

## **Jesus Lifestyle. Blessed.**

Isaiah 61:1-6 and Matthew 4:12-5:6.

Holy Spirit, my teacher, as I dive into the Bible would you awaken my heart, expand my mind and shape my identity and life today...

The Sermon on the Mount. It has been described as 'the supreme jewel in the crown of Jesus teaching'. In the nineteenth century, a writer said of it : 'We are near heaven here.'

Jesus teaching presents a challenge to our lifestyle here in the West.

And it offers an alternative lifestyle.

We are called – each of us – to develop the Jesus lifestyle.

We are going to follow and explore Jesus words across the coming months – up to in fact the end of October. As a church we have talked about UP, IN OUT. This is a time of IN – about our discipleship. How does a Jesus teaching make a difference, what does a Jesus lifestyle look like when we are angry, struggling with lust, have enemies, getting on with people, when we go to church and so on ....

## **Faith?**

We begin our journey with a question. What is Christian faith about? I mean really? What is it for you? We all probably have Christian cards, bookmarks. One such one a bookmark with flowers, some hearts and in the middle a picture of a wide eyed teddy bear who looks like he has done something wrong... and underneath it says 'Christians' aren't perfect, just forgiven.'

Yes. We are forgiven! Wonderfully. Amazingly. "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!" We do not need to be perfect or do anything – it is by grace through faith alone. But is forgiveness – like that bookmark says – *only* what Christianity is about. Does that really say: Christianity is about a faith in Christ that brings forgiveness but in every other part of your life, you remain the same as those others around us who have no faith in Christ. That Christian faith is about what happens when your earthly life comes to an end?

## **Bar codes Christianity**

Think of bar codes. The scanner only responds to the bar code doesn't it. If the ice cream sticker is on the dog food, the dog food is ice cream! Is all that God is interested in, is that we have the right bar code – we have committed our lives to repent believe and trust in Jesus and it doesn't matter what is going on inside us, what is inside the can?

Does that mean that God really has a plan for us that essentially bypasses the needs of our present lives and leaves our human characters untouched? Can we believe that the essence of Christian faith and salvation covers nothing more but death and the after and all we need to do is thank God regularly for it – though such thanksgiving and worship is important. Have we somehow, come to see our faith as 'fire insurance' – it protects us against the future... but apart that, not much else...

## Who is Jesus?

This leads us to a second question. Who is Jesus? How would you describe him?

Imagine a team building day at work. For the icebreaker, the person at the front asks people to shout out names for the smart people in the world. People will probably mention rocket scientists, astronauts, Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking...

Okay, the person says, shout out names of people in history who are gentle, kind... And you will get other names... Mother Teresa, Princess Diana, your grandmother and so on...

Now. On the second list, probably Jesus name will appear – the greatest example of kindness, gentle. "2,000 years ago one man got nailed to a tree for saying how great it would be if everyone was nice to each other for a change." Douglas Adams who wrote Hitchhikers guide to the galaxy.

Would Jesus name be on that list of smart, clever people? Would you have shouted him out – even that question was a Christian camp or conference? Do we believe that? That Jesus was the smartest, most clever, most insightful person who ever? Or do we, honestly, see him as someone – because he didn't live in our day – he wasn't fully informed... You see, the way the argument can go is this. We come across Jesus teaching and deep down, we begin to say – Jesus, you don't really understand our world we are now in. Then that was fine what you said. Now, well it is complicated...

Our confidence must be - he was the most insightful, most intelligent, most smart person who walked this earth. He knew exactly what he was asking, saying, when he taught. He knew the depth of our human hearts he knew how dark we can be in our thoughts and words and deeds – and he knew what was possible in the Kingdom, through the resources of the Kingdom. He said: I have come to bring your life and life in all its fullness.

So as we look at Sermon on the Mount we begin with those two important questions.

Is Christian faith – is God interested only what happens when his Son returns or when you die – ie forgiveness. Or is he interested, got plans and seeks to transform you in this life ...

And is Jesus a well informed teacher – who knows what he is asking and saying... eternal values, teachings, ethics... Or, is he, well, asking too much ...

But not in our strength.

CS Lewis said:

"the command be ye perfect, is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into the creatures that can obey that command."

Jesus talks about concrete things in the sermon. Because his aim – is to enable us to be good, not just to talk about it. He actually knows how to enable us to be good... Many – who are not

Christians – will claim they live faithfully by the Sermon on the Mount. Yet when you read it carefully, you find, it is quite impossible to do so, without the help of the Spirit. We see Paul's emphasis in Ephesians. He teaches them how to live but also he says is praying for the Spirit's work within them, and he calls on them to seek to be continually filled with the Spirit's – God's empowering presence they must seek – to live and walk as Jesus did.

