

# The Sermon on the Mount – Part 1

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon  
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> Feb 2011

## Intro-

- What is the most significant teaching, or sermon Jesus gave? Many would identify the Sermon on the Mount as the most important teaching Jesus gave, but why did He give this teaching and what does it mean? Going to be looking at the Sermon on the Mount in a series, starting this week. Will be looking at the context and what it means for us today.

## The context of this sermon

- Jesus had done miracles and was attracting a good crowd. People were wondering if He agreed with the Pharisees in their interpretation of the Law of Moses. People were evaluating whether to follow Jesus, or continue to follow the teaching of the Pharisees.
- The place was a mountain in Matthew, but a plain in Luke (Lk 6:17-49). Could have either been the same place, or a different occasion and another place. However, Luke's version read in parallel does help interpretation and adds some points, so is useful for study alongside.
- The point of the sermon was really to smash people's concept of who was really going to Heaven. The assumption was that the Pharisees and teachers of the law were the 'experts', the good guys who would be first in entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus was about to smash these preconceptions. Today people like to think that God will let them into Heaven, as they are not a really 'bad person'. The gospel breaks this mindset and prepares us to truly receive God's salvation, through Jesus alone.

## Read Matt 5:1-20

We will look at 4 aspects from this passage we can apply to our lives today, whilst noting their original context:

### 1. We must learn to evaluate blessings from God's perspective rather than the world's- v3-10

- These are the 8 beatitudes. The word "beatitude" is derived from the Latin "beatus," which means 'blessed' or 'happy'. The greek word used here literally means 'happy'.
- The world has set ideas as to what true happiness is, and many are on a road trying to be happy in this life. However, Jesus encourages us to see things from Heaven's perspective, and things look very different in the light of eternity. In fact many tables will be turned, and the things this world now considers blessed turn out to be the very opposite in many cases. 'Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.' -Ps 84:10- i.e. luxury in the world's eyes is no comparison to being even a small part of God's kingdom. Do we have this attitude, or do we sometimes envy the wicked, thinking they have it easy? Let's take an eternal perspective as did Asaph in Psalm 73 when he began envying the wicked until he saw their final destiny.
- Verse 3 and 10 contain the same refrain 'For theirs is the Kingdom of God'- Jesus is talking specifically about the attitude of those going to Heaven, contrasted with

those not. We could regard each refrain after the 8 beatitudes as saying the same thing- i.e to 'inherit the earth' is to get to Heaven, to be called 'sons of God' is to be qualified for Heaven etc. Verse 12 says 'great is your reward in Heaven'. Also Luke contrasts those in difficult situations 'now' with how blessed they will 'be' in the future (i.e. In Heaven), contrasted with those having all they need now, who will lack in the future (i.e. In Hell).

- We have to be careful here, as scripture is clear that we are not saved by works, however, what Jesus is doing is pointing out that the Pharisees are not exhibiting the necessary ingredients to humble themselves in order to accept the salvation Jesus is offering. They were not 'poor in spirit' i.e. humble etc. They thought they were righteous enough and didn't need God's help.
- The first 4 beatitudes are directed towards God. They can all be seen as aspects of repentance- getting right with God and strongly desiring God's help. The first thing God does when He saves someone is to upset them, to make them uncomfortable in their sin. The first 2 beatitudes have echoes of Isaiah 61, where the Messiah comforts all who mourn and preaches 'good news' to the poor. The 'mourning' here in verse 4 can also be translated as 'wailing' (for sin). In Pensacola people would wail over their sin when the altar call was given. People would run to the front as Steve Hill cried out 'hurry, hurry'. In times of revival, the Welsh revival included, people are in turmoil over their sin before coming to know God's grace.

#### [John Wesley asks God to confirm His Word](#)

When John Wesley concluded his message he cried to God to "confirm His Word," to "set to His Seal," and to "bear witness to His Word." And God did. Sinners were stricken immediately, and began to cry for mercy under fearful conviction of sin, and soon after, in a moment they were set at liberty, and filled with unspeakable joy in the knowledge of a present Salvation. In his wonderful journal he sets down what his eyes witnessed, and his ears heard in the following words:

"We understood that many were offended at the cries of those on whom the power of God came; among whom was a physician, who was much afraid there might be fraud or imposture in the case. Today one whom he had known many years was the first who broke out in strong cries and tears. He could hardly believe his own eyes and ears. He went and stood close to her, and observed every symptom, till great drops of sweat ran down her face, and all her bones shook. He then knew not what to think, being clearly convinced it was not fraud, nor yet any natural disorder. But when both her soul and body were healed in a moment, he acknowledged the finger of God." Oswald J. Smith, *The Revival We Need*, pp. 16-17

#### [Deeply affected and wounded at heart- David Brainerd's Journal](#)

Aug 9. In the afternoon discoursed to them publicly. There were now present about seventy persons, old and young. I opened and applied the parable of the sower, Matt. xiii. Was enabled to discourse with much plainness, and found afterwards that this discourse was very instructive to them. There were many tears among them while I was discoursing publicly, but no considerable cry: yet some were much affected with a few words spoken from Matt. xi. 28. "Come unto me, all ye that labour," &c. with which I concluded my discourse. But while I was discoursing near night to two or three of the awakened persons, a divine influence seemed to attend what was spoken to them in a powerful manner, which caused the persons to cry out in anguish of soul, although I spoke not a word of terror; but, on the contrary, set before them the fullness and all-sufficiency of Christ's merits, and his willingness to save all that came to him; and thereupon pressed them to come without delay. The cry of these was soon heard by others, who, though scattered before, immediately gathered round. I then proceeded in the same strain of gospel-invitation, till they were all melted into tears and cries, except two or three; and seemed in the greatest distress to find and secure an interest in the great Redeemer. --Some who had but little more than a ruffle made in their passions the day before, seemed now to be deeply affected and wounded at heart: and the concern in general appeared near as prevalent as it was the day before. There was indeed a very great mourning among them, and yet every one seemed to mourn apart. For so great was their concern, that almost every one was praying and crying for himself, as if none had been near. Guttumaukalummeh, guttumaukalummeh, i.e. "Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me;" was the common cry. It was very affecting to see the poor Indians, who the other day were hallooing and yelling in their idolatrous feasts and drunken frolics, now crying to God with such importunity for an interest in his dear Son! David Brainerd's Journal, Part I., From A.D. 1745 June 19th To Nov 4th, At Crossweeksung And Forks Of Delaware

#### [The power of a holy life – Charles Finney in a factory](#)

The next morning, I went into the factory, to look through it. I observed there was a good deal of agitation among those who were busy at their looms, and their mules, and other implements. On passing through one of the apartments, where a great number of young women were attending to weaving, I observed a couple of them

eyeing me, and speaking very earnestly; and I could see that they were a good deal agitated, although they laughed. I went slowly towards them. They saw me coming, and were evidently much excited. One of them was trying to mend a broken thread, and her hands trembled so that she could not mend it. I approached slowly, looking at the machinery, as I passed; but this girl grew more and more agitated, and could not proceed with her work. When I came within eight or ten feet of her, I looked solemnly at her. She was quite overcome, sunk down, and burst into tears. The impression caught almost like powder, and in a few moments nearly all in the room were in tears. This feeling spread through the factory Mr. W——, the owner was present, and seeing the state of things, he said to the superintendent, "Stop the mill, and let the people attend to religion; for it is more important that our souls should be saved than that this factory run." The gate was shut down, and the factory stopped; but where should we assemble? The superintendent suggested that the mule room was large; and, the mules being run up, we could assemble there. We did so, and a more powerful meeting I scarcely ever attended. It went on with great power. The revival went through the mill with astonishing power, and in the course of a few days nearly all in the mill were hopefully converted. Charles Finney, Autobiography, English version, p154

