

Sermon on the Mount (1) (15.9.1983)

by Nigel Lee

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being different from the crowd, living a life of character and integrity, and experiencing the gospel in one's own life.

Duration: 52:52

Scripture: Matthew 4:17, Matthew 5:3 - 7:27

Topics: "Jesus Teaching"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the true gospel message. He encourages the audience to delve into the scriptures and allow God to work in their hearts. The sermon highlights the promises and blessings that come from accepting the gospel and following Christ. Repentance is emphasized as the starting point for experiencing the fullness of God's grace and becoming a beacon for others to be drawn into the kingdom. The preacher references Psalm 51 and David's plea for restoration and a transformed heart.

Transcript

Well, it's good to be here and to worship with you. I'm sure many of us are going to remember Colin's wows in prayer as he worships the Lord. You have a tremendous gift of saying wow to the Almighty, Colin.

I'm sure he'll never confuse you with a dog. It's good to hear someone who's expressive to the Lord. Can you turn, please, in your Bibles to the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew? Just put my watch somewhere where I can't see it.

Matthew, and the fifth chapter. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain. And when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain 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 they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you

falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. We'll end there. We're going to look during these next few days at some themes from these three chapters.

Matthew 5, 6 and 7. The Sermon on the Mount. It's a passage of scripture which surprisingly one doesn't often hear preachers taking up. And yet it's perhaps the core of what Christ wanted to say to his disciples at the beginning of their period of following him on earth.

First question. Who is this sermon really for? Well there's a distinction made right at the start in the first verse between the crowd and the disciples. Jesus saw the multitudes and went up into the mountain and when he'd sat down his disciples came unto him.

It's preached for disciples. Now that of course includes all of us. And not just a special elite.

Every one of us. Jesus has only disciples. If you turn over to the 7th chapter and verse 21 he says, Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.

But he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. I see it as a sermon preached for disciples and yet perhaps overheard by a crowd that would have been sitting round the outside edge. Because it says in the last verse of chapter 7 that when Jesus ended these words the multitudes, the crowd were astonished at his teaching.

For he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. But it is initially and primarily for disciples. You and me and the few that have been mentioned as already giving up their job, their priorities, their careers in order to follow Christ.

Only four have been mentioned so far. If you turn to verses 18 and 21 of the previous chapter, you see Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, and then later James and John, four fishermen, giving up their fishing business at least temporarily and following Christ. They had probably heard the teaching and the preaching of John the Baptist in the opening verses of chapter 3. John had come declaring the kingdom of God, saying, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.

The expectation of Messiah is about to be fulfilled. Are you going to get ready? They had been stirred by that. And now Christ comes preaching the same kingdom.

And so they are prepared to follow him. It is for you and for me. Often these chapters we take as rather hard to understand or demanding in their standards that they set.

Martin Lloyd-Jones has said that Jesus came and lived and died and rose again and sent the Holy Spirit in order that you and I might live the Sermon on the Mount. That is salvation. The salvation of our characters as well as our souls.

And every characteristic through the sermon is intended to mark every disciple of Christ. In other words we cannot set ourselves up as specialists. Specialists in peacemaking.

Specialists in being meek. But all these characteristics like the fruit of the Spirit are all to mark our lives. And finally in my little introductory remarks let me say that the constant theme running through these early verses is that you must be different from those around.

Noticeably, remarkably different from the crowd. Think of these revolutionary beatitudes that we have just been reading. Turning upside down the expectations of the world.

You are to be like salt, different from the food into which you are placed. You have a heavenly father he says. Tremendously emphatic.

You have a heavenly father. Verse 8 of chapter 6 speaking of the Gentiles, the general crowd of men. You must not be like them.

Your praying must be different. In chapter 7 verses 13 and 14 he speaks of the road that the majority take in life. It's easy, it's broad, it gradually slopes downhill to destruction.

But you go a different road. You must get used to treading a different road. In practically every area of life you are to be marked by being different.

And what other people do is not the standard for you. Now chapter 5 of these three chapters concerns who you are. Christ is a well organised preacher.

And he deals with things in the order in which we need to understand them. And so chapter 5 will focus on who you are as a man or woman of God. Your inner resources of character.

