

Reading: Matthew 7:24-27

1. Over the last few months, we have been looking together at Jesus' words as written in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. Share with each other what has struck you about this series.
2. Read Matthew 7:24-27, how does this parable connect with Richard's blunt phrase, that this whole sermon series may have been "a waste of time"? What must we do so that it is not a waste of time?
3. Jesus' invitation to those who heard him was not "become a Christian" but rather, "come, follow me". What do you think is the difference between these two invitations?
  - a. Does it surprise you that "Christian" appears 3 times in the New Testament whereas "Disciple" appears 269 times?
4. This is what it looks like to follow Jesus, "Be with Jesus, and therefore become like Jesus, and therefore do as Jesus did." It is not just about "being a Christian" but about choosing to follow where Jesus goes. Richard said that Psalm 142:8 encapsulates this idea well. Have a look at this verse and discuss how it relates to what it looks like to be a disciple.
  - a. "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go."
5. How would you describe The Gospel / The Good News? What would you include? Do we sometimes reduce it to "the 4-steps to eternal life" – I am sinful; God loves me; Jesus died bringing me forgiveness; If I trust in him, I can go to heaven when I die.
  - a. What do you think of the Good News being about "right now" as well as "eternal life"?
6. Being a disciple requires us to make a choice, to act upon the words of Jesus, or not; To build our life on the rock, or to build it on sand; to follow the Way of Jesus, or to follow the way of something else. What other ways are we susceptible to follow?
  - a. the way of money, the way of power, the way of indifference, the way of the world, the way of status, the way of self, the way of pleasure, the way of...
7. If we do not actively choose The Way of Jesus, we passively, by default choose not to. Read Matthew 7:13-14. How does this passage and the imagery Richard used of a wide motorway with a narrow slip-road connect with the choice we have?
8. By choosing to follow Jesus, the first disciples chose to be in the presence of God and therefore, inevitably, they were formed by God. What do we allow ourselves to be formed by? Have a look at the following questions as a useful way of identifying what we are choosing to be in the presence of:
  - a. Where does your mind go when it is not occupied by the tasks of the day?
  - b. What is your emotional home? What "feeling" do your emotions return to?
  - c. What do we do when we have free time?
  - d. What do we spend our money on when we've paid for the necessities?
9. How might we be able to change our practices to spend more time in the presence of God?
10. Richard said, "in many ways, the only role we play is in the choice, "who or what to follow". After that, if we have chosen the narrow path, it is God who takes over the hard work of forming.
  - a. What is our role in the transformation of our lives?
  - b. What is the role of the Holy Spirit?
  - c. How do these work together?
  - d. How does this link with what Saint Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century described as, "Without God, we cannot; Without us, God will not"
11. Pray together

#8. Retaliation vs Reconciliation (10/11/24)

Reading: Matthew 5:38-42

1. In Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus challenges the idea of "an eye for an eye." What do you think Jesus means when He tells us to "turn the other cheek"? How does this teaching differ from the common attitudes of His time—and perhaps even our own?
2. Jesus instructs us not to resist an evil person but instead to go the extra mile. How might this teaching have sounded to His original audience, who lived under Roman rule? How does it sound to us today?
3. Jesus mentions giving to those who ask and not turning away from those who want to borrow. What does this teach us about generosity and compassion?
4. On Remembrance Sunday, we honour those who sacrificed their lives in wars for the sake of peace and freedom. How can we reconcile Jesus' teaching on non-retaliation with the need to sometimes confront evil, such as in times of war?
5. How can Jesus' call to "go the extra mile" and to respond with love rather than vengeance shape the way we remember those who served in war? What lessons can we draw about sacrifice, courage, and reconciliation?
6. How might we apply Jesus' teachings on forgiveness and turning the other cheek in our remembrance of past conflicts? What role does forgiveness play in healing and peace between nations?
7. Are there situations in your own life where you find it difficult to follow Jesus' teaching of turning the other cheek? How might this passage encourage you to respond differently?
8. Jesus calls His followers to a radical standard of love and grace, even in the face of wrongdoing. How might embracing this teaching impact our approach to modern conflicts, both personal and global?
9. As Christians, how can we be peacemakers in our families, communities and in the world? What actions can we take in remembrance and honour of those who have sacrificed, while still striving to live out Jesus' command to love and forgive?

Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

1. Our series is entitled Transformed by Jesus' words. Is that what we want and are our hearts ready for it? What would be the effect on us as individuals and as a Church if this was our daily reality?
2. How do you instinctively react when you read "love your enemies" and "be perfect"? Is it realistic?
3. William in his talk said that to love our enemies:
  - a) We need to know ourselves. Do you know yourself? What does it mean to know yourself?
  - b) Do you know in your hearts that Jesus loves you? You may like to read Mark 10.21 (but please read the passage in context.) Perhaps take time to allow this truth to sink into your hearts. Remember that if you look in the mirror and do not like what you see, Jesus is looking back at you and loving you. Pray that through.
  - c) Who are your "enemies"? The people we avoid...who avoid us...who we don't or won't interact with...Share thoughts on this. Are you fearful or wary of such people? How can we overcome such "fear"? William gave an illustration from the Invictus Games. Do you find that helpful?
  - d) What steps will you take to "love" those who you have perhaps shunned or who have shunned you? Within the realms of confidentiality, be practical what might this mean?
  - e) How would this impact or transform our individual relationships and how could this change or transform church life?
4. The call to perfection is a high one! Whilst the verse should not be taken out of the context of loving your enemies, it can perhaps also be seen in a wider perspective. What is this perfection and how is it achieved? Our work or the work of the Holy Spirit?
5. William's talk finished with the picture by Paige Payne (shared below). Share your thoughts within the group.
  - a) For yourself...broken hearted...healed...restored...hugged by Jesus...by others within the Church...more beautiful through restoration.
  - b) For the others (the "enemies")...see their restoration
  - c) For your role in such restoration...to hug them in Jesus' name
  - d) For the Church...hugged by Jesus...united...not "me and the others" but "we"
  - e) For the Church to organically build on relationships with those not yet in the Church leading to Church growth

Please take time to pray for one another



Reading: Matthew 6:19-24

### Openers

1. What determines our wealth? Are there different kinds of wealth?
2. What are your initial thoughts about the benefits / advantages of wealth?

In the reading, Jesus uses three separate images each consisting of a pair of items. We are going to examine them in turn.

### Two treasures

Read Matthew 6:19-21

1. What might it look like to store up / accumulate treasures on earth?
  - a. What would you say is the difference between having enough and accumulating?
2. What reasons can you think of which lead us to store up treasures on earth?
3. What are some of the reasons why earthly treasures are unreliable?
4. How do treasures in heaven relate to our heart-attitude?
  - a. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"
5. What are the differences between treasures on earth and treasures in heaven?
6. How might we invest in our relationship with God to accumulate our knowledge and love of God?

### Two eyes

Read Matthew 6:22-23

1. If we were to have a spiritual eye-test, what would be the diagnosis?
  - a. Would our eyes be healthy (generous / undivided loyalty to God)?
  - b. Would our eyes be unhealthy (clouded with jealousy and greed)?
  - c. Likely, a little of both perhaps?
2. What do we need to be wary of? What are our personal temptations, our preoccupations, that draw our eyes away from God?

### Two Masters

Read Matthew 6:24

1. The language of love and hate is less to do with emotions and more to do with our pattern of life – the things we allow to direct us – our master. What are the things that we let direct our path, our decisions, our way of life?
2. Jesus' call to discipleship is not a little add-on, a supplement, which can run alongside our other masters – it is a call to undivided loyalty, of radical commitment to Him. How does this calling make you feel? What are the challenges, what are the benefits?
3. Is there an area of life where God might be asking you to take an earthly treasure, that has been accumulating and taking up space in your heart, and put it to work for God's kingdom instead?

### Prayer

Pray together for the wealth of treasures in heaven. For our eyes to be healthy and generous and to be focused on our relationship with God so that our hearts begin, once again, to store up treasures which cannot be consumed or rust, treasures of eternal worth, so that we become wealthier than we ever were before.

Reading: Matthew 7:1-5

1. Recalling Keith's talk what judgements are OK and what are not OK as a followers of Jesus? (It is acceptable to consider and decide, evaluate and discern, make a legal case. It is not acceptable to pronounce judgement or to condemn.)
  - a. Can you give examples from everyday life of acceptable judgement-calls?
  - b. Can you give examples from the Bible of when acceptable judgements have been made?
  - c. Have you ever felt condemn by someone? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
2. Keith listed inappropriate judgements as pre-judging; allowing bias, prejudice, favouritism, to impact your judgement; judging harshly; judging without understanding, knowing the facts, thinking; judging without empathy, grace, mercy and love; judging without first judging yourself; and condemning.
  - a. Discuss each of these forms of inappropriate types of judgement individually. How might they appear in everyday life.
  - b. In an age of 'trial by internet' which are we culturally most susceptible to?
  - c. Which are you most susceptible to?
3. In his talk Keith focussed in on pre-judging/prejudice, and listed humanity's ways of being prejudiced usually along lines of gender, ethnicity, religion, ability or disability, colour, sexuality, accent, tribe, politics, education, income, and age.
  - a. What prejudices are missing from the list?
  - b. What has been your experience of prejudice?
  - c. In our modern culture what prejudices do you think are on the increase?
  - d. Do you feel that social media has an impact upon our prejudicial behaviours?
4. When Jesus talks about the 'plank in your own eye' before removing the 'speck' in the eye of a brother or sister he is using hyperbole to make his point. How do you understand the point he is making?
5. As humans we are complex and a bit messed up. Some of us tend toward being overly judgmental, some of us tend to avoid being appropriately discerning, and some of us are a bit of both - being overly judgmental towards some people whilst also lacking wise cautious judgment towards others.
  - a. Which of these 3 do you more likely tend toward? And how is this expressed?
  - b. What do you, with the help of God and others (in your CG), need to do to achieve a better balance between ?
6. Discuss the following. Consider how they may have been a part of your life and the lives of those around you?
  - a. Those who (repeatedly) feel judged and condemned are likely to harshly judge and condemn others. (What is needed to break this cycle?)
  - b. Those who haven't appropriately evaluated their own wrongs, can often project their own wrongs on to others and judge them harshly. (What is needed to break this pattern of behaviour?)
7. Reading John 8:2-11.
  - a. How does the woman feel as she is brought to the crowd and Jesus?
  - b. How does she feel after Jesus has spoken to her once everyone else has left?
  - c. What does this account tell us about the judgement of men?
  - d. What does this account tell us about the judgement of God?

