



christ church
moreton

BLESSED
PEOPLE

CHRIST CHURCH
HOME-GROUPS
Spring 2011

The diary for this term looks like this:

Wednesday 5th Jan

PRAYER MEETING

Week beginning 10th Jan

Home-Group session 1

Week beginning 17th Jan

Home Group session 2

Week beginning 24th Jan

Home Group session 3

Wednesday 2nd Feb

PRAYER MEETING

Week beginning 7th Feb

Home Group session 4

Week beginning 14th Feb

Home Group session 5

Week beginning 21st Feb

Free Week

Week beginning 28th Feb

Home Group session 6

Wednesday 9th March

**ASH WEDNESDAY
COMMUNION**

Week beginning 14th March

Lent Home Group series starts

Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'

John 8:31-32

Do you want to be free? Free to be the person God created you to be, free to live life in the way that it was meant to be lived?

If you do, then you need to know the truth – the truth about God, the truth about yourself, the truth about the world we live in. And there is only one place to find that truth – in the word of God.

But that truth can only be known by those who have committed themselves to Jesus, to follow him as his disciples. And, as we study Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, we'll find that it turns most people's expectations about how to live upside-down. But only as we trust what Jesus says, and put it into practice as his disciples, will we be able to know real freedom.

1. THE UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM

WELCOME

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

WORSHIP

Psalm 96 reminds us that whatever we see going on around us, it is the Lord who reigns, and it encourages us to sing praise to him. Use the psalm to bring your praise to the Lord, the King.

WORD

What do you need to give you life at its best? I'm sure that most people have a fairly clear idea of what would constitute the ideal life – it would probably include wealth, health, popularity, and all the things that go along with them.

The Bible doesn't say that there is anything wrong with those things, but it does tell us that they are not sufficient to give us life to the full. In fact, in order to enjoy the life that Jesus came to give, we might have to turn some of those dreams upside down.

Read Matthew 5:1-12

- *How does our normal description of the blessed or fortunate person compare with those Jesus considers blessed?*

Although people often take the beatitudes as a series of unlinked statements, it is more likely that Jesus intended us to see a link between them.

To be 'poor in spirit' is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty, to admit that we have nothing with which we can deserve God's favour.

- *Why is this where we have to start if we want to receive the kingdom of heaven?*
- *Why do you think many people are reluctant to admit their spiritual poverty?*
- *Why would being poor in spirit lead us to mourn?*
- *How would having a true understanding of ourselves (that we are poor in spirit) lead us to be 'meek' – to have a gentle attitude to others?*
- *What do you think Jesus meant by 'hunger and thirst for righteousness'?*
- *How does what has gone before lead to this?*

- *Jesus says that the merciful will be shown mercy. Why do you think our treatment of others will affect God's treatment of us?*

- *Jesus says that we should be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. Why would being like that earn the world's persecution?*

- *Have you ever faced the persecution that Jesus talks about here?*

- *The things Jesus said in the Beatitudes certainly turn the world's values upside-down. But why would living this way make you 'blessed' – and enable you to live life to the full?*

Read Matthew 5:13-16

Before refrigeration, salt was used to keep meat from rotting.

- *What does Jesus' statement 'You are the salt of the earth' tell us about society and the role of the church in society?*
- *Can you think of anything that has been in the news recently which shows that society is decaying?*

Jesus warns against losing our saltiness?

- *What might cause this?*

Jesus second statement is 'You are the light of the world.' As salt, we are called to prevent decay, the spread of sin in our society.

- *What do you think being called lights means we should also be doing?*

- *In what ways might we hide our light?*

- *According to Jesus, what will happen when people see our good deeds?*

WORK

As God's people we should not only be active in the church, but also active in being salt and light in our community. In what ways are members of your group doing that? How can you support one another in being salt and light in the world?

2. LIVING BY THE BOOK

WELCOME

Who is your favourite character in the Bible?

WORSHIP

Psalm 19 encourages us to rejoice in God's work in creation, but even more to rejoice in his word. Use the psalm together.

