

# 17 Bible Studies on Matt chs 18-21 – 1<sup>st</sup> draft

The fortunes of Israel were at a low ebb. There had been a time when this was not so - 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. . . .

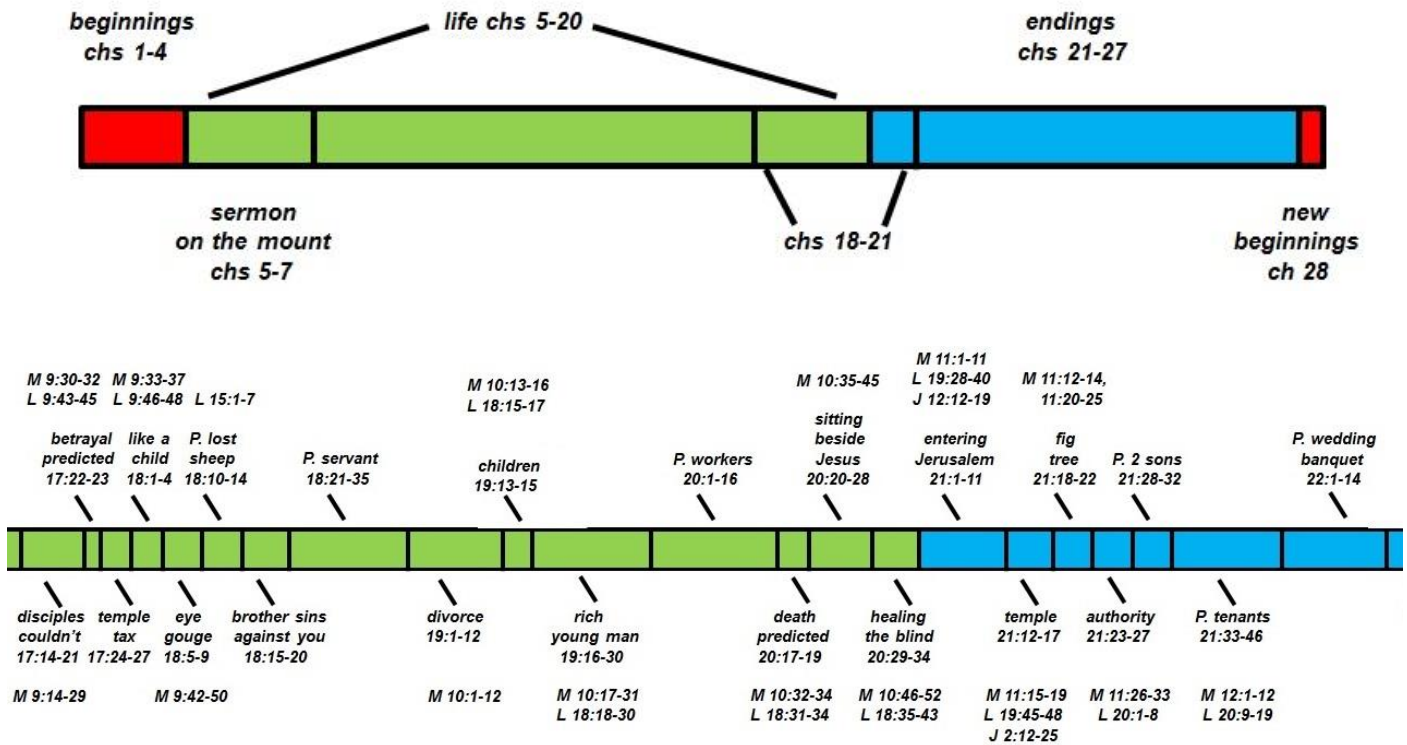
From The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) pp 9-11 by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne.

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. We see the glory of Jesus in chapters 17 to 20 and then Jesus arrives in Jerusalem in chapter 21. The Jews celebrate because their king has come but for others he's not welcome – there is a power struggle between Jesus and the religious heavies.

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In preparing these studies I've used the following sources:, New Bible Dictionary 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, The Lion Handbook to the Bible article by Richard France, The New Testament a translation by David Bentley Hart, The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page, The Evangelical Universalist by Gregory MacDonald, The Message of Matthew by Michael Green (Bible Speaks Today commentary), Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 and Mark for Everyone by Tom Wright, Luke (Tyndale Commentary) by Leon Morris, Doctrine II PTC study booklet by D.B.Knox, The Good Living Guide Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, Ten studies on Matthew chs 17 to 26 by Kerry Nagel St. Faiths, Narrabeen May 2005, Bible Brief on Matthew 17-25 from Briefing #336, Sept. 2006, Bible studies from St Andrews, Roseville 2015 (forgiveness) and 2016 (Matt ch 21), talks by Rikki Watts at Macquarie University 4, 5, 11, 12/7/2014, 7 talks on "Hope and Hell" from 2/3 to 7/9/2018 by Tony Golsby-Smith from [www.gospelconversations.com.au](http://www.gospelconversations.com.au), sermons by John Dickson at St Andrews, Roseville, Nooma video, #7, "Luggage", by Rob Bell

## Matthew's Gospel



## Study 1, Matt 18:1-4, like a child

### Getting started

1. What criteria do you use when evaluating how "great" someone is?



2. Is it wrong to want to be great?

3. What is true greatness?

### Bible

4. Read Matt 18:1-4 and 19:13-15.

(a) What is it about little children that allows them to enter the kingdom of heaven (18:3, 19:14)?

(b) (i) From Matt 18:1-4 what is it about humility that allows us to be great in the kingdom of heaven?

(ii) How does this answer the disciples' question in 18:1?

(c) How does Matt 19:13-15 add to what Jesus has already said in 18:1-4?

(d) (i) How does knowing Jesus help us to be humble?

(ii) How does knowing Jesus help us to have self-esteem?

(iii) Is there a problem in having both humility and self-esteem?

Along the way Jesus again talks of dark days ahead; but the disciples seem unable or unwilling to confront this reality. Instead they start arguing about who is the greatest. (Easy to see how this could come about. One can imagine the three disciples who had been up the mountain looking condescendingly at those who had failed at the mountain's base [Matt 17:1-13].) Jesus responds to this in a formal, rabbinic style: he sits down and calls them to him (Mark 9:35 [= Matt 18:1-4]). It is a seminar, a class about leadership. And, like everything else in the kingdom, it is upside down. The bottom is the top, the first is the last. The visual aid is a child. It is a striking image, because no one in the first-century Jewish world would see a child as a religious role model. Jesus is talking about service here. Whoever welcomes — i.e. 'serves' — these children is serving him; but in the household of his time the women, children and slaves did the welcoming, brought you food, washed your feet. In Aramaic the word for 'child' and the word for 'servant' are the same — talya.

The disciples are behaving childishly, but they need to behave like children. Jesus' teaching on leadership is informed all the time by a subversion of the models he sees around him. Leadership, for Jesus, is all bound up with service. We shall see this in its fullness in the Upper Room, the night before his execution [Luke 22:24-30]. His description of how honour and status work in the kingdom he is establishing is all about role reversal. It is an upside-down world, where the last is first, where the landless day labourer who works for one hour gets the same rate as those who worked all day [Matt 20:1-16], where those who expect the seats of honour will get put at the other end of the table.

It seems to me that Christianity has spent the better part of its history ignoring these principles. Take, for example, Jesus' impatience with titles and honorifics. "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father — the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah .The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted." (Matt. 23:8-12) I'm not sure how all the Fathers and the Reverends and the Canons and the Rectors and the Monsignors and the Senior Apostles and the Most Reverends have got around that one.

