

## Matthew chs 13 – 17

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### Notes

1. In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: the Tyndale Commentary Matthew by R.V.G. Tasker, the Bible Speaks Today Commentary The Message of Matthew by Michael Green, Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 and Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 by Tom Wright, Matthew for Everyone Bible Study Guide by Tom Wright with Dale & Sandy Larsen, The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, the Bible Brief on Matthew 17-25 by Rob Dawson and Andrew Prince from The Briefing magazine # 336, the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet News of the Hour (Mark's Gospel) by Peter Bolt and Tony Payne, the St Faith's Bible Study booklet The King who must Die (Matt chs 17-26) by Kerry Nagel, 9 studies on Luke chs 9 to 12 by Ed O'Connor, John's Gospel (John chs 1-6) by Roger Green, Isaiah Surprising Salvation by Kirk Patston and The New Bible Dictionary (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Throughout the studies I've added paragraphs and used some of the questions from these books.

Ed O'Connor (began 25/05/12, finished 23/6/12)  
(small addition 17/7/12)

## Study 1, Matt 13:1-23, Parable of the Sower

### Introduction

"Under David and Solomon, Israel had been a safe and prosperous nation. According to his promises to Abraham, God had planted them in the Promised Land, subdued their enemies, and blessed them with prosperity. This was the historical high point of Israel as a nation.

From that point on, things went downhill. Israel was destroyed because of its chronic apostasy and rebellion against God. By the time of the Exile to Babylon in 587 BC, the everlasting kingdom promised to David in 2 Samuel 7 was in ruins (see Ps 89).

But all was not lost. God's promise to Abraham still stood. As Israel's fortunes declined, the prophets emphatically declared that God would restore his kingdom. . . .

The Jews of Jesus' day were sick of being losers. Nearly five centuries had passed since the last of the Old Testament prophets, and during that period, with a few exceptions, Israel had suffered nothing but humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles (first the Greeks and then the Romans). . . .

Into this mixed environment of messianic hope strode Jesus, proclaiming that the time had finally come - the kingdom of God was at hand."

From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) pp 9-11 by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne.

In the first half of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus had been talking about the kingdom and revealing that he is the king who is bringing in the kingdom. But this type of kingdom and this type of king wasn't what many people expected or wanted and Jesus endured a good deal of opposition. Chapter 13 is the hinge on which this whole Gospel turns. After chapter 13 Jesus sets forth from Galilee towards Jerusalem and his death. We will see this happening in the chapters to come but for now we will look at the pivotal chapter 13 and, in particular, the Parable of the Sower.

### Getting started

1. When you were at school how did you learn things?
  
2. Was there a method of learning that worked particularly well for you?

### Bible

3. Read Matt 13:10. Jesus tells his first parable, the Parable of the Sower.
  - (a) To whom did Jesus tell this parable?
  
  - (b) What do you think v9 means?
  
  - (c) When you were at school and the teacher said something you didn't understand, what did you do?
  
  - (d) Who asked a question about the parable?
  - (e) Read v10 again but before reading any further, what do you think would be a logical reason for teaching a parable?
  
4. Read Matt 13:10-17. Why does Jesus teach in parables?

**Matt 13:14-15 quotes Isaiah 6:9-10.** The book of Isaiah begins with a description of the wickedness of the people of Judah and God's impending judgement of them. Isaiah volunteers for the task of preaching to these people. Usually a prophet's words were to convince the people of their sin and cause them to repent but God tells Isaiah that his preaching will only confirm their hard heartedness and blindness. "As a parable preacher, Jesus saw himself performing the same function as Isaiah: preaching to make people blind and to

confirm their hard-heartedness. This worked itself out in at least two ways. As Jesus' ministry came to an end, his act of cleansing the temple and the tearing of the temple curtain at his death were signals that the end of national Israel had come. Like Isaiah, Jesus was at work as Israel was coming to an end. From another point of view, Jesus worked to bring himself to an end! The parables confused and provoked people who turned on him and killed him. Jesus, as the true Israel, fell under the judgement of God. This was as God had planned and, strangely, just what he wanted."

From Isaiah Surprising Salvation pp 92-93 by Kirk Patston.

5. Read Matt 13:18-23. The disciples are given the secrets of the kingdom (v11) but it doesn't mean they immediately know what a particular parable means. They need to be *given* the explanation and Jesus does so in vv 18-23.

(a) Do you know people who you thought were Christians but they seem to have drifted away?

