

The Sermon on the Mount (1)

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[0 : 00] Today I hope to preach the greatest and most famous sermon in all of Christianity. That is the Sermon on the Mount, not my sermon.

I'm glad to accept the invitation to be with you and to meet with you. It's a great privilege. I've heard of this congregation for many years and have known of it. And it's a great privilege to share with you.

As an Australian standing today before you in a suit, you may be a little confused. An Australian in a suit is usually called the defendant.

But for your sake I have found your cold weather sufficient to put a tie on and a coat and to preach like this.

The Sermon on the Mount is a terrific, of course, marvellous part of Matthew's Gospel. But for most people it is detached from Matthew's Gospel. And read and studied in and of its own self.

[1 : 13] From chapter 5 of Matthew through to the end of chapter 7. But it wasn't written from there to there. It was written as part of the 28 chapters of Matthew's Gospel.

And so the first thing to do is to place it in its setting. Which is why we had read for us a few moments ago, chapter 4, if you would turn to that part of the Bible.

Matthew chapter 4. John the Baptist has just been placed in prison. And with the arresting of John, Jesus takes the signal to start his public ministry.

He withdrew into Galilee. More specifically, leaving Nazareth, he goes to Capernaum, to the area known as Zebulun and Naphtali. It wasn't accidental. He did it purposefully.

Because the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 9, the bit that we read at Christmas, if we didn't sing it repeatedly at Christmas, Unto us a son is born, unto us a child is given in his name.

[2 : 18] That passage starts off with the people living in darkness, seeing a great light. The people who live in darkness live in Zebulun and Naphtali. That is the northern extremity of Israel.

They live in darkness because whenever the conquerors came, they came from the north. The Assyrians came in the 8th century, not across the desert.

Only mad Englishmen, such as Lawrence of Arabia, would go across the desert. Any sensible sane invader, like I presume Scots if we ever did, would come from the north downward.

So they would go up the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and across the top and then down north. The Babylonians did the same thing, up the river and down from the north. The Greeks did the same when they came across from Europe.

The Romans had done the same when they came across. So every time Israel was invaded, it was invaded from the north. And the people in the north, Zebulun and Naphtali, they were the first to come under the condemnation and judgment of God as he brought these nations into the land to destroy.

[3 : 29] The people sitting in darkness were the people who were going to hear the great message of light. They were the first to be told of the kingdom of God.

And so Jesus goes specifically to the north to declare this message of salvation and declares, verse 17, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.

The kingdom is now here. It was exactly the same message as John the Baptist preached. If you look back to chapter 3, verse 2, chapter 3, verse 2, Jesus' message was the same as John's message.

To these people, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. As he starts preaching this message, he goes through the land and walking by the sea, collects up some disciples, two sets of brothers' fishermen that he calls to come after him and to fish for men.

They are to change their occupation slightly. No longer for fish, now for men. The image of fishing for men is found in the Old Testament and it often refers to judgment.

[4 : 45] For fishing as an exercise is an exercise of judgment for the fish and salvation for the fishermen. It's a mixture of blessings, this, but that's the way the kingdom of heaven is going to come.

For some it will be horrendous judgment. For others it will be the moment of salvation. These men are to join with Jesus in fishing for men.

And then Jesus' ministry starts there in verse 23 following, as he goes throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of kingdom. But he does more than proclaim it.

He starts to enact it. For these people sitting in the darkness, in the shadow of death, life is coming. And the life is seen by the reversal.

No longer are they going to be in sickness and in disease and all kinds of affliction. No longer evil spirits going to be dominating their life. Now life comes instead of death.

[5 : 47] Health comes instead of sickness. God comes instead of the evil spirits. And so he relieves people of pains and those oppressed by demons.

And all manner of diseases are suddenly reversed. It is an extraordinary thing, friends. Because death and disease still dominates our lives.

You're very polite people sitting quietly watching me. But just let me ask a little question that will be an invasion of your privacy.

But just a little, for a moment, if you'd just bear with me, remembering that I'm a crude man from down under, even though I stand up on top here. Hands up all those who have, in the last seven days, taken any form of medication.

