**September 22, 2019 Matthew 5:3-12**

 ***Life’s Healing Choices – The Hope Choice***

**Scripture:**

Jesus saw the crowds, went up the mountain; sat down with his disciples; then he taught them, saying:

Matthew 5:3-12 (3)"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4)"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (5)"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (6)"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (7)"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (8)"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (9)"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11)"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**Notes:**

***"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* Matthew 5:4**

**Choice 2 -** The Hope Choice: ***Earnestly*** believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me change.

Our paths to comfort & hope: ***Escape.***

God’s path to comfort & hope:

1. **SEE WHO *God really is.***

*"Who then will* ***condemn*** *us? Will Christ? No! For he is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us there in heaven."* Romans 8:34 (TLB)

*"But you, O Lord, are a* ***compassionate*** *and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."* Psalm 86:15 (NIV)

*"God is the Father who is full of mercy and all* ***comfort****."* 2 Cor. 1:3 (NCV)

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they* ***comfort*** *me."* Psalm 23:4 (NIV)

1. **SEE WHO *I really am.***

*"For* ***all*** *have sinned;* ***all*** *fall short of God's glorious standard."* Romans 3:23 (NLT)

*"But there is nothing covered up that will not be* ***revealed****, and hidden that will not be known."* Luke 12:2 (NAS)

*"I love you with an* ***everlasting*** *love. So I will continue to show you my kindness."* Jeremiah 31:3 (GW)

*"May your unfailing love be my* ***comfort****…"* Psalm 119:76a (NIV)

*"God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has* ***freed*** *us by taking away our sins."* Romans 3:24 (NLT)

1. **SEE HOW *God can change me.***

*"Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know that the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives* ***power*** *to those who are tired and worn out; he offers* ***strength*** *to the weak. Even youths will become exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like* ***eagles****. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.* Isaiah 40:28-31 (NLT)

*"For it is God who is at work within you, giving you**the* ***will*** *and**the* ***power*** *to achieve his purpose."* Phil. 2:13 (Phillips)

**Transcript:**

So; last week we started a look at the most famous sermon ever preached, does anybody remember what that was? It was the Sermon on the Mount. And in this sermon Jesus began by saying Here's eight things that will make you happy. We know these eight things as the; does anybody know? That is right the Beatitudes. Why are they so important? Well, here are eight things that will bring you real contentment in life.

We're walking through those eight things these next few weeks; talking about how you and I can make Life's Healing Choices based on those eight things that Jesus taught us. The first one we talked about last week. The first choice we talked about last week was from Jesus' first Beatitude, Matthew 5:3, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* That's the reality choice, the choice to realize I am not God and admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing, and my life is unmanageable.

Last week as we began the series; the thought of admitting my faults is tough. It’s tough when I have to admit them with God, but admitting them to a friend, a peer, or a mentor is even more difficult. As we proceed into this series of Life's Healing Choices, we get this picture of what the next eight weeks is going to be. We dread thinking of the difficult things that we are being asked to do; but we also know that a lot of what is being said in the message is true.

For a lot of us the picture we have is like my picture of going to a dentist. I hate going to the dentist. I went this past Monday and while I like the people who are there, I do not like the things they do to me. Scraping and polishing your teeth, while stretching your lips as far as possible. I’ve had many bad trips to the dentist. The smell of the drill burning through the enamel of your teeth; grinding the decay away, so that the cavity can be filled with new filling. To make it more traumatic; they have all of their tools and contraptions on display, syringes with needles about a foot long, the device they use to clamp your mouth wide open and keep it stationary, and while they do their work; they talk to you; and you try to talk back; like they understand what you are saying when you answer.

I’ve talked to some people who say they go to the dentist and, "It was fine. Some say they go to sleep in the dentist's chair; that’s wrong in so many ways. When I go to the dentist the number one thing I'm thinking is "Just get me through this as quickly as you possibly can and get me out of here."

In Life's Healing Choices if you're not careful you'll start to feel that way about it. It's like a trip to the dentist; just get me through it. Like it’s an unpleasant experience. Let me give you an entirely different picture of what Life's Healing Choices is all about.

Life’s Healing Choices are like a door being opened to a prison cell, all of a sudden you're free for the first time in your life. Our hurts, our hang-ups, and our habits can build the four walls of a prison cell. They lock you away from being all that God wants you to be and do. You feel locked up, you can't get out. Life's Healing Choices is all about opening the door and walking out into freedom.

