

Hope for the Holidays Part 5

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[0 : 00] We've had a great sermon series, haven't we, in Matthew, finding our hope and needing it so desperately because of the year that we've had.

And maybe this year has just highlighted what many people's years have been like throughout the years, hard and difficult and unexpected and not easy.

And so we wanted to hold out hope as something that the Bible offers for us and that offers in Christ particularly. And it's the perfect time to remember why we've got hope because that's what the Christmas message is all about.

So as we finish up our series on hope, we'll finish up our series in Matthew. We're going to look at the Jesus' first sermon, the Beatitudes. And the Beatitudes stretch, well, the Jesus' first sermon stretches from Matthew chapter 5 all the way through chapter 7.

It's interesting, though, that it starts with these promises of happiness and blessing. So as we start, what is your source of hope? What was your source of hope when you started 2020?

[1 : 09] We all go through it almost every year, don't we? Happy New Year. This is going to be the best year ever. No one's going to be saying that next. In fact, I wonder if we... Oh, 2021.

Let's just go quietly into 2021. Maybe it won't notice we're here. So what is your source of hope? How can you get hope if you feel hopeless?

Do you need to be an optimist, an optimist type in order to have hope, always looking for the good with those rose-tinted glasses? What if you're more of a realist or, as optimists call, a pessimist?

Is your source of hope yourself? I have goals I want to achieve and I'm going to do whatever it takes to get them. Is your goal of hope only for this life and for its material things?

If I'm happy, if I have A, B, C, X, Y, Z, I will be happy. I want this kind of job, to live in this kind of house, to have this kind of family.

[2 : 10] That's the difficult one, isn't it, of all those? Maybe think of hope as... Your thoughts of hope are more like wishful thinking. You ought to be really nice if... Dot, dot, dot.

But you never really know if it will happen or not. Your source of hope is somewhere out there, but it's very vague. Maybe it'll happen. Maybe it won't. And now we've learned it's very difficult for us to make things happen when we hit with things like the coronavirus.

Now, just to be clear about what we mean by the word hope. So, here's a definition from Wikipedia, which is an easy one to look up.

Hope is an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one's life or the world at large.

It's helpful to know its opposites, things like dejection, hopelessness, and despair. Hope, or the Cambridge Dictionary definition, hope is to want something to happen or to be true and to usually have a good reason to think it might.

[3 : 20] And what's important for us is that element of something happening in the future and of it being true. Of it actually happening, of it coming to pass, to exist, to become reality.

Otherwise, it's just a wish that's there that may or may not happen. And for it to be good, to be beneficial to me and to others in some way that will result in me being happy.

That's what hope is all about. It's the positive, good stuff that we look forward to. Now, over the past few weeks, we've been looking at how, in the Gospel, God the Father and Jesus his Son are the hope of the world.

Today, the hope that we'll be looking at is not so much in Jesus' person or his actions, it's obviously based in that, but in his words. And in following his words and how that will bring about change and how that gives us hope.

Now, this is important because we must find such hope in what Jesus has achieved, as in what he tells us, we must find as much hope as in what Jesus has achieved, as in what he tells us to do. [4 : 31] So we often find hope, and you'll hear it from myself and Nick often, in what Christ, who he is and what he's done. The cross, the resurrection, his incarnation, his ascension. Now, those are the reality of hope.

But we must also have as much hope in the words that Jesus speaks in the Gospels, in the promises that he makes, and in the things that he tells us to do. Are you with me? Which is why we're ending up with this series on the Beatitudes.

We must obey him when he tells us to do certain things or not to do certain things. We must literally do what he says. We must find hope in them and then you act on them, knowing that he's going to do it.

We must trust him if he makes promises, and especially when he spells those promises out to us. We must take him at his word. So our hope today is we're going to look at Jesus' words and find out how they can give us hope.

Hope. Now, if you've got your Bibles, keep them open at Matthew 5. And just some preliminary remarks about the Beatitudes to help us get a handle on them.

[5 : 35] Now, we can't, you know, we're not going to go through each one individually. You know, when you do research on the Beatitudes, and then there's one sermon on blessed are the poor in spirit.

And there's another one for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. You can get a sermon on each one, and rightly so. But we're not going to be doing that today. So, firstly, what we need to note about the Beatitudes is that Jesus is acting in a great line of prophets of the Old Testament, but with even more authority than they had.