WORD

For almost everyone, our relationships form a big part of our lives. Even for those with little in the way of immediate family, there are friendships, work relationships, neighbours. Unless you are an absolute recluse, living life to the full will involve relationships.

And we should expect that. One of the important things about our belief in the Trinity is that relationship is at the heart of God, and that as people created in God's image, relationship is part of what it means to be human. We were created for relationship.

But at the same time, relationships can be a big source of heartache for many people. It sometimes seems that people are incapable of maintaining genuine relationships. If we are honest, all of us know that we need guidance if we are to have good relationships. And Jesus insists that we need the whole of God's word.

Read Matthew 5:17-20

Last time we saw that Jesus wants his people to be salt and light in the world. Straight after talking about salt and light, Jesus now goes on to highlight the importance of Scripture (the Law and the Prophets) Being salt and light highlight the practical aspects of being a Christian, whilst this emphasis on the Bible highlights the importance of paying attention to what God says.

- *How can paying attention to the Bible help us to be salt and light more effectively?*
- *How does Jesus emphasise his high view of the Old Testament Scriptures? How can Jesus' words strengthen our confidence on Scripture?*

The Pharisees and teachers of the law were passionate about keeping the Law – they calculated that the Law contained 248 commands of things they should do, and 365 commands concerning things they shouldn't do.

- *How can our righteousness possibly surpass theirs?*

Read Matthew 5:21-30

- *Do you think that when Jesus compared anger with murder, he was trying to make a point by overstating the case, or is being angry with someone really as bad as murder?*

- *Why should it matter what we think about someone, as long as we don't physically harm them?*
- *What do verses 23-26 tell us about broken relationships?*

Although the context is slightly different, Jesus' instruction in v.23-24 lies behind the practice of 'Sharing the Peace' in the communion service. Before we come to the Lord's Table to remember Jesus death for us, we should make sure that all our relationships are right. In the Communion Service in the Book of Common Prayer, the minister instructs the congregation to review their relationships before taking communion, and in the past, when a minister knew that members of his congregation were not 'in love and charity' with one another, he would refuse to administer the bread and wine to them.

- *Do we take the state of our relationships within Christ Church seriously enough?*

Jesus moves on from anger to lust.

- *What, according to him, is the full meaning of the commandment 'Do not commit adultery'?*
- *Again, why should it matter what goes on in the privacy of our own minds, as long as we don't get physically involved with someone? Why is this part of God's recipe for living life to the full?*

- *Some Christians have taken verses 29-30 literally and have mutilated their bodies. How do you think Jesus intends us to understand his warnings?*
- *In what situations might you need to 'gouge out an eye' or 'cut off a hand'?*

WORK

Next Sunday (23rd Jan) we launch E100 – our challenge to read 100 essential passages from the Bible over the next few months. How can you encourage one another to persevere in doing that?

3. ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

WELCOME

What was your favourite toy when you were a child?

WORSHIP

Psalms 121 is one of the best loved of the psalms. It helps us to express our trust in the Lord and in his unfailing love. Use the psalm together.

WORD

We saw last time that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenge the accepted attitudes of his day, and insisted that among his followers not only the way we act towards other, but even the way we think about them is important.

That is a challenge in our day, when so many people see nothing wrong with harbouring grudges, or with lust. And as Jesus continued, he turned to 2 other relationships – that of husbands and wives, and that of enemies. Ad what Jesus said in both instances is just as shocking to our society today as it was in the society in which he first spoke these words.

Read Matthew 5:31-32

Divorce is a painful issue for many people, including many Christians. Probably most of us have either been through a divorce or have had someone close to us go through it.

But as disciples we need to learn from what Jesus says even on these difficult issues.

- *How does what Jesus says here contrast with the views of our society concerning marriage and divorce?*
- *How do these verses underline the high value that God places on marriage?*

Read Matthew 19:3-9

When Jesus was questioned about divorce, he pointed back to Genesis.

