

Why Preach a Sermon Series on the Beatitudes?

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It was at a high school awards assembly where an off-brand version of the Beatitudes was offered (for some reason that has long since been forgotten) that it became evident that these blessings of Jesus may be in need of refocusing. Our culture likes soft words like *blessing*. The idea of a blessing can be placed in any number of situations. In most uses, “blessing” is a non-threatening good wish that costs nothing and asks little.

We preached a series of sermons on the Beatitudes of Jesus in Matthew 5 to try to reclaim the power of these words to shape our active life of faith. We wanted to engage the congregation we were serving at the time in a deeper exploration on how “blessings” are closely related to ethics, faith development, and the consequences of following Jesus today. Far from being soft, benign good wishes, Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount—and the Beatitudes within—filled with expectations for our participation in the Kingdom of God. It is the reshaping of our imagination of how to live as God’s children that was the focus of our exploration of the Beatitudes.

We proceeded through the series focusing on spiritual geography—how are the Beatitudes lived out in real time by people like us? To further illustrate this, we preached scriptural texts alongside the Beatitudes that illuminated how these blessings are made real by the power of God working through the lives of those in the Bible—the laborers in the vineyard, Jacob wrestling until dawn, Jesus in the moments of his betrayal and arrest, and Paul and Silas in prison.

“Geography” (first in a series on the Beatitudes) *Genesis 32:22-26 and Matthew 5:1-16*

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It seems that a sought after token of “the good life” today is also one of the most unattainable, at least according to *The Wall Street Journal*. It’s a cell phone number with Manhattan’s 212 area code. It used to be that area codes were geographic: I grew up in the Central Illinois 309 area code and went to college in Central Virginia’s 804. Now, it doesn’t matter if you live in California or New Jersey, in Asheville or Peoria; if you want to be seen as “having what it takes,” you get a New York City 212 area code.

Apparently, some people are going to great lengths in manipulating the system