No status. No titles. No thrones or seats of honour. Slavery, servanthood, a childlike welcome to all. This may be why Mark also inserts here the story of the unauthorised exorcist [Mark 9:38-41]. Someone has been casting out demons in Jesus' name without seeking prior approval or filling in the forms. The church has a long history dismissing those doing good because they were not working through official channels, or because they were unorthodox, but Jesus puts it into perspective. 'Whoever is not against us is for us.' Don't knock them: they are on our side.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 182-183.

## To finish

5. How does this childlikeness work out in church leadership?
6. How does greatness in the kingdom of heaven relate to greatness in church?
7. (a) Is Jesus' idea of greatness at odds with church hierarchy?  
(b) If so, how can we change the church hierarchy so that it is in line with the way Jesus wanted it?

## Study 2, Matt 18:5-9, eye gouge

### Getting started

1. The Handmaid's Tale is an American TV series based on a 1985 Margaret Atwood novel by the same name. In the near future, fertility rates have collapsed as a result of sexually transmitted diseases and environmental pollution. The government of "Gilead" rules the former United States in the aftermath of a civil war. Society is run by male Christian fundamentalists called "Commanders". Women are subjugated and by law are not allowed to work for themselves, own property, handle money, or read. Worldwide infertility has resulted in the conscription of the few remaining fertile women in Gilead, called "Handmaids". They are assigned to the homes of the ruling elite where they must submit to ritualized sex with their Commander in order to become pregnant and bear children. Other classes of women are "Marthas", who are housekeepers and cooks, "Wives", who are expected to run their households, women prisoners are called "Unwomen" and are worked to death clearing toxic waste in the Colonies, "Aunts" train and oversee the Handmaids and "Jezebels" are prostitutes in secret brothels catering to the elite ruling class.

Everything in Gilead (Hosea 6:8, 12:11) has a Biblical basis.

Commanders rule because man was made in the image of God while woman was created to be his helper (Genesis 2:18) and the head of a woman is a man (1 Cor 11:3).

Handmaids are given to Commanders because Sarai couldn't have children (at first) so she gave her handmaid, Hagar, to Abram (Gen 16). When Rachel can't get pregnant she gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah (Gen 30). Handmaids are saved by bearing children (1 Tim 2:15) and are not to be given any anaesthetics when giving birth (Gen 3:16).

Wives are given the children borne by Handmaids (Gen 30:1).

Women are to grow their hair long (1 Cor 11:15).

Marthas derive their name from the biblical Martha, Mary's sister, who's more interested in preparing food and serving than listening to Jesus' teachings (Luke 10).

Transgressions of the law are dealt with most severely e.g. the death penalty is given for adultery (Lev 20:10) and homosexuality (Lev 20:13). Women are not allowed to be educated but Serena, the wife of Commander Waterford, asks an assembly of Commanders if the daughters of Wives could be allowed to read. As punishment for her "sin" Serena has a finger cut off (and one of the Wives comments that the penalty used to be a hand – Matt 5:30, 18:8).

(a) If Commanders can justify their actions biblically, where have they gone wrong?



(b) What is dangerous about using the Bible to justify our actions?

(c) How can we make sure we don't make the same mistakes in applying Matthew to our lives?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. When they ask him who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven he teaches them about children.

## Bible

2. Read Matt 18:5-7.

(a) Who is Jesus referring to as “little ones”?

They include weak, vulnerable children, of course, as we are thinking in the previous passage [Matt 18:1-7]. But they also include those who are weak and vulnerable at other times of life, too: the cripples, the chronically sick, the elderly and infirm, refugees, women (in many cultures), any who find themselves on the human scrap-heap that our world throws people on to when it can't think what else to do with them.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 by Tom Wright p 31.

David Bentley Hart's translation of Matt 18:6 is

“And, whoever causes one of these little ones who have faith in me to falter, it is better for him to have a millstone, of the kind turned by an ass, hung about his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” NIV

(b) What does “causes one . . . to falter/stumble” mean (v 6)?

(c) Why is “causing little ones to falter/stumble” so serious?

What we do with our children — and what we do *to* them — is a worryingly accurate indication of what we think about the world, God and ourselves. To many adults, children are just a nuisance. But the point is that they're a nuisance (if they are) because they matter. They disturb our organized adult world because they are real people. If they were toys or machines we could put them away in a cupboard. But we can't. They have their own dignity, their own questions, their own future, their own unique identity.

Many societies have done their best to ignore this, and in the ancient world it was often forgotten altogether. Children were frequently seen as only half-human until they had reached puberty, perhaps for the worrying reason that until they were available as sexual partners adults wouldn't want to know about them. Girls in particular suffered. Often newborn girls were simply thrown away — left to starve or be eaten by predators, or sold for prostitution at an early age — because the family didn't want another expensive daughter to bring up. It is significant that in some languages, including the Greek in which the New Testament is written, the words for 'child' are mostly neither masculine nor feminine, but neuter: the child wasn't a 'he' or a 'she', but simply an 'it'.

The child in this story is an 'it' in Greek (verse 2). But I have guessed, in the translation, that 'it' was a girl, not least because a girl would make with special clarity the point Jesus was wanting to get into the disciples' minds: that the weakest, most vulnerable, least significant human being you can think of is the clearest possible signpost to what the kingdom of God will be like. . . .

He [Jesus] is, of course, concerned for children themselves. He doesn't have a romantic, cosy vision in which children can just play happily. Precisely because they are so trusting, so eager, they are of all people the most at risk. This remains as true today as ever it was.

So Jesus issues a stark warning, with typical exaggeration. There must be easier ways of drowning someone than making them carry an enormous millstone around their neck and taking them in a boat far out to sea so that they can sink into the deepest part; but that's what his picture suggests, like a vivid and overdramatized cartoon. Large circular stones, with a central hole for the mechanism, were used to grind corn; the biggest were so large it took a donkey to work them. That's the type Jesus is talking about, the type he says you should imagine having round your neck as a collar. And he doesn't just talk of people being 'thrown into the sea'; he is talking of the deep sea, far out, away from the shore.

If this seems violent or extreme, perhaps it's because we, too, have undervalued the 'little ones' Jesus is talking about — children in particular, of course, but also all those who are powerless, vulnerable, at risk in our world. Exploitation of such people is inevitable, granted the way the world now is. But those who indulge in it are given this warning, far sterner than anything that Jesus ever says about what we think of as the 'big' sins such as murder, adultery and theft. They matter, but causing one of the little ones to 'stumble' or 'trip up' matters even more. Harsh words to address a harsh reality. Learning about God's kingdom means facing the real evils of the world and realizing that God hates them far more than we do.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 by Tom Wright pp 27-29.

### 3. Read Matt 18:8-9.

David Bentley Hart's translation:

"Now, if your hand or your foot causes you to falter, cut it off and fling it away from you; it is good for you to enter into life crippled or limping rather than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the fire of the Age. And if your eye causes you to falter, tear it out and fling it away from you; it is good for you to enter into life with one eye rather than, having two eyes, to be cast into Hinnom's Vale of fire."

"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. <sup>9</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell." NIV

Now it's about causing yourself to falter/stumble.

(a) Does Jesus really mean we should cut off a hand or a foot?

(b) Why is it so serious?

(c) What sort of things could you do to cause such faltering/stumbling?

Of course, we know that Jesus didn't mean us literally to cut off hands and feet and pluck out eyes. That kind of self-mutilation is a sign of mental disorder, not of genuine holiness. It's like the two-ton millstone round the neck: a huge exaggeration to make the point. But the point is no less serious for that. Anyone who has ever tried to break a bad moral habit will know that it sometimes feels like cutting off a hand or foot. Anyone who tries to stop a bad attitude towards others will know that it's almost as hard as plucking out an eye. And the habits and attitudes that Jesus has in his sights in this passage are as hard as any. Cutting off the 'hand' that refuses to give to the poor; cutting off the 'foot' that refuses to walk to the soup kitchen to help out; and, in particular, plucking out the 'eye' that refuses to notice the weak, the vulnerable, the helpless all around us, in our cities, on our streets, in our wider world: all these pose a challenge every bit as severe today as the day Jesus first issued it.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 by Tom Wright pp 32-33.

