



Arriving

Study Three



Harold Copping, *Sermon on the Mount*

Someone said...

'The pilgrim is humble and devout, and human, and charitable, and ready to smile and admire; therefore, he should comprehend the whole of his way, the people in it, and the hills and the clouds, and the habits of the various cities.'

(Hilaire Belloc)

Key verse

'Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.'

(Matthew 5:1-2)

The kingdom is near

(Read Matthew 4:17 - 5:12)

After his time of testing in the wilderness, Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been imprisoned, so it made sense to move away, heading northeast to settle for a while in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee (4:13), fulfilling Isaiah's prophesy of 'a people living in darkness seeing a great light'.

Walking in the area, Jesus found his first disciples, and as news about him spread so crowds gathered from nearby and further afield, seeking healing and hope from his teaching. The core of Jesus' message was plain, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' (4:17)

So, with a much bigger message to share, Jesus found higher ground where the crowds could gather and hear what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, teaching which has influenced so many, including influential figures

such as Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, and Martin Luther King Jr., whose nonviolent movement was born out of his understanding of what it meant to live out Jesus' words.

What Matthew presents is almost certainly a summary of a longer sermon, as Jesus is known to have spent many hours teaching, and the words we have in Matthew 5-7 can easily be read in thirty minutes. But what Jesus did talk about was kingdom life, with guidance and instruction as to what this might mean for individuals and how it is seen by others.

Some of the blessings might be difficult or uncomfortable to read and understand, unless seen in the context of Jesus' own sacrificial life and ministry.

SAMPLE

Discussion

- 1: We might often think of Jesus as continually on the move, but we're told that he lived and made a base for his ministry for a while in Capernaum. How important might that stability have been at this point in Jesus' work?
- 2: Which of the Beatitudes speaks loudest to you, and which are the hardest to understand?
- 3: How do the Beatitudes, or life in the kingdom, compare with life in today's world?



Stage 3: The Mount of Beatitudes



Mount of Beatitudes (pic by Olevy)



There's quite a distance to travel, around 154 km (95 miles) by foot from the second to third stage of our virtual pilgrimage at the Mount of Beatitudes, located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, between Gennesaret and Capernaum.

There are recordings of pilgrimages to here from the 4th century, and remains of an early church and its cloister from that time can be seen, alongside what is left of an early monastery on the hill, which is not too far from the area around Bethsaida where Jesus is believed to have fed the 5000, and overlooks the fields of Gennesaret where Jesus healed many people who had been brought to him, and chastised the Pharisees and teachers (Mark 6:53-56).

The hill would certainly have provided Jesus with ample room for crowds to gather and hear the Sermon on the Mount. Pope John Paul II celebrated a Mass nearby in March 2000, and there was space available for 100,000 people.

At the summit is the Church of the Beatitudes, built in 1938 and designed by the Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi. The church is octagonal, symbolizing the eight Beatitudes, and surrounded by lovely peaceful gardens. In the courtyard in front of the church is a mosaic, depicting justice, prudence, fortitude, charity, faith, and temperance. There is also a modern Christian centre called Domus Galilaeae (House of Galilee), with an adjacent functioning monastery and hostel.



Church of the Beatitudes (pic by jawcey)

Discussion

- 4: Pilgrimage has been an aspect of Christianity since its early days, but not to the extent of some other faiths. Is there a reason for this, or are we missing out today?
- 5: Jesus gathered crowds around him on a hillside to hear his words. Today we might join a Zoom (or similar) meeting online to hear someone teach. What's the difference for an individual?
- 6: If you were there, gazing down from the hillside onto the very countryside where Jesus walked, taught and healed, what would be going through your mind, do you think?



Walking in the kingdom

(Read Colossians 1:9b-14, Matthew 25:34-40, Matthew 18:1-5)

There is no shortage of Bible verses relating to how we ought to live our lives. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, even in its summary version, is three chapters long, but for Paul as he writes to the believers in Colossae, it is 'living a life worthy of the Lord and pleasing Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God...' and this is enabled through the wisdom and understanding that the Holy Spirit gives in their lives, along with the patience to cope with the challenges that lie ahead as they journey together in faith.

The image of 'bearing fruit' reminds us that a young tree once planted needs to become established in good solid ground before growing, blossoming and

hopefully producing fruit. The Beatitudes do not give us entrance requirements to the kingdom of God but do give us a picture of the kind of people God wants to see, and it's not the power-seeking and money-grabbing, but the humble, the vulnerable, the persecuted, seekers of peace and justice, givers rather than takers.

Jesus made that clear when his disciples questioned him about greatness in the kingdom of God, and he places a child in front of them as an example. A child's humility is in their vulnerability and need for a parent's help as they grow.

Discussion

- 7: Of the verses you have read, which speaks loudest to you, and why?
- 8: What differences can there be between a fruitful life in the world's eyes, and one as God sees it?
- 9: A crowd arrived to hear Jesus' teaching. How did your own first encounter with the words of Jesus affect you and life's journey as it was then?

Someone said...

'If you're walking down the right path and you're willing to keep walking, eventually you'll make progress.'

(Barack Obama)

'We all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive.'

(C. S. Lewis)

Key verse

'For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.'

(Colossians 1:13-14)

Takeaway

How do we know we're on the right path?