine. The only question is, do you want it?

So close your eyes. I know that was a lot. Take a breath. Listen to the Holy Spirit. What's He want to say? What's He stirring? How's He moving? What's He showing?

Holy Spirit, we need You to be the great guide and counselor on this journey into a good and beautiful life. I am convinced that this phase of the journey that we're on together as a church is not about you doing, behaving, acting, pretending. I'm convinced it's about thinking differently about who God is and what He actually offers you. May the spirit of repentance be released in your life and in our church where we think differently and therefore live differently because we see God differently. Jesus, your words are so profound to me. The Sermon on the Mount is so moving to my own personal life. Thank you. Just even as I pray now, I thank You that You preached it to me. That message wasn't for someone else sitting in the room. No, that message is for me – that a good and beautiful life is for me and it's at hand, which means it's at

"Where's Your Life Going?"
October 4, 2026 | Pastor John Stickl

reach and it's available and accessible to any of us who want it. Would You help us take it?
Would You help us walk it? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.