

# SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 2, 2014

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i (UCC)

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: Micah 6:1-8; **Matthew 5:1-12**

Message: **Sermon on the Mount Series #1:**  
**"GOD's Power & Aloha Are Revealed**  
**Thru Foolishness & Weakness!"**

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## Gathering in the Word

This morning's scriptures, Micah 6:1-8 and Matthew 5:1-2, turn our social norms upside down!

Social norms are group-held beliefs about how members should behave in a given context. Sociologists describe norms as informal understandings that govern society's behaviors, while psychologists have adopted a more general definition, recognizing smaller group units, like a team or an office—or even a church.

Matthew's Beatitudes tell us about **covenantal norms**. Jesus offers to us a list of behaviors that will result in blessings of well-being. Clearly—"life in Christ"—is a radically different life in the world!

## Hearing the Word

### Micah 6:1-8 (The VOICE Bible)

*This is the fourth time in Micah's prophecy that the city leaders and general population of Judah are called to "listen up" (Micah 1:2; 3:1; 3:9; 6:1). Each time the prophet has something very important to say to those in Judah.*

6 <sup>1</sup>Listen to what the Eternal is saying. *People of Israel*, stand up and plead your case to the mountains; Let the hills hear what you have to say.

<sup>2</sup> Listen, *jury of mountains*, to the complaint of the Eternal One; listen, you enduring foundations of the earth, For He brings a charge against His people and argues against Israel.

<sup>3</sup> **Eternal One:** My people, what have I done against you? How have I made you tired *of me*? Answer Me!

<sup>4</sup> I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, paid your ransom, freed you from that place of slavery, and sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead you.

<sup>5</sup> O My people, remember how King Balak of Moab plotted *against you*, how Balaam (Beor's son) answered him, *refusing to curse you*? *Everything happened* between Shittim and Gilgal *as you took possession of the lands I promised you*, so that you might remember *all* the saving acts of the Eternal.

<sup>6</sup> **Israel:** What should I bring into the presence of the Eternal One to pay homage to the God Most High? Should I come into His presence with burnt offerings, with year-old calves *to sacrifice*?

<sup>7</sup> Would the Eternal be pleased by thousands of *sacrificial* rams, by ten thousand *swollen* rivers of *sweet olive* oil? Should I offer my oldest *son* for my wrongdoing, the child of my body to cover the sins of my life?

<sup>8</sup> *No*. He has told you, mortals, what is good *in His sight*.

What else does the Eternal ask of you but to live justly and to love kindness and to walk with your True God in all humility?

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Micah<sup>i</sup> was a country boy—a bit of a bumpkin (*regarded as unsophisticated*) in the eyes of the ruling religious establishment in Jerusalem. Micah spend part of his ministry wandering around Jerusalem buck naked, howling like a jackal (*wild animal resembling a dog*) and making owl noises (*or to hoot, as the case may be*).

Micah was hard to take seriously on the surface—but his words . . . the message Micah brought was powerful serious stuff! What emerged from Micah’s gap-tooth mouth was shattering and devastating; because Micah saw clear down to the roots of Israel’s problems of his day. Micah saw how the religious ceremonies were mostly just a front to cover over lives on injustice, of arrogance and condescension, and of abusing the poor!

Micah saw the disconnect between religious talk and secular lives from the leaders!

Micah had the *inside track* from YAHWEH GOD to know how absolutely nauseated GOD was with all of this!

Micah’s very name in Hebrew is ***mi ki yah***: “Who Is Like YAHWEH?”

So after 5 chapters of rebuking the very leaders and prophets in Israel (the very ones who should be leading the people to a deeper devotion to YAHWEH but who were instead leading the people the opposite direction via their own shoddy and careless examples); everything comes to a head in our Micah 6!

GOD tells the people through the Prophet Micah to stand tall and brace themselves to received what GOD was about to say. GOD reminds them although all he is getting from them was abuse and unfaithfulness—GOD has been nothing but faithful! (The history of the Exodus from Egypt is traced)

All of this (above) is the backdrop to verse 8!