Downstairs is a lot sicker than upstairs. That may say something. But from my vantage point, I would say roughly 50% of you put your hands up and when you take into account the couple of embarrassed people who don't want to let on, more than half of us, this is the healthiest generation that has ever lived.

[7 : 04] And more than half of us have taken medication in the last seven days. Sickness is a normality in this world. It's funny to think of it that way, isn't it?

We usually think health is normality and sickness is when I'm below par. But in fact, it's not that. Sickness is normal. Because from the moment we're born, we're heading towards death.

And death doesn't come just at the end. Death comes all the way along as we feel it in the aches and pains of our bodies and our minds.

It's part of life. Jesus comes bringing life. And so he comes overcoming the natural tendency of life that we have, namely sickness.

And death. He keeps reversing it extraordinarily. And so we read in verse 25, a verse that most of us just skip by.

[8 : 04] I could even ask now, seeing you're good at putting hands up, hands up anybody who's ever had verse 25 as a memory verse. All kinds of memory verses, but I've never met a person who uses verse 25 as a memory verse, unless of course you're one of those people who learn chapters as a whole.

Verse 25 is not a memory verse, is it? You know, the people, great crowds followed him from Galilee to Kabbalist, Jerusalem, Judea, from beyond the Jordan. So, well it's actually a very important verse, the very key verse.

Because you'll notice in verse 1, seeing the crowds, Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. Just as John the Baptist's arrest led Jesus to start his ministry, the crowds led Jesus to preach the Sermon on the Mount.

Of course there were crowds. For if you were to conduct such a ministry as Jesus today, there would be crowds. See, if for example this morning, I wave my hand over those who are in the lower section of our building, the upper ones seem to be too healthy, they don't need me, I wave my hands over the other, and every disease of every person in the lower section of this building this morning was instantaneously healed.

All those with glasses could take them off and throw them away because they could see perfectly. Those with hearing aids would take them out and get rid of them because they could hear perfectly. If this morning I did that, how many people do you think would be here tonight to hear me preach?

[9 : 41] And how far would they be travelling? How far would the news go? If I said you don't tell anybody, could you be trusted with that instruction?

No, of course you couldn't. The phones all over Scotland would be ringing, wouldn't they? Every sick relative that you ever had would be dragged along here. The wheelchairs would be lined up in all the aisles.

There'd be people let down through the roof, wouldn't there? If I could just but do such a thing, if there was genuine healing ministry like that taking place today, crowds from everywhere would come.

That's what happened. Crowds from everywhere came. You're not picking the point of what's being said here because you don't know your geography well enough. You see, Galilee is about 150 kilometres or 100 miles, depending on how you think.

About 150 kilometres from Judea. Capernaum to Jerusalem is around 150 kilometres. As the crow flies.

[10 : 52] Actually, it's a very hilly country. And the roads wound around the hills in those days because the modern engineering of just carving through, that wasn't available.

And so it was much, much longer than 150 kilometres or 100 miles. And as you travelled, you were travelling not in one of our modern cars, but on foot or in a donkey or in a cart.

And of course, the people that you are travelling with were sick. That's why they were going there. So we're talking of people taking a 10-day, two-week trip to hear this man.

This wasn't just, you know, the people in Glasgow. This were people all over Scotland, all over in the islands, on the edges of the fringes of this great nation. They were coming from everywhere. It was taking them a couple of weeks. But this man was doing such miracles that it was worth travelling. And from Decapolis, which is the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and they'd already come from Syria, which was to the north, people were coming huge distances.

[12 : 00] Sometimes the crowds of Jesus' ministries are numbered, like in the feeding of the 5,000 or the feeding of the 4,000, because it was a one-off event. And they all sat down and you could count them out and they were distributing food to them.

So they actually knew the numbers. Here the crowds are described in terms of the distances they travelled. And it's the distances that you would expect to be travelled when someone was doing the kinds of reversal of death ministry that Jesus was engaged in.

And when Jesus saw the huge crowds, can you imagine what the fishermen were thinking? I think I'm on the right side this time.

