

## **“Crazy, Life”**

We all want a little insider information don't we? We all want to get an edge. Whether it's a little bit of info about the school our kids are going to, or their teacher, or how we can work it so that we can get the school and the teacher we want. We like to insider information to give us an edge. We like to have an edge when it comes to buying things—especially big things. We like to get the inside scoop on deals and discounts. Groupon has exploded because of that. People that invest love to have a little inside information so they can capitalize on that make some serious money. Of course that's called insider trading and it's illegal and you can go jail for that kind of insider stuff. We want insider info about restaurants that are coming in. We like to hear from people what they know so that we can make a decision—do I want to spend my time and my hard-earned money doing this, buying that, going there. We like insider information because we think it will make our lives better. And in some ways it does.

So what if we had some inside information about how to get to the sweet spot in life where you feel right: connected to people, connected to your purpose, connected God. That sweet spot where you feel joy, and meaning, where you feel strong, and alive, and wise. What if you could get **that** insider information? And what if it wasn't illegal? And what if it's what God really wants you to have anyway? Would you do it? When I put it that way, you want it, don't you? Somebody would be crazy to not want all that? But if you're like me you're also thinking, “What the catch? What's the trade off? What do I have to give up? There's always a catch.” And you're right. But sometimes the catch, the trade off, is more than worth it.

With that in mind we're going to jump into Matthew chapter 5. Jesus invited people to be his disciples. Twelve men took him up on his invitation. Jesus takes them aside to teach them. It says, **“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them...” (Matthew 5:1-2).**

Now I think this is a little funny. That phrase in there, “he opened his mouth and he taught them.” He opened his mouth! I mean, how else is he going to teach them? Hum to them?! Most of your Bibles probably say something like, “He sat down and began to teach them.” But that's not an accurate translation. It says, “he opened his mouth...” In Greek it's a phrase used before someone made a weighty, important, significant saying. When it says that Jesus opened his mouth and taught them, it's saying that Jesus is giving them the stuff that comes from deep within him, the best of the best, the words and teachings that have the power to change people and change the world.

Here's how he starts. **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:3-12).**

Before we move on there are a couple of details about the way this was written that might be helpful. First let's look at the word “blessed”. The Greek word is “markarios” and it means a godlike joy. It's a self-contained joy, or bliss, that's independent of all the circumstances, chances and changes in life. Contrast that with the word “happiness.” The root of the word happiness is “hap” which means chance. Human happiness is based on chance. It might bring joy, or might bring pain. But this markarios type of joy is something that pain, and grief, and loss can't touch. If your joy is based on circumstances, when the circumstances get bad, the joy is gone. But markarios joy is self-contained joy. It's present even when the circumstances change for the worse. Jesus is saying, “If you want that, then do this...”

The second thing to look at before we dig further is when you look at these in the original Greek language there is no verb in these sentences. In English, the verb in each of them is the word “are.” Blessed **are** the poor in spirit. Blessed **are** the merciful. But in the Greek there is no “are” in there. The way they were

written is more like this, “O the blessedness of the merciful... O the blessedness of the meek...” You see, these are not boring little statements, they are exclamations! This is important because it means that these are not focusing on the future, of what might be, about heaven, they’re not statements about what you hope will happen. The way these are phrased, Jesus is saying that this is what you can experience now! Today! In this life! A joy and bliss that nothing in this world can touch or take away.

Now, is that something you are interested in? Of course you are? We all are, but we are all skeptical that it can happen to us. For some of us experiencing something like bliss, or joy that nothing can diminish simply sounds crazy. So over the next few weeks we’re going to see if we really can get there.

Today let’s take a look at a couple of these statements and see what Jesus was getting at. The first one Jesus says is this: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** I want to clarify right off the bat that Jesus is not saying that poverty is a good thing. Poverty is **not** a good thing. Jesus would never say that it’s a good thing to live in slums and not have enough to eat. Christianity is about relieving that kind of poverty.

But talking about being poor in spirit seems a pretty strange way to start talking about the way to bliss and joy. But the word for poor here has an interesting history. In Greek it’s the word *ptochos*. The word started off just meaning being poor to the point of having nothing. But over time it started to mean because you’re poor you have no power or influence. Then it came to mean that because you have no power or influence you’re oppressed by others and pushed aside. Then it came to mean the person who because he has no earthly resources at all has put his whole trust in God.