The quality of the person that you are. And then chapter 6 will go on to deal with what you should do. The marks of true spiritual life in a Christian.

The way he uses his time, the way he treats his body. His attitude to his material possessions and what he does with them. And then chapter 7 will set out the choices that are before us after hearing the message that has gone before in the previous two chapters.

He'll speak in chapter 7 of the two different kinds of road that you can walk. The two different kinds of fruit that you can bear in your life. The two different kinds of building that you are actually involved in building.

Now you have the choice. As a result of listening to all that he said. Then the choice is put before you at the end of chapter 7. Here right at the beginning we are to be concerned this morning with the kind of people that we are and those that we are becoming.

And everything follows from this in the Christian life. By their fruit, says chapter 7, you shall know them. It is a unique Christian truth.

Absolutely contrary to what we find in Hinduism or Islam. Christ looks at the heart. He evaluates the heart.

He's more concerned about your heart and your character growth than about anything that you may do in the coming year. For God, have you accepted it? It is the person that you are becoming that matters more than your evangelism. More than the miles that you may travel.

The Pharisees travel land and sea. Anxiously searching for one convert that they can make even more a child of hell than themselves. What is the problem? Their heart has never been touched.

Their character has never been moulded into the likeness of their creator. And so Christ is going to stress the heart. And this should be a heart-searching chapter in our own experience.

As we ponder these things through, as you take notes that you will look at during this coming year, there should be dealings within your own heart. God, I believe, will speak to us through this chapter and he'll put together what he's saying through this chapter with what we're hearing in other studies in the mornings, what God says to us in the prayer meetings, how God speaks to us through our fellowship groups. There should be heart-dealing during these days.

I think I still have at home somewhere in a box the notebook that I kept at my first September conference. In those days we used to have it in October. The September conference was in October in 1968.

And I was taking down all kinds of notes on messages, freezing of course, this is why we moved things forward into September. Writing with my shivering hands in some old building in London where we held the conference notes. And I remember going through them in India, pondering through the messages that people actually, some of them have now gone to glory.

They preached. Men who've left OM. Men who were just guests in OM for a short while.

And George and Dale and Greg Livingston and these men pouring out their hearts to us, me scribbling my little notes. It was so valuable in the coming months. God dealing with my own hearts as I reviewed what I'd written down.

I believe the power of God rests in an unusual way in this sermon. And God is going to deal with us at perhaps quite a deep level if we allow Him. Let me show you, I've mentioned this before this summer, something of the context of this word from the Lord.

What was it that attracted these disciples to come follow Christ and listen to Him? Let's turn back into chapter 4. In chapter 4 verse 17 we see the Lord coming and preaching. Beginning His message. He came from that time and began to preach and to say repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

God's kingdom. God's control. God's authority.

At a level deeper than people have known before. Then in verse 24 Christ heals three particular kinds of diseases. The report of Him went forth into all Syria and they brought unto Him those that were sick.

Holden with various diseases and torments. And then He mentions three. Christ healed those that were demon possessed.

Those that were epileptic. Those that were paralyzed. And Christ healed them.

Three different diseases. Now why are they picked out as Matthew tells the story? Those three diseases are all diseases of loss of control. Loss of control first of all in the spiritual area.

You become demon possessed. Loss of control in the mental area. The epileptic person has no control over their bodily functions at times of epileptic fit.

They never know when it's going to strike. The person who is paralyzed has lost control not at the spiritual or mental area but at the physical level. And Christ is quite simply demonstrating the authority of His word at every level of a person's existence.

And these ordinary fishermen from Galilee are watching this astonishing display of kingdom authority. Christ comes, preaches the gospel of the kingdom. He said to these disciples, you come follow me.

You listen to my teaching. You walk in my footsteps. You come live with me.

You watch me. You work with me. And I will make you fishers of men.

And then they saw His control. They saw the effect of His word of authority at each of these three different levels. Then the Lord is going to begin to talk to them about their problems, their hearts, their anger, their lust, their prayer lives.

And it is very heart searching for all of us. Because it is in fact at these levels that we get the problems. Most of you can adjust to eating food quite unlike that which you had at home.