#### **Eternal**

The Latin vulgate translated one word "eternis" for two words in Greek: "aidios" which means timeless, without time, eternal and "aeonis" which means an age or epoch. Aeonis is far more common in the New Testament than aidios. NIV follows the Latin vulgate by translating both aeonis and aidios as "eternal". David Bentley Hart and Tom Wright translate aeonis as "of the Age" or "of the Age to come" or something similar (except for one occasion in Tom Wright's case). So "eternal" rather than meaning everlasting means an age or epoch.

**Fire** is better thought of in terms of cleansing, purification or refinement rather than torture. John Dickson makes a very strong case that all the destruction passages in Matthew were pointing to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. Those terrible warnings were about a cataclysmic extinction of Jerusalem.

From the 5<sup>th</sup> of 7 talks on "Hope and Hell" from 2/3 to 7/9/2018 by Tony Golsby-Smith from [www.gospelconversations.com.au](http://www.gospelconversations.com.au).

It ought to be noted that a debate has arisen within recent Gospels scholarship about whether Jesus actually spoke of punishment in the afterlife at all. N. T. Wright has argued that the apocalyptic language of the Gospels has been misunderstood by generations of Christian readers. Such language did not refer to the end of the space-time universe, as is commonly thought, but was a powerful way of speaking of the theological dimension of cataclysmic events of divine judgment and vindication within history. According to Wright all the passages that warn of the fires of Gehenna speak not of any post-mortem punishment but of the pre-mortem events of AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. The threat of Gehenna was one made to the generation contemporary with Jesus (Matt 12:38-39)—a warning that "all that was left of Israel's hopes and dreams" could become "a heap of rubble, with Jerusalem as a whole turned into a large, smoking extension of Gehenna, her own rubbish dump." [N.T. Wright Jesus and the Victory of God p 336.]

From The Evangelical Universalist by Gregory MacDonald p 141.

**Hinnom's Vale or Valley of Hinnom** – a deep, narrow ravine west and south of Jerusalem. At the high places of Baal in the Valley of Hinnom, parents sacrificed their children as a burnt offering to Molch (2 Kings 23:10). Ahaz and Manasseh, kings of Judah, were both guilty of this awful wickedness (2 Chr 28:3, 33:6). But good King Josiah destroyed the pagan altars to remove this temptation from the people of Judah.

The prophet Jeremiah foretold that God would judge this awful abomination of human sacrifice and would cause such a destruction that “the Valley of the Son of Hinnom” would become known as “the Valley of Slaughter” (Jer 7:31-32, 19:2, 6, 32:35). The place was also called “Tophet”.

Apparently, the Valley of Hinnom was used as the garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. Refuse, waste materials, and dead animals were burned here. Fires continually smouldered, and smoke from the burning debris rose day and night. . . .

Translated into Greek, the Hebrew “Valley of Hinnom” becomes **Gehenna** which is used 12 times in the New Testament (11 times by Jesus and once by James), each time translated as “hell” (Matt 5:22, Mark 9:43, 45, 47, Luke 12:5, James 3:6).

From New Illustrated Bible Dictionary p 568.

## To finish

4. (a) How big a role does sin play in your practical everyday life?

(b) Do you think more about sin when you go to church than when you live your life outside of church?  
Why/why not?

(c) Do we think of ourselves as terrible sinners, constantly reminding ourselves of our sin or do we think more positively about ourselves as saints, made in the image of God, sons and heirs of God?

(i) Which of these 2 ways of thinking should we use day by day?

(ii) Which one is better for our self-esteem?

(d) Are you sinning if you don't think often enough about sin? Why/why not?



### Study 3, Matt 18:10-14, parable of the lost sheep

#### Getting started

1. Have you ever found any money in the street or on the beach or at work etc.? How did you feel? What did you do with it?

#### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about children when they ask who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He teaches about sin and the danger of Gehenna.

#### Bible

2. Read Matt 18:10-14.  
(a) What ideas would come to the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish mind with the mention of a shepherd (see Isaiah 40:11, Eze 34:11-12, Psalm 23)?

- (b) How is Jesus like these images of a shepherd?



#### Shepherds

“As a class shepherds had a bad reputation. The nature of their calling kept them from observing the ceremonial law which meant so much to religious people. More regrettable was their unfortunate habit of confusing “mine” with “thine” as they moved about the country. They were considered unreliable and were not allowed to give testimony in the law-courts.”

From Luke (Tyndale Commentary) p 84 by Leon Morris.

- (c) If you had a box of 100 paper clips and you lost 1 or 2 or 3 would you bother looking for them? What is so special about sheep?

#### To finish

3. How so Jesus' sheep relate to people?

### Study 4, Matt 18:15-20, brother sins against you

#### Getting started

1. Consider this scenario: A middle aged couple have recently begun to attend your church. They have come every Sunday for the past 2 months and you've got to know them quite well. One day the assistant minister says that homosexuals will go to hell unless they repent. From that day you notice a change in the way they relate to the assistant minister. You find out they have a gay son and they are considering leaving the church. How would you try to resolve the problem?



#### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about children when they ask who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He teaches about sin and the danger of Gehenna. He teaches them about the Father's joy in saving the lost.

#### Bible

2. Read Matt 18:15-20.

(a) According to this passage what is the proper process for conflict resolution?

(b) (i) Have you ever heard of this process being used? Why/why not?

(ii) What happens instead?

(c) What does it mean, in today's terms, to treat someone as a pagan or tax collector (v 17)?

There is realism and there is hope in that phrase **a pagan or a tax collector** [This was a traditional Jewish expression of distaste for outsiders, such as Gentiles and tax collectors. While Jesus did not treat people like that (8:5-13, 9:9-13), he can still use the expression metaphorically for someone to be ostracized.] - the realism of recognizing that there is at present an impenetrable barrier separating us from him; and the hope of forgiveness and a new start. The person will not listen, we are told three times. It takes two parties to make reconciliation; and therefore exclusion must follow and the barrier must stand. But what did Jesus do with tax collectors and sinners? He loved them into repentance and new hope. Matthew had good reason to remember that. He had been one of them. So this instruction is saying that love and patient caring for the straying individual should always accompany Christian discipline. . . . The aim should always be restoration.

From The Message of Matthew by Michael Green p 196.

3. (a) What do you think the “binding” and “loosening” means (v 18)?

This is a rabbinic phrase to describe community regulations. Jesus gives that authority to leaders of his church, but woe betide them if they exercise it amiss. Church regulations affect immortal members of the body of Christ. They can do great good or harm. It is a responsibility that requires the greatest love, tact and thoughtfulness.

From The Message of Matthew by Michael Green p 196.

- (b) Does this apply to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century i.e. do we have the same power? Why/why not?

4. Does prayer work today like it says in v 19? Why/why not?

5. Jesus died and rose again 2000 years ago.  
What does it mean that he is there with the 2 or 3 gathered in his name (v 20)?

We aren't left on our own as we struggle to become the sort of communities, families and churches that Jesus is describing. God's presence is with us; our actions on earth have an extra, hidden dimension, the heavenly counterpart of what we do here. And, when we pray together in Christian fellowship, we are therefore assured of being heard and answered. Because, in a promise that remains central to everything that Christians ever do together, 'where two or three' (or two hundred or three hundred, for that matter, but it's often the small groups that need this encouragement most) 'gather in Jesus' name, he is there in the midst of them'. That's not just a promise that we will sense his presence. It's a promise - and a warning! - that he will see and know the innermost truth of everyone's heart.