*These final questions, taken from the end of Keith's talk, may be best for private reflection and prayer*

8. Some of you need to evaluate yourselves appropriately, rather than judge yourselves inappropriately and condemn yourselves. Some of you are way too harsh on yourselves, and as a result your making some poor life choices and seeing yourself as not worth anything better than the crap you are in. You need to experience Jesus' transforming judgement. You need to experience the value, the worth, the regard he holds you in.
9. Some of you need to leave your life of sin. The Jesus who did not condemn the woman, will not condemn you. He will forgive. He will love. He will transform. If you allow him.
10. Some of us probably need to do a bit of both. We are humans are complicated and messed up. For some of us it isn't an either or, but both. We need to see ourselves as God see us and we also need to leave our lives of sin.

Reading: Matthew 6:25-34

1. Whilst it is unlikely nowadays, in the West, that many of us are consumed by worry about food, drink and clothing, what sort of things do you worry about? [As opposed to just being concerned by]
2. What does this verse mean to you? - "*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you*" [Matthew 6.33.] In particular, what do you understand by the word 'righteousness'?
3. Romans 12:2 says "*Do not conform to the pattern of this world*". How do we conform to the pattern of the world in a way that is contrary to what God wants for us?
4. Looking back through our lives, are there situations or relationships that caused us or influenced us to become habitual worriers?
5. Do you believe God is completely faithful and can be trusted in all things? If not – what are the exceptions and why?
6. 2 Corinthians 3:18 begins with "*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory*" - what does this mean?
7. Can we identify things in our past that damaged our willingness to trust in God's provision?
8. At the end of John 16:33 it says "*But take heart! I have overcome the world*" "What do you understand by 'I have overcome the world'?"

Reading: Matthew 6:1-4

1. What does 21st century financial giving look like? Do you feel pressurised into giving through the big TV whole-evening events that are part entertainment and part income generation or charity appeals through letters, magazines, emails, junk mail. What about the appeals through the TV accompanied by heart-rending scenes of destruction, rescue and aid. Do you contribute via crowd funding and social media?
2. Should we put Grants, sponsorship, interest-free loans, committed regular giving, and spontaneous donations in the same category as the ways above? Is the motivation different?
3. What motivates generosity - a whole industry is built around social conditioning and psychological manipulation. Can you think of examples of this?
4. Blowing of trumpets: the subtle promotion of self as a reward. Is it ever right to put your name to a public gift; ie it could encourage others to give.
5. There is a culture of expecting rewards for giving. How do Reward Schemes encourage the 'getting something back in return' mentality?
6. Giving with 'strings attached' versus the accountability of the receiver to use the gift appropriately. How hard is it to let go of the gift?
7. Generosity is not always about finances. Sometimes it is about time, talents, how we treat others graciously, How does the Good Samaritan story illustrate this? (Luke 10:25-37)
8. Do you find it easier to give than to receive? Why is it important to learn to receive too? How can this be a generous act?
9. How can we balance the Joy of giving with not receiving something in return. Is "Joy" actually a reward? Are rewards wrong? Are they not just 'outcomes' – if I do this, that will happen.
10. Meditate on God's generosity. We sang the song Reckless Love at the 11am service. What does this mean to you? Is 'reckless' the right word for God's Agape love, His grace, His forgiveness?
11. How is motivation of obedience different from generosity? Is it easy to confuse the motivation.
12. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) The love of God compels us to give – so do we have a choice?

Reading: Matthew 5:21-48

With patience, no prejudice, and without adding or removing anything read Matthew 5:21-48

1. How does this passage make you feel? What are your initial thoughts? Why do you think it makes you feel this way? (Don't spend too long – just brief initial thoughts.)

