

fresh start

exploring
the basics of
christian faith



in the gospel of
matthew

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G A V I N A N T H O N Y

For suggestions or corrections, I would love to hear from you!
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	what is <i>Fresh Start</i>?	i
	for teachers	iii
	introduction	
	<i>the gospel of matthew</i>	1
1	introducing Jesus	
	<i>matthew 1-4</i>	5
2	what is the gospel?	
	<i>matthew 5-7</i>	9
3	a power to transform	
	<i>matthew 8-10</i>	13
4	how are we changed?	
	<i>matthew 13 & 18</i>	17
5	“who do you say that I am?”	
	<i>matthew 14-17</i>	21
6	why people didn’t like Jesus	
	<i>matthew 19-23</i>	25
7	living for the future	
	<i>matthew 24-25</i>	29
8	“why did Jesus have to die?”	
	<i>matthew 26-27</i>	33
9	an unstoppable kingdom	
	<i>matthew 27-28</i>	37
10	so what do we do now?	
	<i>matthew 28:16-20</i>	41
11	help for the journey 1: prayer	
	<i>matthew 6:5-15</i>	45
12	help for the journey 2: the Holy Spirit	
	<i>matthew 3</i>	49
13	help for the journey 3: the church family	
	<i>matthew 12:46-50</i>	53
	summary	57



fresh start

what is *Fresh Start*?

Fresh Start is a set of 13 studies that will guide you through Matthew's account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. You will explore for yourself the story that lies at the heart of Christianity.

Matthew had been a tax collector for the Roman authorities occupying Palestine until Jesus called him to be one of His apprentices. Matthew's account is an eyewitness description of what he experienced as he lived with Jesus. As an eyewitness to Jesus' life, Matthew is a valuable source of information. To understand the content of Matthew's gospel—"gospel" meaning good news—is to grasp the foundational ideas and beliefs of Christianity, and what life with God is about.

As you will see from the Table of Contents, we will consider some basic but critical questions, such as, who is Jesus? How can we change? Why are Christians persecuted? And why did Jesus have to die? The final three sections will introduce you to some core Christian concepts: prayer, the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the need for the Church. These are all foundational to understanding how Christianity works, and how it might work in your own life.

As Matthew gained a fresh start to life as he spent time with Jesus, these studies will help you to decide if such a life with God is the type of fresh start that you would like as well.

Each study has six sections:

1. Introduction
2. Reading Matthew: You will read chapter by chapter through Matthew. There are questions here to help you think about what Matthew is describing.
3. Summary: A summary of the key ideas that come from the questions just considered.
4. Questions: After you have read the passage, answered the questions and read the summary, you may still have questions to ask someone later.



5. Think about it: Questions to help you think about the implications of what Matthew is writing.
6. Application: Three simple questions to help you personally respond to Matthew's account.

I hope you enjoy the journey!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gavin Anthony". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'G' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Hollywood, Ireland
2013



fresh start

for teachers

Fresh Start can be used for one-to-one studies or in small groups.

With either method, ask participants to cover the 1) Introduction, 2) Reading Matthew, 3) Summary, and 4) Questions? sections before you meet. This is because there are a number of chapters to read in preparation for each study. When reading is completed prior to meeting, you will be able to have a more meaningful and thoughtful discussion time as participants will have had longer to reflect on what Matthew has to say.

When you meet with participants, review these four sections, then continue on to the Think About It, and Application sections.

It is probably best to ask participants to complete the Think About It section by themselves before sharing their ideas with others. This allows them to have time to think about answers, and not feel embarrassed about being put on the spot with questions. It also allows the Holy Spirit to interact with their thoughts.

Do leave plenty of time for these last two section. This is where the teachings of Matthew have an opportunity to be integrated to the participant's life.

As a teacher, you will find that the more time you have for prayerful preparation — both for yourself and for your participants—the greater spiritual impact you will have in their lives. May the Holy Spirit equip you with the spiritual gift of teaching as you lead others to explore the story of Jesus.

Gavin Anthony





fresh start

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

introduction

The Bible is a story. The story begins in a garden where God created human beings in a paradise. They were created to reflect the character of God. But unexpectedly, they chose to disobey God and made choices independently of God. Consequently, the people whom God created to live in perfection and harmony began to experience life without him, resulting in pain, brokenness, and hopelessness. The Bible story describes how God set out to urge us, His people, to reconsider our direction, and return to a relationship with Him. This would transform our brokenness to wholeness, confidence, and hope.

In order to reveal His true character of love and His desire to see us experience a life of purpose, God ultimately revealed himself on earth in the person of Jesus. He did this so we might clearly understand who He is and so learn to trust and love Him for ourselves.

Ultimately, the Bible story ends in another garden. Sin and pain have been destroyed forever. Human beings live in this garden because they have chosen to trust Jesus with their lives, and so will live with God forever.

This story is unfolded throughout 66 individual books that form a library that is the Bible. These books were written by over 40 different authors across 1600 years. Through history, stories, teaching, and predictions about the future, each book tells us a part of God's tireless efforts to bring us back to himself, that we may regain what was lost — unbroken relationship with the Father who made us.

While the Bible story ends by showing us how God will transform this world back into the perfection He originally created in Eden, the Bible, and especially Matthew, explains that we don't have to wait for the future for things to change. We can have a fresh start today because of the person of Jesus.

I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man.... But for this Book we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it.

Abraham Lincoln

background to Matthew

After three years of being a disciple of Jesus—a first-hand witness to Jesus' life—Matthew would have seen and heard a lot of things. When he sat down to write his account of Jesus' life, Matthew acted as an editor. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Matthew chose the stories, events, teachings, and miracles, that illustrated what Jesus came to reveal about God and God's plans for our lives.

But how reliable is Matthew's account? If you look at the table below, you will see other historical documents, their dates and the number of copies in existence. As you can see, there are many more copies of the New Testament than other writings. Every copy confirms that we can trust what the writers are saying as accurate and reliable.

Our choice is to decide whether or not to believe what they have to say.