(b) Do any of the reasons given in this passage apply to people you have known?

(c) Do you know of other reasons that people drift away?

(d) In this context what does the expression "drifting away" mean?

### To finish

6. (a) Do you treat Christians differently to non-Christians? Do you think you should?

(b) People who drift away (see Matt 13:18-23) can perhaps be encouraged to come back.

Think about these two scenarios and in each situation ask yourself the questions

"Are they treating Christians differently to non-Christians? Do you think they should?"

- (i) A church is so evangelistically minded that it values witnessing to non-Christians more greatly than nurturing its own flock.

- Does lack of nurturing contribute to people drifting away?

- (ii) Christians are so involved with doing church things that they don't have any non-Christian friends and don't need or want non-Christian friends.

- Sometimes the people we consider to be non-Christians are people who have drifted away. Does our neglect of non-Christians contribute to people staying away?

3. Jesus gives us some ideas about the kingdom of heaven in the following parables:
  - (a) Read Matt 13:24-30 and 13:36-43 where Jesus explains this parable – the Parable of the Weeds. What is the main point of the parable?
  - (b) Remember last term we studied a book called God's Big Picture by Vaughan Roberts which was about looking at the theme of the kingdom of God as it progressed through the whole Bible. We used the idea of the kingdom of God as God's people in God's place under God's rule. How does this idea of the kingdom of God (= the kingdom of heaven) fit in with what Jesus has said about the kingdom in this parable?
4. Read Matt 13:31-32 – the Parable of the Mustard Seed.
  - (a) What is the main point of the parable?

(b) How does the idea of the kingdom of heaven as being God's people in God's place under God's rule fit in with what Jesus has said about the kingdom in this parable?

5. Read Matt 13:33 the Parable of the Leaven.

(a) What is the main point of the parable?

(b) How does the idea of the kingdom of heaven as being God's people in God's place under God's rule fit in with what Jesus has said about the kingdom in this parable?

"In bread-making the **leaven** was probably a piece of dough, retained from a former baking, which had fermented and turned acid. This was then either dissolved in water in the kneading-trough before the flour was added, or was 'hid' in the flour (Matt 13:33) and kneaded along with it. The bread thus made was known as 'leavened', as distinct from 'unleavened' bread (Ex 12:15, etc.)"

From The New Bible Dictionary (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) p 679.

6. Read Matt 13:34-35. This is how Jesus spoke to the *crowds* not his disciples and the crowds didn't get it (Matt 13:14-15) but some people could have come to Jesus for an explanation and become disciples.

Matt 13:35 quotes **Ps 78** where the psalmist reminds God's people about God bringing them into his kingdom though his mighty acts during the Exodus but they continued to sin against him. After punishing his people God chose David to shepherd his people to safety. Like the psalmist Jesus tells the crowds about God's kingdom which is the same in Jesus' day as it was in the past.

7. Read Matt 13:44 – the Parable of the Hidden Treasure.

(a) What is the main point of the parable?

(b) How does the idea of the kingdom of heaven as being God's people in God's place under God's rule fit in with what Jesus has said about the kingdom in this parable?

8. Read Matt 13:45-46 – the Parable of the Pearl.

(a) What is the main point of the parable?

(b) How does the idea of the kingdom of heaven as being God's people in God's place under God's rule fit in with what Jesus has said about the kingdom in this parable?

9. Read Matt 13:47-50 – the Parable of the Net.

(a) What is the main point of the parable?

(b) How does the idea of the kingdom of heaven as being God's people in God's place under God's rule fit in with what Jesus has said about the kingdom in this parable?

10. Read Matt 13:51-52.  
What do you think this means?

11. Read Matt 13:53-58. ?

“Up to this point Matthew has been giving an account of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, his own country. And the conclusion of it is that Galilee has rejected him. Not completely. And he will not immediately leave it. But an unmistakable indicator is raised that his days in Galilee are numbered, and from now on his direction is towards Jerusalem and his death. There is a powerful parallelism here, too. The first part of the Gospel ends with this note of rejection in Galilee. The second part of the Gospel brings us to his crucifixion in Jerusalem. The lesser prepares the reader of the greater. But there is an overtone here which it is important not to miss. The implication of a prophet not being recognized in his home area is that he *is* recognized outside it. And that of course took place. The hint of Gentile expansion at the end of the first half of the book is made explicit with the Great Commission [Matt 28:19-20] to the Gentile mission at the end of the second half. The proximate rejection of Jesus in his *patris* leads forward to his ultimate recognition universally throughout the world.”

