

BLESS
YOU

Christ Church
Home Groups
Autumn 2020



christ church
moreton

2020

For I am **not ashamed**
of the **gospel**,
because it is the
power of God
that brings **salvation** to
everyone who **believes**.

Romans 1:16

It is Sunday, and as the service ends the minister says some final words. At Christ Church usually these are taken from the Bible – words of blessing to lead us out into the coming week.

But what do those words mean? Are they just a nice sentiment – good words to remember as we start another week? Or is there more to them than that – do they actually express what we believe God wants to do in us? Does hearing those words make a difference?

That is what we are going to explore this term as we look at 6 of these blessings.

The diary for this term looks like this:

w/b Mon 14th September – Home-group 1
w/b Mon 21st September – free week
w/b Mon 28th September – Home-group 2

Wed 7th October – **Prayer Meeting**
w/b Mon 12th October – Home-group 3
w/b Mon 19th October – free week
w/b Mon 26th October – Home group 4

Wed 4th November – **Prayer Meeting**
w/b Mon 9th November – Home-group 5
w/b Mon 16th November – free week
w/b Mon 23rd November – Home-group 6

1. The blessing of Peace

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

WELCOME

The last six months have been difficult for most of us. But can you share one good thing that has happened during that time?

WORSHIP

James 1:17 reminds us that ‘every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.’ Spend some time thanking God for the good things he has given you.

WORD

‘Bless’ and ‘Blessing’ are words which many Christians use regularly. We might sign off a letter with ‘God bless.’ Several of the songs we sing speak of God blessing us, or us blessing God. Our services often end with a blessing. But what does it actually mean?

The Bible passage which most of us would probably associate with the word is in the beatitudes at the start of Jesus’ ‘Sermon on the Mount.’ But in other places in the Bible a different Hebrew or Greek word is translated bless – and it is those that we will be looking at in this series.

Read Psalm 67

- What 3 things does the Psalmist pray for in verse 1?
- Do you think these are 3 different things, or 3 ways of saying the same thing?
- What is the purpose of seeking these things (v.1-3)?
- What is the key prayer of the Psalm from v. 3-5?
- The harvest coming in (v.6), shows that God has blessed His people (Deut. 28:1-10). How do God’s people react to God’s blessing (v. 6-7)?

Read Genesis 3:1-19

- What relationships were broken by the first sin?
- Which of these seems most serious to you?

Read Romans 5:1-8

- What relationship(s) are restored through the death of Jesus?

Read Numbers 6:22-27

- What do you think God means when he says he will put his name on the Israelites (v.27)?
- What are the priests to ask God to do for the people?

- How do all these things link together?

God's purpose for his people has always been that we should have a restored peace with him, which will spill over into peace in all our relationships.

- Why would using these verses at the end of a service be both an encouragement and a challenge?

WORK

What things in your life might be stopping you from knowing the blessing of peace? How can you help each other to know more of that peace?

2. The Blessing of Unity

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind towards each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:5-6

WELCOME

What have you missed most about church in the last 6 months when we haven't been able to meet?

WORSHIP

Psalm 133 talks about how special our unity as God's people is. Use this psalm together, then praise God for the others in your home group and in Christ Church.

WORD

Apart from Coronavirus, one of the biggest issues of 2020 has been the Black Lives Matter movement, as society has been reminded that racism has not gone away. It highlighted the prejudice that still exists, and the divisions that flow from that.

It sometimes seems that those sort of divisions dominate our society. We are divided by our politics, by our background, by our wealth or lack of it, by our attitudes to contemporary issues like sexuality.

Sadly those divisions sometimes creep into the church. That is nothing new – one of the main themes of the New Testament epistles is the importance of unity. And our ‘blessing’ in this study is a reminder that unity is something that God most definitely wants for his people.

As with the other blessings we are looking at, Romans 15:5-6 doesn’t stand on its own, it comes in a long section which begins at the start of Romans 14.