Work	Date of original document	Date of earliest surviving copy	Approximate time between original and oldest surviving copy	Number of ancient copies in existence today
Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian war	c. 431-400 BC	c AD 900 plus a few late 1st century fragments	1300	73
Tacitus' histories and annals	c. AD 98-108	c. AD 850	750	2
Caesar's Gallic War	c. 58-50 BC	AD 825	875	10
New Testament	AD 40-100	c AD 350	310	5000 Greek 8,000 Latin 1000 Others

Table from Christianity Explored Leader's Guide

The Bible is God's chart for you to steer by, to keep you from the bottom of the sea, and to show you where the harbour is, and how to reach it without running on rocks and bars.

Henry Beecher

think about it

1. What do you hope to find out about the Bible or God in this course?



2. Before beginning this course, how would you have summarised the message and purpose of the Bible and Christianity?

3. Are there any questions you have about what you have read?

I never had any doubt about it being of divine origin. . . point out to me any similar collection of writings that has lasted for as many thousands of years and is still a best-seller, world-wide. It had to be of divine origin.

Ronald Reagan





fresh start

introducing Jesus 1

introduction

Henry Bosch writes that Socrates taught for forty years, Plato for fifty, Aristotle for forty, and Jesus for three. Yet the influence of Jesus' three year ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined 130 years of teaching from these men who are considered the greatest philosophers the world has known. Jesus painted no pictures; yet, some of the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci received their inspiration from him. Jesus wrote no poetry; but Dante, Milton, and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by him. Jesus composed no music; still Haydn, Handel, Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the hymns, symphonies, and oratorios they composed in His praise. Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble carpenter of Nazareth.

But who exactly is Jesus?

This is a question people have asked from the moment Jesus appeared on the earth. And there have been many very different answers to that question.

For some, Jesus is simply a swear word to use when they are angry or surprised, but Matthew sees Jesus quite differently. For Matthew, Jesus is a real person. Jesus is God who has come to earth to bring people a fresh start to their lives.

In this lesson, you will have an opportunity to look at some of the different facets that help to explain who Matthew believes Jesus to be. We will begin to look at Matthew's account of Jesus' birth and the beginning of His ministry.

you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21

reading matthew

Read chapters 1-4 of Matthew in one sitting, then go back and answer the questions below. They are designed to give you an overall picture of who Matthew believes Jesus to be.

Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is himself the way.

Karl Barth

What do you think Matthew want us to tell about Jesus by writing...

1. about His ancestors? (Matthew 1:1-14)
2. about so many prophecies from the Old Testament? (1:1-16, 2:5-6, 2:17-18, 2:23, 3:3, 4:15-16)
3. that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit? (1:20)
4. that He will save people from their sin? (1:21)
5. that kings came to worship him? (2:1-12)
6. that He met and overcame Satan? (4:1-11)
7. that He called people to repent and follow him? (4:12-22)



summary

In these first four chapters, Matthew weaves a tapestry of many different scenes, each one giving us a different angle on who Jesus is. Through the long genealogy in chapter 1, Matthew first establishes that Jesus is part of the human race, yet at the same time He cannot be human only because He is conceived by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the many prophecies foretelling His arrival indicates that Jesus' birth is not an accident of history, but part of a divine plan. This plan is hinted at in the words of the angel who announces that Jesus is coming to "save people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21)—saving us from the consequences of our rebellion against God's Kingdom and law. This is made possible by responding to His teaching with repentance for how we have lived in opposition to God. Such a mission indicates a purpose far greater than merely being a great moral teacher. This is emphasised by the example of the wise men worshipping Jesus—suggesting that He is someone to be worshipped by us also. Finally, as we watch Jesus overcoming Satan we see that there is no power which can stop the work of Jesus in our lives.



questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

think about it

1. Before you began this course, what picture did you have of Jesus and where did you get it from?

2. How does Matthew change or challenge your picture of Jesus so far?

You can gauge the size of a ship that has passed out of sight by the size of the wake it leaves behind.

Philip Yancey

I have to accept that he [Jesus] was and is God. God has landed on this enemy occupied earth in human form.

C S Lewis

3. C S Lewis wrote, "I have to accept that he [Jesus] was and is God. God has landed on this enemy occupied earth in human form." Do you agree? What are the major obstacles to you sharing Lewis' conclusion?

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?





fresh start

what is the **2** gospel?

introduction

The United States has a constitution which begins with the following preamble:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The constitution continues to describe the values, principles, laws and actions which shape what it means to be a citizen of the United States.

In a similar way, Matthew next records what has been called the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus sets out some of the core values, principles and actions that shape the Kingdom of God. For us who have not been to Heaven, Jesus explains how Heaven lives.

Before Jesus came, the Jews had been living under the oppressive rule of the Romans. Many felt that God had forgotten them, and were longing for the arrival of a Messiah to rescue them. When John the Baptist and then Jesus arrived announcing that “the kingdom of Heaven is near”, the Jews were expecting a king to remove the Romans and create of a kingdom directly ruled by the Messiah—God's King.

But as we begin to see in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has something different to offer. As the promised King, He knew that change could not be lasting if imposed by force. Change that makes a difference must start from within the human heart. Explaining how transformation could happen would be good news for people trapped in brokenness and sin.

So Jesus heralds the arrival of the Kingdom of God to earth. This was especially good news because God himself had come to explain it and be personally accessible to anyone who was looking for a fresh start. Jesus shows that God is not distant or unapproachable. For those with an open heart, the promise of a clean, transformed heart was a real possibility. However, this type of Kingdom was going to challenge everyone. Jesus was giving greater clarity to a set of values, principles, and laws which were going to turn the world upside down.

We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount... The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.

**Gen. Bradley
Armistice Day, 1948**

reading matthew

Read chapters 5-7 of Matthew, then go back and answer the following questions. They will help you gain an overview of what God's kingdom is like and why it might be seen as very good news to those listening to Jesus.

