

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 18th January 2009

Good News – for Society Matt 5:13-16



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Jesus marks out his disciples as the infiltrators of good news – to be in the world but not of it, called to be distinctly Christian – to be salt and light.

As we read the Gospels it's clear that Jesus came to launch the kingdom and for many of us now in the 21st century it looks like he's ended up with the Church. It doesn't sound like a very good deal. Did he intend to found the Church? Even if he didn't envisage cathedrals and synods, he did envisage small communities of people committed to living out his vision of the kingdom, and continuing beyond his life on earth. The Message v13 puts it succinctly as to what these communities are to be like

The context of v.13-16 is of significance because it follows directly on from the last beatitude: *Blessed are those who are persecuted*. The distinctiveness which makes Christ's followers objects of persecution is illustrated by the two images of salt and light which follow. So for us as followers of Christ we are called to function as an alternative and challenging community. It's of real significance that this is not a call to those who have everything worked out or who live perfect lives. It's addressed to those who may be like those described in the first beatitude when it says: *blessed are the poor in Spirit – if you are ground down by life but still trust God you will enjoy the undergirding security of dependence on him*.

Graham Tomlin lays down a challenge to us when he writes 'If my Jesus has very little to do with real life, then my Christian faith will have very little to do with real life.' It is because many of us Christians in the west live lives that are indistinguishable from those of our non-Christian friends and neighbours that the church in the west is struggling today. This corporate body – this community – this church - is made up of individuals loved and cherished by God. How are we to become this good city on a hill? Graham Tomlin's words on part of 1 Peter 3:15 provide an answer for us: *In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord*'. Graham then goes on to say that this is the most crucial part of the verse. As a Christian learns to live their life under the lordship of Jesus Christ, as they learn to adopt his perspective on money, sex, power, time and eternity and live their life in the light of these, then they will become the kind of person who provokes questions in the minds of their 21st century neighbours; those who are on the outside looking in. And it's not just for individuals. The verbs in this section of Peter's letter are all plural. They are addressed to the Christian community, and so the instructions come to the Church as a whole, rather than just to individuals.

Bill Hybels sets out for us a vision of what it could mean for the Church to be a 'city on a hill'; "There is nothing like the local church when it is working right. Its beauty is indescribable. Its power is breathtaking. Its potential is unlimited. It comforts the grieving and heals the broken in the context of community. It builds bridges to seekers and offers truth to the confused. It provides resources for those in need and opens its arms to the forgotten, the downtrodden, and the disillusioned. It breaks the chains of addictions, frees the oppressed, and offers belonging to the marginalised. ---The potential of the local church is almost more than I can grasp." All of these aspects can be seen in our own community to some degree or another. The challenge for us as individuals and as the community of faith is to pursue this vision so that we are truly the *salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth*.



Witness: questions to discuss

1. **To be in the world but not of it. Discuss how this works out in practice. Are we distinctive enough?**
2. **Did Jesus intend to found the church as we know it or was it all a big mistake? Share together your vision of what the church ought to be like.**
3. **Have you ever met people whose quality of life has spoken into your life? What attracted you to them?**
4. **Read the Bill Hybels quote again. Can we see aspects of the same beauty and power in St Paul's? Encourage each other by sharing where these are evident.**
***For further thought:* read 1 Cor 4: 10-13. Meditate on the qualities we need to be truly Christ like; to be salt and light**