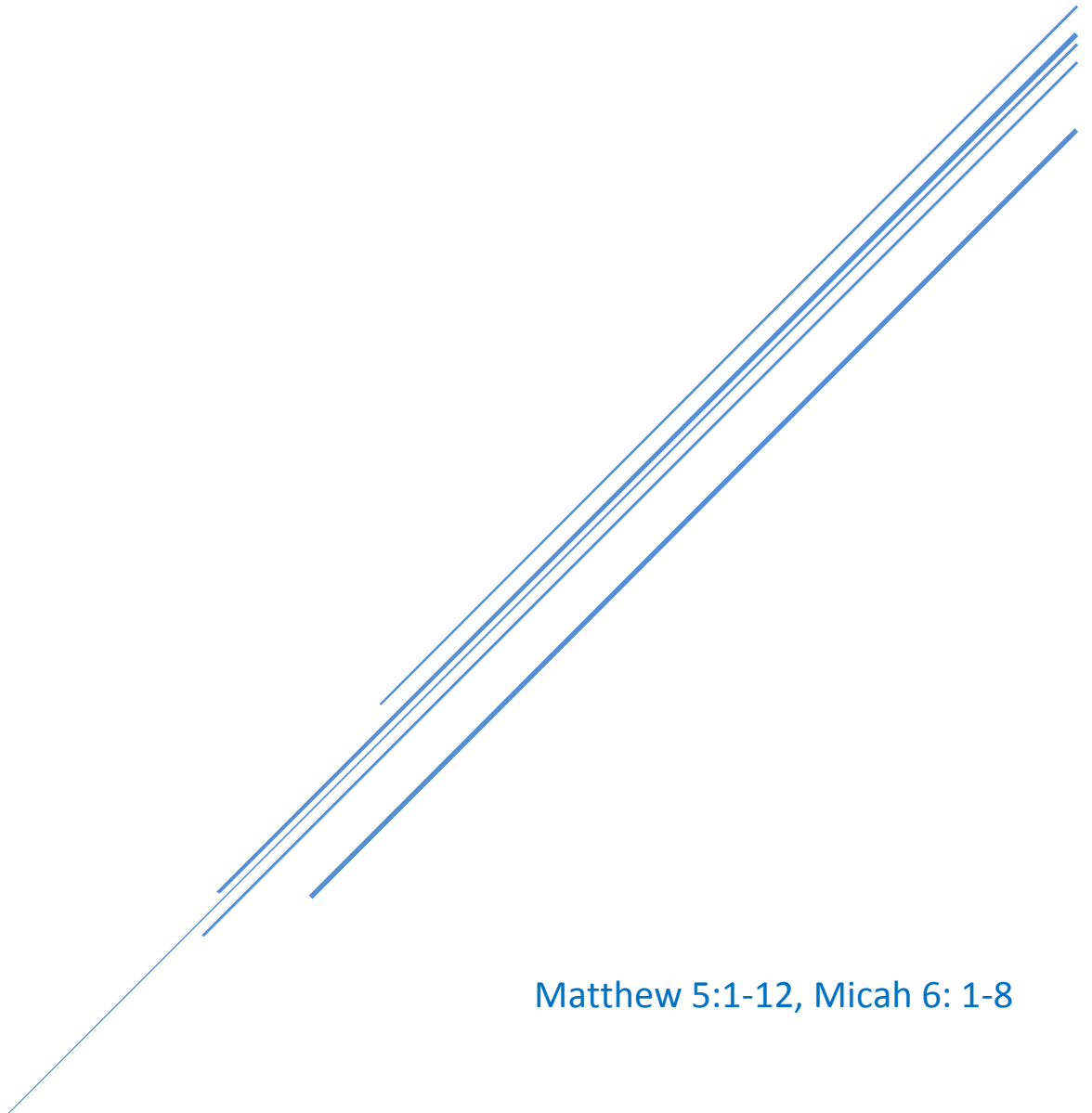


# “PICK ME! PICK ME!”

February 2, 2014



Matthew 5:1-12, Micah 6: 1-8

In honor of Superbowl Sunday, let's say that God sent Jesus to draft a fantasy team to do the work of the Kingdom. Not the 12 disciples, they're like recruiters, you know? But the actual team itself.

