
Living the Good Life (Beatitudes)

DAVE BAST

What would you say makes life good? Is it the people you know, the events you encounter, or the things you have? In Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus teaches his disciples and a crowd of onlookers about his definition of a good life. What he says is surprising and puzzling. So, how exactly does Jesus define “the good life?” Stay tuned.

BOB HEERSPINK

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast: okay, Bob, let’s play word association. I will say something and you say what comes into your mind. Here is the phrase: The good life.

BOB HEERSPINK

The good life, I think of swimming pools, I think of mansions, I think of that car I always wanted to drive but never will.

DAVE BAST

Uh-huh. Nice vacations.

BOB HEERSPINK

Nice vacations.

DAVE BAST

Going to interesting places; good food.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; I read someplace that everybody really thinks they can live well if they just make twenty percent more than what they make right now; so...

DAVE BAST

Everybody, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Everybody; so, you know, it doesn’t matter where you are at financially in life, most people think the good life is about twenty percent out there in terms of an increase in income.

DAVE BAST

So, the guy making \$30,000.00 thinks that and the guy making \$500,000.00 a year says the same thing. I remember seeing a sign once; supposedly Frank Sinatra had this hanging in his garage. It said: He who dies with the most toys wins. That is the good life, right?

BOB HEERSPINK

That is the good life.

DAVE BAST

Well, not according to Jesus.

BOB HEERSPINK

Jesus had some different ideas?

DAVE BAST

Yes; just think of *good* in a different sense. Not good as in pleasurable or fun or exciting, but good as in ethical...

BOB HEERSPINK

Moral.

DAVE BAST

As in moral, yes; as in virtuous.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that puts us into really a different realm. You know, it is interesting to know whether the good life in terms of a life of financial blessing actually does give you a good life.

DAVE BAST

That is a very good point, I think; and who defines what makes a life good or not? Maybe the author of life ought to be heard from.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, because actually even when you think of the good life in terms of being moral, you know, there are people trying so hard to be good and they keep failing, that even the good life in terms of the moral life eludes us; and if you go to the Sermon on the Mount – the Beatitudes – I think you have some really shocking news by Jesus about what, really, the good life is all about.

DAVE BAST

So, the Beatitudes; that is a technical term. Maybe we should define that.

BOB HEERSPINK

The blessings, the way in which your life really is blessed. When I read these Beatitudes of Jesus, they are kind of shocking because whether I think in terms of morality or in terms of financial wherewithal, these are not the kinds of things I think of. Let me share what Jesus says:

Matt. 5:³Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

DAVE BAST

That is not just puzzling, that is absolutely contradictory to what everybody thinks, including most of us in our default mode of thinking, which is worldly, who are the happy and the well-off and the blessed. It is people with everything.

BOB HEERSPINK

Okay, but now you just said “happy,” and I think that is a key issue that we have to come to grips with in this passage. I have heard the Beatitudes described as the be-happy-attitudes; that grates on me because I don’t think Jesus is really, first of all, talking about happiness here.

DAVE BAST

Okay, okay; happiness is subjective. It is more...

BOB HEERSPINK

Happiness is an emotion.

DAVE BAST

Yes, okay; but don’t Christians talk this way all the time? Oh, I feel so blessed. What do they mean? Well, my kids – I enjoy them. They are great. They are doing well. I have a beautiful house. I have all these things. I have all this stuff. I feel so blessed. Am I right? Christians talk like that; but what does Jesus say?

BOB HEERSPINK

You see, Jesus is really pushing beyond the notion that our blessedness is found in things. He is really saying our blessedness is found within life within his kingdom that gets us into... Well, it gets us into, for example, an awareness that we cannot make it on our own. The very first Beatitude is saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit. If you know you cannot make it on your own, blessed are you!

DAVE BAST

Let me just put it this way, to kind of bring the shock out. I am so sad, I am so sorrowful, I am so lowly, I am so down, I feel so blessed. Do we ever talk like that?

BOB HEERSPINK

We don’t, but if we took the Beatitudes seriously...

DAVE BAST

I’m so hungry. Do I feel blessed?

BOB HEERSPINK

I am in a situation where I am caught between people who are at war and I am trying to get things straightened out. I am a peacemaker in this situation...

DAVE BAST

And everybody is shooting at me.

BOB HEERSPINK

I am so blessed, right.

DAVE BAST

Yes; everybody is shooting at me from both directions, because that is what happens to peacemakers.