From the Bible Speaks Today Commentary The Message of Matthew p 162 by Michael Green.

### To finish

12. How do you feel about parables as a teaching method?
13. What is the best way for you to learn about following Christ?

### Study 3, Matt 14:1-21, Death of John the Baptist and Jesus feeds 5,000

#### Getting started

1. When someone mentions the word “serving” at church what do you think of?
  
2. Describe a bigger picture for “serving”.

#### Bible

Read Matt 14:1-12.

“**Herod** king of Judea” (Luke 1:5) or Herod the Great was given the title ‘king of the Jews’ by the Roman Senate, advised by Antony and Octavian. He ruled Palestine for the Romans even though he was an Edomite by birth. He was king when Jesus was born and ordered the slaughter of the children at Bethlehem (Matt ch 2). After his death his kingdom was split up amongst his sons, one of whom, ‘**Herod the tetrarch**’ or Herod Antipas, is the Herod mentioned in the rest of Luke [and Matthew]. He inherited the Galilean and Peraean portions of his father’s kingdom. In the Gospels he is conspicuous chiefly for his part in the imprisonment and execution of John the Baptist and for his encounter with Jesus when he was sent to him by Pilate for judgement.

From The New Bible Dictionary p 522.

3. What are Herod’s strengths and weaknesses?
  
4. What threat does Herod pose for Jesus’ mission?
  
5. Why does Matthew make such a point of what happens to the body of John the Baptist (see Matt 14:2, 16:14, 27:49)?

**John [the Baptist]** has cleared the path for Jesus, by warning people of the coming kingdom and preparing them for the coming king. He has made it clear, in his preaching, that Herod can’t be the true king of the Jews, the Messiah. His moral life is such a mess that the idea is unthinkable. That’s probably what lies behind John’s attack on Herod’s bizarre marriage, stealing his own brother’s wife. It isn’t just that Herod is an adulterer, but that such behaviour demonstrates that he can’t be the Lord’s anointed.

From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 p 182 by Tom Wright.

6. Read Matt 14:13-21.  
What is remarkable about Jesus’ reaction to the crowds?

7. What does the feeding of the 5,000 remind you of in the Old Testament (see Ex 16:1-18)?
8. What does this say about Jesus?
9. What do you think Jesus wanted his disciples to learn from this event?
10. The role of the disciples amongst the 5,000 can be seen as similar to our role amongst our community. What aspect of our role is on display here?

**To finish**

11. How were John the Baptist, Jesus and the disciples “serving”?
12. Who do you serve and how do you serve?



## Study 4, Matt 14:22-36, Walking on water

### Getting started

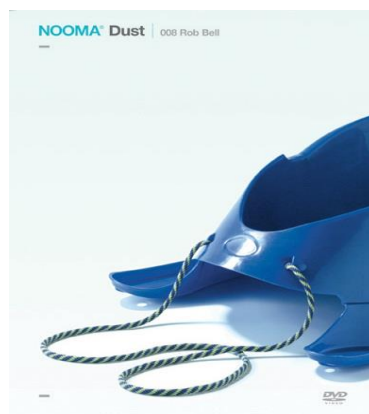
1. What do you do when you hear things from other people or in the media that you find very hard to believe?
  
2. (a) What are some of the things people find very hard to believe about Jesus and what he did?
  
- (b) What do those people do about the things of Jesus that they find very hard to believe?
  
- (c) What do you do about it?

**Bible** Read Matt 14:22-33. 2 options: (A) Video or (B) Study.

### (A) Video

For a change we could watch a video which talks about Jesus walking on water. The video only goes for 14 mins and the speaker, Rob Bell, doesn't *only* speak about Jesus walking on water so don't focus only on that. Rob Bell says some other very interesting things as well. We will talk about the video after it has finished and if you have any questions we will deal with them too.

Play Nooma video "Dust".



3. What was the main point of the video?
  
4. Was there anything that surprised you in the video or anything you didn't know before seeing the video?

5. (a) Have you any questions about the video or was there anything you didn't understand?

(b) Did you get the thing with the neighbour shovelling snow?

**Ans.** At the beginning Rob Bell says he wants to be a person who does the right thing, like help your neighbour shovelling snow. But he doesn't do that. At the end of the video his neighbour has cleared her drive *and* her neighbour's drive. The neighbour has done the right thing and set the example of love and grace.

(c) Do you know why the video was called "Dust"?

