

The Present Does Not Define Your Future

You've seen people with Bibles
They highlight and underline passages
That mean a lot to them?

I saw a cartoon a few years back
Of someone with a black magic marker
Marking in his personal Bible.

He was blocking out those Scriptures he didn't agree with
Or that unduly challenged him.

There are, in fact, hard lessons in the Bible.

And at times we'd like to use a magic marker
And mark out some of the tough, tough passages.

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The Sermon on the Mount may be one of those
We'd just as soon take a magic marker to.

But if you want to know the heart of Jesus
You find it here in Matthew, chapters 5-7.

It is one of the more important teachings of Jesus.

And whether you're a follower of Jesus or not
It is an essential read.

It is radical and it is in your face
And it continues to be misrepresented
Because of the challenges found in its teachings.

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For instance, some say the Sermon on the Mount
Is not to be interpreted literally.

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It is not for us in this present age.

It is how people are to live
When the kingdom of God comes.

For they say, none of us can achieve the ethical perfection
Jesus speaks of in this sermon.

It is only intended to show us how bad off we really are.

Don't believe it!

John Stott, the late English theologian writes:

The Sermon is probably the best-known part of the teaching of Jesus. It is arguable the least understood and certainly the least obeyed.

It is Jesus' own description of what he wanted his followers to be and to do.

Here is a Christian value-system, ethical standard, religious devotion, attitude to money, ambition, lifestyle and network of relationships—all of which are totally at variance with those of the non-Christian world.

I believe Jesus is held captive in the United States

By the conventional, affluent, white, evangelical worldview
Describing who Jesus is and what he came to do!

Do yourself a favor and sometime today

Cozy up in your favorite chair
Take down a readable translation of the Bible

And read Matthew chapters 5-7

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Slowly . . . deliberately

And tell me the teachings of Jesus aren't radical.

I wish we had time now

To look at the sermon in greater detail.

But for now, over the next 3 Sundays

We will explore three portions of the sermon.

Today, we read 5:1-12 known as the Beatitudes.

The word beatitude means a state of blessedness.

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Matthew introduces the beginning and the end of the sermon

In this way:

Matthew 5:1 One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, ² and he began to teach them.

He ends it this way:

7:28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious law.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit

Blessed are those who mourn

Blessed are the meek

The crowds begin to squirm

Raising their eyebrows a bit.

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What's Jesus talking about . . . ?

These people aren't blessed!

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

Blessed are the merciful

The pure in heart

The peacemaker

Blessed are you when people insult you

Persecute you and say all kind of evil against you.

Rejoice?!

Take a moment to consider the people Jesus is speaking to.

These are rural and small-town Galileans.

They are a motley crew of farmers and fishermen

A ragtag of humanity

Uneducated and perhaps uncouth

The overlooked and underprivileged

The oppressed and depressed . . .

Life hasn't been easy for them.

They're working class.

They live from hand-to-mouth.

They receive their education

From the school of hard knocks.

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Jesus is preaching to them.

He is “comforting the afflicted.”

He is saying to them

You who are suffering now . . .

Your time is coming.

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The Gospel of Luke records another sermon of Jesus
Known as the Sermon on the Plain.

It is similar in many ways.

It begins in much the same way as the Sermon on the Mount
With a series of blessings
But Jesus ends it with words that

Rather than comforting the afflicted
Afflicts the comfortable.

Hear Jesus this time:

**Luke 6:24 But woe to you who are rich, for you have
already received your comfort.**

**25 Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go
hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn
and weep,**

**26 Woe to you when all [people] speak well of you, for
that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.**

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Now this is where those who follow a prosperity gospel
Take out their magic markers.

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Because if you're looking for a prosperity gospel
Then we'd better stop reading these sermons from Jesus.

Because the ones Jesus calls blessed
Are not the ones in Fortune 500
Are not the prosperous, the affluent
The powerful, the famous.

They do not live on Park Avenue.
Or shop at Saks Fifth Avenue.
They do not own a private jet.

They are not preachers with \$10 million dollar homes
With 30,000 followers.

No, Jesus doesn't call them blessed.
Who Jesus calls blessed
Are the dispirited ones
The hurting ones
The broken ones
The persecuted ones

The ones who live from paycheck to paycheck.

The ones that didn't get for a month
Because they were pawns in a political game.

The world has tighten a noose around their necks.

To the rich, the powerful, the famous
They are nobodies.

But to Jesus . . . to Jesus . . . they are his beloved.

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Am I saying Jesus favors the poor and the downtrodden?

The very first words from Jesus' mouth
In the Gospel of Luke are these:

¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, ¹⁹ and that the time of the Lord's favor has come.

Catholic scholars use a phrase worth considering:
God's preferential option for the poor.

The Good News of Jesus is a paradox.

It has an upside down quality to it!

The worldly kingdom see things right side up.

Blessed are the ones who are on top!
The rich, the famous, the powerful.

They're the ones the world considers blessed.

But Jesus comes along and changes everything.

He turns everything upside down

Phillip Yancey, the author and theologian calls it
The upside down kingdom.

Jesus declares that the first shall be last
And the last shall be first.

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Jesus says he who humbles himself like a child
Will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Let me say this . . .
Jesus always roots for the underdog.

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The kingdom of God is upside down to the world
Because it replaces worldly values
With kingdom values.

For in Christ, we are no longer controlled by worldly things.
We don't need the things of the world
Because our faith, and joy, and sustenance
Comes from Jesus our Savior.

We live in an upside down kingdom
Where weakness is power
Where suffering leads to comfort
Where even death leads to life eternal.

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What Jesus is saying in the Beatitudes
Is that those who suffer now
Who are persecuted now
Who mourn now
Who are marginalized now

Who are oppressed, overlooked, undervalued, despised
Sneered at, mocked, and bullied . . .

The underdogs of this world

Those filled to the brim with sorrow and disappointment
Those who are hopeless and despair NOW

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Your time is coming!!

The present will not define your future.

The kingdom of heaven awaits you.

You will be comforted

 You will inherit the earth

 You will be filled

You will be shown mercy

 You will see God

 You will be called sons and daughters of God

Rejoice and be glad.

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It is these kinds of scriptures

 That the world takes a magic marker to

 To blot out and ignore.

But to those who suffer

 These very scriptures keep alive the hope

 Found in the promises of Jesus Christ.

It is Scriptures like this that keeps believers from despairing.

The African slave in America read these Scriptures!

They found the hope and promise

 That the present conditions will not define their future.

The EYN church in Nigeria kept the faith

 By reading these Scriptures

When Boko Haram burned 1000 of their churches

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And killed 10,000 members
And sent hundreds of thousands to IDP camps.

It is scriptures like these
The Honduran family whispers to themselves

As they huddle together seeking warmth
In an overcrowded and overlooked refugee camp.

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Blessed ate the poor in spirit
For there is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who mourn
For you will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek
For they will inherit the earth

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May we the followers of Christ Jesus
Hunger and thirst for righteousness

Let us refuse to waste our lives building a worldly kingdom.

Let us seek God's kingdom first and his righteousness

Until the day we see the captives released
The hurt, the sick, the poor at peace.

May we lay down our lives for heaven's cause

We are your church
We pray revive our earth."