Who would Jesus pick for this dream team? Which exemplars of the Christian faith would make the cut? Who will our heroes be? Would he pick Tim Tebow or Peyton Manning? Maybe that's too obvious. How about Abraham Lincoln or Mother Theresa? Would Jesus pick a non-Christian – maybe Ghandi?

Pick me! Pick me! Right? Who doesn't want to be on Jesus team?

If we were asked to guess what kind of people Jesus would pick for that special team to do that special job, what sort of people would we pick– men and women of impeccable morals, strength, faith, and spirituality, right?

The same kind of people Jesus would pick, right?

Wrong.

Jesus doesn't pick the people that we would likely pick out – maybe he didn't know any, maybe they didn't need to be pointed out...but it's interesting to look at just who Jesus does pick.

You can see them – close your eyes and picture Jesus sitting in the center of a crowd, teaching them gently, yet with great authority – like no other teacher, ever. They're not what we might call a “high-class” crowd – peasants and working folk, fishermen like Zebedee. Mostly pretty shabby-looking and probably not well educated... Do you think there's hero in there -- In that mass of common, no very clean, rather ordinary people, do you think there's a faith hero for us? With their brows furrowed with concentration and their jaws set?

In picking out this dream team, who does get picked gives us a pretty good insight into who does NOT get picked.

He doesn't pick spiritual giants – He picks what he calls the 'poor in spirit.' The Greek for this is *ptochos*, which comes from a root that means bent over, to crouch or cringe -- the poorest of the poor. These are people who have absolutely

nothing to give and everything to gain. You know, that feeling of total surrender. Why go on? Imagine the story of the Prodigal where the son comes home and says to his father, "I am not worthy to be your son." There's clearly a self-worth issue with this group... These are not spiritual giants...

He doesn't pick out the champions of faith. The people who somehow have the uncanny ability to rejoice even when they're in the middle of their suffering – not them, no. Jesus picks the ones who mourn – the ones who mourn over their own suffering because they know that for the most part they probably brought it on themselves – the people who mourn over the suffering of others because that's just how they feel when they're around them. They hurt when others hurt.

He doesn't pick out the strong ones. He picks the gentle ones; the meek. Not the milk toast meek – and I looked this up, thanks to Wikipedia... -- **Caspar Milquetoast** was a comic strip character created by H. T. Webster for his 1924 cartoon series *The Timid Soul*. Webster described Caspar Milquetoast as "the man who speaks softly and gets hit with a big stick". The character's name is a deliberate misspelling of the name of a bland and fairly inoffensive food, milk toast -- light and easy to digest, milk toast is an appropriate food for someone with a weak or "nervous" stomach. – So Jesus doesn't pick out the 'Caspar Milquetoast kind of meek. Think more along the lines of Charlie Chaplin's little tramp character. Always getting walked over by the world, but undaunted to the end somehow makes the world a little more human as he goes along.

This next one is a bit of a surprise...He doesn't pick the righteous ones. You'd think that we would want people who are righteous on our team? But not Jesus -- no... Jesus picks the ones who hope to be righteous, one day – who are doing the best they can to become righteous, but, you know, these folks know full well that they have farther to go on this journey than they've travelled already.

He doesn't pick out the winners of great victories over evil in the world...I think I'd like a couple of those on my team! But this is cool – Jesus picks people who,

because they see the evil in themselves in the mirror every morning, when they see it in others they're merciful.

And then, He doesn't pick out the totally pure, but only the 'pure in heart' to use Jesus words. The scribes and Pharisees were completely caught up in outward cleanliness and purity; Jesus called them out in Matthew 23 saying, <sup>25</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup so that the outside also may become clean." Theologian Frederick Beuchner says that these people who are pure in heart are probably just as shopworn as the next guy, but still manage to maintain a little freshness and innocence.