What do we learn about God's kingdom when Jesus says:

1. That we are blessed when we do the things listed in 5:1-12?
2. That anger is the same as murder (5:21-22) and lust is the same as adultery (5:27-30)?
3. To "be perfect" like our Father in Heaven? (5:43-48)
4. To "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well."? (6:33)
5. "Do not judge"? (7:1-6)
6. To "Ask and it will be given to you"? (7:7-12)



The Good News of the kingdom required a moral and spiritual response from the people, and not simply the acceptance of a ruler.

Warren Wiersbe

7. To "Enter through the narrow gate"? (7:13-14)

8. That not everyone who claims to know Jesus will be with Him in Heaven?
(7:15-27)

summary

The good news is that even though we still live on earth, Jesus' coming to earth enables us to become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. As we shape our lives around the values, principles and laws of this kingdom, our lives become transformed, giving us a fresh start. The kingdom of God values sorrow for sin rather than indulging in whatever I feel like doing, meekness rather than pride, mercy rather than revenge, illustrating God's character that focuses on serving others rather than myself. Jesus again emphasises the importance of character by showing how what we think in our minds and hearts is just as important as our external behaviour. Our aim is the pursuit of perfection, which is loving others as God does, loving even though they don't always care about us. It may be tempting to think of ourselves as better than others, but more often than not, we have problems within ourselves that we tend not to notice. Therefore, our task is not to focus on the sins of others but to pursue God and His kingdom for ourselves. Jesus assures us that when we put God first, He will care for us with everything we need for our lives. We just need to ask our Father for He longs to give us good gifts. The reality however, is that our human nature naturally battles against God's principles, values and laws. Therefore, this sort of life is described as choosing "the narrow way" because most people prefer something easier. Finally, Jesus cautions us against surface religion. Those who will enter Heaven itself will only be those who do the will of the Father, not just talk about it.

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

***The gospel isn't a
"plan" as much as it is
a Person.***

Scot McKnight



think about it

The gospel has been described as a pool in which a toddler can wade and yet an elephant can swim.

Timothy Keller

1. What do you think are the areas in which people today struggle the most? How could Jesus' teaching help to address these issues?
2. What do you think are the greatest obstacles to accepting what Jesus' is teaching in Matthew? Are there any ideas you struggle to accept?

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?





fresh start

a power to **3** transform

introduction

Wherever Jesus went, people's lives were dramatically changed. It wasn't simply that people were learning interesting things about him—their whole lives were being revolutionised. There were Jews and Roman soldiers, young people and the elderly who were all impacted by His power. No matter what the illness or disease, Jesus could bring healing—even the demon-possessed were freed from Satan's power.

When we look around us today, we see the same pain and suffering that Jesus saw. But the pain we see today is not only physical. If you take a look at people's faces as you walk down the street, many a face betrays the signs of deep loneliness, stress, anger, or bitterness. There is often a deep restlessness and frustration in many human hearts that cannot be kept hidden.

And even if we could hide our hurts, God would still see them.

Perhaps Matthew never began to imagine what the world would be like at the beginning of the 21st century. But God has always known. The longing in the heart of God to make a difference on earth through the transforming power that comes through Jesus, is not any less today than it was when Jesus came to earth 2000 years ago.

Therefore the message of Matthew is extremely relevant to our culture. The power of God to transform human lives is still available today. And this is critical. For without the transformation of our inner thinking, we are doomed to replay all the mistakes of the past.

***While other institutions
can provide services,
only the church offers
a gospel that can
transform a life from
the inside out.***

Ron Fowler

reading matthew

Read chapters 8-10 of Matthew, then go back and consider the following questions. These questions are designed to show you the different areas over which Jesus has power.

Science has found that nothing can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation. If God applies the fundamental principle to the most minute and insignificant parts of the universe, doesn't it make sense to assume that He applies it to the masterpiece of His creation—the human soul? I think it does.

Dr. Wernher von Braun.



1. Over what does Jesus reveal His transforming power?

a. 8:1-4.

b. 8:5-16.

c. 8:23-27.

d. 8:28-34.

e. 9:1-8.

f. 9:9-13.

g. 9:18-26.

h. 9:27-34.

2. Why do you think Jesus sent His disciples out to do similar things in 9:35-10:42?



summary

Jesus demonstrates His transforming power over all types of diseases, the power of Satan, over nature and even death. This demonstrates the incredible power Jesus has to make us whole again and remove the pain which sin has caused in our lives. As Jesus sent His disciples out to do similar things, Matthew points to the work that we can have in passing on the good news of the power of God into the lives of others.

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

The true God is a living, intelligent and powerful Being. He governs all things, and knows all things that are or can be done.

Sir Isaac Newton

think about it

1. If you could transform any part of your life, or transform part of your culture, what would you choose? How does this compare or contrast with the work that Jesus demonstrates?

2. From what you have read about Jesus in these passages, what impact do you think Jesus could make within our culture and personal lives, if He was given the opportunity?

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead...

Paul, Ephesians 1:19-20

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?





fresh start

how are we **4**
changed?

introduction

Most of us believe there are a few areas of our lives that could use some improvement, and there are plenty of voices volunteering to help us do this. Yoga and mediation ask us to look within ourselves for answers. Self-help books show us new ways to focus our minds. Television adverts constantly bombard us with suggestions on how our lives could be different, as long as we buy the latest such and such. Sometimes, the choices are bewildering.

But how can our hearts be changed?

The Christian life that Jesus is unfolding through His teachings is not a recipe for an ordinary life. Once we meet Jesus, it is not His intention that we remain the same. The good news is that as we integrate the teachings of Jesus into our lives, our lives will be changed so that we can experience a meaning for life which is more than skin deep. But is there any more detail on how the change process happens?

As many of the Bible writers describe, transformation does not happen simply by wishing or hoping for it. Strangely, it is not even something that occurs merely because we pray for it. Indeed, the teaching that Jesus gives in Matthew 13 about how God changes lives, and the priorities of God's kingdom, may be quite different to the ideas we have had about how life-change is supposed to work.

The parables that Jesus now shares with His listeners will give us a little more insight into how God has designed us to grow. These parables are simple stories but are packed full of meaning. Their meaning may not always be clear immediately, but the more they are studied, the clearer they become.

The Bible doesn't necessarily want to simply address the modern world; it wants to create a whole new world that cannot be seen without conversion.