Getting up at some unearthly hour of the morning. Doing a few jerks. Getting on with the day.

Sitting in regular meetings. Flowing along with OM. The OM pattern of life.

You can adjust. You've survived this far. But you know, so often it is in our hearts, our thought life, the quality of our character adjustment to the likeness of Jesus that we are so slow to learn.

And this sermon demonstrates right at the start that it is at that level that Jesus wants to deal with us. And these disciples are faced with this challenge. Leave your fishing.

You come follow me. If you will let me, I will make you into fishers of men. Have you met those characters in life who just seem to be astonishingly attractive as Christians? You want to go with them.

You want to listen to them. You like to travel with them. You like to draw on their experience.

And you watch them as they influence other people. What is it about them? Is it that they have allowed God to deal with them at this deeper level so that they are effortlessly fishing for men and women? Christ says you follow me, you let me deal with your heart and I will make you into a fisher of men. You won't have to learn all kinds of extra difficult techniques which you are constantly trying to remember in order to be effective.

I will turn you into someone who attracts others. Someone who draws other people, lands them into the kingdom, catches them. But first God must deal with our hearts.

That is why Christ begins by striking the note of repentance. Repent ye, he says, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, verse 17. You remember Psalm 51.

Psalm 51, verses 12 and 13. David says, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with a free spirit and then will I teach transgressors thy ways. And sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Oh God, he says, I want to be sorted out. My heart needs to sing to a different tune. I need to be made clean.

Then, automatically, the lives of other people will be touched simply because you have been able to deal with me. You find right at the end, in chapter 7, verses 28 and 29, a vast crowd have begun to gather. They have begun to listen to this teaching to Christ's disciples.

The disciples themselves are having an amazing visual aid of Christ as the master fisherman. They are listening to him and he is saying, I will make you a fisher of men. And as they look around, they see that it is automatically happening that he is fishing for men.

They are coming. They are drawn. We are introduced to the Jesus that we were worshipping in the tent last night.

At the beginning of Matthew's gospel, as the one who will save us from sin. The angel said in Matthew 1.21, Joseph, call his name Jesus. Call him nothing else but Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

He is Emmanuel, verse 23. God, here with us. The God who made the planet.

The God who threw the universe out into space. The God who created everything that there is. It is all his plan, his mind, we are his creatures.

And then he comes. As we were thinking last night, born as a little slimy, wriggly, blue baby, just starting the same way as we all do. He grows up, he walks, he rubs shoulders with men and women in their worship.

He sits with them in their little tea shops. He travels with them on their roads, he pays the same taxes as they do. He watches their lives and he comments, as he moves, on how they are getting on.

Particularly on how they are relating to God. And he has come in order to save you and me from sin. Not merely the guilt of sin.

Not just the fact that we had a broken relationship with God. So that his own body will eventually have to be broken. Not just that.

He comes that by his teaching and his example we might here in life be stopped from sinning. Christ's great goal in our life and it's not yet anything like complete in mine. The Apostle Paul had the same sense, I have not arrived, I am far from complete.

But God's purpose, God's goal is definitely and without mistake to move you towards being saved in your character. To stop you from sinning altogether. Not merely from the guilt of sin.

I wonder have you accepted that? It's so very easy, you know, sometimes just to cling on to bits and pieces of sin in our lives that we like. We nurture it. Because we think, well I am always going to be a failure in this life.

This same sermon will tell you that you are to be perfect even as your heavenly father is perfect. That's God's goal, that's the direction you are to be moving in, in your Christian life. And so the Lord as he gathers his disciples around him is going to begin by preaching the gospel to them.

The fullness of the Christian gospel, not simply four laws or five laws or however many laws you are using. But verse after verse of good news of salvation. The privileges and the blessings for the child of God that only God can give.

Listen to what is the Lord's sense of what the gospel is as he begins with these disciples. Do you want to come into the kingdom of God? Do you want to have a heart, a life that is filled with righteousness? Do you want to have the almost unbelievable joy of seeing God? Do you want to obtain mercy? Do you want to be called the child of God? Do you want reward? This is the gospel. The gospel is absolutely crammed full of God's riches in grace towards us.