### **The Sermon.**

'Jesus went up on a mountainside.' What has happened before? Jesus ministry has begun. The first disciples are called – fishermen – James John Peter Andrew. They at once leave all and follow him. He goes through Galilee preaching, healing every disease and sickness, demons are cast out.

Crowds gather from all over the local area but further away as Jerusalem and Judea. His message. We are told twice: 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.' And v23. He went throughout Galilee teaching, preaching the good news of the Kingdom."

### **The Kingdom.**

We see that the unifying theme of this sermon is the Kingdom. Note where it occurs. 5:3 and 10 – it envelopes the Beatitudes – Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are those who are persecuted – for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Some verses later in 5:17-20, there is the relationship between the Old Testament and the kingdom . The 'kingdom' returns at the heart of the prayer that Jesus teaches – in chapter 6. It ends the section on security, with the call to seek the kingdom. And finally near the end in chapter 7. V21-23, the kingdom is presented as something which must be entered.

Jesus message is the good news of the kingdom. The kingdom is available in him and through him. Now he shares what that Kingdom looks like, what a Jesus lifestyle looks like.

### **The Listeners.**

To whom does he speaking. Some writers say – to the crowds. Some say – to everyone. But it seems clear: "the crowds gathered. He went up the mountain. He sat down - and "his disciples came to them and he began to teach them, saying..."

What he says, he says to his disciples. Until recently these individuals had been part of the crowd. They have publically left the crowd to follow him. "Now they live in poverty – they left their work – they are poor, they only have him – Jesus – and with him they have nothing, *literally nothing* in the world, but everything with and through God." Bonhoeffer, p.95

Paul Simon : Blessed are the sat upon, spat upon, ratted upon...  
Jesus begins by saying 'Blessed'.

What are they?

Before we look at these first 4 statements individually, what are the beatitudes? One view has been, that these are only about the return of Jesus – so the entire sermon on the mount are all future, to be worked out in the millennium.

Another view is that these sayings and the rest of the sermon are intended for non believers – the crowds to listen and see how much they need God. It is evangelistic.

Another view is that these are ‘be-attitudes’ as Billy Graham and others suggest. These are attitudes Christ desires for every Christian to have. So these attitudes do not get you into the kingdom – for the kingdom is about relationship with Jesus – but if you are in the kingdom, these attitudes are for all and the Spirit of God can grow them within, and God wants you growing in them.

It is important to focus is on the language. Blessed are the poor in spirit... for theirs is the kingdom of heaven and so on... “ Jesus says to his disciples. I believe he looks at them and he is not giving them a target to reach, rules how to live. I think he is speaking about how they are now. I believe he looks and says - those who feel poor in spirit – theirs is the kingdom... those on my right who mourn – you will be comforted. Those on my left who are meek – you will inherit. Those in front of me who hunger and thirst you will be satisfied. Jesus shares the blessings of the kingdom that they now can receive or will have a taste of, as the kingdom is inaugurated.

For in their following of Jesus, when they seek to live out, what Jesus will be saying, to live out much of what he teaches, they will become these things – peacemakers, meek, merciful, they may mourn at how society does not live that way. So these are blessings that come to them. It is a promise. Not a list of attitudes they need to stir up or mature into...however as they live in the Kingdom, and as they seek to live a Jesus shaped life, these characteristics they will notice in themselves from time to time or see growing.

They are blessed because of the call, and the promise of the Kingdom, what it brings to them. To the crowd it must have been startling to hear these band of disciples, blessed. ‘They are blessed ultimately because they have obeyed the call of Jesus...’ Bonhoeffer. Jesus shares a vision of what is blessed – turning for some their view of the world upside down...

### **Poor in spirit.**

It means to look at yourself and realize something is lacking and needs to change. Spiritual poverty. These disciples may have felt – as we do so often - they do not have experience, or knowledge to give them consolation or security. They were fishermen. They were not highly educated. In fact they had not been deemed worthy to press on with religious education. After a general torah education, Jewish boys could be kept on to do further study, and after that study they could follow a rabbi who would teach them. Like Paul. But if they were not kept on, they would learn the trade of their parents normally. These fishermen- they were not the best of the best. They may have sat there thinking – who am I? My life needs to change. I am spiritually poor. And others may have looked at them in the crowd – remember a few weeks back, we read about Peter standing before the Sandedrin, how he preached and it says they noted they were “unschooled ordinary men” – it means they did not have college education

and professional qualifications - and then it says "and they note that these men had been with Jesus." The Kingdom is yours.