I think I'm with the winners on this occasion, aren't I? This is, I've picked the right man to support. I mean, look, look at what he's doing. Look at the crowds.

And I'm one of the ones on the inner ring. I'm not just in amongst the crowds. I'm one of his right-hand men. I'm his left-hand man. The kingdom of heaven is coming and you can see it with this man.

[13 : 03] And I'm going to be right there in the front row of the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus, seeing the crowds, went up on the mountain, sat down, and his disciples came to him.

Sitting was the usual position of the preacher in those days. The congregation stood. The preacher sat. Which enabled you to preach considerably longer sermons. I don't know if you've thought of this as a possibility, Willie, but there's a pattern that was in previous days.

It was also because chairs were hard to make and it was a much more difficult thing to do. But Jesus sits, the position of the teacher, and his disciples, his students, his fishermen, come to him. And he starts speaking to them. Now, what is Jesus going to say to his disciples in the face of his public ministry, in the light and the sight of these massive crowds?

What do the disciples need to know about fishing for men? Well, he starts off with a passage we call the Beatitudes. He opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[14 : 15] Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. He starts talking about the great blessings of being in the kingdom of

heaven.

We don't know what the word blessing means, really. We don't know how to translate it. Sometimes the Good News Bible translated it as happy. Happy is the man. But that's a bad translation because it's a philosophy of utilitarianism which says the ultimate good in life is happiness, which is not true. And so, really, it's how lucky the person. But we don't believe in luck, so we can't translate it how lucky. You can say how fortunate the person, if you're slightly more upper class than lucky. But we don't believe in fortune, so we can't translate it that either. This is the good life to be envied. But envy is sin, so we can't translate it that way either.

[15:21] So we translate it blessed. We don't know what it means, but it's accurate. And so, here is the good. You know, this is, you've got it when you've got this.

But what are the things that you've got when you've got it like this? Well, it comes to the people who in this world's views, of course, are downtrodden and beaten. The poor in spirit. Those who are sad and sorry.

Those who mourn. Those who, it comes to the people the world does not expect it comes to. But to there, all the blessings of heaven come. They will inherit the earth.

Not the strong, not the mighty, not the powerful, but the meek will inherit the earth. Each of these is in the Old Testament. Each can be found in the Old Testament. Some word for word.

Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth is Psalm 37 verse 11. Blessed are the mourners, for they shall be comforted is a clear allusion to Isaiah 61 verse 1 and 2. Each of them is Old Testament.

[16:19] There's nothing novel in what Jesus is teaching. He's a teacher of the Old Testament. But he is saying those things that the Old Testament longed for, looked forward to, those reversals of fortune, so to speak, of the down past, those reversals will come with the kingdom of heaven and now is the moment of the kingdom of heaven.

And blessed are they and blessed are they and blessed are they and the disciples were really pleased. Now is our time. We are the people sitting in darkness. We're about to have the light. We are the people who are mourning over this world.

We're about to be comforted. We are, we're about to inherit the earth. We're in the right place. Until Jesus gives them the disciples' beatitude.

Verse 11. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kind of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

See, all the other blessings were blessed are they, blessed are they, blessed are they, blessed are they, blessed are they and this one is blessed are you. This is your blessing. This is just yours.

[17:35] And what is their blessing? Persecution. And how can that be a blessing? Well, if you're one of the persecuted, reviled and hated people, you've got the best of all company.

You're in with the prophets who were beaten up, bashed, killed, sawn into, dropped down wells. The prophets. It's a good career move for your children.

Not. No one wants their children to be a prophet unless they really have had a dreadful time with them in their early childhood. It's a dreadful thing for your children. Prophets always come out badly in the Bible.

And Jesus is saying, blessed are you when you go really into this time of persecution, hostility and hatred because you're going to be up there with the prophets. That still sounds alright because the kingdom of heaven comes and I'm going to be with Moses and Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah, maybe it's not too bad.

I've got to go through some rough times but it's going to have a good outcome, isn't it? And then Jesus goes further. You are the salt of the earth. If the salt has lost its taste, how shall it be restored?