From Matthew for Everyone part 2 chapters 16-28 by Tom Wright pp 36-37.

### **To finish**

6. (a) What are you thinking about when you go to church?

- (b) Do you ever think Jesus is there with you at church?

- (c) In what sense is Jesus there at church?



(c) (i) What does forgiveness from the heart mean (v 35)?

(ii) Are we motivated to forgive because if we don't we will be punished by God?

(iii) Is the motivation in (ii) contrary to the concept of forgiving from the heart? Why/why not?

6. Matt 18:34 NIV

In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Matt 18:34 David Bentley Hart

And in anger his master delivered him to the inquisitors until he should repay everything owing to him.

What are the implications for the disciples and for us of Jesus' concluding words in verse 35?

## 7. Video

This Nooma video, #7, Luggage, by Rob Bell is about a number of subjects but I want to focus particularly on what it says about forgiveness. Rob Bell made 24 short videos between 2002 and 2009. In each video he takes an aspect of Christian life and expresses it in an interesting and challenging way. Talk about the video after it has finished and ask questions if you have any.

(a) What do you think is the take home message from the video?



(b) (i) How did you feel about the ending?

(ii) What was the point he was making?

(c) Rob Bell said that you haven't truly forgiven someone unless you can wish them well. Agree or disagree? Why/why not?

(d) What problems does forgiveness solve?

**“May you** forgive as you’ve been forgiven.

May you give to others what’s been given to you.

May you set someone free and find out it was you.

May you do it today because you might not have the chance tomorrow.”

### To finish

8. (a) What can be so difficult about forgiveness?

(b) What can we do to make it easier?

9. A Christian friend has been deeply hurt by someone who is unrepentant. “I just can’t forgive and forget,” they tell you. What could you say to them in this challenging time?

## Study 6, Matt 19:1-12, divorce

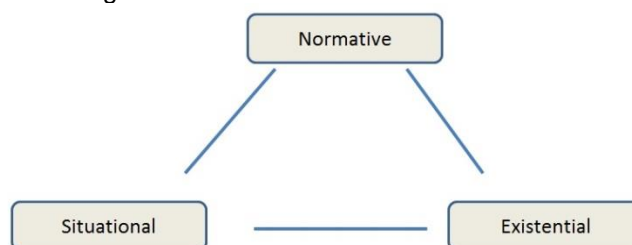
### Getting started

1. Think back to the time when God opened your heart to believe in Jesus.  
(a) What did you begin to see that you hadn't seen before?

(b) Mention one thing that you have come to understand as you have matured in your faith.



2. Look at this model for Christian growth:



**The normative perspective** means we look to an ideal standard or norm. This is what we use to determine right and wrong. The norm is transcendentally true and doesn't change. In this perspective we try to understand God's will and the Bible. Paul describes it as "growing in the knowledge of God" Col 1:10.

**The situational perspective** means we look at our circumstances or situation. We respond to the changing contexts that we find ourselves in. If you respond to different situations in different times then it involves change. The normative perspective never changes.

**The existential perspective** means we look at our own existence; our emotional, personal and individual feelings; our "gut instinct"; what is authentic to our inner selves.

Any comments on this model?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution and forgiveness.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 19:1-12.  
(a) What is the normative answer to the question of verse 3?

(b) What is the situational answer?

(c) What is the existential answer (see vv 10-12)?

3. Is divorce really allowed?

Jesus' teaching on **divorce**, for example, has been seen as a blanket injunction for all times. It is wrong. Full stop. But divorce today is very different from Jesus' day. Jesus' teaching on divorce (Matt. 5:31-32) has to be seen first and foremost in the context of protecting the weak and the powerless. In first-century Judea a woman could be divorced for virtually any reason. Deuteronomy allowed for a man to divorce his wife if he found 'something objectionable about her' (Deut. 24:1) and by first-century AD this catch-all phrase meant that a man could issue a bill of divorce for virtually any reason. Different rabbinical schools argued that it permitted a man to divorce his wife if she burned the dinner (Rabbi Hillel), or even if she were less attractive than another woman (Rabbi Akiba). Women, on the other hand, could only initiate divorce if their husband was impure in some way. We can observe this in action. Josephus divorced his wife because he was 'not pleased with her behaviour', even though she was the mother of his three children. He subsequently went up in the world and married a Cretan Jew 'of eminent parents'. So Jesus' injunction — that divorce is only permissible in the case of adultery — not only protects women, but goes way beyond the restrictions of rabbinical Judaism.

From The Wrong Messiah p 125-126 by Nick Page.

5. Read 1 Cor 7:10-16, also known as the **Pauline Privilege**.

Context: Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to answer a number of problems and issues that the church was struggling with i.e. divisions within their group, wisdom and foolishness, sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, marriage and singleness, food sacrificed to idols, Paul's apostleship, idolatry, headship, eating meals together, spiritual gifts, the resurrection and collecting money.

Does Paul give another ground for divorce? Why/why not?

6. What advice and hope does this passage have for couples going through a tough marriage?

7. What advice and hope does this passage have for single people?

## To finish

8. How should you relate to divorced people?



## Study 7, Matt 19:16-30, rich young man

### Getting started

1. Thinking back to when you became a Christian, what was it that “clinched the deal” for you?
2. How would you explain Christian salvation without using Christian jargon?



### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness and divorce.

### Bible

3. Read Matt 19:16-30.
  - (a) When the rich young man asks Jesus how to gain eternal life which word does Jesus pick up on and why (vv 16-17, see also Eph 2:8-9)?
  - (b) What instructions does Jesus give the man so that he can inherit eternal life (v 21)?
  - (c)
    - (i) Which of the 10 Commandments *doesn't* Jesus mention?
    - (ii) Why do you think this might be?
  - (d) Why are the disciples surprised (v 25)?

Jesus points out time and again the perils and costs of discipleship. The literal cost, in fact. A rich young 'ruler' comes to Jesus and asks what he has to do to live for ever. One senses Jesus' excitement at this question and at the young man's willingness to follow him, an excitement only matched by his disappointment when the man cannot sign up to the last, most difficult request: 'sell everything you have and give to the poor' (Luke 18:22 NIV).

Who was he? A 'ruler'. Sometimes translated as 'magistrate', the Greek word is archon. He is not a synagogue leader. And just because he claims to have kept the commandments, it does not mean that he need be a

religious leader. His wealth is the key issue here. Wealth born of status and privilege. An aristocrat of some sort, then. An Herodian, perhaps, come down from Tiberias to listen to Jesus for the day. There is, in fact, a candidate for the post: in Acts, Luke mentions a man called Manaen, a prophet and teacher in the young church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Manaen is described as a syntrophos of Herod the tetrarch, i.e. Antipas. Syntrophos means 'brought up together with', 'foster brother', or 'companion from youth'. We are not sure of the exact relationship, but it was clearly very close. Manaen was probably one of Luke's main sources of information about Antipas. So perhaps he was this rich young Herodian who at the time went away saddened, but later became a disciple.

Whoever he was, Jesus' reply indicates the difficulty of the rich getting into the kingdom, like trying to fit a camel through a needle. Many attempts have been made to defuse this remark, including the entirely fictitious explanation that 'The Eye of the Needle' was a narrow gate in Jerusalem through which a fully laden camel would have had trouble fitting. Sadly for the young man, Jesus meant what he said.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 204-205.

## To finish

4. What do we have to do to inherit eternal life?
5. Why is it so hard to get saved?
6. What do we get in return for giving up so many things?

## Study 8, Matt 20:1-16, parable of the workers

### Getting started

1. (a) What do you remember about getting pocket money when you were a kid?
  
- (b) Did you get more pocket money if you did more work? Why/why not?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce and wealth as an obstacle to eternal life.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 20:1-16.
- (a) Here, Jesus is again describing the kingdom of heaven. Who are the characters in this parable?



