



**THE
BRIDGE
CHURCH**

How the Blessed Life Looks **February 6th, 2022**

Bridge fam, how are you today? Man, it's good to see you. A very special welcome, by the way, if you're joining us online or in Columbia. We love you guys so much. We're going to be in Matthew 5 today if you want to turn there.

And before we dive in, I wouldn't do this if it wasn't actually today, but today is my parents' 40th anniversary, and so can we give it up for my parents? I know they're watching or maybe watching, but man, I love them. I'm so grateful for them. All right, with that, let me pray for us and then we'll dive in.

God, what a gift it is to gather. Whether we're here or in Columbia or online, God, remind us of what a joy it is to be called up into something bigger than ourselves. God, I'm so grateful for this family, for this community, for what we sense that you're doing both in us and through us, God. And so I pray that we wouldn't just simply hear or sing some words, but that your spirit would do a work in us, God, that is way beyond ourselves. God, give us eyes to see, give us ears to hear, and give us courage, God, to live differently as a result. We thank you and we love you. And we pray all these things in the beautiful, powerful name of Jesus. And everybody said, "Amen."

This might date me a little bit, but do you guys remember the #blessed era? Is that dated? Is that lame? It's like ten years old now. Okay. But we all remember, like, #blessed, right? And typically, here's what you saw when you saw anything that was #blessed, it was always like, "Brand new ride. #blessed!" Right?

Or, "I just got a boat. #blessed!" Or, "Made a bunch of money! Double #blessed" if the double did something. And listen, I'm not saying any of those things are bad. In fact, by the way, if you have a boat, I would love to come pray over it. But can we be honest, though?

How many of us would say that our life is actually a whole lot more like this: "Hot mess, but I'm blessed." Any hot messes here this morning? Wow, a lot more hands than I anticipated. Yeah. Again, nothing wrong with all of the "#blessed! Here is my highlight reel!" But I've never once seen someone post when they got a flat tire, "#blessed" or, "Haven't left the couch in four days. #blessed."

It's always like the up-and-to-right expressions of how great we're doing and what we often do is we'll compare our blooper reel with everyone else's highlight reel and assume that "I'm not blessed." But this word "blessed", it actually shows up 112 times in the New Testament and not one time is it connected to material wealth. 112 times this word "blessed" shows up, and not once is it connected to our bank account or that car or that house. Again, I'm not saying those things are bad.

I'm wondering, though, is it possible that we've missed what the blessed life is actually about? Is it possible that we've misunderstood what Jesus is getting at when he talks about the blessed life? Jesus, not surprisingly, has an upside down way of thinking and talking about who is really blessed. And spoiler alert, it's not who you might think. He's regularly saying things like, "The Kingdom of God is at hand, and those who are closest might surprise you." He's regularly doing this.

Now, what we talked about last week was sort of the stage that was set, right? We talked about this primary audience for this Sermon on the Mount was not the crowd, but it was the disciples.

And don't just think of like the twelve. The twelve were the Apostles, but the disciples sometimes were hundreds of people. And it says that he sat down on a mountain and he taught them. Last week, we talked about the significance of the mountain and the significance of him sitting down. But something I didn't realize was actually that it was very common in first-century context for the Rabbi to sit down and everyone else stood.

Can you imagine how awkward that would be if we did that today? Right? If I sat down to teach you guys, we're really close right now, aren't we? And I'm going to ask you all to please stand up wherever you're at. Okay?

The last service, everyone stood. Thank you very much for your [inaudible]. I'm kidding, I'm kidding. Sit down. But it would be very common for a Rabbi to sit down as an indication that he is about to teach. And all of his disciples, his apprentices, would stand up as he taught.

Now, to be fair, Jesus' sermon here is about ten minutes, and mine is longer than that. But he sits down. And remember, the primary audience is his disciples. And what Matthew wants us to understand is that Jesus is the foretold Messiah.

His audience primarily are Jewish people who have been hearing about this Messiah for generations. And so Jesus sits down on this mountain to deliver his manifesto about the Kingdom.

And the disciples must be thinking, "Oh, man, we're in. We made the cut." Because what do the disciples know of the Messiah?

A few things—they thought that this Messiah would free them from Roman oppression, that he would be a King in the literal sense, and that he would restore Israel to its former greatness. Their assumption was that this Messiah, whoever he was, was going to restore them to their greatness, their former glory, by overthrowing and taking the throne and then ruling with an iron fist. So if this Rabbi sits down to deliver his Kingdom manifesto, these disciples are thinking, "We're going to be rock stars. We're at the top."