William Willimon

reading matthew

Read chapters 13 and 18 of Matthew and then go back and answer the following questions. These two chapters will give you a general understanding of how lives are designed to be shaped to live as citizens of God's kingdom.



1. In chapter 13, Jesus uses stories to explain the ways in which the kingdom of God works to change lives.
 - a. In the parable of the sower, what is the seed, and how does it take root in someone's life? (13:1-23)

 - b. In the parables of the mustard seed and yeast, what might be surprising about the way God's kingdom works? (13:31-35)

 - c. In the parables of the hidden treasure and pearls, what is Jesus saying about the attitude of those who live in it? (13:44-46)

4. If you choose to live in the kingdom of God, what characteristics can you expect to see emerging in your life?
 - a. 18:1-9

 - b. 18:15-19

 - c. 18:20-35

Living in our selfishness means stopping at human limits and preventing our transformation into divine love.

Carlo Carretto

summary

In the parable of the sower, Jesus shows us the importance of hearing God's words and understanding them, for it is by these words that our lives are changed. For the people of that time, understanding was not an intellectual activity but required practical application. The parable shows that if we don't take God's words seriously, they will have little influence as time goes by because of all the problems that inevitably distract us.

The parable of the mustard seed and yeast shows how God's kingdom may not appear to be making a huge, visible impact immediately, but like a very small seed, or a small amount of yeast in dough, the results will grow beyond what we might imagine. God often works slowly and silently, but there is always a magnificent result. Consequently, the parables of the treasure and pearl emphasise how valuable God's Kingdom is, and that we should sacrifice the most precious things we have to gain it.

So as we participate in God's kingdom, humility will be seen as the test of greatness, we will be willing to forgive and offer mercy to those who offend us without limit—because of the great forgiveness and mercy God has offered to us.

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?



***Only through an inner
spiritual transformation
do we gain the
strength to fight
vigorously the evils of
the world in a humble
and loving spirit.***

***Martin
Luther King, Jr***

think about it



1. If our lives are to change, what is God's role, and what is yours? If God is so eager for us to change, why might many people become frustrated by a lack of change?
2. How would a) you, and b) your family, be different, by applying the principles that Jesus taught in today's texts?

Give up the struggle and the fight; relax in the omnipotence of the Lord Jesus; look up into His lovely face and as you behold Him, He will transform you into His likeness. You do the beholding--He does the transforming. There is no short-cut to holiness.

Alan Redpath

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?



fresh start

“who do you say that I am?” JESUS **5**

introduction

C S Lewis, the Oxford professor who wrote many books, including *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and whose life-story was made into the film, *Shadowlands*, once stated,

A man who was merely a man and said these sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher, he'd either be a lunatic—on a level with a man who says he's a poached egg—or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your own choice. Either this man was the Son of God or else a madman or something worse... But don't let's come up with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He hasn't left that open to us. He didn't intend to.

This is a radical statement. Lewis suggests that there is no middle ground when it comes to making up our minds about who Jesus is.

At the start of our study, we looked at how Matthew introduces Jesus and what we could learn from his introduction. As we come the middle of the book, Jesus now presses this question to His listeners himself,

But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am? (Matthew 16:15)

It's one thing to listen to what others think about Jesus, but there comes a time when we have to answer for ourselves. To help us work through this question, we will look at some more examples of Jesus at work. These stories will give us more information that will enable us to come to a more informed answer.

I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.

H G Wells

reading matthew

Read chapters 14-17 Matthew, then answer the following questions. They are designed to give you a deeper understanding of who Jesus is.



1. In the Bible, bread is a symbol of Jesus himself. What do you think we are supposed to learn from the stories of Jesus multiplying bread for thousands of people? (14:13-21 and 15:29-39)
2. What do you think compelled the people in the boat to say about Jesus, "Truly you are the Son of God"? (14:33)
3. Why does Jesus condemn the religious leaders who wanted Him to do a miraculous sign? (16:1-4)
4. Who do the people say Jesus is, and what is Peter's answer? (16:13-16)
5. Why does Jesus say to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan"? (16:23)
6. What do you think was the purpose of the transfiguration of Jesus in front of Peter, James and John? (17:1-9)

