

WELCOME 22nd January 2023 – 3 Epiphany '23 A

Matthew 5:1-12

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... **Aim** small. Miss small. From golfers to target shooters & **places** in-between, it's a given that a specific focus, a smaller objective implies a smaller margin of error & greater chance of hitting the total target. To aim big & miss means a greater chance of not accomplishing your goal...not reaching your desired result...of ending up somewhere you don't want to be...

For many followers of Jesus...being his disciple seems a big target. "make disciples of all nations" "fish for people" "WWJD?" "becoming more like Jesus" "win my high school or city for Christ" --- All seem huge by comparison to what I feel capable of most days. But Jesus gives us a smaller target...a specific focus for his work in our lives when his call feels too big for our small hands...It's like this...

Acknowledge my heart's poverty & weakness to rely on his strength...live humbly in a world of arrogance...work for peace surrounded by antagonism...offer comfort to those who mourn...live with purity seeking only the right good & true that God offers...grant mercy when the world cries vengeance...live joyfully as the Father's beloved especially when attacked by those who belittle or deny that love...

Aim small...Paul would admonish the church in Thessalonica:

Make it your **ambition** to live a quiet life, minding your own business & working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live... 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 *ambition...strive for...aim small*

Rather than a new 10 Commandments...or a big goal for your life or mine, the Sermon on the Mount describes how the Father blesses those whom he calls his own in the specific circumstances of our lives so the power of the risen Jesus can bless in & through us the small places of this world with eternal impact.

The world does not need smarter, harder working, more beautiful, busier, or more successful people. The world needs those whom God blesses to aim small...to act, speak, pray, & relate from the level of being dearly loved & deeply/fully empowered by the Father. The world needs you & me to be filled by the life of Christ in the small places we inhabit.

We'll experience & share that today...and throughout our lives...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, giver of all good gifts, you have given us life. You have bestowed upon us your love & that love includes your plans for us. You call us to yourself & into your world in your name. Our lives are a response to your call. Give us grace to hear your voice & hearts that respond in boldness. Today we listen again. Let us not be overwhelmed with fears of the future or of our failures in the past. Guide us to that place where your will is to be accomplished through our hands hearts & words...

Through Christ who is alone Lord & Saviour - Amen

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What would happen if a group of people sought to live as Jesus describes here, loved one another (& others) sacrificially, & shared the gospel boldly?
2. What would you need to do that intentionally & fervently starting now?

3 Epiphany '23 A – It's TIME! KINGDOM LIVING

Go big or go home! Not just a motto on the walls of locker rooms & club rooms of major sports powerhouses around the world or the title of books on business strategy & leadership. It was said often at the church growth & evangelism multiplication conferences I attended throughout the '90s. In all seriousness that kind of thinking became the driver for contemporary churches all around the world. If you've hung out in church-y circles over the last 20-30 years you know the names of biggest of the big...starting @ 2K worshippers/weekend & going as high as 15-45K... Willowcreek...Saddleback...Elevation...CCV...Fellowship...NorthPoint...in the US HillSong...Planetshakers...KingdomCity...Influencers...Inspire...here in Oz

And there's a 2-edged sword in simply calling attention to those biggest of the big. 1st The NT is clear...**God's** church...his beloved bride is intended to flourish & bless in widening circles. NT church is vibrant/flourishing. "Making disciples of ALL NATIONS" is not a suggestion; it's an *EX-PECT-ation*. People as yet unclaimed by the gospel are to be reached in Jesus' name. So I do not want to put down the efforts of faithful men & women who go to great lengths to expand the reach & grasp of Christ's church.

At the same time...I know that despite the best efforts of the disciple-makers in these churches **the** overall influence & impact of the church continues to decline. Less than 1/2 of Britons self-identify as followers of Jesus. Even w/ the biggest of the big on US/Aus shores...we're heading the same way. That does not bring God glory. **And**...Go big or go home! imports the mindset of the 21st century corporation into the church...We become McDonalds or a franchise operation where efficiency, speed, numbers, predictability & control are the core values...& worse; the unspoken implication is/was: if you're not that & not moving that way...you ought to close up shop/call it quits because you're not being faithful. (our bldg. fits in here)

So my heart is often drawn to the Scriptures like:

*For the High & Exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy says this:
"I live in a high & holy place, **but also with** the one who is contrite & lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly & to revive the heart of the contrite. – Is 57:15*

*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.
– Ps 34:18*

God blesses the poor in spirit, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

*Make it your **ambition** to live a quiet life, minding your own business & working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live... 1 Thess 4:11-12*