- **What matters in terms of Kingdom-living is what emerges from the inside of our hearts!**
- **What matters is seeing the whole world in a new way—of overturning what society values so as to reveal what GOD values!**
- **External practices—what the people do—will result from such kingdom perspectives (faith perspectives) and ingrained sensibilities but *without* such internalized kingdom priorities and vision—nothing we do on the outside will matter to GOD!**
- **After all—when it comes to GOD—there’s no such thing as *our getting away with just going by appearances!***

### **Matthew 5:1-12 (The VOICE Bible)**

*People talk about this Jesus, this Preacher and Healer. Word spreads of His charisma and wisdom and power and love. People who are too sick to walk persuade their friends and relatives to carry them to Jesus. These cripples and demonized and ill and paralytics come to Jesus, and He heals them, and they follow Him.*

5 <sup>1</sup>Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountain (as Moses had done before Him) and He sat down (as Jewish teachers of His day usually did). His disciples gathered around Him.

*There on the mountain Jesus teaches them all. And as He is teaching, crowds gather around and overhear His teachings, listen in, and are captivated. This, the Sermon on the Mount, is the first of the five Mosaic-like sermons in Matthew.*

<sup>2</sup> And He began to teach them.

<sup>3</sup> **Jesus:** Blessed are the spiritually poor—the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn—they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the *meek and gentle*—they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness—they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful—they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are those who are pure in heart—they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers—they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness—the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

<sup>11</sup> And blessed are you, *blessed are all of you*, when people persecute you or denigrate you or despise you or tell lies about you on my account. <sup>12</sup> *But when this happens*, rejoice. Be glad. Remember that God's prophets have been persecuted in the past. And know that in heaven, you have a great reward.

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So what about the BEATITUDES? What is Jesus telling us about ***kingdom living*** in Matthew 5?

Jesus suddenly interrupts his successful healing ministry: Jesus' miracles were important signs of Jesus' power and of GOD's kingdom—but Jesus makes it clear to his hearers that his **teaching ministry** is the main event! In verse 2, Matthew says that "Jesus began to teach . . . ." Crowds and lots of people were coming to Jesus to be around him. Yet, in verse 1—Jesus goes up the mountain and sat with his disciples. It's as though it's the crowds that are driving Jesus into a private teaching session with his disciples.

So Jesus *turns the world upside down*:

- Jesus blesses the **meek**, the demure, and the people who look like they'll never accomplish anything.
- Jesus blesses the destitute and the poor; the penniless and those on the breadline!
- Jesus blesses the quietly pious folks huddled on the fringes of the business world.
- Jesus blesses those who mourn over things like the Roman occupation.

Jesus is saying that he didn't come to establish one more political kingdom; no—Jesus came to usher in a new order where the last are first and where the truly excellent ones are the ones who get sneered and scorned at by the rest of the world!

**So what would a Beatitude-filled-person look like?**

**What would a Beatitude man/woman look like?**

- That person would be consistently kind and yet a bit shy—shunning and avoiding the limelight!
- That person would always downplay his/her own actions by claiming they were never enough to achieve what he/she really wants, and so, we might conclude he/she has a bad self-image!
- This person would be quick to lend a hand to anyone in need but also quick to get a bit depressed every time he/she heard about bad news happening around the world or in the neighborhoods—this person would as often as not—be on the verge of tears; someone who could never shrug off anything!
- This person would be transparently religious—someone whose heart seemed so centered on the

GOD of his/her faith that most everything he/she did would come off looking like an offering!

- This person would be perpetually restless and dissatisfied with lots of life's facets and features—he'd/she'd be someone who consistently gave money to environmental groups, who volunteered to clean up road and highways, who pitched in on programs to aid the homeless, who talked at dinner parties about the need to do something to help those who live in poverty or who are gripped by addictions to drugs or pornography.

In short—Mr./Ms. Beatitude might not always be a barrel of laughs; but he'd/she'd have a serious look of concern on his/her face or a tear of sympathy on his/her eye; they'd rather talk about substantive issues of global warming or the war on poverty or homelessness/houselessness.

