

The Latimer Women's Conference

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The second Latimer Women's Conference was held at St Christopher's Anglican Church, Christchurch, on the 17 and 18 of September 2010—just two weeks after the first Christchurch Earthquake of 4 September 2010! Understandably given the earthquake, the number of delegates at the conference was lower this year than in 2008, however for those who were able to attend, the conference was a great blessing.

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The Revd Kay Clark from Australia was our speaker. Kay is the Assistant Minister at St Michael's Anglican Church, Vaucluse, Australia. Kay brought us three talks on The Beatitudes. The first group of beatitudes were about the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. These are all descriptions of people who know their need—they are not arrogant, or self-sufficient. They know the true condition of their hearts and of the world and they mourn the way things are. They are meek, acknowledging to others their sin. These things aren't impressive in the world's eyes! But those who know their spiritual bankruptcy, those who mourn it, who hunger and thirst for righteousness...they will be "filled". They will have a sure and certain hope that one day all will be put right, God's kingdom will come fully and completely, and he will put an end to all unrighteousness.

The second group of beatitudes focussed on the character of God's people. They are to be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. To be merciful is to relate to people with grace, treating them with compassion as fellow sinners. To be pure in heart is to be single minded, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. To be a peacemaker is to be one who appeals to people to "be reconciled to God", and who also works to reconcile people to each other.

In the final group of beatitudes, those that speak of persecution, Kay explained that even though we are unlikely to be persecuted here in New Zealand in the same way other Christians have faced persecutions throughout the centuries, Jesus' words still speak to us because we all do face suffering in one way or another. What is our attitude towards the possibility of suffering? Do we see it as something to be avoided at all costs? As Christians, we should not flee from it or fear it, instead we should have a positive attitude towards suffering because we know that God will use it to mature us. We do not need to try to protect ourselves from it by making choices that are easy for us and our family.

I think that having a women's conference like this is a great thing for a number of reasons. Firstly, it's a chance for women to hear great teaching from other women (Titus 2:4). For those of us who are Mothers of young children, it's a rare opportunity indeed to be able to listen to teaching unhindered by little ones! Secondly, it's an opportunity for those of us from smaller evangelical churches (such as All Saints, Methven!) to see that there are many other like-minded people out there. Thirdly, we mustn't forget that some people coming along will actually not be Christians and it's a wonderful chance for them to sit under a weekend of Biblical teaching focussed on Jesus.

The timing of the women's conference was, on the surface of things, not the best. Two weeks after the Canterbury Earthquake and no chance to change the date. We had to call in musicians at the last minute as some of our original musicians were unable to play. The conference didn't get as much advertising as it could have, given the upheaval many churches were going through at that time. And we even had a 4.5 aftershock during one of Kay's talks!

However in a way the timing was perfect. In the wake of the earthquake, what a great chance it was to be reminded that it is actually a blessed state to be in, if we are helpless and aware of our own need (Matthew 5:3) and when we mourn the state of our world (Matthew 5:4). It was a chance to reconsider our priorities, remembering that we should be hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matthew 5:6), single-minded about following Christ (Matthew 5:8) and showing mercy to those who need it (Matthew 5:7), rather than looking after our own interests first. We should not be surprised when we face trouble or suffering (Matthew 5:10), instead we must trust God who is in control and who uses all things to work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purposes.

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