

God Declares You Are Blessed

By Bobby Schuller

Today we're beginning a series called Your Best is Yet to Come. And a lot of this is going to be located in the sermons of Jesus Christ, but I just want to begin by saying that that's actually true. That your best is yet to come. And you might say to me, Bobby, you don't know how old I am, how sick I am, you don't know how good my past was. There's no way my future's as good as what I used to have. Isn't it true that it's better to be in a bad place and know something good is coming, than to be in a good place and know that something bad is coming?

I think at the heart of it, that's the difference between hope and despair is that one of the constant promises through the scripture is that when we do life with Jesus Christ, our best is always, always yet to come.

When I talk about this, too, I don't mean just heaven, and I do mean that, but I also mean that God loves to do miracles in people's lives. God is an eleventh hour God. He loves to annoy us with His timing, for some reason. I don't know if it's His sense of humor, but I've seen over and over what Tolkien called the euchatastrophy: the good catastrophe. That last minute, this thing that so often happens in our lives, and just felt very strongly today that the Holy Spirit could just proclaim this over you, that no matter how good your past was, no

matter how bad your present is, your best is yet to come. It's not going to come from you trying harder, it's not going to come because you're so smart, or from your effort, it's going to be grace: a gift from God. So just receive that promise today and begin to lean into that promise and believe that it's true, amen?

So the reason you can believe this is because of the proclamation of the gospel of grace. The word grace, by the way, means favor. And this proclamation is the proclamation of the gospel. And so actually recently we had John Ortberg. He was great, wasn't he? I thought he was terrific. And actually his sermon was so similar to the one I planned to preach today, that I just amended it and made some changes to it because he said exactly what I would have wanted to say preaching on this subject.

Now when he was preaching, he asked the question 'what is the good news? What is the gospel?' And then he asked everybody to turn around and kind of ask your neighbor what is the gospel? What does it mean? And everybody kind was like oh, I don't know.. Jesus and.. God.. and.. His Bible.. something. And what he was saying was very often we actually, if you're in church a lot, it's easy to minimize the gospel to just the cross and resurrection. It for sure is that. But it's really what did the cross and resurrection make available, and that is the kingdom of God. The message, the gospel of Jesus was the kingdom of God and he did such a good job of describing how the kingdom of God is working its way into the kingdom of earth.

So all of us have our little mini kingdoms, Ortberg says, right? So when a child turns about two years old, what is the first word a two year old learns? “No!” And what is the second word a two year old learns. “Mine!” Right? And so this is the spirit or a will taking reign over a blob of matter, a little body, and deciding and willing what it will do, who it will be, where it’s boundaries are, where it will go, and it creates a little range of effective will. It’s got some toys maybe, or a juice. This is its kingdom.

And when those two, you know, a two-year-old and a four-year-old, or let’s say a five-year-old and a seven-year-old are sitting next to each other in the back seat, they’re arguing over which side of the seat is theirs. This is my kingdom. No! This is my kingdom. And the war ensues until they find out that the dad turns around and he says, no you’re both wrong, this is my kingdom, right?

So this is what happens in life is you have these little kingdoms that are enveloped by larger kingdoms, like dads, right? And that dad has a job, and they reign over him, or a government. And so you have little kingdoms into medium sized kingdoms into big kingdoms, and it creates this big blob network of authority, kingdoms, wills, spirits conflicting with one another, negotiating with one another, deciding and forming what is on planet earth. And the Bible simply refers to this as the kingdom of earth. How is the kingdom of earth going? It could be better. Honestly, it could be a little better, couldn’t it.

Well this is the proclamation of Jesus that the kingdom of earth is now coming under an even vast, greater authority of the kingdom of heaven where broken hearts are mended, where the suffering are cared for, where things are made right. And the proclamation of the kingdom of God, this is what Jesus is preaching. The gospel is good news; that something new is happening through the bodies of believers who are taking their little kingdoms and submitting them to the kingdom of heaven. That not only do we go to heaven when we die, and we talk about that a lot and that's so important, but heaven is coming here in us, and that we are living in the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the Father's world where anything is possible. And where good is always the ultimate thing, and that's what faith means – trusting that God's promises are true. Your best is yet to come and that's the good thing about being a part of the kingdom of heaven.

Now in these kingdoms, every kingdom is operating under a philosophy. Everyone has a worldview. A worldview is the lens through which you view the world. Everybody's got one of these, and it's sort of a mish mash of your religion, your culture, your background, your family life, socioeconomic stuff, whatever, education, lots of other things, and they sort of mesh together to form this lens through which you view tragedy and victory and life and purpose and meaning. And that lens is your philosophy. So whether you are just a baseball player and you've got your all American philosophy, or whether you're Descartes we all

have a lens like this. And every lens tries to answer four essential questions, all right? See that's God's grace. Right? Right when I start getting in Descartes, it's like we just need something funny.