- (b) Who do you think these characters represent?
  
- (c) Did the vineyard owner treat his workers fairly? Why/why not?
  
- (d) Did the vineyard owner treat his workers graciously and generously? Why/why not?
  
- (e) What does this parable tell us about God's generosity?

(f) What does this parable tell us about God and salvation?

(g) Do you ever feel like those workers that were hired at the beginning of the day?

Do we "begrudge" God's generosity to others? Why/why not?

(h) Verse 16 repeats the idea Jesus posed in Matt 19:30.

How does this parable help us to understand what Jesus means by this statement?

### **To finish**

3. What do you think of using this passage as an excuse to delay making a commitment to God?

## Study 9, Matt 20:17-19, death predicted

### Getting started

1. (a) What do people mean when they talk about making sacrifices for their children?



- (b) What is actually sacrificed when they say this?

- (c) What emotions are involved in making sacrifices for your children e.g. love, regret, pride, sadness?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life and God's generosity.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 20:17-19.
  - (a) This is the third time Jesus foretells his disciples of what is to happen to him (see Matt 16:21, 17:22-23). Does Jesus add any more information this time?
  - (b) How would the disciples be feeling at this point?
  - (c) What response would you expect after Jesus tells them what will happen to him?
  - (d)
    - (i) What is the next reported event (read Matt 20:20-28)?
    - (ii) What does this (vv 35-45) tell us about the disciples?

(e) How do you think Jesus felt about making his supreme sacrifice?

**To finish**

3. Over the next 3 or 4 weeks listen carefully at church to see which is spoken about more  
- Jesus' death or Jesus' resurrection.
4. How is Jesus' death relevant to your life now?
5. How is Jesus' resurrection relevant to your life now?

## Study 10, Matt 20:20-28, sitting beside Jesus

### Getting started

1. (a) Were/are you ambitious in your studies/work/family/sport/church?



- (b) Were you driven by ambition? If so, how so? If not, why not?

- (c) Is it better to be driven by something or just coast along? Give reasons for your answer.

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life, God's generosity and his own death.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 20:20-28.

It is here, in the months leading up to Passover, that James and John come to Jesus with a request: they want to sit at his right and left hand in his 'glory' (Mark 10:37). In Matthew's Gospel it is not just the brothers, but their mother too, who make the request (Matt. 20:21), but probably all three were involved in the petition.

In Jewish tradition older women were treated with respect, and as we have seen, this may have been Salome, the sister of Mary (Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). They are family. But they are asking the impossible. Although they confidently assert that they can drink the cup that Jesus will drink, they have completely misunderstood the nature of status in his kingdom. They think that what is being planned in the ravines of Ephraim is some kind of messianic coup. But in the hours of his 'glory', the only people at Jesus' left and right hand will be convicted criminals.

James and John do not know what they are asking, but, in Myers' words, 'they do know how the ruling class operates'. To sit at the right and left hand of a ruler was to sit in the highest places of honour. At banquets and public events, people jostled for positions of influence and patronage among the nobility. This is why Jesus slaps them down with his condemnation of the leadership among the Gentiles — by which he clearly means the Romans. The statement drips with sarcasm: 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and there great ones are tyrants over them' (Mark 10:42). You can sense the quote marks here: the 'so-called' rulers, the 'great ones'.

In fact, he goes to the other extreme. Whoever wants to lead in his kingdom will be like a slave in the Gentiles' world. Far from sitting at the top table, the kingdom leader's role is to be a waiter, a nobody. 'For who is greater,' asks Jesus, 'the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22:27). Jesus uses two words here: *doulos*, which means 'slave', and *diakonos*, which means 'servant' (Matt. 20:26-28). It is significant that when the early church came to name the officials who looked after their churches, they chose one of the words used here: they became 'deacons'. They became servants.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 218-219.

(a) It has been said that "absolute power" corrupts absolutely! How were the disciples to exercise the "power" or authority they had been given? Whose example were they to follow?

(b) Why were the disciples indignant (v41)?

(c) (i) How did the disciples think about greatness?

(ii) How did they think greatness could be achieved?

(d) What does Jesus say is the way to be great?

(e) What do these verses tell us about leadership?

(f) How should this apply to the organisational structure of the church?

### **To finish**

3. A newspaper columnist wrote that he was really put off by sportsmen and women thanking God when they won sporting events.

(a) What's the motivation for doing that and do you think it's a good thing?

(b) What if they lost?



## Study 11, Matt 20:29-34, healing the blind

### Getting started

1. “That came out of left field”, “I didn’t see that coming”, “I was blindsided”.  
(a) What do these expressions mean?



- (b) Has it ever happened to you?

- (c) Did you learn anything from the experience?

- (c) What precautions could you take to avoid being blindsided?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life, God’s generosity, his own death and ambition.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 20:29-34.  
(a) What problems did the blind men have in getting to Jesus?

- (b) The two blind men here wanted Jesus to hear them, no matter what those around them said. What do they want?

(c) Why did the crowd rebuke them (v 31)?

(d) What *could* have they requested from Jesus?

(e) Why did they request the most difficult option?

(f) How does Jesus respond to their request? Why?

(g) What do the blind men do once they have been healed?

(h) What do they see?

(i) From this and previous passages what don't the disciples see?

On the way into Jericho, Jesus heals a blind beggar called Bartimaeus (in Luke he is unnamed; in Matthew there are two blind men and the incident occurs on the way out of Jericho). It would be a good place and time for a beggar to sit by the road: the crowds of pilgrims heading into Jerusalem for the Passover would mostly come through Jericho. The incident is significant for the phrase that the beggar uses: 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' (Mark 10:47). Mark records that the crowds try to shut the man up, but he persists and his persistence is rewarded. (His faith is such that he throws away his cloak — and the beggar's cloak was not just a piece of clothing, it was what he spread out in order to receive alms, his shopfront. It was his means of livelihood.) This is the first time that Jesus is called Son of David — an explicitly messianic title. Why now? Well, obviously there is the irony in the story: this blind man sees more clearly and accurately than the crowd around him. But David was always associated with Jerusalem, the City of David. It must have been clear then. Even the blind can see where Jesus is heading. It also explains why the crowd try to hush him. They can sense that this is a triumphal procession, but in their Judaism the Messiah is not interested in low-status beggars.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page p 220.

**Son of David** was the most honoured Messianic title amongst the Jews of the Lord's time. But Jesus pointed out that the common Jewish conception of the Messianic office was inadequate (Matt 22:41-45). He was not merely David's Son. He was David's Lord. Paul preached Jesus as the Son of David (Acts 13:34). Hebrews 1:5 applies the promise of a Messianic kingdom for the Son of David to Jesus.

From Doctrine II p 17, PTC study booklet by D.B.Knox.

The first public confession that Jesus is **Messiah** occurs at Mark 10:47 [= Matt 20:30-31 = Luke 18:38-39]. Jesus is fulfilling the messianic hopes but more than that, this is the Lord coming to his temple. Casting out demons, healing lepers, raising the dead etc. are all YHWH stuff, not Messiah stuff. When Jesus asks how can the Messiah be David's son? (Mark 12:35-37) he was pointing to the fact that every human attempt to be the Messiah failed so God steps in and says "I'll do it". In Is 59:16 God looks around and sees there is no-one to help so God put on his helmet of salvation (Is 59:17). Did Isaiah get it that this was about Jesus? John the Baptist didn't [Luke 7:18-23] and he was the greatest of the prophets [Luke 7:28]. Jesus is going to be the Messiah because Israel can't do it.

The Messiah was a purely human figure. He was never expected to heal people. "Messiah" means "anointed". Anointing was a means of setting someone aside for a task. David was a messianic king. He was anointed for the task of showing Israel to the world and lead those people in the ways of justice. It was about leadership. When Jesus was declared Messiah it was not just about morals but about setting up a massive new social system.