- The meek inheriting the earth is taken from Psalm 37:11, Jesus skillfully weaves passages from the Torah together in this sermon to show the traits of those who are truly blessed. The word 'earth' in Hebrew can also mean 'land' i.e. the land of Israel. It is those who humbly accept Jesus' authority in their lives who will inherit God's Kingdom. This was something the Pharisees were not prepared to do- they didn't like the look of Jesus. God sometimes comes in ways we do not expect and we need to be humble enough to allow Him to be God.
- I will finish with the last of the attitudes toward God and due to time skip the next 4 relating to man. This attitude is one of 'hunger and thirst for righteousness'. In Is 55:1 'Ho! Everyone who thirsts come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat'- Jesus is here clearly stating that we are blessed when we realise our need of God's righteousness! This is the gospel! In Matt 6:33 as part of this same sermon Jesus says specifically 'seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness', and a few verses later says 'Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you' (Matt 7:7).
- Have we truly mourned over our sin, and are we relying now solely on Christ as our means of righteousness?

## 2. Give up trying to get to Heaven by good works- v20

- The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was seen as very great by the people at the time, but Jesus was not fooled. He declared we would not get to Heaven unless we were more righteous than them.
- Pharisees prayed every day 3 times a day. They fasted twice a week.
- The Pharisees had built a 'hedge' around God's law so that they would not break God's commandments. This hedge was the 'oral law'- extra sayings said to have been given by Moses but not written down, but rather passed down orally. Also, together with this were the sayings of the Rabbis handed down through the years, comments on the correct interpretation of the law, together with extra rules. Jesus called their additions the 'traditions of man' which went against the 'commands of God'.
- Read Phil 3:2-9. Paul was a top Pharisee and very zealous for obeying the law, but really he was trusting in his own ability and was on a path to Hell. He considers what he lost, his previous life as a Pharisee, to be dog-muck ('skubalon'- v8) compared to knowing Christ, and having Christ's righteousness instead of his own dung dung righteousness.
- How do you evaluate whether you are saved or not? Is it based on your flawed performance, or on the perfect work of Christ? We can slip into relying on Church attendance, bible study, prayer, outreach as our basis of salvation, or righteousness and wobble if we mess something up. Let's be clear we are saved by Christ alone. "At the centre of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out come back to you: an eye for an eye. . . . Along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that. . . . Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed. . . . I'd be in big trouble if Karma was going to be my judge. I'm holding out for Grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross." --

### 3. Trust in the One who is our righteousness- v17

- Some Christians think the law is bad, but Jesus didn't.
- It says how wonderful the law is in Psalm 119. This Psalm uses a different Hebrew word for 'law' (10 different Hebrew words) each verse. The verses are grouped in 8 verses beginning with the same Hebrew letter, and then the next 8 verses begin with the next Hebrew letter in the Hebrew alphabet (22 letters in their alphabet), making 176 verses. Each verse extols the beauties of God's law.
- Romans 7:7-12 says the law is holy, just and good, the problem is us- our inability to keep it.
- Jesus says (Matt 5:17) He didn't come to change the law or destroy, but to fulfil it. This has 4 aspects to it:  
Firstly, He came to give the correct interpretation to the Law (which He does later in this sermon).  
Secondly, He lived under the law and abided by the law completely- the only person to ever do this.  
Thirdly, He fulfilled all the prophecies made about Him (over 300) in the Law and Prophets.  
Fourthly, He took the punishment of the law against our sins completely, so that we are released from it's jurisdiction and power. The death of Christ signifies for us the end of the law- we do not have to convert over to Judaism and eat Kosher meat, or take ritual baths when unclean etc. However, some aspects of the law still apply, such as 'do not steal'. We have the New Testament letters, and God's Holy Spirit to lead us in a lifestyle pleasing to God. The good news is there is no condemnation now for us! (Rom 8:1).
- Jesus is the righteous fulfillment of the law on our behalf. We are justified- given His perfect lawkeeping record, as a free gift! We are declared righteous! We are more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees, the top dogs in Jesus' day! This is the 'gift of righteousness'. Read Rom 3:20-22. Read Rom 4:4-8.  
'It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.'(1 Cor 1:30)  
'God made him who had no sin to be sin [a sin offering] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' (2 Cor 5:21).  
Rom 1:16-17 The gospel reveals to us the righteousness of God with us by faith from first to last.

Searching for an easily understandable way of teaching his children about salvation, Jim decided to call his children to the bottom of the staircase. Standing at the top of the stairs he said, "I'm Jesus in heaven and I want you here with me, but you cannot climb up the stairs or use the handrail." After initial puzzlement his 12-year-old said, "Okay, Dad, I'll play. Come down here." Jim came down. The boy asked him to turn around, climbed on his back, and asked his father to carry him up the stairs. After each of the four children had been carried up the stairs, their father discussed with them the indelible lesson – how salvation comes not from self-effort, but from what Christ does for us.

- Do you feel righteous? It is not about how we feel, but facts about what Christ has done. Let's bring our belief and expectation into line with the facts.
- "Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace." -- Jerry Bridges

### 4. Live as an example to the world of what God's grace can achieve in a person- v13

- Legalism is not good works, it is trusting in good works to save us, or to make us right with God. We are saved for good works, not by them.
- As Christians we are no longer 'under law'. This means that we are not under the Law of Moses. However that does not mean we are lawless. Antinomianism is lawlessness- we are not to be lawless, but to obey Christ's law of love. We are to submit to the laws of the land. God's grace means we are free to obey God from the heart without fear of punishment, and that we now have the power, through Christ,

of living righteously. Sin's power over us is broken once and for all- we just need to believe it and live it out.

- Eph 2:8-10 make it all clear-saved by grace though the medium of faith, and even that saving faith was not ours, but a gift from God, so we can't brag. However, we have been saved for something- good works, which again God planned beforehand that we should walk in, they are not our own doing.
- Grace leads us to far greater works than law can accomplish. God's grace leads us to be gracious, giving and not begrudging. A follower of Christ is meant to be holy, something different to the rest of the world, like a shining beacon to the world. As we understand God's grace we will become naturally more evangelistic, out of the right motives.