And Jesus knows something that the disciples don't. And he wants to not only set a right expectation, but to show them a way. We talk about this idea of "the way" a lot. The way, first and foremost, is Jesus. It's a person. It's not an institution, it's not rules, it's not intellectual assent.

Jesus is King, and we give our allegiance to King Jesus. This is why you'll often hear me say Christianity is not just simply about praying a prayer so we go to heaven when we die. It's about surrender and trust, because Jesus is Lord, not Lord elect. And we often get that very confused.

It's about surrender to King Jesus and upfront, just to be blunt, that's my prayer for all of us. Not just that we would say that we're a part of The Bridge or that I tithe here, or that I'm a part of that small group, but that I've trusted in and give allegiance to Jesus. So the way is a person. But I think it's actually more than that.

It's a new way of being in the world. In fact, well before Christians were ever called Christians, this band of weirdos was kind of creating a bit of a stir. I mean, they were loving their enemies. They were being generous to people who persecuted them. They were showing hospitality to those outside their tribe.

And well before they were called Christians, they were called "followers of the way". You see this in Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 24. It was a group of people committed to the teachings of Jesus, but also committed to the way of Jesus, which is exactly why we're digging into the Sermon on the Mount. It's the greatest collection of teachings from Jesus. And so today we continue in Matthew 5.

Now, keep in mind, again, Matthew's unique angle is a Jewish audience to see Jesus as the foretold Messiah. He goes up on a mountain, he sits down—deeply significant in the first-century context, easy for us to miss in a kind of Western, post-Enlightenment context. He's being portrayed as a

King, delivering his manifesto for the Kingdom, and then goes on to list who is really blessed. Now, last week I read through these Beatitudes, these blessings, and I asked you to be mindful of the one that you really disagreed with—that when I read it, it really kind of rubbed you the wrong way.

This time, I want to read them and I want you to know the one that resonates most deeply with you. I want you to be mindful of the one that there's resonance there. Like you just think, "Oh, yeah, there's something to that." But I want us to walk through them today a little differently than maybe we normally would.

For example, we might say, "Blessed are those with the most followers, for theirs are the retweets and the shares." But Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." We might be inclined to say, "Blessed are the thick skinned, for they never show weakness," but Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." We might say, "Blessed are those who fly first class to luxury vacation spots on tropical islands, the kind that you typically only see in Hallmark movies where they lay all day in lounge chairs, the only two people on an enormous, white, Instagram-ready, no-filter-needed beach with Barry Manilow playing softly in the background, and they even have one of those drinks with the adorable little multicolored umbrellas in it, for they shall be satisfied." Thanks for sticking with me. But Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth."

We might say, "Blessed are those who drink craft beer, for they shall be surrounded by carefree football-watching buddies and they shall be satisfied." But Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." We might say, "Blessed are the taskmasters for they get results, but Jesus says "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." We might say, "Blessed are those who have outstanding, well-behaved kids. Truly, I say to you, highly blessed are those who have a golden retriever bounding along on that slow motion video, playing with the kids in the park, for they shall be the envy of families everywhere and they shall be satisfied." But Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

We might say, "Blessed are the instigators, for they make people notice them." Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." We might say, "Blessed are those who clap back at their critics, for theirs is the satisfaction of owning someone in an argument." But Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

The purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to show what it looks like to truly apprentice in the way of King Jesus, motivated not by law, but by love. Think about it this way. I think I've already alluded to this. I have a bit of a speeding problem. I've said this a couple of times, right?

When I punch in something on my GPS, I see the arrival time as a challenge. I can't help it. But you better believe if a police officer pulls in behind me, who's driving three under the speed limit all of a sudden, right? Did anyone else sweat buckets? Even if you're already doing the speed limit and you know that everything's up to date, you still slow way down to geriatric speed. Anyone else doing that?

It doesn't matter—when I see that police officer behind me, I tense up, but you better believe I'm obeying the law because there's a police officer behind me. The other example, though, I remember when we finally got to bring home our firstborn from the hospital. He was in the NICU for a while, and I remember when we loaded him up in the back of the car, which we strapped him in like he was taking off in space, right? Like it was just a thousand buckles and padding and all sorts.

