

Matthew 5:1-12 – August 1, 2021
“The Blessed of the Kingdom”
8:15am & 11:00am Morning Services
Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA
Pastor Nathaniel H. Gutiérrez

On August 1st, 1971, 50 years ago to this very day, the Lord brought Gerardo a.k.a. “Gerry” Gutierrez to his knees in repentance and faith. Dad was a communist leader in the Shining Path, a movement in Peru that ended up taking the lives of over 70,000 people. But by God’s grace, dad was transformed from the Shining Path to the Shining Light of the gospel of Jesus to become a pastor, missionary, and leader, making a kingdom impact on countless people around the globe.

50 years ago, no one ever would have dreamed that Gerry would be sitting here attending Faith Presbyterian Church, in Tacoma, WA, one of the many churches who no doubt prayed for his salvation. How much less would we have anticipated him listening to his own son preaching from this pulpit from the Sermon on the Mount, the sermon that John Stott referred to as the nearest thing to a manifesto that Jesus ever uttered! [Stott, 15]

This week when I found my copy of John Stott’s well-known commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, I remembered that dad knew John Stott as a mentor and father in the faith, a man who he travelled in Peru with, and who he affectionally called “Tio Juan” (or Uncle John). And it is Tio John Stott who will also be our mentor as we go through this series and learn what Jesus wanted his followers *to be* and *to do*.

What an awesome God we serve. With that introduction, we will begin reading in Mt. 5:1.

Matthew 5:1 Seeing the crowds, he [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

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

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

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

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

10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray together.

What do you want?

***If you had to write down the answer to that question, what would you write?
What do you want in life?***

If I asked five people from your workplace or elsewhere to describe you as candidly as possible—who you are and what you want in life—what would they say? What would they highlight? What would stand out most to them about ***what you want in life?***

The answer to this question “What do you want?” can be a pretty good indicator of who you are. Jesus tells us that we are known by the fruit we produce in our lives.

In James Smith’s book, *You Are What You Love*, he opens by arguing that one of the most important and fundamental questions asked by Jesus in the gospels is the question “*What do you want?*” Jesus doesn’t ask “what do you know?” or “what do you believe?” but rather “what do you want?” Smith argues:

“This is the most incisive, piercing question Jesus can ask of us precisely because we *are* what we want. Our wants and our longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behavior flow. Our wants reverberate from our heart, the epicenter of the human person.”

He goes on to explain that being a disciple of Jesus is more about “hungering and thirsting than of knowing and believing.” Jesus wants our lives and our hearts to be aligned with what God wants and desires. [Smith, 2]

Of course, Smith is not the only one to argue this. The apostle James teaches that the desires and passions of our hearts, when misaligned cause all sorts of problems in life and our relationship with God.

“James 4:1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”

Here in James’ letter, it is clear that the conflict causing all the problems originated from the sinful passions and desires of their hearts. Misguided hearts were longing for the passions this world offers and were causing problems in the church. Misguided passions of the flesh were a struggle in James’ day, and they still are a struggle for us today.

Culture

Apart from the sin in our hearts, another reason why it is such a struggle to keep our love for God pure, is because we live among people who disregard the God of Scriptures and have no place for him in their lives. Our culture makes decisions based on the here and now, not based on eternity. While God’s common grace does restrain evil, we know that for unbelievers, their desires are worldly.

Since the worldly do not believe that we must face judgment before God upon death, they live life differently than the Christian does.

For the person who clings to the here and now, it makes perfect sense that the desire of their heart would be to gain power, wealth, fame, and love. To make decisions that serve their desires and passions.

The once popular slogan, “you only live once - YOLO”, seeks to light-heartedly communicate the idea that you might as well try anything and do anything you want to, because “Hey, you only live once. Might as well make the best of it!”

The Apostle Paul wrote about how different his life would be if life after death was not a certain hope. He wrote that if that were the case then “Let’s eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” For Paul, life would have no purpose beyond pursuing the pleasures of this world. And that makes sense. Why wouldn’t you seek to have the best life here and now if this is all that we have? Why wouldn’t you disregard all of God’s commandments? Why wouldn’t you find ways to cheat, steal and cut corners so that you can enjoy life to the fullest now? Why would you seek purity and abstinence? Why would you love others more than yourself? Or why would you serve others?