In 1987 an IRA bomb went off in a small town in Northern Ireland, among a group of Protestants who had gathered to honor the war dead on veteran's Day. Eleven people died and 63 were wounded. What made this act of terrorism stand out from so many others was the response of one of the wounded, Gordon Wilson, a devout Methodist. The bomb buried Wilson and his 20-year-old daughter under five feet of concrete and brick. "Daddy, I love you very much," were the last words Marie spoke, grasping her father's hand as they waited for the rescuers. She suffered severe spinal and brain injuries, and died a few hours later in the hospital. A newspaper later proclaimed, "No one remembers what the politicians had to say at that time. No one who heard Gordon Wilson will ever forget what he confessed.... His grace towered over the miserable justifications of the bombers." Speaking from his hospital bed, Wilson said, "I have lost my daughter, but I bear no grudge. Bitter talk is not going to bring Marie Wilson back to life. I shall pray, tonight and every night, that God will forgive them." After his release from the hospital, Gordon Wilson led a crusade for Protestant-Catholic reconciliation. Protestant extremists who had planned to avenge the bombing decided, because of the publicity surrounding Wilson, that such behavior would be politically foolish. Wilson spoke out against violence and constantly repeated the refrain, "Love is the bottom line." The Irish Republic ultimately made Wilson a member of its Senate. When he died in 1995, all of Ireland and Great Britain honored this ordinary Christian citizen for his uncommon spirit of grace and forgiveness.

Max Lucado observes, "Apple trees bear apples, wheat stalks produce wheat, and forgiven people forgive people. Grace is the natural outgrowth of grace."

## Summary

- Evaluate blessings from God's perspective rather than the world's.
- Give up trying to get to Heaven by good works.
- Trust in the One who is our righteousness.
- Live as an example to the world of what God's grace can achieve in a person.

Song: All I Once Held Dear / Jesus, We celebrate Your Victory

## The Sermon on the Mount – Part 2

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon  
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2011

### Intro-

- Last week noted that the Sermon on the Mount is a hugely important teaching of Jesus, but we noted that it must be interpreted correctly and in the light of other clear scriptural teaching. We said that the context of the sermon was to smash the (then) current ideas on the kind of righteousness needed to enter heaven, perpetuated by the teaching of the Pharisees. We made 4 observations from the passage we read:
- That we should **evaluate blessings from God's perspective** rather than the world's- e.g. Blessed are those who mourn, the meek, the poor in spirit, thirsting after righteousness- Jesus was saying that it is those who are humble enough to realise their need of God's forgiveness and gift of righteousness that characterise those going to heaven.
- **Give up trying to get to Heaven by good works**- our righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees even to enter heaven, and they were the 'righteousness' experts at the time, fasting twice a week, praying 3 times a day etc.
- **Trust in the One who is our righteousness.** We noted that the law wasn't bad, but good, the problem is we are bad by nature until we come to know Christ. We noted that Christ didn't come to destroy the law but to obey it fully on our behalf, so we might have His perfect righteous standard given to us as a gift.
- **Live as an example to the world of what God's grace can achieve in a person.** We noted that we, as the people of God, are meant to be salt and light, and it is only as we appreciate the grace of God given to us that His grace will truly flow out of us to those around us. We are saved for good works, not by them.

### Read Matt 5:21-48

Here, after making and a hugely controversial statement, Jesus starts to illustrate what He means by this statement. The statement was that you needed a righteousness greater than the religious leaders of the day in order to get into heaven. He now goes on to show five examples of how they were misinterpreting God's law, so that even though it looked like they were keeping it, they really were not. We will look at these five areas of their understanding of the law, and see where the Pharisees were going wrong. We will look at what it means to us today.

#### 1. You shall not murder- v21-26.

- The Pharisaic understanding of the law was that as long as you had not transgressed the letter of the law you were okay. They made up many of their own extra laws to keep them from disobeying God's law. This made them appear to others to be righteous. However, even though they appeared to be holy to other people they were really unclean. What Jesus was doing was revealing a true righteousness, and getting to the spirit behind the law rather than a mere appearance of righteousness.
- The Pharisees, thought that as long as they had not actually murdered somebody they had kept the law 'do not murder'. This meant that they could do everything up to actually murdering someone, but still appear to be holy. Jesus went on to show them that murder was really the final end of the scale of a hatred towards fellow

man, and that deeds done out of hatred towards our fellow man actually violated the righteousness of this law.

- Often people view themselves as being "good". They would say that they have never murdered anyone. When we describe ourselves in this way, we are being like the Pharisees. How many times have we insulted other people? How many times have we felt like throttling someone? If we have done it even once we have transgressed the law 'you shall not murder' and become lawbreakers.
- Murderers are mentioned in the book of Revelation in chapter 21 as having their part in the lake which burns with fire, meaning Hell. 1John 3:15 is even more specific 'Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him '. This is concerning- are we to conclude that if we have ever hated a brother or sister in Christ we are going to Hell? Yes, if we are relying on our own righteousness to save us, because we've all done it. That is why we need a greater righteousness than our own. That is why we need the righteousness of Christ!
- What does a murderer look like? They look like you and me. My experiences visiting people in prison who have committed murder and nursing people who have. Me throttling my brother, and running after a kid who did a 'typewriter' on my chest at school- we all have it in us. Saul (Paul), once a violent man (death of Stephen, first martyr), chief of sinners. David. Barabbas- insurrection, released by Jesus, soldiers nailing Jesus to the cross 'forgive them Father they don't know what they are doing'. There is forgiveness for murder today in Jesus Christ.
- **Application-** are you holding on to guilt for something you have done to someone in the past? Do you need to know their forgiveness? Apologise to them if you are able. Bring any sin to God and ask for His forgiveness. His blood is more than adequate to cleanse you. Decide to forgive yourself and enter into the freedom Jesus died for you to have.

## **2. You shall not commit adultery- v27-32.**

- There are some sins that people are quick to condemn others about. Murder is one of these. Adultery is another one. The Pharisees thought that adultery was a terrible sin. We see this in their eagerness to condemn the woman caught in adultery in John 8:3. Jesus' response is one of grace. He did not condone her sin, but told her to go and sin no more.
- The Pharisees thought that if they had not committed adultery, literally, then they were not guilty of this sin. Jesus showed them that the commandment 'do not commit adultery' was to be obeyed internally as well as externally. He showed them that lusting after someone else was a breaking of this commandment. This means that in God's eyes, if we have ever lusted after someone else whilst being married, we are guilty of adultery. Jesus explains that we commit adultery 'in our hearts'. This was a Hebrew way of saying 'in our minds'. It is when we fantasise that we are with someone else who is not our husband or wife. This might be done through the medium of a romantic novel or through pornography, or simply by using the imagination. Jesus is saying it is not only the act, but everything which leads up to the act.
- Jesus adds another example of where the Pharisees were wrong about adultery. There was a debate amongst the Jewish scholars about Deuteronomy 24:1. This verse mentions that if a man finds 'something indecent' in his wife and divorces her, and she marries another man, then he is not to re-marry her at a later date (i.e. God wanted them to understand the seriousness of marriage). From this passage, some Jewish scholars concluded that God almost commanded divorce under certain circumstances. The debate was over, what 'something indecent' meant. One side said that 'something indecent' meant sexual sin. Another side said that 'something

indecent' meant anything from burning the cooking, to being unattractive to her husband. Jesus gives the right interpretation of this passage in Deuteronomy as meaning serious sexual sin, and even then it does not necessarily have to end in divorce. In other words, Jesus was saying 'remain faithful to your marriage vows'. In today's society, there is a thinking that when people get married if it does not work out, they can easily have a divorce. Whilst this may not be violating the laws of the country, it is against God's ultimate plan that a man and a woman commit themselves to one another for life in a loving marriage.