6. Did you agree with Rob Bell's thoughts on faith?

(a) "It is good to have faith in God but God has faith in us. God chooses us because he has faith that we can be like Jesus."

(b) Rob Bell says Peter started sinking because he lost faith in *himself*. Agree or disagree? Why?

7. What was good about the video?

8. What was not so good about the video?

**"May you** believe in God and may you come to see that God believes in you. May you have faith in Jesus and may you come to see that Jesus has faith that you can be like him, a person of love and compassion and truth, a person of forgiveness and peace and grace, joy and hope and may you be covered in the dust of your rabbi, Jesus."

**(B) Study.**

3. Read Matt 14:22-33.  
What is hard to believe about this story?
4. Did Peter have little faith in Jesus or himself? Give reasons for your answer.
5. When do you lack faith in God?
6. When do you lack faith in yourself?

There are many times when Jesus asks us to do what seems impossible. How can we even begin to do the task he's called us to? How can we even think of doing without that sin which we're asked to give up? How can we really suppose we might be able to develop a serious habit of prayer when we're so frantic and disorganized?

Of course, if like Peter we look at the waves being lashed by the wind, we will conclude that it is indeed impossible. What we are called to do – it's so basic and obvious, but so hard to do in practice – is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, and our ears open for his encouragement (even if it does contain some rebuke as well). And our wills and hearts must be ready to do what he says, even if it seems crazy at the time.

From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 p 191 by Tom Wright.

7. Do you have faith in other people? What do you do if you lack faith in other people?
8. Read Matt 14:34-36.  
(a) Is it superstition to touch the fringe of Jesus' garment to be made well, or faith?

(b) What is the difference between superstition and faith?

**To finish**

9. Why are some people superstitious?
10. What would you say to someone who said believing in Jesus was superstition?

## Study 5, Matt 15:1-20, The Pharisees

### Getting started

1. What is morality?
2. Where did you get your morality?

### Bible

**Pharisees** (see p 18).

**Experts/teachers of the law = scribes**

“In a world where many could not write, or not very well, a trained class of writers (‘scribes’ [= teachers of the law]) performed the important function of drawing up contracts for business, marriage, etc. Many scribes would thus be legal experts, and quite possibly Pharisees, though being a scribe was compatible with various political and religious standpoints. They believed that Israel’s law, the Torah, should be applied to every area of life, and so combined in themselves the modern roles of ‘lawyer’ and ‘religious teacher’, and much besides. It is small wonder that such people took offence at what Jesus was saying. If he was right, their entire programme was based on a huge mistake. If they were right, the mistake was his. The fierce opposition between them continues on and off right through to the final showdown in Jerusalem.”

From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 146 & 316.

3. Read Matt 15:1-9.  
What do the Pharisees and scribes accuse Jesus of breaking?
4. What does Jesus accuse the Pharisees and scribes of breaking?
5. Who is right and who is wrong? Why?

In the Ten Commandments themselves, the Israelites were commanded to **honour their parents**. This meant, not least, looking after them in their old age. But in the Pharisees’ traditions it was permitted that someone might make a gift to the Temple of an equivalent amount to what they might have spent on their parents. If they did that, they were deemed to be under no further obligation. This had an obvious benefit to the Temple, and indeed might give the appearance of great piety. But it undermined the whole point of the law.

From Matthew for Everyone part 1 chapters 1-15 p 194 by Tom Wright.

6. Read Matt 15:10-20.  
In verse 15, Peter asks Jesus to “explain the parable”. Which ‘parable’ is Peter talking about?
7. How does “what comes out of the mouth” (v11) reveal what is in the heart?

8. Why is it easier to keep yourself pure externally than to keep yourself pure internally?

**Washing hands before meals** was not required by the Old Testament, but it had become an essential part of the tradition of the Pharisees [see note in Study 8], which they regarded as possessing the same authority as the law itself. They insisted upon this washing not for sanitary but religious reasons. To them it was the means by which any ritual defilement they might have incurred by coming into contact with people or things that were legally 'unclean' could be removed.

From the Tyndale Commentary Matthew p 147 by R.V.G. Tasker.

[The Pharisees] had good reason for their view. It was not only substantially representing the scribal tradition, but it was heavily dependent on the purity laws in the book of Leviticus [e.g. Lev 7:22-27; 11; 17]. This saying [Matt 15:11], as Mark perceived in his Gospel's account of the incident [Mark 7:19], had the effect of doing away with the ceremonial law and rendering all meats 'clean'. This was revolutionary. No wonder the Pharisees were livid. Jesus quite firmly and deliberately sets himself up against the Old Testament ceremonial law.