- But before we look at that, why do you think God is so concerned about unity among his people? Why does it matter?

Read Romans 14:1-23

The Bible contains many clear commands, but it is also silent or ambiguous about some issues. These issues have always been a source of dispute among Christians.

The main matter lying behind what Paul writes here is to do with food. This was nothing to do with modern vegetarianism, there are two likely reasons why meat was an issue.

It could have been that some Christians from a Jewish background still held onto the Old Testament food laws, or it could have been that Christians from both gentile and Jewish backgrounds were concerned that almost all meat on sale in the market would first have been sacrificed to pagan gods.

But the key issue Paul is addressing is – what do you do when something that as a Christian you consider to be fine causes offence to another Christian?

- What types of behaviour do Bible-believing Christians disagree about today?

- What attitudes do the weak and the strong tend to have towards each other? (v.1-4) Why might they feel this way?
- Why is it wrong to pass judgment on other Christians? (v1-13)
- Does this mean we should never challenge another Christian who we see doing something wrong?
- Are there issues where you do feel critical of others at Christ Church?
- When we are not around those whose faith is weak, what principles should govern our Christian liberty?
- When we are around those whose faith is weak, what principles should guide our actions?

Read Romans 15:1-7

- How was Jesus the supreme example of what Paul commands in verses 1-2?

If we are going to put into practice what Paul has been saying, why will we need endurance, encouragement and hope (v.4-5)?

- How does the Bible provide us with these things (v.4)?
- How can the fact that Christ has accepted us promote both unity and praise (v.7)?

Translating verses 5-6 is not straightforward, so different versions do it slightly differently:

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (ESV – probably the most literal translation)

May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NLT)
May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (The older NIV)

Despite the differences, the thrust is clear – if we are following Jesus, we should do it in unity with one another.

Timothy Keller writes:

“This unity is, ultimately, a *supernatural gift*. It is a spirit that God must “give you” (v.5). No method can create it; it is from him. And it comes from a *common following of Christ*. God gives it “as you follow Christ Jesus.” This real unity does not come when we seek it directly. Rather, it is a by-product of seeking something other than unity; namely seeking to follow Christ.” (Romans 8-16 For You, p.164)

Why would using these verses at the end of a service be both an encouragement and a challenge?

WORK

How can you pursue peace more actively within Christ Church?

3. The blessing of love

I pray that out of his glorious riches God may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:16-19

WELCOME

The restrictions of the last few months have made many of us daydream about where we would like to travel. So – if you could go anywhere in the world, where would you rather be right now?

WORSHIP

Psalm 116 begins by speaking of love for the Lord because he hears our cry. Use the psalm, then praise God for times when you have known that he has heard your cry.

WORD

Love is so fundamental to the Christian life. Last time we were thinking about unity, which flows from the love that we should have for one another in church. But that love isn’t something we can

produce ourselves. It flows from knowing a greater love – in John’s first epistle he writes: *We love because he first loved us.* 1 John 4:18

The problem is that the word love is so slippery in our society, and many people have had bad experiences of love. And it is all too easy to subconsciously transfer those experiences onto our understanding of God’s love.

So – if you’ve been brought up in a home where you were loved, as long as you did well at school, or as long as you were good – it is easy to start thinking that God loves you as long as you are good.

If you have been in a relationship where you were loved, as long as you did what the other person wanted, it is easy to start thinking that God loves you as long as you do what he tells you.

But God’s love is very different to that. It is the perfect love.

As with the other blessings we have looked at, this prayer of Paul’s doesn’t stand alone – it flows from what he has already written in this letter (verse 14 begins: *for this reason*)

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

It’s not the easiest passage in the Bible to understand! In the Greek in which this was originally written it is one long sentence. It seems that in his excitement about what God has done, Paul burst out in praise, and wanted his readers to share that praise as well.

