

Shining



like
stars

CHRIST CHURCH
HOME-GROUPS
Spring 2008

CHRIST CHURCH,
MORETON
2008

You shine like stars in the
universe as you hold out the
word of life.

Philippians 2:15-16

1. Follow Me

WELCOME

What was the best thing about your Christmas?

WORSHIP

We live in a world where things seem constantly to change. It is good to know that the Lord our God never changes, and that what we read of him in the Bible is still true today. Praise God for revealing himself in his word; for his love, faithfulness, mercy, justice etc.

WORD

Mark begins his gospel with an explicit claim about who Jesus is – Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I guess that we are quite familiar with those terms, and maybe take them for granted, but Mark must have known that his first readers would need convincing that Jesus really was ‘the Christ’ – the Messiah – the rightful king of God’s people, and that he was the Son of God.

Although we might be used to talking of Jesus in that way, many (maybe most) in our society have little understanding of who Jesus is, and even less understanding of what it means for him to be Christ, the Son of God. So as we look at the first part of Mark’s gospel, it is worth looking out for things which we might be able to share with others who ask us what was so special about Jesus

Read Mark 1:1-13

How did the crowd respond to John's preaching?

What does that tell you about their sense of need?

Do you think that there is a similar sense of need around today:
in our society?

in the church?

Read Mark 1:14-39

We often think of the gospel solely as a message about the forgiveness of sins. But Jesus begins his ministry proclaiming a different kind of good news. What was the good news Jesus talked about, and what response did it call for (v.14-15)?

When Jesus called Simon and Andrew, he said that they would be 'fishers of men.' What do you think he meant?

Was that calling to be fishers of men specific to Simon and Andrew, or does it apply to all followers of Jesus?

In v.21-31, Mark shows Jesus having authority as a teacher (v.22), authority over evil spirits (v.25), and authority over sickness (v.31)

Which do you find most striking, and why?

What do each of these show you about who Jesus is?

The healing of Simon's mother-in-law took place on the Sabbath, when no-one was permitted to travel more than was absolutely necessary. But as soon as the Sabbath was over (at sunset) a crowd very quickly gathered – *That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases.* (v.32-34)

The people were so eager to get to Jesus that they didn't even wait for next morning. There was an obvious need there – many people who were suffering. What does Jesus do next day?

What does this tell you about Jesus' priorities? Why was this so important?

Does this tell us anything about what our priorities should be?

WORK

Our theme verse for this year say *'You shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.'*

Are there people to whom you would like to be able to hold out the word of life? Share these people and situations with each other, and then pray for each other, that the Lord will help you to live in such a way that there will be opportunities to share with those people something of your faith.

2. Why did Jesus come?

WELCOME

Who is the most interesting person you have met?

WORSHIP

God welcomes us into his family not because we are special, but because he loves us unconditionally. Spend some time praising God for accepting you and making you part of his family.

WORD

One of the remarkable things about Jesus was the range of different people he was prepared to mix with. Last week we saw him call four fishermen to be his first disciples – ordinary working people. After that, we find Jesus healing a man suffering from leprosy – despite that fact that the Old Testament law said that anyone touching such a person themselves became ceremonially unclean.

On into Mark 2 we find that the next disciple to be called was a tax-collector – certainly not the sort of person you would expect a rabbi to call. Immediately after that we find Jesus at dinner with people who were generally classed as 'sinners.'

Just in those two chapters we find Jesus mixing with, and being welcomed by, all kinds of people. In fact, the only people who seem to have rejected Jesus from very early on in his ministry were the 'teachers of the law' – the religious leaders of the day.

Read Mark 1:40 – 2:17

Last week we saw Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law of a fever. But healing someone suffering from leprosy was even more remarkable.

Why did Jesus heal the man (v.41)

Why is it important for us to know this about Jesus?

Why did Jesus not want news of this healing spread around?

Next, we find Jesus meeting with someone who was paralysed. The four men who brought their friend to Jesus knew what they wanted Jesus to do. But what did Jesus see as being the paralytic's greatest need?

Do you think that being forgiven by God is really that important?

Do people in our society generally see forgiveness as a significant issue?

Have there been situations where you know what you wanted God to do, but actually God gave you what you needed rather than what you wanted?

Why were the teachers of the law so upset by what Jesus said?

In what way did Jesus' healing of the paralytic answer their questions?

According to v.17, why had Jesus come?

What do you think that means?

Jesus came announcing the kingdom and calling people to follow him. What change would need to take place in the Pharisees before they could answer Jesus' call?

Does this have anything to tell us about how we share the gospel today?

WORK

The first thing that Matthew did after Jesus called him, was to throw a party for his friends, and invite Jesus to it. Building relationships with those who aren't Christians is a vital part of being 'fishers of men', but it isn't always an easy thing to do. Are there things that you could do as a group that would give non-Christians a chance to meet with Christians? It might be that some of you have few non-Christian friends, but you can still be praying for and supporting those who do.