From the Bible Speaks Today Commentary The Message of Matthew p 170 by Michael Green.

### To finish

9. (a) Think about what comes out of your mouth. Are you happy with all that you say and how you say it?

(b) What needs to be fixed?

(c) How can you fix it?

10. By comparing what you say with your morality you determine what needs to be fixed and what is ok. If you are trying to be more like Jesus then you get your morality from knowing Jesus. Jesus has rejected the ceremonial law in Matt 15:1-20. If we are to be like Jesus then we are not to base our morality on the Old Testament law, at least not *all* the Old Testament law.

(a) Which bits of the Old Testament law do we follow and which bits do we ignore?

(b) List some other areas where Jesus didn't exactly follow the Old Testament law?

(c) What did Jesus base his morality on?

**Study 6, Matt 15:21-28, A Canaanite woman****Getting started**

1. What is “political correctness”?
2. Describe some personal situations that have involved political correctness?
3. What happens if you break the rules of political correctness?

**Bible**

4. Read Matt 15:21-28. What significance does Jesus draw from the fact that the woman is a Canaanite (see vv 24 & 26)?
5. What is startling or puzzling about what happens when Jesus talks to the Canaanite woman?
6. How does the Canaanite woman demonstrate her persistence?
7. After first refusing why does Jesus then agree to help?
8. How does this episode add to the discussion from Study 5 (Matt 15:1-20) about the themes of clean and unclean, pure and impure?

9. How do you feel about Jesus calling Gentiles “dogs”?

[Jesus] wasn't simply a travelling doctor whose task was to heal every sick person he met. He had a very specific calling, which he already hinted at in Matt 10:5-6. God's people, Israel, needed to know that their God was now at last fulfilling his promises. If God's new life was to come to the world, it would come through Israel. That's why Israel had to hear the message first. But if Israel is indeed the promise-bearing people, then Israel's Messiah will ultimately bring blessing to the whole world. The Canaanite woman in fact reminds Jesus of this by saying that even so-called [Gentile] dogs will share the scraps that fall from the children's [of Israel] table. . . . The woman's faith broke through the waiting period, and Jesus congratulates her for her great faith.

From Matthew for Everyone Bible Study Guide by Tom Wright with Dale & Sandy Larsen pp 69-70.

**To finish**

10. Jesus doesn't worry about rules for “political correctness. It's a bit like Jesus not worrying about the rules for Jewish hand washing (Matt 15:1-9). Some other examples of Jesus not following the rules are:

(a) At the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-5) Jesus' mother asks him about the wine and he says “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” Not the right way to talk to your mother according to our morality.

(b) Jesus made a whip to drive the traders and money changers out of the temple (John 2:13-17). It would have taken some time to make a whip. Maybe Jesus did it overnight. It's not “right” to stay angry for a prolonged period of time to make a whip to use it on people the next day.

(c) The Jews knew what you should or shouldn't do on the Sabbath and, to their way of thinking, Jesus was wrong by healing on the Sabbath (John 5:1-17). Jesus' answer to them was based on his relationship with the Father (v17). (See also Luke 6:1-11, 14:1-6, Matt 12:1-14.)

(d) The scribes and Pharisees knew it was right according to the Law that an adulterous woman should be put to death (Lev 20:10). When they brought her to Jesus (John 8:1-11) he doesn't think that way. Jesus disobeys the Law and lets her go.

(e) Although Judas had mixed motives he knew it was right to give to the poor and not waste expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. Jesus didn't think that way and told him to leave Mary alone (John 12:1-8).

(f) Jesus cursed and killed a fig tree in order to make a point about faith (Matt 21:18-22, Mark 11:12-14) to his disciples. Today we would label this a misuse of power.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement and give reasons for your answer:

“Jesus lives life in relationship with his Father without regard for political correctness or Law.”

## Study 7, Matt 15:29-39, Jesus feeds 4,000

### Getting started

1. Besides being born, converted, married or having children what are two of the important events of your life?
2. Why are these two events so important to you?

### Bible

Read Matt 15:29-39. Jesus feeds thousands of people but why is this second story included so soon after a similar story in Matt 14:13-21? We will look at 2 reasons, A and B.

3. **Reason A.** Compare the language of vv29-31 with that of Matt 11:2-6. What is Matthew drawing to our attention?