There is at the very centre of who God is a love of the smallness of his people. The Creator of all this is...the God who dwells in infinite grandeur & glory draws near to the deepest need...greatest hurt. We are dust...what could be smaller...beloved by God & chosen to reflect him **here** on this tiny blue spec in the vast reaches of the known universe...That's us. I love how Paul challenges the Corinthian church when their heads started getting too big: *Remember, dear brothers & sisters, few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. – 1 Cor 1:26* Remember how insignificant/small you were ...but God chooses the small to shame the big - foolish to shame the wise - powerless to shame the mighty. *We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God & not from us. – 2 Cor 4:7*

"God blesses the poor in spirit, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs...God blesses you when people mock you & persecute you & lie about you & say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Rejoice & be glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. Remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way."

The Beatitudes are not a list of pious aims or vague promises. They do not outline a new moral code. They are not good advice. They ARE GOOD NEWS. They ARE 'GOSPEL'. **Makarios** – crazy hard word to translate happy, blessed, fortunate, congratulations to. Which means They ARE 'good news': Wonderful news even. Why? Because something quite momentous is happening. Jesus declares that the world's values (achieve, acquire, accomplish, accumulate, wealth, power, success, efficiency, speed, numbers, bigness, control & pride) are overthrown because he has come & intervened in history. God's values now stand...everything else decays but God is here there & then in 1st century Near East...but just as surely into our world & into our hearts.

Just take this in...When you have nothing to offer God – no prior claim/thought that God owes you something...BTθ is yours...Every blessing heaven can pour into your lap you have. (Eph 1) Our world runs on the principle of scarcity...that we're going to run out of what we need or want most of all (Jas 4) but Jesus announces God's kingdom is foundationally a place of abundance because all things come from the abundant love of God who does & will provide all that is necessary & nothing depends on our stamina strength smarts or success.

Acknowledge my heart's poverty & weakness to rely on his strength...live humbly in a world of arrogance...work for peace surrounded by antagonism...offer comfort to those who mourn...live with purity loyalty/devotion seeking only the right good & true that God offers...grant mercy when the world cries vengeance...live joyfully as the Father's beloved especially when attacked by those who belittle or deny that love...

The challenge for each of us is not to alleviate the hardships or difficulties of our lives – to work ourselves into some higher place but in every moment to see God is our true treasure...& then...live from his presence & power & provision in all those small places we inhabit among all the small moments of our day...to see his presence as sufficient victory/strength when there appears to be nothing else for us.

Rather than a new 10 Commandments...or a big goal for your life or mine, the Sermon on the Mount describes how the Father blesses those whom he calls his own in the specific circumstances of our lives so the power of the risen Jesus can bless in & through us the small places of this world with eternal impact. *Make it your **ambition** to live a quiet life, minding your own business & working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live... ambition...strive for...aim...goal...small places you go every day.*

The world does not need smarter, harder working, more beautiful, busier, or more successful people....bigger grander flashier cooler. The world needs those whom God blesses to aim small...to act, speak, pray, & relate from the level of being dearly loved & deeply/fully empowered by the Father. The world needs you & me to be filled by the life of Christ in the small places we inhabit.

The world sees itself as cursed...war & famine...disease & conflict...injustice & heartache...If it bleeds it leads & they all lie. But we know Christ has died & risen & rules eternally so all those things will be gone forever & we have the capacity to live blessing into a world of cursing.

Christ living in us equips us to live so out of step with the worlds values & engage in life in such a way that the world has to attack you or prove itself failing – world has to admit defeat if it doesn't try to destroy you. We are now people who see ourselves as recipients of unfathomable grace & favour of God & receive power to live out of step with the world & are richly blessed now and in the world to come.

Earlier we asked these questions...

What would happen if a group of people sought to live as Jesus describes here, loved one another (& others) sacrificially, & shared the gospel boldly? as recipients of unfathomable grace & favour of God & empowered to live out of step with the world & are richly blessed now and in the world to come **What** would you need to do that intentionally & fervently starting now? support encouragement companionship...

TAKE IT HOME-

Think of 1 small place you will definitely be this week...
How will you live your "blessedness" from God there, so others too are blessed?

Let's pray...

*Gracious Father apart from you we are nothing...and we deserve nothing of what you have provided. But you have provided for us in abundance & we praise you. Thank you for 10 years as a community of your children. Make us worthy of your name and guide us by your Spirit. Fill us today with your power that the world may see in us your kingdom & your presence ruling over all we are and all we do. Let your grace be experienced and your glory extended among us & through us.
We pray in Jesus' name...Amen.*