- The fact is, if we are honest, most of us in some way have transgressed the law 'do not commit adultery'. Paul says in 1Cor 6:9. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God..." This means we are in trouble if we are relying on our own righteousness to get into heaven, but we are not. Paul goes on to say; '...And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.'
- **Application-** Do you need to know today that you are sanctified by the blood of Jesus? Do you need to know, like the woman caught in adultery, that Jesus does not condemn you, and that you can go and be released to not sin again. We live in a fallen world, and in a society, which says it is okay to live together outside of marriage. When people come into the church, they come with a history. We need to show love to people and understanding, whilst at the same time upholding marriage. Are you married? Choose to be faithful to your spouse, not just by physically not committing adultery, but also mentally. Are you single? If you would like to get married, be patient, keep yourself pure, and when you have the possibility of becoming married have a mindset of making the marriage work. Are you divorced? God wants you to know this healing. If you remarry, He wants you to have faith to make the marriage work. God knows the heartache of divorce, and that's why he wants to protect us from it. He loves us and wants the best for our lives.

### 3. The keeping of oaths- v33-37.

- This next section has a quotation, which is not in the Old Testament. However, the law states that we should not give false testimony, i.e. tell a lie. It was a common practice in the Old Testament to say 'as the lord lives.' People would swear by the Lord, that they were telling the truth. However, this began to be distorted by the Pharisees. They would say that people did not have to keep their word if God's name had not been used when the people had sworn. Therefore, they said that if someone had sworn by the temple, but not used God's name then they were not bound by their vow. People would swear by the Earth, or by Jerusalem, or on their own lives. Again, the Pharisees said that if God's name had not been invoked then the vow had lesser need to be fulfilled.
- Jesus countered this by saying that we needed to simply tell the truth. The very need that people had to start swearing meant that they were not people who were telling the truth. He was really convicting the Pharisees of breaking the commandment 'you shall not give false testimony'.
- Rev 22:15 says that outside the new city of Jerusalem (Heaven) are those who "...love and practise lying' (NASB)- i.e. they didn't get in to Heaven.
- **Application** – Have you ever told a lie? Even a white lie? If so, you have become a lawbreaker. In James 2:10, it says 'For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.' In John 8:46 Jesus

challenges the people 'Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?' Jesus always told the truth, and often said 'I tell you the truth'. Do we need to know God's forgiveness for lies we have told? Do we need to apologise to others? How trustworthy, are we with the things we say? It's our word, our bond?

#### **4. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth- v38-42**

- There was a law in the Old Testament, which allowed for people to settle disputes. This law allowed people to take from an offender that which had been taken from them. This law limited the desire we have for retaliation. It meant that no more could be taken from the offender than was done to the victim. However, this law was abused so that people started to use it as an excuse for a lack of forgiveness, and the need to always get even. Jesus brought out the heart of the law, which was that it was actually better to forgive. The law was given as a concession, rather than a command. Jesus was getting at the heart of the situation and revealing that deep inside mankind is the desire to make other people pay up, whilst we get off lightly.
- **Application** – is there someone that you really want to get even with? Has someone done harm to you? Are you planning revenge? Are you bitter? Are you over obsessed with your rights? We all need to know the wonders of God's mercy. So that we are in turn merciful to others.

Rom 12:9 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Deuteronomy 32:35 It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." We need rather to feel sorry for those whose feet will slip in due time, for it will surely happen.

#### **5. Love your neighbour, hate your enemy- v43-47.**

- Jesus then addresses exclusivity. It is so easy to love those who love us and hate those that we don't get on with. However, God loves everyone. There was a mandate upon the children of Israel to disperse the godless wicked people from the land of Israel. From this mandate, the Pharisees took things further. They began to hate, certain people who did not fit their expectations. They hated the Samaritans, the tax collector's, the Romans, and anyone else they considered unclean. Jesus had a different approach; He loved all people, despite their background. He said. 'It is the sick who need a doctor.' and He particularly ministered to those who were on the outskirts of society.
- Although everyone considered the Pharisees to be the most godly people, Jesus clearly showed that because they were so exclusive, they were actually no better, in reality than the tax collectors that they so hated for being disloyal to the Jewish people. The Pharisees themselves were disloyal to people by their exclusivity.
- **Application** -are we exclusive? Do we greet our brethren only? How welcome does a newcomer feel when they enter the building? Who are our enemies? Who do we find it hard to socialise with? The book of Romans says that while we were yet enemies of God, He reconciled us to himself. When we realise the full implication of this it makes us want to do it for others. What enemies, do you have that you need to reconcile to yourself? How will you do that?

#### **Summary Matt 5:48**

- Jesus sums up the righteousness needed to enter Heaven by saying 'be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect'. In saying this Jesus is really saying that the standard of lawkeeping necessary to enter Heaven is actually perfect lawkeeping that never falters, such as God displays. He was preparing people to receive, by faith, His perfect righteousness given freely to all who believe. Hallelujah!

- As we have been reading through various things that Jesus said you may have felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit. If you know that there are areas in your life that you need to address then respond to God in these areas. Bring any concerns you have to the cross of Christ. Ask his forgiveness and choose to trust in his righteousness alone.
- Are you a Christian who started off trusting simply in the grace of God, but now are trusting instead in your own righteousness? Maybe you feel condemned, because you are not practising spiritual disciplines. Maybe you feel caught in a certain sin. Choose to come back to the grace of God alone. Celebrate his victory on your behalf, and believe that he has overcome all the power of the evil one. Ask him to fill you afresh, with his Holy Spirit and choose to walk in his power. Choose to believe that his grace is sufficient.

*Song: Jesus, We celebrate Your Victory*

## The Sermon on the Mount – Part 3

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon  
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2011

### Intro-

- We've been looking at the Sermon on the Mount, one of the most well known teachings of Jesus, but not always easy to interpret, as it contains some hugely controversial and shocking statements. We saw how Jesus started by giving the qualities of those who will enter the kingdom of heaven. We previously noted that these qualities were not the qualities the world considers blessed, but with God, things are different.
- Perhaps the most shocking and controversial statement was the one that Jesus made when he said that unless your righteousness was greater than the Pharisees and the teachers of law you would certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. We noted that it was necessary to have a greater righteousness than we could exhibit ourselves; a righteousness which is a gift from God- i.e.the righteousness of Christ.
- Jesus then went on to give examples of the ways in which the teachers of the law were misinterpreting the law. Although they appeared to so many others to be great law keepers, in reality they were making up their own laws and were not obeying God's laws from the heart.
- In this session we will move on to look at the conduct of the Pharisees. Jesus has first shown to gaping holes in their interpretation of the law, and now he shows the gaping holes in their conduct. To help our understanding of this passage we will first look at a passage in Matthew, which speaks about Jesus's condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees.

