



Matthew 13:16–17

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

Reflection

Perhaps Jesus had stopped for a break, stepping out of the small fishing boat

that he's been preaching from, and back onto the shore for a few moments. Maybe to have something to drink, or to share some bread or dried fish with his disciples. They're on the edge of the Sea of Galilee, likely in the early afternoon. Such large crowds had gathered to hear Jesus preach that he had got into a small fishing boat and spoken to them from just off shore. If you visit Israel today there's a particular cove near the ancient town of Capernaum where the land slopes down to the water, forming a natural amphitheatre. If this was where Jesus was preaching, it meant his voice would have travelled across the water and been heard by the crowd as far as one hundred metres back because of the natural acoustics.

As has been the case for much of the past

year, Galileans from right throughout the region have travelled to hear Jesus preach, although as often as not they were probably even more hoping to witness one his miracles. It's an agricultural region, most of those listening work the land as farmers, or day labourers, or make their living as fisherman on the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus could always hold a crowd, but today, these farmers and fisherman had been held enthralled by his stories drawn from their daily lives. Jesus spoke of farmers sowing seeds, and enemies of farmers sowing weeds in amongst their wheat. Could anything be more devious than that! He told tales of mustard seeds growing into huge trees, and shared stories about the baking of bread. Stories too of finding treasure hidden in their fields, can you imagine

that, it would change your life overnight! And fishing stories as Jesus sat there on a fishing boat, his back to the great Sea of Galilee. Finally a teacher who speaks their language, a man who knows their world, who's walked a mile in their shoes, someone that they can relate to because he relates so well to them.

While Jesus was taking a break from preaching his disciples came up to him. Peter and Andrew were there, they were fisherman, this is a familiar scene for them, the Sea of Galilee was like their backyard. Perhaps it was their idea having Jesus preach from the boat. In fact, it was a familiar scene for all of Jesus' disciples. They'd followed him everywhere. Jesus had told them that he'd come to preach, and he'd been preaching the good news of the king-

dom of God with them in tow for a good year now. They'd heard his sermons so often that they could almost quote him verbatim, later on Matthew and John would have no problem setting some of them down in writing. It's how Peter in particular became such a great preacher, from listening to Jesus so often. But today, something was different. Jesus always filled his sermons with illustrations, but today Jesus' sermons had become illustrations. Today Jesus was speaking only in parables, and offering very little explanation. He was as engaging as ever, perhaps even more so, but as his disciples scanned the faces in the crowd, very few had that look of recognition, of understanding. Many of them looked perplexed, even confused at what Jesus was saying.

And so in this moment, while Jesus took a break from preaching, his disciples asked him privately about this sudden change, in verse 10 of yesterday's passage,

‘Why do you speak to the people in parables?’

As he often did, Jesus explained what he was doing in terms of the fulfilment of prophecy from the Old Testament. Just as Isaiah had predicted hundreds of years earlier, the people of Jesus' generation were rejecting him. Hearing without understanding, seeing without perceiving, because their hearts were stubborn. They'd deliberately closed their eyes and ears to the good news of the kingdom that they were both hearing and seeing in the ministry of Jesus. This generation has had their op-

portunity and now that window of opportunity is drawing to a close. Jesus will continue to teach and preach, but increasingly in parables. Only those who are genuinely seeking the kingdom of God will be able to understand. And those blessed with the knowledge of the kingdom of God, like his disciples.

To them Jesus turns in our passage today and speaks this beatitude:

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

In the face of almost an entire generation of people who are rejecting him, who have failed to recognise him as the Messiah – God’s promised king, who’s come to save

the world from Satan, sin and death – Jesus is reminding his disciples of how blessed they are by God, who has enabled their eyes to see and their ears to understand and believe.

‘Do you understand how blessed you are?’ says Jesus, ‘How privileged you are not just amongst these crowds, but amongst everyone to have ever lived?’ He goes on,

17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

‘All of human history has been moving towards what is happening on earth right now. Since the first prophecy about me in

Genesis chapter 1 thousands of years ago God's people have been looking forward in eager anticipation to this day. Even angels longed to look into the events that are unfolding before your very eyes (1 Pet 1:10–12). Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day (John 8:56). The prophets and righteous men and women of the past, the heroes of our faith, were still living by faith when they died, they saw and welcomed from a distance what you're witnessing firsthand. Can you imagine what they would have given to be here with you today? (Heb 11:13, 40) Do you have any idea how blessed, and how privileged you are to be my followers, to witness firsthand the salvation of the world?

Think

What is true for the first twelve followers of Jesus is just as true for Jesus' followers today. You might not be feeling very special at the moment. Perhaps there are days you feel like just a cog in the wheel, going through the motions of what you feel is a rather unremarkable life. If that's you today, and it's all of us on one day or another, then please stop for a moment now consider what it means that God chose you, singled you out, picked you. He determined before the beginning of time to love you, hold on to you, die for you, and find joy in relationship with you. From amongst the huge crowds of our generation God chose you to love and to cherish forever. You mean so much to the God of the universe that he died for you. Our passage today calls you blessed. Blessed are you. Rest in this eternal truth, and draw strength from it as

you head out this morning into your day. How will it change the day ahead? What does it mean for the worries and anxieties and pressures that we all carry around?

Pray

Chosen. Loved. Blessed. Forever. However this makes you feel towards God please tell him now in prayer. Thank our Father for his extraordinary love, mercy and grace in sending Jesus to die for us, while we were still his enemies, and then opening our eyes by the power of his Holy Spirit so that we might come to faith and be saved. Pray also that the reality of who we now are in Christ might be our daily reality and our greatest joy. Chosen. Loved. Blessed. Forever.