

## **The kingdom of God – getting to the root!**

Factoids! A regular feature on Steve Wright's show on Radio 2.

Here is a factoid for us.

In 1976, a Los Angeles secretary formally married her 50-pound pet rock.

Saudi diplomats have 367 unpaid parking fines in Britain.

There are 336 dimples on a regulation golf ball.

"Dreamt" is the only English word that ends in the letters "mt".

Out of 62 countries where crime is registered do you know where the UK ranks relative to its population?

Any guesses?

6<sup>th</sup>. A chart in which the US is 9<sup>th</sup> and Poland (where I was mugged twice) comes 15<sup>th</sup>!

I don't know about you but either we are just hearing about more crime on the news or there is actually more in the way of crime.

Why is that? People will point to all manner of things – poverty, education, failures in local and government policy, broken homes, poor parenting skills and so on. I am sure we all have opinions as to they it might be. But ranked amongst root reasons in the bibles worldviews also the sinfulness of the human heart and the fruit it produces – hate, greed, jealousy, lusts, selfish ambition and so on listed in Galatians 5.

As you can see from the headings we are looking at topics like murder, adultery and divorce! A cheery line up. But with the backdrop of statistics about national UK life I think they are actually quite important. It seems we need to hear these basic values being re-articulated in this generation. Actually, never mind what I think – actually Jesus sees them as important enough to talk about. What I want to do this morning is let Matthew draw us back in time. Back to that mountainside. Gathered with many hundreds of people from the time but joined by many thousands over time who also have sat and listened to this teaching – seeking to follow Jesus in their time and context.

We are back up near the front. Sitting beside us is Mr Joshua Levi a resident of Jerusalem in Jesus day. He doesn't know it but his ancestors are going to be world famous jeans manufacturers one day. Beside him is Mrs Ingrid MacDonald who is listening to the words of being preached down the road in

Auchtermuchty. We are going to be able to listen in to their thoughts as they hear what Jesus is saying.

Just as a reminder Jesus has been talking about being salt and light and a bit about how his teaching fits with the Old Testament. That he has fulfilled the law and now shows how we can live it out in the way it was meant to be lived. Not so we can earn our way to heaven but so we can be more like him – holy and as he says in vs 48 perfect! In essence Jesus is fleshing out what it means to be salt and light in a number of different areas.

Back on the mountainside Joshua is tucking into some fresh bread and Ingrid has just been handed a pandrop! Jesus says

“you have heard it said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders is subject to judgement.’ Both Joshua and Ingrid have the same thought – yes that is from the 10 commandments. Good start. Bit of a relief for both of them because sometimes they are not entirely sure they understand everything Jesus says but get the gist! Anyway neither of them had ever murdered and weren't planning to either so they began to switch off.

But Jesus continues, ‘But I tell’. Oh ho, they both think zoning back in. What is coming here?

‘But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement’.

## **Anger**

Joshua takes a wee intake of breath there but stops himself before anyone notices because he knows he has quite a temper on him. As a young lad he worked in the palace kitchens where if you didn't get everything just right pots, pans and all manner of expletives were thrown at you. And you get like the folks you work with so he learned just to flare up right back.

Ingrid remembers an occasion when Jesus was angry at money changers so is he being a hypocrite?

The Holy Spirit reminds her that there is of course a righteous divine anger to be expressed against injustice isn't there? But Jesus here is talking about anger against another person. That we so readily jump to that kind of anger when somebody cuts in on us at a roundabout but remain unmoved by the plight of the oppressed and mistreated.

Ingrid then thinks of anger she had seen in the past couple of days - youths angrily shouting at each other on the station platform hurt in their eyes, here own anger at her kids more because she was tired than they were bad and their following her example later that day and being angry with each other, an

elderly gentleman shouting at his neighbour because her children had accidentally kicked their ball in his garden. Wouldn't it be a different place if anger was a less well visited reaction? Her psychologist friend once told her - there is always a reason for a reaction - it might be pain in another area of life unrelated to the present over reaction. Fighting fire with fire only creates a furnace.

Jesus words break her train of thought.

"Again, anyone, who says to his brother, 'Raca', is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'you fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell (Gehenna)."

Joshua once knew of a guy who was up before the Sanhedrin, the religious authorities, for using that word of contempt when he fell out with his cousin over some property deal done in the market.

But what did he mean, the fires of Gehenna? Wasn't Gehenna the city rubbish dump where they burned everything. They say the fire never goes out there!

He turns to his friend Zacchaeus and asks him what he thought Jesus meant.

Zacchaeus told him he thought that Jesus was telling them to be careful how you speak and act because such actions were usually completely unjustified and

thoroughly sinful leading us to deface another person needlessly, who in the end was God's creation, and lead us away from kingdom living into the life of one lost to God forever. That we should be more concerned about divine judgement at the end of time when we shall have to account to God for all our actions.

