

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Part 3 – The blessed life

I. Review: The Gospel of the Kingdom and the Sermon on the Mount

1. The gospel (good news) of the kingdom was Jesus' central message.
Matthew 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.
2. It is the message attached to the great commission – the message needed to prepare the world for the coming of the kingdom. It is an essential guide in preparing for eternity.
Matthew 24:10 And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. 11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.
3. It is also our means to enter in to the benefits of living in the kingdom *now*. A mind conformed to this world must settle for what peace and joy this world can offer. As we renew our minds with the thoughts and ways of God, we enter into kingdom joy and peace.
Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.
Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your reasonable act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
4. The essence of the gospel of the kingdom is a simple message trumpeted by John the Baptist and then by Jesus: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” It is a message proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom of God – near enough for those who want it to lay hold of it by saying no to their own ways and yes to the ways of God, and near enough that all should take warning that it will soon confront them whether they're seeking it or not.
5. In the Sermon on the Mount – Jesus' first recorded sermon – He expands upon the message He had been preaching. He begins to describe what the kingdom is like – fleshing out how the ways and thoughts of God differ from the ways of men, and what it looks like to repent – how to change our thoughts and ways to line up with God's.
6. The Sermon on the Mount is a single sermon with a single main point: “seek first the kingdom.” It is a call to reach out and lay hold of what God has made available in Christ, and a guide for how to do so. It lays out “the narrow way” between complacency and religion – a radical pursuit of the righteous kingdom God created us for, lived before the eyes of a loving Father who delights to give it to us.

II. The Beatitudes: The blessed life

1. A commandment with a promise

The heart behind the beatitudes is revealed in the way they're introduced. Each beatitude begins not with “thou shalt”, but with “blessed.” They are not given as orders, but as promises of how God will respond when we position our hearts to align with His. Nonetheless, they are not to be considered optional (unless we consider receiving the kingdom optional).

2. Happy holiness

Jesus overturns the religious world with one simple word – “blessed.” He introduces a lifestyle of holiness based not on self-denial, but the pursuit of a higher satisfaction. Jesus is not preaching on how to live a good life, but on how to enter into the life in God for which we were created.

John 10:10 ...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

3. The blessed God

Jesus teaches on happy holiness from a deeply informed perspective – He is holy, and He is happy. The gospel of the kingdom is “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” (**1 Timothy 1:11**) It is the gospel of a God who enjoys being Himself and created a people in His image to enjoy being with Him and to enjoy being like Him. Paul lays out this glorious gospel in the book of Ephesians and he begins it this way:

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

4. Living larger than life

The word 'blessed' is 'makarios' in the Greek. In its most literal original use, it referred to the gods who had achieved a state of happiness and contentment that was beyond all the difficulties of this life and even beyond death. It was later applied to the dead who had passed beyond the trials and concerns of this life, and at its loosest to the elite of society who lived above the cares, struggles and labors of ordinary people. Jesus offers us that kind of higher-plane existence even as we live in the midst of those struggles and cares.

5. Come up here

In Christ, God invites us to join Him where He is – to place our identity, our reward, our peace and our joy in eternal life – far above the cares and struggles of this life.

Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

III. Treasure in heaven

1. He is a rewarder

With each beatitude comes a reward. Jesus reveals a Father who longs to give good gifts to His children and is waiting to reward us when we do nothing more than ask, seek and knock.

Matthew 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

2. Lay up treasure

Alongside that revelation comes a call – don't waste your energy on things that will fade away, but *do* intentionally and deliberately store up eternal treasure for yourself in heaven.

Matthew 6:19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

3. An unshakable reward

When we believe in Christ, the single most important thing about us is beyond the reach of our biggest problems, our greatest failures and our worst enemies. We have an inheritance in God that cannot be taken away.

Luke 10:41 And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. An eternal weight of glory

What lifts us above the struggles and cares of this life is the possession of an eternal treasure – knowing Christ Jesus. God lifts us out a time bound journey where setbacks seem so crushing and struggles so unending and sets us into an eternal reality where this life is at worst a momentary light affliction preparing us for an eternal weight of glory.

2 Corinthians 4:6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

IV. A Godly personality profile

1. Blessed are the kingdom-minded

Each beatitude lays out a condition to receive the reward – not a thing to do, but a character trait to have. Jesus is not giving tasks that we perform in order to *earn* a reward, but rather describing character traits that God loves and has built His kingdom on. The more we reach for godly character, the more we are *able* to enjoy a kingdom designed on godly principles.

2. A self-portrait

Jesus in the beatitudes lays out His own nature – what God so loves about Himself. Jesus in His life demonstrates this nature in its fullness. What the law could only point to and draw some rough borders around – what God is like – Jesus reveals in fullness.

Psalm 45:7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

3. Soulmate wanted

Just as importantly, though, Jesus lays out what God is looking for in a bride. He describes the nature that the image-bearers were created to have and the nature to which He will lovingly restore us as He washes us by the word, cleansing us of every fallen thought, fallen behavior and fallen emotion to present us to Himself as a pure and spotless bride.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Revelation 19:6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

4. It's important to separate the question of what God loves from the question of who God loves (and to know the answer to both). Jesus answered three essential questions when He came to earth, without which we could not have relationship with God:

- What is God like? ...why we *want* relationship with God.
- Who does God like? ...how we're *able* to have relationship with God.
- What does God like? ...how to *grow* in our relationship with God.

Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

V. Seeking the kingdom

1. He will give you the desires of your heart

The rewards and the conditions of the beatitudes are not disconnected. Each character trait is rewarded with what a person with that heart most desires. Or put another way, if we set our heart on what the kingdom offers (if we seek the kingdom), it will produce in us kingdom character.

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

2. Eyes on the prize

Jesus is preaching a message intended to restore the fallen eyes of His beloved creation. Nothing will more surely condemn us to failure than setting our eyes on the wrong target. Jesus came to rescue a creation that was in danger of settling for a good reputation in the eyes of men, the riches of this world or simply surviving life's cares with as high a comfort level as could be managed, and about to miss out on laying hold of their inheritance in God.

Matthew 6:22 “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

3. A change of heart

One of the chief calls of Jesus' message - “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” - is a repentance (turning) of our heart's desire. The kingdom of heaven is at hand – turn from whatever you're striving for and start reaching for the kingdom.

Matthew 6:32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

4. Improving our desires

One very clear theme of the beatitudes (and the sermon on the mount and the whole of Scripture) is that our part is to ask, seek and knock – to desire the best things. God's part is to actually give them to us. He satisfies the desires of all things. The question is what do we desire in our heart of hearts? Our objective in this life should be less about acquiring what we desire and more about *improving* what we desire.

Psalm 145:16 You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:3-12

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 filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain 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 they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.