

The Jesus we never knew x 13 (PP1) VPBC 26 March 2017

Matthew 5: 1 – 16 (READ)

v8. The pure in heart will see God – they are blessed. (PP2)

The teachings of JESUS – from the mountain – for his Disciples. (This is not for the crowds but those who are following him and need to understand the implications of this). Jesus sits down to teach the Disciples about being the People of God and seeing the Kingdom of Heaven coming on the Earth.

Understanding the teachings of Jesus is one key way of understanding the person of Jesus. This week we looked at the further unpacking of the Messiah's description of his Kingdom: those Jesus declares are "blessed".

DO YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE "BLESSED"? – Makarios. Are we a blessed congregation of God's people? "Blessed" – happy and to be envied – opposite of cursed. (Not a subjective shallow feeling. Blessed – what God says about happiness & not just what we feel)..

Any discussion group about "happiness" should take into account what Jesus said on the subject ... and I would suggest when we say what we want for ourselves and our children is that we should "be happy and healthy" we need to understand what Jesus meant by that.

Jesus and the Pharisees. I think we can describe this relationship as one of growing tension and conflict. There was a contradiction about what Jesus and the Pharisees taught about PURITY. The Pharisees were accused by Jesus of being hypocrites: they were concerned about the outward show of religion and the ceremonial presentation of their religious duties and Jesus argued that what was going on in the HEART of a person was what GOD was concerned about. One incident in the Gospels strikes me (there were probably several if not many clashes). On this occasion when invited to eat with the Pharisees they were surprised that Jesus did not go through various ritual washings before eating (Luke 11: 39). Jesus also challenged them: **READ Matt 23: 25 – 28. (PP3)** Jesus accused them of being unclean on the inside and only concerned to present an outward, superficial show of being clean. He said they were like bowls and plates which were washed on the outside but not scoured out and cleaned on the inside. (Their failure to feed and care for the poorest). He also said they were like the whitened sepulchres on the hillside – outwardly white but inwardly full of rotting and decaying humanity. (They did not *shine from the inside out* as the song says). Jesus accused them therefore of "spiritual blindness" – concerned about the superficial display of ritual purity but not about purity of heart – the inner self.

(PP4) 8 qualities or attitudes of the believing disciples and community of the Kingdom: 4 "couplets". (Those who are willing to be persecuted for following Jesus).

Meek and merciful

Poor in spirit and pure in heart

Mourning and hungry for righteousness

Peacemakers and persecuted because of Jesus.

Jesus in his prophetic statements) uses this word (makarios) in a totally different way to the world of his day and indeed our own. It is not the elite who are blessed. It is not the rich and powerful who are blessed. It is not the high and mighty who are blessed. It is not the people living in huge mansions or expensive penthouses who are blessed. Rather, Jesus pronounces God's blessings on the lowly meek: the poor in spirit, the hungry and the thirsty for pleasing God, the pure in heart, the mourning. Throughout the history of this word, it had always been the other people who were considered blessed: the rich, the filled up, the powerful. Jesus turns it all upside-down. The elite (blessed) in God's kingdom, the blessed ones in God's kingdom, are those who are the poor in spirit, those who live in dependence on God. In P. Yancey's words, it is the "unlucky who are lucky". ONLY THOSE WHO PURE IN HEART WILL SEE GOD.

**** Matthew's beatitudes are not practical advice for successful living, but prophetic declarations made on the conviction of the coming-and-already-present kingdom of God.***

The Kingdom Community Jesus describes could be seen to be the outworking of what it might mean to ***"love one another as Jesus has loved us!"***. What do you think?... *the beatitudes are not "entrance requirements" for outsiders, but a declaration about insiders. ...they are about being a "living community of faith, love and service"*

This leads us into: Continuing our theme for this year and ***we return to the way Jesus' declared what sort of Kingdom he is bringing in*** by his presence – and his teaching. Nowhere is this spelt out more than in these chapters in Matthew's Gospel. (***chapters 5: 1 through to 7: 29***) ***Jesus is about God's Kingdom on EARTH (as in heaven – Matthew calls it the Kingdom of Heaven) – Now as well as Future. Jesus introduces the idea of an alternative (and blessed – makarios) community*** that exists as a witness to him as the Messiah who has come and fulfilled The Law and the Prophets. (*It is to be salt and light in the midst of darkness*). These people are to live counter culturally – different value system. ***"Do NOT BE LIKE THEM" – the Pagans***, says Jesus in *Matthew 6: 8*. *Be different by prioritising the Kingdom of God and living righteously. Live more righteously than the scribes and Pharisees of our present day and culture.* Demonstrate a foretaste of the Kingdom that will come in fully on my return.

The Jesus we never really knew challenged tradition, customs, prejudices and still does if they are contrary to God's perception of justice.

