

SERMON NOTES Sunday 22nd October 2023

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **Being salt and light in our relationships**

Passages: **Matthew 5.17-48 and Exodus 20.1-17**

Some of the main themes from the sermon

Picture yourself on the mountainside

There you are, sitting among the crowd at the feet of Jesus. He's just taught you the beatitudes and told you to be salt and light in the world. And now he launches into these 5 similar sayings, each prefaced with the words, 'You have heard that it was said...'. Each time he goes on to say, 'But I tell you...'.

New for old

What the Law of Moses did was to establish a way of being God's people in a broken world. Look at Exodus 20 v1-3 to see how God set up this covenant between himself and his people, the Jews. God wanted them to be the city on the hill (v14) but they turned away from Him. God needed a different way to bring in his kingdom, to draw his broken creation back to himself. And that is where Jesus comes in.

Being perfect

The 5 sayings put detail to what it means to be salt and light. They dig below the 10 commandments to the attitudes that God's people need to live a fully human life. I wonder how you respond to the 5 different challenges in verses 21-47. I can avoid murder but am I free of anger and resentment (v21-26)? I can avoid adultery but do I treat people as commodities (v27-30)? I can avoid breaking promises but can I avoid the need to pressure people to agree with me (v33-37)? I can avoid revenge but can I avoid being hard-hearted to those who I feel have wronged me (v38-42)? I can love my friends but can I love my enemies (v43-47)? In summary, I'm a million miles from being perfect (v48).

'I can't do this'

Where does this leave the people on the mountainside? Leave me? Leave us? Lost. So, what do we do? The Sermon on the Mount is not good advice it's Good News. Jesus lived the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is not tearing up the Law of Moses or the writings of the Prophets. On the contrary, he is fulfilling them

(v17). And where God's kingdom is, good reigns supreme, joy reigns supreme, love reigns supreme.

Being...

We can't make ourselves the people God made us to be but we **can** accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness. We **can** pick ourselves up every time we mess up and ask God to be at work in us to change us. The irony is that if we ever feel we've got it sorted and we've cracked living a godly life we'll be wrong, just like the Pharisees were (v20). While ever we know that we're needing God's help and forgiveness, it's there for us.

...and becoming

But that's not all. God does change us. St Paul knew this and expressed it perfectly in his letter to the Christians in Philippi (Phil 2.12-13).

Some questions for thought and discussion this week:

1. *Talk about which of the 5 challenges you find the most difficult and why.*
2. *Do you think Jesus is being unreasonable in his demands on his followers?*
3. *Look at verses 29-30. Why do we see so few one eyed, two handed Christians?*
4. *Think about people you know, who have been changed by the work of the Holy Spirit over the course of their lives. What do you notice?*
5. *Look at the poem by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What do you think he is trying to say?*
6. *Think of one thing you could change in the way you behave that would help God to work more in your life. It may be forgiving a particular person, giving up a particular habit, thinking differently about something... If you feel comfortable share this with the rest of your house group.*

Quotes for the week.

'Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.'

Phil 2.12-13

'Who am I'

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Christian pastor and theologian, murdered by the Nazi regime in Flossenburg concentration camp in 1945.

Who am I? They often tell me I would step from my cell's confinement calmly, cheerfully, firmly, like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me I would talk to my warders freely and friendly and clearly, as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me I would bear the days of misfortune equably, smilingly, proudly, like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?

Or am I only what I know of myself, restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage, struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat, yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds, thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness, trembling with anger at despotism and petty humiliation, tossing in expectation of great events, powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance, weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making, faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other? Am I one person today, and tomorrow another? Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others, and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling? Or is something within me still like a beaten army, fleeing in disorder from a victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.

Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

A new covenant

Jesus embodied God's love, taught God's ways and brought back to God anyone who was willing to respond to him with a grateful 'Yes!'.