So he goes up on a mountainside, and he sits down, and he gives people laws. Okay, so that's a reminder of what Moses did in the Old Testament. It's not a like for like, but it's an echo of the Jews would be thinking, oh, wait, we've done this before.

We've done this kind of thing before. But Jesus is not just a prophet. He's a king. And so the rules that he gives is a royal law.

It's law for his followers. And so he's pronounced, what he will pronounce is going to be the new royal law that his people must follow. And then lastly, to remember that Jesus is not just our king, but because of Christmas and what we know about what happened at Christmas, he's God incarnate.

[6 : 50] And so the words that Jesus speaks carry truth and power. Whatever his words say will happen. Are you with me? You understand where we're coming from with that?

Now, and then secondly, just to note, this is for us evangelicals because we're always so concerned about earning our salvation, but it's a fair point to make just so that we know what we must expect from the Beatitudes and what not to expect.

The law that Jesus gives is not a law to keep in order to get saved. Just so that you know that, right? Jesus is speaking to people who are already in the covenant.

He's speaking to fellow Jews. He's not speaking to outsiders who need to become Jews to get saved. He's already speaking to people who are already covenant people.

And more especially, he's speaking to his disciples, people who already particularly follow him. So the context for Matthew chapter 5 is Matthew chapter 4. And there you'll see all the crowds in Judea and everyone was coming to him.

[7 : 50] Verse 25 in chapter 4, large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him. Huge crowds, by the way. This is a huge amount of people that went to go listen to Jesus. And then he sits down, and then it says in chapter 5, his disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying, okay.

So that's the context. So in keeping the law of Christ, in doing what he says, we're not going to be legalistic like the Pharisees in trying to earn our salvation.

We, as Christians, are already saved. We are following the program of change by obeying the words of our Savior King. We prove ourselves his law as subjects. In other words, we show that we are saved by doing what he tells us to do.

Do you understand the relationship between doing what he says and salvation? Okay? It's not in the text, but you've got to make that point so that we can get a handle on how these things are to be

understood. Now, to look at the Beatitudes themselves, we don't have time to go into detail in each one, but to highlight a few things, and maybe just to take a zoom-out view of the Beatitudes themselves.

And the main thing, the essential point Jesus is making for what we want to look at today is that you can have present blessing based on future promises that will happen in spite of going through hardships now.

[9 : 15] So if you have that in your mind, you'll understand the main points of what the Beatitudes are all about. You can have present blessing based on future promises that will happen in spite of going through hardships now.

So it's the surety of present blessing. In the Beatitudes, there's the surety of present blessing, there's something that we must do, and there's the promise of future reward.

So each Beatitude says, you've got something now, blessed are, we'll go through that in a second, those who do X, Y, Z, because they will get A, B, C.

Should have stopped that around, really. You get me? So each Beatitude goes through those little steps. You've got something now, you've got to do something now, because I'm going to give you something later.

Pretty much. So, just to look at the word blessed. Blessed are the poor, blessed are the poor. And that's where we get the Beatitudes from. I think that's from the Latin, actually, to be honest, now that I think about it.

[10 : 18] The Beatitudes, probably from the Latin translation. But just to get a handle on that word blessing. Now, you know, by now you should know it's an important biblical word, dating, going all the way back to Genesis.

And essentially meaning that you've got something that makes life worth living. Anything that makes life easier or better or good, another important biblical word, is a blessing. Now, that surprises us, because the first four Beatitudes don't sound very positive.

We don't often use blessing in our daily life. So, what the translators, the commentators actually say you can use the word happy or fortunate. It's got those connotations. Happy.

You can be happy if, is what Jesus is saying. You can be happy. So, just put happy. And I know people, I know happy, it's such a superficial word. Well, that is actually a legitimate translation of the Greek word.

And many of the commentators make that point. So, if you want to get a handle on it and you're not quite sure, you can just say, look, I can be happy if the following happens. So, Jesus is saying you can be happy now.

[11 : 21] His followers can experience happiness, blessing, and blessing here and now. Notice that blessed are is a present tense verb, not a future tense, because then it will be blessed will be.