I remember when I pulled to that first intersection, and my wife can vouch for this, I turned to her and I kind of yelled. I was like, "Why is everyone driving so fast?!" She's like, "No one's driving any faster than they normally do. Your perspective has changed."

You better believe I drove three under the speed limit the entire way home, not because a police officer was behind me, but because of love. There's something different. There is someone different in my car than previously. That's a little bit of what Jesus is getting after here.

It's not about legalism. It's about the heart. And maybe no one has written more clearly or more prophetically about the Sermon on the Mount than Dallas Willard. If you've not read "The Divine Conspiracy", I cannot recommend it enough. But he writes about the Beatitudes saying this:

"The Beatitudes in particular are not teachings on how to be blessed. They're not instructions to do anything. They do not indicate conditions that are especially pleasing to God or good for human beings. No one is actually being told that they are better off for being poor, for mourning, for being persecuted, and so on, or that the conditions listed are recommended ways to well-being before God or man. Nor are the Beatitudes indications of who will be on top after the revolution. They are explanations and illustrations drawn from the immediate setting of the present availability of the Kingdom through personal relationship to Jesus. They single out cases that provide proof that in

Him, the rule of God from the heavens truly is available in life circumstances that are beyond all human hope."

So who really is blessed? Jesus says it's the overlooked, the undervalued, the marginalized in society. And the question that maybe a lot of us are asking is: is that true?

And that's why we've called this series, "Did Jesus Really Mean That?" Is that really true? Or is Jesus just like that nice friend that tells you something nice and makes you feel better when you've had a bad day? Jesus, I believe, knows that the Kingdom of Heaven operates on a completely different value system.

This is the same Jesus that says things like, "The first will actually be last." He says, "Do you want to be great?"—which I'm assuming he knows is most of us... "Become the least." He operates in a different way.

If we're going to follow Jesus in the way of the Kingdom, we have got to start seeing the world in a different way. So do you feel the tension a little bit? Bluntly, you should. And if you don't, I say this with all the love in the world... If you don't feel this tension, we should ask ourselves, "Am I actually following Jesus in the way of his Kingdom?"

Because it looks different than how the world tells us blessedness is measured. So again, I mentioned this last week, but I want to make sure to say the same cautions. We don't look at these Beatitudes as a set of achievements to chase after. They're not instructions for how to be blessed. It's Jesus saying, "The divine blessing, the divine benediction rests on those like this." If we're following Jesus in his Kingdom, we find ourselves in the Beatitudes. We don't strive for these things, but because we are living in a different way, we become them. They become true for our lives as we align with this upside-down way of living.

This is what I believe some of what Paul was getting at when he wrote to the Church in Rome. Romans 12. He says, "Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world." He said, "Don't fit into the boxes of how the world defines blessedness." He says, "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

And so we walked through some of the Beatitudes last week, and I want to walk through the rest of them today. But just briefly, here's how I want to categorize them. Last week, verses 3-6 is where character takes root. It's about our vertical relationship between us and God today.

Now I want to talk about how character bears fruit, about our horizontal relationship. The first three are really about this relationship between us and God, and these are really going to be about how we interact with the world at large. So let's dive in. He starts in verse seven.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Now, I imagine the disciples must have been really confused at this one. Like with the first three verses, they probably thought, "All right, those are a little weird, but I can get on board." And then he gets to mercy, and they must have been thinking, "No way, no, no, Jesus—we're the oppressed ones. It's time for vindication. It's time for revenge. We're the underdogs who have had the boot of Rome on our neck. No, we can't be merciful."

But the Kingdom of God invites us to extend mercy even for those who offend us, because we know that mercy has been extended to us. Forgiven people are forgiving people because we realize more and more each day how much mercy has been shown to us. It gets harder and harder for us to lord other things over other people. It becomes more difficult to be unmerciful. The disciples are characterized not only by a passion for justice, but also by being merciful. They look beyond vengeance. They want transformation, even for their oppressors. They are willing to forgive and offer people a new beginning, just as they themselves have been recipients of a new beginning.

It made me think of a story that I heard years ago, of Prince Felix of Schwarzenberg—which I always read as Schwarzenegger, I can't help it. Prince Felix of Schwarzenberg entered the diplomatic service and was appointed foreign Minister of Austria in November 1848. After the Hungarian revolt was suppressed in 1849, someone suggested to Schwarzenberg that it would be wise to show mercy toward the captured rebels.

