



Sunday 2nd May, 2021

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

This Generation – Challenge

1. Reading:

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

16 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn."

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; 19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

25 At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

2. Questions:

a. 'Expectations' are defined as 'a strong belief that something will happen or be the case' and each generation has differing expectations. What expectations do you have about the life you would wish to lead? In what ways have you had to adapt or change your expectations about life through circumstances you have experienced?

b. It is impossible that Jesus will meet all our expectations; not because he's not 'up to scratch' but because our ways/goals/methods/values do not always match his. How have your expectations about who Jesus is changed in recent years?

c. Sally said, 'God isn't about books and laws and religious rituals. The ordinary people surrounding Jesus at the time, the sinners, tax collectors, the poor, the widows etc. they were discovering more of God simply by

following Jesus and being with him, eating, drinking, fellowshiping and finding out about his love, mercy, grace and forgiveness.'

How might those of us who hold intelligence, rules and religious life in high value struggle with God's grace going first for those who appear 'less deserving'?

d. Even today followers of Jesus still try to demonstrate their discipleship primarily through obedience to Christian rules. It's exhausting! What kind of alternative life do you think Jesus is suggesting when he invites the weary and burdened to follow him?

e. Sally said that the elders were currently learning about the value of 'indifference'. That is an indifference to 'our baggage, our expectations, our cultural norms and unconscious biases' which means we are free to solely hear and respond to God's purposes and plans. (This indifference is costly because we cling on tightly to our baggage, expectations, culture and biases'). Can you truly say that you are free from some constraints? If not, what might you need to do to become indifferent to all but God's will.

3. Prayer:

Bring your expectations to God.

- Expectations about the life you want and give them over to God.
 - Take from him the gift of only the life he would have for you.
- Expectations about who you have made Jesus to be and give them to God.
 - Take from him the gift of only the Jesus who he truly is.

Bring your busyness to God and ask his forgiveness for not having accepted and lived the life he wanted for you.

Receive from God his rest; his yoke (which harnesses you alongside him).

Receive his ease and lightness.

Bring your 'baggage, our cultural norms and unconscious biases' to God. List them; think through them.

Offer them to God in exchange for indifference to all things apart from the will of God for our lives.

4. Text of the Sermon:

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

This Generation – Challenge

Today we're continuing to explore the gospel of Matthew and today I'm going to talk you through some passages from chapter 11, that my bible heading refers to as "This Generation" and "Rest for the Weary". So why are we looking at a generation issue, and rest for the weary in the same message – hopefully all will come clear!

So, I belong to Generation X. If you're familiar with the sociological thinking of grouping people according to their date of birth into broad categories, and labelling them with similar characteristics and behaviours. So I'm a Gen X. Born in the 60's and 70's – 73 to be precise. That apparently makes me materialistic, competitive and individualistic. I apparently like status, brands, nice cars and luxury articles. For those of you who know me reasonably well, I'd hope you agree that I wouldn't call myself any of those things, nor a slave to the brand icons – as my teenage son will attest when he frequently begs for expensive branded clothes. Except for individualistic – I think I like that. The Generation label also indicates what political era you were born into, what national and global circumstances that may have affected your upbringing and view of the world. As I was born in the 70's in South Africa in the height of the awful apartheid regime, my world view and social context is likely to be very different to yours, depending on where and when you were born.

So here's a quiz for you – if you were born in the 1940s-50s – Baby boomer
80's and early 90's – Gen Y (millennial)

1995 – 2010 – Gen Z

2010 – now – Generation Alpha

What's all this got to do with the passage we're looking at today? I hardly think the people of Jesus day sat around pondering these things. But Jesus makes the point about 'this generation' as we see in the first part of the passage from Matthew 11: 16-19. So let's read this now.

Matthew 11:16-19 NLT – this is Jesus talking

16 “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

17 ‘We played the pipe for you,

and you did not dance;

we sang a dirge,

and you did not mourn.’

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

So, what were the characteristics of the generation that Jesus walked the earth with? We know that they were under Roman occupation and the Jewish people had a long history and memory of God, Moses and the prophets. They had visions of the Kingdom of God being like it was in the Old Testament with swords, spears and violence through holy wars. Their vision of a messiah was most likely built on that expectation that the Messiah would come with a sword and vanquish the Romans and free the Israelites once more. But Jesus isn't that kind of messiah. He came like a window on to the living God. Where he was, through his words and actions, people could see who God the Father really was, and get a glimpse of the real Kingdom of God. And it wasn't swords and fighting and holy wars. It was love, mercy, grace, forgiveness.

And the generation that Jesus walked with wasn't comfortable with this. It didn't fit with their expectations. They were looking for something different. They rejected John the Baptist, who we know paved the way for Jesus. Despite that being prophesied in the Old Testament book of Malachi - that Jesus' contemporaries would have known, he didn't fit with their model, they thought he was possessed; that strange man who wore camel hair clothes and ate locusts and honey, (certainly not a Gen X like I am apparently).

And then the people of the day couldn't see Jesus for who he was. He came to the table to fellowship, eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners, he made wine out of water at a wedding! Where's the sword and battle and freedom from Roman rule they were expecting? Jesus didn't fit their mould. They made excuses not to be with him, listen to him and believe him. They responded to him with indifference and rejection, ultimately betrayal leading to His death on a cross. How do you reach a generation like that?

