



Matthew 5:1-12

1 Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. **2** Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:
3 'How happy are the poor in spirit: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **4** Happy the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage. **5** Happy those who mourn: they shall be comforted. **6** Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied. **7** Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. **8** Happy the pure in heart: they shall see God. **9** Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God. **10** Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 'Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.'

Other readings: Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13 Psalm 145 (146) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Matthew's gospel is a gospel of teaching. It celebrates Jesus as the great teacher, who surpasses even Moses. The evangelist sets down five major speeches of Jesus in the course of the gospel, and the first of these is the famous Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, like Moses, goes up the mountain. He sits down and begins to speak.

The beatitudes, which open the Sermon, are a type of saying already found in the Old Testament and adopted by Jesus. The beatitudes of Jesus present a radical challenge to commonly accepted ideas. Jesus proclaims that the poor are 'blessed' or 'happy', not the rich. It is the gentle, the meek, who will inherit the earth, not those who are violent.

Eight beatitudes describe eight qualities or situations, such as those who mourn, those who show mercy, those who are persecuted. Each of these qualities or situations is described by Jesus as a special channel of God's favour. Jesus presents what we might call the 'scandal' of the gospel, a profound challenge which invites us to reconsider and to change the way we think and the way we behave.

The passage ends with a final beatitude, this time spoken directly to the disciples of Jesus: 'Happy are you'. How can we possibly consider persecution and abuse to be blessings? If we can unite our own sufferings with those of Christ, we can begin to know God's presence in an entirely new way. With his very first words of teaching, Jesus calls us to radical change.

Is it absurd to look upon personal suffering as a gift from God?

What should our attitude be to the suffering of others?

We ask for the strength to transform our attitudes and behaviour.

We pray for all those who are persecuted and abused.