

Plan BE

Matthew 5: 43-48

Michael Hart has written a book – called THE 100. And it's a ranking of the people who in his opinion. Are the 100 **most influential** people of all time. Not the 100 most famous, or best people, but the most influential.

And number 1. The most influential person in history, is NOT JESUS.

The second most influential person of all time, is also, NOT JESUS.

The third most influential person in history, according to Michael Hart, is Jesus Christ.

So how did he come to that conclusion?

Why does Jesus only rate Jesus at number three?

And you might want to know who got to be number one.

Well according to Hart, and he's not a Christian or Muslim. According to him. Mohammed rates as the most influential person of all time.

So why's that? Why does Mohammed rate number one? Why does Mohammed rate above Jesus? This is why. It's because in Michael hart's observation.

As he's observed christians and as he's observed muslims.

Mohammed has far more influence over the lives of muslims than Jesus has over the lives of christians.

That's why mohammed's at the top of the list.

Not talking of Jesus' lack of influence over unbelievers.

He's saying that christians, from his observation...do not widely follow, believe or take heed of their Lord and master, Jesus Christ.

Which..... is a bit of an indictment isn't it?

In terms of actual influence. Jesus to Christians is something like a figurehead like say the Queen of England to Aussies.

And you have to stop and think. Does he have a point?

Is it true of me? Is it true of us? If HE thinks that – then.....is that how lots of other people see christians as well? Maybe it is.

I mean. That's not to say that we're not nice people. I don't think that's what he's saying. But has Jesus had a significant impact on you...if you're a christian? If you are in fact a nice person....is your niceness, is it just a by product of your upbringing? You say please and thank you. And you're good to your mum. Is that the extent of it? Because if it is. Then maybe he's got a point.

Because Jesus calls people who'll follow him to something more than that. And that's what we're going to see today as we look at just one little section of Jesus' sermon on the mount.

We're going to zoom in on verses 43-48 in particular. And we'll see the radical nature of how Jesus wants his followers to treat others. But even as Jesus kicks things off back in the beginning of chapter 5. He's turning things upside down and inside out.

He says. Blessed are the poor in spirit. And blessed are those who mourn.

And blessed are the meek.

But that's not true is it? It's no more true today for us than it was to the people of Israel Jesus was speaking to. There's no kind of poor that's blessed is there?

Those things are polar opposites aren't they? Poverty, and blessing. And meek is just weak. Meek never makes it to the top of the food chain.

He says blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

We say blessed are those who live for their dreams.

He says blessed are the merciful. And we know don't we. That the reality is...blessed are the powerful. It's not the merciful living in the penthouse. It's not the MERCIFUL driving the C-class Mercedes is it?

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This is Jesus' teaching.

Now in the first instance. We need to get the context right. He's standing on a mountain in Israel. And He's talking to the people God chose. And gave his law to.

And his promises. Jesus is talking to the people God promised to bless if they obeyed him.

But the problem is. God's people Israel. Haven't really been influenced much at all. By the truths of his word. By his good laws. By his instruction and guidance. By his discipline and mercy. God said to his people. Be Holy as I am Holy.

But they haven't been at all. I mean they're extremely religious. You've got to give them that. They've got lots of laws. They've even expanded on the one's God gave them. And they've gone to all the effort of rebuilding God's temple after their enemies smashed it down. They've got all the trappings of religion.

But Jesus stands there. The new Moses on the mountain. With some new words for Israel. And he says. NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

He says firstly to the nation of Israel. The same thing that's going to ring out to the rest of the world as the gospel goes out. That true righteousness comes from a change of heart. Which comes from turning back to God.

You're not blessed. Jesus says. Because your hearts are not right.

Listen to what Jesus says to Israel in verse 20. This is a clanger if you've been living under the tyranny of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Verse 20

I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

You wonder if he might be trying to drive people away.

Bit of an insult if you are a Pharisee or a teacher of the law. But if you're not. And if you're looking at those kinds of people - if you're using the religious heavyweights as the benchmark. Then Jesus has just blown you out of the water.