[18:39] It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You're the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand and it will give light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Why are the disciples going to be persecuted?

Why are they going to be hated? Why are they going to be reviled? Why? Because they're salt and light and a city on a hill. What have those things got in common?

I remember some time ago coming to preach on this little passage you are the salt of the earth and I'll let you into some of the secrets of being a preacher. Come Monday morning which is when I start preparing I thought this is going to be a good week.

This has got to be one of the easiest most preachable passages in the Bible. You're the salt you're the light. Salt is used for preservation of things and for taste. Light is a symbol of knowledge and so the salt and light of the world the sermon it preaches itself doesn't it?

[19 : 50] You are the preservative of the society you are that which gives flavour to this society and you are the light to the world you are those who are going to bring the knowledge of the gospel of Jesus to the ends of the world.

I mean the sermon was written in my mind around about 9.25 on Monday morning so that means the rest of the week is going to be considerably easier and I can do all those other things that I can't do because I'm working hard on the sermon but I thought surely I should just check out that this is right.

I mean salt how do I know it is preservative and taste? I mean it obviously is, I've always heard about it so I just looked up a dictionary mistake the rest of the week was taken preparing this sermon because in the dictionary of the ancient world there were 13 different usages of salt. Salt was used to rub into newborn babies salt was used to curse the land symbolically salt was also used to ruin the name so if you hated your neighbour you just salted his land and nothing would grow in it.

Salt was used also in the exact reverse as a fertiliser so if you want your manure pile to really work better you sprinkle salt in it even to this day most fertilisers have salt as one of its components.

[21 : 06] Salt was used as an expression of friendship a way of saying I'm friend is that we share salt together we have a cup of coffee together today but they used to share salt together.

Salt was used as a means of paying taxation to the salt there were all these different uses of salt and I thought well I can't really just stand up and say it was always preservative and taste when there's all these other usages.

What about the Old Testament? Let's forget the ancient world. What about the Old Testament? How many uses of salt are there in the Old Testament? It's about Tuesday by this time. When I got out my concordance and I looked up every reference to salt in the Old Testament there are a few. It was Tuesday night by the time I'd worked out that not only were the 13 usages of the ancient world in the Old Testament but there were four or five others as well. Instead of reducing the list I just expanded the list and I'm running down to Wednesday and nothing else is getting done I can tell you.

Helen is keeping on wondering why I'm walking around talking about salt all day every day why my mind can't be lifted above the elements of salt. I haven't reached light, I haven't reached the city on the hill, I'm just wrestling with salt.

[22 : 14] So I think to myself well which one of these did Jesus have in mind? The way of working that out is how does Jesus use the Old Testament and where else does Jesus speak about salt?

So I look through all the references of the salt that Jesus used to try and work out what he meant. The only one that actually connected in which revealed anything of the mind of Jesus is found at the end of Luke chapter 14 where it actually says much the same kind of thing as here only it says the salt will be no longer any use for the manure pile.

Now that was interesting because I figured that he didn't mean taste. Unlikely that he was thinking of the taste of the manure and so I could get rid of taste out of the mind of the idea that Jesus was speaking of and so maybe preservation.

salt is a question because you don't preserve a manure pile. So the very two reasons for which he was using salt in the one clear occasion when I can understand what he meant he meant neither taste nor preservative.

What did he mean? Fertiliser. That's what he meant. So you come back here into Matthew 5 and say you are the fertilisers of the land. It's a bit hard to work out what he's saying now isn't it?

[23 : 36] I mean I'm so glad you're here. You're a bunch of manure. You know that's your end goal to be that. It's unlikely isn't it? So I'm stymied now.

What is Jesus saying? It's getting about Thursday. The secretary is saying where is the outline of your sermon to be printed and I'm saying well it's just where the rest of the sermon is.

Kind of in limbo at the moment. Not that I believed in limbo but it. So you move on to light and the light well it doesn't always mean knowledge and it doesn't mean and so it also doesn't mean what I think it means.

