

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

Matthew 5:1-12

*"The poor, the hungry, and the sorrowing will never confuse these things as being their salvation. And **THAT** is the blessing. They **KNOW** their need of God."*

Listed on The Text This Week, www.textweek.com: Contemporary Commentary, Studies, and Exegesis for the Gospel reading.

Year A, Season of Epiphany

Epiphany 4

Sunday Between January 28 and February 3 Inclusive

January 30, 2011

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [Matthew 5:1-12, The Message](#) or [Matthew 5:1-12, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click [here](#) for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Listen to or download an MP3 of this post:

Matthew 5:1-12

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "."

Matthew 5:1-12 is the opening of [Sermon on the Mount](#). See my post, [Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, Chapters 5, 6, and 7](#), for an short overview of these chapters.

The sermon ends with a teaching from Jesus about a difference between those who are wise and those who are foolish:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell--and great was its fall!

Matthew 7:24-27 (NRSV)

What is the crucial difference between the one who is wise and the one who is foolish?

It has nothing to do with what we usually associate with wisdom: knowledge, many years of experience, perspective, intelligence, insight, etc.

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Nor does it have to do with **HEARING** what Jesus has said. Both cases begin - "Everyone who hears these words of mine ..."

The difference between being either wise or foolish is in **ACTING** or **NOT** acting.

It is not enough for us to hear these words of Jesus; to study them; to be inspired by them; to have hopes / aspirations / dreams based on them. We must **ACT** on them; practice them; live them in our everyday lives.

So whatever passage we read from the Sermon on the Mount, we must hear it with one question in mind:

*What must I **DO** to make this the bedrock of how I live?*

This passage is often referred to as "The Beatitudes," based on the original Latin word for "Blessed."

To begin, Malina (see footnote below) suggests that the Greek word translated as "blessed" or "happy" would be better as "honourable."

Whatever the translation, Jesus completely reverses who society regards as blessed.

Who are the blessed / honourable? The poor. The sorrowing. The humble. The hungry. The merciful. The pure. The peacemakers. The hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed.

This is a tough list for those of us who are rich, or full, or laughing, or spoken well of. Aren't these good things to have and to aspire to?

So let's go back to the text for a second glance.

Notice the directness and immediacy of Jesus' language: **YOU**, you right here, who **ARE**, who are right **NOW**.

Jesus is speaking to real people who are right in front of him, and he is talking to them about their actual current circumstance.

And notice that he is **NOT** saying that being poor is a blessing. Or that being hungry is a blessing. Or that being sorrowful is a blessing. All of these will be reversed.

But being hated, being hated "on my account," now that **IS** a blessing. For that is a sign that you are among the company of God's true prophets.

So I wonder if Jesus is **NOT** saying that being rich, or full, or laughing is in itself wrong. These too will all be reversed.

But rather Jesus is condemning the all too human weakness to confuse our needs.

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For example, as we are able to meet our needs to provide for our families, to be well fed and happy, we neglect our need for God. Instead, what is within our immediate grasp becomes our salvation.

But the poor, the hungry, and the sorrowing will never confuse these things as being their salvation. And **THAT** is the blessing. They **KNOW** their need of God.

So there are perhaps two sermons that need to be preached from this text.

The first is one of comfort and assurance to those who are right now: poor, mourning, humble, hungry, etc., etc. They are blessed now and their circumstances will not last.

The second is one of awakening and encouragement to those who are right now: satisfied, happy, accomplished, well fed, etc., etc. They too are blessed now - but not because of their circumstances - their circumstances will not last.

Rather, we are blessed when we bind ourselves to Jesus; when we are true and loyal to him; when our reputation is on account of him. Even in the face of persecution.

We are blessed when - whatever our circumstances - we know our need of God.

Because knowing our need of God allows us to enjoy the good things of this life without expecting them to be our salvation.

Because knowing our need of God allows us to endure the bad things of life knowing they cannot utterly destroy us.

Because knowing our need of God allows us to know the quality of life and relationships that God desires for us, and gives us guidance for aligning our personal, social, economic, environmental, and political relationships.

Thankfully, those who followed Jesus, then and now, have had some inkling of the blessing that comes from hearing these words and practicing them. Their lives inspire us to do the same.

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Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, see link below, pages 40-41.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

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Matthew 5:1-12 (NRSV)

- ¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.
- ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
- ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
- ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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Matthew 5:1-12 (The Message)

- ¹ When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down ² and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:
- ³ "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.
- ⁴ "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.
- ⁵ "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

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⁶ "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

⁷ "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'carefull,' you find yourselves cared for.

⁸ "You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

⁹ "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

¹⁰ "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

¹¹ "Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. ¹² You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

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