**Jesus continued** <sup>23</sup> "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. <sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your enemy before it is too late and you are dragged into court, handed over to an officer, and thrown in jail. <sup>26</sup> I assure you that you won't be free again until you have paid the last penny.

With a moment of unusual clarity Ingrid Macdonald realised that Jesus was saying what is the point of coming to God to worship and seek to live as salt and light when the light of Christ is not shining into your own life and relationships. You have offended someone or they feel offended and you have not done your bit to make amends. I suppose it is sometimes easier to come to church or run a church coffee morning than it is to resolve a relational conflict, she thought.

But what about you? As we listen to Jesus what are our thoughts? Maybe you have questions about whether taking life in a war is murder. Good question

and one to be answered at another time. But is this an area where the light of Christ is dimmed in your life because of anger – neighbours, family, work, church! Jesus is saying if we want to be salt and light we need to change.

Ingrid realised that she needed to meet with her brother. They had pretty much fallen out last Christmas over who was going to host the family get together. Time to make that right she thought.

As Jesus continued Joshua realised for himself that what Jesus was talking about was more than just dogged adherence to a cold law but a radical heart obedience to God and his ways.

Jesus words interrupted his thought and he listened all the more intently.

He continued "You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Vs 27-28

## **Lust**

What Jesus is focussing on here is not so much temptation which can be easily extinguished nor the God given natural admiration of the opposite sex which is necessary for attraction but rather lust – that prolonged and involved dwelling.

Back on the hillside there are some red faces, a lot of looking to the ground and thoughts like, my goodness this teaching is hard but by the end of their time they will look back and be amazed 7:28.

Ingrid thinks about her own society in which sex sells anything from mouthwash to cars. Where the sexual liberation rather than offering freedom and healthy expression of sexuality has been like opening pandora's box and we have become impoverished and enslaved to and by it and sexual health is at an all time low. The widespread availability of porn degrading women all over the world. On the internet alone there are 80 000 000 porn sites allowing all manner of perversions to be expressed. All feeding out lust.

She thinks on her church and wonders when the last time she heard a sermon on lust! Her denomination seemed to think biblical values of chastity before marriage and fidelity in marriage were quaint and for a bygone and less sophisticated era! Repressive even! Those very values had not done any harm she thought.

Joshua worked in all male company. Lust was practically seen as a virtue a key component of the male identity amongst his work colleagues. He wondered what they would say if they heard this. Would they question Jesus sexuality? Probably. If he was serious about following Jesus teaching what was

he going to do next time the conversation went in that direction? Excuse himself? Change the topic? Remain silent? Question the value of it? Tell them what he heard Jesus say and ask them what they thought? Maybe add in that he thought there was some sense in it? Mmmh something to look forward to!

Jesus continued to about gouging out eyes and before Joshua could ask his friends Zacchaeus he turned to him and explained that Jesus was using exaggerated language to make the point. That what was required was radical action sometimes like Joseph who ran away from Potiphar's wife!

Ingrid heard it and thought of some of the trashy novels she sometimes reads, another man along the row thought of stuff he sometimes watches later on at night on the tv. All of them realising things had to change. Either Jesus way or another way.

What about us? If our conversations are to be seasoned with salt and light does that mean we need to think twice about how what we talk about when we talk about the opposite sex? What are we reading and watching that is feeding the kind of lust Jesus is talking about in our minds? What changes are we going to have to make?

Jesus penetrating teaching continued, following naturally on from adultery...

**Matthew 5:31-32** <sup>31</sup> "You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a letter of divorce.' <sup>32</sup> But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

## Marriage

They were all a bit shocked by this one and so quite a bit of chattering ensued. Zacchaeus thought Jesus was pointing out that asking for ground for divorce was the wrong question but rather understand that marriage should be seen as for life and so more should be made of trying to reconcile than divorce. So it was more about an affirmation of lifelong marriage than a statement about divorce.

Ingrid immediately thought of several complicated situations. What if a husband or wife is abusive? What if divorce took place before someone was a Christian does that make a difference? Is divorce compulsory after adultery could there not still be reconciliation?

She was aware that there was more material on this in the bible which answered these questions but she appreciated the point Jesus because she lived in a culture of quick divorces and someone somewhere should be asking more fundamental questions about what marriage is for.

She then remembered reading something CS Lewis wrote about there being two forms of marriage – a state one and a Christian one based on their different value systems. She had also heard her minister once say that marriage and love were for the tough minded because it took work to make a good and lasting marriage.

For some folks here this passage might create confusion in your mind. If you would value talking about it with me please do so. For single folks or widowed it might seem irrelevant but I would encourage you to pray for the marriages of the folks here. That they would be strong, healthy and honest. For those of us who are married it is an encouragement to see marriage as a good thing and a God thing. He invented it. It is a gift to us. Your partner is a gift to you. Appreciate him or her. There is more material in the library to read on this. 60 minute marriage. It takes around a hour to read! I should be preaching three sermons on this passage alone but we will run or advertise courses that look more in depth at marriage in the future please look out for them.