So you see the Bible is changing my thinking now because I'm taking it seriously. What does it mean? And the key lie really in the city and the hill.

For the context that is important not the ancient world not the Old Testament not even the rest of the New Testament the context is the context right in front of you.

[24 : 42] In this passage what is meant by light and salt and the city on the hill. What have they in common? Well they all stand out as distinctive.

That's what they have in common. There's no point lighting the light in order to cover it up. It must stand out distinctively. And the city is something that is impossible to cover up.

No matter how you try to hide a city on a hill it will always be seen. And salt if it loses its distinctiveness is of no value or use to you at all.

It's the very value of salt lies in it being different. I know you chemists know that salt can't lose its saltiness but the salt of the ancient world was taken out of the Dead Sea pans where it was mixed with gypsum and the salt would be washed out and the gypsum would remain and so it would lose any usefulness but it looked much the same but it was useless salt.

This is a complete irrelevance to the sermon but I just know there are pedantic scientific minds around who are going to sit there for the next 20 minutes saying but it can't lose its salt. It can't. Anyway forget it.

[25 : 50] Come back to the reality here. You see I found out a lot about salt that I really didn't want to know. Distinctiveness, differentness, complete change, you will stand out and if you cease to be different you cease to be of any value.

Now why is he saying that? Because he's just saying blessed are you when all men hate you and revile you and despise you and reject you for my sake because you'll be like the prophets of old but if you lose your distinctiveness you're useless.

For you see the prophet of old always stood out over against the society, over against the king, stood out as that awkward uncomfortable character who was calling upon everybody to repent, who was standing saying you're going the wrong way.

He's like the little boy saying the emperor has no clothes. Everybody else is saying the emperor's got wonderful clothes. Isn't that marvelous? It's the little boy who's completely different and says no he's naked and big and fat and wrinkly and stupid as well but those things are not said out loud in the story.

But it's the difference and if you lose that difference, if you become part of your society, part of your world, if you just merge in with everybody else, then you are useless.

[27 : 12] In a conformist society like Australia, and I just presume Scotland, standing out as being different, being the odd person out, being the awkward, angular, difficult person in the party is a very unpleasant place to be.

Most of us are deep down conformists. What's everybody else is wearing? That's what I'll wear.

What is everybody else talking about? That's what I'll talk about. What values and attitudes are everybody else saying, well, I'll say those kinds of same things.

I would never say anything politically incorrect, never anything that would be out of the normal or abnormal. I like just merging in and being part of the family, part of the community, part of the society, and as long as you're part of your community, family and society, you are useless to Jesus. But if you want to be different, you'll be disliked, you'll be shunned, you'll be rejected, you'll be scorned and ridiculed and laughed at by the society.

But blessed are you, says Jesus, when everybody does that to you, because you're like one of the prophets of old. You will be able to fish for men, but you've got to be different. In what way have you got to be different?

[28 : 30] You've got to wear a suit, you've got to wear a tie, you've got to listen to certain kinds of music. What is the ways in which you are to be different?

Where in lies the saltiness of these disciples? Verse 16 is really what the Sermon on the Mount is about. In the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to you, saying what a wonderful person you are, the kindness, and it's not what's said there, is it?

So that they may give glory to your Father who is in heaven. You see when people do good things, most people say, gee he's a nice person. But the good things that are being spoken of here are the kinds of things that people will say, that person's touched by God.

That's God at work in his life. It wouldn't be except for God that he would do that kind of thing.

They're God raising consciousness activities. Now what are these?

Well, they are fulfilment of the law and the prophets. That's what they are. It's doing what the Old Testament says. If you do what the Old Testament law and prophets say, you will stand out as screamingly different to the society around about you.

[29 : 47] As I've wandered the British Isles and as I've even listened in this last day or so within Scotland to people here, there is a great feeling of uncomfortableness that has come upon us.

Greater wealth and prosperity every time I visit these isles but an uncomfortable. I'm no longer feeling part of the society. There are other groups moving in, there's changes in society, there's changes to laws that I'm not feeling like it's the place I grew up in.