- What are the blessings which Paul says we have received from the Father?
- Which of these seems most significant to you personally?
- How is your life now affected by all the spiritual blessings you have received in Christ Jesus?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

In verses 1-3 Paul describes our state before we became Christians. What 3 words might you use to sum up what he said?

- a) (v.1)
 - b) (v.2)
 - c) (v.3)
-
- In verses 4-10, in contrast to the desperate fallen condition of human beings, what three things has God done for us?
 - What motivated God to do all this for us?

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Go through this wonderful prayer and pick out the things which Paul prays for for the Ephesians.

- How do they flow from what he has already said in chapters 1 & 2?
- Three times in v.14-21, Paul mentions ‘love’ and ‘power’. What do we learn about love and power in these verses?
- What does it mean to be ‘rooted and established in love (v.17)?
- How does what Paul prays here help us to understand what is meant by having the fullness of God (v.19)?

Paul prays that we shall have power to know God's love and power *with all the Lord's holy people*. He isn't referring to especially holy people, but all the Christian in Ephesus.

- Why do you think Paul emphasises this? Is it possible to know God's love and power in isolation from other Christians?

We will only ever know that love if God acts to enable us to know it. I guess that is why Paul ends his prayer by saying that God is able to do far more than we can even imagine.

Although this is more in the form of a prayer than the other blessings in this series, it is still one we use often at the end of a service. It's a reminder that we will never know God's love through our own effort. But we can know that it is what God wants for us.

So as we are asking at the end of each of these studies, why would using these verses at the end of a service be both an encouragement and a challenge?

WORK

Knowing the fullness of God's love is something that can only happen in the context of fellowship.

- i. Pray this prayer for each other during the coming 2 weeks.
- ii. Are there other ways in which you can help fulfil this prayer for one another?

4. The blessing of holiness

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

WELCOME

Who in the world would you most like to meet? Why?

WORSHIP

Psalm 25 asks for God's forgiveness for past sins, then prays for his guidance for the future. Use the psalm together, then bring to God any situations where you particularly need his guidance.

WORD

I wonder what you think of when you hear the word 'holy'. So often today we use holy to mean morally very upright – someone might be called 'holier than thou' – meaning someone who makes a big issue of never doing anything wrong.

But that isn't essentially what holiness means. It actually means 'being set apart'. If you are a Christian, it means that God has chosen you to be his child. As I guess we all know, being a Christian isn't about what you do, it is about a relationship which you have with Jesus.

But when you have that relationship, you belong to him. You have been set apart for him. Of course, when that has happened, it will affect the way you live your life. If you have become God's child through faith in Jesus, you will want to live in a way which pleases God. You will want to be holy – set apart for God, set apart from things that are wrong.

- So, what do you think a holy life looks like?

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Faith, hope and love are three hallmarks of Christian faith. Paul mentions them again in 1 Thessalonians 5:8

- Why do you think these three things are so central to the Christian faith?

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (verse 10)

Of course, things are different for us – we never were idol worshippers. Except, of course, that our society is full of false God's which people worship – money, sex, leisure, their gardens. But because these things are ordinary elements of everyday life, it can be much more difficult to realise when they have become *idols*.

- Are there things which you once used to worship, which now you have turned your back on because you are a Christian?

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-4

We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. (verse 4)

Of course pleasing God doesn't always mean upsetting people! In an earlier study we thought about the importance of putting one another first, so in church we should be looking for ways to please both the Lord and one another.

But when it comes to the society we live in, it can be different. The world has a different agenda to the church.

- Can you think of any situations where in order to please society we would have to neglect pleasing the Lord,
- or conversely, situations where if we are determined to please the Lord, it could bring us into conflict with society?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality. (4:3)

- Why is sexual immorality such a problem for a church?
- In what ways does sexual immorality hurt people?
- How can we, as a church, help one another to stay away from sexual immorality?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

- How does Paul want us to treat each other as brothers and sisters within Christ Church (5:13b – 15)?
- Which do you find most challenging?