**So To be poor in spirit means to humbly put your whole trust in God.** If you realize your own helplessness and put your whole trust in God two things will happen. You become **detached** from things because you know that they can’t bring lasting happiness or security. And you’ll become **attached** to God because you will know that only God can bring you help, and hope, and strength. To be poor in spirit means to realize that things mean nothing and God means everything.

Now here’s where Jesus kind of left us hanging because he doesn’t tell us right here how we do this. But when it comes to being detached from things he gives us training in other places. Like when he says, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?” (Mark 8:34-36).**

Way too many of us have gained the world and lost our souls. One of the key ideas we draw from God’s word on this is that the best way to make sure we don’t lose our souls is to hold things loosely—our possessions, our money, our stuff—hold it loosely and constantly listen for God to tell us when it’s time to give it way.

On my bike trip this was an everyday reality for me. And it was something that I wanted to press into. You see, on the trip we couldn’t carry a whole lot with us. One suitcase on the trailer and a just a few things on the bike. And I found myself tempted to hold tightly onto certain things. Like Advil. My body hurt so bad that that Advil was like a 5<sup>th</sup> food group for me. Every meal it was like dessert. But early on I made the decision that whatever I had on the trip I was going to share. I was going to ask if anybody needed anything. So whenever I was taking some Advil I was like, “Does anybody else need any?” And there were always people ready.

There was a day when I realized that I didn’t have much Advil left. Just enough for me. I was always handing it out from my stash, but that day I was tempted to keep it for myself. But since I had already decided to hold it loosely, instead of taking it myself I gave it away. At this point you want me to say, “And miraculously I didn’t hurt all that day!” But that would be a lie. My aches ached! That lower part of my knees hurt—the low knee. And that upper part hurt too, the high knee. But knowing that somebody else’s didn’t, made up for it.

And not just Advil, but I consciously made the decision that anything I was using, anything that was particularly valuable to me, I would offer to give away. Food, clothes, toothpaste, ointments, whatever. One day in Mississippi we stopped at the top of a hill to rest a minute and a man came tooting along on a beat up old bike. He had a crate on the back and was collecting cans and metal to recycle for a little bit of money. His name was TK and we had a great conversation with him. He was a real character and told us what to expect

down the road, and where to be extra careful, and who to look out for. He made a comment about the tail lights on the backs of our bikes. I asked him if he had one to keep safe out there. And he didn't. Well, Becky Browne had given me one for the trip. I took it out and gave it to him. Told him to keep safe. And that sounds easier than it was. Because on that ride every little bit of home meant something deep. Every little gift like that was something to cherish because I was homesick. And anything safety related was **really** important to me because of my spastic riding style. But I'd determined to hold things more loosely than ever on this trip—so I gave it away. I don't know, but I have a feeling that God will do something pretty cool with that light in TK's hands. I can't measure the end result of holding those things loosely, but I have a feeling that it was one small way to bring the team a little closer, of bonding us together, of keeping us safe.

One of the best ways of detaching from things and attaching to God is holding things lightly and practicing generosity every day. And not just to give away the stuff you don't want or need, but to regularly give away the things that mean something to you, whether that's a few Advil tablets, or a car, or house, or some of your hard earned money. I was a recipient of generosity last Sunday on my trip to Atlanta. I stayed in the home of a family who have dedicated their basement to housing missionaries, travelers, people like me who needed a place to stay. A beautiful apartment. They're keeping an intern from their church. It's their ministry of giving; of holding their stuff loosely; of sharing what they have. See your life as a part of a bigger picture and build margin into your life so that you can be more prepared than ever to be generous.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. O the bliss of the man or woman who has put their whole trust in God. O the joy of the one who has detached from things and attached to God. It sounds crazy to our ears in our culture, but to be truly joyful be ready to give the most important stuff away. In God's economy, what you keep, you lose, what you hold loosely and are ready to give away, you ultimately get back.

Let's look at one more beatitude. **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4)**. Again, when you first look at this you think, “Jesus, are you crazy?! O the bliss, the unbreakable joy, of those who mourn? Are you crazy?” No. Listen, nobody would wish grief on somebody else, but here's what I know, the people of faith who have recently grieved the most have experienced a couple of deep, deep blessings. They've experienced an outpouring of love from others that they never thought possible, that they never knew was there. They've cried tears of joy in the midst of their grief because of the kindness of friends and family, the kindness of strangers. They would also say that in their grief, even because of their grief, they experienced the compassion of God in a way that they never knew before; never knew possible. Some would say that it led them to an unshakeable joy. Blessed are those who mourn.