***Jesus is the God whom
we can approach
without pride and
before whom we can
humble ourselves
without despair.***

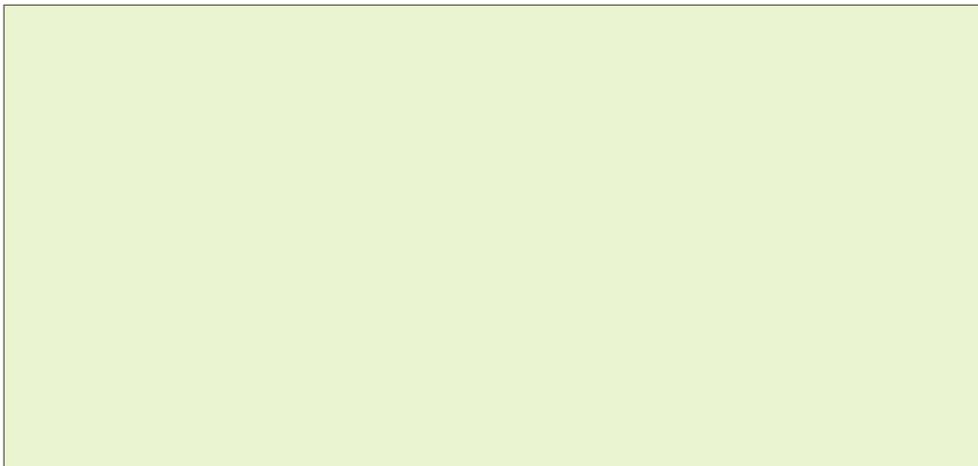
Blaise Pascal

summary

The two stories about bread happen in different parts of Israel, one which was mostly Jewish, and the other which was not. The fact that Jesus miraculously fed both groups demonstrated that Jesus is for all people—there are no restrictions on who can become part of His Kingdom. The second miraculous story where Jesus walks on the water again affirms His supernatural origins. His rescue of Peter in the middle of the turbulent sea causes His disciples to realise that Jesus definitely is not simply a good teacher, and not even a good supernatural being, but God himself. While Jewish leaders still want more signs, and others think Jesus one of the many prophets, Peter testifies that Jesus is God himself, a conclusion that Jesus says came to Peter because of divine revelation. In other words, the divinity of Jesus is not simply something we discover by ourselves, but a truth that God reveals to those who are open to him. Despite Peter's conclusion, Peter is angry when Jesus suggests He must die, which demonstrates how Satan was trying to work through Peter to prevent Jesus dying in the place of sinful human beings. This also shows that Peter still had not grasped the mission Jesus had—that Jesus death and resurrection were essential for us to become members of God's kingdom. But as Jesus had already mentioned, He would be resurrected on the third day after His death. His glorious transfiguration with Elijah and Moses, demonstrated to Peter, James and John that though death lay before him, He had the power to resurrect the dead. Moses symbolises those who will die and be raised back to life, while Elijah symbolises those who will go to Heaven without seeing death at the return of Jesus. However, both types of people will go to Heaven because of Jesus. Jesus is the only one to trust for our eternal future.

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?



*I have one passion. It
is He, only He.*

Count Zinzendorf

think about it

1. What do you think is the difference between believing in Jesus as a good man, and believing in Jesus as the "Son of God"?
2. Are there any obstacles or fears that are preventing you from believing that Jesus is the "Son of God"?

Christianity is not a doctrine, not truth as truth, but the knowledge of a Person; it is knowing the Lord Jesus. You cannot be educated into being a Christian.

T. Austin-Sparks

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?





fresh start

why people **6**
didn't like Jesus

introduction

But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Matthew 12:10

With all the good things that Jesus was teaching and doing, you might think that everyone loved him. Yet His goodness was the very reason why some people began to plot His downfall. Indeed, from very early on in Jesus' ministry, the Jewish leaders were looking for opportunities to kill him.

In a similar way, many people who become Christians experience a lot of antagonism from those around them. Like Jesus, they experience problems, even from their own families.

Such opposition did not take Jesus by surprise. Indeed, He anticipated that His followers would endure extremely difficult times. At the very beginning of His ministry Jesus told the crowd,

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Opposition and rejection has been experienced by those following God from the very beginning.

But why? How can there be resentment towards those who are trying to reflect love to those around them? And more particularly, if we are opposed for following God, how will we cope?

Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

**Paul
2 Timothy 3:12**

reading matthew

As you read Matthew 19-23, every time that Jesus encounters some form of conflict, write down why you think the people treated Jesus like this, and how Jesus responded to them.

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.

1 Peter 4:12

1. Conflict with the Pharisees regarding divorce (19:1-12)
2. Announcing the betrayal of the chief priests and teachers of the law (20:17-19)
3. Conflict with the chief priests and elders (21:23-45)
4. Conflict with the Pharisees regarding taxes to Caesar (22:15-22)
5. Conflict with the Sadducees about the resurrection (22:23-33)
6. Conflict with the Pharisees (22:34-46)
7. Condemnation of the teachers of the law and Pharisees (23)

summary

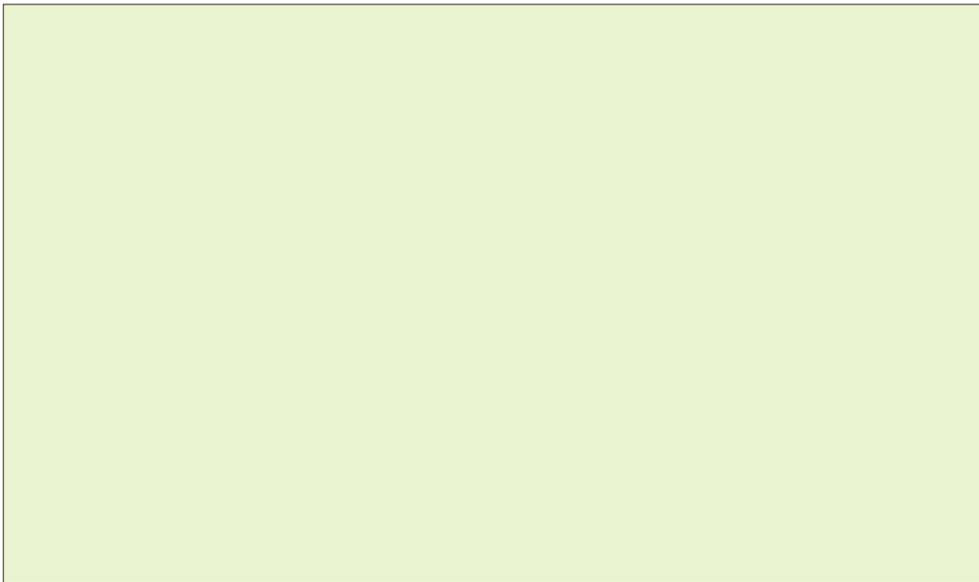
From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Satan worked to tempt Him away from His mission. Failing a direct approach, Satan worked through others to stop Jesus' purpose. The Jewish leaders feared Jesus' rising influence and their corresponding loss of influence among the people. Their jealous, pride, and closed minds to God's revelation of himself through Jesus, resulted in their persecution of him.

The followers of Jesus can expect to face similar opposition. Opposition does not come because Christians are doing something wrong, but because we are identifying ourselves with the Kingdom of God which is under attack by Satan. Satan continues to work through feelings of jealousy, pride and unbelief, hoping to cause Christians to lose their focus on God.

In spite of the opposition, Jesus does not hide, but continues to respond directly to those who oppose him, often referring to the Hebrew Scriptures which give His arguments power. If He sees that they are totally rejecting what He says He leaves them alone, because further discussion would only create greater antagonism.