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (5:16-18)

These 3 verses are so short – and yet so difficult to put into practice!

- How can Paul say that we should always rejoice when there is so much in life that can hurt and upset us?
- How is this linked to giving thanks in all circumstances?
- And what about 'pray continuously'? What do you think Paul means?

All of these things are part of being sanctified, or holy. Humanly speaking it would be an impossible list to put into practice. But 1 Thessalonians 4:3 tells us that it is God's will for us to be holy, and then in the blessing at the end of the letter Paul tells us how that can happen – it is God who does it in us. *The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.* What you can't do for yourself, God can do for you. But that doesn't mean that you can sit back and leave him to do it. It is just his guarantee that as you strive for holiness in your life, God will be at work bringing it about.

So as usual, our last question is, why would using these verses at the end of a service be both an encouragement and a challenge?

WORK

In what area of your life do you most struggle with holiness? How can you encourage one another in this?

5. The blessing of equipping

The God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

WELCOME

What skill would you most like to have?

WORSHIP

Psalm 62 helps us to express our dependency on the Lord. Use it together, then pray for areas in your life where you know you need his help.

WORD

Being a disciple of the Lord Jesus is not always easy (which is probably a bit of an understatement!) We live in a world where there will always be other voices calling us to follow the ways of the world around us, and recognising and resisting them is a challenge. Jesus himself said "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me", and doing that will never come naturally. Added to that is the challenge of serving the Lord when we often feel ill-equipped and out of our depth. Given all that, how can we keep going? That was the challenge that the epistle to the Hebrews was written to address. Most likely it was

written to Christians from a Jewish background who were being tempted to give up and go back to their old faith. The blessing we are looking at today comes from the end of Hebrews, and as we've seen before, it builds on what has been written earlier.

Read Hebrews 10:19-23

- How is it possible for us to draw near to God? What has Jesus done to make it possible?
- How can we have full assurance of faith?
- Why should realising this make us want to 'spur one another on towards love and good deeds'?

Read Hebrews 11:1-16

Hebrews 11 is probably the best known part of the epistle, and one of the great chapters in the Bible. We will only look at the first part, but it is well worth going through the whole chapter asking the 2 questions below.

- The word 'faith' is bandied around in many different ways in our society. How do these verses help us understand what the Bible means when it talks about faith?
- How did Abel, Noah and Abraham show what faith looks like in practice?

Read Hebrews 12:1-6

- How does fixing our eyes on Jesus help us to persevere as Christians?

Read Hebrews 13:1-19

- What key things are Christians to do and to avoid (v.1-5)? Why are each of them important?
- Have you found that knowing the Lord makes you content, or do you still seek for other things?
- How does knowing that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever help us not to be taken in by 'strange teachings' (v.9)?
- Why do you think that the writer links offering 'a sacrifice of praise' with 'doing good and sharing' (v.15-16)?

Read Hebrews 13:20-21

- Why do you think that the writer refers to 'the God of peace' here?
- And why does he talk about Jesus being raised from the dead?
- Given what you have looked at earlier in this study, what kinds of things fall into the category of 'doing his will' (v.21)?
- What do you personally need to equip you for that?

➤ What is the ultimate purpose of doing God's will (v.21)?

As usual, our last question is, why would using these verses at the end of a service be both an encouragement and a challenge?

WORK

God calls each of us to serve him in some way or ways, and he is the one who equips us to do it. Is there something new that God is calling you to? Or are you aware of needing new equipping for some ministry you are already involved in.

Share some words of encouragement with each other, then pray for each other.

6. The blessing of persevering

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.

Jude 24-25

WELCOME

Have you ever started a new hobby, but then given it up?

WORSHIP

Psalm 100 remind us that God's faithfulness never ends. Use the psalm, then praise God for the ways in which you have experienced his faithfulness.

