

Matthew 5v1-12: The Greatest Sermon Ever

And so to the New Testament, the 'new' covenant of God's grace and love as predicted by 'Old' Testament prophet preachers like Jeremiah (31v31-34).

After four centuries without any confirmed divinely-inspired utterances or writings the time has come for God's promises to be fulfilled.

Charismatic preacher Jesus from Nazareth is announcing that people should 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near' (4v17), speaking with unusual authority demonstrated in jaw-dropping miracles of healing and deliverance.

Could He be the 'Christ', the long-awaited Saviour King?

Towns empty as large crowds follow Him into the hilly wilderness to hear more, and there Jesus lays out His manifesto to those He has called. However instead of a political or nationalistic speech they hear something much deeper and farther-reaching.

People who wouldn't regard themselves as religious will nevertheless recognise excerpts from this famous 'Sermon on the Mount', for so many popular values worldwide owe their origin to Jesus' teaching.

'Turn the other cheek.'

'Do not judge or you too will be judged.'

'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

'Love your enemies...'

'Do to others what you would have them do to you...'

All parts of this magnificent address, plus the Lord's Prayer, the 'parable' illustrations of salt and light and the wise and foolish builders and a moral standard even higher than the zealous Pharisees! It appears God assesses our private thoughts as much as outward words or actions!

At first glance it might sound like entrance requirements for would-be subjects – here is how your king wants you to be. But while Jesus urges us to strive to be perfect like God, anyone who thinks this is achievable in our own limited strength is naïve at best!

And so He Who would later offer His perfect life on Calvary as an offering to purchase forgiveness and salvation for sinful human beings begins His landmark sermon with *spiritual* principles known as the 'Beatitudes'.

The heavenly kingdom of God is indeed near for God has sent His king to offer generous grace and life to all. But rather than assuming we are worthy or attempting to somehow earn the king's welcome we must acknowledge we are spiritually poverty-stricken. We must mourn for our sin which separates us from God, humble ourselves and desire 'righteousness' - all that pleases God, demonstrating our sincerity by showing mercy and single-minded devotion, practising peace even in the face of misunderstanding and persecution.

Then we shall be *blessed* with a welcome in God's kingdom! We shall be comforted by the Lord, one day inherit the earth and be satisfied with seeing God and receiving His mercy, loved as His children always! Let people think, say and do what they like – our future is secure with God so we can rejoice whatever our present circumstances!

The New Testament is begun. The King has come. Let us pay careful heed to His words!