

## Home Group Leaders Notes

### Matthew 5:1-16

#### Context

- **The Old Testament** - In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses promised Israel that one day God would raise up another prophet like him who would be their teacher. As Jesus goes up on a mountain to teach the people Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is the new Moses who went up Mount Sinai to receive God's law.
- **Chapter 4-5** - In chapter 4 Jesus has been calling on people to repent and preaching the good news of the kingdom (4:17 and 4:23.) The sermon on the mount will show us what it looks like to repent and live our lives in the kingdom under Jesus' rule. Notice the repeated references to the kingdom of heaven in 5:3 and 5:10 and your father in heaven in 5:16. See also how the kingdom of heaven bookends the rest of the sermon (5:20 and 7:21.) Notice too who the initial hearers of the sermon on the mount are (5:1), they are those who are already Jesus' disciples. This is teaching that is first and foremost for disciples rather than enquirers.

#### Structure

- The passage naturally falls into two sections (v3-12 and v13-16) but these two sections are linked. If v3-12 show the blessings for disciples that come from living by the norms of the kingdom then v13-16 show the blessings for the world that come when we live by the norms of the kingdom. Similarly the good works of v16 will obviously include the beatitudes of v3-12.
- It is important to recognise that the beatitudes are not thrown together randomly. There is structure and order.
  - Notice how v3 and v10 both mention the kingdom of heaven. This bookend structure tells us that everything in v3-10 is about the kingdom of heaven. This helps us to understand what is meant by each of the different beatitudes.
  - It's also important to notice how there is a flow to the beatitudes. For example;

Those who recognise their spiritual poverty... (v3)

Will be those who mourn their sin... (v4)

And those who are conscious of their sin will be meek/humble towards God and others (v5)

And in humility they will then long to walk in righteousness (v6)

Righteousness will be seen in...

Showing Mercy (v7)

Making Peace (v9)

Being Persecuted (v10-12)

## **Tricky Bits**

- ***What does 'Blessed' mean?***

- You often hear people say that blessed = happy but that is overly simplistic. Happy is a subjective state that fluctuates but what Jesus is talking about here is objective. Jesus isn't talking about his disciples will feel, instead he is talking about what God thinks about them.
- Thinking that blessed=happy falls down in v4 being to be happy and to mourn are contradictory. In a similar way being persecuted isn't normally a cause of happiness but Jesus does say that it is a mark of being in his kingdom and therefore we are blessed even if we don't feel happy. The command to rejoice and be glad in v12 comes as we see our future reward rather than our present experience.

- ***Does v7 mean that we have to earn God's mercy by being merciful? Isn't that salvation by good works?***

- We need to start by understanding mercy. "Mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness" of someone else (Carson.) We are to show mercy to those who are miserable and helpless. If we don't see ourselves as spiritually helpless (v3) and if we don't mourn our spiritual state (v4) then we won't think we need mercy from God and we won't be inclined to show mercy towards others. Think of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9-14. The Pharisees doesn't think he needs mercy from God (v11-12) and so he is unmerciful in his contempt for the tax collector (v11.) In contrast the Tax Collector mourns his spiritual poverty and therefore meekly asks for and receives mercy and righteousness (v13-14.)

- ***What does it mean for Jesus' disciples to be the 'salt of the earth'?***

- In the ancient world salt was primarily used as a preservative and that is the sense Jesus is referring to here. Jesus is therefore saying that as his disciples live out the beatitudes they will have a preserving impact on the world around them. "Christians have the effect of delaying moral and spiritual putrefaction. If their lives conform to the norms of verses 3-12, they cannot help but be an influence for good in society" (Carson.)
- The next question is "how can salt lose it's saltiness?" Surely if salt is salt then it can't stop being salt? So what does Jesus mean? Whilst salt can't lose it's saltiness it can be adulterated and mixed with other things such as sand. This would then diminish it's saltiness and the impact for good. Jesus is therefore saying that the more Christians live like everyone else then the less impact for good they will have.

- ***"What does it mean for Christians to be the light of the world?"***

- In John's gospel Jesus says that he is the light of the world so in what sense are his disciples the light of the world as well? By being Jesus disciples we are (notice the present tense) the light of the world. If we don't live distinctive lives shaped by King Jesus then it's as if we are putting our light under a bowl. Instead we are to our let people see that we are living our lives in obedience to King Jesus lives so that through our words and deeds they too might come to glorify God with us.

