

TRANSFORMING FROM WITHIN

“Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying....” —MATTHEW 5:1-2

The Sermon on the Mount is the most concentrated of Jesus’ teaching recorded in the New Testament. It is not presented as a collection of thoughts and ideas at different times, but as one address given at a particular time, in a particular place and to a particular people.

It is important we understand to whom Jesus was speaking. This was not an evangelistic sermon for unbelievers with a view of bringing them to discipleship. There are certain things Jesus said that do not apply to those who were not yet disciples, such as “You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14). Although a crowd was present and went away amazed at what Jesus had said, He was not addressing them, but teaching His disciples.

The three chapters, Matthew 5, 6 and 7 of the Sermon on the Mount, can be legitimately divided into two main sections. In Matthew 5:1-16, Jesus talks about the character of a Christian, which includes the Beatitudes and being salt and light. From Chapter 5:17 through to Chapter 7:27, Jesus talks about the conduct of a Christian in relation to the law, to reputation, to treasure and to priorities. The

first part concerns what we are intended to be, and the second part concerns what we are intended to do.

The teaching on conduct only makes sense in light of the teaching on character. We do not evolve from good conduct to good character by doing the right things. Rather, it is the reverse; by becoming the right person we do the right things. Jesus is always Saviour first before He is teacher. He changes what we are on the inside before changing what we do. If we fail to understand this, His teaching on conduct becomes legalism, an external imposition, rather than an internal transformation. Teaching on conduct alone will only produce frustration, because in and of ourselves we do not have the capacity to live the Christian life.

It is this central principle of Jesus changing us on the inside first which lifts Christianity above every other religious or philosophical system. Jesus did not come to preach ethics or to refine a moral code, but to invade the life of ordinary human beings with the life of God, and consequently transform our behaviour from within.

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the incredible gift of your Son and His work within me. I pray His life fills me more and more every day.

TO REFLECT UPON: Am I trying to live the Christian life under my own steam, or am I dependent on the transforming work of Christ within me?