4. **Reason B.** Some Old Testament prophecies that said Jerusalem ('Zion') would become the great mountain (or place) to which all nations would flock:

Jer 3:17 At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart.

Jer 31:10-12 "Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.' <sup>11</sup> For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. <sup>12</sup> They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more.

Eze 17:22-24 Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. <sup>23</sup> On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. <sup>24</sup> And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it."

Eze 20:40-41 "For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. <sup>41</sup> As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations.

Dan 2:35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Mic 4:1-2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, <sup>2</sup> and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.



Zech 2:11 And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

Zech 8:1-8 And the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. <sup>3</sup>Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain. <sup>4</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. <sup>5</sup>And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. <sup>6</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvellous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvellous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts? <sup>7</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, <sup>8</sup>and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

(a) The location for this story (Matt 15:29-39) is a mountain and who are the people flocking to?

(b) What does this say about Jesus?

### To finish

5. Name some of the greatest events in the history of our world?

6. (a) How does Jesus fit in with these great events of history?

(b) What difference does Jesus make?

## Study 8, Matt 16:1-12, Signs and leaven

## Getting started

1. What do you understand by the term “signs of the times”?
2. What are some signs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## Bible

3. Read Matt 16:1-4.  
What is the sign of Jonah (see Matt 12:38-42)?
4. Why do you think Jesus wouldn't give them a sign except the sign of Jonah?

The **Pharisees** were an unofficial but powerful Jewish pressure group through most of the first centuries BC and AD. Largely lay-led, though including some priests, their aim was to purify Israel through intensified observance of the Jewish law (Torah), developing their own traditions about the precise meaning and application of scripture, their own patterns of prayer and other devotion, and their own calculations of the national hope.

By Jesus' day, the **Sadducees** were the aristocracy of Judaism, possibly tracing their origins to the family of Zadok, David's high priest. Based in Jerusalem, and including most of the leading priestly families, they had their own traditions and attempted to resist the pressure of the Pharisees to conform to theirs. They claimed to rely only on the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), and denied any doctrine of a future life, particularly of the resurrection and other ideas associated with it, presumably because of the encouragement such beliefs gave to revolutionary movements.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 pp 221 and 223-224 by Tom Wright.

5. Read Matt 16:5-6.  
Before reading any further, what do you think Jesus means by verse 6?

6. Read Matt 16:7-12.

In bread-making the **leaven** was probably a piece of dough, retained from a former baking, which had fermented and turned acid. This was then either dissolved in water in the kneading-trough before the flour was added, or was 'hid' in the flour (Matt 13:33) and kneaded along with it. The bread thus made was known as 'leavened', as distinct from 'unleavened' bread (Ex 12:15, etc.)

From The New Bible Dictionary (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) p 679.

At Passover, one of the greatest Jewish festivals, all leaven had to be cleared out of the house, commemorating the time when the children of Israel left Egypt in such a hurry that they didn't have time to bake leavened bread, and so ate it unleavened. Gradually, 'leaven' became a symbol not for something that makes bread more palatable, but for something that makes it less pure. Warning against the 'leaven' of someone's teaching meant warning against ways in which the true message of God's kingdom could be corrupted, diluted or (as we say, referring to drink rather than bread), 'watered down'.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 pp 3-4 by Tom Wright.

Put yourself in the disciples shoes. What might it have felt like to follow someone who said things you often didn't understand, was caustic in how he spoke to the religious authorities, and yet performed good and miraculous deeds?