Those who live in our cities have a worldview, or a perspective on life, that is different than ours. They order their lives differently than a Christian does. They use their finances; their resources and their time differently than we do. And all of it is rooted in a self-focused desire. There are no such things as neutral pursuits.

False Hope and Illusions of Happiness

If we do not keep this in mind, we run the risk of joining in on the false hope that we can find joy by living like the world does—seeking after the pleasures of the here and now. We can fall into the mindset that if we only build our lives around the right things this world has to offer, we can find true happiness. So, we set our hearts on things, experiences, achievements, or relationships. We turn our hearts toward pursuing our own joy and satisfaction at all costs. And it doesn’t pay off. It does not bring joy or fulfillment. They are only illusions of joy. And we can easily fall prey to believing that somehow, they will.

This past Wednesday, at just 21 years old, USA’s Sydney McLaughlin, won the world record becoming the fastest woman in the history of the 400m hurdle event. As I read her story, I was impressed with the remarks she made after her victory concerning some lessons she had learned about herself and her motivations.

Sydney writes, “My goals are different now....A lot of my life was trying to prove something, which is an endless cycle that will never fulfill you. My gifts are not to glorify myself. When I stand on the podium, I give the glory to God.” [The Guardian]

“I no longer run for self-recognition, but to reflect His perfect will that is already set in stone. I don’t deserve anything. But by grace, through faith, Jesus has given me everything. Records come and go. The glory of God is eternal. Thank you, Father. ♥” [Sydney McLaughlin]

In only 21 years, Sydney had already perceived that she had been pulled into the lures of fame. She longed for fulfillment and recognition through her accomplishments and victories. But by God's grace, she was able to recognize that her heart was pulling her toward the desires of this world. She made a conscious stand to correct herself and align her life and energies in such a way as to give glory only to God. As she so powerfully put it, "Records come and go. The glory of God is eternal."

Her comments are inspiring. She achieved world-wide success, and in the same moment made it abundantly clear that that glory of fame and world-records was fleeting. She said, for all the world to hear, "That Jesus was everything to her" and that world-records were temporary. This was just days ago and yet so pertinent to our message.

How often do we imagine something to be the solution to all our problems? How easily we fall into the trap where we convince ourselves that things would be easier if only, we had more money, or a better job, or better health, or a better living situation. If only I had X,Y or Z, then life would be better. I would finally be happy.

Our hearts buy into the idea that as soon as we have that "thing", everything will change. But we reach that goal or that change, and there is little to no difference in our lives. We get discouraged, but quickly forget how disappointing that empty feeling felt.

But God has created us in such a way that we will never be satisfied with the fleeting pleasures of this world. The true joy that will bring us fulfillment and happiness can only be found in Jesus. So, he calls us his people and calls himself "our God."

God's Chosen People

When dad took over my childhood soccer team, I remember the coach setting the guidelines at the outset. He trained us and told us we would not be like the other teams. We would train harder and stronger than the others. While other teams went out to celebrate and drink, our team was prohibited from smoking or drinking. The coach's constant refrain was, "we are not like the other teams." He wanted us to be different.

Along similar themes, God has called us out of the world to be different from the world. As his covenant people, he calls us to be counter-cultural to the cultures and societies around us that live as though there were no God.

And this is a main theme in all of Scripture. "God's historical purpose is to call out a people for himself; that his people are a 'holy' people, set apart from the world to belong to him and to obey him; to be 'holy or 'different' in all its outlook and behaviour." (Stott, 17).

In Leviticus 18:1-4, we read of God's command to Israel, reminding them that he is their God, and they are his people. They were not to return to the ways of the people of Egypt. The land of their bondage.

Lev. 18:1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. 3 *You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in*

the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God.

God had freed them from slavery, and they were not to return to the practices of Egypt. He was their covenant God, and they were his people. They were his chosen children called to be different from everyone else. They were to follow his ways, not follow those around them.

In the same way, God freed all his children from the slavery of sin and death. And as he did with Israel, he calls us to be careful to guard our hearts. To be careful not to fall into the practices and pursuits of the people around us.