You know the guys that wash their hands at the right time, and fast and even tithe a tenth of their herbs? The one who know the law backwards. Who can quote the bible. You know those guys? Jesus says.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

You have to do better. Which of course you can't. Which is Jesus' point. You don't do better by being more religious. By adding more laws. By fasting in the desert. By going to church more. You do better by growing up.

By turning back to him....and by being the sort of person God wants his people to be.

That's why their called the BE ATTITUDES.

I don't know if you noticed....There's no extra laws here.

Let me take you to the section we're looking at this morning. And in particular verse 48. Which is really the key to understanding the whole of Jesus' sermon on the mount.

He says there. Verse 48. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

It's not the idea of the perfection of a flawless diamond. He's not saying. Be without flaw. It's the idea of maturity. It's God-likeness. Godliness is being like God. In your thinking, in your attitudes.

And that's going to bear out in your actions.

And Jesus is just saying GROW UP. He's saying. Be mature. And real maturity for anything. Is about growing into what it is you were always meant to be.

And for God's children that's to be like him.

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

And you'll notice as Jesus expands on the beattitudes you get this phrase. You have heard that it was said.....but I tell you. Jesus talks about murder and adultery. And divorce. Things in the Jewish law. And you get to verse 43.

And Jesus says. You've heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. ...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

Now I don't know if you've ever been in a work situation. Where your boss gets you to do things one way. And then someone else comes along and tells you the exact opposite. It's pretty frustrating.

But that's what it sounds like here. This isn't Jesus tweaking around the edges.

He's saying something completely different from his predecessors.

He's turning things upside down again.

The religious guys said this. They said you have to love your neighbor. That's in the law. So if you're headed up the road and you find a cow stuck in the mud by the road. If it belongs to a Jew. You should really pull it out.

But if it doesn't. If it belongs to a heathen Gentile. You leave it there.

Love your neighbor but hate your enemy. That's what you've heard. And they crowd's nodding.

But you can see what you've done. You have to love your neighbor. But... if we minimize that category. That'll make sense. After all. Otherwise you'd have to love everybody. And that's ridiculous.

But this way. It's achievable. And I guess if you've got lots of enemies and not many people in the neighbor category it's even better.

But notice what Jesus does. He doesn't just widen the category of neighbors. He doesn't say...You've gotta love people from the other side of the river. You've gotta love people from south of the border. At this point I'd normally take the cheap shot and add. You've even gotta love those kiwis. But I won't do that.

Because Jesus doesn't go down that road. He says. LOVE YOUR ENEMY - if you want to be a son of the father. It's pretty hard to wiggle out of that one.

Love your enemy. And pray for those who persecute you.

Now that's something isn't it. You might say. Yeah that's something. That's ridiculous. But even if you say that. You've gotta see the seismic shift in thinking when Jesus says something like that. In fact...if you're not at all offended by that

statement. If you don't see the outrageous nature of it....You probably haven't thought about it enough.

I was watching the football last night. Brisbane and Sydney in the Aussie rules. And they were playing in Sydney. And when the Sydney side got what they thought was a tough call from the referee you know what it's like the crowd would roar in anger.

And I wonder if there was any sort of audible response when Jesus said those words.

Love your enemies.

Now for you and I our enemies are probably people who just disagree with us at times. Or who we don't particularly get on with. But for the Jews. We're talking centuries of bloody conflict. We're talking REAL ENEMIES. We're talking about a brutal occupying Roman force. As well as. On top of.... the kind of day to day argy bargy and disagreements with people.

And Jesus says you want to be mature? Good. Love you enemies. You want to be called sons and daughters of God? LOVE your enemies.

But how do you love someone who you know would take great pleasure in your demise?

How do you love someone who's responsible for some past hurt? For an ongoing one for that matter.

How do you love someone – you know. Talks you down. Every opportunity they get.

Well Jesus doesn't say how.... he just says to do it. And not just in a sort of a passive way. He's not saying. Look, don't take revenge. He's saying more than that. There's that active element. He says pray for them. Pray for those who persecute you.