There is no doubt that this is a hard passage, it makes us feel uncomfortable. But I wonder why, and is it because of what we first think it is? For sure, the stats on Divorce in this country paint a bleak picture and our nation's attitude to adultery is weak to indifferent. But is Jesus really focussing on just these things or has he got a bigger picture in mind?
2. Jesus begins each section of this reading with, "You have heard that it was said... But I say to you" and each time Jesus doesn't loosen the letter of the law but rather tightens it. Why do you think he does this?

A: Jesus wants us to go further in our relationships than simply fulfilling the law. Jesus expects more from us than simply not murdering, not committing adultery, not swearing falsely, etc...
3. The context for this passage is given in Matthew 5:17-18 where Jesus says that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it. The big topics of this passage (murder, deceit, adultery, divorce) are not what Jesus has his sights set on. Does this surprise you? What do you think Jesus is really targeting in this passage?

A: It is the attitudes of our heart from which these outward actions come. The outward actions are not the root of our damaged relationships; the root is the attitudes of our hearts.
4. Richard used an illustration of the headache medicine "Anadin" and "Anadin Extra" to show the difference between simply doing enough to fulfil the requirements of the law and Jesus' call for us to go further in transforming our relationships – allowing a deeper transformation of the attitudes of our hearts.
  - a. What do you think of this illustration? Where is it helpful? Where is it limited? How might you help yourself remember Jesus' call for you to be transformed at the heart level?
5. Richard used the following statements. Take some time to consider them, which do you struggle with? Which one do you need the Holy Spirit's transformation? You don't need to share, but you can if you'd like.
  - a. ...not just don't murder but don't be angry, don't be insulting, don't call each other fools.
  - b. ...not just don't commit adultery but don't be driven by lust
  - c. ...stop fussing about divorce as if that is the only issue in your relationships, I don't want your relationships, any of them, to be driven by fickleness, by the thoughts of impermanence.
  - d. ...not just don't swear falsely but don't be driven by any falsehood, anything less than the truth.
6. Spend some time in prayer with each other, nothing specific is needed, just a prayer for us all to be open to transformation in our relationships. For our hearts to be powered by, selfless giving of ourselves, permanence, consistency, endurance, love, compassion, mercy, and truthfulness.
7. The passage ends with Jesus saying, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect". Even at the close, Jesus does not ease up, he is desiring perfection from us. Is this possible in our relationships?

A: In this world prior to the coming of the fullness of the kingdom of God it is unlikely we will ever be perfect but as followers of Christ, we are "in Christ", and Jesus has accomplished all these things in his relationships.
8. What can we do when we have failed, where we struggled, where we hold onto our past failings?

A: We look to Jesus. We turn to God for forgiveness and restoration. We don't need to hold onto our past but instead hand them over to God for healing, restoration, and reconciliation because Jesus has done everything that is needed to heal and reconcile.
9. As you finish, you might like to read the words of one of the hymns from Sunday:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full, in his wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of his glory and grace



Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

The Sermon on the Mount, a collection of Jesus' teachings from the start of his public ministry, is found in Matthew Chapters 5 to 7. There is value in reading the whole Sermon on the Mount in one sitting at the start of this teaching series. Please recommend to your CG they do this in their own time in the coming days.

Keith focussed his talk on introducing the Sermon on the Mount and this new teaching series, as well as the first of the Beatitudes.

*\*Are questions that may be best not answered publicly. Instead give everyone a few minutes to privately and prayerfully consider their response. Encourage them to write their answers as a record.*

1. What from Keith talk
  - a. Was helpful/unhelpful
  - b. Resonated/scratched an itch
  - c. Left you confused/left you with more questions
2. The Sermon on the Mount is known as the 'Manifesto of the King'/'Compendium of Christ's Doctrine'/'Jesus' Vision of the Good Life'/'The Magna Carte of the Kingdom'. Why do you think Matthew put The Beatitudes and the beginning of such a significant collection of teachings?
3. Which of the 8 blessings resonates with you the most? Why does it?
4. Share how you have been blessed in such a way that relates to one (or more) of the beatitudes.
5. Which of the blessing listed in the beatitudes are you least keen to experience in this life? Discuss.
6. In verse 11, how do you understand 'because of me'?
7. Looking at the individual beatitudes how can you see them as a blessing (not just a future blessing, but a blessing in the here and now).
8. What are the words (positive or negative) that changed you the most? How have they left their mark?\*
9. What are the words of Jesus, or from the Bible, that have changed you most? How have you been transformed by these words?\*
10. Consider what are the areas of your life that you long to be transformed by the words of Jesus. Read Matthew 5:1-12. Which of the Beatitudes best fits with the area of transformation you long for? Pray for God to give you the blessing that comes with the Beatitude you have identified.\*