

Genesis 25:19–34; Psalm 119:105–112; Romans 8:1–11; Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

Opener: Good Life Through Christ

Friends, everybody wants the good life. We may not all use those words, but we know the longing: peace in our homes, purpose in our days, settled souls, and lives that matter.

But Scripture asks a deeper question: Do we know what actually leads to life?

This morning's readings do not promise ease. They show us something better: the Gospel of God through the lens of holiness.

God wants us to live the good life through Christ, share that good life with others, and give thanks. But the good life is not grabbed, traded for, or produced by the flesh. It is planted by the Word and grown by the Spirit.

The Good Life is not produced by the flesh; it is grown by the Spirit.

Introduction: When the Spirit Makes the Heart Good Soil

It all begins with a bowl of stew in Genesis 25. Two brothers struggle together even before Jacob and Esau are born. Esau comes out first. Jacob follows, grasping his brother's heel, reaching for what is not yet his.

Years later, Esau comes in exhausted from the open country. He is hungry in a way that makes everything else feel less important. And Jacob has stew.

Esau is tired and very hungry. He says, in effect, "Give me some of that stew." Jacob says, "First sell me your birthright."

The birthright was inheritance, future, blessing, promise, and identity. But Esau says he is about to die and asks what good the birthright is to him. He sells it, eats, drinks, gets up, and leaves.

And Genesis says, "So Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34 NIV).¹

That is a hard sentence.

We may not trade a birthright for lentil stew, but we know what it is to trade something lasting for something immediate: peace for control, patience for reaction, holiness for appetite, the slow work of God for relief right now.

Sometimes the thing in front of us feels more real than the promise ahead of us.

That is the danger of disordered desire. Hunger is not evil. Hunger is human. But when hunger becomes lord, it can make a bowl look bigger than a birthright.

The good life begins when Christ reorders what we love. Holiness is not the destruction of desire. Holiness is desire healed, reordered, and led by the Spirit toward life.

Genesis gives us the warning: the good life can be traded when appetite becomes master.

But Psalm 119 gives us a different picture.

Psalm 119: The Light

Not a bowl. A lamp.

The psalmist says, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105 NIV).²

This is not a floodlight or a map with every mile marked out. It is a lamp for the feet. A lamp gives enough light for the next faithful step.

Esau is driven by appetite. The psalmist is guided by light.

There are times when all we get is enough light to tell the truth, forgive, wait instead of react, and choose mercy when resentment feels easier. Not enough light to see the whole road, maybe, but enough light to keep walking with God.

That is the good life.

The Word of God does not merely inform us. The Word forms us. It names the difference between stew and birthright, appetite and inheritance, impulse and obedience.

And as we turn to Matthew 13, the image deepens. In Psalm 119, the Word is a lamp for the path. In Matthew 13, the Word is seed for the soil. God does not only guide the steps of His people. He plants His life within them.

Mathew 13: The Soil...

Matthew 13 says Jesus sat by the lake. Crowds gathered, so he got into a boat while the people stood on the shore. The water carries his voice, and Jesus begins with a farmer.

“A farmer went out to sow his seed” (Matthew 13:3 NIV).³

That is the kingdom image. Not a warrior with a sword. Not a politician with a platform. Not a celebrity with a stage.

A farmer with seed.

The kingdom comes like seed: small, scattered, hidden, vulnerable, and full of life. Some seed falls on the path. Some falls on rocky ground. Some falls among thorns. Still other seed falls on good soil and produces a crop.

Jesus says, *“Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown”* (Matthew 13:8 NIV).⁴

The seed is good. So, the issue in the parable is the soil. What kind of soil is my heart becoming?

- Some soil is hard like a path, packed down by disappointment, grief, betrayal, cynicism, and old wounds. The Word lands, but it does not enter.
- Some soil is shallow. It receives quickly, but there is no depth. When faith becomes costly, the root is not deep enough to hold.

- Some soil is crowded with thorns. Jesus names the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. The Word can be choked by normal anxieties, pressures, ambitions, distractions, and fears.