All right, according to Rich Mouw, my professor of philosophy who's an influential guy, every philosophy, no matter what it is, attempts to answer four questions, all right? We're going to learn these today.

The first question is who am I? That's question number one. It's the most important. Question number two is where am I? Question number three is what's the problem? And question number four is what's the solution? All right we're going to say this together, ready? Question number one – get rid of the slide, we're going to just.. by memory. Oh wait, you can put it back up. People are taking pictures. You can take a picture of it, that's fine.

All right, here we go. Try not to look and cheat, though. Ready? Number one, who am I? Number two, where am I? Number three, what's the problem? It's like Fonzie. What's the problem? Number four, what's the solution? Okay great. Wow, you guys are great.

Okay. So everybody attempts to answer these questions, and in Jesus' day, there were two main groups that were answering these questions for everybody – the Romans and the Pharisees. So the Romans, how would they answer this question? Who am I? Well, I'm what I do. I'm my glory. I am my achievement. I am my wealth and my power. Rome was a very glory action oriented kind of.. this type of thing. And so it was

very much might is right. The powerful and the weak, that's where I am. I am in a chaotic world that needs to be reigned in with authority and power so that I can attain glory. What's the problem? The problem is I don't have enough power and money and etc., and what's the solution? I need to get power. I need to get glory, I need to do spectacular, amazing things so that after I die, I'll be remembered.

Okay, now if you live in the Roman world, is that good news for children or for old people or for the poor? Is that good news? If you're born into that world and you have a disability, if you're born into that world say with Down syndrome, do you have a place in that world? If you're born into that world and you're a slave, do you have a place in that world? No, you don't.

So there's the other group, the religious group, the Pharisees, how do they answer those four questions. Who am I? I'm a chosen one. And very clearly, they are not. I, the Pharisee, am chosen. They are not. Excuse me. Where am I? I am in God's creation, which is under wrath. It's under God's judgment. God is angry. What's the problem? We're not clean enough. We don't obey. The clear rules about what we should eat and what we should wear and what we should not do on Saturday's. And what's the solution? The solution is separation. A wall between us, the clean ones, and they the dirty ones. They are there because you don't understand, they eat bacon. And the non bacon eaters: those who don't

mesh wool with polyester – also a rule. That’s actually one of the rules - are in, all right?

So you’re born into this world and these are the two main worldviews that you sort of get to choose from. If you’re born into that world, and your dad is Jewish but he’s a bacon eating tax collector, you’re in trouble! That’s it! You’re out, man. You’re not going to do well in the Roman world, and you’re not going to do well in the Jewish world. You can’t even go to church.

And so this is the world that Jesus comes into. And when He comes in to preach His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, there are thousands of have not’s, want to be’s, fakers, sick people, outsiders, Samaritans gathered around Him because they want something from Him. What do they want? They want power, they want healing, they want to be restored. They basically see Him, many of them, as a magician that can heal them, and in some ways He kind of was. I mean He will heal these people after this sermon, but before He heals them and performs miracles, He wants them to know why and He proclaims the beatitudes to hurting people.

Now if you’ve been in church for a long time, the beatitudes, the blessed are the poor, blessed are the.. these beatitudes have often been taught as Jesus, like new Ten Commandments, like eight commandments. Be these eight things and you’ll grow. And every sermon I’ve heard on these are good sermons, the message of these sermons are

usually powerful and helpful, but I have to tell you that that is not what Jesus is saying when He proclaims the beatitudes. He looks at these people, and what He's saying is blessed are they, blessed are they, blessed are they. He's not saying do these things. Rather, He's saying you have been told that only the religious elite and the wealthy, powerful elite have the good life, and you are out of luck. I'm here to tell you, to proclaim over you, that today the kingdom is made available to you. Wow. He's not saying do this, do that. No He's saying the kingdom is among you now. It's breaking through. You're about to see miracles happen, and just everything's going to get shaken up, and everything's going to get weird, and it's going to be great, right?

So this incredible proclamation from Jesus that their best is yet to come; that the first will be last, that the last will be first, and that God has chosen prostitutes, tax collectors, murderers, rejects, even bacon eaters to be His chosen ones. He's picked anybody that would just answer the call and say yes, Lord. When Jesus preaches the beatitudes, He's not giving eight new things to do, rather, He's just proclaiming the gospel. It's a great proclamation of hope and joy.