And here in these verses we have eight promises. One after another from the father of grace and truth just showered out upon us. I believe if you want God's blessing in your evangelism, God's fulfillment in your team life, you need to come back to this particular sermon, these three chapters and devour it.

Read it, pray over it, verse by verse. Let God deal with your heart, paragraph by paragraph. God says, I will make you fishes of men.

But first, I want to bring you under control. If you're going to be going out and talking to people about God's kingdom, God's authority, turning from your wicked ways and placing yourself under the authority of the son of God, then God is first and foremost going to require that in you. It is a simple principle, but it very often happens.

I'm involved a good deal in Britain in evangelism, preaching the gospel among students mainly, some churches. How many times I have found it to be so that I come under particular attack and make a mess of things just before going out and preaching the gospel. Maybe a wrong relationship with my wife, maybe losing my temper with my children, maybe getting frustrated with something at home.

And I'm maybe then going to go away for a week or a ten day campaign. And the very last day before I go, I'm trying to throw a few clothes into a bag, trying to get a few notes together, ready to go, and there's something wrong. And I'm going to have to repent and get right with my own family maybe before I go.

It has happened time and time and time again. And I've gone through a stage where I blame my wife. Why does she allow Satan to use her in the 48 hours before I go off on a campaign? She always does.

She always does. She says sharp words, she gets angry with me, always in that 48 hours. Her fault.

Why do the kids become so wretchedly, just then? It's wrong. It's almost always my fault. And God is allowing it to happen for this very good reason.

That I'm going to have to humble myself and I'm going to have to say sorry to them and I'm going to have to break and maybe weep and ask forgiveness and pray with them. And I tell you it is a humbling thing to kneel down at night beside the bed of your four year old and say, Jonathan, I'm sorry for what I said earlier today. Will you forgive me? He normally breaks into tears at that point.

He crushes me up. Poor little lad. There am I, trying to get right with him before I go preach.

And he's weeping on the bed. Very sensitive little fella. And the other kids just throw their arms around him.

Daddy, it's alright. Or they get embarrassed. But I'm having to humble myself.

Why is that? So that as I go to preach a gospel that is the same challenge, it will come from a heart that's fresh. A heart that's recently come through the pain of breaking. Why does God put you in teams? So that you can have that experience on teams.

Oh, it is a wretched thing to go out and knock on people's doors and preach in the streets and actually you can hardly stand the person that's helping you on the team. And God will allow these frictions to come so that you can experience the gospel yourself as it bites a little deeper in your own life. God wants you to share a message of forgiveness and renewal and God's resurrection power to remake you from a heart that's experiencing it regularly yourself.

And so before these men are going to be made fishers of men, before they're going to go out and preach God's kingdom, God's authority, they're going to have to come under it. And so this message is going to bite them and that is part of God's salvation. The salvation of their life.

The salvation of their ministry. Not merely the rescue from a guilty conscience. Now you may say to me, but look, I've always found this particular sermon very puzzling.

Isn't it very legalistic? Isn't God saying, look, you've got to be merciful before you can get mercy? You've got to be meek before you will inherit the earth. There's absolutely no hope for you unless you are poor in spirit. But even in the Lord's prayer, you've got to forgive before you get forgiven.

Now I find that legalistic, you say to me. This is my problem with this sermon. It seems to set impossibly high standards.

And so because it doesn't fit in with my gospel of justification by faith, I sort of scoot round it. No. No.

Listen to the way the Lord begins. The very first words in verse 3. Gospel. Gospel of forgiveness.

Implicit in the opening words that the Lord has for us. The kingdom of God, in all its riches, is precisely for, and only for, those people who feel themselves when faced by these standards to be so poor, so unworthy, so empty, so dry, so full of failure. You've never been very much used in your Christian life.

You've never led anyone to Christ. You feel so uptight about your own spiritual condition. It seems that a day of prayer and fasting at a conference throws up in your mind and your being so many problems, so many distractions.

It's just almost as if yesterday we had the x-ray of our souls and today we've got the x-ray of our bodies. And if the x-ray of our bodies turns out as rotten as yesterday, oh, well, we probably won't be alive in a month. Look at the way, look at the way the Lord begins.