I'm feeling like it's all being shifted away. A million have left, I understand, to live down in Spain and Portugal rather than live in the British Isles in which they were raised.

It's more comfortable. I'd rather be a foreigner there than a foreigner here. But there's that sense of it's changing. I'm being dispossessed culturally.

It's a fearful thing. What the Jew did was actually different to the law that he was given.

[31 : 06] The law and the prophets laid out life as it should be lived. But the Jew of Jesus' day was no longer living by the culture that had been given by Moses and the prophets.

Jesus was calling them back to Moses and the prophets. Verse 17, don't think I've come to abolish the law and the prophets. I haven't come to abolish them. I've come to fulfil them. And then he spells out in chapters 5, at this moment some of you might be thinking, we're going to be here a long time this morning, aren't we?

If he's going to do the whole Sermon on the Mount. But this is your moment of enormous relief. Because chapters 5 and all of 6 and through to chapter 7 verse 12 is all about the law and the prophets.

The law and the prophets are first mentioned in 5:17 and finally mentioned in verse 7:12. He speaks about fulfilling the law and the prophets in 5:17 and again in 7:12.

7:12 is the summary of the heart of this Sermon on the Mount. Now tonight I'm going to take one section of that and spell it out in chapter 6 verses 1 to 18.

[32 : 27] But in chapter 5 he talked about the way in which they had changed what the law said. You've heard of said of old, you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you, you shall not.

You've heard of old, you shall not kill, but I say to you. You've heard of old, you shall an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you. He's not actually changing the law. What he's doing is calling people back to the real meaning of the law.

And he's showing that what they're doing now is quite different to what the law and the prophets were requiring them to do. There has been a huge culture shift in Israel away from the law and the prophets that Jesus is calling them back to.

Likewise in chapter 6 verses 1 to 18 where he talks about fasting and he talks about almsgiving and he talks about prayer. And the way in which they're doing it is quite different to the way the law and the prophets were talking about.

Or in the second half of chapter 6 he then speaks about materialism and speaks about the kingdom of heaven and that we've got to seek the kingdom of heaven and God's righteousness first because you cannot serve God and money.

[33 : 35] You cannot do that. It's not, you shouldn't. You cannot do it. But instead of worshipping the creator, the people of Israel have worshipped the creature. Instead of worshipping the God who provides all wealth for us, they were worshipping the wealth that God has provided.

I don't know about Glasgow but my guess is that you're the same as Sydney, aren't you?

Materialists. This is what really runs our country down under. We've lost nearly all other values. We've lost any discrimination other than the bottom line. The possessions. Chief occupation and habit of people is shopping.

That's one of the great joys of people. On a shopping mall as we are at the moment, that's a sad thing to say but my guess is there'll be more people out shopping on the mall than will come into church. It's reflection of the culture that we've shifted to, you see.

And people run after what they may eat and what they may drink and what they may wear. What you eat, what you drink, what you wear is an irrelevance, isn't it? In our newspaper, down under our main newspaper in Sydney, has a regular weekly lift out section called the good living guide.

[34 : 50] The Beatitudes. It's the good living guide. And it's all about food and drink and clothing. The exact reverse of what Jesus says is the good living.

And so it's the latest in fashion. Why do we need to wear the latest in fashion? Why on earth would we ever want to wear the latest in fashion? Because as soon as you wear the latest in fashion, it's no longer the latest and you've got to change it, haven't you?

I mean, it's just a manipulative tool of the clothing industry to get us to keep on changing our clothes. Perfectly good clothes. They could last for 30 years but no, they're out of fashion so we've got to change them.

It's the way of keeping people in business, isn't it? It really has nothing to do with reality, with life, with meaning, with value, with purpose but there are pages and pages and pages.

There's whole industries of people devising new ways to make the human body look stupid. And what you eat and what you drink, you know, the gourmet eating habits of people, the latest restaurant to go, the most incredible exquisite taste of what you can sit on your tongue and what you can drink and the difference vintages of the different wines and the different bouquet and fruity little flavours and all the rest of it.