Galatians 5:6 *"It is for freedom that Christ set us free."* God wants you toexperience that freedom, for some, maybe the first time in your life. Realize, I can live out the life that God has made me to live. I can do those things I thought I never could do. I can set aside the habits I thought would imprison me for the rest of my life. I may not forget but can be released from the pain of the past I’ve struggled with. This can happen. That's the fresh air of freedom. That's what God can do in my life and in your life during Life's Healing Choices.

This is what brings us to our second choice. The second choice is in Jesus' second Beatitude, God’s second blessing. Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matthew 5:4*. Our **second choice is the hope choice**. It is the choice to earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to him, that he has the power to help me to change. And it's based on this Beatitude.

As you read it, you realize, blessed are those who mourn… Jesus' path to comfort and hope is entirely different than our path to comfort and hope. Two entirely different directions. The truth of the matter is the thing that I most often try to avoid is God's path to real comfort. The truth is we don't want to mourn. We don't want to feel bad about our faults. But the minute that we admit that and see that, then God can open something up and give me real comfort.

I think I realized this many years ago when I lost a loved one to death. I didn’t want to say goodbye and go through life without them, so I refused to mourn; holding back my emotions, holding back my tears, holding back my fears until I could hold them no longer. In a flash, the flood gates opened and the tears flowed like a torrent of flood waters and at moment I began to feel the release, the chains fell off, and I received freedom. But we try to avoid God's path to real comfort. We have our path to comfort and hope… God has a path to comfort and hope. Our path to comfort and hope focus on how I can get to a place of comfort, a place of hope as quickly as I possibly can. We don't want to go through the process. We don't want to take the time. We just want to get there and get there quick.

Our paths to comfort and hope can be things like alcohol. I don't feel comfortable about life, so I find something to help me escape that becomes my path to comfort; Let me list a few of these things we use; whatever drug or alcohol you use that makes you feel more relaxed about life; gambling, get the adrenalin rush and you feel better; shopping, go out, buy something and feel better; who cares if I can afford it; sexual immorality, pornography, illicit relationships, makes life seem more exciting; immersing one’s self into some form of entertainment; television, movies, sports, whatever takes your mind off of you and gives comfort and hope; self-pity, feeling bad about ourselves, helps us feel better; anger, making somebody feel uncomfortable about themselves, which empowers you and makes you feel better; food, you eat to escape to this place of comfort and hope; work, I've got to achieve something to feel better about myself.

But there is one word that is central to all of these paths, the word *escape.* We try to escape to a place of comfort and hope. The problem is; all of these things only offer us a momentary escape at best. It gives me no comfort in the end; they often leave you addicted, needing more and more to maintain the euphoria, Many have discovered and know this; a comfortable life will not comfort your soul. You and I need something bigger, something greater than that. Something that only God can give.

How does this kind of comfort and hope come into our lives? *"Blessed are those who mourn."* We expect to happiness and no bad things in our lives. Have we ever watched a movie. Every movie starts good, then there’s some kind of crisis, and then it gets better in the end. Life’s not that way, it’s about *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."*

How does God give us comfort and hope? 3 things, God’s path to comfort and hope: **See who God really is.** That’s where it starts. How do I know that I can trust God to comfort me? I can only know that if I see him for who he really is. How do I know I can trust God to comfort me if I think that God is out to punish me? That is what some people think; God is out to condemn you, and then punish you. You have this feeling God is watching over your shoulder, waiting for you to mess up so he can tell you how messed up you really are.

What do you put your trust in? Are you going to trust your feelings; or in the event that changed human history? Because that event, what happened when Jesus Christ walked onto this planet, what happened at Easter, the Resurrection, is all about God telling you that He loves you more than you will ever know; He is not out to condemn you.

Paul writes in Romans 8:34 *“Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? No! For he is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us there in heaven.”* I understand that some of us, maybe all of us feel God is condemning us. It’s a powerful feeling in some of our lives. But Jesus came to earth, lived his life for you, He went to a cross and died for you. He did all of that so we can begin a relationship with him, when you consider your feelings of being condemned and what Jesus did, You may begin to think maybe our feelings don’t fit. The truth is Jesus lived his life for you, He died and was resurrected for you. He is sitting at God’s right hand, praying for you, so you know he’s not condemning you. Who are you going to trust? Your feelings; or what God has said and demonstrated to you. Who is God really? God is really a God of compassion.