BOB HEERSPINK

But here in this passage, Jesus is really saying that that blessedness is God’s gift to those who understand their own need for Christ and his kingdom.

DAVE BAST

There is a great line I think from John Stott's exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. It is called *The Christian Counterculture*. He says that the Sermon on the Mount is the best known, but perhaps least understood and obeyed, of all the teaching of Jesus; and it starts right here with the Beatitudes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

It is really an expression of what is sometimes called the upside down nature of the kingdom of God. The world says it is the rich and the powerful and the well-off who are right where they want to be, and receiving everything and blessed; and Jesus says: No, it is upside down.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, I have also heard it described as being eccentric. You know, we have to be eccentric Christians because eccentric means being out of center, and we don't have the same center that the world has. We have a new center in Christ and his kingdom; so really, Christians are asked to think a whole different way about the world; and not just about what we have received as kingdom citizens, but I think there are implications here also in the Beatitudes for how we live – for what is important to us ethically and morally.

DAVE BAST

Well, you read most of the Beatitudes. You actually left the last one out. We did that intentionally. We want to save that for the next segment after the break, but it is the most shocking one of all, I think.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, it is; and we will get to that in just a minute.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Welcome back. This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

Bob, I mentioned just before the break that there is one last Beatitude we didn't read. Listen to it now. Jesus says:

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And then he doubles it up and puts it in the second person, directly to his disciples: ¹¹Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, that really is the capstone to the Beatitudes; and I think it blows totally out of the water the notion that this is just about happiness.

DAVE BAST

Yes; when you suffer you are blessed. I am suffering; how blessed I am! When do we say that?

BOB HEERSPINK

When you are persecuted, when you are ostracized, when people look at you and say: Hey, you are out of center from where you should be as someone who is living in this world. That is when you are really blessed of God.

DAVE BAST

Well, let's talk a little bit about persecution and what that is and what that means for us. We know about the persecuted Church; in fact, once a year there is a kind of a week for the persecuted Church that some churches observe; but most of us aren't persecuted in that way.

BOB HEERSPINK

No; we don't go through experiences like this one Christian in Saudi Arabia whose brother actually killed her – an honor killing.

DAVE BAST

Yes, we heard that story.

BOB HEERSPINK

Because of her faith in Christ. You know, we say we are so blessed that we *aren't* persecuted. That is what we tend to say; but I think we really have to look at what kind of life we are living and whether we are really laying our faith on the line; because Jesus doesn't really seem to suggest that this is an experience that a *few* folks are going to go through...

DAVE BAST

Not at all, no.

BOB HEERSPINK

He is really saying this is the typical life of discipleship.

DAVE BAST

Yes, the first thing he says about persecution, really, is that we ought to expect it if we are Christians; but I think it is also important to see even he here defines it this way: When they say all kinds of evil against you. When they insult you and persecute you. Even in places like Saudi Arabia or Iran or North Korea or China, most of the persecution isn't executing people. I mean, that does happen, but most of it is the more subtle insults and words.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; it is this notion even that I sometimes pick up as a pastor, as a preacher, from people who you have kind of wasted your life. You know, you have had gifts to use and you have thrown it away following Jesus and doing the work of the Church.

DAVE BAST

Sure, yes; people sneer now; especially... It is getting worse and worse in our culture. Christians are laughed at. They are often mocked in the media. It is very difficult to say or do something out of conviction and not have opposition; especially if you stand up, like the prophets did, for the will of God and the word of God.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, because Jesus really stresses in this passage that the suffering is for his sake, and sometimes I think we kind of pull our punches. I mean, we will take a stance, but we aren't quite willing to say: I am doing this because I am following Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Well, that takes real courage. If you are on a college campus, stand up and say something unpopular about sexual morality; say something about Jesus in that context and see what kind of a response you get; certainly ridicule; but I think that is another important point that you bring out of here. If we are persecuted, it ought to be for righteousness' sake...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

It ought to be because of Jesus, not because of us.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; it is not just because we are different or because we are intentionally trying to offend people. That is not the point.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you are not blessed if you are persecuted for being a jerk...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And we all have met Christians who are like that, haven't we? They almost want to bring it on themselves.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; it is almost like if I call attention to myself – if I make myself offensive to people – somehow that is obedience to Jesus. That is not the point here.

DAVE BAST

I remember meeting a guy years ago who used to go into fast food restaurants and put this big red sticker on his forehead, and when people looked at him and asked him then he would start talking about Jesus with them; and I thought even then: Friend, you are just being an idiot! That is not blessed.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; that is just bringing embarrassment to the kingdom.

