

Study 8, June 29th 2014: Matthew 25 Life in God's new community—readiness.

1. How do you know you are ready for the return of Christ as King? How does the first parable illustrate the need to prepare for the groom's delayed arrival? What distracts us and why?
2. Read Matthew 25:14-30, for what is the third servant condemned? What is the link between a correct understanding of the character of God and productivity or fruitfulness in the Christian life?
3. "The gold/talents symbolize the giftedness that is bestowed on each person who is graced with kingdom life and with how we use our gifts in service of the kingdom". Is this a fair assessment of what the parable is teaching? Why/Why not? How are you using the grace-gifts given you by the Holy Spirit to serve Christ, his people and the world around us?
4. Read Matthew 25:31-46, this parable teaches us that "we will all be accountable for what we do in this life while awaiting the return of the King.". Does this frighten you, encourage you or what?
5. How exactly does Jesus describe our service to him? Does our ministry flow from the humility of Jesus own heart for the needy among us? How do we express the urgency of the need to repent to those we encounter today?
6. Consider the following quote, "Live as though Jesus is coming back today; plan as though he is not coming back for a hundred years". What does it mean for your priorities for 2014 to know that Jesus Christ is coming back? Pray now about the rest of the year, ask the Lord to grant you humility and openness to new avenues of ministry in which you can serve? What does it mean for you to be a disciple of Jesus where you are?

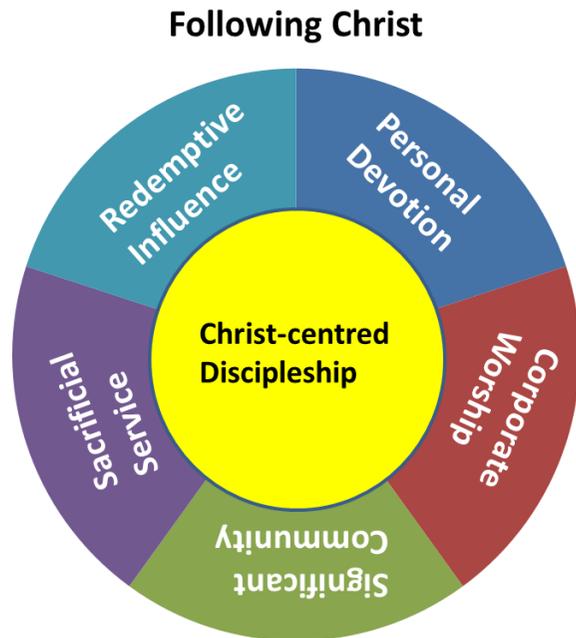
St John's Anglican Church, Mona Vale Term 2 2014 Studies in Matthew's Gospel

Matthew 5	May 4 th	Life in God's new community - Blessing
Mathew 6	May 11 th	Life in God's new community - Trust
Matthew 7	May 18 th	Life in God's new community - Relating
Matthew 10	May 4 th	Life in God's new community - Mission
Matthew 13	June 8 th	Life in God's new community – Hidden power
Matthew 18	June 15 th	Life in God's new community - Relationships
Matthew 24	June 22 nd	Life in God's new community – Expectation
Matthew 25	June 29 th	Life in God's new community - Readiness

What does it mean to follow Jesus? For Matthew it means being a disciple – to decide for Jesus means repudiating old ways of behaviour. The love of God for us in Christ means that same love must have a practical outworking in our lives. Contrary to the expectations of many, the expression of what it means to follow Christ is found in community – a new community formed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. A community that lives in a secular society exhibiting different behaviours and priorities and values, recognising that, like our Lord, we will be rejected and mocked. Nonetheless standing for the truth and living it out together.

The five teaching blocks in Matthew's Gospel are where Jesus addresses his disciples directly and teaches us that discipleship is the name of the game and what that looks like in everyday life.

The diagram below pictures what it means to follow Christ on his terms, and we will see this as we follow Jesus' teaching in Matthew's Gospel. Discipleship means putting Christ at the centre of our lives, growing in discipleship entails a personal devotion life – getting to know him better; gathering together weekly; belonging to a small group where personal relationships flourish; serving in the body of Christ and/or the community around us with the gifts God has entrusted to us; and influencing others for Christ.



Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount.

Perhaps the Sermon on the Mount is indeed the supreme jewel in the crown of Jesus' teaching (Green, p. 88). We could spend the rest of our lives studying it to our advantage. It is not just a great code of ethics, it is about the lifestyle of disciples of Jesus. At the centre of the sermon is the command, 'Do not be like them' (Matthew 6:8). Life, for Christians is to be radically different, both in terms of our ambitions, our priorities and our values. This is Christ-centred discipleship.

Study 7, June 22nd 2014: Matthew 24 Life in God's new community—expectation.