There's another way of looking at this beatitude. **Blessed are those who mourn, who have deep sorrow for the suffering in our world**. Two weeks ago today I was worshipping in a church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Later that day we toured the city and my heart broke for them just like it broke for us. But one of the most heartbreaking scenes was in one of the housing projects. Because of the tornado warnings that day in Tuscaloosa, they had sent all the kids home from school early. Lots of the kids in the housing projects just went home to empty houses, their parents couldn't get off work to be there with them. So when the tornado hit this very poor section of the city, the kids were just out playing in the playground with nobody to look after them, nobody to warn them or get them safety. A large number of people killed that day were children with nobody to look after them. All that's left of that place is a field. And as I saw that my heart just broke. That should not be.

There are kids in the same boat here in our city. What can we do to make sure they're safe in a situation like that or any other? I don't know the answer, but my heart aches for that. Maybe the answer is the Bright Futures initiative. Where we, as a church, throw ourselves more deeply into Cecil Floyd so that there is somebody who cares about these kids in our midst, maybe it happens through being lunch buddies, maybe it's the tutoring part, maybe it's the weekend meal part.

And maybe this doesn't make your heart ache—and that's OK. But God has wired you and called you to let your heart ache over something bigger than you. To let your heart get wrecked over something bigger than you. Let it happen! Stop spending so much time and effort distancing yourself from the things that will wreck you, instead go boldly marching into them. I want you to get wrecked about something. One thing. Maybe it's poverty, or illiteracy, or human trafficking. Maybe it's people with HIV/AIDS, maybe its people

battling addictions, maybe it's domestic violence or child abuse. Maybe it people dying of malaria in Africa. Let yourself get wrecked over one thing.

I had the chance to year a young woman speak last week. Her name is Katie Davis. She's 21 now. When she was 18 she moved to Uganda to teach kindergarten at an orphanage—she felt God's calling to go do that, to immerse herself in the poverty there. Not long after she got there she was called into the night because a house had collapsed on some kids. They were orphans living in the house their parents had owned before they died. She didn't know what else to do so she brought those three little girls into her small house. After a few days later they started calling her Mommy. And a few months after that she ended up adopting them—she's 18 at the time! She ended up founding an orphanage, a feeding program, a school and foster care system that's helped hundreds of kids. She's ended up adopting 13 children herself. Can you imagine being 21 and having 13 kids, 13 daughters! She let her heart get wrecked over one thing.

I love hearing and telling stories like that, but I also don't like hearing and telling them. Because lots of us think, "Whoa! I don't want my heart to be wrecked over anything because I don't want to go to Uganda! I don't want 13 kids in my house!" Name thinking like that for what it is—excuses. It's me and you putting barriers up between us and God and it keeps so much from happening. But God is most likely not going to send you to Africa. He's most likely not going to ask you to adopt 13 kids. It will be closer to home, in your neighborhood, through our church. You've got to make the decision that you are willing to have your heart wrecked. It hurts to have your heart wrecked over something and nobody wants to hurt. But if we insulate ourselves with all kinds of excuses, we will miss out on the best stuff of life, the stuff that leads to ultimate bliss and unshakeable joy. I dare you to let your heart get wrecked over something because it will lead to the kind of joy that Jesus is talking about here.

Oh, and one other part of the blessing of mourning, is when we mourn for ourselves, for our sin. When we look at the stuff we do, or don't do that we should, the thoughts we think, the things we say, and we truly mourn for our sin, that opens the door for us to experience forgiveness and cleansing so deep, so pure, that it's euphoric. When we look at the cross of Jesus and say, "That is what sin does. It took the most beautiful life and smashed it on a cross," and we mourn our sin. That opens the flood of forgiveness that leads to bliss, unshakable joy.

Again, I know all this sounds crazy. The path to real joy, real life is through becoming poor in spirit, in letting suffering wreck you. It sounds crazy, but Jesus knew what he was talking about. I know because I've experienced it and so have some of you. But a lot of you never have, you've danced around it and kept all this at a safe distance. The time for being safe is over, the time for keeping all this at a distance is over. Maybe it's time to do something crazy. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. And for today that is the good news. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.