From talks by Rikki Watts at Macquarie University July 2014 (3QA.3-4, GC 2.2.2).

### To finish

3. What do these verses tell us about
  - faith
  - sight
  - salvation
  - praising God?

## Study 12, Matt 21:1-11, entering Jerusalem

### Getting started

1. How do people react when you enter a room?



The minute you walked in the joint  
 I could see you were a man of distinction  
 A real Big Spender  
 Good looking, so refined  
 Say, wouldn't you like to know what's going on in my mind?

So let me get right to the point  
 I don't pop my cork for every man I see  
 Hey Big Spender  
 Spend a little time with me.

These are the first two verses of "Big Spender", a song written by Cy Coleman and Dorothy Fields for the musical *Sweet Charity*, first performed in 1966. Shirley Bassey's version, made in 1967, is how the song is best known.

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life, God's generosity, his own death and ambition. Jesus continues his healing ministry and heals two blind men before entering Jerusalem.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 21:1-17.  
 Jesus had told his disciples what kind of reception he'd receive when he got to Jerusalem (20:17-19). Now he's arrived and there are many different responses to Him. And how people respond to Jesus affects Jesus' response to them.  
 (a) What are the different titles given to Jesus (v3, 5, 9, 15)?

(b) What do they mean?

3. (a) Why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a colt and not a war horse (read Zechariah 9:9-10)?

**Zechariah** was a prophet who was involved in rebuilding the temple after returning from exile. His visions were of hope, judgement and the coming Messiah.

(b) By riding into Jerusalem, how is Jesus modelling the prophets?

(c) What is his message (see Zechariah 9:9-10)?

(d) How is it counter-intuitive (see Matt 20:25-28)?

(e) How might we respond to it?

4. How does the logistical detail of verses 1-3 enforce the point already made by Jesus' predictions of his death (see Matt 16:21; 17:22; 20:17-19)?
5. Read Zechariah 9:11-17, a continuation of the prophecy quoted by Matthew. To what future event does this refer and how might we anticipate it?
6. (a) How did the crowds react when Jesus "entered the room"?
 

(b) What are the crowds saying about Jesus?

(c) What do verses 9-11 reveal of the people's understanding of Jesus' identity?

(c) What might the crowds be hoping for? What were they expecting to happen next?

(d) Who did the people think Jesus was? Do you think they understood who he really was?
7. Read Ps 118:26 which is quoted in Matt 21:9. How does this verse from the psalm fit in with what is happening in Matt ch 21?

**Psalm 118** describes the thoughts of the psalmist who is surrounded by his enemies but saved by the Lord. He writes about reliance and trust in God and looks forward to a time when the righteous will have intimate fellowship with God.

8. Read the rest of Ps 118. What other verses in this psalm are applicable to what Jesus is about to do in Matthew's gospel?

Early on the Sunday, Jesus sent two unnamed disciples to fetch a colt from the village (Mark 11:1-6 [= Matt 21:1-6 = Luke 19:28-34]). There is nothing in the Gospel text to indicate that this was some kind of miraculous provision. In fact it was all part of a prearranged plan, organised either the night before, or in that surreptitious visit to Jerusalem in the winter of AD 32. The disciples even have code words to indicate to its owner who needs the colt.

Once Jesus mounted the colt — probably near the crossroads on the main Jericho—Jerusalem road, where the road to Bethphage goes off to the south — he was ready. Time to make the grand entrance, over the Mount of Olives, cresting the hill and then down into the Kidron valley and a sea of people. It was Passover, and everywhere there were pilgrims sleeping in tents, under makeshift shelters, or wherever they could. No wonder the excitement catches, like a spark to the dry grass: soon there is a mass of followers, cheering, shouting, caught up in the moment, waving branches and joining in the chanting.

Throughout his campaigns in Galilee and Samaria, Jesus avoided making overt statements about his messianic status. Not so now. Nothing Jesus ever says is more of a signal than this donkey ride into Jerusalem. Jesus is using the symbolic vocabulary of Zechariah: 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey' (Zech. 9:9).

It is his clearest statement yet of his messianic credentials. 'I am the king' is the message, and the people respond. Greeting him according to a custom usually associated with royalty, they throw their cloaks on the ground. But Jesus is giving out other messages as well. Because, as Jesus was entering Jerusalem, another procession was taking place on the other side of the city.

Pilate lived in Caesarea, not in Jerusalem. A week before each major festival he came into Jerusalem, both to authorise the handing over of the ceremonial vestments and to ensure that order was kept. The festivals were, in Josephus's words, 'the usual occasion for sedition to flare up', so it was important for Pilate to be present. Accompanied by his retinue, his family and, of course, extra troops, he would have entered on the other side of the city, along the road from Joppa (past the crucifixion site and burial ground), and towards the former Palace of Herod the Great, the most splendid building in Jerusalem and Pilate's headquarters for his visits.

Two processions, then. One from the east, tumbling down the Mount of Olives, wild with cheering and rich with messianic symbolism. The other coming from the west, but just as symbolic: gleaming armour and burnished leather, cavalrymen on horseback and the imperial eagle leading the way. From the west comes the kingdom of the world; from the east comes the kingdom of God.

Jesus' entry to Jerusalem was not only a statement of his messianic claim. It was also a politically charged act, a two-fingered salute to the empire, the world and the Gentile ways of power.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 226-227.

## To finish

9. (a) Do our attempts at evangelism ever get to the point of asking who Jesus is?
- (b) How can the following become “roadblocks” to evangelism - different religions?
- rules?
- church?
- (c) How can we avoid these roadblocks?

## Study 13, Matt 21:12-17, temple

### Getting started

1. (a) What makes you angry?



(b) How do you handle your anger?

2. What made Jesus angry?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life, God's generosity, his own death and ambition. Jesus continues his healing ministry and heals two blind men before entering Jerusalem.

### Bible

3. Read Matt 21:12-17.

**The Temple** in Jerusalem was planned by David (c. 1000 BC) and built by his son Solomon as the central sanctuary for all Israel. It was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC and rebuilt by the returning exiles. Desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC. Rebuilding and beautification began by Herod the Great in 19 BC and completed in 63 AD. The Court of the Gentiles contained the thriving markets in sacrificial animals and sacred money for the temple offerings. Here too men would gather in the shaded porticos to listen to any teacher who cared to set up his stand. The Temple was not only the place of sacrifice, it was believed to be the unique dwelling of YHWH on earth, the place heaven and earth met. It was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

From Mark for Everyone by Tom Wright p 242 and The Lion Handbook to the Bible article by Richard France p 494.

'He who has not seen the Temple in its full construction has never seen a glorious building in his life'. So wrote the later rabbis, and they were not exaggerating. It was one of the wonders of the Greco-Roman world. Herod had transformed the relatively modest temple building of Zerubbabel's time, adding a large entrance porch and a second storey, raising the height of the building to 100 cubits. He also added new wings on each flank of the entrance hall, turning the overall building into a kind of T-shape. He refaced it with white marble inlaid with gold.

Jews were encouraged to donate to the temple. The gates were plated with gold by one Alexander the Alabarch, an Alexandrian Jew. A man from Rhodes called Paris, son of Akestor, helped pay for the pavement. And just inside the doors there was a huge golden vine which hung from vertical columns and to which individuals could donate a golden leaf or a berry.

Surrounding the temple Herod created a huge, raised plaza covering an area of around fourteen hectares — some 12 per cent of the city's area — which was entered by a series of steps, walkways and tunnels. Everything about the temple was luxurious, magnificent. Even the high priest's vestments were fabulously ornate. According to the

Mishnah, the clothing cost 10,000 denarii, an almost unbelievable amount. We are talking about clothing that on today's scale would cost £400,000. No wonder they hated handing them over to the Romans.

