

St Luke's Spring 2023

The Parables of Jesus

The Sermon on the Mount



“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.” Matt 7:26

St Luke's verse for the Year

“May the Lord direct your hearts
into God's love and Christ's perseverance”

2 Thessalonians 3:5

SPRING TERM 2023

Biblical Material

This term we shall focus on the Good News **according to St Matthew:**

- some of the morning sermons will focus on parables from that gospel, whilst
- Connect Groups will consider the Sermon on the Mount.

Some Special Dates – Sundays at 10.30am

Sunday 15th January we focus on our verse for the year (see above)

Sunday 19th February Gareth Davies of the Bible Society is our guest preacher

Sunday 12th March St Luke's Gift Day – more details will be sent out nearer the time

Sunday 19th March All Age Service for Mothering Sunday

Sunday 26th March Service of wholeness and healing

Messy Church (9am) is on

Sundays: 12th February; 12th March

New Vicar

During this term some important events take place with regard to finding a new vicar for St Luke's: the completion of the Parish Profile; the advertising; the short-listing; the interviews. Please pray for the whole process!

THE GOSPEL OF ST MATTHEW

Although it is not clear the precise nature of how this Gospel came into being, there is good evidence that Matthew, the tax-collector (mentioned in Matthew 9:9) is the person behind the Gospel. A number of disciples were fishermen and might have had fewer skills in putting words on paper, but Matthew was different. When Jesus called him, as he sat in his tax-collector's office, Matthew got up and followed. He left everything of his old life behind except ... his pen!

In the second century, judging by the number of times that it is quoted by Christian writers, Matthew's Gospel was their favourite. It became known as the "ecclesiastical Gospel" because it provided the Church with an indispensable tool in their three-fold task: -

- instructing converts in their new-found faith
- helping the Church member to live a disciplined life based on the words and deeds of their Lord and Master, which they heard read week by week in the systematic form provided by this evangelist.
- defending the Gospel against attacks from opponents

TOPICAL

Matthew has arranged his material in a topical rather than a chronological order. For instance he groups together 10 miracles in chapters 8 and 9 instead of putting them in their historical sequence. It is of interest to note that Luke, in the introduction to his Gospel explains that he is writing an "orderly account."

THE KING AND THE KINGDOM

Each of the four gospels has its own emphasis. Mark wrote particularly to instruct Roman readers; Luke wrote mainly for the Greeks. John has a universal message that "this is the Son of God." In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the King who brings in a new Kingdom.

FIVE SECTIONS OF KINGDOM TEACHING

In Matthew's Gospel the focus is on the Kingdom of God, and there are 5 sections of teaching which Matthew has collected together, and each of these sections is concluded by words such as "and when Jesus had finished these sayings." (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1)

The 5 sections of teaching can be described like this: -

The Law of the Kingdom	5:1-7:27
The Announcing of the Kingdom	10:5-10:42
The Parables of the Kingdom	13:1-13:52
The Fellowship of the Kingdom	19:1-35
The Fulfilment of the Kingdom	23:1-25:46

THE GOSPEL OF ST MATTHEW - AN OVERALL STRUCTURE

Here is one way to consider the overall structure of this Gospel: -

THE REVELATION OF THE KING - (chapters 1-10)

His person confirmed by

- descent from David - chapter 1
- the wise men – chapter 2
- John the Baptist –chapter 3
- Satan - chapter 4

His principles – chapters 5-7 - the Sermon on the Mount

His power – chapters 8-9

His people – chapter 10

THE REBELLION AGAINST THE KING - (chapters 11-13)

His messenger rejected (11:1-19)

His words denied (11:20-30)

His principles refused (12:1-21)

His person attacked (12:22-50)

The parables of the kingdom (chapter 13)

THE RECOGNITION OF THE KING - (chapters 14-20)

His person - e.g. the transfiguration, prediction of suffering and death

His principles - e.g. salvation, marriage and divorce

His power - e.g. feeding the thousands, healing

His people - e.g. humble, serving, forgiving

THE REJECTION OF THE KING - (chapters 21-27)

His public presentation as King (21:1-16)

His conflict with the rulers (21:17-23:39)

His prophetic message (chapters 24, 25)

His suffering and death (chapters 26, 27)

THE RESURRECTION OF THE KING – (chapter 28)

If you are looking for one word to sum up the Gospel, it is “Royal.” Here is a portrait of royalty, the King, the Messiah.