### Read Matthew 23:1-28

### Read Matt 6:1-18

The Pharisees were famous in their charitable work for the poor and in their prayer lives and also in the dedication to God through fasting. They seemed to be the model as to how everyone should live their lives. Jesus here blows their cover in these three areas of dedication to God. We will look at each one in turn and see what lessons we can learn today.

### Giving

- Jesus starts with a warning that we should not do our acts of righteousness in order to be seen by others. He starts off with something that everyone would consider to be good; the act of giving.
- Firstly, Jesus does not denounce giving, but rather says 'When you do, a charitable deed'. Here he is clearly saying that there is an expectation upon someone who says they are a follower of God, that they should be someone who is a giving person. When someone looks at each one of us would they describe us as being a giving people?
- Jesus gives a hilarious caricature of the person who really wants others to know that they are doing a good deed. Harry Enfield and Paul Whitehouse used to parody famous disc jockeys with their caricatures named "Smashie and Nicey". They would forever go on and on about their amazing work for charity saying "All for charidee mate" Are we secretly a little bit like that? Do we like people to know that it was us who gave the gift? Do we like people to know that we tithe?

- Jesus gets to the heart of our motivation. Are we a God-pleaser or a man-pleaser? Do we like to play to the camera? The true definition of a gentleman is one who behaves the same when no one is watching him- he holds his knife and fork properly etc. when alone.
- If what we do is to impress others then Jesus says we will have no reward from our Father in heaven. The Bible is clear that there are rewards in heaven. Later on in verse 20 Jesus encourages us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. I wonder how many times in our lives, we have lost our reward in heaven because we have 'let the cat out of the bag'. Sometimes it is impossible to give without others knowing, but God knows what is in our hearts and will reward us accordingly. I was once at a meeting where the leader of the meeting announced that he was going to put a certain amount into the offering and challenged others to match that. This may well have motivated others to give more, but I can't help thinking that the person may have lost a reward in heaven on this particular occasion. How is your bank account in heaven doing at the moment? There used to be an advert on television about a secret lemonade drinker. He would get up in the middle of the night, whilst others were asleep and go downstairs and sneakily open the fridge and help himself to a bottle of R. Whites Lemonade. Jesus says that we should be just a sneaky as this. He says that we should not even let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. This is sneaky. Are you a sneaky giver? Jesus promises open reward for those who are secret givers.
- Charles Spurgeon and his wife, according to a story in the Chaplain magazine, would sell, but refused to give away, the eggs their chickens laid. Even close relatives were told, "You may have them if you pay for them." As a result, some people labelled the Spurgeon's 'greedy and grasping'. They accepted the criticisms without defending themselves, and only after Mrs Spurgeon died was the full story revealed. All the profits from the sale of eggs went to support two elderly widows. Because the Spurgeon's were unwilling to let their left hand know what the right hand was doing they endured the attacks in silence.

## Praying

- Jesus goes on to talk about praying. He warns us not to be like the hypocrites (He says don't be like the hypocrites for each of these three areas- v2, 5, 16). The word hypocrite comes from the Greek word which means "play-acting". Greek actors would take on multiple roles in their place. They used different masks to change role. They would be adept at quickly changing from mask to mask and from role to role. Can we be like them sometimes? Are we adept at shifting into the prayer voice? Do we act differently at church to how we really are at home? Where do we pray the most? Is it in the secret place, or is it only public prayer? Are we habitual in our praying? If you love someone you want to spend time with them. We could spend time with someone because we are forced to or because we love them. Love should be our motivator. Grace motivates far better than legalism.
- Jesus encourages people to pray in their room with the door shut. He is not against prayer in a group context, but makes it clear that this should not be at the expense of private prayer. He tells us to shut the door so that others cannot see, so that our motivation is towards God, rather than for show. We often admire great ministries within the church, but we don't know the cost behind these ministries. The cost for Jesus was a life characterised by prayer alone with the Father. We have a choice: impress the crowd, or have intimacy with God. The Pharisees impressed with the crowd, but they had no intimacy with God. What about us?
- The Pharisees were good at praying. They were really good. They were professional. They could craft a good prayer. They could craft a long prayer. Sometimes in church people are put off praying, because they feel they cannot pray, as well as someone else. This is crazy. Prayer should be from the heart, and it should be simple and to the point. Jesus illustrates this principle here. This is the context here of the Lord's prayer. It is a very simple prayer, and gets straight to the

point without waffle. It is a very sincere prayer. It is a humble prayer. It is a prayer which glorifies God, and asks Him for His help. When we pray We need to remember the KISS principle. Keep it simple stupid.

- Jesus likens the religious people of his day with their long impressiven prayers to heathens. Their long prayers showed that they really had no faith at all. Their long prayers were like heathens trying to placate their gods. Jesus reminds us that our heavenly Father knows what we need before we even ask Him. He is not impressed by our long words and theological expertise. He longs to hear the cry of our hearts.
- This is a prayer of intimacy. God is addressed as Father, Abba, Daddy. The Aramaic term 'Abba' was an intimate term. Under Roman rule or a slave was never allowed to use the term 'Abba' or 'Imma' (mummy). However, if the slave was adopted, they had the privilege of using this term. This is what Paul speaks about in the book of Romans when he says that we are no longer slaves, but can cry 'Abba' to God. When we come to God in prayer, we need to remember that we are his children and he loves to give good gifts to us.
- This is a prayer full of worship. God's name is honoured. Our love for God will mean that we often can't help but express our praise to God. When we come to God, we need to remember that He is God and we are not. Our intimacy with God should not lead us to complacency. Our God is an awesome God. This is a prayer which contains daily worship because it mentions daily bread, so it is a daily prayer. I do not believe that God wants us to literally repeat this prayer word for word every day, as this becomes vain repetition, which Jesus has only just warned us about. Instead Jesus, I believe is speaking about the elements necessary for regular, healthy prayer times with the Father.
- The prayer asks for God's kingdom to come. This is the message which we preach. It is the coming of God's kingdom, the reign of Jesus in people's lives. Here we can pray for unbelievers to come to know God. We can pray for the advancement of the Gospel. We can pray for people to be healed.
- 'Give us this day our daily bread' means asking God for his provision. This may be physical provision in terms of finances, or food, or clothing. It may be the necessary word from God that we need, or wisdom in a situation.
- 'Forgive us our debts' means walking in close fellowship with God, bringing any sin before him and asking for his forgiveness. It means keeping a clear conscience before God.
- Jesus then points out the need to forgive other people. He makes the point that how can we expect God to forgive us if we are not prepared to forgive other people? As this is regular time alone with God, it can prevent bitterness from taking root in our lives. It is the antidote to anger. It is the antidote to gossip. It is the antidote to anxiety and paranoia. It is an ongoing time of getting right with God, and making sure that we are right with other people as much as it depends on us. The test of whether or not, we have really forgiven someone is whether or not we are prepared to pray for them. It might be tempting to pray for destruction and curse someone, but we are called to do the opposite; to bless and pray for our enemies.
- The prayer finishes with worship. As Christians we can sometimes slip into the habit of only worshipping God when we meet with other Christians. Jesus advocates here a lifestyle of daily, private worship.