DAVE BAST

But then Jesus says this third thing about persecution. Okay, expect it, make sure you don't deserve it; make sure it is really for me; but then, rejoice in it, he says. How can you rejoice in persecution?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, do you rejoice *in* it, or *for* it? I mean, I think there is a difference.

DAVE BAST

That is a good distinction, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

There is a verse in Paul's writings where he says: We rejoice *in* our sufferings. He doesn't say we rejoice *for* our sufferings.

DAVE BAST

Because of our sufferings.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; I think that is the same distinction that I would want to make here.

DAVE BAST

Like Paul and Silas singing hymns in prison in Philippi, was it, even though they were beaten and in the stocks? I don't think they were real happy and comfortable there, but they could still rejoice because, I think, it says there they were counted worthy of suffering for the Name.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, has a remarkable thing which he says about martyrdom. He says: All Christians are called to suffer, but some are counted worthy by God – worthy enough to share Christ's suffering unto death; and you know, that was just a whole different way of looking at suffering for me. I would think those who are blessed are those who escape martyrdom. He is saying those who – well, like him; he died for his faith – really were counted especially worthy to be conformed to the image of Christ.

DAVE BAST

But still, I think it is important for us to say that persecution isn't fun. I mean, I have met many Christians, I would say, especially from Iran, who have literally been physically persecuted. They have been jailed, they have been beaten, and it is not an enjoyable experience; it scars them; it leaves them different emotionally; and it can subdue people, but they were able to rejoice in it because of the joy that they had for testifying to Jesus Christ in this way.

BOB HEERSPINK

And after the break we are going to invite into our conversation someone who can speak personally about that. He is involved in mission tough places of the world where there is persecution, and we will be welcoming him into our circle in just a minute.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

Bob, we have talked about the Beatitudes, the good life as Jesus defines it; and that last Beatitude, the strangest one of all: Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; and rejoice if that happens to you, Jesus says to his followers.

BOB HEERSPINK

In a sense, we are the persecuted Church simply because we are followers of Jesus.

DAVE BAST

We all should be.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

Maybe we don't experience that always, but nevertheless, when we think about persecution, we tend to think about those real, glaring examples, and there are many places in the world where that is literally happening; where people are suffering, even dying, for their faith in Jesus Christ; for no other reason; and we are really fortunate today, I think, to have someone who knows a lot about many of those places. He is Doug Van Bronkhorst; he is the director in the U.S. of Inter Serve, a mission agency that focuses on what they call the "hard places of the world." Welcome, Doug...

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Thank you.

DAVE BAST

It is great to have you here and to talk a little bit more and flesh out this whole idea of persecution and suffering in the world today for Jesus' sake.

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Well, I am glad to be here; tough subject, but I am glad to be here.

DAVE BAST

Where are some of the hard places? I mean, maybe we cannot be too specific, but share with us some of the things that actually are happening in our world today.

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

There are all sorts of ways of defining *hard* in that context, but typically the really difficult places today, which do produce some kind of persecution are those places dominated by Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. So, that is Asia and the Arab world.

DAVE BAST

And the things that are happening... I know that in the West it is sometimes sensationalized in their claims of lots of martyrdoms and all that, but in your experience, or to your knowledge, these things do happen?

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Yes, they do; and they have been happening for a long time for those nationals who live in these places, like Chinese Christians or Iranian Christians, and so on; but most recently now, and I think this is one way in which the world has changed, it is happening to Western believers who are there. I just lost two friends who were murdered in Afghanistan, solely because of their Christian life and testimony.

BOB HEERSPINK

As they went into that experience, Doug, did they realize the possibility that they might have to pay for their witness through death itself?

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Yes; we say to all of our people – we have been saying it for many, many years: Your safety is not our first concern. If it were our first concern, we would tell you to stay home; don't leave your house...

DAVE BAST

Wow.

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Our first concern is your faithfulness; now we are going to try to take care of you. We don't want you to be foolish or stupid, but nonetheless...

BOB HEERSPINK

So, you put that right up front that this is dangerous stuff.

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

For them and their mothers and their grandmothers.

DAVE BAST

Just refresh us. I know this made huge news headlines throughout the world – secular media as well as Christian media and on the Internet; but just go over the story again about what happened in Afghanistan, because it was particularly chilling, I think.