3. Sowing the seed

WELCOME

Spring might seem a long way off at the moment – but it won't be long before keen gardeners will be out planting seeds. If you had green fingers, and could grow anything you wanted to, what would you have in your garden?

WORSHIP

Psalm 145 begins *I will exalt you, my God the King, I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.* The psalm then goes on to give many reasons why we should praise the Lord. Use verses from the psalm to praise God.

WORD

There have been times when I have heard an evangelist speak, and they have explained the gospel so clearly, and have called for a response so sensitively, that I have been sure that any non-Christian listening is bound to be convinced, and would want to respond. But more often than not, they don't. I know people who have heard the good news so many times, and yet still have ignored the message.

I guess that all of us doing this study will have family or friends who we would love to become Christians. Maybe we have had opportunities to speak to them about Jesus, but with no response at all.

Why is it that some people can hear the good news, and respond, whilst for others it just seems to go in one ear and out the other? Why do some people respond joyfully to the message of Jesus, whilst others seem completely resistant to it?

Read Mark 4:1-34

The parable of the sower is one of Jesus' best known parables. In v.12, the disciples ask Jesus about the parables. How would you summarise Jesus' answer?

We usually expect preachers to speak in a way which will make things clearer (whether they succeed or not is another matter!) But Jesus seems to say that he used parables to keep things hidden. How do parables like this one help Jesus' followers to understand his kingdom, but hinder the understanding of those who do not follow him?

Jesus tells the disciples that the seed is 'the word' (v.14) What does that mean?

Who do you think is the farmer?

In his explanation of parables, Jesus quotes the book of Isaiah. The quotation is taken from Isaiah 6, where Isaiah is first of all commissioned by God as a prophet, and then told that even though he will speak God's words, the people will not listen. If God knew that they wouldn't listen, why did he give Isaiah the job of speaking?

In quoting from Isaiah, Jesus seems to be saying that the purpose of the parables is to prevent people from turning and being forgiven. What do you think he means?

Look through Jesus explanation of the parable in verses 14-20. What kind of people are described by the four different types of soil?

Do you know people like these?

You should never try to make every element in a parable stand for something – it is the general thrust of the story which is important. However, maybe there is something significant in the fact that the farmer sows the seed on bad soil as well as good – presumably with the exception of the path he wouldn't know beforehand which was the good soil, and which had weeds in it, or rocks under it.

How might this influence the way in which we share the gospel with others?

What encouragements do the parables of the growing seed and the mustard seed (v.26-34) give us about the growth of God's kingdom?

Read Mark 4:35-41

The disciples are quite naturally afraid of the storm and disturbed that Jesus seems not to be concerned about their drowning. Once Jesus calms the storm, however, they are still terrified. How does their fear after the storm differ from their previous fear?

Why did Jesus criticise the disciples for having no faith (v.40)?

4. Bread and Fish

WORK

In Ephesians 6:19, Paul says *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel*. In our first study, you were encouraged to think of those people with whom you would like to share the good news. Continue to pray for opportunities, and pray that when those opportunities arise, God will enable you to use them wisely.

WELCOME

What's the best meal you have ever eaten?

WORSHIP

Lent is a time when many Christians give up something they enjoy, in order to have the time to enjoy the Lord himself more. Take some time to praise God for all the good things he does give us, then praise him for what he has done to make it possible for us to have a relationship with him.

WORD

We live in a society where some people react very strongly against Christianity, and consequently against Christians. Scientists like Richard Dawkins, and novelists like Philip Pullman are particularly scathing, but most of us have probably met people who seem to have a deep dislike of anything to do with Jesus.

This shouldn't surprise us, as even Jesus faced the same sort of hostility from some people. Others, though not hostile, were only interested in him while he met their needs. But some did recognise him for who he was.

Read Mark 6:1-5

What response did Jesus get from the people of his home town?

It might be that they thought they knew who Jesus was, after all they had known him for years, and they didn't like it when he seemed to be something other than 'the carpenter from down the road.'

Do you think that sometimes people in our society think they know who Jesus is, and are offended if we try to talk about who he really is and why he came?

Read Mark 6:30-56

As usual, a large crowd gathers around Jesus. Mark tells us that *he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.* (v.34) What do you think that means?

What was Jesus response to the situation? (v.34) Why did he respond in that way?

The importance of the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is seen from the fact that it is the only miracle (except Jesus' resurrection) to be found in all four gospels.

What does it teach us about Jesus and his power?

What great Old Testament event does this miracle have similarities with? (see Exodus 16:1-12)

How does looking back to this Old Testament event help to explain who Jesus is?

Straight after feeding the crowd, Jesus sent his disciples off in the boat, while he went away alone to pray. What happens next?

Mark tells us that the disciples were amazed *for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened* (v.52)

What should they have understood about the loaves?

And what did Mark mean by saying that their hearts were hardened?

What steps can we take to prevent ourselves having hardened hearts?

