

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 14/02/2021

Mini Series – “Making Disciples”

Part 12 - Matthew 5 v 1-11 and Matthew 6 v 25 – 7 v 6

“Responding to Covid lockdown as Christ's disciples.”

All scripture references are from the English Standard version (ESV), unless otherwise indicated.

Matthew 5:1-11 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account”.

See p4 for the second reading **Matthew 6:25-7:6**

God's ultimate purpose is to bring glory to himself, especially the glory of his grace in the life of Christ's blood bought bride – the church. God has redeemed us so that we might be made like Christ, and reflect the beauty of Christ in a world that is ignorant of him, in order that the glory of God's grace might be seen and praised above everything. (**Ephesians 5: 25-27, Ephesians 1:4-6** see p4)

When Jesus walked on the earth, he taught his disciples to live differently to the world. (**Matt 5:13-16** see p4). How you and I live as disciples of Jesus matters, because the glory of God is at stake if we do not live in a different way to the world around us, a world that does not know God. We need to apply Jesus' teaching to the way we respond to trials, especially in the current Covid lockdown.

Every night we listen to the news and/or social media and hear:

- the government's instructions on what we are to do or not do

- the advice from medical experts, all backed up with statistics and often harrowing images
- posts from people with diverse opinions which can leave us confused, angry or fearful and are often responded to in spite and anger

The current crisis is serious, and any loss of life or suffering is distressing, but many of us are largely feeding our minds on everything the secular world has to say about it, and not listening to the truth of God's word.

The world has more of our attention than God and his word does.

Of course, the government (appointed by God) and medical experts should be listened to and respected, but we need to be listening to what God has to say about living life in a broken world so that we respond in a way that glorifies him. There are two main responses to this current crisis:

- Frustration – people can't do the things they once did, lockdown has gone on long enough and they just want an end to it. For them, the lockdown is worse than Covid.
- Fear – people are fearful of getting ill, of spreading the virus to others, of long-term complications and of death. For them, Covid is worse than the lockdown.
- Some people are both frustrated and fearful – for them Covid and lockdown are as bad as each other.

Fear and frustration may well lead to sin, and Jesus addresses both responses in the Sermon on the Mount, showing us how we can react rightly and not fall into sin.

1. **Responding with frustration** – the current restrictions may make us feel frustrated. This is not sinful in itself but the fruit of frustration can be sinful when it leads to:
 - Hatred of government leaders, because the tough decisions they've taken aren't what we wanted
 - Speaking ungraciously against leaders of medical institutions, schools, churches etc
 - Commenting sarcastically about those who have different views about how we should have responded to the pandemic

- Expressing hostility to those who see and do things differently to us, or don't move out of our way in the street, or alternatively cross the road to avoid us.

When that happens, our frustration has strayed into sin. In contrast, we can look at the righteous behaviour that Jesus expects from his disciples.

He commends the meek (v5 above), the merciful (v7) the peacemaker (v9) and those who don't retaliate (**Matt 5:38-42** see p4). He expects us to love our enemies (those we might disagree with over the way we respond to the pandemic) (**Matt 5:43-44** see p4), teaching us that we should pray for them.

As God's people, we will have our frustrations over both the handling of the pandemic, and the way others respond to it. Imagine what an impact it would have on those who don't know Jesus if we responded as Jesus calls us to, with meekness, mercy and love, seeking peace not strife and not retaliating when we've been wronged. If we live that out with integrity, our words will carry much more weight when we tell people about the Jesus who:

- is merciful and loving,
- came to make peace for us with God
- was willing to be wronged in order that we might be put right with God

2. Responding with fear – fear is a natural response to danger and can be good if it leads to saving lives, but it becomes sinful when it leads to a kind of paralysis that stops us:

- serving God in worship, and serving his kingdom
- serving people in love

Jesus tells us not to be anxious about the things we need to sustain our life (**Matt 6:25** see p4). The King James Version says 'Take no thought for your life' – in other words, survival on earth is not our highest priority.

The kingdom of God is to be our highest priority.

