



## **WEEK 1 – BE...WHAT?!**

### **CHECK-IN**

How are you? What's one cool thing God has done in your life in the last week? And... last week was April Fool's Day. Did you play a prank? Did you drop a good ol' standard like shaving cream in the shoes, or were you on the receiving end, and someone put toothpaste in *your* Oreo? If not, what's the best prank you've played or had played on you?

### **OPENING PRAYER**

Loving Creator, thank for being a God who walks with us in our lowest places.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Jesus may not have played many April Fool's pranks, (though, it *was* a bunch of dudes hanging around together... so you know someone got spicy hummus put in their tunic.) However, Jesus did love to surprise people with his teaching. He loved to take the conventional wisdom

of the day, the normal laws and expectations of life, and flip them upside-down. Through this series, we'll look at an instance where Jesus did this for an entire sermon... and it turned out to be pretty revolutionary.

**Warm-up Question: Let's put this in perspective. For many of Jesus's listeners, his teaching was unlike anything they'd ever heard. Who is the most impactful speaker you've ever heard? What was it about them that captured your attention? What was the message?**

## **SERIES SETUP**

Jesus taught a LOT. Sure, he healed the sick, cast out demons, and performed miracles... but he never missed an opportunity to teach his followers something. Perhaps the most famous instance of this is in what is commonly known as "The Sermon on the Mount." Found in Matthew's version of Jesus's life, his 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> chapters, (yes, it was one of his first and one of his longest,) Jesus went up on a hillside above Capernaum and began teaching. Nowadays, much of what Jesus taught is pretty normal: love others, forgive people, treat others how you want to be treated. Much of what you listed in the warm-up question may even now seem like common sense. But what we often forget, today, 2000 years later, is that, at the time, when Jesus spoke these words, they were *revolutionary*. When Jesus gave this Sermon on the Mount, much of what he taught were things that had never before been uttered by anyone in the history of humanity. (Yeah, it's that big of a deal.) The ideas and the instructions he gave, that now

seem obvious, when Jesus first spoke them, would have shaken these listeners to the core. Mind. Blown.

Why were they so revolutionary? Well, that's going to be the theme of this series. See, Jesus liked to do the unexpected. He liked to take the norm and do something *abnormal* with it. He liked to take the common wisdom of the day, even things that had been codified into law, and give his listeners something *uncommon*. And he spends this entire "Sermon on the Mount" doing that very thing, flipping the conventional wisdom on its head. And though it may not seem as *revolutionary* today, it is definitely just as *relevant*, and if we take his instruction seriously, can be just as life-changing for us now as it was for them then.

**Question 1: Do you have a favorite teaching of Jesus? Maybe something from Sunday school as a kid, or a particularly memorable scripture reflection from Pastor Mike. (We know, we know, there are so many.) Is there a pivotal teaching that you hold onto?**

## **SCRIPTURE**

So, where do we start? Well, we'll start where Jesus did. He begins with a prologue, an intro that foreshadows the tone of the rest of the sermon. If Jesus is going to flip things the rest of the sermon, let's start flipping things from the beginning.

**Read Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1 through 10.**

This intro to the famous “Sermon on the Mount,” is about the most famous intro to any sermon ever. It’s called the “Beatitudes.” The be... what? What am I supposed to be? Attitude? What’s wrong with my attitude? Nothing, the word “Beatitudes” just comes from the Latin word for “blessed.” But, “what am I supposed to be?” is actually a helpful question here. Because, Jesus’s list is pretty important. We’ll break it down, but first...

**Question 2: What is your first impression of this introduction? If you were in the crowd, listening to Jesus preach this sermon, and this is what he began with, what would you have felt? What would have caught your attention? What would have been confusing? Would you have stuck around for the rest, or would you have quietly made your exit off the mount?**

## **REFLECTION**

Starting his sermon with The Beatitudes seemed to serve two purposes. First, as we said, it set up the rest of the sermon. (Jesus didn’t go to the Mike Whitaker School of Preaching where every sermon starts with a joke. To each their own.) Instead, Jesus seemed to say, “Okay, I’m going to take everything you know about life, everything that’s written down in the Law of Moses, everything that makes sense to you about how the world should work, and I’m going to turn it upside-down. So, let’s just start flipping things from the jump. Buckle up, cuz it’s about to get wild.”

But there's another reason Jesus starts with these "Blesseds." (Yup, invented a word there.) In the episode of *The Chosen* where Jesus is talking to Matthew about this sermon, he calls the Beatitudes "a map... directions where people will be able to find me." And it makes so much sense. Jesus lists nine instances where we can feel lost and alone and empty and broken, and then says, "it's okay, I am there with you. If you have ever felt any of those ways... take heart, because there I am, too. You are not alone in your suffering or sadness or struggle. You are not alone in your loneliness or confusion or fear. In fact, whenever you find yourself feeling any of these ways, you are never more close to where I am. And when I am there with you, you are still blessed." You want to find Jesus? He's right there in the weariness and sadness and meekness. He's right there in the justice and mercy and peace. Blessed are you, because Jesus is right there.

**Question 3: Have someone read the Blesseds again. This time, find yourself on that map. Think about the "poor in spirit." Are you feeling weary all the way down to your soul? Think about the "mourning." Have you experienced a loss that you're grieving? Think about the "meek" or the humble. Are you feeling lost or alone? Think about those who "thirst for justice" or are "merciful." Have you been hurt by someone or maybe you did the hurting and need to seek peace? As they read the Beatitudes again, listen for the one where you find yourself. Then share with the group.**

## CLOSING

And this is just the beginning. No one had ever said anything like this before, and we're only on the intro. Jesus opens with this "map" of where to find him, and immediately flips their expectations. They had been told God was in a place of might and power. But Jesus flips it, saying, God wasn't in the temple or on the mountain top or glorified in the heavens. Jesus said you would find God with the lowly, with the sad, with the oppressed, with those this world had simply beaten down. And it's a beautiful reminder for us. When we find ourselves on this map in one of these groups, when we identify with those poor in spirit or mourning or humble or seeking justice or merciful or pure in heart or longing for peace or persecuted... we know Jesus Christ is right there with us. So, today, take these Beatitudes with you, and let them be your attitude... that if you find yourself reflected in one of these verses, know that God is right there with you.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.**

**Close in prayer.**