

making disciples  
growing disciples  
being disciples

# Rescued from the dark

CHRIST CHURCH  
HOME-GROUPS  
Summer 2016

Homegroup programme for this term:

w/b Mon 16<sup>th</sup> May

Study 1 – Filled to overflowing

w/b Mon 23<sup>rd</sup> May

Study 2 – The image of his Father

Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> June

Prayer meeting

w/b Mon 6<sup>th</sup> June

Study 3 – A man with a mission

w/b Mon 13<sup>th</sup> June

Study 4 - I've started so I'll finish

w/b Mon 20<sup>th</sup> June

Study 5 – (Re)born free

w/b Mon 27<sup>th</sup> June

Study 6 – Leave the light on

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July

Prayer meeting

w/b Mon 10<sup>th</sup> July

Study 7 – Pass it on.

Hope Moreton 2016 gave us a great chance to focus on Making Disciples – helping others to find a living relationship with the Lord Jesus. That is something we need to go on doing, but in our home-groups for the rest of this term, we will focus on how we can grow as disciples ourselves – which should spill over into helping others grow.

To help us do that, we are going to look at Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

It seems from various comments that he makes in the letter that Paul was concerned that the Colossian Christians were at risk of being taken in by other teachings. Whilst that might not seem such a big issue, he understood that it would lead to them stopping growing as disciples.

As we live in a world so desperately searching for truth wherever it appears to be found, this letter has a lot to say to us about maintaining the simple truths of the gospel and not allowing the waters to become muddy. If we are going to hold out the word of life, we need to be clear just what that word is, and be able to answer those who are confused by what the truth really is.

# 1. Filled to overflowing

## *Rescued from the dark into the Kingdom*

### WELCOME

What hobbies have you had in the past, but given up on?

### WORSHIP

*‘For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does’ (Ps 33:4)*

Psalm 33 is a great psalm of praise to the God who saves his people. Use the words of this psalm to praise God for his faithfulness to us.

### WORD

#### **Read Colossians 1: 1 - 8**

After his initial greetings, Paul frequently thanks God in some way for the Christians he is writing to. In the case of the Colossians, he thanks God for three things that are very dear to him. These are three things that Paul refers to in many of his letters, and are always closely connected.

He thanks God for their: **faith** in Christ Jesus;

**love** for all God’s people;

and the **hope** that is stored up for them in

heaven.

- What is the 'hope stored up for them in heaven'? (v5)
- How does 'love for all God's people' spring from that hope?
- How do the Colossians (and we) know about this hope?

Paul then encourages them to see that the gospel isn't just at work in them, but is working across the world: *the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world (v6).*

- What is the difference (if any) between the gospel 'bearing fruit,' and it 'growing'?
- Can you see the gospel bearing fruit and growing at Christ Church? How?

### **Read Colossians 1: 9 - 14**

- What does Paul pray for the Colossians? (v9)
- Why does he pray that? (v10)

What 4 things does a life 'worthy of the Lord' and 'pleasing to him' show? (v10 - 12)

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- Which do you find the hardest to do?
- How can we encourage each other in these areas?
- Colossians 1:13 is a great truth, but how is it relevant to what Paul has just been saying about living a life that is worthy of the Lord?

In his first letter, Peter says that we have been redeemed from 'the empty way of life' (1 Peter 1:18). A life that is worthy of the Lord is that life to the full that Jesus promised he had come to bring. (John 10:10)

The dominion of darkness can promise only empty lives in the present and a hope-less future. But we have been rescued from that and brought into Christ's kingdom, where we can have life in all its fullness in the present and the guarantee of inheriting our share of the hope which awaits us in heaven.

We have been qualified for that hope, but we need to live lives that are worthy of that qualification; lives that are worthy of the Lord and that will please him in every way.

WORK

What difference will the knowledge of your rescue make to you in practical terms this week?

# 2. The image of his Father

## *Rescued from the dark by reconciliation*

### WELCOME

Who are you most like in your family?