Read Mark 8:22-30

In what way were the disciples like the blind man in Bethsaida?

How did you come to recognise who Jesus really is?

WORK

This Easter lots of people will be talking about Jesus, as millions are likely to be transfixed by the story of Jesus' final week when *The Passion* shows on BBC1. The plan is to broadcast the big budget series during Holy Week.

The series is expected to create enormous potential to talk about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus with friends, neighbours and colleagues.

The Evangelical Alliance website has a number of suggestions about how Christians can make the most of these opportunities (see www.eauk.org/passion) Is there something that you could do as a group to make the most of this series? Pray about how you can be ready to take any opportunities you have as a result of the series.

5. Choices

WELCOME

If someone was to ask you, 'What is the best thing about being a Christian?' what would you say?

WORSHIP

'But what about you?' Jesus asked. 'Who do you say I am?'
An important part of worship is recognising who Jesus is, so that we can give him the honour and praise he deserves. Praise him for what the Bible tells us about who he is and why he came.

WORD

I used to have a friend who would only ever give to charity if it involved buying a lottery ticket. Give Nigel something where he stood a chance of winning something (even if it was only a remote chance), and he could be quite generous. Ask him just to give, or to support someone doing a sponsored event, and the answer was always 'no.'

I guess that a lot of people are like that – wanting to think that there is something in it for them. And sometimes I've heard evangelists who seem to play on that – telling people all the good things that come from following Jesus. And, of course, there are great blessings in being a Christian, not only for eternity, but also now. But to claim that faith in Jesus is a short cut to solving all your problems seems to me to be a long way from what Jesus himself said. The life he called his followers to could at times be really tough.

Read Mark 8:27-9:1

Why do you think Jesus responds so harshly to Peter (8:33)?

What does Jesus say is involved in being a disciple (8:34)?

What does that mean in practice?

In evangelism we are usually keen to tell others what is good about becoming a Christian. Do you think that we say enough about the things Jesus talks about here?

Read Mark 10:17-31

What is the one key thing that the rich ruler must do to inherit eternal life?

Why must he do so?

Does the same apply to us?

Read Mark 10:32-45

For the third time Jesus predicts his death. Does he say anything different this time?

Why do you think Jesus repeated the prediction of his death (and why did Mark include it three times)?

Given what Jesus has just said, what is ironic about James' and John's request (v35-37)

What do you think Jesus meant by the cup he is to drink and the baptism he is to be baptised with (v.38-39)?

In v.35 Jesus explains again why he has come. How does that also act as a motivation for his followers?

WORK

Are there areas of life where you find it difficult to 'deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus'? Maybe at work? Or in a particular relationship? Pray for one another in these areas.

6 The Cross

WELCOME

What is the best present you've ever been given? What made it so special to you?

WORSHIP

When I survey the wondrous cross As we approach Good Friday and Easter, focus on what the death of Jesus means for you, and then thank him for what he has done.

WORD

We've spent this series trying to understand who Jesus is, why he came, and how we can share that with those who don't yet know him. But whatever else we might or might not say about Jesus, you certainly can't give an explanation of him without talking about the cross. Jesus himself said that is why he had come, and we sell the gospel short if we leave the cross out.

Of course, Mark, like the other gospels, doesn't actually explain the significance of the crucifixion – you'll need to go into the epistles to find that. What Mark does give us is the story – a story which we need to know for ourselves, and to always be ready to share.

Read Mark 8:27-32

Why do you think that immediately after Peter had realised who Jesus is, Jesus talks about his coming death?

Read Mark 15:1-32

Four groups or individuals are involved in Jesus' death – the soldiers, the Jewish leaders, Pilate, and the crowd. How would you describe each one's attitude to Jesus?

- The soldiers
- The Jewish leaders
- Pilate
- The Crowd

In what way do their attitudes parallel those of men and women today?

We know virtually nothing about Barabbas, except the brief comments in the gospels. But – in what way does Barabbas stand for every believer?

The wine mixed with myrrh offered to Jesus would have had a narcotic effect. Why does Jesus refuse it?

(It might help to look at Mark 10:38, 14:25, 36)

Read Mark 15:33-39

In what way is the centurion's confession a climax to the whole of Mark's gospel?

It was seeing Jesus death that convinced the centurion of who Jesus was. How can we present Jesus death to our society in a way which will help people today to understand Jesus' identity?

WORK

As we approach Holy Week, think again how you might use *The Passion* when it comes on television next week. Pray that even though it is not meant as an evangelistic show (indeed, I suspect that the BBC would be horrified at that thought!) the Lord will open up many opportunities for witness through it.

CHRIST CHURCH,
MORETON

We want to be a **W**elcoming Church

Because Jesus welcomed all who came to him

an **E**vangelising Church

*Because we believe that everyone has the right to hear the
Good News of Jesus*

a **L**oving Church

*Because Jesus commanded his followers to love one
another*

a **L**earning Church

*Because we are in the business of making disciples, and
disciples must always be learners*