They might be your enemy. Maybe in your family. Maybe at work. Maybe in your CHURCH. You want to be mature. Be like your father in heaven?

Do good to them. Actually, when you think about it telling us to PRAY for them is even a bit harder. Because you can do something good but do it in a sort of a self justifying way. And still be hating them in your heart.

Make a meal. But in your head you're saying I hope you choke on it!

But you can't fool God. You can't pray for them without a change of attitude.

Now you may well say that's impossible.

But that's what Jesus does isn't it? As he's hanging on the cross. He prays doesn't he. He says FATHER FORGIVE THEM.

And he wants his followers to do the same.

In verse 45 HE says.

He (God) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good.

Do you see what he's getting at?

He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

It would be crazy you'd think. And we'd be outraged if God just beamed the sun in to his friends. If he just send rain on the righteous people.

God doesn't operate that way.

But we tend to operate that way. Jesus knows that. And he's calling Christians to be different. Because anyone can do the thing where you love the people that love you. That's what he says there in verse 46. In fact. He chooses the people on the lowest rung of the ethical chain for Jews. He points to the tax collectors. In our case. It might be the real estate agents. I don't know.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Don't even pagans do that?

And you have to admit. He's right. There's nothing much special in loving the people who love you. That's a pretty easy thing to do. But there's something radically different about going beyond that. Loving people who don't love you. loving people who even hate you. Who are your enemies. There's something very Godly about that. Which is what Jesus is calling us to.

So I want to ask you – if you're someone who calls yourself a Christian. Have you been influenced by Jesus? I want to ask you that. But I won't just yet.

Because there might be a small confusion. And I think it's worth saying one thing at this point. The word LOVE has a lot of different meanings. And you have to ask. What does Jesus mean when he says love your enemies?

Because if you're thinking of love in a sort of emotional sense. Not even necessarily a romantic sense. But even in the sense of having warm fuzzy feelings. Then that's not what Jesus is getting at I don't think. I mean.

I really can't control my emotions to that extent. I can't force myself to have warm fuzzy feelings towards anybody.

Sometimes - and you might have experienced this. Your emotions have a sort of a life of their own. They can even operate in opposition to your will. I've had plenty of times where for some reason I'm exceptionally nervous. I'm about to speak to a group of people. And I can tell myself not to be nervous. I can give myself ten good reasons not to be. But my emotions are on a bus ride all of their own.

And I have to just get on with it and hope they'll catch up.

And I think you have to bear that in mind.

You can't force yourself - and I don't think Jesus is asking you - to feel warm and fuzzy towards everyone. But you **can** control some things. And you have to start there. You **can** control your attitude. You **can** control your action. You **can** pray.

And prayer's a great one because if you are having those problems of feelings. If you're feeling bitterness. If you're emotions are violently opposed to someone. Praying for their good's gotta help. It's pretty hard to stay seething mad with

someone when you keep praying for their good. So at least DO GOOD. Even if your emotions won't come to the party.

But that still doesn't make it easy does it. But Jesus doesn't want us to do what's easy. He wants us to do what's Godly.

Or you might say. What's Christ-like.

Not because Jesus is on a crusade to be the most influential person of all time.

But he is on a crusade.

He's preaching the good news. It's good news for Jews. And good news for you and I.

It's not that we can somehow pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and become righteous enough to force open the gates of heaven.

That's what he does on our behalf. That's what Peter says in his first letter.

1 Peter 3:18 ¹⁸ For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

That's his bit. What he's calling us to do is to follow him. And that means having that change of heart.

So that we can start becoming more and more like him. There's two parts to salvation. There's the thing we call justification. That's God's declaration of righteousness to people who aren't. But the second thing is called sanctification.

And that's about being set apart. And becoming more and more like our Lord.

Paul says in Galatians

That it's like he's in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in them. He says to the Ephesians. Be imitators of God as dearly loved children. In Romans. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

As you turn to God through Jesus. He'll make you more and more like Him. He will influence you. And continue to change you in significant ways.