ABOUT PARABLES

A number of our Sunday morning sermons will be taken from the Parables of Jesus.

The Importance of the Parables

- (a) Approximately one third of Jesus' teaching is given in parables
- (b) So many phrases from the parables are in common use: e.g.
 - "pass by on the other side"
 - "don't hide your light under a bushel"
 - "pay the last farthing"
 - "count the cost"

What is a parable?

- (a) The word "parable" means "to place beside."
- (b) As defined in Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament words, a parable "signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison."
- (c) "it puts the known next to the unknown so that we may learn."
- (d) "An earthly story with a heavenly meaning" – that is quite a common (and good) description of a parable.
- (e) "A parable is a story in the bible which sounds at first like a pleasant yarn but keeps something up its sleeve which suddenly pops up and knocks you flat"
(a character in a P. G. Wodehouse novel).

How many parables are there?

- (a) About 60 parables in the widest sense – that is, counting the proverbs of Jesus
- (b) About 30 story parables

Why did Jesus use parables?

- (a) Stories are loved all over the world, and not just by children
- (b) Parables evoke a response

Parables and allegories - differences

In an allegory every detail is significant (e.g. John Bunyan's book *Pilgrim's Progress*). However, a parable usually has one or two main points

One ninth century Bishop said this: -

"The words of Christ are like a fountain which never dries up. When you draw from this fountain of wisdom, it fills up again, and the second truth is fuller and more splendid than the first. Thus it is with all proceeded from the mouth of Christ, His sayings and his parables."

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT?

Before we start our study on this teaching of Jesus, we ought to have some basic rules of interpreting this “sermon.”

DIFFERENT WAYS?

As with other Scriptures, you will find that different people come to the passage with very different starting points. For instance: -

- (a) some have argued that it is a charter for world peace, with a plea that the nations of the earth accept it
- (b) others have said it is God’s plan for salvation: in other words “do these things that Jesus says, and you will get to heaven.”

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

Many Bible writers see a two-fold purpose for the Sermon on the Mount: -

- (a) It shows us that we cannot please God by ourselves, for these standards are far too high. We realise that we so much need the forgiveness of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- (b) It shows the Christian how to live

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT - THE CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO

Doubtless, the political parties in the UK are working on their manifesto for the next election. For the Christian, our manifesto has been provided by Jesus. We have no need to “touch it up” or “to revise it” – we merely have to live it!

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IS ...

- the best known part of the teaching of Jesus
- possibly the least understood
- certainly the least obeyed!

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Connect Groups are encouraged to look at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) under the following seven headings: -

5:1-12	A Christian's attitudes
5:13-16	A Christian's influence
5:17-48	A Christian's character
6:1-18	A Christian's devotion
6:19-34	A Christian's ambition
7:1-20	A Christian's relationships
7:21-27	A Christian's commitment

Jesus deliberately went up a mountain to withdraw from the crowds. His early public ministry had been spent in Galilee and had attracted huge numbers. Now He wanted not just to be quiet, but to give the disciples some more concentrated instructions on being a disciple.

It seems also highly likely that Jesus was demonstrating a parallel between Himself and Moses, who went up a mountain to receive the law.

Luke says that Jesus delivered His teaching "on a level place" after He had been in the hills at prayer (Luke 6:17-49). But Luke's "sermon" is considerably shorter (30 verses as compared to 107 in Matthew), and each includes material absent from the other. The most reasonable suggestion is that this teaching is not the material of one sermon, or of one day, but a collection of what Jesus was teaching His disciples on various occasions.