- *What does this teach about God's original design for marriage?*
- *In what way might divorce reveal the hardness of our hearts?*

Read Matthew 5:33-37

The Pharisees had elaborate formulas for oaths, with some being binding and some not (see Matthew 23:16-22)

- *Why is Jesus opposed to oaths?*
- *Why should oaths be unnecessary for Jesus' followers?*

Read Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus' quotation of 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth' comes from Exodus 21:24, where it was an instruction for Israel's judges.

- *How might we be tempted to apply the same approach to those who have hurt us?*

- *What is accomplished by turning the other cheek or going a second mile?*
- *According to Jesus, how are we to treat our enemies? Why should we do this?*
- *Does this mean that as Christians we should let others walk all over us?*
- *How was Jesus himself an example of what he teaches here? How can his example help us?*

WORK

Is anyone in your group struggling with someone who is being an enemy to them at the moment? How can you support them in that situation?

4. REAL RELIGION

WELCOME

Which would you rather have someone else do for you: the ironing, the washing up, or the gardening?

WORSHIP

Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' (Mark 12:30) Thank the Lord that that is the way he loves you, and ask for his forgiveness for the times when you have failed to love him. Ask for his help to love him more.

WORD

What comes into most people's minds when they hear the word 'church'? I guess that for many it will be the building, whilst for others it will be the services that happen in the building. For most people it will all seem monumentally irrelevant to real life.

But what comes into God's mind when he hears the word 'church'? I suspect that most people think that God is particularly concerned about the building, or about what goes on in it. But the Bible gives us a very different picture. Yes – meeting together to encourage one another is vital for Christians (see Hebrews 10:25). But God is more concerned about how we live out our lives as his people. The prophet Micah told the people of his day what the Lord was really looking for from his people:

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

And now Jesus continues his teaching by reminding his disciples that true religion is not centred on outward acts of piety, but on genuine devotion shown through giving, praying, and fasting.

Read Matthew 6:1-6.

In Matthew 5:16, Jesus said, 'Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good deeds.' But now he says 'Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them.'

- *Why the difference?*
- *In what ways might we be tempted to be hypocritical in our giving?*

Read Matthew 6:7-15

- *What was wrong with the way the hypocrites prayed in Jesus' day?*
- *How might that happen today?*

Instead of praying that way, Jesus gives us a pattern for prayer.

- *But – if God already knows what we need (v.8), why do we need to pray?*

We live in a self-centred culture, where most people are preoccupied with their own wants and concerns.

- *How does the Lord's Prayer challenge this attitude?*

- *Can we still pray this prayer if we are finding it difficult to forgive someone who has hurt or offended us?*

Read Matthew 6:16-18

Jesus assumes that Christians will fast (though probably few of us do).

- *Why and how should we fast?*

Again, there were those in Jesus day who fasted in order to impress others, just as they gave and prayed to impress others.

- *How can this passage help to purify our motives?*

WORK

It is all too easy to hear about giving, praying and fasting and to acknowledge that they are important, and then to pass quickly on to the next study!

But if they are important, they are issues which as disciples we need to pay serious attention to. Over the next week, please set aside some time to review your giving (both to Christ Church and to mission generally), your praying (where do you make time to fit it into your schedule) and fasting (have you ever even thought about doing it?)

Pray for one another, for the Lord to help you think these things through this week.

5. REAL TREASURE

WELCOME

If you were to be stranded on a desert island, which of your possessions would you most want to have with you?

WORSHIP

Psalm 63 is a psalm of longing for God. As you begin this study, use these words to focus on him.

WORD

Life today is more complex than it has ever been. Although we have labour saving devices that we have been undreamed of only a hundred years ago, we also have a sometimes overwhelming amount of things with which we can fill our time. Cars mean that we can go where we want when we want, TV and Internet clamour for our attention 24 hours a day. Leisure has at times become a curse – most of us probably end the day more worn out than my granddad, who used to work 12 hours a day in the mill. In the words of Timothy Dudley-Smith's hymn 'Lord for the years', we are 'spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care.'

So – with all of these things to enjoy – how can we get our priorities right?