1. What gives you a sense of security in your life?
2. How does Jesus answer the disciples questions in this chapter?
3. People have published timetables from time to time about the return of Jesus. What events might deceive the disciples into thinking his return is imminent?
4. Verses 9-14 describe the dangers believers will face before the end, how are we to deal with them?
5. Read Matthew 24:15-22. In 167 BC Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem and placed a pagan altar in the temple and in AD 70 the Roman General, Titus captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Although Jesus may have had these in mind, what he is talking about goes beyond these two historical events. What warning does Jesus issue in the light of this 'abomination'? Why does Jesus issue these warnings?
6. What kinds of pressure do you face because of your faith?
7. How can we distinguish false Christ's from the true one?
8. What can we know about the timing of Christ's return? What cannot be known?
9. What do the two parables in verses 42-51 teach us about living in the light of the return of Jesus?
10. What does it mean for us to be watchful and to persevere?

Study 6 continued, June 15th 2014: Matthew 18 Life in God's new community—relationships.

6. Forgiveness (verses 21-22) Why is forgiveness so vital in any community? What gets in the way of us offering to forgive someone? What part does the larger body of Christ have to play in resolving conflict? How vital is unity to the corporate life of Christians? Who do you need to forgive? How can you forgive someone who has wronged you?
7. Freedom from resentment (verses 27-35). Is there someone who you will NOT forgive? Are you willing to take the initial steps to forgive them? How does this parable convict us when we fail to forgive? What does this say to us about cheap grace?

We are not responsible for the reaction of the other party in all this. If he/she will not accept our apology, we cannot help it. What we are responsible for is fleeing from resentment in our own hearts and instead taking it to the cross.

Study 1, May 4th 2014: Matthew 5 Life in God's new community—blessing.

Practical and generous obedience that flows from the character of God, transforms our character, affects our influence and shows itself in practical righteousness.

Life in the Kingdom with Jesus is a life of profound joy, a joy (blessedness) that no person or circumstance can take away.

1. Write a brief description of each quality that Jesus wants for his disciples, why would it make such a huge difference in our society if we displayed these qualities. Select one for you to work on this week
2. What does Matt 5:13-14 say about how we are to influence the society around us. What does this mean for your conversations and attitude towards those amongst whom we live?
3. In the light of Matt 5:17-20 and also Matt 28:16-20, what is the place of obedience in the Christian life?
4. What is the difference between a formal obedience and an obedience flowing from a personal devotion to Jesus Christ.
5. What does verses 21-26 tell us about the nature and value of significant community? Who do you need to be reconciled with? How will you start that process this week?
6. What sin do you need to deal with right now? (verses 27-30)
7. In verses 31-33, how does Jesus' teaching contrast with the way our society sees marriage and divorce
8. Why should oaths be unnecessary for disciples of Jesus?
9. 'The real test of love doesn't come from the way we relate to those we find easiest to care for; but rather how we relate to those who annoy us, oppose us, despise us'. Who do you hardest to love? How can we practice love for our enemies according to Jesus here? How do we see Jesus practising this kind of love?

Study 2, May 11th 2014: Matthew 6 Life in God's new community—trust.

Practical and generous obedience that shapes our personal devotional life and radically alters our ambitions.

Verses 1-18 – authentic personal devotion of disciples.

Jesus warns against those who 'play to the gallery'. There are two aspects of devotion which we must be wary of.

Ostentatious devotion – to be seen by others
(the gallery is other people)

Mechanical formulation – to be repeated meaninglessly
(the gallery is God)

Jesus teaches about how the devotional life of disciples as we pray, fast and give alms, are to be authentic, ('not like them'-the hypocrites and pagans).

1. What are the marks of generosity? How do you see them in the lives of others? What about yourself? Why is the motive of reward so opposite to the gospel? What does the word 'reward' mean in verse 4?
2. What is the motive behind the hypocrites' and pagans' prayer? (verses 5-7) How are we to be different?
3. How does this prayer (the disciple's prayer not the Lord's prayer) reflect the way of life for disciples of Jesus?
4. In your own prayers, how do these concerns shape why/how/ what you pray? Will you stop and pray right now, and use the prayer Jesus taught us as a model for your prayers?
5. What does fasting achieve? Why would you consider fasting?

Questions continued on next page.

Study 6, June 15th 2014: Matthew 18 Life in God's new community—relationships.

Practical and generous obedience that enables us to serve each other as Christ has served us.

This chapter highlights seven qualities of relationships of disciples in the community of faith.

1. Humility (verses 1-4). How does the little child exemplify humility? What is the antidote to preoccupation with status and position?
2. Acceptance (verses 5-6). How does this show Jesus' evaluation of children? 'The way we behave towards children is one of the indicators of the way we behave toward Jesus'. Do you agree? Why/why not? How do we show in our church how much children matter to Jesus? How do we show how much visitors, the poor, the elderly, the odd matter to Jesus?
3. Wholeheartedness (verses 7-9). What is the nature of stumbling blocks? Why is it important to consider carefully how what we say and do affects others? How do you deal with sin in your own life? What better choices can you make?
4. Pastoral care (verses 10-14). What part do you have to play in caring for your brothers and sisters? What kind of relationships does Jesus envisage in the church? Who are you caring for?
5. Openness (verses 15-20). How do you respond to criticism? What is our usual first response (verse 15)? What kind of attitude should we have in confronting someone? What do we want from the one who has hurt us? What do we do as a LAST resort? What is the place of prayer when people disagree?

