

“Attitude Check!”

Micah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

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One of my most horrible, awful memories of my youth is my summer training as a young military cadet. We were at Ft. Riley, Kansas. 100 degrees in the shade. We slept in wooden, WWII barracks without a breath of breeze. The cadre ran us ragged from morn until night. It was horrible. I spent half that summer asleep on my feet.

Periodically, when we were about to start a new class or go on a march or something arduous, one of the instructors would shout, ‘Attitude Check!’ That was our cue to yell and scream and stomp and make all the noise we could to show we were motivated and had a great attitude.

The instructors knew what we all know. Attitude matters. A basketball team can be technically excellent, but if they have a poor attitude, they won’t play their best. A student taking a test can know the subject backwards and forwards, but if she has a poor attitude, she’s not likely to do very well. Attitude matters. Our basic attitude towards life matters.

Years ago, when my wife and I lived in TN, our house needed a new back deck. The one that came with the house was old, rotten, and falling apart. For safety’s sake we needed something better.

So, we hired a contractor and he came and put in a deck. Did a great job. We were happy with his work. But the man was horrible to work with. “Oh, I’m sorry I’m late. Got stuck in traffic. These aren’t the screws I ordered, someone messed up. I have to leave early, things to do tonight.” When he wasn’t making excuses, he was busy telling my wife all his marriage problems.

He did good work. But his attitude was horrible. It was all about him. He mattered more than the job. His attitude was all about him, not the customer.

Later, we decided to add a doggy-door to the back deck. Let the dogs go in and out whenever they wanted without us getting up and opening the door for them every 15 minutes.

So, we bought the kit and hired a contractor and he came and installed it. Did a great job. Cut the hole in the side of the house just right. Made it so wild animals couldn't get in. Excellent work.

And he did it without bothering us. "Hello, nice to meet you." Did the work. "Thanks for the pay, goodbye." That was it. His attitude was all about the customer. Go in, do the job right, get paid, leave. And don't bother the customer!

The next time we needed some work done, who did we call? We called the worker with the good attitude. Attitude matters.

Many Christians get stuck on the nuts and bolts of our faith. What do we have to do? What are the steps? Where's the instruction manual? What are the rules?

Rules matter. Laws are important. We need laws and rules and understanding. But something else comes first.

Look at our Old Testament Lesson. Look at Micah 6:6-8. It's not doing things exactly right that pleases God. It's our attitude. Do we care about social justice? Are we concerned for others? Do we want a healthy relationship with God?

All that stuff about offerings and sins - they matter. But they come later. What matters first is attitude. Are we committed to social justice, caring for others, having a proper relationship with God? That's what comes first. That's what matters. If our basic attitude is right, the rest of it will fall into place.

Look at our Gospel Lesson. Let's look again at Matthew 5:3-9. If you had to summarize these, what would you say? If you had to sum them all up in just a few words, what would you say? I would say, God cares for those at the bottom and those who are making things better. God cares for those at the

bottom and those who are making things better. God has a positive attitude towards the powerless and those who help them.

Do we? Is that who we care for? Is our attitude, “Me and mine first and we’ll see what’s left over?” Or is our attitude, “Let’s care for those at the bottom and make things better for them?” What’s our attitude toward those at the bottom of the social ladder?

Let’s look at our Epistle Lesson, those famous words in 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. What do these verses tell us? They tell us God is not a philosopher. God does not talk to us in deep, philosophical language with step-by-step instructions on living a Christian life.

Nor does God send thunderbolts from heaven or make miracles happen on a whim. Jesus used miracles to show people who he was. They were signs of his divinity, not proofs of his existence.

No – what God shows is Christ, crucified. The one who came to the cross in meekness. The one who cared for the powerless. The one who is the Prince of Peace both then and forever. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, we see God’s basic attitude: weakness and meekness and caring for the powerless is what matters. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, we see God’s basic attitude: weakness and meekness and caring for the powerless is what matters.

Rules are important. Laws need to be learned. Instructions need to be followed. Christianity has them and we need to obey them. Make no mistake, we do.

But before the action comes the attitude. Attitude before action. The volleyball team may be excellent but without the right attitude they’ll never be as good as they can be. A contractor whose attitude is “Me first and customer second” can do wonderful work, but you’re never going to hire him twice.

What is our attitude? What is our attitude towards God’s foolishness and human wisdom? What is our attitude towards the powerless? What is our attitude towards the weak and meek? What is our attitude towards God? What is our basic attitude towards life? What is our basic attitude towards life?

Me and mine first? Or is it, Care for the powerless, make life better for the weak and meek, and have a good relationship with God?

Beloved, I'm not going to ask for us to do it right now, but let's remember in just a few weeks we begin the Holy Season of Lent. Seven weeks later, we celebrate Easter. We celebrate the foolish power of God raising a man back to life, a man who was not rich and powerful and famous, but rather a man who devoted his life to the weak and meek and powerless, a man who walked humbly with his God. A man whose basic attitude in life was others first and him second. How close is our attitude to Jesus' attitude?

Beloved, in the next few weeks may we all make time for an attitude check. Amen.