He doesn't pick out the peaceful ones – the ones who have found peace, necessarily, but the ones who are trying to bring it with them everywhere they go, however they can. Who try to make Peace with their neighbors, their coworkers, peace with God, and, ultimately, peace with themselves.

And who gets picked last? Is it safe to assume that these people are the cream of the crop because he saved them for last? It's the people who are always on the side of heaven. People who are on God's side even though any fool can tell you that's the losing side, and all you get for your pains is – well – pain. Jesus looks directly at these people – right into their eyes and speaks to them directly for the first time in this sermon. "Blessed are YOU," he says to them. Blessed are you when you've been worked over and cursed or mocked on his account, he tells them. And notice that it isn't his hard times to come that Jesus is concerned about – it's theirs!

Pick me! Pick me! Wait -- Do I really want to be on this team of Jesus'? I'm not sure it sounds all that amazing, and frankly, it sounds kind of hard. It seems that God's fantasy team is full of people who are still working on it. But let's say that I do want to be picked for this team? What does God require of me?

Micah sets it down in a beautiful, easy to remember formula.

Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.

Say it after me: Do justice ..., love mercy ..., and walk humbly with your God.

We don't know much about Micah, but we do know that he is on fire! He is on a roll here and he's set up something like a courtroom drama, where all of nature is called upon to witness.

"I don't know, Brad," my friend told me on the phone, "I just feel like he doesn't care about me. I mean, he says that he loves me but he doesn't really do the stuff he says he's going to do for me and he just doesn't treat me all that well." Before I can say anything, she asks the question I knew was coming:

"What am I doing wrong?"

Can you hear it? What am I doing wrong?

I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

and redeemed you from the house of slavery; -- I keep a roof over your head and food on the table?

And – truth be told – neither the insecure parent of God has done anything wrong.

And, *I don't want to say* that God is just like an insecure teenager or an awkward parent, lacking in self-confidence –but in this week's scripture, God comes across like an insecure teenager or an awkward parent, lacking self-confidence.

"O my people," wails God, "what have I done to you?"

I think we tend to assume that God is always the strong one in this relationship, but what if something deeper is happening? What if God never meant to make the people feel guilty, but simply wanted to reveal the depth of God's pain instead? Like confronting an addicted child, or talking to one's abuser... God is wearing his pain on his sleeve this week. Who knew that we have the power to hurt God's feelings?

What does God want from us? We can read Micah and find out everything the Israelites were doing wrong, both in life and for worship – burnt offerings and sacrifices – there’s even a mention of child sacrifices – they did that back then! And God wants no part of it!

What if God’s words in Micah 6:3 reflect an honest plea for answers? Could it be that God is pleading with creation like a parent, desperate for the affection of a child they feel that they’re losing -- that’s drifting away? Like most parents, God can’t help but see good memories in the eyes of his children—no matter how narrowed the pupils have become.

All parents see their children with rose-colored glasses most of the time. They tend to see the best because that’s what good parents do. I wonder if God is like that. God remembers what it was like when things we’re good—night time strolls, star-gazing with Abraham, wrestling with Jacob, the sound of Miriam’s song, the roar of pride from the Israelites in the time of the judges, the joy of David as he danced. The good memories of our kids are the strongest. When all we see is the best in someone, it is easy assume that we’re the ones doing something wrong when the one we love treats us poorly.

The Hardest Question of all, and I don’t have any answers, is: What if God doubts the divine self? And what if God actually believes that God could have done a better job drawing love out of creation? What if, like the rest of us, God gets desperate for affection and longs for love? Do we have the power to hurt God’s feelings? We are created in the image of God or, in Latin, *imago Dei*. What if this [\*imago dei\*](#) can be seen in our insecurities as much as in our confidence?

What do we have to do to be on God’s team? Say it with me one more time: Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.  
And we have to be willing to be picked last!