Does that sound familiar – indifference and rejection? It's not about what decade they or we are born in, whether you're a boomer, an X,Y or Z, or even a young Alpha generation. Jesus faced the same indifference and rejection 2000 years ago that he does today.

So how does Jesus respond? We find out in the next set of verses from Matthew 11 – verses 25 – 30.

25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

27 “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

There's so much in those verses – let's unpack this a bit more.

At the end of the first passage we looked at – verse 19, Jesus says that “wisdom is proved right by her deeds”. People of the day would have looked up at their religious leaders as wise and learned scholars because they studied the law and publicly lived out the law. That ‘wisdom’ may have seemed out of reach to the ordinary people. But it was those people that led the rejection of Jesus. Where was their wisdom, if in their ‘deeds’ (v19) they couldn’t or wouldn’t recognise Jesus as Christ the Messiah. So in verse 25, Jesus cuts right through this perception of wisdom by praising God for hiding true knowledge and wisdom from these ‘so called wise men’ and showing them to little children - to those of little apparent wisdom, not clouded by the old law and pre-conception of what Jesus would be like. Jesus was the Son of God – he reminded them of this in verse 19. But he had come to know God his Father not by studying books about him but by living in his presence, listening for his voice, learning from him by watching and imitating Him. And because of that, God had revealed everything to him.

Jesus pointed out that the ‘wise and learned’ people were getting nowhere. God isn’t about books and laws and religious rituals. The ordinary people surrounding Jesus at the time, the sinners, tax collectors, the poor, the widows etc. they were discovering more of God simply by following Jesus and being with him, eating, drinking, fellowshiping and finding out about his love, mercy, grace and forgiveness. Just by being with him. So, Jesus then does what the religious leaders were least expecting. He says to them, verse 28, “come”. Not a call to battle on his chariot, but come – you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

What? Rest? Rest from what? Where’s their salvation from the Roman occupation, where’s their freedom? No, Jesus knows they are burdened with the yoke of law and religion. They are clouded by their pre-conceptions, their expectations, what their parent’s had told them. They may have been agonising about whether to step away from their generational expectations and step into the shadow of Jesus. They may have been indifferent or/and outright rejected Jesus. But Jesus invites them and says “come”. Come to the Father, through me. Wear my yoke of mercy and love that is easy to bear. Not a yoke of oppression, fear and slavish obedience. To the ordinary Jewish people and their religious leaders this was radical and contradictory to what they had been expecting.

Jesus isn’t the sword wielding freedom fighter that they were expecting. He’s offering a lighter yoke. A yoke that keeps you joined together, following the same road, at the same pace. “Take my yoke and learn from me” Jesus says. “Sit at my feet, walk with me, eat with me, drink with me, celebrate with me. I am gentle and humble and I will give you rest.”

As an Eldership – we are doing a course together looking at how we can better discern what and how God is speaking to us leaders. We’re working through a book by Ruth Hayley-Barton called “Pursuing God’s will Together – a discernment practice for leadership groups” – it’s a long title ☹️. One of the things we as an eldership have been considering is indifference. This is different to the indifference Jesus encountered – people being disinterested, not bothered. But the sort of indifference we are looking at is setting aside our baggage, our expectations, our cultural norms and unconscious bias that we have in our hearts and minds, and once we’ve reached that place of indifference, neutrality, a blank sheet as it were, then we can truly open up our minds to listen to and hear from God. Here’s a quote from Ruth’s book:

What am I willing to let die [in order] to give God room to start something new? What will I lay aside or leave behind? People involved in the process of shedding may (need to) humble themselves or give up values they usually cherish in pursuit of the greater good. The process may mean spiritual death and resurrection (P.189) That’s what it’s like to take off the yoke that is heavy and burdensome, let things go, let values or traditions, expectations or preconceptions go, to die to them and enter a new life with Christ, with his yoke. Ruth goes on to talk about wisdom. We see from these passages in Matthew that Jesus doesn’t rate wisdom as the world perceives it.

This is why indifference precedes the prayer for wisdom. We need to be indifferent to our egos’ need to be seen as wise by human standards. We need to be aware of and utterly detached from the false self’s need for control, success and approval, or whatever else it longs for. Indifference prepares us to pray the prayer for wisdom and to receive it when it is given (P191)

That prayer for wisdom from the book of James 1:5 – says “If you seek wisdom, ask our generous God and he will give it to you”. But knowing what Jesus thinks of worldly wisdom, we would do well to become like

children, to become indifferent to our generational expectations and welcome the wisdom of God into a clear and open heart and mind.

Those words that Jesus spoke 2000 years ago to a generation of sceptics and 'opposers' are still so valid today. Whether you are a baby boomer sitting back enjoying your retirement, working hard to make a good life for yourself or your family, or young and finding your way through this world, those words are still the same and still totally relevant and still alive. They speak life. The message doesn't need to change. God doesn't change. God is the same then, now, always was, always is and always will be. Come. Come to him. Take his yoke that is easy and light. Walk the road with him and get to know him.