Do you feel that? You don't feel particularly overconfident about yourself and when you read through the sermon you feel worse? Blessed are those that are poor in spirit. Those that are broken. Those that are upset at their own condition.

The Lord is not talking about that state of mind when we feel we have sort of slightly inadequate perfection, you know, that we could have done better if we'd tried a little harder. It's deeper than that. Some of us live like that for a long, long time.

Perhaps it's built into our culture. We feel if only we'd tried a bit harder, then we'd have been perfect. Next year, Christ is talking here about people who are in utter despair of themselves.

Who feel they have no hope. They feel even when the topic, the Sermon on the Mount is announced, they feel, oh, no, oh, Lord, help me just to sit through these mornings because I've read it and it's impossibly high. That is the way the Lord begins for you.

Do you feel that? Do you feel a little bit down and depressed and discouraged at even the thought of the Sermon on the Mount being dragged out for three mornings or four? Blessed are the people who feel like that. The poor in spirit. Those are the ones that respond to the gospel of lives saved that the Lord has here in this chapter.

Turn just for a moment to Isaiah chapter 57. Isaiah 57 and verse 15. For thus says the High and Lofty One, this is the God that we're dealing with and that we're worshipping last night and whose voice we're hearing this morning.

The High and Lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy. I dwell in the High and Holy Place, but with Him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble. We can do no more than be honest with God this morning.

Honest with God about our yesterdays and our tomorrows. And the Lord comes from that High and Lofty Place to revive the spirit of the humble. To revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Perfect illustration of this here in Luke's gospel. Luke's gospel chapter 18. There's five verses between 10 and 14.

You remember the story of the two who went up to the temple to pray? The Pharisee. I thank thee Lord that I am not as other men. Certainly not that scruffy character over there.

I don't know how they even let him in. How did that chap get on our end? Unbelievable. Don't they have any screening around here? Ignorant fellow.

Even just sleeping with him in the dormitory is next to impossible. I haven't seen him open his Bible yet. I thank thee that I am not like that.

And the other guy who wouldn't even raise his eyes. He felt so dreadful. Oh God, he said, have mercy on me.

Because I'm as full of holes in my life as a string vest is. I'm hopeless. I'm finished.

Have mercy. That's all I've got left to say, oh God. I don't ask for anything except mercy.

Oh God, give me your mercy. The Lord told the parable. It took quicker to tell it probably than I've just done.

He said that man, the second man, he went to his home righteous. Declared righteous. He went with God's favour.

The other fellow, well he got his reward. He got his reward. What is the reward of the Pharisee? What is the reward of the person who puts on a tremendous show in a prayer meeting? Oh, you ought to listen to them.

You ought to watch them. Well, if you open your eyes. What is the reward? They have a tremendous reward.

The Lord talks about it in the next chapter. The reward of the public Pharisee. They have a fantastic reward, says the Lord.

Marvellous reward. They get every single person in the room to think how fantastic they are. That's it, that's what they get.

That's what they were after. That's what they get. And they go home and everybody thinks marvellous.

That's all they've got. The man who was willing to be broken. The man who trembled at the word of the Lord.

They were the people for whom the kingdom of heaven is. Those were the ones that responded to Christ during the time of his ministry. It was the tax collectors.

It was the prostitutes. It was the people whose lives were a miserable moral mess. It was those who must have felt in the presence of Christ an astonishing sense of unworthiness and yet of welcome.

And understanding. For you is the kingdom. For you is the free gift of the kingdom of God.

You don't have to do anything except come as you are. And just be yourself. And bow down.

And repent. Now this whole sermon with its breathtaking demands can be very depressing. And yet the Lord begins with pure gospel.

Come back to it again and again. He's not going to let you go even one page inch further into the gospel without letting you know that the people who feel depressed, the people who feel down and discouraged, for them is the kingdom. For them.

Blessed are those that mourn. Verse four. They shall be comforted.

Quite literally it says blessed are the unhappy. Or if you want to be absolutely literal to the Greek, happy are the unhappy. I don't think it's just talking about bereavement, mourning in the sense of losing a loved one.

But there is a sense of progression running through these verses from three to four to five and so on. Those that are anxious and concerned, serious minded about their own sin and weakness. Those that carry on their hearts a sense of burden at the way the world is.

