

## IF

### **Matthew 5:1-12**

#### **Intro**

The message combined with the actions of Jesus had begun to take hold. People were talking and the whisper down the lane reality was very much in affect causing people to want to get close to this person.

And there are all sorts of people.

Rich and poor. Healthy and sick. Confident and insecure. They all were drawn to Jesus.

Jesus sees them, in so many ways he sees them. What we are about to hear is his response to being in the presence of the people, God's people. It is not said, at least as we have it recorded in Matthew, to all the people.

Instead, it is spoken to the disciples shortly after Jesus steps away from the people for a time of respite.

Can you picture it? Jesus, sitting with his closest friends, reflecting upon the realities that he is currently in the presence of. The way that I read the passage this week, I could almost hear Jesus speaking in ways that carried the painful realities that he speaks to, all the while knowing the hope eternal that is able to break forth...if.

Jesus showed us the 'if': he spoke to it and he showed us what it looks like. The hope eternal that is of God can be ours (and that is regardless of our current reality), ...if.

The scripture reads this way.

### **Matthew 5:1-12**

**5** 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.

### **Micah 6:1-8**

#### **Intro**

The 'if' that Jesus spoke to was not an unknown. God had been declaring variations of it throughout the generations. Our second passage provides one of those variations...immediately after it reminds the

people what the 'if' is not. The realities of the world (those things that are spoken of in the Beatitudes) might not change, but what they mean can,...if. The scripture reads this way.

### **Micah 6:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. <sup>2</sup>Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel.

<sup>3</sup>'O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! <sup>4</sup>For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. <sup>5</sup>O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.'

<sup>6</sup>'With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup>Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' <sup>8</sup>He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

### **"If"**

When was the first time that you heard the line, 'nothing in this world is free'? While I can't pin it down to a specific age, I do remember a time in my early youth as my parents had brought my brother and I over to Zern's, the local indoor flea/farmer's market around where we lived in the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania. We didn't go there often, but what I remember about it was that there was so much to see. As a kid, I found it more than a little overwhelming.

The other thing that I remember was just how in your face some of the salespeople were. 'Here! Try this for free!' 'Take one! It's free!' 'You don't have to pay anything: it's free!'

Well, as a kid (who had no money), there were more than a few occasions when that sounded pretty good...so off I would venture to the vendor that was selling this food, those toys, or the other Pennsylvania Dutch knick-knacks.

What happens when you get pulled over to that respective booth? Yes, you get the free thing...but then you want to buy something else, or you're told that in order to get the free thing you actually have to buy one other thing. So off I would go to my parents.

Any guesses on the lesson I learned off of those experiences?

Now mind you, sometimes the answer was 'yes'. Many times the answer was 'no'. But always, there was some variation of, 'you need to remember that nothing in the world is free'.

Most of us have been taught that lesson and whenever we start to get close to something that sounds too good to be true, what do we ask? What's the catch? Because nothing in this world is free.

Or the flip, when feel like that we are not getting compensated for what we have paid or put in, we end up getting upset. Why? Because we operate from a mindset that we should get what we paid for.

Nothing in the world is free but if we put our money or our effort down, well, there better be the agreed upon compensation.

I know that I have had those thoughts and said those statements more than a few times not only in regard to my own life, but absolutely in regard to helping my kids know what it means to be wise spenders in the world.

So when that becomes one of the foundational stones that we lean upon as we move in and through the world (and I absolutely believe that it is for a whole lot of us!), how does that affect how we live out our faith?

For example, what are we expecting when we, as it tells us to do in Micah, 'do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with our God'? I'm not saying that we get it correct 100% of the time, but we feel like we've been doing a good job...of being good. Do you have an expectation of what your 'return' will look like? What your return will feel like?

When we're sitting here in the church pews, my guess is that many of us will respond by saying, 'God forgiving and loving me is more than enough.'

Theologically appropriate.

But I have this sneaking suspicion that once we leave the comfortable confines, the lessons that we have been taught, that nothing in the world is free, and correspondingly to get your monies worth, very much build into our expectations of God.

Not only do I believe this to be true because of the number of times that I have heard people ask, 'why is God punishing me?' (both because they feel guilty for something that they have done, or because they are angry because they feel that there is no reason that they should be treated 'this way'), but also because of how Jesus begins to reframe the realities of life to those who are closest to him, to those who will ultimately share Jesus' message in the world. Jesus know that his disciples have similar expectations so when he sees the realities of the world on full display through the crowds that have assembled, he takes the time to explain what can happen...if.

Remember, Jesus isn't just speaking to some of the minor annoyances of life: he's speaking to the realities that can be out and out debilitating. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and those who are persecuted.'

Jesus sees these realities in the crowd before him. He knows their pain. And he is reframing the perspective of their reality...if.

If they are able to do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God they will begin to experience the world in ways that are deeper than 'make sure you're getting your monies worth', or 'nothing in the world is free'.

If they are able to be merciful, pure in heart, and be peacemakers their prism of life will begin to shift and even though that shift will still leave them seeing in a mirror dimly, it will leave them trusting that that much more that they are beginning to see the world as the Creator of the world sees it.

If they are able and willing to put their faith into action.

What about us? Where are we at in regard to our 'if'?

Now, just as important a question: where do you want to be?

Putting your faith into action is not just about being able to: you have to be willing to do so as well. If we put our faith into action then we have a greater likelihood of being able to see God even in the greatest of difficulties.

That was very much on display yesterday as we heard the mission report back from Haiti. Haiti is a hard place where the expectations that we have about life so very often are more of a dream, and yet as people have been willing to put their faith into action, the blessings of God are able to flow, and be experienced, even in the midst of...hardship.

I know that I was able to feel that truth a few months ago when I pinch hit for soup kitchen. Here are people putting their faith into action, serving others. And even though the homelessness is still there, even though the underemployment is still there, even though hunger is still there, ...there is also the light of God's presence as people serve and are served in His name.

Faith put into action can transform the way that we see curses so that even through the difficulties, we are able to recognize the blessings of the Divine.

If.

If we do so.

As individuals. As a congregation. If we put our faith into action, then our perspective will begin to be transformed. The trials do not go away, but how we see them will.

I know, by the wisdom of the world it sounds like you're not getting your monies worth, and leads us to feel ever more confident that nothing in the world is free.

But that isn't how God works. Never has been. And we need to stop fooling ourselves into believing that it ever will be.

Where are we at in regard to our 'if'?

Hear the words of God again: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and those who are persecuted.'

Do you know any of those realities? In your life right now, do you struggle with any of those realities?

The Creator of all says that you will be blessed with a new perspective if do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.

The Savior of the World will be revealed in new ways if we are able to be merciful, pure in heart, and be peacemakers.

A new understanding of these lives that we have can begin to be experienced if we are able and willing to put our faith into action.

If.

You know what? We need to start transforming those 'if's' into 'when's' so that sooner rather than later, those 'when's' will become 'now's'.

A new perspective, ...if.

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, the steps were proclaimed so very long ago. Jesus affirmed them as he articulated the blessings that are able to be received when we place our reliance upon You. Nothing changed. Your call remained the same, and does so into this Your sanctuary here today. Lord, however we may be able to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with You, grant us the strength and the courage to do it so that we might be able to move from 'if' to how we are putting our faith into action. Lord, hear our prayer. Amen.