WORD

We saw last time that the Christian life is not easy, and from the earliest days there have been temptations to give up. Sometimes the pressure came from outside – first the hostility of family and friends, especially against anyone who had converted from a Jewish background. Then later a more systematic and official persecution by the Roman Empire.

But there was also pressure from inside the church. Several New Testament epistles warn about the danger of false teachers, and that is the case with the little epistle of Jude.

Jude calls himself 'a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James'. Both Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 speak of James and Jude (along with Joseph and Simon) as brothers of Jesus. James became a leader in the early church. We hear from Jude only in this book, and it is interesting to note that while Jude claims James as brother, both he and James refer to themselves as servants of Jesus.

Read Jude 1-4

- What 3 ways does Jude describe the people he is writing to (v.1)?
- What do each of those words mean to you?
- What 3 things does he pray for them (v.2)?
- Why is each important?
- What are the false teachers doing?
- Jude says that he is trying to build up their faith and sticking to the message of the gospel. Why is it important to constantly remind ourselves about the message of the Gospel?

Read Jude 5-16

This next section of Jude refers back to some historical examples of people that ignored the calling of God and chose to live a life of sin. Though there are many examples that could have been made, Jude

chooses 3 in verses 5-7 to Jude warn against pride, unbelief, sexual immorality, lust, greed and rebellion.

- Sexual immorality is mentioned quite frequently in scripture. Why is this such an important issue?
- What do you do to create the necessary boundaries in your own life?
- Do you feel pressure when it comes to this area of your life? Why or why not?
- How does Jude describe the false teachers (v.8-10)?
- How does Jude describe the ungodly (v 16)?
- Do you see any of these things in yourself?
- What are the ways that you can be tempted to give in to cultural pressures?

Read Jude 17-23

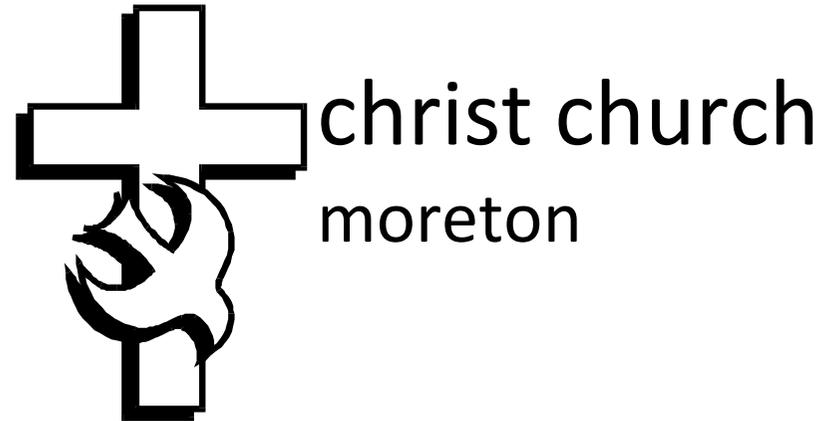
- How do you see scoffers in our world today? Do you have any friends that would fit that description?
- In verses 20, 21 Jude gives 4 ways to go against false teachers. What are they?
- Jude started by urging his readers to 'contend for the faith.' (v.3) Are the advantages of 'contending' worth the possible consequences? What might you lose by doing it?

There is a big challenge in recognising the ways in which we can be led astray, and then standing against them. Sometimes our society influences us in ways we are hardly even aware of. But Jude ends by reminding us that God is able to keep us. Once again, what we can't do for ourselves he can do for us – but that doesn't mean we can sit back and leave it all to him!

As usual, our last question is, why would using these verses at the end of a service be both an encouragement and a challenge?

WORK

As we approach Advent and start to prepare for what will probably be a very unusual Christmas, what can you do together which will keep your eyes fixed on Jesus over the coming month?



making disciples
growing disciples
being disciples