

The Good Life

Matthew 5:1-12

How would you describe 'the good life'? What visions of the good life emerge from social media?
(Hint: look for #blessed!)

Context: Read Matthew 4:23 – 5:2

Jesus is proclaiming the good news all around Galilee and demonstrating the nearness of the kingdom through his healings. Large crowds are gathering from all over – north, south and east. In response, Jesus goes up a mountain and begins to teach his disciples. Whilst we can assume the crowds are listening in (see 7:28-29), the disciples are the primary audience. Jesus is teaching them what it means to live as one who belongs to God's kingdom (the kingdom of heaven) in this present age - in essence, what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Read Verses 3-10

Jesus begins by redefining what it means to be a truly blessed person.

Notice two things about these statements:

- 1) Each statement has two parts:
 - a) *Blessed is 'this kind of person'...*
 - b) *Because they will receive or experience 'this good thing'.*
- 2) The second line of the first and last statements are the same (they have the same promise or reason): *"for the kingdom of heaven is theirs."*

List, or take note, of all the descriptions in the first part of the statements (the statement about who is truly blessed).

→ Are there any phrases you are not sure about? (Discuss together what characteristic or behaviour Jesus is talking about)

→ What overall picture stands out to you? What kind of person is this?

List, or take note, of all the promises in the second part of the statements (the reward or reason they are blessed).

→ How do reasons 2-7 relate to the 'bookend' statement: 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'?

→ What is Jesus saying about why these 'blessed' people really are blessed?

** Dig Deeper: Go back over each statement in full, and discuss together for each one:

→ How does the second line (the promise or reason) relate to the first line (the statement of who is blessed)?

Reflect...

→ What vision of 'the good life' is Jesus encouraging his followers to embrace?

→ How does this description of 'the good life' challenge our assumptions?

(How does the world normally view the kind of people described in the first part of each blessing statement?)

→ What is Jesus saying we should expect of life here and now if we belong to his kingdom?

Read Verses 11-12

How does Jesus reframe the blessing statements in these verses?

→ In particular, how does verse 11 shape our understanding of the blessed person in verses 3-10?

What reason and encouragement does he give for seeing yourself as blessed when you're persecuted on his account?

→ How does he encourage us to view ourselves and our persecution?

Reflect...

→ Which 'blessing statement' do you personally find most challenging, and which do you find most encouraging? Why?

→ How would you or do you react when you're ridiculed, excluded or even harassed for being a Christian? *(Try to bring to mind an actual situation in the past or imagine something in your current community / school / workplace...)*

→ Can you imagine considering yourself blessed in such a situation?

→ How could internalising Jesus' words in this passage help you to do so?

Pray for each other and give thanks together in response to Jesus' words in this passage.