### WORSHIP

*'Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created'* (Psalm 148:5) We have the awesome privilege of having a relationship with the One who created everything in existence. Use Psalm 148 to praise God for his amazing creative power.

### WORD

There are so many ideas about Jesus around at the moment. A few years ago the hugely popular *The Da Vinci Code* brought some of these ideas into the mass market, and there has been no slowdown. But it is nothing new – one of the key issues which Paul had to address when he wrote to the Colossians was misunderstandings about Jesus.

### **Read Colossians 1: 15 - 20**

Which verses counter each of the following claims?

- *That Jesus wasn't fully God*
- *That Jesus wasn't really a man*
- *That Jesus was a created being*
  
- Do you recognise any of these claims from your conversations with non-Christians?
  
- Why is it important that we accept each of these things as true?

Paul says that Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God'. That isn't to imply that Jesus is in some way an imperfect copy of God, but that he is perfectly like God. He is exactly the same as God. The writer to the Hebrews says *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...* (Hebrews 1: 3)

### **Read John 10: 1 - 18**

- What aspects of God's character can we see in Jesus' description of himself?

The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. He isn't forced to; it's something he does from his own will. But Jesus, as the good shepherd, can only lay down his life, because he has a real, physical body.

## Read Colossians 1: 21 - 23

- What difference would it make to the work of the cross if Jesus had only appeared to have a real body?

We like to believe that, as long as we have accepted Christ as Lord, our final redemption is assured. But actually here Paul appears to put a condition on that hope; '*...if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.*' (v23)

- How might we be tempted to move from the hope held out in the gospel?
- Why would doing this be so serious?

There are times though, when we all wonder about the strength of our faith. There are times when it can seem to be slipping away from us and is certainly not 'established and firm'.

## Read John 10:27 - 30

- How is this an encouragement to us when we are feeling less than secure?

In the Disney film 'Finding Nemo', the character Dory has a very simple philosophy in life - *just keep swimming*. Paul's challenge to each of us is to do exactly that - just keep swimming. Keep going, 'do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.'

### WORK

How can we encourage each other, within our home groups, to 'just keep swimming'?

How do we make sure that, as a church, we are 'not moved from the hope held out in the gospel'?

# 3. A man with a mission

## *Rescued from the dark for the hope of glory*

### WELCOME

What's the best surprise you've even had, or ever given anyone else?

### WORSHIP

*'The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul'. (Psalm 19:7)*

We are so blessed to have easy access to the word of God. Use the words of Psalm 19 to lead you to praise God for his word which guides and encourages us.

### WORD

Paul knew, better than anyone, the sufferings that came with Christian ministry. In his second letter to the Corinthians he explains just what he has suffered for the sake of the gospel.

## Read 2 Corinthians 11: 23 - 28

None of us will ever know that kind of suffering for the gospel, thankfully. But in all of that Paul never gave up, he never lost sight of what he was suffering for. And he never stopped rejoicing.

- We don't suffer in the same way as Paul, but in what ways have you suffered because of knowing Jesus?

Paul knew that suffering was inevitable. In fact, he saw it as part of his work, for the sake of the church.

### **Read Colossians 1:24 - 2:5**

When Paul says that he is filling up 'what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions', he isn't saying that Christ's work on the cross is incomplete. That suffering was finished and total. But Christ himself warned that there would be suffering and persecution for the church. And when the church suffers, Christ suffers. Paul suffers for the sake of the church. When Paul suffers, the church suffers less.

- In what ways can the sufferings of our leaders reduce our suffering?
- How can we help them to rejoice in that suffering?

Paul's commission from God is to present 'the word of God in all its fullness', which he says is a mystery that has now been revealed.

- What is the mystery? (Ephesians 3:2-6 might help here)
- Who has the mystery been disclosed to?
- How does Paul reveal the mystery? (v28)
- Why does he do it in that way? (v28)

Paul says that he struggles, with Christ's energy, for everyone in the church at Colossae, the church at Laodicea and even for those he hasn't met.

- How much are we struggling for our Christian brothers and sisters we have never met?