Proverbs 4:23 warns us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." As believers, we must guard our hearts against the allure of this world.

And God was very serious about this law. The people of Israel were not to live with, marry or even imitate the cultures around them. We too are called to be different from and not to marry those who are not part of God's people – we are not to even imitate them!

Contrast

When I take photos, I try to always take them in a format that allows me to edit them freely. I like that because when I can freely edit the contrast on a photo, it gives me a better picture. It is helpful because it allows you to see the differences between two subjects that might appear to be similar or blended.

And this is why the beatitudes are so helpful. They allow us to see the contrast between God's culture and the world's culture.

You see, at the beginning of the sermon, I asked the question "What do you want?" And I think if we answer the question honestly, we all know the right answer should have been to "Glorify God and enjoy him forever", but the more pressing or dominant desire/practice was probably something slightly different. Influenced by the world around us, we might have more of a "I want to enjoy life on earth with God, and have things go well for me." Or perhaps we begin to hold the perspective that, "I want to love God, and I want him to show me his love by protecting my health, providing generously for me, and helping my life to go smoothly without any hiccups."

And while we can pray for many of these things, for good health, for God's provision and a smooth life, we must remember who we are. And we must reevaluate what we truly want and always be striving against the attractions of this world.

Are we happy with this world? Have we ever been totally satisfied with anything this world has to offer? Do we really want our joys here? Of course not. Only Jesus is our truest desire. We would certainly say with, Sydney McLaughlin, that "Jesus is everything!"

If you know Jesus as your savior, then you know that nothing else can satisfy. And while we will struggle, and while we have mixed desires on this side of eternity, we know that no other can satisfy. For those of us who know him, know the truth. We have experienced his unending and

overwhelming love. We have felt the true freedom in his everlasting forgiveness. We know his unrelenting mercy and grace. We even know eternal life even in part right now. And we could never, NEVER, go back to where we were before Jesus rescued us.

We have seen and tasted of his goodness. We long for more of it. We hunger and we thirst for it. We have been justified and made righteous. While we are tempted and we fight sin, we are free from sin's bondage. We are children of God. Loved, protected, and sealed by him.

And that is the reality of the child of God. We wrestle with longing for the things this world longs for. We wrestle, but it is not who we are.

Beatitudes

And that is where the beatitudes we are examining this morning come in so powerfully. These beatitudes are not instructions, or commands, but rather descriptions of the reality of the life of the Christian.

As Sinclair Ferguson explains, the beatitudes are not instructions on “what we’re supposed to **do**” as Christians. In fact, they are not even “who we are supposed to **be** as Christians” but rather the beatitudes begin **with the blessedness of who we are**. [Ferguson]

The beatitudes are not commands for us to follow. They are descriptors of who we are in the Kingdom of Heaven in Jesus. That counter-cultural kingdom that challenges all worldly ideals and virtues and turns them upside down.

See, Jesus was sitting down to teach his disciples. To give his church the word of God. These were the people who had already left everything to follow him. Jesus was not giving instructions on how to be saved—he was talking to those who were already saved. He was talking to his children. It was family talk, kingdom talk.

And he was bringing them words of great comfort.

I'm sure at first glance no one immediately saw these words as being words of great comfort. I think instead we read these and say, how can you even say these things? How can you be so insensitive to so many who are really, truly suffering in this life? To those who are pouring out their tears day after day and night after night because they are completely and utterly broken. This is a difficult word to wrap our heads around.

In these verses, Jesus explains to his disciples that they are blessed in all the sorts of ways that we would all consider to be the exact opposite of blessed.

Who would say that these people are blessed?

