

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

Week beginning Sunday 2 February 2020 Kingdom values

Pray Thank God that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of believers (in in congregations) to shape us according to the pattern of Jesus and to build the kingdom of God through values and qualities that characterised our Lord. Pray for an openness to cooperate with the Spirit so that though we are works in progress signs of kingdom values might shine through.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Matthew 5:1-12.

Background Jesus could never be described as a rules and regulations person. His approach was much more person-centred and that sometimes placed him at odds with the religious authorities who were apt to hold firmly to the letter of the law. While never being an “anything goes” person, love and concern for individuals and in particular the love God has for people, for everyone, including those who were marginalised was at the heart of his thinking. It is important that the beatitudes are seen as values rather than rules and are seen as signs of God’s blessing rather than attainments which need to be earned by human effort.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. The Good News version uses Happy are those..., older versions Blessed are those... Most people appreciate that the “happiness” referred to in the list of beatitudes is rather deeper than our normal feelings of pleasure we experience when things go well or we’ve had a good day. How do you understand the “happiness” in Matthew 5? In what ways might it be a) similar b) different to everyday happiness?
2. The reasons for happiness or blessedness in this passage contain some rather unusual statements. Society might think folk who are well off as being “blessed” whereas here it is the poor/poor in spirit who are blessed. Pick out a couple of the beatitudes and ask yourself how “happy” you are with a) society’s norms for them b) the Bible’s norms. How do we come to terms with the differences?
3. Rules and regulations. We don’t like them. We may feel hard done by sometimes if we fall foul of them but in many ways people can be more at ease with them than a more open approach. “At least you know where we stand” is often the response. Perhaps for that reason many people take the beatitudes as though they were rules – and then give up because they can’t keep them. How might we think differently if we grasped that these are not rules but values of the kingdom or reign of God? Traits and qualities which are in keeping with his plans?
4. It’s important that we don’t run ourselves into the ground attempting to emulate these values by our efforts. How might our attitudes and our actions in regard to the beatitudes differ if we saw them as gifts of blessing from God rather than hurdles we had to overcome by our own efforts?
5. These kingdom values give further examples of how God’s way of thinking is often counter to normally accepted practice. How comfortable are you with God’s “topsy turvy” thinking? If God’s values are the “norm” how do you feel when we are so out of step with them? How do we go about getting ourselves right side up?
6. To what extent are we more concerned about not looking odd or out of place in society rather than seeking to align ourselves with God’s values? How do we maintain the overarching principle that our salvation is God’s free gift to us in Jesus (rather than our doing) without ignoring or devaluing the importance of God’s values laid out in the beatitudes?
7. Do have a think about anything else that might have prompted a thought on Sunday.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your care and concern for us, for your readiness to share your values and blessing with us. Help us to seek to align ourselves with them but to look to you to facilitate them while not being overly concerned what others might think. Amen.