You can easily become hardened. The television and the news magazines. To the suffering.

The heartache, the anxieties, the death, the starvation, the maim, the effect of disease, the unhappiness, the brokenness of families. Caused by sin. That same sin that lurks in your own heart.

That same selfishness and pride and coldness of heart towards other people. Blessed, says the Lord, are those that carry that sense of unhappiness with them. Because they shall be comforted.

Being a Christian isn't just a matter of going around with a nice big wide teasy grin and a sort of happy H-A-P-P-Y thing. As we were hearing about from my brother Ko last Bible study series. It's not that.

Christ talks about joy in the Christian life. But it's not just a kind of bubbly fizz as you would get momentarily on the top of a glass of Coca-Cola. Joy is a very deep thing but it's also matched and balanced with a sense of burden and concern.

For your own growth. And for the situation in the world around you. There is something I just want to pop in here and we must get quite clear this in our own minds.

You have a relationship with God your Father. You also have a fellowship with God your Father. And the two are quite distinct and are to be kept separate in your mind.

I mean think of the illustration of your human father for a moment. When you were born you got a father. For better or for worse.

For richer or for poorer. He was your dad. And you can't get.

He will always be your dad. He was physically, biologically responsible for your coming into this world. He is your father.

Nothing can alter that I'm afraid. His name goes on your birth certificate. He is your father.

That particular relationship with your father. There's nothing you can do about it. You may not like each other.

You may get very distant from each other. You may have times of closeness. But that is fixed.

He is your father. That is a historical fact. But you also have what I would term fellowship with your father.

As you sit around a meal table you can sometimes feel a little bit cross with him. Or he with you. You can have a certain distancing effect.

You can go home after a month in the summer crusade with O.M. And you can find that relationships are becoming more and more tense. I went through this a certain amount. My parents were not entirely happy with me joining O.M. when I first did.

They had other plans for their little son. And they thought, particularly they thought that dear brother George was an American hypnotist. Who with the power of his bony fingers and his mesmeric oratory would completely deceive gullible innocent naive young men like me and get them under his power and then before they snapped out of the trance he would put them in the back of a truck and tell the driver to go to India.

And my parents had a particular feeling of suspicion concerning people from the other side of the Atlantic. And I don't know why it is but it does seem that the American accent is a much more transferable accent. It's much more sticky.

It sticks on to people than the British. You ought to hear my kids at a conference like this. They start talking pure New Jersey.

And the amazing thing was I would come home from the conferences somehow sounding a bit like an American. Now, I didn't notice. Parents certainly did.

And I confess they didn't like it very much, you know. They thought they brought me up to be English. And so fellowship went through little strains.

Now the relationship with my father was in no way affected by that. But the fellowship perhaps did go through times of strain with mother, with father. The same it is with God.

When you became a Christian, God became your father. That is a relationship that has a historical origin. God is your father.

You have no other heavenly father. He is your father. And yet your fellowship with him, that is something that you have to work at.

That is not one of those unalterable things. That you have to work at. That takes time.

And you know, although you may feel grieved sometimes at yourself, you may mourn at your slowness to progress. Because Christians grow at different rates. You may feel sometimes terribly grieved and frustrated with yourself.

Your absolute relationship with your father does not change. And those that mourn over their own slowness to progress, the Lord himself says they shall be comforted. And it is the comfort that comes from God and God draws alongside those kind of folk.

Christians will always grow at different rates. It is like the difference between a cat and a tortoise if you pour boiling water on them. I mean, you can pour boiling water on the tortoise and he may try to go as fast as he can.

This comes out well on the tape, doesn't it? You pour boiling water on a cat. Tremendous speed. Now, you see Christians, they get converted.

I have seen a few cats take off. There was one chap I remember at a university down in South Wales. He became a Christian, I think, on Tuesday.

He had read the entire New Testament by the Friday. He led two other people to Christ by the following Wednesday. He was making faster progress than half the executive committee of the Christian Union.

And yet there are other people that are still in the tortoise stage and it doesn't matter. You're never going to get a tortoise to go as fast as a cat. It's them.

