



# MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

## Read: Matthew 12:15-21

### Plug In...

Matthew watches Jesus withdraw as the Pharisees begin to pursue Him. Then, Matthew sees Jesus avoid publicising the good things He is doing. Matthew could conclude Jesus is being strategic (i.e. circumvent a premature arrest and trial; offset zealot movements which want to establish a political kingdom now!). However, Matthew explains this move as Jesus presenting the very attitude and disposition of the one called the Servant in Isaiah 42:1-4. [NB: This reference comes from the first of the so-called "Servant Songs" of Isaiah.]

Jesus has just pronounced that He is *Lord* (12:8). Matthew announces that Jesus is the *Servant* Lord.

### Chew It Over...

The noun "Lord" states *who* Jesus is. The adjective "servant" describes *how* He does His lordship. What values, goals, attitudes does Jesus have towards you and me, and towards humanity?

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Ask for resolve to take the Servant's good news of victory and justice to the nations in the same manner. Pray that we are gentle, not quarrelsome, seek those who are bruised and smouldering, and offer kindness. Thank God that He sent the Servant to do all this for us, and transforms us to be a servant like The Servant.



The Lakes

TUESDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

## Read: Matthew 12:22-29

### Plug In...

The title “Son of David” in v.23 is attributed to Jesus by some in the crowd (or at least they’re raising the question). The promised David (Messiah) was to be a good king that would shepherd and rule his people forever. Raising this title of Jesus here is significant. While the Bible never minimises an individual’s culpability for their own sin, it does look at things from a corporate angle at times. That is, what’s going on for the leader will dictate the state/fate of the corporate of people. Much of the Old Testament stories show that when the king is corrupt, low-and-behold, the people follow suit. Here, this is a contest for leadership. In that, it is also a battle which seals the fate of the people. The leaders of the day, the Pharisees (and also Teachers of the Law – v.38) show how bad they are as caretaker-leaders (every leader until the Messiah came was a caretaker). These caretakers are unwilling to hand the keys back. Instead, upon hearing the crowd ask, “Is this the Son of David?” They divert the crowd. Essentially, they tell the crowd that Jesus removes evil *by* evil.

Jesus unpacks their logic. First, evil driving out evil is paradoxical. Second, the Pharisees can do exorcisms (miracles) too, so the exorcism/miracle cannot in-and-of-itself be used as a ‘positive’ [i.e. it is more neutral than we might expect] (v.27). Third, if the Spirit of God drives out demons, and “I” (the just proclaimed Son David, Son of Man, Servant) do it then you are up against God. Implication, the kingdom has come right up to their doorstep, but they’re on the outside, not the inside like they supposed.

## **Chew It Over...**

How does this section of Matthew help you see the battle for power in the world?

What things does this passage say are reliable evidences one should look to that Jesus is combating evil by God's Spirit?

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Praise Jesus for being a leader that is strong enough to break the hold of Satan. Read Isaiah 49:22-26 and let it develop words of confident praise that you can pray to Jesus.



## WEDNESDAY 1 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

### Read: Matthew 12:30-37

#### **Plug In...**

Jesus' identity is the issue. He's been announced as the Servant of Isaiah that brings forgiveness (12:18-21); the Son of Man who receives and dispenses the kingdom to Jews and Gentiles (12:8). People ask if He's the Messiah (12:23), which for the close reader of the Old Testament, should be a realisation these personalities are all rolled into one expected figure. Even more, while Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man, He hints that *that* figure is divine (12:6) – this is not entirely foreign to the Old Testament painting of this figure (see Daniel 7:14).

The Old Testament expected the Spirit of God to empower and embody these figures. Jesus asserts that to reject Him as this expected figure/s, is to throw away God's means of bringing forgiveness and the kingdom – subsequently such a person forfeits their forgiveness.

There are a series of pictures, metaphors, that show our words and actions characteristically reveal who we think Jesus is; moreover, expose whether we embrace or reject.

## **Chew It Over...**

Have you ever been suspicious of some claim to a miracle only later to worry deeply that you may have called something of the Holy Spirit not of the Holy Spirit? Maybe you've called something a 'false teaching' and then baulked? Maybe you've actually been threatened by someone who uses this text as a club to justify what they're doing. How does the wider story free you from living with guilt that you've apparently committed the "unforgivable sin"?

How do you use this passage to assure someone they're safe if worried they've committed the unforgivable?

Do your words and actions characteristically identify Jesus as the God-sent man that saves you from judgement? (As you answer, remember this is not looking at isolated instances where you may have called a God-miracle a non-God miracle, but looks at who you think Jesus is).

Evaluate your words and actions. Do they gather or scatter?