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Yes; this is just the most recent incident, but it was a particularly sensational one. There was a team of ten people who were working for a Christian, non-government organization in Afghanistan, one that had been there for fifty years with the permission of the government. They were invited to go to a very remote place in the farther northern reaches of the country as a medical mission primarily related to eye care, but there was a dentist along and another doctor. They had to walk... after taking the vehicles and horses, they walked, including climbing a 16,000-foot peak. So there was a lot of physical danger involved with this trip; and when they got there they served hundreds of people who stood in the rain to be served; and on their way back they were ambushed by a group of armed men who killed them. Credit was claimed by the Taliban. It was unclear as to exactly what the connection was, but certainly they were killed, no doubt about it, because they were foreigners and presumed to be Christians.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, they understood the culture. They understood the danger that they were experiencing in terms of this ministry?

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Yes; and this particular trip was a calculated risk. They actually thought the biggest danger was climbing the pass, and it was very difficult.

DAVE BAST

But they weren't taking wild risks; they weren't ignorant people kind of going in to bombard with tracts or Gospel messages. These were savvy, experienced Christians living out their faith and doing good and healing people – carrying on the healing ministry of Jesus.

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

We have been talking about a very extreme case of persecution, which is all too real in our world, but there are all sorts of other levels, and I say as a general rule when we say to people we expect faithfulness, that is what they expect of themselves. God blesses faithfulness. It is counterintuitive, especially to Americans, but there is a sense of meaning and purpose and satisfaction that comes from your life and your work; and it is heightened by God in mysterious ways when there is difficulty attached if what we are trying to do is not put our head in the noose or be masochistic, we are trying to be faithful. I think God does bless that. One of my partners wrote a letter a while back... in fact, it is one who was very much personally touched by this death,

and she started out by saying: I love my job... and her job was a really tough job in Afghanistan, really difficult, lots of opposition. She said: I come home at night and I say to myself as I take off my burka, I love my job. Now, that has got to work.

BOB HEERSPINK

But you look at a passage like this and you recognize that that blessing comes as we push forward God's kingdom; and as that kingdom is pushed forward, it is going to meet resistance. There is a demonic pressure against the word of God and against the advance of the kingdom. To *not* expect any pressure against us, whether around the world, or even in North America, is not only not realistic, but it might even be a sign that we are not being as faithful as what we should be.

DAVE BAST

Jesus says here: Rejoice when you suffer for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. And I think of that line from later in the New Testament about the disciples who rejoiced because they were found worthy to suffer for the Name. We know too little of that, maybe, in North America.

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Right; you know, precious in the Lord's sight is the death of his saints. That should be enough aspiration for us, in a certain sense, as we do our lives and our work.

DAVE BAST

For great is your reward in heaven.

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Right.

DAVE BAST

Are we unblushingly believing that, that heaven is real and that the final accounting for what matters and what doesn't matter, and for who is blessed and who isn't blessed is only going to take place at the last judgment. I mean, it is not here and now. We have gotten so comfortable in this world – in this life – in this prosperous country – *still* prosperous country – let's be frank; who needs heaven when you've got a comfortable easy chair and you can go somewhere on vacation?

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Yes, the pursuit of happiness is usually our goal as opposed to pursuing God.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, when you have these experiences overseas, Doug, and you are working with people under this pressure – persecution – what does this say back to us in North America? Your travels, your experiences... if you had an opportunity to say something to the North American Church about what needs to change among us to be more faithful to a Beatitude like this, what would you say?

Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Well, let's get things in perspective here, though, too. The biggest danger to missionaries overseas is traffic accidents. That is number one. Nothing else is even close in second place. So a lot of the same potential problems that they face over there are the same as the ones that we face here; and I think the issues are basically the same. Am I living for myself or living for God? Where do I find meaning and purpose? The people I send overseas are just typical, ordinary, average Christians who have discovered that serving God is

number one; and when you do that, he gives you blessing and joy.

DAVE BAST

So, it is not that they are superheroes...
Doug Van

BRONKHORST

No.

DAVE BAST

Spiritually speaking, or...
Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Not at all. I think of them as average Christians.

DAVE BAST

Right.
Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Normal Christians.

DAVE BAST

As we all should be, right?
Doug Van

BRONKHORST

Right; exactly.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is probably a good place for us to wrap up. Our time is done. Doug, we want to thank you for being here. Blessings to you as you continue to lead the work of missions around the world.
Doug Van

BRONKHORST

You are welcome, and thank you.

DAVE BAST

And thank you, too, for joining this *Groundwork* conversation; and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that will keep our topics relevant. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest passages of scripture or subjects that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Just visit us online at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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