

It has been a landmark week. Something that has not happened for 26 years, Manchester United were looking for a new manager.

It was quite interesting listening to fans commenting on Sir Alex Ferguson fans from Brighton and Plymouth, from Worcester and Weymouth and it did raise as ever the question as to who is a true fan because most Manchester United fans seem to live anywhere but Manchester!

Last Saturday at my latest grandson Toby's baptism the clergyman doing it in his talk asked if anyone supported a football team. There were a number of responses from the congregation including Kettering Town! He then asked if anyone had the team shirt and I think there was only one response! He then produced an Arsenal shirt and explained how his son at school thought he should support a team and the boy chose Arsenal. At the tea after the service I asked the clergyman if he supported a team and he said "only Arsenal through my son".

It made me think that he was not a real supporter and he would probably agree.

The real supporter shows it by being there at the matches no matter what position or division the team are in. Reality is shown in action.

That is what Jesus seems to be saying in Matt 7:24, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

The wise, the true disciples is the one who hears and does what Jesus says.

Our present sermon series is looking at what it means to be a follower of Jesus and we are learning about that from things that Jesus said to his first followers. Last week we looked at putting Jesus first before everything else and today from this passage in Matt 7 we look at obeying what Jesus says.

This chapter is part of what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. As we read in 5:1-2, "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". Jesus got his disciples round him and, in the hearing of the crowd, he taught them. In the passage we have had read he showed them that there are two paths in life but only one leads to life, that is to eternal life and that is through Jesus. However not all who claim to be on that path, to be followers of Jesus are what they say, Matt 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." In other words Jesus was saying it is not a matter of what we say but what we do that marks us out as true disciples of Jesus. It was true followers Jesus was looking for, those who are willing to put him first and here those who not only hear but obey his words.

1. The true disciple hears

Often in the gospels we read Jesus saying "he who has ears let him hear". It is a plea from Jesus to listen to what he is saying and while he doesn't say that here he clearly expected his followers to

listen as he spoke to them. He got them round him and began to teach. Here is the one who has wisdom to impart.

But the question comes to mind as to why should they listen to Jesus and why should we?

We live in a world where you can find a welter of experts ready to speak on any given situation, often with different perspectives. In matters of faith there are many different faiths so why should it be Jesus we are listening to?

The first thing we note is that Jesus taught with authority. We see that in v28-29 where we read that when he had finished the Sermon on the Mount the people were amazed because he taught with authority. We were looking at this last Tuesday in the first of our Christianity Explained sessions, where we recognised that this display of authority in teaching along with many other areas where Jesus showed authority points to his nature as God.

Why should we listen to Jesus – because he is God and he speaks the word of God. Peter recognised this and in John 6:68 said “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life?” That was why Jesus expected and encouraged the disciples to listen to his words.

We in our day if we are followers are called to do the same. The true disciple will listen to Jesus.

That is what Jesus expects and encourages. But how do we do that?

Can I just give us my top tips for listening to Jesus?

a. if you haven't got one get a Bible the NIV is fine though the newer translations, which are the only ones you can buy now, are not as good as the one we use here. If not NIV the ESV is good. But get a Bible and read it, read the gospels and listen to Jesus. Read the rest of the NT and listen to what people saying about Jesus and about following him. Read the OT and see what was said about him before he was born.

b. Get some Bible reading notes – they can be a great help. But can I make a plea get some notes that help you read the Bible not that get you to read one verse and then give you a little homily!

c. Make time to read and think. Read the passage and ask what is God saying here? Take time to do that before you use the notes to help you understand.

d. Be regular in your reading. It may not be every day but perhaps more than once a week.

e. Be accountable. It may help to have a friend with whom you share what you are reading and who can ask the question – how are you getting on with reading Numbers!

Then there are many other things that can help us such as joining a homegroup, taking notes from the sermons, going on line to listen to the sermon if we have missed it.

Jesus expected and encouraged his disciples to listen to him through his words and he expects and encourages us to do the same.

However having said that we have only got half of what Jesus was saying and indeed if we stop there then Jesus would say you haven't got it at all.

2. The true disciple listens and obeys

That was what Jesus was saying as he drew the Sermon on the Mount to a close. He was saying I have taught you lots, I hope you have been listening now if you really are my disciples you will go and put it into practice.