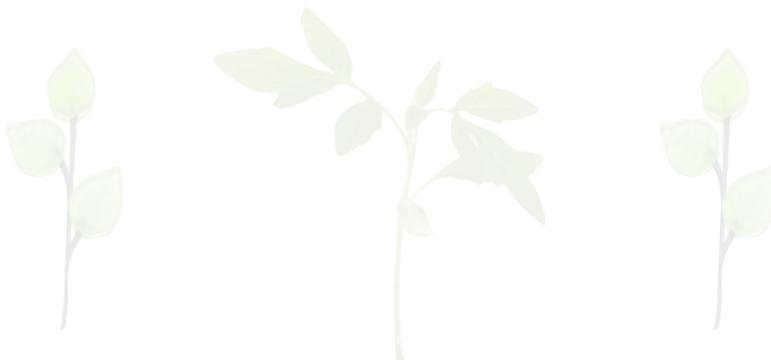
questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?



***If the world hates you,
remember that it hated
me first.***

***Jesus,
John 15:18***



think about it



1. How could Jesus' response to opposition help you?
2. Why do you think Christians often face opposition within our culture? How could we better respond?

application

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**Jesus,
Matthew 5:11-12**

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?



fresh start

living for the **7** future

introduction

When people find out that they are soon going to die, they don't normally waste their time talking about trivial things. The imminence of death brings a great seriousness to the remaining life.

Matthew 24-25 is about Jesus' promise to return to bring us to Heaven, and how we should live as we wait for this. It is the last section of teaching that Jesus gives His disciples before His betrayal and crucifixion. In this context, it gives Jesus' teaching added meaning, for what people say before they die often has deep significance.

In Matthew 24, Jesus describes two future events at the same time: the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans, and the return, or second coming, of Jesus. Jesus then describes how it is possible to know approximately when His coming will be, by looking at certain signs that will indicate that this time is near.

Then in Matthew 25, Jesus tells three parables which give instructions on how we are to live as we wait for His coming. These are serious parables, because once Jesus returns, there is no more time to make a decision to follow him. Therefore, at the end of each parable, Jesus lets us understand the seriousness of the times by describing the judgements that will occur on those who do not prepare.

Understanding how to know when Jesus is returning, and how to prepare is critical information for all who live on the earth today.

Are we looking for our Saviour's return? Do we long for His appearing? Can we say with sincerity, Come, Lord Jesus? Do we live as if we expected Christ to come again? These are questions which demand serious consideration.

J C Ryle

reading matthew

Read chapters 24-25 of Matthew, then go back and answer the following questions. Matthew 24 discusses the signs of Jesus' return so people will not be deceived by false religious teachers. Matthew 25 gives three parables that explain the way we should live to prepare for Jesus' returns.

For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus, Matthew 24:27



1. What are the signs of Jesus' second coming (24:1-14, 29)

2. How can we tell if it really is Jesus coming or a false Christ? (24:23-27)

3. Why do you think Jesus gives us the analogy of the fig tree? (24:32-33)

4. Who is the only one who knows when Jesus will come? (24:36)

5. What will the world be like before Jesus comes? (24:37-41)

6. What lessons are we to learn from the parable of:
 - a. The ten virgins? (25:1-13)

 - b. The talents? (25:14-30)

 - c. The sheep and the goats? (25:31-46)

summary

While the world has gone through many turbulent times—which will increase in intensity the closer we get to the end—the primary indication that Jesus' return is imminent is the sharing of the good news about the kingdom of God around the world. No-one but the Father knows the time of Jesus' return, but it will be a cosmic event that will be visible to everyone at once. Just before Jesus' return, many will think the world will continue just as it always has. But for those committed to Jesus and His kingdom, they will continually keep watch for Jesus' coming like the 5 wise virgins, spend their time using the gifts God has given them to use in His work, and live a life of serving others.

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

think about it

1. Jesus' own teaching about His second coming in Matthew is very clear. Why do you think so many people, even Christians, are unaware that Jesus is coming back?
2. How far do you see the world today reflecting the picture that Jesus describes of the world before He will come again?
3. How do you relate to Jesus knowing He gives such strong warnings of judgment?



The doctrine of the Second Coming is deeply uncongenial to the whole evolutionary or developmental character of modern thought. We have been taught to think of the world as something that grows slowly towards perfection, something that “progresses” or “evolves.” Christian apocalyptic offers us no such hope.

C.S. Lewis

application

***Again and again, I
have been tempted to
give up the struggle,
but always that strange
Man hanging on the
cross sends me back
to my tasks again.***

George Tyrell

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?





fresh start

“why did Jesus have to die?” TIME 8

introduction

On April 12, 2004, Time magazine's front cover asked, “Why did Jesus have to die?” Perhaps it was strange that such a publication would be interested with this question, but it has been a question asked by all sorts of people throughout history.

So why did Jesus have to die? Was it just a tragic accident at the end of a good life, or was it somehow an essential part of His mission on earth?

Throughout His ministry, Jesus knew He was going to die. Yet the crowds and even His disciples thought His mission was to overthrow the Roman occupation and set up an earthly kingdom—with Jesus as the king. So when Jesus began to share with His disciples that He would be killed, Matthew tells us that ‘Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”’ (Matthew 16:22)

In order not to fall into the same trap as Peter and think we have a better idea of God's plans than God does, we have to correctly understand Jesus' mission. Jesus did not come to simply share morally uplifting truth. As the angel clearly told Mary at the very beginning, “he will save his people from their sin”. The way that this would happen, as Jesus himself declared, was that He would “give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

In other words, the main reason why Jesus came to earth, was to die the death that our sin demands, for the “wages of sin is death” (Paul, Romans 6:23). Jesus died instead of us dying. He died as our substitute. Jesus died from the consequence of sin. But not just any sin—mine. He would have died for me if I was the only person on earth. God is love.

***The Son of Man did not
come to be served,
but to serve, and
to give his life as a
ransom for many.***

**Jesus,
Matthew 20:28**

reading matthew

Read Matthew chapters 26 and 27, then answer the following questions. They will give you an understanding of the events around Jesus' death, and why His death was necessary.

1. What does Jesus mean by saying "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (26:28)
2. What was so difficult for Jesus that He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible may this cup be taken from me." (26:38-42), and call later, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (27:46)
3. While so many people ridiculed Jesus, what do you think the Roman centurion saw in Jesus that caused him to conclude, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (27:54)

The death of Jesus was not the death of a martyr, it was the revelation of the eternal heart of God.

