

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 5:1-12

Year A - Epiphany 4, Text: Matthew 5:1-12
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Matthew 4:25 and 5:1 make reference to the plural crowds — a usage unknown in the Old Testament. Comparing Mark 3:13–19, we read of Jesus going up a mountain, choosing the twelve disciples, and calling them apostles. However, Mark makes no reference to Jesus teaching.

But Matthew sees in Jesus the New Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15) who proclaims and establishes a New Covenant on a New Sinai. Luke's parallel discourse (Sermon on the Plain) consists of 30 verses; Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5–7 consists of 109 verses. Most likely Matthew has assembled sayings of Jesus uttered on a variety of occasions to present His New Covenant as the perfect realization and fulfillment of the Old Testament religious focus.

Verses 5:1-2: When Jesus sees the crowds, He goes up a mountain, sits down, and begins to teach. When a great teacher taught, he always did so from a seated position. What Jesus begins to teach, He will continue to teach throughout His ministry.

Verses 5:3-12: The beatitudes find the ideal attitude for the receiving of the Kingdom of God in two Old Testament classes: the *'anawim* or "the poor" of Israel, commemorated in the first four beatitudes, and the prophets, the protectors of the poor and oppressed in the last four beatitudes.

Verse 5:3: The poor in spirit is a phrase found only here and in the Qumran writings; they are those who are conscious of their need of God's help. The true *'anawim* accepted suffering patiently. They possess much more than the land of Palestine — "the kingdom of heaven."

Verse 5:4: Those who mourn are those who continue to grieve concerning what took place during the Babylonian exile, and what continues to take place in their lives. Jesus is bringing them a message that will do away with the need for such mourning. Jeremiah had promised that the people's pain would turn into joy

with the breaking in of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:15–24). The mission of Isaiah's "servant" would be to console the disconsolate.

Verse 5:5: In Jesus' day, many Jewish people longed for the day to come when their nation would dominate the nations of the world forever (study Daniel 7, the entire chapter!). However, the meek would inherit a life on earth altogether different from traditional Jewish hopes. They would seek to serve humanity, not dominate it.

Verse 5:6: The deep desire for righteousness will be something that Jesus' brothers and sisters will experience with deep satisfaction. Indeed, those who hunger and thirst for it will be filled with it!

Verse 5:7: Those who practice mercy will receive mercy! This "mercy" implies not only compassion, but an active alleviation of distress.

Verse 5:8: To be pure in heart signifies purity of intention, a sincere devotion to knowing and doing the will of God. To see God was the unique privilege of Moses — the ideal representative of the Old Testament covenant. The term "see the king" was a metaphor from Oriental court life, and it meant to experience the intimacy of royal favor.

Verse 5:9: Jesus devoted His life to establishing peace (i.e., *shalom*) — a biblical symbol for the totality of messianic blessings. God's children are to share this goal as adopted sons and daughters of God.

Verse 5:10: The prophets devoted life to promote and establish God's true kingdom within human history. Although they suffered persecution because of their efforts to realize that goal, they proved themselves worthy of membership in that Kingdom.

Verses 5:11-12: Although Jesus' brothers and sisters can expect to experience persecution, their willingness and commitment to endure it will demonstrate that they are the true successors of the Old Testament

prophets. Those who are prepared to find joy when experiencing adversity for the sake of their commitment to Jesus are referred to in the New Testament as true citizens of God's Eternal Kingdom.

It is important to note that although in the Old Testament, being blessed is often (but not always) linked to possessing and enjoying material goods (see Deuteronomy 28:1–14), the New Testament emphasizes the spiritual dimension of reflecting the mind and manner of Jesus, the Servant Messiah (Matthew 25:31–46).