Read Matthew 6:19-34

- *Jesus warns us against 'storing up treasures on earth.'*
Obviously this can mean storing up money, but in what other ways might we be tempted to give earthly things too high a place?
- *In contrast – what does it mean to 'store up for yourselves treasures in heaven'?*
- *According to Jesus, why is it foolish to worry about our physical and material needs?*
- *How will our response to what Jesus says in v.19-24 affect our ability to live free from worry?*
- *What are the sort of things that the people around us are running after at the moment (v.32?)*
- *How do you understand 'the kingdom of God'? As something purely spiritual, or as something concerning the whole of life?*
- *What do you think it means to 'seek first the kingdom of God' (v.33)?*
 - *Do you ever think about how God wants you to be spending your time? (Not just about how much of your time you should be spending on church activities, but about all of it.)*

- *Is church-going a leisure activity for you (well, O.K., you are bound to say it isn't, but do stop and think. Everybody else in society thinks it is, and that you only go to church because you 'enjoy' it. How do we avoid being caught up with that view?)*

WORK

Pray for each other, for wisdom in using wisely all the wonderful opportunities for enjoyment and pleasure that God gives us.

Pray as well for others you know who are so busy enjoying themselves that they have no time for God, and no realisation of their need of him. How can you show them that putting Jesus first really is the best way to live?

6. KEEP TO THE RIGHT ROAD

WELCOME

Next Wednesday (9th March) is Ash Wednesday. Are you planning to give up something for Lent? Why?

WORSHIP

The book of Psalms begins with a description of two ways to live. Use the psalm together, then pray that the Lord will help you to be like the blessed man in the psalm.

WORD

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has challenged some of the deepest held assumptions of our society.

- He has challenged the view that what goes on in our minds is no-one else's business.
- He has challenged the view that we should love our friends, but even if we don't actively seek to harm our enemies, we have no obligation to help them.
- He has challenged the view that religion is about outward performance, something we do for our own satisfaction.
- He has challenged the view that the secret of a good life is having money, popularity and success.

All of these attitudes are so ingrained in our society that as Christians we need to be constantly looking at how much we are influenced by them. Because although they are the worldview of the majority of our family and friends, they are actually barriers to true

freedom. And in our last study, Jesus confronts another of our society's deepest held myths – that life is meant to be comfortable.

Read Matthew 7:1-12

Judging others is the bread and butter of the media. But Jesus says that we should not be like that.

- *Why should we not judge others? (Jesus gives 2 reasons)*
- *What should we do if we want to truly help a brother or sister? (v.5)*
- *How does 'in everything do to others as you would have them do to you' sum up the Law and the Prophets?*

Read Matthew 7:13-23

In our consumer-oriented society, people would like to combine elements of several religions, or even to design one of their own. And Christians can be tempted to pick the most comfortable bits of the Bible, and build their faith on those. But Jesus doesn't allow us to do that. He highlights the choices which we have to make, and the consequences of those choices.

- *What is so attractive about the wide gate and broad way?*
- *Why do people find it hard to find the small gate and narrow way?*

The Christian life begins by entering through the narrow gate – accepting that challenge of receiving Jesus as Lord. But having done that, there are many temptations to lose our way.

- *Why is it so significant that Jesus' warning about false prophets comes straight after what he says about the narrow and wide gates?*
- *How can we tell a false prophet from a true one?*
- *You would think that prophecy, casting out demons, and miracles (v.22) were pretty impressive fruit! Why do you think that Jesus could call some who did such things false prophets?*

I don't believe that Jesus was saying that it is wrong to prophesy or to cast out demons, or to perform miracles – after all, he did all of those! But there is something more important than these things.

- *What is it (v.21)?*

Finally – read Matthew 7:24-27

It's one of Jesus' best known parables. Both the wise and foolish builders heard the word, but only one did anything about it.

- *In what ways might we be tempted to hear the word but not put it into practice?*

The effect of doing this is disastrous. I know several people who know a lot about the Bible, and who sometimes seem to know more about the Christian faith than some Christians do! But they have done nothing with that knowledge. As we come to the end of this series, are there things that you need to stop just hearing and start acting on?

'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says!'

James 1:22

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