He does not ask people to have it altogether spiritually to enter the kingdom. And when we feel we are so spiritually poor – we all will – we get convicted and our cry is 'have mercy on me a sinner' – we may feel that as we walk through the sermon – the kingdom is still there for us. We have not blown it. In fact, we experience the kingdom more powerfully possibly – we come afresh under the rule and reign of God. Isaiah 61 reminds us that the ministry of Jesus is good news ...

### **Blessed are those who mourn.**

It is a strong Greek word. Used in the GK translation of the Hebrew Bible for 'mourning over the dead' – the word used to describe Jacob's grief as he believed his son Joseph was dead. It can be used in the NT over personal loss. Paul uses the word saying they as a church – in 1 Cor 5 – should be mourning over sin in the lives of Christians. Peter in Luke 5 tells Jesus 'get away from me a sinner'.

As the disciples will hear what Jesus says, they receive comfort as they mourn...Mourning over the sin in the world – mourning for its guilt, its fate and its future. As Bonhoeffer says: Those who mourn, see that for all the jollity on board, the ship is beginning to sink." The world sees itself as its captain – it will sort Corona – but ignore what God may have been saying or doing in hearts over these past months. It will sort the climate – but ignore that God has always called us to be stewards of his world and not just when we feel we have to. The world, as Bonhoeffer says 'dreams of progress, of power, and of the future, but the disciples meditate on the end, the last judgement and the coming of the consummated kingdom.'" Bonhoeffer 98.

Jesus applied Isaiah 61 to his ministry and we hear those promises – in the Kingdom 'to bind up the broken hearted ... to comfort all those who mourn, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning.'

### **Blessed are the meek.**

Meek does not mean weak, spinless or feeble – as many may think it. It means gentle, considerate, unassuming. It is the opposite of arrogance and self seeking. This word is used of two great men in the Bible. Moses – Numbers 12 – Now the man Moses was very humble – translated sometimes as meek – more than any person who was on the face of the earth. And Jesus says of himself "Learn of me, for I am gentle or meek and lowly in heart.' Gentle, unassuming, considerate. They shall inherit the earth...

To be meek towards others – implies freedom from malice and revenge, exact things Jesus will later discuss. The Greeks felt to be meek was a vice – it made you like a slave. Jesus says – to be meek – you inherit the earth. Affirming the disciples where they are, encouraging them when they are being gentle and considerate.

### **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.**

We hear this vivid image of desire in the psalms 42 and 63 – my soul thirsts for God. What is this hunger and thirst, he may see among his disciples or which may grow over time. A hunger and thirst for personal righteousness – as Jesus presents what righteousness looks like in the kingdom, a hunger for more. There is a film called *Over the Hedge*. A group of animals who live in the forest. But they meet a Raccoon called RJ. RJ loves nacho chips. He shares them with the other animals – esp a squirrel called Hammy. Once he tastes them, there is no going back – including painting some bark later hoping it tastes the same...

As they see Jesus walk talk love, care, their desire for righteousness in their lives.

But the word can also point to JUSTICE – so hunger and thirst not only that they can do God's will in their heart, but hunger and thirst for justice everywhere. As DA Carson says: "All unrighteousness grieves them and makes them homesick for the new heaven and earth – the home of righteousness." (Carson, *Expositors' Bible Commentary: Matthew 1-12*), pg 134. They are not satisfied with how they are now nor with how social justice is now, they cry out for both, they long for the full kingdom to come...

Bonhoeffer: "Those who follow Jesus grow hungry and thirsty on the way, they are longing for the forgiveness of all sin, for complete renewal, for the renewal too of the earth and the full establishment of God's law." Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*.

Ultimately they will be satisfied and filled only when the kingdom is consummated. They will eat the bread of life in the Messianic Feast but they already enough this bread here and now, for in their hunger they are satisfied by the bread of life."

### **Conclusion.**

The Jesus lifestyle. If we see Jesus as that informed teacher, if we see the Trinity as desiring and planning and working on transforming us, then the Sermon on the Mount is not a burden. It is an adventure. It is like Jesus says – this is the compass, this is where the kingdom is taking you guys. This will turn upside down – and those around you. An adventure. Perhaps that is not the words we would associate with the Sermon on the Mount... . The Beatitudes are not laws to do, levels to reach, but promises and a vision of what is valuable in the kingdom... Shall we pray....

Our closing prayer – is an ancient one...  
"Thanks be you thee my Lord Jesus Christ,  
For all the benefits thou has given to me  
For all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
May I know thee more clearly  
Love thee more dearly  
And follow thee more nearly,  
Day by day. Amen.