Are you following me? He doesn't say you will be blessed. He says blessed are. It's a present tense reality. And in fact, if you look at the Beatitudes in verse 3 and verse 10, they're completely present tense.

So, verse 3, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. That's something they've got now. And verse 10, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

But, before we shoot off in one direction and say, oh, you know, you can get everything you can now. Certain preachers teach you that. It's probably better to say that we can have a taste of happiness or a measure of blessing, because there's also a future element to the Beatitudes. It's not all here. It's not all now. And it's not all at once, although it is real and substantial. Because there are future promises.

[12 : 38] The middle six Beatitudes, from verse 4 to 9, all have the future verb attached to the promise. So, have a look at verse 4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they, depending on your translation, shall or will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, verse 5, for they will. It's something that will happen in the future. Jesus is saying our future can be different from our present.

Mourning will one day turn into comfort. The pure in heart will see God. There's a note of hope to what he's saying, of a positive outcome that is beneficial to me personally, and it's not mere wishful thinking.

It will happen. The use of the future tense in the Beatitudes is not to remove our hope of happiness from our experience now, but to confirm that it will indeed happen.

The will there is a certain thing that will happen. The future tense is indicative. It's indicative mood or voice. English?

[13:49] Mood or voice. You also don't know, so it's fine. But it indicates something that, it indicates certainty. These things will happen. The promises are guaranteed to become reality.

The emphasis is not just on their futurity, that's such a terrible word, but on their certainty. You can try and make up words when you preach, sometimes they don't work.

We can live in hope, knowing that these things will indeed take place. That the things that you experience now that are negative will become positive. Positive. But, it's not all rosy, because we'll get this in spite of going through hardships.

So, to be poor in spirit is to be totally broken before God. To have no hope in your own abilities or status, and to realize that you are totally bankrupt, and totally dependent on God's grace towards you for everything.

It could also mean someone that is economically destitute. So, it carries a double meaning. One is a picture of the other. The one who mourns carries a similar double picture reality.

[15:03] It can mean one who's bereaved over the death of someone, or the loss of something great. But, it can also mean to be mournful of one's sins. To be full of grief, because of the way you've lived your life.

And, of course, it's never enjoyable to be reviled, or spoken badly against, or indeed to be actually persecuted. But, just a note, when Jesus talked about persecution, he had in mind what happened to him.

Being whipped, being beaten, and being killed. So, none of us sitting here have faced that. Not at least to the last point. Yet, the amazing point that Jesus is making here is that because of the certainty of the promise and the future rewards, we can go through hardships with joy and gladness.

If your hardships, now think about that. Now, this is such a difficult thing to get your head around. But, if your hardships can bring you gladness, then you've got hope to overcome any obstacle. That's real hope. If your hardships, if the things that are difficult in life, can you guarantee future reward or blessing, then you've got hope, overabundant hope.

[16:16] Of course, it's easier said than done. Especially in the middle of really, really hard times like we've been going through. So, how are we to put these things into practice in our own lives? They're so counterintuitive.

They won't just happen by themselves. We need to focus on them to make them a reality. We've got to focus on our obedience, on the thing that Jesus tells us to do. So, that's what we're going to do now for a short while.

So, we're going to look at ourselves, at our own lives, and let's see where we need to do a bit of changing. One of the secrets to change is to not bite off more than you can chew. A helpful book on the Christian life, on repentance, says to focus on one thing that you want to change and have it as a kind of a pet project for, let's say, three months.

It's a helpful way for us to get our lives more in our direction with Jesus' words. You know, you're going to get us, someone tells you to, you must do all of them all the time. Well, it's a little bit overwhelming. So, what I want you to do, if you're listening at home, think through the things that Jesus highlights in the Beatitudes and see which one you're most lacking in.

That's a simple way to choose one that you know that you need to do. And each one will be slightly different. See which one you're most lacking in your life at the moment, because that will change over time, or which hardship maybe you're going through, but you're not hanging on to the promise strong enough.

[17:40] Maybe you need to be more poor in spirit. Maybe you find that you're mourning a lot and you can't get out of that. Maybe you realize you've got to be a bit more meek, or you've got to develop a hunger for righteousness.

You see what I'm saying? Maybe you need to be a bit more merciful, or a lot more merciful. Or you've got to cultivate purity in your heart, or learn how to be a peacemaker. So, choose one that you think you need to focus, the weakest point in your life at the moment, and then we're going to work through how you can make that change.