This was countercultural in Jesus' day, but even more so now, when we have made everything about life on earth, and want to survive here for as long as possible. Jesus tells us that our lives have great worth (**Matt 6:26** see p4). The death of any human is serious, whether it is caused by Covid, old age, cancer, murder, abortion or

euthanasia. Every human being, whether a baby in the womb or an old person, is more valuable to God than the birds of the air, because we are image bearers of God. Even so, the kingdom of God is a higher priority than our survival on earth.

Jesus gives us three reasons why we do not need to be anxious:

- a) We can't live one hour longer than God has determined (**Matt 6:27** see p4) It is he who has set the day of our birth and of our death. We're going to die on time!
- b) Those who don't know God stress over the things that relate to this life (**Matt 6:32** see p4). We are not to be like them. This world is not our final resting place. We are destined for life in God's eternal kingdom, where our righteous king, Jesus, reigns. Our priority is to ensure that we belong to God's kingdom, that we are living righteous lives and that we are promoting the kingdom with our prayers, our time and our money. Jesus took no thought for his own life but laid it down in order to redeem us for the kingdom of God. He calls us to be like him. This world, the Covid lockdown and all that is unpleasant in it, is passing away.

Eternal life in the kingdom of God, the kingdom of righteousness, is what awaits the disciples of Jesus.

- c) **Matt 6:30-33** (see p4) gives perhaps the most important reason why we aren't to be anxious.

Anxiety over life shows that we don't trust God with our lives.

Jesus tells us that our heavenly Father knows everything we need to keep us alive for our allotted time span, and is more than able to give us what we need. The root of anxiety is failure to trust God (**Matt 6 v30** p4). When we show fear as the world does, then we are not commending God to them. They fear because they don't know God, and therefore don't trust him. Our fear only confirms their view that God can't be trusted.

What a terrible thing to portray to a lost and dying world.

What, then, is the right response, not just to Covid but to all crises?

3. Responding with faith – the root of both fear and frustration is unbelief. We will fall into fear or frustration when we fail to trust that God:

- Sovereignly and providentially governs our lives from birth to death
- Will provide everything we need for the time allotted to us on earth
- Will take us home to be with him when our time comes

We need to deal with this by trusting in the promises of God. The media, the government and scientists can all give us useful information, but we need the biblical perspective on how to live, placing all our trust in God because:

a) God sovereignly and providentially governs our lives from birth to death.

Throughout the Bible, we see that he governs all things according to the counsel of his own will, including our lives. James tells us that rather than boasting about tomorrow, ‘you ought to say “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that”’ (**James 4:15**). This truth means that my life is not at the mercy of anything I might fear or feel frustrated with, but is in the hands of a loving, personal God who governs every aspect of my life by his wise providence according to his own will, for my good and his glory.

b) God gives grace for every trial and promises to work all things for good, even Covid lockdown. Hebrews 4:14-16 (see p4) reminds us that Jesus knew what it was like to live here on earth. If you are feeling frustration or fear bring it to the Lord. Tell him how you feel, and that you want to repent of the sin of fear or the sin that frustration breeds and claim the promise of his grace to help you deal with it. That grace is Christ himself, coming to satisfy you with himself so that no matter what we may have lost in this life, we know that we still have Christ who is our treasure. He will come to you with a word of promise to sustain you and assure you that what you’re going through is working for your ultimate good.

c) God has opened to us his eternal home which is far better than life. Our ultimate good is to be at home with the Lord, to be where he is and enjoy him forever. Although death is an enemy, it has been defeated for us by Christ when he died and rose again. We have the assurance that, if the Lord wills our death, our soul goes immediately into his presence. When he returns to this

earth, he will raise our bodies to live on a new earth free from Covid lockdown and every other thing that makes life here frustrating or fearful at the moment. As we trust God in this, it becomes a powerful testimony to the world. When we show that we are not frustrated because we have found our contentment in Christ and we are not afraid of death because we have the assurance of eternal life with Jesus then we show that

Jesus is the greatest treasure a person could have, even more precious than life itself.

Matthew 6:25 – 7:6 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. **Ch 7** “Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. ⁶ “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

Ephesians 5: 25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ **so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish**

Ephesians 1:4-6 even as God chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ **to the praise of his glorious grace,**

Matt 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that^[b] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:38 – 42 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. **Matthew 5:43 – 44** ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Hebrews 4:14-16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.