## **Fasting**

- Jesus speaks about fasting and uses the words 'When you fast'. This means that fasting is not weird, but a normal part of a godly life. In the Old Testament people were only commanded to fast one day a year, according to the law; on the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27 'afflict your souls'). All of the other special days were feast

- days. Despite this, the Pharisees used to fast twice a week (Lk 18:12). Jesus does not criticise the Pharisees for fasting twice a week, but for bragging about it.
- Fasting is a spiritual discipline and is useful when we are seeking God about an important situation, for guidance or for breakthrough. In Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appoint elders and commend them to the Lord. Paul and Barnabas had been sent out after the leaders in Antioch had a word from God whilst they were 'Ministering to the Lord and fasting'. In response to this revelation, the leaders fasted and prayed and laid hands on them and sent them away. Paul says that he was in fasting is often 2Cor 11:27, 2Cor 6:5.
  - In Acts 10 whilst Peter is in prayer and hungry on a roof God shows him in a vision that the Gentiles are to come to Christ, meanwhile, whilst a centurion, Cornelius had been praying and some manuscripts add fasting as angel appeared to him and told him to send for Peter to come, and where he would be staying. The result was the gospel came to the gentiles. This shows the power of fasting in the right way.
  - Some people cannot fast for physical reasons; for example diabetics. However, there may well be other areas where we can fast as we seek God. Paul mentions that it is viable for couples in agreement to abstain from sexual relations for a limited period of time in order to commit to prayer. It may be appropriate to say that whatever takes our time and our energy, such as a computer, or some other hobby may be an area where we can fast in order to commit more fully to prayer 1Cor 7:5; Ex 19:15.
  - The Pharisees were quick to tell people that they fasted twice a week. When we fast it should be to the Lord rather than to impress others. Often the temptation when we fast is to go around and tell as many people as possible. This defeats the whole purpose of fasting. Jesus says we have received our reward in full when we do this. However, there is a great blessing and reward when we secretly fast. We know we don't need to fast in order to be accepted by God or to earn his favour; we already have it. Fasting helps us to get in tune with God, and is a way of re-prioritising our lives. It can help where there are strongholds in us that need to be broken. However, fasting itself can become a bondage if done for the wrong reasons.

### **Summary**

- The spiritual life is one which is humble, and God-directed. It can be so easy to slip into a show in front of other Christians. We might presently look really good to those who are Christians in this church, but how honestly, is our relationship with God?
- Are we a regular secret giver? Are we a regularly secretly committed to prayer? Do we set aside times, where we fast and seek God?
- Are we free from the shackles of legalism and simply serving out of our love for God?

*Song: In the Secret, in the quiet place*

## The Sermon on the Mount – Part 4

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon  
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011

### Intro-

- We've been looking at the Sermon on the Mount, one of the most well known teachings of Jesus.
- We've looked at the characteristics of those who go to heaven- the essential ingredients of humility and seeking God's righteousness rather than our own.
- We've noted that the most holy people of Jesus' day, the Pharisees, were not even righteous enough to enter heaven by their own deeds- a higher righteousness was needed- that which comes by faith in Christ.
- We've seen Jesus reveal the errors in the Pharisaic interpretation of the law.
- We've also seen Jesus giving 3 examples of how the practise of the Pharisees fell short in that it was done for other people to see.
- This week we will see how Jesus again shows the righteousness of the Pharisees to be left wanting. This time He will expose their love of money rather than love of God. Amongst other things, we will be finding out what Jesus meant when He said 'The eye is the lamp of the body'.

### Read Matthew 6:19-34

#### Treasures on earth are temporary- v19-20

- What is your attitude towards possessions? Lk 16:14 it specifically says that the Pharisees were 'lovers of money'. They thought that spirituality was evidenced by riches. People today can still sometimes equate God's blessings purely in terms of finance and materialistic possessions.

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ?  
My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends.  
Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends,  
So Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ? (Janice Joplin)

This can lead to a simplistic view that if we are rich then God has blessed us, and if we are poor then He hasn't. Whilst riches and possessions are indeed a blessing now, the time will come when this world passes away, and our heavenly riches will depend on how we have used what God has given us on earth.

- Jesus vividly describes the temporary nature of possessions by using the examples of the moth, rust and theft:
  - Moths.** Music videos these days of rap artists in their designer bling and fashions. Pressure on youth to wear labels. Moth invasion in our house- hard to get rid of. Camel throw eaten through. Clothing eaten. Won't always have clothes- naked came into the world and naked will depart (Job). One day the moth of death will totally consume all our clothing.
  - Rust.** Old cars. Rust buckets if don't treat rust soon enough. Gradually replace the rust with filler. Gradually replace a metal car with one made from filler. Soon every car will be melted down when we account to God.
  - Theft.** Bass guitar speaker stolen from my car on a Sunday afternoon from outside nurses home. Should have made it more secure. People go to great lengths to make sure their possessions and money is secure, but one day the thief in the night will come to snatch us from this life
- Law of Atrophy- pretty depressing. Can't take it with you. All gonna be burnt up in the fire.
- Antidote: put your treasure somewhere more secure- in Heaven! Lk 12:33 'Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the Heavens that does not fail' Generosity equates to treasure in Heaven. Although the Pharisees appeared to be do-gooders because they made a

song and a dance about their giving to the poor, in reality they were tight fisted and feathering their own nests.

- How about us? Are we trapped in a cycle of trying to keep up with the Joneses? Are we content with what we have, or always trying to better ourselves? How are our bank accounts in Heaven presently doing?

### **Your heart is revealed by where you put your treasure- v21**

- Jesus says 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'. Jesus had said earlier in the sermon on the mount in Matt 5:13-14 that the people of God are the salt of the Earth and the light of the world. This means that in a local community, the local Church is the salt and light in that whole community. Do we believe Jesus? If we believe Jesus it will be evidenced by where we place our treasure. Willow Creek 'The local Church is the Hope of the World'.
- Put in a simple way, what you feel the most strongly about you will spend your money on. 'Home is where the heart is', 'the heart is where the treasure goes'.
- Believe in the vision of BFC? Sow into it. Aim is to spread the load, so that we are all giving sacrificially. Some may not be able to give financially due to a non-Christian spouse, but could give in other ways. This year vision is a faith step and God will do great things, but we must play our part. As James says, faith is evidenced by works- literally 'putting our money where our mouth is'.
- How you can give- regular standing order- easiest. Claim tax back.
- What to give- some give a tithe. This means setting aside 10% of your income to give to God. Takes faith, but is a biblical principal. It was commanded in the Old Testament so that out of the 12 tribes of Israel, the Levites (who were full-time for God) could earn their living from serving God and the people. Although it is not commanded in the New Testament, the principle still holds true that people who are full-time serving in the Church need an income. If 10 families tithe 1 family can be fully supported to work in the Church without having to have an outside income. This is a model for Church growth. As we grow we will employ more people, and then plant out. If we are serious about wanting the Church to grow, we need to be willing to play our part financially.
- We are under grace, not law and give according to our understanding of, and in response to God's grace to us. The fact is God does not need our money, or force anyone to give, but has chosen to allow us to take part in this grace of giving. In Acts 2 the early Church was characterised by spontaneous generosity. The New Testament principle is simply this- generosity according to our appreciation of Christ's gift to us. Read 2Cor 8:1-9; 6-7; 1Cor 16:1-2 -this concerns a gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem who were going through a tough time- Paul taught that we give in response to God's grace to us, setting aside regularly the amount at the start of the week that God has put on our hearts, and to give cheerfully, not begrudgingly.