The temple was fabulously rich. It was, in our terms, one of the top-grossing visitor attractions in the ancient world. Every year hundreds of thousands of visitors made their way to Jerusalem. In addition to the temple tax sent from throughout the Roman Empire, it made money through tithes, the surcharge on the temple tax, and by selling animals to all the pilgrims. Because every visitor to the temple had to make a sacrifice.

The Greco-Roman world was big on sacrifice. Virtually all religions sacrificed animals. Temples were religious abattoirs, and any priest was also a skilled butcher, operating with surgical precision on their sacrificial beasts. The temple, especially, relied on it. Through sacrifice, people gave thanks to God and shared in his peace; they celebrated major festivals and asked for forgiveness. Through sacrifice, they were able to be cleansed from impurity.

Every pilgrim who came, therefore, either brought an animal with them or, more often, bought an animal from the stalls in the temple. These did not come cheap. The very basic sacrifice a pair of doves — cost 1 denarius: one day's pay for the average labourer. A lamb cost 4 denarii, a ram 8, a calf 20, and an ox anything between 100 and 220 denarii. At festivals, supply and demand — those two timeless pagan gods — made things even pricier. A passage in the Mishnah tells us that at one festival in Jerusalem, a pair of doves cost 'a golden denar'. Since there were 25 silver denarii to 1 golden denarius, the price was clearly extortionate.

The wealth of the temple caused some resentment. And this was further stoked by the fact that it acted as a bank, lending money to those in need — then, when they could not pay, foreclosing on the debt and taking their land. The temple became one of the biggest landowners in Judea. The resentment of this activity can be seen in the fact that after the revolutionaries took control of the temple in AD 66, one of the first things they did was burn the record of debts.

It is these kinds of factors which lie behind Jesus' actions on that Monday morning.

[H]e entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers,' (Mark 11:15-18)

All four Gospels record this incident (although John puts it at the beginning of Jesus' mission). It was clearly not a serious attempt to start riot or a violent revolution. No guards intervened, no soldiers rushed down from the Antonia Fortress to restore order. Jesus even went back there the next day. Nor was this an attack on the sacrificial system. If Jesus had wanted to do that, he would have gone to the Court of Priests, where the sacrifices took place. More than any other act, Jesus' temple protest, and his statement about the destruction of the temple, were the things which sealed his fate: because he was not attacking the money changers or the traders themselves, he was attacking the system which sanctioned them. He was attacking their bosses: the family of the high priest.

The temple undoubtedly made money from money-changing and from the sale of animals. But it is possible that some of those who directly profited from the trade were the family of the high priest himself. Animals were bought and sold in the temple precincts on the south side near Solomon's Portico. But they were likely sold elsewhere in the city, too, and according to one account, near to the temple were the shops of Hanaun, or Hanan. We must be careful here, because the name is not an uncommon one, but Hanan is a version of the name of the high-priestly family Ananus. So it may well be that the stalls selling animals in the Court of Gentiles were, in the words of Jeremias, 'supported by the powerful high-priestly family of Annas [Ananus]'. The high-priestly family themselves were making their fortune from the selling of animals for sacrifice.

They certainly had stores of grain. A line in some later rabbinic writings says that the storehouses of the 'children of Hanin' were destroyed three years before the rest of Israel 'because they failed to set aside tithes from their produce'. The reference implies that they claimed some kind of exemption from the practice.

This puts a sharper point on the temple protest. This is personal. This was a protest directed at the very top: at Annas, his son-in-law Caiaphas, and all the members of that dynasty who were to run the temple over succeeding years. And it explains some subsequent events. Caiaphas and Annas saw that Jesus was punished, but the grudge went beyond that. According to Luke, after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, Peter and John were arrested in the temple and dragged before a council that included 'Annas [Ananus] the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family' . . .

The temple protest, like the donkey ride into the city, was both a critique of those in power and a messianic sign. One of the key roles of the Messiah was that he would renew the temple. The belief goes back to the book of Zechariah, which saw a king and priest together, rebuilding the temple:

Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he that shall build the temple of the LORD; he shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule on his throne. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them. (Zech. 6:12-13)

Zechariah may have meant the leaders of his day by this — King Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest — but later interpreters, faced with the fact that the second temple was not particularly glorious and that the restored kingdom proved to be even less of a success, projected this forward. The belief that the Messiah would renew the temple is widely reflected in the messianic literature. The Qumran community, who regarded the high-priestly dynastic families as illegitimate usurpers, believed that their own community was a divinely approved temporary substitute for



the temple, and that when God returned a new temple would be built. An apocalyptic work known as 1 Enoch contains a passage known by the rather Disney-esque name of the 'Animal Apocalypse'. This reflects a deep dissatisfaction with the temple priesthood and a belief that the sacrifices were impure. It talks of the destruction of the 'ancient house', its columns and ornaments taken away. Then a new 'house' is set up 'greater and loftier than the first one'.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 227-231.

(a) Why was Jesus angry (vv 15-17)?

(b) Why were the chief priests and the teachers of the law angry (v 18)?

### **To finish**

3. What is the equivalent of the temple now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (see 1 Cor 6:19, 1 Pet 2:5)?

## Study 14, Matt 21:18-22, fig tree

### Getting started

1. Have you grown?



(a) Looking back over the past year or past few years, what is it about you that has changed?

(b) Have these changes been positive (growth) or negative?

(c) Ask your spouse or close friend these same questions i.e.

(i) Looking back over the past year or past few years, what is it about me that has changed?

(ii) Have these changes been positive (growth) or negative?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life, God's generosity, his own death and ambition. Jesus also continues his healing ministry and heals two blind men before entering Jerusalem where he is greeted joyfully by the people. Not so joyful are the priests and money-changers when Jesus overturns their tables and exposes their corruption in the temple.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 21:18-22.

(a) What might Jesus be illustrating by his actions in v19 (see also vv 43-44)?

(b) Jesus comes to a fig tree looking for fruit but finds none.

How is this illustrative of his cleansing of the temple in vv 12-17?

(c) How do you reconcile Jesus' 'gentleness' (v 5) with his actions and words in v12, 18, 43-44?

(d) What does the mountain represent (v21)?

(e) How does throwing the mountain into the sea relate to the fig tree?

(f) (i) Is Jesus writing a blank prayer cheque in v 22? Why/why not?

(ii) How do other parts of scripture qualify his statement?

Jesus does a curious thing. He goes to a fig tree to look for fruit and, when he finds none, he curses it (Mark 11:12-14). It seems rather unfair on the tree, as it was not actually the time for the fig harvest. But the key is the location. Jesus is on the Mount of Olives, looking across the Kidron Valley. On the other side of the valley is the temple. Like the parable he told on his way in, the fig tree is linked to the temple. . . .

This condemnation of the temple is graphically illustrated the next morning, when, as Jesus and his followers descend the hill towards Jerusalem, they see that the fig tree cursed the day before has 'withered away to its roots' (Mark 11:20). It is a sign. The temple will be uprooted and destroyed, root and branch.

From The Wrong Messiah by Nick Page pp 227 and 231.

**Just before the new summer figs** appear there is a batch from the old shoots that are really sweet and juicy. The fig tree is a symbol for Israel. Leafy green means wonderful worship centres, priesthood, glorious buildings but no fruit which is what Jesus finds when he comes to the temple [Mark 11:15-17].

What **mountain** is Jesus talking about in Mark 11:23? They have left the temple and are probably on the Mt of Olives. What mountain are they looking at? Probably the temple mountain – the one mountain in Mark that has consistently stood in the way of the Lord (see Is 40:4). What do you do when God's people become the mountain that resists the way of the Lord? God's people became the 4<sup>th</sup> beast in Daniel [ch 7]. They so misunderstood holiness that they dehumanised that which is made in God's image.

