

# January 24<sup>th</sup> Jump Start Bible Study Materials

## For Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Matthew 5:1-12 ; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians; 1:18-31; Isaiah 9:1-4

*The Beatitudes gives us a clear vision of how to be blessed. Pastor Paul will be preaching. Read Matthew 5:1-12.*

Matthew 5:1-12

When, in Matthew 5:1, Jesus goes up the mountain with his disciples, we get our first glimpse of Jesus as an authoritative teacher. We know that Jesus is a teacher and a healer because the Sermon on the Mount follows a summary statement of Jesus' activity: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people" (4:23). Matthew shows Jesus to be an active agent of God's power among the people and an authoritative teacher, highlighted by what is arguably the most famous of Jesus' teachings, the Sermon on the Mount. This week's passage is the overture, if you will, to this sermon. The beatitudes, in my mind, serve as sort of a preamble for the way in which Jesus will interpret the law and how he will conduct his ministry. So far in Matthew, Jesus has prepared for his ministry. He has been baptized. He has been tempted by Satan. He has called his first four disciples. He has taught in the synagogues, proclaimed the good news, and cured diseases and sickness. Now, he turns to teaching his disciples (the first time they are called such in the Gospel), presumably only the four that have so far been called—Andrew, Simon Peter, James, and John. The crowds, then, serve as a sort of backdrop to this sermon. They aren't the direct audience of the sermon, but they are presumably the recipients of the divine favor Jesus says God has in store. It is easy, from our pews in the wealthiest country in the world, to read the beatitudes and overlook the embodiment present in them. For those of us living comfortable lives in the wealthiest nation the world has ever known, how can we embody the beatitudes? How can we pursue justice, righteousness, and peace? How can we embody God's promises to those that are poor, mourn, and oppressed? When the beatitudes are rooted in embodiment, rather than spiritualized, we can more clearly see the ways we could act to bring God's kingdom into people's lives. The life of a disciple of Jesus runs counter to the values of the world. Perhaps we don't experience persecution in our modern American context in the way that early Jesus followers did—no one is looking to kill us simply because we confess Christ. But do not be deceived. When we live a life for justice for the oppressed and marginalized, when we extend mercy to the outcast, when we live the values outlined in the beatitudes, the rulers of this world will resist us. But we must persevere if we are to be blessed.

- The Greek word for poor means to make oneself little, to crouch. How would you interpret verse 3 with this definition in mind?
- In what way have you experienced God's comfort when you have felt mournful?
- As you read verse 5, substitute the phrase "submissive and obedient to the Lord" for the word "meek." In what way does this change your interpretation of the meaning of verse 5?

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- Verse 7 tells us to be merciful. Does your life provide opportunities for you to apply this beatitude?
- Read verse 9. In what way can we be peacemakers in our families, neighbors, friends?
- What encouragement does the Lord offer to those who are persecuted in his name?
- What examples do you see today of Christians being persecuted in today's world?

### Psalm 15

Psalm 15 is classified generally as a Community Hymn and more specifically as an Entrance Liturgy. In three movements—Question (verse 1), Response (verses 2-5b), and Promise (verse 5c), the prospective worshiper is schooled in the proper demeanor of those who would enter into the presence of God to worship. Verse 1 sets the question. “Who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?” (NRSV). The two words, “abide” and “dwell” are interesting studies. The word translated “abide” is from the Hebrew root *gur*, which means to “stay as a resident alien, as a foreigner”; the word “dwell” is derived from *shakan*, meaning to “settle down, be at home.” Whatever these words may have meant in their setting in ancient Israel, they speak volumes to humanity today. We are all “foreigners or resident aliens” when we seek to come into the presence of God, and our hope is to “settle down, be at home” (just for a while) in that presence, that sanctuary. In order to truly “settle down, be at home,” though, certain things are required of us. And verses 2-5b clearly lay them out. We begin with verses 2 and 3, which scholars suggest is a masterful work of Hebrew poetic parallelism. The verses contain, in three phrases in verse 2 that echo three phrases found in verse 3, the three requisites for entrance into God's holy space. The message of Psalm 15 is the same that we read in the other Lectionary Texts for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany. Micah 6:1-8 and Matthew 5:1-12 are familiar passages. Micah tells that God does not want burnt offering or animal sacrifices; God wants justice, kindness, and a humble walk before God. Jesus, in Matthew's gospel talks about the make-up of the Kingdom of Heaven—those who are meek, those who are merciful, those who are peacemakers. The message of Psalm 15, and of Micah 6 and Matthew 5, seems to be that God is not so much interested in whether we get the ritual right—the invocation, the litany, the music, the sermon, as God is interested in whether our attitude and actions are right as we enter into the sanctuary. Those who can sojourn/live as a foreigner and sit down for a while in the presence of God are not necessarily those who have read their Sunday School lesson for the week, dressed in their Sunday best, know the words to all the hymns, and bring the sweet rolls for coffee after the service. No, the inside is more important than the outside. Did you speak the truth (Psalm 15:2); did you not slander (Psalm 15:3) or “lift up” words against your neighbor (Psalm 15:3); did you stand by your word (Psalm 15:4); and did you not speak ill of any innocent person just for your own gain (Psalm 15:5)? Contemplate the prerequisites, and then enter in!

- Where do you go to worship? Is prayer effective when you are not in a religious building? Explain.
- What should the worshiper do to prepare himself/herself to worship the Lord?

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- Do most Christians follow these requirements? Why or why not?
- Are you able to live in such a way that you comply with these requirements? Explain.