Then there is good soil.

Good soil receives, holds, gives the seed room, lets the hidden life take root, and bears fruit.

And fruit is never only for the plant. Fruit is meant to feed others.

That is where the good life teaching comes alive. **God wants us to live the good life, share the good life, and give thanks for the life that comes from Him.** The Word takes root in us so the life of God can become visible through us.

But we need to be careful here. If the sermon ended with Matthew 13, we might hear it as pressure. We might hear Jesus saying, “Try harder. Be better soil. Produce more fruit.”

But that is not the Gospel. The Gospel is not, “Be better dirt.”

The Gospel is that Christ comes to us in mercy, gives us His Spirit, and makes alive what the flesh cannot make alive.

That brings us to Romans 8.

Romans 6: No condemnation

Paul says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1 NIV).⁵

No condemnation.

That does **not** mean there is no conviction.

It does **not** mean sin does not matter.

It does **not** mean appetite, thorns, and shallow roots are harmless.

It means that in Christ, the final word over the believer is not shame, rejection, or guilty condemnation. The final word is mercy. The final word is grace. The final word is life in the Spirit.

No condemnation because Christ has done what the flesh could not do.

Paul is honest. The flesh can grab, trade, react, justify itself, and even look religious for a while. But the flesh cannot produce holiness.

Only the Spirit gives life.

Paul says, “*The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace*” (Romans 8:6 NIV).⁶

Life and peace. That is the good life through Christ.

Not perfect circumstances. Not an easy road. Not freedom from all struggle. But life and peace in the Spirit.

The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in the people of God. That means the good life is not a human achievement. It is Christ's redeemed life taking root in us by the Spirit.

So, what does God want from us?

The Good Life

Sometimes we make that question too complicated, as though God is waiting with a hidden list and we fail if we guess wrong. But Scripture gives us something simpler and deeper.

First, God wants us to live the good life through Christ. To live the good life is to let Christ reorder our desires, receive the Word as lamp and seed, and walk by the light God gives.

Second, God wants us to share the good life with others. To share the good life is to bear fruit: patience, mercy, truth spoken in love, forgiveness, justice, kindness, witness, and holy love made visible. Fruit is the life of Christ becoming nourishment for others.

Third, God wants us to give thanks. To give thanks is to remember that this life is gift before it is task. We do not give thanks because every circumstance is good. We give thanks because God is good, and God can bring life even where life seems buried.

That is holiness.

Holiness is not religious performance. Holiness is the life of Christ growing in the people of Christ by the Spirit of Christ.

A good life is not getting everything we want. A good life is learning to desire what leads to life.

Invitation

So the invitation today is not shame. It is not, "Look how bad your soil is." The invitation is, "Bring your heart to Christ."

Bring the hard places, shallow places, crowded places, and tired places. Bring the appetite that keeps asking for stew and the ache that wants relief right now.

Bring it to Christ.

Because the One who sows the seed also gives the Spirit. The One who gives the lamp also walks the path. The One who names the thorns also has power to clear them.

Friends, there is a good life through Christ.

Not the easy life. Not the comfortable life. Not the self-made life.

The good life is the Christ-filled life.

It is life where the Word takes root, the Spirit gives peace, desire is healed, mercy becomes visible, and gratitude rises even before everything is fixed.

Open Worship

So, as we come toward Open Worship, I want to leave us with two queries:

Lord Jesus, where have I been trading the good life for something less?

Lord Jesus, make my heart good soil for the life you want to grow in me.

Let us sit with that in the presence of Christ. Not rushing. Not pretending. Not defending ourselves before God. Just opening the heart.

Because the Good Life is not produced by the flesh; it is grown by the Spirit.

And what the Spirit grows in us, God can share through us, until our lives become thanksgiving.

Notes

1. Genesis 25:34 NIV.
2. Psalm 119:105 NIV.
3. Matthew 13:3 NIV.
4. Matthew 13:8 NIV.
5. Romans 8:1 NIV.
6. Romans 8:6 NIV.