You see—the life of Mr. /Ms. Beatitude will be a busy and restless and maybe even a little nettlesome—*a person who is easily provoked or annoyed*—**because folks like this have seen the kingdom in Jesus and they're not going to settle for less ever again!**

If—as Jesus predicts—we get ridiculed and persecuted—part of the reason will be because we're not bowing down the world's agenda! We're going to challenge a lot of conventional wisdom and shake up the powers that be. On the other hand, though, the Beatitudes do not call us to be world-shunning-persons. We are not to pretend that society or culture doesn't matter, that politics are beneath our notice, or that environment can slide into

hell of pollution because this world is not our home anyway seeing as we're headed for heaven!

- ✓ No—instead the Beatitudes make clear that we are to hunger and thirst for GOD's righteousness—not in the sweet-by-and-by but right here, right now!
- ✓ We are to make for shalom here!
- ✓ We are to be meek right here and if we are—we are promised to inherit the earth—the earth—you may notice is what Jesus promises!

Jesus easily mixes up his talk about “the kingdom of heaven” with his talk about this earth. Apparently in Jesus' mind there is no dichotomy or difference! You don't have to choose between heaven and earth—because down the line—the two are going to merge and become one.

In summary—blessed are you if you can see the world as Jesus sees it! Congratulations to you if you already feel and act and live in these ways because it shows that when it comes to GOD's kingdom—**you get it!**

### **Doing the Word**

So what is the Word of GOD for us this morning?

**1. ONE: IN CHRIST—GOD HAS ALREADY LAVISHED ON US ALL THE GRACE WE WOULD EVER NEED TO BE CHANGED ON THE OUTSIDE IN TERMS OF HOW WE LIVE, HOW WE EAT, HOW WE VOTE, HOW WE TALK TO ONE ANOTHER ABOUT WHAT MATTERS IN LIFE AND WHAT DOES NOT!**

- ✓ Our task and kuleana is to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our GOD! How well we walk with GOD depends in no small measure on how justly we walk with one another!
- ✓ GOD's grace abounds and invites!
- ✓ GOD's grace may even demand creative transformation so that we become our best selves—grace-receivers and grace-givers!
- ✓ GOD's Grace calls us to gratitude and grace—supporting our sisters and brothers.

## **2.TWO: GOD BLESSES EVERYONE**

- ✓ Those who are blessed know that we need GOD and that we need one another!
- ✓ The Church is to be a BEATITUDES SOCIETY! ([www.beatitudessociety.org](http://www.beatitudessociety.org))
- ✓ The Church is to be a blessed community—gloriously dynamic and interdependent Body of Christ!
- ✓ We need to be blessed and we need to bless others too—including our most vulnerable around us—our members, our children, persons with challenges, and our seniors – everyone!
- ✓ GOD blesses those who are left behind: the poor in spirit, the meek, those who are mourning, the merciful, those hungering for justice, the pure-hearted, the makers of peace, those mistreated for the cause of justice!
- ✓ Because GOD blesses everyone—those who know their deepest needs (the protagonists of the Beatitudes) open their arms and hearts to receiving GOD's and our care.

### **3.THREE: BLESSED—WHAT IS IT?**

- ✓ To be blessed feels like you have someone's unconditional regard.
- ✓ To be blessed feels like you are not and will not be alone, like you will be accompanied wherever you go.
- ✓ Being blessed feels like you have the capacity to rise above the current circumstances—like you are more than the sum of your parts or past experiences.

#### **Sent in the Word**

The Beatitudes are not entrance requirements into GOD's kingdom—NO—the Beatitudes describe for us of what kingdom-living, as a person, a family, a Church—is like **after** you have been saved by grace! The Beatitudes show us how to live **after** grace, not how we earn grace (which we can do anyway—or course!).

Maybe after all—that's what true blessing is all about:

- ✓ Coming together regularly as the People of GOD at TFCCCH!
- ✓ Seeing each other as GOD's beloved children!
- ✓ Meeting each other at the points of our brokenness!
- ✓ Conveying and passing on to each other our promises and GOD's promises of regard, presence, accompaniment, and, above all, worth!

#### **NEXT WEEK IS PART 2 OF 4 MESSAGES ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT!**

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<sup>i</sup> Via Scott Hoezee of Calvin Theological Seminary in Michigan.