THE STUDY NOTES

There is a little bit of homework (the first two questions in the boxes) before a connect group meeting – but don't worry if you have not had time to do this! The "personal lesson" is something which can be filled in during or after the Meeting.

JESUS' CONNECT GROUP

Jesus started his ministry by forming a group. His disciples who made up that group were with Him throughout His ministry. They discovered who Christ was, they found out about themselves - some assumptions and priorities were radically changed

1. A CHRISTIAN'S ATTITUDES - Matthew 5:1-12

1. Is there a key phrase which stands out for you?

2. Does this passage make you excited, sad or confused?

3. The "Lesson" for me (fill this in at the end of your group meeting, if you wish)

NOTES

- (a) Some call these Beatitudes the "Beautiful Attitudes."
- (b) How many Beatitudes are there? Eight or nine, depending whether you combine the last two sentences.
- (c) All these qualities are for every Christian! There are not separate groups of disciples: some meek, some merciful etc. In a similar way we regard that the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) is for every Christian.
- (d) See on a different page for the understanding of the word "blessed."

REFERENCES

You might like to look up (some of) these verses: -

Poor in spirit	Isaiah 57:15 but compare Revelation 3:17
Mourn	Psalms 119:136; 2 Corinthians 7:10
Meek	Psalms 37:11, 22, 34
Hunger and thirst	Luke 1:53; Matthew 6:33
Merciful	Matthew 6:14; 18:21f
Pure	Psalms 86:11; Matthew 6:22
Peace-maker	Romans 12:18
Persecuted	Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 4:13-14

Questions

- (a) What are some of the things that keep people from being blessed, happy, content, and fulfilled?
- (b) What does it mean to be realistic about our own spiritual condition?
- (c) What are some of the things that people today are hungering and thirsting for?
- (d) How can we, as Christians, keep our motivations pure and focused?
- (e) Why is it difficult to be a peace-maker?
- (f) Are the sentiments of verse 11-12 rather foreign to us?

SOME NOTES ON THE WORD "BLESSED"

Some versions have "happy" rather than "blessed." This is a correct translation, and indeed holiness and happiness are very close in the Christian experience. However, our contemporary ideas of "happiness" can be rather different from the biblical meaning.

In Greek there are two words that are translated into English as blessed: -
Eulogeo and Makarios

There are important differences.

Eulogeo (which is not used in the Beatitudes) is used in prayer when the leader asks God for some blessing. For example "O Lord bless (eulogeo) the children."

Makarios (which can be translated as "happy") describes an existing happiness, a quality of spirituality that is already present.

So we might say "Mr So and So is a bless-ed person in our church." We are not asking for something, but rather affirming a quality that is already there.

Kennet Bailey (in his book "Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes") puts it like this:
We could say "Bless-ed is the happy daughter of Mr Jones because she will inherit the Jones' farm"

The woman in question is already the happy daughter of Mr Jones. She is not working to earn the farm. Everyone knows that a key element in her happy and secure life is that she and the community around her know that the farm will one day be hers.

"The special feature of makarios in the New Testament is that it refers overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to the person for their share in the salvation of the kingdom of God" (Friedrikch Hauck)

2. A CHRISTIAN'S INFLUENCE Matthew 5:13-16

1. Is there a key phrase which stands out for you?
2. Arising from this passage, do you have a question for the group?
3. The "Lesson" for me (fill this in at the end of your group meeting, if you wish)

NOTES

- (a) As we think about the influence of a Christian, it is interesting to observe that the word "influencer" has a special meaning in today's culture: -
 "Influencers in social media are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic. They make regular posts about that topic on their preferred social media channels and generate large followings of enthusiastic, engaged people who pay close attention to their views."
- (b) In spite of the persecution that Jesus talks of, He obviously expects His disciples to influence the world. He makes two affirmations, with two comments

AFFIRMATIONS	COMMENTS
You are the Salt of the earth	keep salty!
You are the Light of the world	don't hide your light!