Psalm 86:15 says *“But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”* When we talk to him about our problems, He doesn’t minimize our pain and struggles, He cares about your hurts. He cares about your habits.

Corinthians 1:3 says this, *“God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort.”* I’ve been pretty fortunate to have a great father; but some have grown up with a father who was full of judgment and criticism. That’s not who God is. God isn’t that kind of father. God is the Father who is full of mercy. God is the Father who is full of all comfort. What’s God really like? God wants to be part of your everyday life. God wants to be close to you. God wants a relationship with you.

 Because of that the Bible says in Psalm 23:4, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”* God’s rod and staff are comforting; and you may ask how could they be comforting? This is the picture of a shepherd and sheep, a rod and a staff. A rod was to discipline the sheep. A staff was to direct the sheep. If the sheep headed towards a cliff, the shepherd stop it, using the rod and staff. When I’m heading towards a cliff, God will bring discipline into my life; he’ll bring direction into my life, to keep me from falling off that cliff.

That is the kind of God who loves us. That is the kind of God who comforts us. That is the kind of God who gives us hope. To have hope we’ve got to see God for who He really is; God is not a weakling. He’s doesn’t pat us on the back and say, “Whatever you want, it’s ok with me no matter how much it hurts you.” He loves us too much for that. So he brings correction and direction out of his love. To get to a place of hope you first have to see who God really is.

But that’s not all. You also have to be honest about a second thing. **I have to see who I really am.** One of the things I have to see about who I really am is I am broken. Romans 3:23 *“For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”* We should all know that. I’ve never met a person who would say I’ve never sinned, We all know there’s something in us that is broken. As much as we know this is true, there is something in us that wants to hide from the truth. I don’t know about you but I spent too much time and energy hiding from the truth that I am broken. In the end I’m not going to be able to hide it anyway.

Luke 12:2 *“But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be made known.”* We think “If I can get through the rest of life, without anybody finding out I will be fine.” Then this verse comes. Here is the Message paraphrase. *“You can’t keep your true self hidden forever; before long you’ll be exposed. You can’t hide behind a religious mask forever; sooner or later the mask will slip and your true face will be known.”* We spend so much of our life and time and energy hiding from the truth of who we are. But people know anyway, word gets around, more so now than ever before in history. We think we are hiding it but people see it anyway. Jesus says, why be a hypocrite, in the end it’s all going to be revealed. In the end we’re all going to realize we have the same struggles. We’re all broken. We’re going to be pointing at the one who loves us – Jesus Christ. And saying thank you. Thank you that you’ve forgiven us all.There is something freeing about that. But you don’t have to wait till the end. Right now you can begin to recognize that.

As you recognize that it brings a new freedom into your life. It brings a new hope into your life. You see who you really are. I’m broken; but I am also loved. I am loved by the one who knows me best. I am loved by God who knows that I’m broken. He loves me with his all. How does God love you? He loves you like no human being has ever loved you. The human love you’ve experienced in this life, is entirely different from God’s love.

What is the difference between God’s love and our love. Human love fades. It might be there for a moment and then it fades. We have been disappointed by that in life. Human love fades but God’s love is everlasting. God says, *“I love you with an everlasting love. So I will continue to show you my kindness.”* Many of us have had a failed love; one of the biggest hurts in your life. Maybe it was a parent. Maybe a husband or a wife. Maybe one of your kids, a close friend. Human love fails; because human beings are imperfect, we are broken. But God’s love? It is unfailing.

Psalm 119:76, “*May your unfailing love be my comfort.” We can b*e comforted in the fact that God’s love is never going to fail you. God’s love never fails. Human love is often earned. But God’s love is a gift. We often earn love from each other – you do this for me, I do this for you. You treat me nice, I treat you nice. You scratch my back, I scratch yours. God doesn’t love like that. God’s love is a pure gift.

Romans 3:24 says, *“God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us* [there’s that freedom word again] *by taking away our sins.”* That is the gift of a relationship with God, a gift of forgiveness, the gift of a new life. That’s where it all begins. If you’re not sure that you’ve made that choice, the choice to begin a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Start there. That is the bedrock. That’s the foundation. You can do that right now. You can receive this gift by saying these words right now, “God, right now, I do want that gift. I want that gift of forgiveness. I want that gift of a new relationship with you. I want that gift of the kind of life only you can give. Jesus Christ, come into my life." If you humbly and honestly pray that prayer, you're receiving the gift that recognizes that you are loved. I am loved. Then once you've received that gift then you live it out every day of your life.