- ***Those who are spiritually lacking***
- ***Those who grieve, mourn and are broken.***
- ***Those who overlook the offenses of others.***
- ***Those who are persecuted, hated, and falsely accused for Jesus' sake.***

And if we bring it a little closer to home. It could also be difficult to hear Jesus say:

- Blessed are you when you when you lose out on relationships, opportunities, success, dreams, power, fame, or finances for the sake of the kingdom.
- Blessed are you when you forgive those who don't deserve it, and they refuse to reconcile or seek peace with you.
- Blessed are you when you love your enemies and those who mistreat you behind your back.
- Blessed are you when you sacrifice greatly to pursue holiness, and still fail.
- Blessed are you when you remain sexually pure or single as you wait on the Lord
- Blessed are you who honor your father and Mother, especially when it is hard to.
- Blessed are you who invite people into your homes and lives, and it goes badly.
- Blessed are you who pray faithfully for the saints, and no one knows it
- Blessed are you who strive to do God's will and it costs you so much.
- Blessed are you who sacrifice your time and health for the sake of another.
- Blessed are you who strive not to complain or grumble over your chronic health pain.
- Blessed are you who strive to praise God in the midst of death or devastating news

Why did Jesus consider all these difficult aspects of life as blessing? What are we missing?

I believe we are missing God's perspective. So tainted and influenced have we become by the culture and attractions of this world, that we have forgotten that we were called to a life of suffering and challenges.

"The Christian life is inescapably one of toil and labor." [Ortlund, 22] In this life we will struggle, but as Jesus said in John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Now, in v. 1-2, Matthew writes that Jesus "sat down" and then "he opened his mouth" and taught them. If you were wondering, Matthew isn't recording random details. Of course, you need to open your mouth if you are going to talk! Here he is pointing out that as a Rabbi would, Jesus sat down to teach. And that as a prophet would proclaim God's word, Jesus opened his mouth.

Jesus, as a prophet, was making a prophetic declaration. Later Jesus would proclaim judgment on Chorazin and Bethsaida, "Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!...will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades." [Matthew 11]

And here in this chapter, Jesus proclaims prophetic blessings. Jesus as a true prophet, is speaking hope into a situation that looks hopeless, backwards, and even upside down. And here he does just that. He declares that those who are suffering, mourning, broken, striving, and being persecuted are the ones who should be rejoicing, not the world, because God has declared that

they will see what no eye has seen. They will experience the blessing of the Kingdom of heaven in all its fullness.

Don't be fooled by the culture's priorities. Don't be discouraged because you are among the few who are suffering in these ways. Don't feel abandoned or forsaken.

In Disney's *The Mandalorian*, there is a well-known phrase that all Mandalorian soldiers repeat as they submit to their sworn code of ethics—whether the task ahead of them is difficult or not, they say “This is the Way.”

Brothers and Sisters, “This is the Way” of the Kingdom of Heaven. You are living the same struggles and pain and suffering that the prophets before you did. You are following the way of the righteous. This is the way.

For that reason, you know that you are on the right path. You know that you are in the kingdom. You know that you are on “the way” because you are doing the very thing that those believers did that are on that Hall of Fame in the Hall of Faith.

You, like them, will taste of your heavenly reward. And you can be confident that your suffering not only does not disqualify you in any way, but rather that it is indicative that you are certainly “in the kingdom of heaven.”

Your pain and mourning don't mean that you are not worthy, but rather that you are so worthy that Jesus himself will comfort you. You may feel like you have lost so much in following Jesus, but Jesus responds, “Good and faithful servant, all of heaven is yours”.

Though it might not seem to make sense to us, Jesus calls us to trust in him for he has accomplished our salvation and he is our very great reward. In v. 12, Jesus ends saying, “rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Our Lord Jesus knows our struggle and he calls us to rejoice. Because the Kingdom of Heaven is yours! Our afflictions will pass, but heaven is ours.

Paul says, “We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” [2 Cor. 4:16-18] Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

France, R.T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. NICNT, Grand Rapids, Michigan. William B. Eerdmans Company, 2007.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel according to Matthew*. PNTC, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eerdmans Company, 1992.

Ortlund, Dale. *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*, Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2020.

Ryle, J.C. *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Matthew*. London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1965.

Smith, James. *You Are What You Love*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.

Sproul, R.C. *Matthew: An Expository Commentary*. Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2019.

Stott, John R. W. *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978.

<https://www.faithtacoma.org/matthew/2003-11-23-am>

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jul/30/sydney-mclaughlin-400m-hurdles-tokyo-olympics-team-usa>

T: *Jesus calls his disciples to rejoice, for his blessings are on those who trust in him.*