Okay, and then what you want to do is you're going to follow some simple steps. That's not to say they're easy. I'm just, they're simple in terms of what we're going to process, of how we can get the Beatitudes to be real in our lives.

Okay, so, first step, you've got to be honest about the reality that you're faced with. Second step, you've got to remind yourselves of the promise for that particular Beatitude.

Third, because you need help, you've got to pray about it. And fourth, you need to take action based on what Jesus tells you to do, and on the promise he makes. Okay, you're following? You've got this?

[18:48] Okay, so let's take an example. Let's look at what you may be lacking. Let's say you're lacking in mercy. Verse 7, Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

And maybe you're experiencing the opposite of receiving mercy in your life. You're experiencing people being harsh, or rude, or difficult with you. And maybe it's because you're not showing enough mercy to them.

Maybe you're getting kicked back at work from your boss, maybe from your colleagues, or even at home from your partner. So what does it mean to be merciful? Well, to be merciful is to practice, I'm just going to say, random acts of kindness to people who you don't know and just want to bless or something.

Or the more difficult one is to practice random acts of kindness to people you do know who have actually done you wrong. That's where it's difficult to be merciful, isn't it, when they're not merciful to you. But then you just follow the process.

Okay, so step one, be honest about the reality you're facing. And say to yourself, I sure don't feel like showing mercy right now. In fact, I want to show the opposite, revenge.

[19:57] Maybe it means, for you, that looks like a cold shoulder. Another, maybe it means just a rude word. Maybe a snide comment. Or worse than those.

Maybe you actually do take physical revenge. Slam that door. And worse. But then you say to yourself, you know what, these are just my feelings. I need to practice mercy regardless of how I feel.

But you can be real about the situation you find yourself in. Be honest with yourself. It's difficult to do these things. Then secondly, you need to remind yourself of the promise for that particular beatitude. Jesus tells me to be merciful, and that's reason enough.

But there's also a promise, is that I will indeed be shown mercy. And who of us don't need to be shown mercy regularly? Now that reciprocal mercy could either be in this life, and some of it will be, from the people you're merciful towards.

But it may just take place on judgment day, when you will receive a good report from the people that you've been merciful towards. And then everyone will see it. And then we'll say, oh yeah, you've been merciful.

[21:07] Yeah, have some more mercy. So you remind yourself, if I do this, there's a promise attached. What's the promise? Hey, I'll receive mercy myself. And that's a good enough reason to be merciful.

Now you need help. So you pray. Dear Jesus, I really don't want to be merciful right now. In fact, I feel like being vengeful and saying something nasty. But you want me to practice mercy.

And you promise that I will receive it when I need it. Please help me to do the right thing for you now. Amen. Now I'm not saying you pray that once and then sprinkle magic fairy dust, you change. It's a bit of a battle, but if you do it regularly enough, you will find that it will happen. And then lastly, you take action based on what Jesus told you to do, and on the promise he makes.

And depending on the situation, maybe it means you hold your tongue. Being merciful might mean not saying something. It might mean faking a smile for a short while.

[22:04] It might mean saying something like, here, let me pay for that. Or, when can I drop off the meal I made for you? Random acts of kindness towards people.

But then you take action. So you've got those four steps. You see how it can work out? Just to make, let's do one more on meekness, just to land it for us.

If you want to get a handle on meekness, so where we, verse 5, Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. And I can never forget, there's a movie line, and it says, yes, well, I wonder how meek they will be when they do.

But if you want to get a handle on meekness, think of being gentle, soft, kind, humble.

It's not being a doormat. Jesus is described as being gentle, and he was nobody's fool. Rather, being meeker, or gentle, or kind, is demonstrating power with undue harshness.

[23 : 01] Demonstrating power without being too harsh. Maybe you find it hard to have authority without being harsh, without barking orders, without taking it out on someone, without lording it over them.

You might find it hard to be humble. Okay, so now we follow the process. Maybe you need to, you've taken, I need to be more meek, this is your project, how are we going to work it? Step one, be honest about the reality you're faced with.

I sure don't feel like being meek. It's really hard for me because I'm scared I'll be taken advantage of, is what many people will say. Okay, or because I don't think they deserve my time or effort, is what many others will say.