Paul's mission is to proclaim Christ, but the purpose of his labour and struggle is explained at the beginning of chapter 2.

*What is his purpose?*

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- Where are all knowledge and wisdom found?
- Where does the world look for knowledge?

WORK

How can we help each other to be encouraged in heart and united in love?

What can you be doing as a group to encourage unity?

# 4. I've started, so I'll finish

## *Rescued from the dark into new life*

### WELCOME

Do you have any family traditions – certain things that you always do as a family?

### WORSHIP

*The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.* (Ps 111 v7) God never changes, he is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Use the words of Psalm 111 to praise God for his unchanging ways.

### WORD

So far in this letter, Paul has encouraged the Colossian Christians to hold firmly to what they have been taught. But he is not ready to leave the subject just yet.

### **Read Colossians 2: 6 - 12**

In verses 6-7 Paul gives 4 pictures of what it means to grow as disciples

- *'continue to live in him'*
- *'rooted and built up in him'*

- *'strengthened in the faith as you were taught'*
- *'overflowing with thankfulness'*
- What does it mean to 'continue to live in him'?
- 'Rooted and built up' gives the picture of something that goes down deep, giving a firm enough foundation for life to be built on. How do we get those deep roots in our Christian lives?
- How is our faith strengthened?
- What should we be thankful to God for? How can we 'overflow with thankfulness' when we are suffering?

These few verses form the 'hinge' of the letter. They provide the link between what the Colossians have been taught and how that should be shown in their lives.

So Paul repeats himself somewhat as he draws all the threads together. But his main concern is obviously that these Christians understand the true gospel and appreciate how vital it is.

*'See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy' (v8)*

The word that Paul uses for 'takes you captive' literally means 'kidnap'. The Colossians are at risk of being kidnapped, stolen away from the truth of the gospel.

- Are there ways in which we are at the same risk? What could 'kidnap' us from the gospel?

Paul restates his argument against the heresies that were surrounding the Colossians, but now he explains what difference Christ's death and resurrection makes to the lives of those who believe and trust in him. He says that we have been 'circumcised' by Christ' in 'the putting off of the sinful nature'.

I have heard people say things like 'well, God's still got a long way to go with me', or 'I'm not perfect, but God knows that'. And while it's true that God knows we all still fail him, because we are not capable of living perfectly his way, it's too easy for that to become our escape clause; a get out jail free card that we use to excuse our sinful behaviour.

But Paul says that we have been buried with Christ in baptism, and then raised with him through faith in the power of God.

## Read Colossians 2: 13 - 15

- What were you?
- What are you now?
- What brought about that change?
- What do you think Paul means in verse 15? How did God make 'a public spectacle' of the powers and authorities?

## WORK

We all acknowledge how hard it is to do all that. But the best weapon we have for the fight is prayer. Praying for each other as a church is so important. It is such an encouragement to know that you don't have to face the struggle alone, but that others are lifting you up in their prayers. We're all in this together.

That's why our prayer diary is so important. Do you have one, or do you have the topics e-mailed daily?

Whether electronic or hard copy, do you use it? If not, why not make a real effort this month to pray for the people in it?

Remember, if you are in the diary, one day every month people will be praying for you.



# 5. (Re)born free

## *Rescued from the dark into freedom*

### WELCOME

If you were Prime Minister, what would be the first new law you would bring in?

### WORSHIP

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.* (Psalm 46:1) This Psalm is a great hymn of praise. It encourages us to see that, if we trust in God, we have nothing to fear. Use this psalm to lead you into worshipping God for that amazing promise.

### WORD

#### **Read Colossians 2:16 - 23**

When Paul uses the word 'therefore' he means that his next idea is a direct result of the one he has just been discussing. So he says that because God has nailed the written code to the cross and made a spectacle of the powers and authorities, we shouldn't let anyone judge us about our adherence to religious rules and regulations.

- Why are these two thoughts connected?

In Isaiah 29:13 God says: *These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from*

*me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.* Keeping that in mind and look again at Colossians 2:20 - 23.