As John Stott put it "neither an intellectual knowledge of him nor a verbal profession, though both are essential in themselves, can ever be a substitute for obedience." (Christian Counter Culture p209)

The wise man, the true disciple is the person who not only hears but puts into practice what Jesus says. Such a person Jesus points out here is like someone who builds a house on a rock. He was not suggesting it is easy, there will be times when what Jesus says is hard to understand and hard to accept but in so doing we are building a true life as a disciple rather than a facade. Solid foundations are important for buildings and they are important for our lives as well. What is your life based on? What gives it shape, purpose, meaning? Jesus here suggests it should be obedience to his word. It is possible to give the impression that we are real followers of Jesus just as buildings can give an impression of solidity.

It was only a few weeks ago that that eight story building just outside Dhaka in Bangladesh collapsed with devastating effect. The building looked good but had not been properly built and the result was dreadful.

That is the image Jesus is using here in terms of building our lives properly. As Jesus shows it is when the storms come, when there are problems and tough times that we find out whether our lives are really based on Jesus and can stand the pressures, the pains, the temptations and trials.

But also it will be on that day when we stand before the judgement throne of God that lives built on the wrong foundation will be revealed with devastating effect.

Now please though note I am not saying in this that we are saved by obeying Jesus. We are not saved by the good things we may do. Our salvation comes only through faith in what Jesus has done for us in his death on the cross. However, the reality of our saving faith is shown in living our lives in obedience to Jesus.

The message from Jesus for his disciples then and now is very clear and very straightforward hear my words and obey them. That is what a true disciple does and as we do that we are building our lives on a strong base that will help us should the going get tough.

But that is easier said than done isn't it because while listening may not be too hard obeying can be!

I know many of you have Satnav's in your car. I wonder how many times you think actually no I won't go that way because I'm sure this way will be quicker and better. Or it seems to be taking you on a route through a town and you think it will be nicer and easier to skirt the town. Or perhaps you don't have a Satnav at all because you don't like to be told what to do!

If we are followers of Jesus there will be times when we have listened to him but not obeyed and if we are not yet followers of Jesus it may be because we don't want to obey and the reasons for both may be similar to what I have just suggested with the Satnav.

We don't do what Jesus says because:

a. sometimes we think we know better than Jesus.

When she was little our daughter Anna used to use the expression "I do it my own". That is what we are independent people and we think we can run our lives ourselves we don't need any help and especially not from God. Turn God off and we can get on very well. In one sense that may be so but ultimately it is a disastrous decision like building a house on sand.

b. sometimes what we hear seems hard to do and so we just put that aside.

One of the aspects many find hard is sharing faith and we can easily say because I find it hard let me ignore Jesus command to his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.

c. basically we don't like being told what to do. Some people will say that is the problem with religion it is all about do this don't do that and as we think about hearing and obeying it can sound as if that is what I am suggesting. But actually the Christian faith is about a relationship and about obeying Jesus because we know all he has done for us, that he as God knows what is best for us and that his will for us is perfect and good.

Friends if any of these things apply to you or if there are other things which are stopping you obeying the word of Jesus then please listen and repent.

Jesus' message for his disciples then and now is hear my words and obey them. Are we going to hear and do that?

3. The words of Jesus

Jesus expected and encouraged his disciples to obey his words, but what did he have in mind for his disciples to do? What words did he think they should be listening to and putting into practice.

Well I suppose overall we should be placing our lives under the authority of the whole of Scripture but here surely "these words of mine" must refer back to what he has just been saying in the Sermon on the Mount.

As I said earlier one of the marks of Jesus' authority which leads us to see him as God was his authority in the way he taught. We see that a lot in the Sermon on the Mount where he uses the expression "you have heard it said...but I tell you". It was that which made the people listening sit up

and take notice. Here was something very different from what they normally heard. “I tell you” has an authority doesn’t it?

In these chapters he told them about being salt and light, making a difference in the world as they lived out and spoke out their faith. He spoke about loving their enemies and not seeking revenge – that’s a hard saying we might be tempted to put aside. He spoke about worry, about true spirituality being what takes place out of sight of others rather than on show for others to be impressed by! I haven’t time to go through the whole of the Sermon on the Mount but you can look it through later today or as your Bible reading this week.

These are the words of Jesus that he expects and encourages those first disciples, and us centuries later, to hear and to put into practice.

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? It means Jesus expects and encourages us to hear and obey his word. That is being a true disciple, a wise person.