- (c) Salt had two particular uses in those days
 As a fertiliser to promote growth
 As a disinfectant - salt is sometimes the only method of sanitation in the Middle East
- SO, Christians are
 to promote good
 to restrain evil

Questions

- (a) How do you react when you think of yourself as “salty” – restraining evil and promoting good?
- (b) How do Christians lose their saltiness? How can we be sure that we stay “salty?”
- (c) For salt to be of value, you must have sufficient quantity, of a certain quality, evenly spread. Do we have sufficient quantity of Christians, of good quality, and evenly spread?
- (d) How do you think the church today is doing at continuing the ministry of Jesus as the light of the world? In the UK? In other countries?
- (e) What are some ways we can be sure that our good works cause people to be reminded of how wonderful God is, rather than how wonderful we are?
- (f) What do you think of this quote: “There can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy.”
- (g) And this quote: “Christians are not be the honey-pot of the world”
(Helmut Thielicke)

A NOTE ON THE WORD “GOOD” (Greek word: Kalos)

The word “good” has several meanings

- attractive, gracious, pleasing to the eye.
- useful
- practical and moral goodness

3. A CHRISTIAN'S CHARACTER - Matthew 5:17-48

1. Is there a key phrase which stands out for you?

2. Are there questions arising from the passage that I would like to discuss with the group?

3. The "Lesson" for me (fill this in at the end of your group meeting, if you wish)

NOTES

- (a) There is a bit of theology in verses 17-20!
- (b) First of all the relationship between Christ and the law, and secondly that between the disciple and the law.
- (c) Christ came to fulfil, not abolish the law
- (d) Jesus calls for a far deeper righteousness from the disciples than they ever dreamt of!

Jesus gives six examples:

- (a) Anger (see Exodus 20:13). The word used for anger is a settled malice that is inwardly nursed
- (b) Lust (see Exodus 20:14). This is not a causal glance but a constant stare with a purpose of lusting. Does Romans 13:14 help?
- (c) Divorce and marriage (see Deuteronomy 24:1). Jesus gives more teaching in Matthew 19:1-12. The Pharisees were concerned primarily about divorce: Jesus was concerned about marriage.
- (d) Honesty in speech (see Leviticus 19:12; Deuteronomy 23:23). The Pharisees used all kinds of tricks to sidestep the truth, and oaths were among them. Jesus teaches that our words should not need these sorts of "crutches" to get people to believe us."
- (e) Passive non-retaliation (Leviticus 24:10-22). This applies to personal insults. But what about groups or nations?
- (f) Active love (see Leviticus 19:17-18). We must return good for evil as an investment of love.

Questions

The examples that Jesus gives are pretty sharp ones, and the subject matter can be difficult for us all.

You might like to discuss what group members have put in the boxes, questions 1 and 2.

- (a) What are some reasons for the moral chaos that often surrounds us in society today?
- (b) In the light of the fact that our society today denies the existence of moral absolutes, what is the importance of God's moral law as revealed in the Ten Commandments?
- (c) How can the church, and Christians, stand up for what we believe without appearing as kill-joys?
- (d) When is anger not a sin? How can we counteract the powerful effect that anger can sometimes have in our lives?
- (e) How can we as Christians, married or not, affirm God's estimation and expectations for sex?
- (f) How can we take a stand for honest and good communication?
- (g) Are some of today's problems rooted in a misunderstanding of the meaning of the word "love?"
- (h) How does Christian love show itself to be different from the world's kind of love?

4. A CHRISTIAN'S DEVOTION - Matthew 6:1-18

1. Is there a key phrase which stands out for you?
2. Do you have a question for the group, arising from this passage
3. The "Lesson" for me (fill this in at the end of your group meeting, if you wish)

NOTES

This section is all about contrasts. Jesus contrasts the Christian way of giving, praying and fasting with other ways

	"religious"		"pagan"	Christian
.....				
giving	ostentatious a reward			secret a reward
.....				
praying	ostentatious pray a reward		meaningless	secret pray to the Father a reward thoughtful
.....				
fasting	ostentatious a reward			secret a reward
.....				