This is what he said. "Yes, indeed a good idea. But first we will have a little hanging." I think this comment illustrates the problem that we often have with Jesus' words. As a purely theoretical concept, mercy sounds like a good idea. The problem comes when we find ourselves in situations where we are required to actually implement it. Approving of mercy and actually showing mercy are two very different things. It's one thing for us to have it painted on a wall or needle stitched on a pillow. It's something else very differently—very different when we come to a circumstance where we're in a position to show mercy to someone else.

Another story I heard was about a mother who came to Napoleon on behalf of her son who was about to be executed, and the mother asked the ruler to issue a pardon on behalf of her son. But Napoleon pointed out that it was the man's second offense, and justice demanded death. "I don't ask for justice," the woman replied, "I plead for mercy." The Emperor objected. "But your son doesn't deserve mercy."

"Sir," the mother replied, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it. And mercy is all I ask." It is not about the other person deserving it because the kind of mercy that has been shown to us we could never earn or deserve on our own either.

Verse eight: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." John Stott writes about this, and he talks about this word "purity" not just meaning inward purity, but he argues that the Hebrew expression actually speaks of singleness of heart, like pure motives. It's about not being hypocritical. It means our hearts are fixed in one direction, that we don't have divided loyalties. A lot of us have come to think that as long as Jesus is in the top five, he should be good with that.

Jesus says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and then all these other things will be added." I think a lot of us end up in some really terrible places because we assume as long as Jesus makes the top five, he should be pumped about that. But many of us know if we've tried to do that, like, "Jesus, you have this part of my life, but I'm going to still hold on to that," it doesn't actually work. It means no split loyalties, no divided minds, no compartmentalizing of faith and work or faith and scholarship. It's pure in heart.

And it doesn't mean "sinless", but the literal meaning is actually "a vine refined by fire." It's desires that have been purified. It's not hypocritical. This is why Jesus says things to the religious elite of his day.

He says, "You guys are like whitewashed tombs." He's like, "You look really nice on the outside, but what's inside a tomb? Death. Rot. Decay." You're saying one thing. Your social media says one thing. When you're around your church friends, it's one thing. But in your heart of hearts, it's something else entirely. He's saying the pure and heart don't have these divided loyalties. Like, "I have this over here, but then this over here. Jesus is Lord, but only over these kind of select categories that I've decided."

So hopefully by now you see some of the progression. It's saying, "Here's my heart, Lord—my guilty heart, my mourning heart, my trusting heart, my cleansed heart."

And then we get to verse nine. This one might be the toughest for some of us. He says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

The disciples were not expecting to be men of peace. They were expecting to be men of war. And just to be clear, a peacemaker is way different than a peacekeeper. A peacekeeper, often with good motivation, wants to manage the status quo, right? Any peacekeepers in the house? We don't want to rock the boat. We want everyone to kind of get along right. Again, with good intention, good motive.

A peacemaker actively seeks healing, actively seeks reconciliation. And this is also different than a peace lover. My guess is most of us would consider ourselves peace lovers. We tend to be that way.

But the disciples—disciples of Jesus, followers of the way—go into situations of conflict, of violence, whether in families or neighborhoods. They go into those places that others don't want to go, and they build bridges between people, enabling people to listen to each other and to talk face to face. It's an active word, not a passive one. It implies initiative, intervention... But it also implies risk.

Peacemakers—and some of you know this all too well—not only are you often misunderstood, you're often very unappreciated, because a peacemaker has to try to actively bridge these two perspectives. And often the assumption is, "Well, if you can even see their point of view, then you can't be on my side. If you're even giving voice to how the other person feels or how they came to that conclusion, then I can't trust you either."

Peacemakers head to dangerous territory. In fact, when Jesus uses the word "peace" here, what he has in mind is way more enigmatic than what we think of when we think of peace. Like, I have two toddlers at home, so when I talk about peace, it's usually like this: "Can I please just get some peace and quiet?" What do I mean when I say that? What I want is just like, "Everyone just stop, please. Stop asking me 'why?' I don't know why dinosaurs are green. I can't answer that for you anymore. Please just peace and quiet."

Jesus is actually evoking a word called "shalom". "Shalom" shows up more than 250 times in the Old Testament and it carries with it way more than just like calm or cool or still. It's this idea of wholeness, of fulfillment, of restoration, of things being made right. It's both global and personal.

It's both vertical and horizontal. Peacemakers are making things right. They're putting that which was fractured back together.