[36 : 10] It's all pre-sewerage material, isn't it? For that's where it all winds up, in the sewer. There's no particular value other than to keep you alive.

I mean, if you enjoy it, good luck to you and if you don't enjoy it, bad luck upon you but it really makes no difference. You've got to eat, you've got to drink in order to keep living. That's why you're doing it. Do you live to eat and drink or do you eat and drink to live?

It's not really rocket science to work out which is which. But when the good living guide is all about what you eat and what you drink, the pagans of today are no different to the pagans of Jesus' day. For they run after these things which are the necessities of life but are given to us by God freely and generously. If you understood God and his word, you would live by his kingdom and you would not put all your emphasis on the things that don't matter but on the things that do matter like his kingdom and righteousness.

And so, section after section in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount is about how to live the good life that will bring glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[37 : 32] But the crunch of the sermon comes in chapter 7 verse 13. So, if you will turn there. Enter by the narrow gate.

For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction. And those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life.

And those who find it are few. Remember, he's speaking to the disciples. The fishermen.

Remember, he's speaking to them in the context of the massive crowds that have come from all over Palestine to see the great healer.

And he's saying to them, many are on the road to destruction. Few are on the road to life. And the road to destruction is broad and wide and easy.

And the way to life is hard and difficult. And few find it. We all want to be in the big crowd, don't we?

[38 : 44] I mean, wouldn't it be thrilling to have this church absolutely jam-packed full? I hope it will be in the next few years. And the ministry that is taking place here. But won't it be thrilling when it is?

No more thrilling than when it is half empty. And the word of God is preached faithfully. But humanly it is much more thrilling. A crowd engenders excitement.

And wouldn't it be so great that the crowd spills out the doors and we've got to put amplifiers outside so that the people outside and in the street there can hear what is being said. And we've got to run service after service because there are so many thousands upon thousands coming.

And won't we feel like we've succeeded? That Christianity has arrived? That we're there when the big crowds? Jesus says, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. No, no. No broad is the way.

Many there are on it. That leads to destruction. Do not judge ministry by crowds. For narrow is the way.

[39 : 44] Few find it. See, he says, beware, verse 15. Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You'll recognise them by their fruits. They're grapes gathered from thorn bushes, figs from thistles. I don't know why he was anti-Scottish at this point. Never can understand references to thistles in the Bible.

So every healthy tree bears good fruit and every diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire and thus you will recognise them by their fruits. What's the fruit of a false prophet? What's the fruit of a true prophet? I mean, to recognise them by their fruits, what are the fruits you're supposed to be looking for? Well, a false prophet will appear like a true prophet. That's one of his characteristics.

[40 : 47] The appearances will be deceptive, which is not surprising because the essence of false prophecy, of a false prophet, is false prophecy. They speak untruth.

But the best lies are always half true, aren't they? That's the sheep's clothing. An out and out lie no one is persuaded by, but something that is half true, that has persuasive power and seductive force. The false prophets? How do you pick a false prophet? How do you pick a true prophet? The day of judgment will reveal it, verse 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Verse 23 is my most unfavourite verse in the Bible.

[42 : 03] I think it's the worst verse. It's awful. That is a verse that I would never want to have said to me. There could be no more awful moment in eternity than to hear that verse said to you.

Depart from me, I never knew you. What's the character of the true prophet? What's the character of the false prophet?

The true prophet does the will of the Father who is in heaven. The false prophet is a worker of lawlessness who does not do the will of the Father who is in heaven.

The false prophet comes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The false prophet prophesies in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The false prophet casts out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The false prophet does mighty miracles in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ but he is still a false prophet. A judge of the prophets is not to be made on the basis of whether they do miracles or not.

[43 : 18] That is not the sign of a true prophet. Indeed Jesus warned in Mark chapter 13 verse 22, false prophets and false Christs will arise to, if possible, lead astray the elect by doing mighty works.

It's not that they won't do mighty works, they will do mighty works. So when you see a massive ministry of thousands of people with television stations and all these accounts of great miracles, that is no sign that you are seeing a true prophet at work.