They're moving forward. And we needn't be expecting everyone to grow at the same rate. All of us need to have a heart that's open and honest before God and concerned about ourselves and about the world and yet resting in the absolutely secure relationship that we have with Him.

Blessed are the meek, says the Lord in verse 5. They shall inherit the earth. The meek. You know, it's easy, isn't it, to be honest before God.

To confess sin before God. But what happens when someone else points out that same thing? Supposing you go before the Lord and you say, Oh God, you know, I've got such a long tongue, it dangles out my mouth and wraps around my ankles and trips me up sometimes. I cause problems with my tongue.

This is the strongest muscle in your body, you know. This can cause more damage than anything else. It's not your great biceps or your legs that are strong.

This. I've sometimes said it in the past. It's often struck me as interesting that ladies will have in the high streets of our towns little shops, you know, where you can get your ears pierced.

They'll put dangly earrings in your ears. I think Christians ought to have special shops where they get their lips pierced. And we ought to have padlock in our pocket, you know.

And the moment we feel the wrath and the anger or the unhelpful remarks, welling up, and we go before God and we say, Oh God, my tongue, I've damaged someone again. Forgive me. One of those private moments alone with God that only you know about.

And then the next day someone comes to you and says, You know, your biggest problem is your tongue. I know a few things about you as well. We will allow God to know the secrets of our heart.

But the meek person is prepared to come under conviction that is channeled not directly from the Heavenly Father but through one or two brothers or sisters. You know, we read in James 1.21 about being receptive to the Word. Be doers of the Word, not just hearers only.

And so often as you sit in meetings during your time with OM, you are imagining who the Word is meant for. Oh, what a wonderful word for the person sitting next to me. Oh, I just wish that the other members of my discussion group were hearing this.

Oh, it would do them good. This is the word that Peter Maiden needs to hear. And you're sitting there imagining the X's and Z's going and nothing hits you.

And you come out thinking, Boy, that was a good message. I hope they felt it. And you're untouched.

The meek person is a person who sits and hears the Word of God and it's for them. They're meek. They're open to instruction and correction.

Gentle and approachable. The Lord Himself says, I am meek and lowly of heart. You come and find rest for your souls.

It's not the same as weakness. Christ was the strongest man that ever walked the face of this earth. The most sinless, the most courageous, the most determined.

You can't go very long without wanting a drink. And that will begin to drive and motivate you. It will cut across other things that you may have planned.

Hunger will dominate your thinking if you go along being hungry. Hungry and thirsty, says the Lord, for righteousness. And we need to beware of that which destroys appetite.

If you turn over to 1 Peter, 1 Peter chapter 2, the Lord has been speaking of the Scriptures, the incorruptible seed of the Word of God. And then He speaks of five things, I'll just touch on this briefly, that can so easily destroy your appetite, your spiritual hunger, wickedness, guile, that's deceptiveness, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking. Those five things, if they take root in your life, they will destroy your hunger as newborn babes for that spiritual milk, that food for your soul, which is without guile, without hypocrisy, that you may grow thereby unto salvation.

Watch out for anything, anything at all, that destroys your desire to be in a family, your desire to be under the sound of God's Word opened up and expounded for you. Anything that will take you from that, watch it. Does it derive from hypocrisy, or envy, or laziness? And then He goes on in verse 7, blessed are those that are merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Mercy, in the Bible, is responding to those who need help. It's the story of the Good Samaritan. And to truly experience God's mercy, for yourself, in that illustration I was using earlier, of the experiences that God allows into your life just before maybe going out into vandalism.

To experience God's forgiveness is to be enabled to show it. My time is gone, blessed are the pure in heart. They will see God.

Sin, allowed to fester, isn't some trivial thing. It isn't some minor irritant, of course you're safe, you just have a problem with sin, in your heart, so that it leaves your heart clean. Not clean, filthy.

Sin isn't like that. Sin will prevent you from seeing God. Seeing Him at work.

Sensing His presence. Hearing His voice. Sin will affect that like a corrosive acid in the soul.

Blessed are those that have a pure heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are those that are peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. We know in Scripture that we cannot have peace with all men.