I'll put it this way, that unity comes through peacemaking. But peacemaking comes through truth-telling. And truth-telling comes through engaging with dignity. But dignity comes through humility, and humility comes through repentance, and repentance comes through confrontation. And none of this is easy.

He goes on in verse ten, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." He bookends the Beatitudes with this. Theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. He began with "poor in spirit" and here he talks about persecution, which, as a quick aside, when he's talking about persecution here, he's not talking about like when your WiFi doesn't work for a half hour. Okay, I'm sorry for your inconvenience—that's not what he's saying.

I can't say how many times I've had conversations with people who are like, "I've been a terrible husband the last month and she made me sleep on the couch. But I guess that's just my cross to bear." I'm like, "No, those are just called consequences. You're being a jerk." That's what that is.

That's not what he's talking about here. Persecution is something way more profound. And the question you might be asking is: why in the world would a peacemaker ever be persecuted? We're called to make peace not only horizontally but also vertically. And how do we make peace between God and man?

It's a very unpopular word called "repentance". And when you invite people to repentance, metanoia, to changing directions, to changing their mind... It won't always be met with a group hug. To tell people, "Hey, that direction that you've been heading down, that thing that you've believed or that you were doing is actually toxic to you and others. You need to change directions. You need to repent of that sin, that brokenness," people will not always hoist you up on their shoulders after that kind of call, when that is your message, people don't always respond with love.

And then lastly here, these aren't a part of it, but this is sort of him reiterating his thought here in verse eleven: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I don't want to be too on the nose, but what do they do with the prophets? Do they slap them on the wrist? They unfriend them on Facebook? No, they killed them.

They killed them. The prophets were saying things in a time and a culture where people did not want to hear those things. And Jesus is saying, "If you find yourself persecuted, you're in good company. Rejoice and be glad." Now, does Jesus say you should be jazzed when people pick on you or bully you, when people want to hurt you? I don't think so.

I think what he's saying is we can know that in those times of trial, there is a greater purpose. There is purpose to your pain. There is purpose to your persecution. When we are persecuted for righteousness, Jesus doesn't merely set expectations. He actually sets an example. Because where does all of this lead him? It leads him to a cross. It leads him to a public, shameful execution. That's where it leads Jesus.

And what Jesus is doing here is confronting our system of what we ascribe value to. He takes aim at our prized dispositions, and things that are given value on Earth are flipped upside down in the Kingdom of heaven. So I want to briefly reimagine these Beatitudes and ask: can you see yourself in them today? Jesus first says to the poor in spirit, "Blessed are the nobodies, the spiritually bankrupt, those who doubt, who are unsure, those without a hint of religion. Blessed are those who are spiritually impoverished, have nothing to offer. You might think that it's the self righteous that are blessed, but I tell you, no, it's broken people who inherit the Kingdom. The Kingdom is for you."

And he speaks to the weeping ones. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have been deserted, leaving them crushed by rejection. Blessed are people who have lost their careers or businesses or life savings. Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction, who have cried real, bitter, uncontrollable tears. Blessed are those of you who feel alone, who are still not over it, maybe never will be. Those who feel alienated or estranged from loved ones, those keeping it together for everyone else." As you see the Kingdom in Jesus, enter it and live it. You'll find true and abiding comfort and healing.

And then he speaks to the meek. He said, "Blessed are the shy ones, the intimidated, the unassertive. Blessed are the hidden people, the ones that no one seems to notice. Blessed are the parts of you that struggle to make eye contact in a world that loves winners. Blessed are the forgotten, the unemployed, the underrepresented, the marginalized." Blessed is the ill-treated waitress who can't speak up for fear that her tip will suffer. You are of heaven, and Jesus blesses you.

Those who hunger and thirst... blessed are those who burn with desire for things to be made right. Blessed are those without lobbyists or advocates, the kids who just want to feel safe again. Blessed are those who can't seem to get ahead, no matter how hard they try. Blessed are those who know that there has to be more than this. Blessed are those who know that if you're not hungry for righteousness, you might just be full of yourself. The Kingdom of God can make the terrible losses we experience seem insignificant. In the greatness of God, he restores our soul and fills us with his presence.

And then there are the merciful. Blessed are those who make bad business decisions for the sake of others, who choose people over profit. Blessed are the teachers, the front line workers, the coaches, the social workers. Blessed are the kids who step between the bully and the weak. People may say, "Woe to the merciful, for they shall be taken advantage of." The merciful are often looked down upon by those who know how to take care of business, but the world is a better place because of you. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you will find mercy to meet your needs.