- Why don't the rules **we** lay down to stop ourselves from falling into sin actually work?
- What needs to change before we will be able to resist the temptation to return to our old ways?
- But what have we seen has already happened if we have turned to Christ?
- So, back to what we saw last week, how do we keep ourselves moving in the right direction? (Col 2: 6-7, 19)

#### **Read Colossians 3: 1 - 11**

- What does it mean to set our hearts and minds on things above?
- What difference should that make to the way we act?

Paul tells the Colossians to put to death, or put off, what belongs to our earthly nature. Paul obviously knows that this is not something we can all do without thinking about it; it's not like flicking a switch, but rather something we have to work at.

- What sort of behaviour should we have 'put to death'?
- Why are these things inappropriate for someone who is being renewed in the image of their Creator?

## Read Colossians 3: 12 - 17

We are new creations, but we need to make sure that the things we have clothed ourselves with are not 'the Emperor's new clothes'.

- What should we be clothing ourselves with?
- How do we go about doing that?
- Which do you find the hardest to put on?
- What do you think it means to 'let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts'?
- And 'let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'?

### WORK

In the last 3 verses of this week's passage, Paul refers to thankfulness 3 times. He says that whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we should do it all in Christ's name, giving thanks to God.

How do we do everything in Christ's name?

How do we give thanks in everything we do?

Is there something in the week ahead that you know will be hard to do 'in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God'?

Spend some time praying for each other about those difficulties.

## 6. I love you, but...

### *Rescued from the dark to love like Christ*

#### WELCOME

Which of your relationships do you find the easiest?

#### WORSHIP

Psalm 23 is one of the best known, and best loved psalms. Read the psalm together and use it to praise God for the way he loves and cares for us.

#### WORD

We all know how difficult family relationships can be. The media would often have us believe that this is due to our changing lifestyles and social climate. But actually, relationship difficulties are nothing new.

Paul writes over and over again about our relationships, both within the church and in our families.

### **Read Colossians 3: 18 - 4:1**

This is one of the most contentious sections of Colossians. In our society the word 'submission' is loaded with negative

connotations, and that is bound to colour our reading of this passage.

But remember that Jesus always treated women with respect in an age in which they were generally regarded as less than second class citizens. And Paul has already stressed our 'oneness' in God's new society (Colossians 3:11). So our understanding of this passage must be set in that context.

- What 3 relationships is Paul concerned with?
- Do you think these rules are all still relevant today, given the changes in our society since Paul wrote this letter?

In this passage, Paul simply says, 'Wives, submit to your husbands' and 'Husbands, love your wives', but elsewhere he expands on what that actually means.

### **Read Ephesians 5:22 - 6:4**

Here, Paul equates the relationship between husband and wife with that between Christ and the church.

- What does that mean for the instruction for wives to submit to their husbands?
- How will a husband love his wife, 'just as Christ loved the church'?

The other relationship that can be so incredibly difficult, is that between parents and their children. In Ephesians 5, Paul tells fathers not to 'exasperate' their children, and in Colossians 3, not to 'embitter' them.

- What do you think Paul means by this instruction?
- How might children 'become discouraged' by their father's attitude towards them? (Col 3: 21)
- Why should children obey their parents? (v20)

The next relationship that Paul turns to is that between slaves and masters. These verses were among those used by the church to defend slavery, until it was seen that they were not condoning it, merely showing how that existing system should operate.

Because we live in a very different society, we maybe miss the most striking thing about these verses, which is that Paul addresses himself to slaves at all. Despite the fact that in Roman society slaves had virtually no rights, here Paul writes to them as accepted members of the Christian community.

- So now we have abolished slavery (in theory as least), can we ignore these verses?
- Do you think that the references to slaves and master here can be applied to modern employer-employee relationships, or maybe to teacher-pupil relationships? If so, how might what Paul writes here be applied in those areas?
- Out of all the instructions Paul has given about relationships, which do you find the hardest?

## WORK

We might not all be married, we might not all have children, we might not all be employed, but still what Paul writes here about these relationships is a challenge. We live in a society where marriage breaks down at an alarming rate, where parents often neglect their children, and children ignore their parents, and where the workplace is often stressful to say the least.