### **The true state of the heart is shown by how generous a person is in life- v22-23**

- The Pharisees we know were really good at tithing. In fact, they were so good that they even would divide up the tiny herbs that grew in their gardens and give 10% to God. However, they would give no more than they were obliged to, and highly valued their possessions, seeing them as a reward for their righteous acts. They probably considered God lucky to have their 10%. They had a legalistic, tight fisted attitude to life and to those around them, except where they could give in order to be seen to be righteous.
- (Continued on scrawled pages)

**Summary**

- Treasures on earth are temporary
- Your heart is revealed by where you put your treasure
- The true state of the heart is shown by how generous a person is in life
- God must come before money
- God will provide

*Song: I will offer up my life*

# The Sermon on the Mount – Part 5

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon  
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2011

## Intro-

- This week we will look at the final part of our series on the Sermon on the Mount- a key teaching of Jesus.
- We have seen how the context of the sermon could be summarised by these words of Jesus 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will not go to Heaven'.
- We have seen the need for the gift of God's righteousness which every Christian has through Christ's victory on the cross.
- We have seen how the Pharisees fell short regarding their interpretation of God's laws, their good deeds to be seen by others, and also a wrong view of money and possessions.
- This week Jesus exposes their wrong attitudes- they thought they were the spiritual elite and looked down from a great height on others from different backgrounds.

## Read Matthew 7:1-29

### Jesus' guidelines about bringing teaching and correction- v1-5

- Is Jesus saying it is always wrong to judge? No, when looking at a tricky verse we need to look at the **context** and also how it **lines up against other scriptures**.

#### Context

- Jesus could not have been outlawing making judgements because in the context He does not forbid taking the speck out of our brother's eye, but says that first we should take the log out of our own, and then we will see clearly to remove the speck out of our brother's eye.
- The pharisees had added many laws to the scriptures as a 'hedge of protection' around the law to prevent breaking God's laws. They looked down on anyone who did not keep their additional laws. As the basis for the sermon on the mount was the need for a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (see Matt 5:20) Jesus could well have been saying 'do not judge' in the sense of judging others for not keeping these additional laws.

#### Other Scriptures

- Lining up against other scriptures Jesus said in John 7:24 'Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgement.' Therefore, we should judge according to the truth of a matter rather than appearances.
- In Matt 18:15-17 Jesus says that we should challenge one another when sinning, and He lays out the criteria for Church discipline.
- Paul says we have a duty to judge those in the Church:

'For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."' (1 Cor 5:12,13)

'Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? (1 Corinthians 6:2-5)

- So coming back to our original passage; what is Jesus meaning concerning judging? I believe, He is saying 2 things:

**1. He is warning against having a judgmental attitude- a critical spirit.** The point He is making is not to be as the Pharisees were; i.e. have a 'holier-than-thou' attitude where others are judged who do not fit into our holy club. The Pharisees exhibited a 'holier-than-thou attitude' on many occasions in the life of Jesus, criticising Jesus for the company He kept. They detested tax collectors, prostitutes and Samaritans. Jesus associated with each of these classes of people and was criticised for doing so, being called derisively 'a friend of sinners'-

"Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!" (Luke 7:34).

The Pharisees were often judging Jesus for not keeping their extra rules concerning especially the Sabbath (e.g. healing on the Sabbath which they considered 'work'). If we have our own 'rules' about holiness that are not in scripture, we can choose to live by them, but we cannot condemn others for not keeping the same standards. E.g. views on Sabbath observance, views on the cinema etc.

Also to not be a nit-picker, always putting others down, gossiping about other Christians in a negative way.

**Correct judgement is all to do with our motivation.** Our judgements then should be motivated by love and should reflect God's mercy- His desire is to restore people. However, within the Church a critical spirit will cause problems including division. That's why Paul says this after warning Christians not to argue over minor issues of doctrine:

"So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:1-13)

**2. He is saying to first sort our own lives out before criticising others- i.e. don't judge hypocritically.**

Judging others can often be a smokescreen to hide our faults. It can make us feel good when we put someone else down because we elevate ourselves above them- this is not good. Revival starts with us.

**Projection-** At the turn of the century, the world's most distinguished astronomer was certain there were canals on Mars. Sir Percival Lowell, esteemed for his study of the solar system, had a particular fascination with the Red Planet. When he heard, in 1877, that an Italian astronomer had seen straight lines crisscrossing the Martian surface, Lowell spent the rest of his years squinting into the eyepiece of his giant telescope in Arizona, mapping the channels and canals he saw. He was convinced the canals were proof of intelligent life on Mars, possibly an older but wiser race than humanity. Lowell's observations gained wide acceptance. So eminent was he, none dared contradict him. Now, of course, things are different. Space probes have orbited Mars and landed on its surface. The entire planet has been mapped, and no one has seen a canal. How could Lowell have "seen" so much that wasn't there? Two possibilities: (1) he so wanted to see canals that he did, over and over again, and (2) we know now that he suffered from a rare eye disease that made him see the blood vessels in his own eyes. The Martian "canals" he saw were nothing more than the bulging veins of his eyeballs. Today the malady is known as "Lowell's syndrome". When Jesus (Matt. 7:1-3) warns that "in the same way you judge others, you will be judged" and warns of seeing "the speck of sawdust" in another's eye while missing the plank in our own, could he not be referring to the spiritual equivalent of Lowell's syndrome? Over and over, we "see" faults in others because we don't want to believe anything better about them. And so often we think we have a first hand view of their shortcomings, when in fact our vision is distorted by our own disease.

**Why we need to make correct judgements: we reap what we sow**

- An arrogant, judgemental attitude will come back to bite the religious. 'With the measure you use it will be measured to you' was a common teaching amongst the Rabbis, so they would have understood this well. The rabbis would give illustrations

from the Old Testament as to how someone's deeds came back to them- such things they saw as significant were: Egyptians drowning the infants in the Nile bit them back when their soldiers were drowned in the Red Sea. Absalom, David's son being puffed up over having long beautiful hair, but it was his hair that led to his death.

- The worldly saying 'what goes around comes around' has an element of truth in it. What we sow we shall reap is a biblical principle (Gal 6:7-9). Karma is a distortion of this spiritual truth- we will not get another chance. If we are merciful it will come back to us- Matt 5:7.
- This is summed up in Matt 7:12 by 'whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets'.
- **Applic-** What judgements have we had to make recently? Have they been made from a right motive of love, or being honest, were there other agendas at play? How fair are we to those around us? Would we want others to speak about us the way we speak about them? Have we got a generous spirit, or a critical spirit?