And then there are the pure in heart, those who refuse to bully, to slain, or to gossip. Blessed are those who defend the defenseless, those both gifted and cursed with a prophetic voice and unashamedly proclaim truth. The world needs you in these places. You help manifest the in-breaking of God's Kingdom. Blessed are you who are pure of heart, for you will see God.

The peacemakers are here, too. These are the mediators, the counselors, the psychologists, and therapists. They're often in the middle, and often times, neither side trusts you because they know that if you're looking at both sides, you couldn't possibly be on theirs. But under God's rule, there is recognition that in bringing good to people who are in the wrong, you show the divine family resemblance. The peacemaker deals often with the ungrateful, as anyone who has tried to do it knows all too well. Blessed are you peacemakers, for you will be called children of God.

And then the persecuted, many of those who were attacked because of their stand for what is right. Blessed are the honest, the whistleblowers. Blessed are those who stand up for others, for what is right, those who speak truth and then suffer for it. The world needs more people in these places and spaces, people who are unafraid and noble. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for yours is the Kingdom of heaven. You will experience an unshakable security in which you cannot be harmed.

And finally, the falsely accused, those insulted, persecuted and lied about because "they're one of those Jesus freaks." That's certainly how the disciples were viewed at one time. Blessed are the Christians in countries where Christianity is illegal. Some might say, "They actually think that this carpenter from nowhere is actually sent to save the world." And yet Jesus says, "Rejoice when this happens—your reputation stands high before God, whose companionship and love and resources are now and forever your inheritance."

Friends... Church... If you've ever felt overlooked, undervalued, unimportant, or insignificant, Jesus says you're the blessed ones. He says emphatically, "I am with you and for you. You're the kind of person who is most likely to understand this upside down Kingdom."

This isn't a list of attributes to strive toward. No, he's saying that divine benediction rests on those like this. And living this kind of life, if we try to do it on our own, will feel absolutely impossible because it is. But Thankfully, Jesus embodies the Beatitudes. He doesn't just set expectations, but an example. Why is Jesus able to speak this blessing over his people?

Galatians 3, I believe, tells us how. It says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written: cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree, so that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." In a life characterized by poverty, mourning, meekness, mercy, purity, peacemaking, and persecution, Jesus himself embodied the Beatitudes. He's the only reason we can live a blessed life. That's it.

He became poor so that we might become rich in the things that matter most. He grieved so that he could comfort us in our grief. He humbled himself so that we might seek to love our neighbors by serving them. He longed to see God's world set right. He was sinless, so by his power we might overcome sin. And he suffered and died so that we might live.

That's the Good News of the Gospel. That's what we're going to celebrate in a minute here—we identify with Christ and his death and his burial, but when we come up out of that water, we identify with him in resurrected life. The way of Jesus is radically upside down, and we will be persecuted for it. But when we understand it and enter it, it will transform how we live. And Jesus says you are salt in light in a dark world.

Maybe GK Chesterton put it best. "We do not, as the newspapers say, want a church that will move with the world. We want a church that will move the world."

The world does not need more YouTube stars or Instagram influencers. What it needs are people of the Kingdom who will enter it, proclaim it, and invite others to do the same. Jesus affirms the world-shaping value of ordinary people who follow the ways of an extraordinary God. And when we embrace this life, it won't always look like a #blessed life, I guarantee you. But it is the fullness of life that Jesus came to set us free to.

We're not just simply saved from something—we're saved for something, to be followers of this way, to proclaim his Kingdom into every corner of the Earth. And when we do, friends, it will change the world. It will change the world. Would you pray with me please?

God, I'll admit there is much in my life where I have struggled to believe that those words were actually true. God, there are times that I still struggle to believe it. To see it. To enter it, God. And I pray for those of us in this room who feel crushed or unimportant or unfulfilled. God, by your spirit, would you do a work in us and through us that only you can do? Give us a new imagination, not for the kingdoms of this world, God, but for your Kingdom. What does it look like to live as citizens of your Kingdom, God? May we be obedient, put one foot in front of the next, to be followers of that way—that scandalous, beautiful, freeing way, God. You are the way. Help us to be more like you every day, God. Show us what the blessed life truly looks like and may we live that together. We thank you, God, and we love you and we pray all these things in the beautiful name of Jesus, and everybody said, "Amen."