

The Present Does Not Define Your Future
Matthew 5:1-12 NRSV
WRCoB 1.22.23

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
Someone had a black magic marker
Marking in his personal Bible.

He was blocking out scriptures he didn't agree with
Or that challenged him.

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

And at times we, too, would like to use a magic marker
To mark out some of the really 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 right here in Matthew, chapters 5-7.

It is one of the most, if not the most
Important teachings of Jesus.

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

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

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

It is not for us in this present age.

It is how people will live when the kingdom of God comes.

For they say, no one can achieve the ethical perfection
Jesus speaks of in the sermon.

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

Don't believe it!

It is for us now as it was then as it will be
When God's kingdom comes.

John Stott, the late English theologian wrote

1

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

2

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

3

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.

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

Slowly . . . deliberately

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

Over the next 3 Sundays

We will explore three portions of the sermon.

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

And 13-20 Jesus' comments about salt and light

And he being the fulfillment of both the law and prophets.

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:

4

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:

5

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.

Jesus begins with the Beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit
Blessed are those who mourn
Blessed are the meek

Upon hearing Jesus
The crowds begin to squirm.

“What’s he talking about?”

“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.

They are rural and small-town Galileans.
They are a motley group of farmers and fishermen

Common, ordinary folk.

Uneducated and perhaps a bit uncouth in the eyes of society

The overlooked and underprivileged
The oppressed and suppressed

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.

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 differently.

Rather than comforting the afflicted
Jesus also “afflicts the comfortable”.

Hear Jesus this time.

6

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

7

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,

8

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.

Because if you're looking for a prosperity gospel
You're not going to find them
In the sermons of Jesus.

Because the ones Jesus calls blessed
Are not the ones in Fortune 500
They 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.

No, Jesus doesn't call the rich 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' whose world has tightened

A noose around their necks.

To the rich, the powerful, the famous, to them

Those people Jesus calls blessed, are nobodies.

But to Jesus . . . to Jesus . . . they are somebody.

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:

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¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.

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 sees 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 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.

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

Let me say this . . . even in football
Jesus 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 desires.

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 eternal life

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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

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 wants to take 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's scriptures like these 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 Church of the Brethren in Nigeria kept the faith

By reading these scriptures

When Boko Haram burned 1000 of their churches

And killed 10,000 of its members

And sent hundreds of thousands to IDP camps.

The present will not define their future.

It is scriptures like these

The Honduran family whispers to themselves

As they huddle together seeking warmth

In an overcrowded and overlooked refugee camp.

Their present condition will not define their future state.

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

We refuse to waste our lives building worldly kingdoms.

We seek God's kingdom
As Jesus teaches in his sermons

Until that day the captives are released
The hurt, the sick, the poor are at peace.

We lay down our lives for heaven's cause

To God be the glory!