These are issues which affect us as a church. So – are there things that we need to be doing? Are there ways in which we could support married couples? A special marrieds weekend or something like that?

Or maybe a parenting course?

Or is there something we could do to support people under pressure at work (without the thing we do causing more pressure!)

Over to you. But please, don't just come up with ideas – come up with ways in which you could make them happen!

# 7. Pass it on

## *Rescued from the dark to share good news*

### WELCOME

What is the best piece of news you have ever been given?

### WORSHIP

*I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. (Ps 146:2)*

Psalm 146 is a wonderful description of just what good news the gospel is. Use this psalm together to praise our great God.

### WORD

All the way through this letter, Paul has shown the Colossian Christians what they have been rescued from and to. He's talked about what their lives were like in the dark before God saved them and how that should translate into changed lives in the light.

But now, as is often the case, Paul draws his letter to a close with a series of quick instructions.

### **Read Colossians 4: 2 - 6**

The last section we looked at was about relationships within the family and our work, Paul now turns to our relationships with those outside the church.

- Who/ what should we be praying for?
- What should our attitude to that prayer be?
- Why?

### Read Luke 18: 1-8

- What should our response be if our prayers appear to go unanswered?
- Why is it important that *we are persistent in prayer*?

We must keep praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are working to share the gospel. That doesn't just mean missionaries in far off countries, but also people working nearer to home. Nor does it only mean those with an official job title, but 'ordinary' Christians sharing the gospel with their friends and families.

Because, as Paul says, gospel ministry is not just about preaching from pulpits or big stages. It's about our actions and conversations. Hope Moreton 2016 was just a start – the TFM team helped us for the week in May that they were here, but now we need to continue that work.

- In what ways should we 'be wise in the way we act towards outsiders' (that's non-Christians)?
- How can we 'make the most of every opportunity'?
- What opportunities do you have to share *the gospel*?

A conversation seasoned with salt and full of grace will be interesting and make the gospel attractive, rather than being dull and lifeless – something I'm sure we all have experience of.

- What has been the best telling of the gospel you have ever heard?
- Why was it so good?
- Should we leave the 'bad news' out of our gospel conversations?
- Should we have a ready prepared answer that we roll out when asked about our hope?

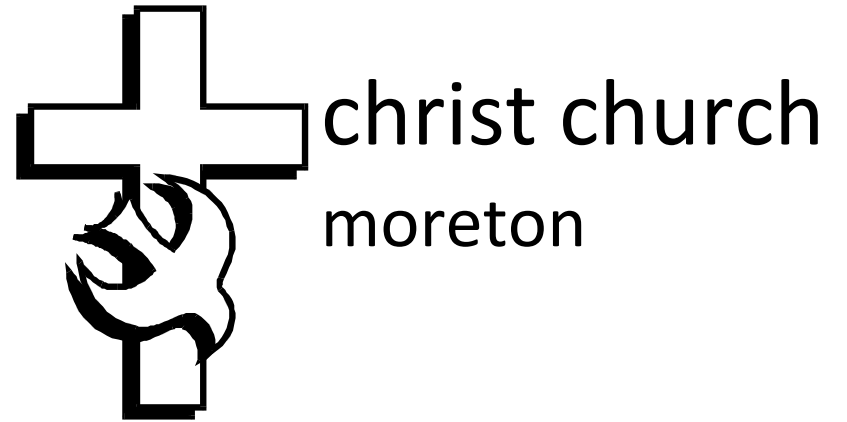
### Read Colossians 4: 7-18

It might seem like a list of names – just a way of ending his letter, but having spoken about prayer at both the start and end of this letter, Paul highlights one person – Epaphras.

- How does he serve the church in Colossae?
- What does 'wrestling in prayer' mean for our understanding of praying for one another?

### WORK

Our summer break is almost here – this is our last home group meeting till the autumn. Can you commit to praying for one another over the next few weeks – regularly and seriously – that *you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured*'?.



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