

**THE MESSAGE OF JESUS  
AND HIS KINGDOM**  
The truth that could change everything



**Part 4 'Jesus the Revolutionary'**

**Matthew 13:11-46 18<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

In our new teaching series about Jesus and the Kingdom, we are trying to peel back some of the layers of history and theology to find the heart of Jesus' message. So far we have looked at Jesus in the context of his political and religious worlds. We have seen how he challenged every known political solution to his nation's woes. He was not a zealot, a Herodian, a Pharisee or an Essene. And though he was definitely a Jew, Jesus also rocked the established religion of his day. Jesus, with his message about the Kingdom of God, was in every sense a revolutionary figure. That's our theme today.

Though Jesus was a revolutionary figure, he still found himself in a grand story - a story that gives meaning and shape to the whole of life. The central character of this story is God. ***In the beginning, God...*** The first chapter of this story is **creation**. God who is himself good, free and creative put his signature to creation. He gave it a fertile goodness, a precious independence and a creative freedom. Creation is never to be understood independently from its Creator. He would always continue to care for his creation and interact with it.

The first human characters in this story are **Adam** and Eve. They have been created in a special way – *in God's image* – so that they reflect the goodness, creativity and freedom of their Maker. They are given special responsibility as God's agents to care for the earth and the special privilege of friendship with God. But their noble status is quickly shattered when they reject the limits placed on their freedom. As the story unfolds we see the results of their disobedience – their sense of shame and alienation from God, misunderstanding and conflict among themselves, and a fundamental disharmony with creation itself. This second chapter we might call **crisis**.

How does God respond to this crisis? He doesn't destroy the earth and start all over again. He doesn't abandon humanity to the mess we've made. He doesn't take away our freedom and make us behave. Instead he recruits a *crisis response team* in the form of a family who will through the generations *remember their Creator* and their original purpose. They will seek to bring God's truth, healing and blessing to all people so that they can be rescued from human evil. God begins the process by calling an elderly couple, **Abraham** and Sarah, who miraculously give birth to the people who will be known as the Jews. These are the people with a special calling to know God and make God known. They will be blessed by God so that they can bless everyone else. We'll call this third chapter **calling**.

Some centuries later we find Abraham's descendents oppressed as slaves by the world super-power, Egypt. Degraded and abused by generations of slavery, how can they be restored? How can they escape? God calls **Moses** to lead them to freedom. And it is through Moses that God gives the people the Torah, the Law. This wise way of living will shape the people individually and as a community so that their dignity is restored and they can fulfil their original purpose in the healing of creation. The prophet leader Moses is joined by the priest Aaron who will pioneer a priesthood to instruct and train the people in holy and healthy living. Across the generations the priests and the prophets will carry on a

conversation with and about God and about their special relationship with God. Let's call this fourth chapter – **covenant**.

The unfolding story reveals the great struggle involved in remaining faithful to God and his calling. But God is faithful in preserving the people of the covenant through many external dangers and internal failures. Under the leadership of King **David** they finally reach a time of stability and peace. Will they now fulfil their calling to bring light to all peoples? Sadly the kingdom deteriorates and slides into civil war. The northern descendants of Abraham are conquered by the Assyrians and later the southern kingdom is over-run by the Babylonians. Even when their descendants return to their land they remain under the domination of foreign powers, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. This chapter we might well call **conflict**.

Now imagine **Jesus** growing up in this story. We know that from his childhood he had a special sense of calling on his life. How would he understand his world and how would he see himself and his mission fitting into the story of **Creation, Crisis, Calling, Covenant** and **Conflict**? As we look at Jesus' message and his prophetic declarations, it becomes clear that he sees the whole story of his people coming to fulfilment in his time and in his own person.

As he teaches about the kingdom, he evokes the memory of **David**, the great king under whose reign the Jewish people enjoyed unprecedented peace, prosperity and spiritual vitality. He is the new David, and the crowds hail him as the son of David.

He proclaims freedom for the prisoner and evokes the memory of **Moses**, the great liberator. But even more clearly he speaks about a *new commandment*. In the sermon on the Mount he says, "*You have heard that it was said.... But I say to you....*" Jesus is clearly identifying himself as a new Moses, a new lawgiver.