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Thank God that Jesus is a good tree full of good fruit. We are at root what our fruit reveals. Our words and actions can only be changed at the level of the heart. Thank God that He has done this for us. Pray that our words and actions can be brought in as exhibits on the Day of Judgement that Jesus has indeed done this work in us.



## THURSDAY 2 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

### Read: Matthew 12:38-42

#### **Plug In...**

Two groups of Gentiles (or at least their leaders) Jesus parades as exemplary. This is similar to Jesus assessing pagan towns with Israel. [Remember, they were Gentiles, who knowing far less of God's revelation, are endorsed over the generation of Israelites in Jesus' day.]

#### **Chew It Over...**

What do the Ninevites (Jonah 3) and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13) have in common? What is the action they do? How is that action different to what the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law are doing?

Watching how different characters react and respond to Jesus, forces the same question upon us: how do you react/respond? We forget how reading a gospel with a non-Christian can do all the evangelistic hard-yards. For the story itself expects and examines the reader; it asks them a ton of implicit questions.

Are you brave enough to suggest to someone you know that you read a gospel together? Why not, especially if they've expressed a little intrigue in what you believe? Maybe Mark's Gospel? – a short one! Put it out there, "Have you ever read one of the stories of Jesus all the way through?" Their curiosity might get the better of them.

## **Prayer Suggestion**

The opportunity probably won't come, neither our courage to suggest such a thing, unless we persist in asking God.



# FRIDAY 3 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

## Read: Matthew 12:43-45

### **Plug In...**

Jesus describes His presence in Israel like a man for whom an exorcism has just taken place. We've seen in Matthew's Gospel examples of the demons fleeing at the mere presence of Jesus (e.g. 8:16; 8:28-34). Israel have been 'cleaned up', they now are free to choose Jesus as their King otherwise the inevitable result is seven other demon spirits will fill the vacuum. Jesus just explained that Israel needs someone stronger than the Devil himself in order for them to be freed. Only if the strongman is bound will the possessions be free to flee (12:29). The strongman analogy tells a truth from the angle of God's sovereignty. This house swept clean analogy tells the same truth, but emphasises the angle of human responsibility.

### **Chew It Over...**

Seeing things from these two angles gives us something very powerful. When the Gospel message is preached, Jesus is present confronting, binding, and then offering a free choice to individuals.

Do we succumb to first thinking we've got to get "our ducks in a row" before we launch into sharing the Gospel? What are our "ducks" we commonly line up? Where does this kind of thinking locate power for persuasion and conversion?

Take what Jesus has said today, join it with Paul's words from Romans 1:16. For sure there is wisdom in building relationships, being 'culturally relevant', however, let's not take too long getting to the powerful element for conversion. The Gospel message is powerful – it binds Satan; it excises demons; it releases and saves.

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Ask God to emboldened you to take up the spiritual weapon Jesus has given you. Lord God, give us more confidence in the "power of the Gospel for salvation"; please build our confidence by showing us these encouraging results more regularly.



## WEEKEND 4-5 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

### Read: Matthew 12:46-50

#### **Plug In...**

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 of Matthew repeatedly pose a choice and weigh the cost. To be with Jesus is costly. Ch. 10 – Persecution, even from within your own family; Ch. 11 – John the Baptist is an example of that cost; pagan towns are choosing Jesus, their fare will be better in the last judgement than Israel's towns rejecting Jesus; Ch. 12 – the leaders of Israel aim to persuade the crowds that Jesus is not the Son of David, but a son of the devil.

In this final scene, Jesus' immediate family are on the *outside* trying to constrain Him (Mark 3:20-21 makes this disruption more explicit). Jesus says His family, His most intimate bonds, are forged at the level of doing the will of His Father in heaven. It is a promise to anyone for whom following Christ has cost them their own family – cost them significant relationships.

#### **Chew It Over...**

At first this is not a pretty teaching. To lose family, to risk losing family is disturbing – we love them! This passage shows that putting Christ first will *disrupt* relationships. We don't deliberately set out to cause problems, but if we are serious about following Christ

inevitable decisions we make will in turn impact our family, disrupting relationships. Those impacts family might not like, they may find them a burden. They might then seek passionately to dissuade us from Christ once they see that is the root cause.

Think through some common touch points where disruption can occur within family when you put Christ first:

- Maintaining a commitment to a ministry at church versus getting on time to a birthday party [it is always seen in the little things; the little things become big things!]
- Using holidays to engage in mission,
- You – a whipper-snapper – sharing the Gospel with people who changed your nappy!
- Giving finances, giving time, giving emotional energy to others at the seeming expense of those you should show loyalty to.

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Thank God for our families. Ask God that we will serve our families well. Pray that we recognise the difference between what is serving our families and what is idolising our families. Help us to do the will of our Father. Thank God for the church He gives when family bonds are disrupted.