From talks by Rikki Watts at Macquarie University July 2014 (2.9 – 2.11).

Like the ancient prophets of Israel Jesus conveyed a lot of his message through what we call **prophetic signs** or **enacted parables**. He offered pieces of public theatre to drive home the message. This is such a massive part of the Jewish background that I think modern Christians, and certainly the general public, don't spot.

Just to give you some examples:

Hosea, the prophet 700 years before Jesus, was told to marry a known prostitute [Hosea chs 1-3]. Why? It was a prophetic symbol. He actually did it but it was meant to be a prophetic symbol of the fact that God was married to Israel who had prostituted itself. . . .

Ezekiel. I think he probably got the rawest deal. He had to do a whole bunch of things: lie on his left side for months, lie on his right side for months [Eze 4:4-8]. But he also had to build a little model of Jerusalem in the public court. Then, everyone's watching the prophet and he had to attack it – play war games against this little model of Jerusalem without saying anything and everyone was saying he's playing war games against this little model of Jerusalem [Eze 4:1-3]. The point was clear: Jerusalem would fall. . . .

Into the New Testament period, John the Baptist called everyone out to actually go to the Jordan River. They *had* to go into the Jordan River. There were plenty of other rivers, streams and baths around Israel but you had to go into the Jordan. Why? Because that's where Israel had begun on their journey to get into the Promised Land. They had to go through the Jordan. It was a prophetic sign that Israel has to begin again, or it will end. . . .

This is such a huge part of the prophetic mindset and of Jewish culture that unless you look at the life of Jesus through this lens you really miss a lot of what Jesus was trying to do. He selected 12 apostles, not 11, not 13. Why? A symbol of the 12 tribes of Israel. These were the 12 new patriarchs. Israel begins again. He dined and wined with sinners not just because he was a leftie liberal. No, it was a prophetic enacted parable of the invitation God was making to sinners to join his table. He was acting out his message of preaching.

From a sermon by John Dickson on Mark ch 11 at St Andrews, Roseville, 15/3/2015.

3. Read John 15:1-17.  
How does this affect your understanding of - the vineyard?

- bearing fruit?

- prayer?

**To finish**

4. (a) Are there any areas in your own personality or life where you would like to see growth?

(b) How would you go about growing in those areas?

## Study 15, Matt 21:23-27, authority

### Getting started

1. When was the last time you read something from the Bible that made you change?



### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life, God's generosity, his own death and ambition. Jesus also continues his healing ministry and heals two blind men before entering Jerusalem where he is greeted joyfully by the people. Not so joyful are the priests and money-changers when Jesus overturns their tables and exposes their corruption in the temple. Some of Jesus' teaching is done in parables including an enacted parable involving a fig tree in the last study.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 21:23-27.
  - (a) Why do the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders ask about Jesus' authority (see also Matt 21:12-13)?
  - (b) Do you think the temple officials felt threatened by Jesus (v 23)? Why/why not?
  - (c) By referring to John's baptism, does Jesus indirectly answer their questions? (Look up what happened when Jesus was baptised by John in Matt 3:13-17.)

John was Malachi's Elijah. The reason Jesus could do what he did was because John came and now the Lord can come to Jerusalem in judgement. Back in Malachi the people were asking for God's presence. Malachi says God hasn't come because if he did they would all be destroyed. Malachi says they are not ready yet so God will send them a messenger first. The messenger's job is to get the priesthood sorted out. God has a house to come to and the priests have to make ready his house. Judgement comes first in the house of God. When the priests are ready God himself will come and do judgement. John was to get the ground ready because God was about to come. John came and went and now it was time for Jesus to come to Jerusalem in judgement. The cursing of the fig tree was a symbol of God's judgement.

From talks by Rikki Watts at Macquarie University July 2014 (GC 2.3.5 – 6).

### To finish

3. What do we do that reflects Jesus' authority?

## Study 16, Matt 21:28-32, parable of 2 sons

### Getting started

1. (a) Jesus challenged the religious “heavies” of his day (the priests, elders and scribes). Is it valid to challenge the religious heavies of our day (you don’t hear much preaching on this)? Why/why not?



- (b) If so, what would you challenge, if anything?

- (c) How would you make those challenges?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life, God’s generosity, his own death and ambition. Some of Jesus’ teaching is done in parables including an enacted parable involving a fig tree. Jesus also continues his healing ministry and heals two blind men before entering Jerusalem where he is greeted joyfully by the people. Not so joyful are the priests and money-changers when Jesus overturns their tables and exposes their corruption in the temple. When they ask whose authority has given him the right to do these things he stumps them by asking about their treatment of John the Baptist.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 21:28-32.  
Jesus speaks 2 parables about a vineyard to teach about the kingdom of God (Matt 21:28-46).  
(a) Who is Jesus talking to?
- (b) What is the vineyard? (Check out Psalm 80:8-9; Isaiah 5:7)
- (c) What does this parable teach us about the Kingdom of God?
- (d) What criticism does Jesus have for the people he is talking to (see your answer to (a))?

(e) What has this story got to do with the previous story of Jesus' encounter with the chief priests and elders and their thinking about John the Baptist?

## To finish

3. Which category did Jesus side with, the “religious heavies” or the “tax collectors and prostitutes”?  
Give reasons for your answer.
4. Which category do you side with today, the “religious heavies” or the “tax collectors and prostitutes”?  
Give reasons for your answer.

## Study 17, Matt 21:33-46, parable of the tenants

### Getting started

1. Look back over Matthew chs 18-21.
  - (a) What have you learnt about Jesus?



- (b) What have you learnt about the Kingdom of God?

- (c) What have you learnt about yourself?

### The story so far . . .

In the first four chapters of Matthew we read about the coming of the king heralded by angels and a scruffy prophet called John the Baptist. After being commissioned by the Holy Spirit Jesus describes, in chapters 5 to 7, what the kingdom of heaven is like under his rule. In chapters 8 to 15 we get glimpses of what it will be like to live with Jesus as king – the sick healed, the dead raised, demons cast out, evil opposed, people fed, relationships restored. In chapter 16 Peter figures out who Jesus is – the Messiah, the promised king. From here Jesus sets out for Jerusalem and his death. On his way Jesus continues to teach his disciples. He teaches them about greatness, sin, saving the lost, conflict resolution, forgiveness, divorce, wealth as an obstacle to eternal life, God's generosity, his own death and ambition. Some of Jesus' teaching is done in parables including an enacted parable involving a fig tree. Jesus also continues his healing ministry and heals two blind men before entering Jerusalem where he is greeted joyfully by the people. Not so joyful are the priests and money-changers when Jesus overturns their tables and exposes their corruption in the temple. When they ask whose authority has given him the right to do these things he stumps them by his answer and challenges them about their treatment and obedience to John the Baptist as God's prophet.

### Bible

2. Read Matt 21:33-46.
 

Jesus speaks 2 parables about a vineyard to teach about the kingdom of God (Matt 21:28-46).

  - (a) Who is Jesus talking to?
  - (b) What is the vineyard? (Check out Psalm 80:8-9; Isaiah 5:7)
  - (c) Who represents whom in this story:
    - the landowner?
    - the farmers/tenants?
    - the servants?
    - the heir?



(d) Who are the 'other tenants' in v 41?

(e) In your own words what does this parable mean?

(f) Who will get God's judgement?

(g) Why will he/they receive this punishment?

(h) What warning is Jesus giving the Jewish leaders here which sums up his teaching in this chapter (cf. v 43)?

(i) What qualifies someone for the kingdom of God (see vv31-32, v 43)?

(j) What kind of fruit is God looking for?

### **To finish**

3. If Jesus came looking for fruit in your life what would he find?