Jesus clearly expects His followers to give, pray and fast. He says "when" (vv 2, 5, 16) and not "if."

Questions

- (a) What is the reward in Christian giving, praying and fasting?
- (b) How do these words encourage us to think about our giving?
- (c) Jesus seems to say that many words in praying may not be the right approach. Yet Jesus Himself spent whole nights in prayer. How does this work?
- (d) What is the place of the Lords Prayer? As a model of real prayer? Or as part of our liturgy in Church?
- (e) What is the place of fasting for us ordinary Christians?
- (f) How do you feel your prayer is going? Is it helpful to consider the metaphor that Tim Keller uses (see later in notes)?
- (g) How does this passage show us the character of our Heavenly Father?

NOTES ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

When the Lord's Prayer is put back into His own language (i.e. Aramaic) it has rhythm and rhyme (unusual for Jewish poetry).

The Jewish daily prayer had: 12 lengthy petitions: 6 for those the people and 6 for the kingdom of God; in that order

Jesus gave 6 short petitions: 3 for the Kingdom and 3 for ourselves: in that order

John Stott writes like this

“The first three petitions in the Lord’s Prayer express our concern for God’s glory in relation to His name, rule and will ..

In the second half of the Lord’s Prayer the possessive adjectives change from “your” to “our” as we turn from God’s affairs to our own. Having expressed our burning concern for His glory, we now express our humble dependence on His grace...

The three petitions which Jesus puts on our lips are beautifully comprehensive. They cover, in principle, all our human need – material (daily bread), spiritual (forgiveness of sins) and moral (deliverance from evil)....”

In his book "Prayer" Tim Keller writes like this: -

"I often ask Christians to evaluate their situations with regard to prayer by using a metaphor. Imagine you are a boat with both oars and a sail. In this case here are four questions:

Are you *sailing*? Sailing means you are living the Christian life with the wind at your back. God is real to your heart. You often feel his love. Your prayers are being answered ...

Are you *rowing*? Rowing means you are finding prayer and Bible reading to be more a duty than delight. God often (though not always |) seems distant and the sense of his presence is fairly rare

Are you *drifting*? Drifting means that you are experiencing all the conditions of rowing – spiritual dryness and difficulties in life. But in response, instead of rowing, you are letting yourself drift....

Are you *sinking*? Eventually your boat, your soul, will drift away from the shipping lanes, as it were – and truly lose any forward motion in the Christian life

In this metaphor we see that there are some things we are responsible for, such as using the means of grace - the bible, prayer and church participation – in a disciplined way. There are many other things we do not have much control over – such as how well the circumstances in our lives are going, as well as our emotions. If you pray, worship, and obey despite negative circumstances and feelings, you won't be drifting, and when the winds come up again you will move ahead swiftly. On the other hand, if you do not apply the means of grace, you will at best be drifting, and if storms come into your life, you might be in danger of sinking,

In any case – pray no matter what. Praying is rowing, and sometimes it is like rowing in the dark – you won't feel that you are making any progress at all. Yet you are, and when the winds rise again, and they surely will, you will sail again before them."

5. A CHRISTIAN'S AMBITION – Matthew 6:19-34

1. Is there a key phrase which stands out for you?

2. Does this passage make you excited, sad or confused?

3. The "Lesson" for me (fill this in at the end of your group meeting, if you wish)

NOTES

Again Jesus makes contrasts

2 treasures	in earth	in heaven
2 visions	darkness	light
2 masters	mammon	God
2 pre-occupations	our bodies	God's kingdom

Notice the "therefore" in verse 25. When we have made our choices (verses 19-24) then we can move on to verses 25-34

If you have difficulty with a busy life-style, you might like to read an old (but nevertheless very helpful) book by Gordon McDonald – "Ordering your private world". But there again, you might not have time – but it could make all the difference!