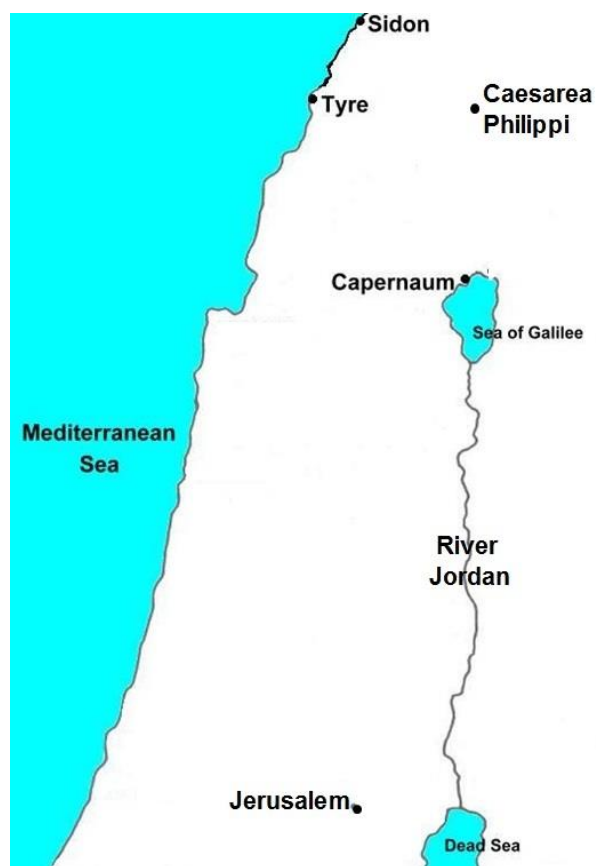
**To finish**

7. (a) What are the signs of God's work in our midst?

(b) How can you tell the difference between true signs and signs of today's equivalent of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees?

**Study 9, Matt 16:13-20, Peter gets it right****Getting started**

1. What do you remember as the first thing you learnt about Jesus?
2. What has surprised you about Jesus?
3. How do you think of Jesus now?

**Bible**

4. Read Matt 16:13-20.  
Why do you think Jesus wanted to know what people were saying about him?

5. Why did some people think Jesus was . . .  
 (a) John the Baptist (see Matt 14:1-12)?

(b) Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:17-24, 18:16-40, 2 Kings 2:1-12 and Mal 4:5-6)?

(c) Jeremiah (see Jer 26:1-16) or one of the prophets (see John 4:1-19)?

6. Write, in your own words, what Peter said about Jesus in verse 16.

It is important to be clear that at this stage the phrase '**son of God**' did not mean 'the second person of the Trinity'. There was no thought yet that the coming king would himself be divine – though some of the things Jesus was doing and saying must already have made the disciples very puzzled, with a perplexity that would only be resolved when, after his resurrection, they came to believe that he had all along been even more intimately associated with Israel's one God than they had ever imagined. No: the phrase 'son of God' was a biblical phrase, indicating that the king stood in a particular relation to God, adopted to be his special representative (see, for instance, 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7).

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 p 7 by Tom Wright.

**Son of Man** [verse 13] is a form of Aramaic speech that could be no more than a periphrasis for 'I'. But it could equally allude to the Son of Man to whom are given the everlasting kingdom and power and glory [Dan 7:13-14]. The ambiguity of the title matched the ambiguity of the person of Jesus. That is why he liked it. It could mean nothing – or everything. 'Messiah' (or **Christ**, the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew term, meaning 'anointed one') was soon so firmly associated with Jesus as to become almost a surname. In Judaism it meant the one who would come and fulfil the hopes of the nation. Traditionally, three sorts of people had been anointed with oil: prophets, priests and kings. [Jesus fulfilled all three roles perfectly.]

From the Bible Speaks Today Commentary The Message of Matthew p 178 by Michael Green.

7. What do you think Jesus meant by 'the rock' in verse 18?
8. Why didn't Jesus want the disciples to tell others that he was the Christ?

### To finish

9. How would you describe Jesus to someone who was interested in following him?
10. What is necessary before people can understand who Jesus is?

## Study 10, Matt 16:21-28, Peter gets it wrong

## Getting started

1. From memory of your conversion to Christianity, what did you understand about the commitment you had made?

## Bible

2. Read Matt 16:21-23.  
Why did Peter rebuke Jesus?
3. Why did Jesus rebuke Peter?
4. One minute Peter is getting it exactly right and is praised by Jesus (Matt 16:16-17) and the next minute Peter gets it exactly wrong and Jesus refers to him as Satan (Matt 16:22-23).  
How do you feel about Peter?

Peter, speaking for them all, has just told Jesus that as far as they're concerned he is not just a prophet, he's God's anointed king, the Messiah. Their natural next move would be to sit down and plan their strategy: if he's the king, and if his people are going to be like the house built on the rock, then they must figure out how to get rid of the present king and priests who are ruling Israel (or, more accurately, misruling it).

The obvious solution would be this: march on Jerusalem, pick up supporters on the way, choose your moment, say your prayers, fight a surprise battle, take over the Temple, and install Jesus as king. . . .

