

DEEP SIX STUDY

January 9th, 2022

“Getting Good”

MESSAGE HIGHLIGHTS (You can view the full message online at capecodchurch.com/Watch)

Opening: (Matthew 5:48 NTE) – A New Year often brings with it a renewed determination for us to change our lives. The desire to “become a better person” is a common human experience—as is the frustration of the failed resolution. In a famous sermon, Jesus shows us the counterintuitive key to “getting better” at life – and, luckily for us, it’s more freeing than anyone could have expected!

1. **Jesus Sets a High Standard...** (Matthew 5:17 NTE; Matthew 5:48 NTE)

- Jesus begins the famous “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5 with very comforting words about how God blesses those the world neglects. But then the sermon takes a turn: it becomes *radically challenging*, as Jesus sets a really, really high moral bar (“perfect...”) for his followers.
- When we read Matthew 5:48, we tend to react in two different directions. We either rationalize that Jesus was just “exaggerating” to get us to try to be good (without really expecting us to), or we think, “God must be cruel if he really expects me to be perfect – so why should I even try?”
- Perhaps there’s more to the story, though. Jesus transitions from the “Blessed are...” part of the sermon to the “be perfect” part with verse 17 – about fulfilling “the Law and the Prophets” himself. If we trust in his kindness and goodness, then perhaps he’s making a critical promise that explains the rest of the sermon...

2. **...But He Makes an Equally High Promise!** (Philippians 2:13)

- When Jesus said he came to “fulfill the Law and the Prophets,” he was making a claim – a claim that he was the One the Old Testament prophets foretold – the One who would restore the Kingdom of God and restore humanity’s relationship with God – who is goodness and life itself.
- We can easily look at God’s calling to a life of “goodness” and think, “I could never reach that standard on my own.” And that’s the point. Jesus knows that, so he came and lived a perfect life to fulfill the Law *for us*; he then fulfilled the promise of the Prophets as the risen Messiah, so that our relationship with our good Father God could be restored. In that restored relationship, we can share in (and enjoy) God’s goodness and “perfection.”
- Jesus doesn’t set a ridiculous moral standard for us and then say, “Good luck with that.” His standard isn’t a harsh demand, it’s a *promise*. It’s an invitation to a life with God, *in Christ*, that is full of growth and discovery and “better.” Jesus is saying, “Let’s run this race...together!”
- If we’re going to make a resolution for 2022, it shouldn’t be about making ourselves “better” or “trying harder.” Since God promises to make us “perfect” (complete, whole) in Christ, our resolution for the new year should be simple – resolve to get as close to Jesus as we can!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

These passages may provide additional insights related to the subject of this week's message.

Isaiah 41:10; Mark 10:17-18; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-10

Video of the Week: [The Law](#) by the Bible Project

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Are you a New Year's resolution maker? If so, what resolutions have you made for 2022? And if not, why not?
2. The message mentioned that 91% of New Year's resolutions fail by the end of the year. Why do you think that is?
3. When you read the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7 – if you have time, read them again now), how do you react to them? Are you generally encouraged, discouraged, challenged, confused? Explain your answer.
4. Do you believe that Jesus realistically expected his followers to live their lives according to his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount? Why or why not?
5. Do you believe that the point of Christianity – of following Jesus – is to be “better people”? Explain your answer.
6. If, as the message indicated, our only resolution as followers of Jesus in 2022 ought to be “get as close to Jesus as possible,” how do we go about doing that? And how do we keep that from being just another “get better” resolution that only has a 9% chance of success?