



## **Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 111; Matthew 5:1-12**

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Which teacher has made the biggest impact on your life, and what did they teach you? The person could be a schoolteacher, a parent, or someone else.

Do you see yourself as a teacher to anyone? What are you teaching them?

In his book, Matthew reports Jesus' first major teaching opportunity. Crowds have been following him. So, Jesus goes up a mountain, sits down, and begins to teach them. What he shares with the crowds is what later became known as the Beatitudes, nine identifiers of a life in God. Those are the values of the kingdom of God which Jesus embraces and shares.

Jesus lived in a time and place where one's actions could bring honor or shame to the family and to a village. Things that brought honor included wealth, power, and high-status positions. Things that dishonored and brought shame included breaking social and religious norms, illness, and poverty.

Political and economic conditions were oppressive in those times; resources were scarce; power imbalances existed; values were challenged. Several sects tried to win the hearts, minds and loyalties of the people as many Jewish leaders cooperated with Roman rulers at best for the purpose of reducing the level of violence and loss of life or, at worst, for personal gain. These conditions are all situations that contributed to social conflict.

On the one hand, I imagine the crowds that gathered around Jesus and heard him speak these nine blessings were shocked to say the least. Jesus was teaching them the values of the kingdom of God, but those values did not align with the cultural values of honor and shame in which they lived.

On the other hand, would we? Both people in Jesus' time and we today know very well that wealth, power, and social status matter. Those who work hard to stay afloat, perhaps holding more than one job, and those who live a more than comfortable life know that wealth is the door to affluence and power. Wealth and status give people a sense of control in life, a sense of pride and earned respect. One would be a fool not to appreciate and pursue wealth and status. There is nothing wrong with that. The questions we may want to ask ourselves are: "Who is in charge?" and: "How do we use them?"

With the Beatitudes we learn that God values people who are poor in spirit and people who mourn. God cares for the powerless and those who hunger for a right relationship with God, rather than for things that help them climb the social ladder. What sounds like foolish talk is actually the wisdom of God.

Jesus spoke to real people like you and me. He spoke to people who had chores and jobs and hopes and sorrows, to people who had experienced hardship, trauma, and setbacks. He spoke to people whose minds occasionally wandered and mourned the time that was or feared the days ahead, worrying about their next meal or their health, and their death. Jesus taught his alternative kingdom values to everyday people and showed them a way of life contrary to the culture of the day.

We, too, are shaped by the culture around us, but we are also shaped by Jesus' words. Christians are still very much *in* the world. Jesus invites us not to be *of* the world. Do we still consider it too foolish to dismiss the way the world runs and look at reality with Jesus' eyes? Those at the bottom of the social ladder and named in the Beatitudes welcome them.

Do we? What needs to happen in our heart to make the transition to a Christ-centered life? Are we open to following the Way?

May the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the Beatitudes lead us into God's Light and Peace. Amen.