Yes, we'll be going to Jerusalem. Yes, the kingdom of God is coming, coming soon now. Yes, the son of man will be exalted as king, dispensing justice to the world. But the way to this kingdom is by the exact opposite road to the one the disciples – and especially Peter – have in mind. It will involve suffering and death. Jesus will indeed confront the rulers and authorities, the chief priests and legal experts, in Jerusalem; but they, not he, will appear to win the battle. He will then be raised from the dead, so Jesus says; but neither Peter nor the others can figure out for the moment what he might mean by this.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 p 10 by Tom Wright.

5. Read Matt 16:24-28.  
When we talk about 'following Jesus' we normally mean something like 'obeying Jesus' teaching' or 'living a good life after Jesus' example'. This part of Matthew gives us a much deeper perspective.  
(a) How do you lose your life for Jesus' sake (v25)?

(b) How do you feel about losing your life?

(c) What do you gain?

Then, as now, the followers of Jesus have been very slow to accept the necessity of sacrifice and suffering. Those who seek to have life on their own terms will lose it. Those who are prepared to sacrifice, even their own lives, will find it. 'This dying to self makes possible the radical love and service that are the essence of discipleship' (Hagner). Taking up the cross, death to self-interest was far from Peter's mind when he acclaimed Jesus as Messiah [Matt 16:16]. Jesus amazes them by his redefinition both of messiahship and discipleship.

From the Bible Speaks Today Commentary The Message of Matthew p 183 by Michael Green.

6. What do you think Jesus means by "coming in his kingdom" (v28)?

### To finish

7. Last term we looked at God's Big Picture by Vaughan Roberts which traced the theme of the Kingdom of God through the whole Bible.

(a) What is your place in the Kingdom of God?

(b) What is your role in the Kingdom of God?

## Study 11, Matt 17:1-13, The Transfiguration

### Getting started

1. (a) Do you interrupt others while they are speaking?
  
- (b) What are some good reasons for interrupting others?
  
- (c) What are some bad reasons for interrupting others?

### Bible

2. Read Matt 17:1-13.  
What great events in the Bible happen on mountains?  
Are mountains significant in the life of Moses, Elijah and Jesus?
  
3. What do you think Jesus was talking about with Moses and Elijah (see Luke 9:31)?
  
4. What is the significance of Moses and Elijah being there?

Moses and Elijah, the first great lawgiver and the first great prophet of Israel, now unite in recognizing in Jesus the One who is the fulfilment of all that is embodied in the Law and the Prophets.

From the Tyndale Commentary Matthew p 164 by R.V.G. Tasker.

5. While Peter was talking about building something he was interrupted by God. Peter was missing the point but what was the point of the Transfiguration?
  
6. (a) What is strange about Jesus' instructions in verse 9?
  
- (b) Why does Jesus give them those instructions (see also Matt 16:20)?



7. Coming down the mountain the disciples ask about Elijah. Are they missing the point again? What does Jesus re-direct them towards?

**To finish**

8. Why do we put so much emphasis on Jesus' death?
9. Jesus usually refers to his death *and* resurrection. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for you?
10. How do you feel about Jesus' resurrection?
11. Should we put as much emphasis or less emphasis or more emphasis on Jesus' resurrection? Why?



Context is vital in working out the meaning of any passage in the Bible. The cultural context of this passage will help us understand these verses:

**Temple tax.** The maintenance of the Temple was costly. So in accordance with the instructions given to Moses in Ex 30:11-16, a tax was levied upon every male Jew above the age of nineteen for the upkeep of the temple services. This tax consisted of half-a-shekel, called a *didrachma* or 'two-drachma'. But as the *didrachma* was not in current coinage, it was customary for two persons to combine and pay a full shekel or 'four-drachma coin'. Jesus points out to Peter that neither he nor Peter are under any moral obligation to pay the temple tax because earthly kings do not collect taxes and tolls from their own families and therefore the heavenly King does not tax his own children. But who are his 'children'? No longer all members of the Jewish race, but the *new* Israel, the disciples of Jesus the Messiah. They are now the 'Temple' in which the Father is pleased to dwell. For them, in consequence, the Jerusalem Temple is superseded. But Jesus does not wish to cause difficulty to those who have not yet understood that discipleship of himself means in effect a break with the Temple and its services. He therefore agrees that the tax should be paid by Peter and himself on this occasion.

From the Tyndale commentary Matthew p 170 by R.V.G. Tasker.

9. Jesus had instructed the Twelve to be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16). How does Jesus use his own advice in this problem with the temple tax?

### To finish

10. Describe your faith in Jesus.

11. When do we "leave it all to the Lord" and when do we use wisdom like Jesus did with the temple tax?