Previous interpretations. And so, we hear his constantly repeated challenge: ***you have heard it said but now I say unto you.*** But we also hear him declare that he has not come to destroy the teachings of the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil them. He is challenging much of our 21st century wisdom and values as well.

The Kingdom of God can be experienced by those who know that they are spiritually bankrupt: the poor in spirit. It is not brought in through fear and violence. The Kingdom of Heaven will never be brought in by the sort of action we saw in Westminster last week or that is day in day out witnessed in the Middle East (Questions re our sales of arms?). The Kingdom of God comes to the earth not by *might or by power but by the Spirit of God. (Zechariah 4: 6). Not by using the weapons of this world. (2 Corinthians 10:4).*

The pure in heart – will see and understand this because they see GOD as GOD IS – not made in our imaging and imagining. To see and understand GOD we need to be pure in heart? HOW is that possible?

To the Jew and indeed to any of us the concept of “seeing God” – understanding and approaching and knowing God is almost an unachievable notion (unless of course God chooses to be known – by revelation. Paul wrote to Timothy (*1 Timothy 1: 17; 6:16*) **GOD IS INVISIBLE AND DWELLS IN UNAPPROACHABLE LIGHT.**

Yet coupled with these statements about GOD is the claim of Jesus of Nazareth and the NT Writers that **GOD IS SEEN AND MADE VISIBLE IN THE PERSON AND HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST.** (*Colossians 1: 15 – the visible likeness of the invisible God*).

Jesus teaches his disciples to see God – we need to be pure (clean – katharoi) in our hearts. Yet the Scriptures tell us that *the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked – a wickedness only truly known by God. (Jeremiah 17: 19).* The remedy proposed by God through Jeremiah and Ezekiel the Prophets is a total transplant – a new heart, a new set of motives and values, the removal of a stony, sclerotic heart with a truly human heart with God’s ways integral to it!

The HEART of a person is not just the major physical organ in the human body but the centre of all our desires and affections – our emotions, our reason and our will. (*It is the fulcrum of feelings and faith as well as the mainspring of our words and actions*). And that is what purity of heart is all about – an inner purity and INTEGRITY and TRUTHFULNESS (Sincerity). Motives and values are not divided by loyalty to 2 things – e.g. God and Mammon. There is NO IDOLATRY COS GOD and GOD’S KINGDOM are desired first and foremost.

READ Psalm 24: 3 – 6. Who will ascend the hill of the LORD? Who will stand in the HOLY place? The one with clean hands a pure heart...if our motives are pure then our actions will be clean. (King David longed for a clean and undivided heart but he knew he was far from that. He prayed therefore the help of God’s Spirit to struggle with his own Spirit – *Psalm 51: 10 Create a pure heart in me O God and put a new and loyal Spirit within me*).

Integrity about money and wealth? Integrity about work and business transactions? Integrity in all of our relationships? Integrity in society and towards the weak and the

powerless? Integrity in the environment? **The person of integrity will see and understand God's reality and God's nature in the present world and the new world.** This will surely inspire in us a greater desire for inner purity of motive and actions?! Not one of us has 100% integrity of heart and so no one among us has the full perception, understanding of God's purity and integrity. God is PURE LIGHT – unalloyed, unadulterated, not watered down by any darkness.

My actions reveal my heart...my actions originate from my heart's thinking and values. Can I develop a growing desire for purity of heart, a greater discernment about what pleases God?

The impure have no desire to see God...indeed they would be terrified of such a prospect. The further any retreat by choice into the Dark Side the more horrifying the prospect of "consuming/ purifying fire "becomes. Many have declared this in their writings, dramas and art.

And yet within the human heart is the longing for God and Home and Creator and Love – there is a pull of the Eternal Spirit to be friends of God, pure in heart. If we refuse to harden our heart, then there is the possibility of redemption. This is what the disciples of Jesus tell the world. There is a GOD who loves us and has come to us and called us.

In the community of the Blessed – we have discovered this – and others can also discover this. We can:

- Seek to purify ourselves from unclean actions and things (*1 Peter 1:22*). Remove hypocrisy and deceit from our lives – do not be fooled by our lies to self and others. So you will see God more clearly. Purify our motives (with God's help) as regards wealth, ambition, power.
- We can allow ourselves to **be pruned (kathairo)** – linked to purging. God prunes (*John 15*).

NOT ONLY will we see God but we will together be BLESSED. This is the alternative community, this is the Kingdom of God.

This will mean that as purity grows we will not be as easily corrupted. We will not as easily fail others. Goodness and mercy will follow. *The world looks on the outward appearance – God looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16: 7. Developed by Jesus - Matthew 5:8)*

PRAYER: Day by day, day by day,
O, dear Lord, three things I pray:
to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,
follow thee more nearly, day by day.
Day by day, day by day,

O, dear Lord, three things I pray:
To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,
follow thee more nearly, day by day,
by day, by day, by day.

(Richard of Chichester)