Questions continued on next page.

Study 5, June 8th 2014: Matthew 13 **Life in God's new community—hidden power.**

Practical and generous obedience that transforms our relationships and enables us to persevere in faith even when we seem powerless.

1. Read Matthew 13:1-23, how does the setting of these parables (verse 2) and Jesus explanation in verses 11-17 remind us that these wonderful stories are designed to test our spiritual sight and expose the condition of our hearts?
2. Outline the 4 responses Jesus expects from his hearers. What 3 things prevent the seed from being fruitful? Why does this parable highlight the essential nature of the role of God's word in our lives?
3. Read Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43; 47-50, how does this explain God's delayed judgement on the wicked?
4. What practical implications do Jesus parables have for us in evangelism?
5. Read Matthew 13:31-35, what do these parables suggest about the way the Kingdom grows?
6. Read Matthew 13:44-46, what do these parables teach us about the value of the kingdom?
7. Read Matthew 13: 51-52, how is their understanding growing as disciples of Jesus?
8. What is the nature of the Kingdom of God, why is it still, in so many ways, hidden, yet real and eternal? What does that mean for the nature of our mission in Pittwater?
9. Why does evil persist?
10. What do the last 4 parables teach us about the nature of the Christian life?

Study 2 continued, May 11th 2014: Matthew 6 **Life in God's new community—trust.**

Verses 1-18 – ambitions of disciples.

1. How do verses 19-34 highlight what we really value?
2. What power has the spell of materialism held over you? How is it hard to break?
3. What do you worry about most? How will the crucial choices we make (suggested by verses 19-24) affect our ability to live a life free from worry and full of redemptive influence?
4. How does undergoing hardship actually demonstrate the reality of our trust in God?
5. What should our primary ambition be? How do your family and friends see that exemplified in your priorities, attitudes and decisions?
6. As a very practical and challenging step it may be helpful (or scary) to check on your spending and see how much you spend on food, drink and clothing. Are there ways in which you could live more simply? How can you make that your ambition?

Study 3, May 18th 2014: Matthew 7 Life in God's new community—relating.

Practical and generous obedience that transforms our relationships and marks us out as wholehearted servants of the King

Verses 1-12 – relationships for disciples.

1. What is the opposite of judging our brother and sister? How can we engage in significant community without judging, yet also helping each other grow as disciples of Christ?
2. The last statement of Jesus here (verse 12) is a radical demand of discipleship. It's not as though Jesus was saying, 'what you do NOT want done to yourself, do not do to others'. This kind of reciprocity breeds legalism. We can't make laws to bring about what Jesus asks of his disciples. What he says can only be fulfilled by self-sacrificial love. It's not 'I must not harm my fellow human being' BUT 'I must go out of my way to serve them'. How does this challenge you as part of what it means to be 'not like them'? What does this mean for you in terms of your relationships with other Christians/family members/friends?

Verses 13-27 – wholeheartedness for disciples.

3. What does this section tell us about the identity of Jesus?
4. What does Jesus mean by the broad road and narrow gate? Why does what he says in verses 13-14 cause offense to many?
5. How can we tell that someone is an authentic disciple of Jesus? What does the fruit look like in verse 16-20? How do you see that fruit in your own life/ the lives of other believers?
6. What do the final verses say about pluralism and permissiveness?

Study 4, May 25th 2014: Matthew 10 Life in God's new community—mission.

This section primarily describes the historical mission of the twelve in the time of Jesus. However it also speaks to the ongoing mission entrusted to Jesus' disciples right up to his return.

Three comments about the historical mission of the twelve:-

- Ever increasing opposition to the proclamation of the Kingdom
- They do and preach what Jesus did and preached
- Theirs is a strictly limited mission (verses 5-6) in terms of time and location

As we look at this passage we discover enduring principles for subsequent disciples to take to heart.

1. How does the compassion of Jesus highlight our motivation for mission to the lost?
2. How does Matt. 9:36 redefine what compassion really is in terms of Mission? What part does prayer play in mission (9:37-38)?
3. How can we embed mission-shaped prayers into our own lives?
 - ◆ Individually?
 - ◆ In our small groups?
 - ◆ In our church?
4. How did Jesus prepare/train the disciples for the Mission field?
5. What training would be helpful for you in reaching the lost?
6. What makes us reluctant to engage in mission?
7. What are the expectations we should have as we go on mission?
8. Does verses 32-39 seem harsh to you? Why/why not?
9. What does Jesus promise to those who are receptive (verses 40-42)? How does this encourage you even when times are tough?