



Matthew 5:1–2

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

We're about to spend ten weeks and 53 talks on the best-known and most extensively studied speech in history of the world. The Sermon on the Mount is the probably the best-known part of the Jesus' teaching, but it's arguably the least understood, and it's

certainly the least obeyed. These weeks will change your life – if you let them.

At the end of chapter four we saw huge crowds beginning to mob Jesus. Jesus had been teaching, preaching and healing, and news about him had spread right throughout the whole region and large crowds were following him wherever he went. Today he withdraws from them, sits down on a mountainside and begins to teach his four disciples: Peter, Andrew, James and John. His teaching isn't for the crowds, it's for them. The Sermon on the Mount is for Christians. The crowds no doubt sat in, and overheard and marvelled at his teaching, but Jesus' teaching was for his disciples, it's for Christians.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his disciples and us about the kingdom of

God and the kind of life required of those who have become part of it. It isn't about how you enter the kingdom of God, it's how you live once you're a part of it, once you've entered it by grace, through faith. You'll remember that for Matthew the kingdom of God is the kingdom of heaven. That's the theme of the Sermon on the Mount. In it Jesus describes what human life and human community look like when they come under the gracious rule of God, what human life and human community looks like in the kingdom of God.

By way of introduction, here's a couple of questions you might be thinking. You might be thinking, 'Is this really a sermon? I mean it's only 107 verses long, three chapters, I could probably read it in 10 or 15 minutes, and it seems to talk about a wide range of things – so is it a sermon?' Well perhaps a

better way to think about it is as Matthew's summary of likely several days of teaching by Jesus. It's certainly a unified whole, its theme is what life looks like living as members of the kingdom of God, but it was likely the result of Jesus withdrawing with his disciples and teaching and training them for several days. It's also likely that its contents formed the basis of many sermons that Jesus preached right throughout his ministry in Galilee.

You also might be thinking, well what exactly is 'the kingdom of God?' Or as Matthew puts it the 'kingdom of heaven?' Well you'll remember from the first four chapters of Matthew's gospel that the kingdom of heaven has never been far from the action. We've seen Jesus presented as the king of the Jews, from a long line of kings, who's come as God's king, to inaugurate his kingdom, and one day

reign on the throne of David forever. And not just as the king of the Jews, but as the king of kings and lord of lords; as king over the whole world. And Jesus and John the Baptist have been preaching 'Repent, for the kingdom of God has come near.' And in Jesus, the kingdom of God has begun. The king is here, he's calling people into his kingdom, starting with these four disciples. And at the cross Jesus fully and finally defeated the prince of this world, he defeated Satan, sin and death, and now he's ruling and reigning at God's right hand in heaven. And so through the person and work of Jesus, God's kingdom has begun – but it is not complete. In a sense it is now and not yet. Jesus is reigning now, but his kingdom will be fully and finally manifested when he returns at his second coming. So how do we live as citizens of his kingdom in these in-between times? Well that's why we

have the Sermon on the Mount.

Final question, 'OK, so the Sermon on the Mount is about living as members of the kingdom of God. But what does that look like? Can you give me a summary?' And here I'm borrowing the summary of a great bible teacher by the name of John Stott. For him, no two words better sum up the intention of the Sermon on the Mount, than these 'Christian counter-culture.' Or if you prefer a verse from the sermon itself, then take Matt 6:8 which is 'Do not be like them.' The Sermon on the Mount is about living in a manner that is completely opposite to the world around us. It's radically counter-cultural, and its message at one level is very simple 'Do not be like them.'

And you know this has been God's message

to his people right throughout the bible. God chose a people to be his own, his treasured possession, a people to be set apart, holy, and dedicated to him. And yet right throughout the bible God's people have always turned their backs on him, wanting instead to be like the nations all around them. But if you're members of God's people, if you're members of the kingdom of God, if you're Christian, then you're called to live differently, to live counter-culturally, to not be like those around you who don't follow Jesus and aren't members of the kingdom of God.

And so perhaps an appropriate question for us to think about today is 'how different does your life and mine look from those around us?' Where do your allegiances lie? When people in your life who don't follow Jesus see your priorities in life, the way you live and act

and speak, do they see a follower of Jesus or do they see someone who looks very much like they do? You see we live in a time when the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world are overlaid – which makes for much tension. Because the two are diametrically opposed. They can't simply blend together nicely because one kingdom is ruled by Jesus and the other is ruled by the prince of this world, ruled by Satan. Do you feel this tension in your life? Christians living as citizens of the kingdom of God are called to live lives that are radically counter-cultural to those around us. So why not stop for a moment now and take a bit of a stocktake. Have a look into the mirror of your life. What do you see? Do you feel the tension? And if not, why do think? You're God's treasured possession, your citizenship in heaven has been bought by the precious blood of Jesus, you've been set apart, as a

light to those around you, to attract people into God's kingdom by the way that you live. What parts of your life look like this? Are there other parts that look no different to citizens of this world?

Again some searching questions this morning to think and pray over. I look forward to picking this up again with you tomorrow.