Okay, then remind yourself of the promise for that beatitude. Meekness doesn't mean that you're going to miss out on anything, but rather that your reward of land will actually increase.

And now we've got a bit of a trick. You need to take Jesus' words as it says. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Now, that word earth can, literally is land.

[24 : 04] More than likely, Jesus was referring to Israel because he's talking to Israelites. And what is one of the big promises they get in the Old Testament? Promise of land. This, by the way, is a direct quote from Psalm 37 or 34.

It's in my other notes. But Psalm 34 or 37 is a direct quote, straight out of the Bible. He's not promising you heaven. Okay, he's promising you land. So, here's how you remind yourself of the promise.

Every time you help someone in a supportive and encouraging way, you just remind yourself you scored a few more square feet of new earth real estate. Are you with me?

Is that what Jesus says? Yes. Is that a good reason to do something? Yes. But it is hard, so you take it to the Lord in prayer. Lord, I'm struggling to be meek and gentle.

I feel like being short and dismissive. I don't feel like offering help. But Lord, you want me to practice meekness. And you promise that those who do will inherit lots of land.

[25 : 11] Lord, help me to help this person in a humble, kind, and gentle way. Amen. Amen. It's really kind of just really simple stuff. And then, step four, you take action based on what Jesus told you to do and the promise he makes.

And you say to the person, hey, it looks like you're really struggling with A, B, C. Can I help you with that? And then to help in a way that doesn't belittle or undermine their confidence but builds them up and encourages them.

You take action based on the promise. Taking action based on the promise allows you to be soft from a position of strength. If you know you're going to inherit lots of land, it's okay if you miss out on stuff now.

You get me? See the connection? Same for being persecuted. Okay. So you get the idea. So you're going to take one of those B attitudes. You're going to get... We should really give more homework, to be honest.

You've got to do this at home, right? You've got to practice these things. You've got to put it into practice. Take one of them. If you're not sure which one to choose, ask your partner. They will tell you which one you're lacking in. Get your kids to choose one.

[26 : 20] Tell them, listen, we're going to practice this. I want to check you practicing this. And then check in with each other. How are you doing? What's difficult about it? Where are you getting stuck?

Can I help? Can I pray with you? And you're doing it together. You'll see change happen much quicker than if you try to do it by yourself. Be real about your struggle, but be equally... Be real about what you're struggling with, but equally be true to the promise that Jesus makes and says he will do.

We are really good at living in the struggle and realizing how difficult it is, but not so good at believing the promise. Especially that one about land. I know what you guys are thinking.

Nah, it can't be as simple as that. So, to practice having hope, you need to consciously place your trust in God's word and in the truth of what Jesus says.

Either he will do it or he won't. But can Jesus lie? Why? Well, no. Is he playing games? Is he manipulating us? Is he like all the other politicians?

[27 : 24] I promise we will... Does he sound like that? No. We know that he's going to do what he says. Will he do what he says? Yes. Can he be trusted?

Yes. In conclusion, Matthew's gospel tells us that there has been a change of leadership on planet Earth. Jesus is the new world ruler and he both institutes change himself.

He takes action to change the way things are. And he wants his followers to follow his program of change. Matthew 5 to 7 spells that out. But it starts with the Beatitudes, which gives us the reason for change.

Because it makes promises... Because it's promises, the promises and the Beatitudes are sure and certain for those who follow and obey Christ. I asked at the beginning what your source of hope is. The answer of Matthew 5 is your source of hope needs to be in the words of Jesus. Jesus' words give us hope because they are his words.

[28 : 28] And because they are his words, we can trust that he will make them come true and our ultimate and final state will be one of blessedness and happiness.

And that should give us hope for change in our daily lives now. So, why don't we turn to Jesus and ask him to help us do these things. Let's pray. Dear Lord Jesus, You are our King, our Lord, and our Saviour, and indeed of the entire world throughout time and space.

We are just your servants, Lord, and we get so many things wrong so often. But Lord, your word is true and sure. You cannot lie.

You don't play games. And you've got the power to make sure that they happen. Lord, help us now as a church. To take your words at their face value and to do what you tell us to do and to hold on to the promises and to live and work through the hardships knowing that we've got a blessed and certain and sure future.

Pray these things in your name. Amen.