Questions

- Is overriding anxiety one of the characteristics of our time?
- To what extent can the pressure of a busy life style become a master?
- What sort of worry is right for a Christian? And what is not?
- What is the distinction between worry and a good kind of concern?
- What value should Christians put on savings and insurance plans?
- What are some practical ways that we can remind ourselves not to be unduly anxious? Put some reminders on strategic places of our home/ office/ car etc..?
- How do our activities, our anxieties, and our ambitions show what priorities truly are?
- Do our lives presently reflect eternal priorities?? In what ways would you like it even more?

6. A CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIPS – Matthew 7:1-20

1. Is there a key phrase which stands out for you?
2. Does this passage make you excited, sad or confused?
3. The "Lesson" for me (fill this in at the end of your group meeting, if you wish)

NOTES

I think these verses can be best linked together by thinking of various relationships

- To our brother/ sister (verses 1-5)
- To dogs and pigs (verse 6)
- To our heavenly Father (verses 7-11)
- To everybody in general (verse 12)
- To false teachers (verses 13-20)

(a) A Christian is not to be a judge, or a hypocrite, but as a brother/ sister.

(b) "It ought to be understood that dogs and swine are names given not to every kind of debauched men, or to those who are destitute of the fear of God and of true godliness, but to those who, by clear evidences, have manifested a hardened contempt of God, so that their disease appears to be incurable (Calvin)

(c) We need divine grace to do (verses 1-5) - and divine discernment to do verse 6, so we must Ask ... Seek... Knock

(d) This verse is known as the Golden Rule. Similar sayings are to be found in other religious teachers, but it is interesting to note that they are always in the negative. For instance "do not to others what you would not wish done to yourself" (Confucius)

(e) Notice how Jesus contrasts the two ways

| action | entry | journey | leads to | who |

Way 1 | enter | narrow | hard | life | few |

.....
Way 2 | enter | wide | easy | destruction | few |

.....
“Enter” is the common word: this implies that neither crowd is ignorant of the issues. I don’t think this parable is about those who have never heard of Jesus.

NOTES – TOO HARSH?

The language of Jesus seems a bit harsh (e.g. pig and dogs). See also when He calls Herod a fox (Luke 13:32) and the scribes and Pharisees whitewashed tombs and a brood of vipers (Matthew 23:27, 33)

Does Acts 13:44-51; 18:5,6; 28:17-28 shed light on verse 6?

Questions

- (a) Can you think of contemporary examples to illustrate verses 1-5?
- (b) “Mind your own business.” Is that what Jesus taught? See verse 5
- (c) How confident are you when you pray? Does Ask, Seek, Knock seem all too simple?
- (d) In what ways is “narrow-mindedness” sometimes proper for a Christian?
- (e) “The problem in the church today is not lack of direction, but failure to follow.” Do you agree?
- (f) Why does the warning about false teacher follow so closely after the “two ways?”

7. A CHRISTIAN'S COMMITMENT - Matthew 7:21-29

1. Is there a key phrase which stands out for you?
2. Does this passage make you excited, sad or confused?
3. The "Lesson" for me (fill this in at the end of your group meeting, if you wish)

Background

Verses 21-27

In these verses Jesus does not give us more teaching, but rather seeks to ensure a proper response to what He has already said.

- There are those who "say" but do not "do" God's will (verse 21)
- There are those who "perform mighty works" but "do not know" Christ (verses 22-23)
- There are those who "hear" the words but do not "do" then (verses 24-27)

Jesus is not teaching that the way of salvation is by good works of obedience, for the whole of the New Testament offers salvation only by the sheer grace of God through faith. Jesus is stressing, though, that those who truly hear the gospel and profess the faith will obey Him, expressing their faith in their works

Verses 28-29

The crowds were astonished – this word means "dumbfounded". They were asking not so much "WHAT do you make of this teaching?" but "WHO on earth is this teacher?"