Some of us received that gift maybe a long time ago, others maybe more recent. You know you have the gift of God's relationship within you. You know that you're loved. But life lately hasn't been telling you that; with everything happening right now in your life makes you feel unloved, like a loser. Every day of your life, the most important truth about you is this: you are loved. You are loved by the God who made you, who wants to have a relationship with you; hold on to that truth every day of your life: I am loved. As I look at who I really am there are truths that help me to grasp Life's Healing Choices. I must often feel worse in order to feel better. I must often feel grief in order to experience joy.

If I want to experience God's hope and comfort, I've got to see who God really is; I've got to see who I really am. But the third thing is: **I've got to see how God can change me.** When I say “God can change me” we get negative reactions Let's deal with that because we've all had them. The First yeah, I'd like to change but I just don't have the time or energy right now. I'm just too tired right now to change my life. Another reaction is "Who am I kidding, that God can change my life? I've tried and find myself at the same place. disappointing myself, others and God. Why should I even try to climb up that hill one more time? Who am I kidding?"

Both of those negative reactions to change come from one place and it is not God. It comes from the feeling that it's all on my shoulders. I've got to change my life for God, and that just wears me out. This feeling and idea is discouraging and self-defeating. It makes want to give up; why even try? So where do I find the power to change? God talks about it. There are verses over at the end of Isaiah 40, a chapter about God’s comforts. At the end here's what God says about the kind of power that he wants to give us.

*"Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know? That the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. Even youth will become exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and they will not faint."* It's not all on your shoulders. You want to have hope, realize that God's power to change is *God's power to change*. It's not me changing for God. It's God changing me through his power. It's hoping in him.

In this verse it talked about wings like eagles, that's God's power. Sometimes our power is like a humming bird and God's power is like an eagle. Hummingbirds don't soar. They flit. Hummingbirds will get a little bit of nectar and fly over to this bush; back and forth, bush to nectar, nectar to bush; their little wings going so fast. Have you ever seen a hummingbird's wings in slow motion? They're still fast in slow motion, going from here to there and up and down.

Some of you are exactly like the hummingbird. You're just worn out by life. You're here and there. Looking here for hope, looking there for hope, looking up for hope, looking down for hope, trying to get hope in your life. You work hard at your job. You put a lot of energy into your job. But when it comes to hope, and connecting with God, to what is most important in life, you're not going to get it like a hummingbird. It's not a matter of how much energy you put into it.

If you're worn out by trying to get to a place of hope on your own, I've got some good news for you. It's not the hummingbird. It's the eagle. Watch an eagle fly. They soar to a height of ten thousand feet. A little hummingbird? They can barely get above your house. It doesn't get anywhere. But this eagle is soaring to ten thousand feet. Its wings aren't going fast like the hummingbird. It just stretches out its wings and it soars. Flaps every once in a while. How does the eagle do that? God designed the eagle's wings to catch the updraft of the wind. So it soars to these points, these incredible heights as it flies.

The good news this morning is that God has designed your soul to catch the updraft of his love. It's not a matter of you trying to hope. It's a matter of you saying, God, I need you. I'm not going to get there on my own. I trust you moment by moment, day by day. The moment I realize I need you, I feel the updraft of his love, of his strength, of his power.

If you feel like this next week, if you feel like, I want that, I've got to get some more hope into my life. I need to be motivated by hope. How can I achieve this attitude of hope this next week? The way to get there is not by trying to achieve the attitude of hope. But recognizing that God alone can give you the kind of hope that you've never had. That's what growth and hope is all about.

The last verse talks about what God's willing to do for us. Philippians 2:13 *"For it is God who is at work within you, giving you the will and giving you the power to achieve his purpose."* God is at work within you, giving you the will. He'll give you the desire. If you feel like, I know I should but I don't want to change I don’t have the energy. Say, God give me the will, give me the energy, give me the power. He's willing to give you the will, the energy, and the power.

God’s power will unlock the prison door. That's where the freedom comes in, when you recognize it's not all about me and my power and my energy. But it's all about God and what he alone can do in my life. The more you and I can help each other to see that in our groups, together on the weekends, in personal conversation, the more I can remind myself of that, the more I'm going to connect with the God who alone can give me the kind of hope that we're talking about.