

**Wonderland**  
**“You are covered.”**  
**Matthew 5:1-12**  
***First of a two-part series, “Attitudes”***

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**Blessing**

Downtown Chicago, in the middle of the loop on Clark Street, there is a synagogue set in a skyscraper. Back in the day when I studied for ministry I like to ride the el and walk the windy streets and slow down, maybe even stop to take in the sight of the synagogue's entrance. Over the rather ordinary door, and projecting above the sidewalk is a big, modernistic, and beautiful brass sculpture. The brass extends outward, looping in and out as the outlines of a bigger-than-life someone's fingers. Two hands of them held palm-downward. Then, above the hands are the words of the most familiar of all benedictions:

*The Lord bless thee and keep thee,  
The Lord make his face to shine upon thee  
And be gracious to thee.  
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee  
And give thee peace.*

Those words. Words of blessing.

And with the hands like the hands of a priest or a rabbi or a pastor –and yet maybe like the hands of God – extended over those who pass in and out of the doors, even those who pass under them, it seems that all who pass under their shelter receive the blessing as it is laid upon their heads.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, I learned in school that this is just the intent of the rabbi. As the blessing is said, hands are raised upward. Then at the end of what is said the hands, still extended toward the congregation, are lowered so that you get the impression the blessing is settling on them like a blanket. They go from the place, covered by the blessing of God.

**Who Get's Blessed?**

That would be nice, especially in a world where it seems like those who are blessed aren't always exactly the ones who deserve it and those who are cursed are the ones,

sometimes, who should be blessed. “The rich get richer and the poor get poorer,” we say, and sometimes that’s the way it works. Good people get seriously ill. Like the Energizer Bunny, meanies seem to go on forever in good health.

And where’s the justice in that?

Sometimes I just want to flip everything over on its head, turn the world upside-down so the unfortunate ones get to have their turn.

Let them be blest.

Which is what Jesus did.

He gathered the people in all their multitude together on the hill and had them take their seats. There they were: mostly not the people who had wealth or power or good fortune in their lives. If you looked among the crowd you probably wouldn’t see many Pharisees who knew everything about God’s Law or Sadducees who were the princes of the day. You’d see people who lived in poverty and didn’t have any reason to expect that things would change. All of life for them was the Great Depression. Lots of them were sick or had lived with physical limitations they had no hope of turning around.

And so on. It was a lot of losers, mostly.

Then he began to speak. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” he said. That’s how it’s put in Matthew. In Luke he’s remembered as having just said, “Blessed are the poor.” We’re used to the opposite: “Blessed are the rich.” What’s this?

We’re used to the blessing of those who haven’t lost anything. Jesus says “Blessed are those who mourn.”

We understand power and the blessing of the rich. Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek.”

You are encouraged to go to school with the idea that education will get you a better job so you can earn more money so you can buy more things. That’s what blessing is, isn’t it? Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.”

We've got a world in which we believe opponents should be crushed. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful."

Casinos and pornography and other quarters of vice industries enjoy billion dollar businesses. People lust after their products. They can't seem to live without them they are enjoyed so much. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart."

There's something in the national soul of every nation that wants to annihilate the enemy. Heaven help the world when a nation gets scared. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

We think we're blessed when we get through making a stand without a scratch. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake."

This is the beginning of his most famous sermon – *The Sermon on the Mount*. And it begins his manifesto. It's the heart of his description of what it's like to live in God's world which is both something that's later to come and something you can have right now.

This is the condition. The people who you'd least expect – including you – are the ones walking under those hands.

The blessing is falling on your heads.

### **Camp**

This is the lesson our kids are going to be dealing with this week at camp.

And what better place?

I have seen kids dragged, kicking and screaming, to their first experience of church camp. Then there's camp and their parents come to pick them up. And they drag them home, kicking and screaming because they want camp to last forever.

Camp is not an ideal world. But it seems like the retreat it offers does something to give a taste of what the ideal world is like. Community, and attention, time with God in

God's created order, time to spend with scripture and prayer and songs around the campfire. Somehow, it all gives you a taste of what could be.

Not only is this the reason for Choir Camp for our kids. It's reason for Adirondack Adventure for adults.

A taste of the ideal world: the world of God's blessing where you know the fullness of God's love no matter what in outward appearances life is dealing you.

Kind of like walking under the hands for a week.

Only to discover you're also walking under the hands every single day.

You are, you know.

Because of Jesus, you are.

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<sup>1</sup> The Chicago Loop Synagogue is described several places on-line. Including its web site: <http://www.chicagoloopsynagogue.org/> and the sculpture's description: [http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM7CXJ\\_Hands\\_of\\_Peace\\_sculpture\\_Chicago\\_IL](http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM7CXJ_Hands_of_Peace_sculpture_Chicago_IL)