## **Big Idea**

**Living Jesus' way brings God's blessing to us and to the world.**

## **Applications**

- **Live counter-culturally for King Jesus** - Jesus is calling us to think and act differently from everyone else. So much of the Sermon on the Mount can be summed up by 6:8 'Do not be like them...' So in the beatitudes...
  - We are to be honest about our spiritual poverty instead of pretending we have more than we really do.
  - We're to mourn our sin and spiritual poverty rather than simply shrugging our shoulders.
  - We're to be humble and meek rather than pushy and proud.
  - We're to hunger and thirst for righteousness more than we hunger and thirst for material things.
  - We're to be merciful rather than holding grudges.
  - We're to strive for purity in a society when wickedness is often celebrated.
  - We're to be peacemakers rather than stirring up conflict.
  - We're to see persecution for Jesus as a blessing rather than a curse.

... Which of these do you find hardest? Which do you find the most counter-cultural?

- **Don't hide away** - Jesus emphasises that living a righteous life for him will bring persecution (v10-12) so it would only be natural for us to want to hide away and keep under the radar. Yet in v13-16 Jesus is clear that if we do that then we will cease to be a blessing to others. This is really quite counterintuitive but vitally important. Publicly living good lives for Jesus will bring persecution, but it will also bring blessing to society (v13) and will be a means that God uses to bring others to salvation (v14-16.)

... Would you prefer to just live for Jesus out of sight? Have there been times when living for Jesus has made life hard or uncomfortable for you? Do people see you living differently for Jesus? Do they know why you do what you do?

- **Recognise that we often fall short** - This will be one of the main applications all the way through the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus shows us how high his standards are and so we need to keep recognising how poor in spirit we are. Jesus begins the whole sermon by encouraging us to recognise our failings and to see that as we do that and mourn our sin and humbly seek forgiveness and righteousness we will enjoy God's blessing.

... Think about this last week. In what ways have you fallen short of the standards Jesus sets? Spend time confessing and mourning your sin and asking Jesus for mercy and forgiveness.

- **Depend on God to help us live the sort of lives he wants us to live** - The more we recognise our spiritual poverty the more we feel how much we need the help of the Holy Spirit to live like this.

... Where do you particularly need the Spirit's help? Spend time asking for his help.

## Questions

### **Starter - “Blessed are the...” How would people normally finish that sentence?**

*There’s no right answer for this question it’s just designed to get the conversation started. Another way of asking the question might be ‘What kind of people do we aspire to be?’ ‘Who are the successful people?’ ‘Who do people look up to?’*

### **1. Get the group to fill in the table and then discuss it.**

*Instead of getting everyone to look at every beatitude you could split the group into smaller groups/ pairs and ask each small group to look at 2 or 3 and then report back.*

*You can download and print off a blank copy of the table for your group from the website. There is also a filled in copy of the table to help you as the leader.*

### **2. Focus on 2 or 3 of the beatitudes that you or the group think are particularly challenging.**

#### **A. Why do we find these particularly hard?**

#### **B. What it will mean for you to live like this in your day to day life?**

*For example what will it mean to be a peacemaker if you work in a fractious office?*

*What will it look like to be someone who hungers and thirsts for righteousness? How do we do that?*

*What does meekness really look like?*

### **3. How does this passage encourage us to live so distinctively for Jesus?**

*Here you will want to help people to think about the different promises in v3-12. You may need to think about whether we enjoy these promises fully now or whether we have to wait for Jesus’ second coming to fully enjoy these.*

*There is also a real encouragement to us in v13-16. Living so distinctively for Jesus doesn’t just bring God’s blessing for us but also for others. It would be good to talk about how Christians living good lives can be a blessing to the wider society. It would also be good to talk about how we ARE the light of the world and therefore we have a responsibility to let our good deeds shine before others so that they might come to join us in glorifying God as his children.*

*Don’t forget to spend time praying at the end about what you have discussed. Pray for one another to be living for Jesus in all the different ways that you have spoken about.*