Romans 12.18 says, be as far as possible at peace with all men, because the Lord also talks about Him coming to bring a sword, to bring division in families. We know that we are going to sometimes have to stand up against governments and rulers, we're going to have to stand up against the forces of vested interest and pressure in our own society. We cannot have peace with all men, but as far as possible, be a peacemaker.

There are many things that produce faction and disunity and division in our teams. Spot them. Draw boundary lines on them.

Become a peacemaker. Try and get people to understand one another. Try not to behave in a way that's going to cause criticism, cause upset, the stubbornness of our own hearts, our own double dealing.

Be a peacemaker. And then finally our reaction to persecution. Persecution and difficulty are guaranteed for the Christian.

Philippians 1.29 says that it is given unto you, those of you who believe, not only to believe, but to suffer for his sake. They cannot kick Christ any longer in this world. They cannot jeer and mock.

They cannot spit at Christ. They cannot slam doors in his face. They cannot any longer ask him to leave their villages.

They cannot throw rocks at Christ any more. They cannot imprison him. They cannot beat him until the blood runs down his back.

And so they will do the next best thing. All those things against you. And so some of you during this coming year will be spat at.

What a glory. What a glory to have someone else's spittle running down your face. That may well happen to you in some areas if you go out to the east.

Many of you if you go door to door will have people to slam the doors in your face. Many of you will experience loneliness and rejection, persecution. And it's really not your fault.

They're not really angry against you. Just rest in that. It is the Christ in you that they don't want that they have already shut the door of their heart to.

What a joy to partake of the sufferings of Christ. Parts of Eastern Europe. Parts of Western Europe for that matter.

Parts of Ireland I was visiting there only last weekend. Been some tremendous troubles for the believers in parts of Southern Ireland. They've been written against in the newspapers by the bishops.

They've been preached against in church after church. There have been pastoral letters read out against these little groups of humble believers in some small churches just beginning in the west of Ireland. We've got more people sitting in the front row of the meeting here this morning than in the little churches.

They're untaught. They're unskilled in dealing with this kind of bad publicity. But the stiff breezes are blowing against them and the Lord says blessed are you.

It's a blessing. It comes from family likeness to Christ. It is in fact one of the greatest privileges of the Christian life to be persecuted.

It puts you right in line of the prophets the servants of God. If those kind of things come blessed are you. It's something to be welcomed.

Rejoice therefore when things go difficult like that. And so suddenly without more ado I'm going to end. Put my other notes away.

I've gone with E-type Jaguar speed through these last verses. But let's pray. And I hope to God that if you've been taking notes that God will bring you back to them during the months and the years ahead.

The memory of some of these things as God is forming your character. OM years often go through some interesting but quite predictable stages. People go out perhaps high from the conference.

They keep going up till Christmas. No problem. I come and see you in January.

February. March. Some of you are cold.

Miserable. Discouraged. You're having battles over your financial support.

Your favorite prayer partner has not been writing to you. Things are getting tough. The same work day in and day out.

February is the blue month. Go back to these verses in those months. And just embrace the cross.

Welcome what God is doing in your life. As he's forming you into his family likeness so that all of us individually and together this year's crowd going through OM become increasingly like who? Who do you want to be like? Who is the one person you want to imitate? Whose life do you want to show up? Who do you want to be like when you touch other people? Who do you want people to say, well he was like that one. Jesus.

Jesus. And God sees the kind of rough edges that need to be scraped off. God sees the new things that need to be brought into your character.

May we just long for this deep character change that we might be made more effective as fishers of men and women in the days ahead. Father, you've heard all that we've said and you know the hearts of each of us. Sometimes in these meetings we get tremendous desires to change.

We get convicted about our sin or our weakness. We make little resolutions in our heart that we're going to have a day of prayer and fasting every month. That we're going to be more into your word.

Lord, we thank you for these ways in which you speak to us. Thank you for everything that you've said this morning. Lord, now we need help.

Lord, in ourselves there's no strength. We don't even discern the right way ahead sometimes. Lord, we're grieved at our own weakness.

Every one of us. Lord, come alongside as you promised. Thank you for your kingdom.

Thank you for the assurance that you are doing a saving work. That what you have begun you will surely finish in us. And that you will one day present us faultless before the throne.

Oh God, thank you. May these verses begin to dig deep into our characters to make us like yourself. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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