Now you don't always see that when you read Matthew chapter 5. You know what the biggest problem is with the Bible is that it's been translated by a bunch of Christians. And I mean that sincerely is that as Christians, when Christians approach a Greek text, they accidentally or intentionally bring their theology with them, and so when you read it in

English, you're reading it through the lens of the translator. But really, a lot of these words, "dikaiosune," for example, means righteousness but it also means justice, so to hunger and thirst for justice is a very different thing than to hunger and thirst for righteousness. And you choose, as a translator, which way you're going to go with that word.

So scholars actually believe that what Jesus is doing is not giving rules to live by, but just proclaiming the gospel. My favorite translation of this was done by my friend, many of yours friend, Bill Gaultiere. Here's his translation: "Blessed are you when you're spiritually poor for you can live in a kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are you if you're grieving a loss for you can experience God's comfort. Blessed are you if you're shy for you can inherit the best earth has to offer. Blessed are you if you're suffering injustice for you can be filled with God's life. Blessed are you if you're tender-hearted towards all who are wounded and needy for you know God's tender heart for you. Blessed are you if you're pursuing seemingly unattainable ideals for you can find God. Blessed are you if you keep getting caught in the middle of conflicts for you can be at peace as God's child. Blessed are you if you're persecuted badly for you can live in the kingdom of the heavens, where there is a reason to jump for joy." That's a good translation, isn't it? And you can hear it when it's done that way, that this is a proclamation of hope, it's a proclamation of the gospel, for people who are suffering.

You might say to me Bobby, you don't know what I'm going through. Bobby, you don't know the things I've had to deal with this week, or this year: loneliness, depression, anxiety, addiction, poverty. Maybe some of you lost everything. Your family is broken up. Some of you are just caught in the same trap that you've always been caught in. Blessed are you. Blessed are you. Blessed are you. Blessed are you. The kingdom is here. The kingdom is here and it's made available to you.

Its "makarios," a Greek word, this blessed. It actually means happy. The translator of The Message Bible, Eugene Peterson, wanted to translate as lucky because it gets the spirit across more, but Zondervan wouldn't let him.. I heard. That's a rumor, I don't know if it's true.

So your best is yet to come. Your best is yet to come. Your best is yet to come. Believe it. Ask the Lord to give you faith. Your best is yet to come.

So Jesus, when He comes into the world and begins to preach this great sermon, He has His own lens. He enters these four questions in His own way. You remember what the first question is? Who am I. Tell me, if you've been going here for years, that you know who you are. We talk about it every Sunday. It's the most important thing that we proclaim. Well what are you not? You're not what you do, you're not what you have, you're not what people say about you, you're not what's been taken from you, you're not your righteousness and your holiness, you're not your sin, you're not your fears, you're not your mistakes, you're not your

regrets, you are beloved sons and daughters of God. Oh, He loves you so much.

And who am I? Well you are.. this is Dallas Willard's words: an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. That's the answer. That's what is true. The life that you're experiencing here, it's so brief. You're going to live throughout eternity and you have a destination in that eternity. Believe it and allow that world to break into this world.

Okay, so who am I? You're the beloved. You're an eternal being. Where am I? You're in the kingdom of God. You're in the Father's world. This is His world. It's a world pulsating with spirit and life, teeming with growth and motion. I mean just look around. You look and you see plants and animals and love and heartbreak and laughter. I mean this is a world full of life that came from the Lord. It's a spiritual reality in the material experience. And this is so important. This is what Jesus is.. a big part of His message is proclaiming the kingdom of the heavens to people who can't see anything beyond their own suffering. To say friend, your best is yet to come, and it's coming from the spiritual world.

Now when I talk about the kingdom of God, one of my favorite things to do is talk about this thing called Plato's Cave. So if you went to college and you had to take a class on classical philosophy, you might have heard about Plato's Cave. Plato's Cave goes something like this, and it helps us understand the spiritual world. Plato said in this parable that

there were these people, okay? And the people are.. imagine there's people and they're sitting.. they're like on the ground with their backs against a wall, and they're chained to the ground. Okay? And they're altogether and they're all friends and they're just sitting there chained. Hey Sally, how was your day? Mine was all right. Can I have a glass of water, please.

Okay, and as they're sitting there, they're facing a projection screen, essentially. Plato knew there was going to be TV 2,500 hundred years before it happened. A projection screen, they're sitting backs to the wall, and they're looking at shadows flickering on the wall. What they don't know is that behind them, there's a bunch of pottery and there is like a fire and that fire is shining through the pottery to make this projection on the wall. And what they think is that the projections that they're seeing on the wall are what is real. It obviously is. It's right there. You can see it. We can all see it together. How can you say it's not real? And they have no idea that there are these pots and this flame behind them.