Oswald Chambers



summary

Jesus explains to the disciples that His own blood, or death, confirms a covenant. This is an agreement between God and human beings which brings us forgiveness. From Jesus' teaching, only His death would enable forgiveness to be made available to us. This is because God had previously explained in the book of Genesis that sin against God must result in the sinner's death. In order for God to remain just, and not be accused of favouritism or being arbitrary, someone would still have to die, but it would be Jesus instead of us. When Jesus did die on the cross, it was the result of our sin that He took upon himself. When He exclaimed, "my God my God, why have you forsaken me" it illustrated how sin creates a real separation between us and God. Apparently, the Roman soldier could tell from the physical events around him at the crucifixion that all nature was responding violently to the death of its Creator, prompting the soldier to recognise that the death of Jesus was not the death of an ordinary man.

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

think about it

1. What do you think would have been the difference on Christianity, and thus Christianity's impact on the world, if Jesus had only been a good moral teacher, and returned to Heaven without dying? Why is His death so critical to Christianity and to growth as a Christian?
2. Do you think Jesus would have come to earth to die if you were the only one who had sinned? What sort of sins do you think you need to commit before it was necessary for Jesus to come and die in your place?

Jesus said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

Gethsemane is where He died; the cross is only the evidence.

Leonard Ravenhill



3. How do you respond to the death of Christ?

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?

2. What are the implications for what you have learned?

3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?

**So when the devil
throws your sins in your
face and declares that
you deserve death
and hell, tell him this:
"I admit that I deserve
death and hell, what
of it? For I know One
who suffered and
made satisfaction on
my behalf. His name
is Jesus Christ, Son of
God, and where He is
there I shall be also!**

Martin Luther





fresh start

an unstoppable kingdom 9

introduction

From Alexander the Great to Hitler and Saddam Hussein, there have always been people in the world who have craved power. Each has tried hard to ensure that their regimes would continue forever. But all rulers on this earth die and their power ends. The message of Matthew is a striking contrast to these rulers, for Matthew reveals that God's kingdom will never end.

That is not to say that there have not been attempts to crush it out of existence. For most of Jesus' life, the religious rulers did their best to destroy Jesus' ministry, and they very quickly began to plot how they might kill him. And they succeeded.

Of course, the intentions of the Jewish rulers to destroy Jesus' influence was nothing new. From the beginning of earth's history Satan has attempted to destroy God's work. In Genesis Satan spoke through a snake to cause Eve to doubt and disobey God. Matthew 4 then describes Satan's temptation of Jesus in an attempt to derail His ministry before it had begun.

In this context, the death of Jesus must have appeared to be a great success. The leader of the new way of living was dead, and His followers had scattered. But then something unexpected happened: Jesus rose from the dead! His followers regrouped, and the influence of Christianity has remained strong throughout history, even in places where Christians have been persecuted.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead demonstrates that Christianity and its promise of life transformation is not just a philosophical dream but a living truth. The resurrection reveals that the good news of the kingdom of Heaven cannot, and will not, be stopped, for its king is alive.

The same power that brought Jesus back from the dead is operative within those who are Christ's. The Resurrection is an ongoing thing.

Leon Morris

reading matthew

Read Matthew 27:57-28:15, then answer the following questions. They are designed to give you an understanding what happened at the resurrection.

1. Why do you think Jesus rose from the dead on the “first day of the week”? (28:1) Why not a few hours, or even a week, later?
2. What was the angel wanting to tell the women when he said, “He is not here; he is risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay?” (28:6)
3. What can we know about Jesus after the resurrection by the record that the women “clasped his feet”? (28:9)
4. Both the angel and Jesus tell the women not to be afraid (28:5,10). What do you think the women must have been thinking that could have aroused their fears?

**What reason have
atheists for saying that
we cannot rise again?
Which is the more
difficult—to be born or
to rise again? Is it more
difficult to come into
being than to return
to it?**

Blaise Pascal



summary

The resurrection is the supreme illustration of the power which God makes available to us today so that our lives can become whole again. The resurrection also shows that life after death is a real possibility that gives us hope, so death should not cause us to be afraid. Nothing can hold back this power of God in our lives and in the progress of God's plans for our future. The only complete day that Jesus rested in the tomb was the seventh-day, Saturday, or Sabbath. The Sabbath was made holy by God at Creation as a day of rest and celebration of His completed work. Now, Jesus who called himself the Lord of the Sabbath rests in His completed work of human re-Creation—for human beings can be restored because of Jesus' death and resurrection. The angel shows the women first-hand evidence of an empty tomb, while later we learn that when Jesus rose, He rose with a real body, just as people will when Jesus comes again. With such power God's kingdom is certainly unstoppable!

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

think about it

1. What would Christianity be like without the resurrection? How does the resurrection affirm that the message that Jesus brought really is good news?

2. A minister declared, "We have closed our minds to such trivial considerations as the question of the resurrection of Christ. If you fundamentalists wish to believe that nonsense, we have no objections, but we have more important things to preach than the presence or absence of an empty tomb 20 centuries old." What do you think are people's objections to the resurrection, and how would you answer them?



The resurrection completes the inauguration of God's kingdom. . . . It is the decisive event demonstrating that God's kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven.

N T Wright

3. What evidence is there in this account of the resurrection that could help people to believe that it really happened?

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?

***Our Lord has written
the promise of the
resurrection not in
books alone, but
in every leaf in
springtime.***

Martin Luther





fresh start

so what do we do now? 10

introduction

At the beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis, God said to Abraham,

Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham's family grew and became the foundation for the nation of Israel. Israel were God's chosen people. They were chosen—not because they were great or special—but chosen for a responsibility to reveal God's character and plans to the world. They were to be like a light on a hill so that the whole world would be blessed. But God's promises of blessing are always dependent upon obedience, and through the years, Israel chose to go their own way. Their ultimate rejection of God's calling on their lives came as they crucified God's son, Jesus.