### **There is a right time to withhold teaching and correction- v6 'do not give what is holy to the dogs'**

- 'Pearls' are used as a metaphor for teaching- i.e. The saying 'pearls of wisdom'. It is parallel to 'what is holy'- i.e. Holy instruction, i.e. Godly correction.
- Not everyone gladly receives the teaching of Christ – v6. What Jesus is saying is 'be wise about ramming God's teaching down someone's throat who really doesn't want to hear it'. "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." (Proverbs 9:7-9)
- ABBA construction- swine trample and dogs tear to pieces- later in v15 the false teachers (a good proportion of the Pharisees) are called 'ravenous wolves'- it may well be that Jesus has in mind particularly the pious, religious leaders who would not only reject the message, but persecute the Church. Here Jesus is cryptically warning His followers of persecution from those, particularly the religious who rejected the message and turned on Christ, and would also turn on His followers.
- Some are set in their ways and don't want to change. Parable of sower- different types of ground- don't blame yourself when someone rejects the message- disciples commanded to move on to next town. Jesus rejected by whole towns- 'woe to you korazin & Bethsaida'.
- There is a right time to move on, when someone is trampling the truth of God to the ground. In Acts 13:45-46 and Acts 18:6 Paul was telling some Jews about Jesus. They rejected the message and started blaspheming and contradicting and resisting Paul's teaching. They were treating a holy thing as unholy and so Paul moved on. Jesus said in Matt 10:14 to 'shake the dust off your feet' if people reject the message and to move on. In 2 John 10 where we are commanded not to receive a false teacher into our home nor to give him a greeting- again this is someone who is abusing the Truth.
- Illust Ambrose of Milan was a famous bishop in the fourth century. He never wanted to be a bishop, but the people of Milan forced him into it. Because of his position, Ambrose became close friends with Emperor Theodosius. Theodosius was a Christian but had a horrible temper. Ambrose never compromised with the emperor. He would tell him, "If a priest doesn't tell you the truth, who will?" Theodosius had appointed one of his friends as governor of Thessalonica. This governor made a fatal mistake. He threw a famous charioteer into jail for cheating. Chariot racing was the Super Bowl of the 4th century, so the city rioted and killed the governor. Emperor Theodosius became enraged. Ambrose begged him to cool down, but the Emperor refused. He ordered the whole city to be massacred. Later he tried to change the order, but it was too late. The population had been crammed into the amphitheater and soldiers spent three hours hacking up men, women and children. News of the massacre reached Milan. The next Sunday, when the Emperor came to church, Ambrose wouldn't let him in. Theodosius pleaded for forgiveness (after all, he had changed the order).

Ambrose told him to go away. Eight months later the emperor returned to the church. Again Ambrose wouldn't let him enter. In the end, the Emperor of Rome had to lie face down in the dirt before he was allowed to worship with the church again. Sin was taken that seriously.

- **Applic-** We are responsible for how we speak to others and for what we share with them, but we are not responsible for people's reactions. Are there some people we need to give more space to?

### **Those truly hungry for God's truth will find it**

- God is more than able to help us to remove planks from our own eyes - v7 'Ask & it will be given you'. If we are struggling with a particular sin God is more than able to set us free from it.
- Jesus now contrasts the hungry with the 'dogs'- 'do not give..(to the dogs)..ask and it will be given to you'. Those who are truly hungry for God will indeed find Him in Christ.
- Jesus had started His sermon by commending those who were hungry and thirsty for righteousness, and in 6:7 He said, rather than seeking possessions etc. to 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness'. Here is Jesus' encouragement that all who truly seek God will find Him, and all who truly seek God's righteousness will find it. All who truly seek His wisdom will find it.
- The tense is present continuous 'keep on asking, seeking, knocking' until you see the fruit of it. The Syro-Phoenician woman in Matt 15:21-28 wanted Jesus to set her daughter free of a demon, but Jesus said 'It's not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs' because she was a Gentile and Jesus had been called first to the Jews. However, her hunger meant she persisted and Jesus granted her request despite her being a Gentile.
- There is a story concerning Thomas Beckett--a story connected with his parentage. His father was a Saxon gentleman, who went into the Crusades and was taken prisoner by the Saracens. While a prisoner among the Saracens, a Turkish lady loved him, and when he was set free and returned to England, she took an opportunity of escaping from her father's house--took ship and came to England. But she knew not where to find him she loved. And all that she knew about him was that his name was Gilbert. She determined to go through all the streets of England, crying out the name of Gilbert till she had found him. She came to London first, and passing every street persons were surprised to see an Eastern maiden, attired in the Eastern costume, crying, "Gilbert! Gilbert! Gilbert!" And so she passed from town to town, till one day as she pronounced the name the ear for which it was intended caught the sound, and they became happy and blessed. And so, sinner, today thou knowest the name of Jesus. Take up the cry, and today, as thou goest along the streets, say in thine heart, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" and when thou art in thy chamber, say it still, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" Continue the cry, and it shall reach the ear for which it is meant. --Spurgeon
- Jesus taught as one with authority- the rabbis quoted other rabbi's opinions for their authority- Jesus did not do this. The Holy Spirit will guide us too.

### **Truth must be lived out, not just listened to**

- 2 ways, 2 trees, 2 professions, 2 builders. True faith is followed by obedience- v24 'hears these sayings of mine and does them'. Cheap grace message- nicey nicey.
- Not easy-road Christianity, but a counting the cost and a picking up our cross daily to follow Christ.
- Universalism is wrong- all paths do not lead to God.
- Cerebral Christianity can be deceptive- the Christian faith should stimulate our minds, but must do so much more than that.
- Pharisees broad way- many Jews were travelling that road, but it was based on legalism, Jesus' road was through relationship with Him.
- Repentance is a necessary part of salvation- we are not saved by works, but a change of heart, leading to change in our actions. Faith sets us free to obey.
- A businessman well known for his ruthlessness once announced to writer Mark Twain, "Before I die I mean to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I will climb Mount Sinai and read the 10 Commandments aloud at the top." "I have a better idea," replied Twain. "You could stay in Boston and keep them."

During the mid-twentieth century, one of the most recognizable brand icons was a dog sitting in front of an old-

time gramophone, head cocked, listening to the sound. That iconic image, owned by the RCA Victor record company, was taken from a painting by English artist Francis Barraud. The dog, Nipper, had been owned by Barraud's brother who had recorded his voice on early phonograph records. After the brother died, Barraud inherited Nipper and the gramophone and records. Whenever the records with Nipper's master's voice were played, the dog would sit in front of the gramophone listening to his master's voice.

That's a beautiful image of the relationship between Jesus Christ and us. He has gone away from earth, so we can no longer hear His physical voice. But we sit in front of His Word, and kneel before Him in prayer, and listen for our Master's voice. The Bible was given to be the voice of the Lord until He returns, and prayer is how we confirm what we believe He has spoken to our hearts. How easily can you pick out the Master's voice from all others? Listening for the Master's voice is a sign of loyalty and longing -- an indication that we are eager to hear and obey.

## **Summary**

- We need to follow Jesus' guidelines for bringing teaching and correction
- There is a right time to withhold teaching and correction
- Those truly hungry for God's truth will find it
- Truth must be lived out not just listened to

*Song: Your Voice is like thunder*