

Living the revolution—Matthew 5:1-16

Theme: Jesus invites his followers to join a movement that will turn the world upside down—are we in or out?

There's a lot riding on this first teaching section in the gospel: it's the Jesus' manifesto and an outline of the character of a revolutionary, someone who has joined his movement. And Jesus kicks off with about as unattractive a list of personal qualities and social dispositions as it's possible to come up with. But these are the very qualities that marked his life and hence must mark the lives of his followers.

Questions:

1. Who are Jesus' intended audience for this sermon? (v1 might help you answer)
2. What do these verses tell us about being a disciple?
3. How do we feel about ourselves and Jesus' invitation to us as we read the beatitudes?
4. Are the beatitudes describing our lives as they are or as they should be? What does Jesus mean by calling these qualities 'blessed'?
5. Does it help us to see the eight qualities outlined in the beatitudes as linked in any way? (see notes overleaf)
6. How do these qualities affect the way we live our daily lives?
7. What does it mean to hunger for righteousness and how might Philippians 3:12-15 help us to understand it?
8. What do we think it means to be a peacemaker at home, work, on the street where we live?
9. In what ways can we be salt to one another's faith? In what ways can we be salt to the world?
10. Where are the dark places in Bromley that need God's light? How can we help it to shine there?
11. What good works is the church doing that causes people in the community to see something of God?
12. What experience do we have of suffering as a direct result of being a Christian—either at home, work or in our neighbourhood?

Your stories:

Potted summary

The Sermon on the Mount opens with a series of pithy sayings that focus on our life with God (v3-6), our life in the world (v7-12) and our life together (v13-16).

All three elements of this manifesto for God's revolution are essential, since we will not be able to live as God wants us to in the world without the right attitude towards him and the right level of support from his community.

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What the passage is about....

The Sermon on the Mount is so familiar to us that it's lost its ability to surprise. So a reminder of its original context could help us see it in a fresh light.

There's a revolution coming; the disciples have signed up for a war. Jesus is their king and he's gathering his foot soldiers to rout the Romans and establish his kingdom in Jerusalem. So there's a lot riding on this first section of teaching in the gospel: it's the movement's manifesto and an outline of the character of a revolutionary.

But surely there's some mistake! Jesus kicks off with about as unattractive a list of personal qualities and social dispositions as it's possible to come up with. And yet these are the very qualities that marked his life and hence must mark the lives of his followers. Indeed the word he uses to describe these qualities—which means 'lucky' 'fortunate' or 'blessed'—is a word used in a number of Psalms—especially Psalm 1:1.

1) Our life with God (3-6)

i) poor in spirit (3 see Luke 6:20): we're spiritually bankrupt; can't pay the price of entry into God's Kingdom; we've nothing to offer the revolution; we don't belong by rights in this movement.

We're rich (relative to the 1.2 billion who exist on 70p a day), clever, cultured—even powerful, but Revelation 3:17 true of us: we're morally bankrupt. When we've taken generous account of our circumstances, the hard life has dealt us, the fact that we're sinned against, we're still faced with Revelation 3:17. And when we see this, we're lucky: because money, brains, culture or the gift of the gab can't buy or blag what God wants to give us for nothing: his Kingdom—see Luke 12:32.

ii) mourning (4): the word really means shattered. Realizing our poverty before God leads us to the sorrow of repentance: we arrogantly assumed God needed us in his revolution; we assumed our wealth, culture, intelligence, technology meant we

amounted to something. It's shattering to see it doesn't!

This is personal – It's also social, global, inviting us to look around, take note and weep for the mess we're in: war, famine, crime, abuse, drugs.

Note that this is also present tense: what Jesus describes here is a permanent condition. It might even be something that grows as we mature as disciples: 1 Timothy 1:15-16 (Paul didn't say this in Philippians 3:5f!)

And the comfort we're offered? Acceptance and forgiveness.

iii) meekness (5); the word refers to the controlled strength of a tamed animal: God is the person whisperer. Psalm 51:17 suggests mourning leads to this: we can't help ourselves, we can't build God's Kingdom with own strength and ideas. Only God can make us into something useful for his revolution: hence John 15:4; Ro 12:3-4 (realistic assessment of yourself and your importance)

iv) hungry (6): Just how much do we want this revolution? Disciples never arrive—we're always pressing on (Philippians 3:12-15), never satisfied with my life or the world as it is. We're constantly wanting more—to be all God wants me to be; to see his justice in the world.

Now these four are a sequence, a spiral, a never ending corkscrew tunnelling deeper into the heart of God's revolution as we follow a crucified saviour. And they are a permanent part of our discipleship—we have to live these as disciples like we have to eat to stay alive.

2) Our life in the world (7-12)

These apparently deeply unattractive qualities aren't just for church: Jesus' revolution is for the world. As the qualities outlined in v 3-6 grow in us, we'll get seen—how will we behave?

i) merciful (7) treating people around us as God treats us: forgiving, doing good to enemies, not sticking the boot in at work, going the extra mile with our oppressor.

ii) Sincere (8) the word means transparent, see-through, no hidden

motives or hypocrisy; no saying one thing and doing another, no Sunday-only revolutionaries.

iii) peacemakers (9): this is God's work. It is at the heart of his revolution: Ephesians 2:14-15. So it must be at the heart of how we live: healing relationships (Philemon 9-10, 17); working out our differences without violence—verbal or physical; restoring those who fall into sin (Galatians 6:1); praying for enemies—especially those we don't like! And doing evangelism: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21: wanting others to participate in, benefit from and enjoy the revolution

iv) persecuted (10-12): the longest beatitude: to live like this is to invite a reaction: darkness hates light. It'll happen to us if we live the revolution.

3) our life together (13-16)

We can't live the revolution alone. It's too difficult and Jesus does not expect it. The opening section of the Sermon on the Mount ends with two pictures of our lives together in the world:

i) salt: it flavours, it preserves, it makes things grow (it was used as fertilizer in the ancient world). So it needs to be spread around: in the world we act as a preservative of godly values, as manure to help those values grow in our homes, workplaces, streets, etc; in the church we preserve one another's faith: we keep each other salty—through gathering to encourage and admonish, pray for and practically help one another.

ii) light: it dispels darkness and helps people to see. This image is drawn from Isaiah 2:1-5 and Micah 4:1-5: people streaming to the city of God from all over the world to hear the values of the Kingdom.

Our life together, our good works as individuals and as a church, shines in the world: it shows our neighbours something of God and it provokes one of two reactions: v10-11: people try to snuff us out; v16: people are drawn to meet the God in whose name we live this revolution. And it's possible to do both simultaneously: Acts 2:47, 5:11, 8:1.