In the Sermon on the Mount, directly and indirectly we can see Jesus' authority: as the teacher, the Messiah the Lord, the Saviour, the Judge, the Son of God, and indeed as God.

Questions

- (a) “The Bible is a dangerous book to read, and the Church is a dangerous society to join.” Do you agree?
- (b) Are there specific steps we can take to be more like Jesus in our daily decisions and attitudes?
- (c) How you ever known a person who was considered particularly wise? What was it that made that person wise?
- (d) Are there areas of your life where you lack wisdom? In what areas do you feel wiser?
- (e) Do you find yourself astonished at the teaching of Jesus? Which parts?
- (f) Had this Course on the Sermon on the Mount changed your attitudes, priorities, or life-style?

A final quote

“The only alternative is to take Jesus at His word, and his claims at their face value. In this case, we must respond to his Sermon on the Mount with deadly seriousness. For here is a picture of God’s alternative society. These are the standards, the values and the priorities of the Kingdom of God. Too often the church has turned away from this challenge and sunk into a bourgeois, conformist respectability. At such times it is almost indistinguishable from the world - it has lost its saltiness, its light is extinguished and it repels all idealists. For it gives no evidence that it is God’s new society which is tasting already the joys and power of the age to come. Only when the Christian community lives by Christ’s manifesto will the world be attracted and God glorified. So when Jesus calls us to himself, it is to this that he calls us...”

(the closing words in the book “Sermon on the Mount” by John Stott)

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER

During this term you may like to use some prayers which can be said together: -

“May the Lord direct our hearts
into God’s love and Christ's perseverance”

(from 2 Thessalonians 3:5)

““The LORD bless us
and keep us;
the LORD make his face shine upon us
and be gracious to us;
the LORD turn his face towards us
and give us peace.””

(from Numbers 6:22-27)

Week 1. A Christian’s attitudes - 5:1-12

Thank God

For Jesus who exemplifies the Beatitudes

For these Beatitudes acknowledged by so many as a great way to live

Ask God

Pray for Christians who are persecuted. The level of persecution is extreme in Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Eritrea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, India and Saudi Arabia. The level is “very high” in 39 other countries.

Week 2. A Christian’s influence - 5:13-16

Thank God

For the expectation of Jesus that we can be salt and light in the world

Ask God

For Christians in public life that they can be wise and influential

For us all to be salt and light in the situations where we are placed

Week 3. A Christian's character – 5:17-48

Thank God

For the example of Christians who show Christ-like character even when it’s difficult

Ask God

For church leaders to have courage when they speak about Christian values

Week 4. A Christian's devotion – 6:1-18

Thank God

For our own personal devotion – and how God has led us to where we are

Ask God

To show us how we can go deeper in our prayer lives

Week 5. A Christian's ambition 6:19-34

Thank God

For the extra-ordinary words of Jesus - for their clarity, with “no small print”

Ask God

To help us to have true priorities and ambitions

For those who have busy lives, where the kingdom of God can get squeezed out

Week 6. A Christian's relationships – 7:1-20

Thank God

For the many different relationships we have

Ask God

For Christian writers and thinkers as they challenge the ideas of today, and put forward the ways of Christ

Week 7. A Christian's commitment – 7:21-27

Thank God

That it is possible to build our house on a rock!

Ask God

That we may all be wise builders, doing what the Lord tells us

For many more people to hear the words of Jesus, to be astonished, and to turn to Him.

The Christian Ministry of Prayer and Healing

In common with many churches, St Luke's has a Prayer Ministry Team who are available at the **end** of morning services to pray with members of the congregation.

On Sunday 28th March, we shall do things a little differently. The 10.30am service – a Service of Wholeness and Healing – will have a time of prayer **during** the service.