One day, a woman's chains break free, and she stands up and she looks at the flickering things, but then she turns around and sees these pots everywhere and this fire. And she looks back at the screen, and she looks back at the pots, and she goes whoa, hold on a second.

And then she realizes that everything that she's seeing on the wall is fake and that this is what's real. And then she looks off in the distance

and she sees a pin prick of light. And she begins to walk towards that light, and it gets bigger and bigger and brighter, and all of a sudden she exits the cave and she's outside, and it's a gorgeous, beautiful day. She's never seen this before. She spent her whole life chained to a dungeon wall. And she's looking around at the birds and the sky and the grass and the water, and she's going what is this place? And as she looks around, her mind is blown. She just can't even believe. It's the most amazing experience of her life, and she's taking it all in, and then all of a sudden, she remembers who – her friends back in the cave, right? And she thinks I need to go tell them. I need to get back in there and free them and show them this place.

So she wanders back into the cave, and what happens when you're outside in a bright sun and then you go into a very dark room that's dimly lit? You can't see anything, right? Everybody in the room can see just fine because their eyes are adjusted, but you can't see very well. So because of the light of the enlightenment, she walks back into the cave and she can't see very well, so she stumbles. She trips and knocks some things over, and they begin to laugh at her. What's wrong with her? And then she tries to describe things she doesn't have a language for. She experienced it, but she can't find the words. So she begins to say like it's this thing. Imagine trying to explain the color blue to a blind person, for example. Right? Or the smells, or the feeling of this big ball of light in the sky, right? She just doesn't have words for it. And so the people on the

wall, even though she's right and they're wrong, she looks like the crazy person and they look at her and they begin to laugh and mock.

This is what it's like, very often, for someone who experiences the Holy Spirit for the first time; for someone who gets a glimpse past the curtain or has a radical experience in the things of the spirit, or from the Lord. You come back from that place and you can seem like a bumbling buffoon. You don't have words to describe what you experienced, and people will laugh at you. But still, we got to go back in the cave, and we have to know that even when we dwell in that cave that there is always this bigger world that we're going to go to. And that those two are combined.

This is so important. It's so important that we understand that we live in a physical world that is informed by and influenced by things of the spirit. This is something, by the way, that scientists more and more are starting to gravitate towards.

So about five years ago, I was invited to a secret meeting in Manhattan at the Harvard Club. And this was a gathering of about 120 astrophysicists, evolutionary biologists, chemists, and they were gathered together and all of these people were Christians. And when I arrived late, I saw these people – now keep in mind, all of them were from either Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and there were a couple from Cambridge. And I walk into this room full of some of the smartest people on the

planet, and they're singing a hymn, and their hands are raised in the sky like a bunch of Pentecostals. What is causing that?

Well there's all this new science that is causing scientists to take a fresh look at the universe. There's all of these ways they're trying to describe what really looks like a spiritual world, things like multi verse, and all sorts of new language that frankly sounds religious. In fact this great quote from Robert Jastrow, who was an agnostic or atheist astrophysicist, and he's talking about all of this that's happening in the scientific world and he says, "At this moment, it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He scaled the mountains of ignorance. He is about to conquer the highest peak and as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

We live in a spiritual world. It's a material world and a spiritual world, and they're woven together beautifully. And God wants you to know that this world can be made available to you, and in this world anything, anything is possible. And this world is governed by and reigned by the Father, a loving God who has complete control and authority over it. And no matter how bad things get, even death, God reigns over that, too. And there is no tragedy, no heartache, no loss, no sickness, no aging that can turn away His goodness, His miracles, and His power.

Friend, your best is yet to come. Ask the Lord for faith and watch as He breaks through your life.

So who am I? I'm the beloved. Where am I? I'm in the Father's world. What's the problem? We're cut off by sin and shame. We sin and then we feel shame, and then we feel separated by each other, we sin more and we have more shame. And so we've all hurt one another. And our pride gets in the way and we refuse to have mercy or grace or forgive one another, or we refuse to come to the Lord. What's the solution? Grace. Its grace. The cross and the resurrection. The solution is become a disciple of Jesus. Follow Him, dedicate your life to Him, do all you can to know Him, pray, listen to Him, it's the most important thing you can do. Become a disciple of Jesus and watch as this world, this good world, the Father who makes Himself available to you in what seems like a world of chaos and receive peace and life and favor and blessing. It's so good.

Father, in Jesus' name, we love you. And I pray that everyone under the sound of my voice would receive faith. Faith is not something we can choose to have, or will, it's a gift. I pray that you'd build in us spiritual eyes and a spiritual heart so that we could live in your good world. We love you, Lord, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.