

Sermon

February 1, 2026

Matthew 5:1-12

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

What does God want from you? That question haunts us, doesn't it? We lie awake at night wondering if we're doing enough, being enough, praying enough. Maybe God wants bigger offerings. Better behavior. Longer prayer lists. We turn religion into a performance review, always wondering if we'll get a passing grade.

The people in Micah's day had the same anxiety. They asked, "What shall I bring when I come before the LORD?" Should we bring calves? Thousands of rams? Rivers of oil? Would God be pleased if we offered our very children?

But here's what's startling: God doesn't want any of it. Listen to what the LORD says in Micah 6: "*He has told you, O man, 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?*" Notice that word "told." Past tense. God already showed them. They already knew. But they'd forgotten. They'd replaced God's simple requirements with religious showmanship. They thought more was better. Bigger was holier.

Think of it like a child who breaks a lamp, then tries to fix it by bringing his mother fifty dandelions from the yard. Sweet, yes. But that's not what Mom needs. She needs an honest confession and a hug. The relationship matters more than the performance.

Israel had done worse than break a lamp. Micah puts God's people on trial. Look at chapter six, verse two: "*Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD.*" The mountains themselves become the jury. God calls witnesses from creation because His people have forgotten who He is and what He's done. "*I brought you up from the land of Egypt,*" God reminds them. I redeemed you. I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. I turned Balaam's curse into blessing.

But now? Now they're going through the motions. Their religion has become transaction instead of relationship. They've confused what God wants with what they want to offer.

We do the same thing. We create complicated formulas for God's favor. We think, "If I just read my Bible more, volunteer more, give more, sin less—then

God will bless me. Then I'll be worthy." But here's the tension we're sitting in: None of that works. Not because those things are bad, but because that's not how God operates.

Paul tells the Corinthians a shocking truth: *"The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."* The Greek word for "folly" is *moria*—where we get our word "moron." Paul says the cross looks stupid to the world. Ridiculous. Backwards. A crucified God? A murdered Messiah? That's not power. That's weakness. That's failure.

The world wants wisdom. The world wants signs of strength—mighty acts, impressive credentials, winning strategies. Jews demanded miraculous signs. Greeks sought sophisticated wisdom. Both wanted proof. Both wanted God on their terms. But God says, *"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise."* Instead of a philosophy, God gives a crucifixion. Instead of a miracle on command, God gives suffering. Instead of power that impresses, God gives power that dies. And somehow—impossibly—this foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom. This weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Think about how a thermostat works. When you want to warm a cold house, the thermostat doesn't heat the air directly. It calls upon the furnace—something hidden in the basement, out of sight. The heat comes from below, from the place nobody sees. That's how God works. His power comes from the least expected place: a Roman cross, a criminal's death, the lowest point imaginable. From there, warmth spreads throughout the whole house.

Paul drives this home personally: *"Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth."* Translation? You Corinthians aren't impressive. You're nobodies. Former pagans. Slaves. Tradespeople. A few wealthy folks, maybe, but mostly? Ordinary. Unimpressive. Nothing special. And that's exactly the point. *"God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are."* Why? *"So that no human being might boast in the presence of God."* God deliberately picks the unlikely candidates. He chooses the unqualified. He selects the overlooked. Not because they're secretly great, but because when

God works through weakness, everyone knows God did it. Nobody can take credit.

That brings us to the mountain in Matthew 5.

Jesus sits down—the posture of a rabbi teaching—and He pronounces blessings. But they're not the blessings anyone expected.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." Blessed are those who know they're spiritually bankrupt, who have nothing to offer God.

"Blessed are those who mourn." Blessed are the brokenhearted, the grieving, those crushed by sin and sorrow.

"Blessed are the meek." The Greek word *praus* means gentle, humble, those who've surrendered control.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Blessed are those who know they don't have it and desperately need it.

These aren't blessings on the successful. These are blessings on the broken.

In 1271, Marco Polo traveled to China and discovered something remarkable: the Chinese didn't value gold and silver like Europeans did. They used paper money. To Europeans, paper was worthless—just pressed plant fiber. But the Chinese emperor declared that paper had value, and suddenly, what seemed worthless became precious. Not because the paper changed, but because the emperor said so.

That's what Jesus does in the Beatitudes. He looks at people the world calls worthless—the poor, the mourning, the meek, the persecuted—and He declares them blessed. Not because they're secretly valuable, but because He says so. His word changes everything. This is the upside-down kingdom. God's kingdom doesn't run on the world's fuel. It doesn't reward strength, success, or self-sufficiency. It blesses emptiness, brokenness, and need. Why? Because that's where God can work. That's where His grace has room.

So what does God want from you? Not your performance. Not your perfection. Not your religious résumé. He wants you. Broken, weak, empty-handed you. He wants you to stop trying to impress Him and start trusting Him. To walk humbly, admitting you need a Savior. To do justice, treating others with the mercy you've received. To love kindness, because you've tasted His kindness at the cross. Because here's the resolution to all the tension: Jesus already did

what you cannot do. He lived the perfect life you can't live. He died the death you deserve. He became weak so you could be strong. He became foolish so you could be wise. He became cursed so you could be blessed. Paul writes, *"Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption."*

Jesus is your righteousness. Jesus is your holiness. Jesus is your redemption. Not because you earned it, but because God declared it. You're not on trial anymore. Jesus stood trial for you. You're not being graded. Jesus got the perfect score for you. You're not hoping God will accept you. He already has—in Christ.

That's the upside-down kingdom. The crucified God saves. The weak become strong. The broken are blessed. The foolish shame the wise. And you—poor in spirit, mourning your sin, hungry for righteousness—you are blessed. Not someday. Right now. Because Jesus has made you His own. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

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