But it will be easily and seductively persuasive for you and I to say, gee, that's a church I'd like to be involved in, that's a ministry I'd like to be involved in. Look at the power, look at the effect, look at the numbers, look at the money, look at everything that is happening, that is happening and did you hear about this healing and did you hear about that incredible thing that's happened there and do you see this and did you see that and that's not the sign of being a true prophet.

Now do you see why chapter 4 is so important because there is Jesus doing all these mighty miracles, there are the crowds coming along and the disciples are saying to themselves, I've arrived, I'm with the right person, he's going to teach me how to do this work and I'm going to get huge crowds following me because I'm going to do these wonderful things and Jesus calls them aside, hey fellas, if you're going to be my disciple, you're going to be unpopular.

If you're going to be my disciple, you're going to be beaten up, rejected and despised. If you're going to be my disciple, you've got to do the will of the Father in heaven which will bring glory to God and hatred to you because you're going to stand out like a sore thumb and the society is going to be irritated by you because you're going to say, no that's evil, you must not do that, no that is wrong, you must not do that.

[45 : 16] This is the way to walk, you must go God's way, repent for judgment is coming upon you, the judgment of God will come upon you for eternity. You're going to preach a message that people hate and when they hate the message, they hate the messengers and you're going to be the messengers because Jesus Christ didn't come into the world to gain huge crowds, Jesus came into the world to die on the cross, rejected by the crowds who would call out, crucify him, crucify him.

The first fundamental lesson that the disciples needed to learn in order to be fishermen is popularity is not the way. You're not being called to a success ministry but to a suffering, rejection because you, unlike the world, will be doing the will of your Father who is in heaven, doing those good works that will bring glory not to yourself but to him, living by the law and the prophets in such a way that you will be like salt, salty in its effect, like a light in the darkness, like a city that cannot be hidden. Blessed are you when all men speak evil of you for my name's sake, revile you and hate you for my name's sake. Blessed are you because then you'll be with the prophets of old.

And he concludes his sermon with the parable of the two houses, the wise man and the foolish man. The wise man heard the words, the foolish man heard the words, the wise man did the words, the foolish man didn't do the words.

And Jesus' teaching, it was not private, it was not secretive. You see there in chapter 7 verse 28, he wasn't alone with the disciples though he was speaking to them.

[47 : 25] The crowds around him were listening in to what was being said and they were astonished at what he said because look at verse 29, it's a dreadful little verse really, not as bad as 23 but it's a dreadful verse.

For he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes, not as their teachers. You see the disciples had Jesus as their scribe, as their teacher.

The crowds, for all Jesus' popularity, for all the distances they travelled, they didn't have Jesus as their scribe, as their teacher and so they weren't listening to his words.

Hearing them, yes. Astonished by them, yes. In order to go home like fools and ignore them, yes.

The disciples, they were the ones who had Jesus as their scribe and teacher.

And they were the ones who were to go home to be wise and to build their lives on the words of Jesus. Which meant they would be radically, dramatically, offensively, distinctive from the society around about them.

[48 : 42] Which meant they would follow the crucified one. Very sad that so few people these days in Scotland know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, isn't it?

And it's our responsibility to share with them that great gospel message. But we won't do it by doing wonder works and miracles and signs and wonders and having big crowds.

We'll do it by being awkwardly, unpleasantly different to the society around about us.

Not giving up on serving our Lord and Master. Not giving up on righteousness and morality and ethics. But obstinately standing firm in obedience to our Father in Heaven.

Blessed are you then. Blessed then. For the kingdom is ours. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for your Son.

[49 : 52] We thank you that he came into this world to save us by his death and suffering. To experience the full wrath of this world against you.

And experiencing your wrath against this world for us. We thank you for him, Father. And we pray that we may not be seduced into the schemes of the evil one.

Into thinking that we can bring your kingdom into this world in any other way than by obediently doing your will. Proclaiming your Son, our Saviour.

His death and resurrection. And living as changed people. Unpopular. But faithful. Bringing glory to you.

By the way we live. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.