1 Corinthians; 1:18-31

It seems that especially since the explosion of the online social media age, we have acquainted ourselves with every form of human foolishness imaginable. There is foolishness that is silly, mistaken, misguided, confused, or just lapse in judgment. And then there is foolishness that is conniving, scheming, devious, and manipulative. We are shameless in sharing the former on our social media platforms, and we are shameless in our willingness to thoughtlessly fall prey to or even perpetrate the latter. It's not that we have discovered new forms of foolishness—there is nothing new under the sun—but we are all more exposed to all of it. In the current political environment, when churches and families have been impacted over disagreements about the pandemic, when we have been disoriented and are sometimes unsure of whom to trust, when fatigue has overtaken leaders we used to count on, when many have to think about how to reconstitute church, when we realize there is no going back but only forward into a future that is unknown, we need now perhaps more than ever in any of our lives to be united, in agreement, of one mind. The last thing the church needs is quarreling and divisiveness. After speaking rhetorically and metaphorically about how we seek to justify ourselves, Paul turns to the experience of the Corinthian Christians themselves. Not only is their preferred “wise one” not so wise, but they themselves were mostly born of low estate, and that is just the point. Paul has been preaching about how together the Corinthian Christians have the gifts to do the work of God until Christ returns. Which one of us does not value or pursue wisdom, financial security, respect, accomplishment? Which one of us does not want enough control over our environment to create a more secure future for our children, families, churches, or communities? The power reversals in this passage, the logic of the gospel, are more intellectually accessible than they are emotionally satisfying. Only spiritually when one gets a taste of the wisdom and power of God through Christ is one able to let go of self-focus and self-satisfaction. God's faithfulness is manifest through the foolishness of the cross. We are not embarrassed by the cross itself as early Christians might have been. The scandal of the cross has largely worn off on us. But neither should the cross be a point of pride. Paul is not suggesting, however, that we boast in the cross. He suggests that if we must boast, we boast in the Lord, quoting Jeremiah who lifts up the voice of God, saying, “I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight.” It is this God whom we declare, proclaim, “boast.”

- Explain why “the message of the cross” is misinterpreted by some people.
- In verse 23, Paul explained that Christ's crucifixion was “a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles.” What are your thoughts as to why this is so.
- What would Christ represent to the person who is “called”?
- Explain what verses 26 through 29 mean to you.

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- What will God provide for those who are followers of Jesus Christ?

Isaiah 9:1-4

For all of the complexities and uncertainties surrounding these verses, the message is quite clear: trust that God’s work is liberating always, even in the midst of trouble and difficult circumstances. The Book of Isaiah is infamously a complex and composite text, meaning scholarship generally agrees that the complete book is the work of at least three—and likely more—authors and editors. Determining the primary historical context for any given portion is a challenge. At the same time, such multivalency lends itself to a reader or proclaimer today: Isaiah speaks of an enduring light that liberates us from the “dark” in all times and spaces. Regarding the complexities, the boundaries of the text require attention. Isaiah 9:1 (8:23 in the Hebrew Masoretic Text) is decidedly problematic, with scholars debating whether the verse belongs in chapter 8 or as the start of chapter 9. The Hebrew terms of “darkness” (Hebrew *hashekhah*), “gloom” (*me’uph*), and “anguish” (*tsuqah*) in 8:20-22 are repeated in Isaiah 9:1, indicating that the verse concludes chapter 8. On the other hand, the shift in verb conjugation from imperfective (in other words, consecutive forms) to perfective in 9:1 may suggest that the verse is a prose introduction to the more poetic verses in chapter 9 (verses 2–7). In its earliest historical context, Isaiah 1-12 is a distinct unit addressing the rise and fall of Assyrian imperial power. Chapters 6-9 specifically highlight the Syro-Ephraimite War and the anti-Assyrian coalition, formed by King Pekah of Israel (Ephraim) and King Resin of Syria (Aram). Thinking that they stood a better chance against Assyria with Judah’s alliance, Pekah and Resin sought to strong-arm Ahaz into joining their coalition. The conflict between these three sparks the Syro-Ephraimite conflict, and ultimately sets in motion the downfall of Israel by Assyria. Considering this passage (and even its larger context) during Epiphany, however, calls us to focus not on any specific child, but on what the child **signifies**. In the midst of political instability, shaky alliances, uncertain futures, Isaiah reminds Ahaz (and all those who encounter the text), *Immanuel*—God is with us. What is more, God’s presence is a shining light, piercing whatever darkness we encounter. As noted earlier, the use of perfective verbal forms in verses 2–4 also provide an enduring quality to the statements. The reversal of darkness in 9:2 has connections to 5:30, with darkness in that case signifying the Assyrian invasion. In the end, whether we read this as advice to a king, as a word of hope to survivors of Babylonian exile, as a call for inclusion of Gentiles in a specific region (per Matthew’s gospel) or some combination, Isaiah’s message of hope rings out. During the season of Epiphany, the message from Isaiah is this: a Light is piercing the darkness and always has been, that Light liberates us from oppressors in many times and places. Finally, in the context of Isaiah, and as an Epiphany message, that Light is not only a foretold child—that Light is *Immanuel*. The message of Isaiah 9:1-4, for all of its complexity, is a reminder that God is with us always.

- In what way did Isaiah’s prophecy “light” relate to Jesus Christ?
- What does Isaiah prophesy about the positive changes what will result from the arrival of the Messiah?