The Christian Ministry of Prayer and Healing has a rich historical background, and some pertinent theological insights.

Healing in the ministry of Jesus

The Gospels are clearly full of healings, and Jesus healed all sorts of conditions: for example:

- relatively minor illness such as a fever (Matthew 8:14-15)
- advanced stages of diseases (a man covered with leprosy – Luke 5:12)
- chronic states – women with hemorrhage for 12 years - the man at the pool for 38 years
- congenital conditions – affected from birth – the man born blind
- terminal conditions – those at the point of death
- the result of accident and assaults – Luke 22:50f Jesus heals the servant of the high priest who had been struck by the disciples

Jesus also healed people in a variety of places and settings: -

- in homes (e.g. Simon Peter's mother in law)
- in the Synagogues (the local church of the day)
- in the Street

If we ask the question, "Why did Jesus heal?" there are two main answers: -

- the healings showed His love and compassion for people
- the healings were "signs" or "signposts" –but not proofs - to the Kingdom of God -

Healing in the ministry of others

- (a) Jesus sent out the 12 apostles on a ministry of preaching and healing, and then the 72 other followers.
- (b) The Early Church continued this pattern: "the crowds paid close attention to what Philip said as they listened to him and saw the miracles." Acts 8:6

What happened after the Bible?

- (a) Church history tells us that healings continued for the first centuries "It is only two years that the keeping of records was begun here in Hippo, and already, at this writing, we have nearly seventy attested miracles."
Augustine AD 424
- (b) Over further centuries, the theology of sickness changed. So for instance, you have the Service of "Visitation of the Sick" in the 1662 Prayer book. This was not so much "you're unwell, let's pray for you" as "you're sick because you have sinned." There are lots of questions as to what you might have done wrong, or whether you believe the right doctrine.
- (c) In the twentieth century, there was a noticeable revival in prayer for healing
 - In the mainline churches (within the Church of England, this was often in "high" churches)
 - In the new churches (e.g. Pentecostal)

A growing interest today

- (a) There has been a growing interest within the Church
- reports from around the world of healings
 - Christians have read their Bible with fresh insight
 - there are personal experiences of healing
- (b) There is an understanding that it is not an either/or situation – i.e. Church Prayer vs. Medicine. We thank God for all that medicine can do, but we also pray for people.
- “sometimes God works through nature and the skill of doctors – sometimes He works directly through prayer and sometimes through both, but always there should be co-operation, mutual respect and an admiration for the variety of ways in which God manifests His glory.” (Francis MacNutt)
- (c) Since there are all sorts of healing on offer nowadays, the person in the street might well be confused. The Christian Ministry
- has its roots in the love and power of Jesus
 - seeks to minister to the whole person
- “By concentrating on smaller and smaller fragments of the body, modern medicine perhaps loses sight of the patient as a whole human being, and by reducing health to mechanical functioning, it is no longer able to deal with the phenomenon of healing” (Prince now King, Charles)

Christian prayer and healing today?

- (a) We recognise that there are occasions when we might need prayer: -
- for our spirit (e.g. coming to Christ, back to Christ)
 - for our soul (e.g. broken heart, disappointment)
 - for our body
 - for our relationships (e.g. broken relationships)
- (b) What are the effects of prayer? Some sense no improvement – some sense some improvement – some have significant improvements
- (c) The Christian community and healing
- A loving atmosphere can be of great help
 - An environment of faith can release God’s power
 - A willingness to accept suffering – not all prayers are answered. In glory, all will be made well, but in the meantime there is suffering and often mystery.
- (d) We often pray **FOR** people – but we can also pray **WITH** people. And we can do so in church, or home, or wherever. Often we lay hands on the shoulder of the person to be prayed for, and ask God’s blessing upon them.

Questions

1. Have you come across stories of healing through Christian prayer?
2. How do you feel about someone praying for you?
3. How might our faith increase so that we can see more people healed through prayer?

Andrew Cullis
January 2023