

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, February 1, 2026. "Who is honored in Jesus' Kingdom?" based on the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 and Micah 6:6-8.

Our lessons for this week really are where the rubber meets the road for our Christian religion. It describes everything we ought to do after we say, "I believe." Once we know we are saved by God's grace, through faith, on account of Christ, then our behaviors and actions should follow Christian ethics as laid out in teachings like Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, for example.

James 1:27 describes true religion this way: Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. Orphans and widows were the most vulnerable people in society. Caring for the most vulnerable people among us in their greatest need is part of our Christian ethics.

In our first lesson from the prophet Micah, who is writing in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE to people who have turned away from God and forgot God's saving acts, like rescuing them from slavery in Egypt, asks the question, "What does the Lord require of you?" Clearly here, the Lord is not interested in increasingly extravagant sacrifices, a calf, to thousands of rams, ending with child sacrifice. But instead, God requires for us to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. God wants our actions and behaviors to reflect these things.

In Our Gospel for today, we have the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount which spans Matthew 5-7. You could study and meditate on the sermon on the mount rest of your life and be changed daily. It is a message for us now on what it means to follow Jesus.

The Sermon on the mount begins with the beatitudes or blessings, beatus in Latin. And it will surprise you who says Jesus is blessed in his kingdom. It's not the rich and powerful or those who seem to have it all together. Thanks be to God for that.

However, most of us would agree that we are blessed in many ways, especially when you have shelter, heat, food, clothing, and clean water. Or, if you have a family that loves you and friends who support you. You are blessed.

But here, the beatitudes are a reversal of the way the imperial world dominated by 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome works.

In verses 3-6, Jesus calls the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for justice in his kingdom blessed. The poor in spirit could be those at the end of their rope. It could be you right now. When you realize this, there is more room for God in your life to enter in and bring healing. Those who mourn could be anyone who is grieving a loss. I know that is many of you. The meek could be the voiceless or those without options. Those who hunger for justice could be our neighbors right now who are living in fear due to the immigration crackdown.

Another translation for blessed that I learned from my New Testament Greek Professor, Jim Bailey, is “How Honored”. For example, those who are mourning a loss this day are most to be honored in Jesus’ kingdom. Then if you notice, the second half of each beatitude promises God’s future reversal of these situations and that that reversal is already underway in Jesus’ ministry.

Then verses 7-12 bless social actions of the alternative community Jesus is building. Those who seek justice, those who are peace makers, and those who are persecuted in Jesus name, God with you. Persecution is inevitable when the powerful elite are challenged. But Jesus says, even then, you can rejoice because, you are on the right track. He says, “Your reward is great in heaven.”

The beatitudes are really about the Christian life and witness... it is our job description our daily ethics. It is everything we do after we say I believe. It is our response to God’s saving love of Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection.

I know hearing this may feel overwhelming and that you aren’t doing enough. But again, learning Jesus’ teachings and following them is a lifelong journey. You will make many mistakes along the way. But know that there is grace for that. May you be challenged and changed by these lessons and may your definition of who is blessed in Jesus’ kingdom expand. Amen.