Jesus calls people to faith and chooses 12 disciples. He challenges them to be the light of the world and sends them out to multiply new disciples of all nations. In doing so he takes us further back to **Abraham**, the man of faith and patriarch of the 12 tribes who received the original call to be a blessing to all nations.

Jesus refused to respect racial, religious, moral, ethnic and class barriers. He welcomed non-Jews and treated them with kindness and respect. He ate with Pharisees and prostitutes. In demonstrating a kinship with all people he was a kind of second **Adam** seeking to undo centuries of distrust and division.

But there is more, because Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. He drove out evil spirits and forgave people's sins. He confronted injustice and demonstrated authority over the forces of nature. Jesus actually identified himself with the story's ultimate hero – **God**. Those who had seen him had in some real way seen God. He and the Father were one. Through Jesus, God was launching a new world order, a new world, a new creation. These are not the words and ways of a polite teacher or even a bold prophet. They are disruptive, shocking, terrifying but also inspiring and hopeful.

The Mediterranean world of Jesus' day was ruled by the most powerful empire in human history. Politically, culturally, economically and militarily it must have felt like the summit of human progress. On to this stage steps an obscure Jewish carpenter who has no credentials or status, no army or weapons, no rank or wealth, not even land or a home. He has a handful of unimpressive male followers and a substantial entourage of supportive women. He travels from village to village engaging with rustic peasants and the urban

poor. He has a special attraction to social outcasts, to marginalized children and disadvantaged women. But why the poor and the outcasts? Why does he enjoy their company and join in their parties? These – the ones he calls *'the poor'* and *'the little ones'* – rather than the greatest are the ones who will receive the kingdom of God first.

Why no weapons or at least a well-oiled political machine? Why live in constant danger and vulnerability? Why not identify an enemy, a scapegoat, a target of hatred? Because, as Jesus says, this kingdom advances with neither violence nor bloodshed, with neither hatred nor revenge. It is not like the kingdoms of the world. This kingdom advances slowly, like yeast in dough, like a seed in soil. It advances with faith. When people believe it is true, it becomes true. And it advances with reconciling, forgiving love. When people love strangers and enemies, the kingdom gains ground.

History is full of violent revolutions. But none of them were really revolutionary. In fact, noisy regime changes are utterly predictable. They are brought about by displays of power and hollow promises. In contrast, the message of Jesus is truly revolutionary. He comes announcing - *the kingdom of God is advancing by reconciliation and peace. It is expanding by faith, hope and love – beginning with the poor, the weakest, the meekest and the least. It's time to change your thinking. Everything is about to change. It's time for a new way of life. Believe me. Follow me. Believe this good news so you can learn to live by it and be part of the revolution.*

It seems crazy! It's hard to think of anything more unrealistic. But what other kind of revolution can change our world? Isn't what we are doing now crazy? Why do we go on imagining that hate can conquer hate, war stop war, pride overcome pride, violence end violence, revenge stop revenge? We are the crazy ones!

How do you picture Jesus? Did you grow up with an image of him wearing strange robes, carrying a lamb round his neck and his hand up as though he was hailing a taxi? Or was your picture of Jesus of him hanging on the cross so that your sins could be forgiven and you could go to heaven? That's true and it is wonderful. But do you sense there might be an even bigger picture which we have missed, a picture that affects the whole of our world and history? And do you sometimes have the sneaking suspicion that Jesus intentionally kept his message of the kingdom a secret so that it wasn't obvious, wasn't easy to grasp, wasn't like a mathematical formula to be learned? Is it possible that the message of Jesus was less like an advertising slogan – obvious and loud – and more like a poem whose meaning comes subtly and quietly to those who read slowly, think long and deeply and refuse to give up? I hope you won't give up as we press on with our series next week.

*For use in your*

**Cell, Accountability Group or on your own**

- ❑ What are your reflections as you think through this retelling of the biblical narrative?
- ❑ How do you feel about Jesus' fulfilling of this story? Think of relevant examples from the gospels.
- ❑ Is this revolutionary message an overstatement? Or is there something here we have missed?
- ❑ Read Matthew 13 again with fresh eyes and share any new understanding you have.