But God's plans for the world to be blessed had not come to an end. For through faith in Jesus, a new family could be built, and through these believers in Jesus, God planned that the world should come to know His true character of love. Indeed, it was as people came to know the Father by knowing Jesus, that people could gain a fresh start in their lives.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples one last time. In His parting words before He ascended to Heaven, Jesus urged those listening to take up the challenge—don't hide the light that you have, go out and share it so that others may come to know the good news too. God has not forgotten them, His power is here, right now, to bring fresh meaning and hope.

This call is for us as well. This is a call for us to become disciples—imitators and apprentices—of Jesus.

**Christianity without
discipleship is always
Christianity without
Christ.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

reading matthew

Read Matthew 28: 16-20, then go back and answer the following questions. They are designed to guide you in an understanding of the work of a follower of Jesus to be a blessing to the world.



***We should be more
concerned with
reaching the lost than
pampering the saved.***

David McGee

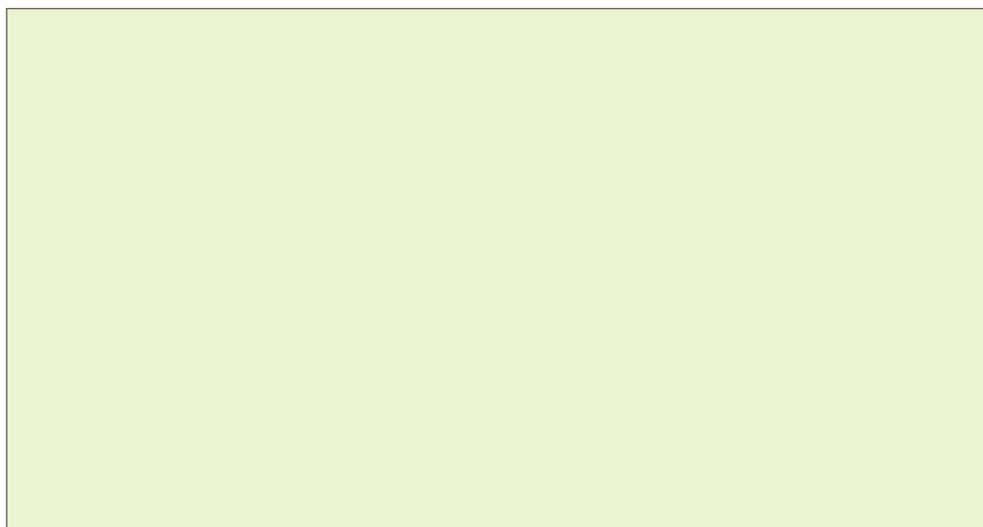
1. From what you have read in the book of Matthew, how would you define a disciple (v19)?
2. What is the basis for Jesus telling those listening to, "go and make disciples of all nations" (v18)?
3. What does it mean to "make" disciples? How does this text guide where you should focus (v19-20)?
4. What does it mean to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (v19)?
5. How is Jesus with us, "to the very end of the age" (v20)?

summary

There are many things we could write for a definition of a disciple, but the central idea is that a disciple is a follower or learner of Jesus. Following Jesus is not just about what we think or do, but who we are, for godly actions always flow from godly character. The task is not simply to believe in Jesus ourselves, but to teach others how to reflect the character and life of Jesus. This is based on the authority that Jesus received from His Father, which Jesus now passes on to us. So discipleship is not our own idea. We are commissioned by Jesus on the authority of His kingship and His kingdom. While discipleship can happen in many different ways, Jesus focuses our attention on "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (v20). This teaching is what Jesus explains throughout the book of Matthew and which is intended to influence every part of our lives. Such teaching normally goes against what we might naturally think and do, so it is important that Matthew has it written down so we can continually refer back to it as a guide. When people choose to become a disciple, they are entering into a community which has the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as its head. This Christian community is called into fellowship with each member of the Godhead. As we look to bring more people into this community, Jesus will go with us. His presence with us is not simply because we might get lonely. Jesus is with us until the very end of the age because He is tirelessly working to bring as many people as possible into His family.

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?



Those who aren't following Jesus aren't his followers. It's that simple. Followers follow, and those who don't follow aren't followers. To follow Jesus means to follow Jesus into a society where justice rules, where love shapes everything. To follow Jesus means to take up his dream and work for it.

Scot McKnight



think about it



1. From what you have read at the end of Matthew, what does Matthew want his readers to remember as they finish reading the story of Jesus?
2. Is there anything preventing you from fully participating in Jesus' plan to make disciples for the kingdom of Heaven?

application

The best measure of a spiritual life is not its ecstasies but its obedience.

Oswald Chambers

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?



fresh start

help for the journey **11**

1—prayer

introduction

Have you ever wondered what prayer is, and what it does? One author put it this way,

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.

This means that as we live as followers of Jesus we can have direct access to him. We don't need to go through a middle-man, but can talk to Jesus ourselves. Therefore, we are never alone and never without a friend. In a world that is often so lonely, and friendships so fragile, this is good news.

It is particularly important to know as people often have difficulties understanding prayer. They think that they have to speak in a particular way in order for God to listen, or that God will not listen unless they are a good enough person. But that's not true.

Prayer is simply a conversation between two good friends. There's no special language to use. And you can pray wherever you are — driving to work, waiting for a doctor's appointment, or walking in the park. The length of prayers is up to you as well. It can sometimes be one word—"help!"—when you are in a tough situation, or it can be longer when you have time alone in the evening. Prayer is the point of personal contact with a loving Father. This means that the more that we get to know God, the more we will want to pray. And of course, as with any friend, it's not just about getting things. Prayer is also about thanking God for what He has done, or praising Him because of His goodness to us.

As it has often been said for the Christian, prayer is the breath of the soul. So now we will look at what Jesus taught His disciples about praying to His Father.

***I can tell you that
God is alive because
I talked with him this
morning.***

Billy Graham

reading matthew

Read Matthew 6:5-15 and answer the following questions.

What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men, men of prayer.

E M Bounds



1. What counsel does Jesus give to those who want to learn to pray in verses 5-8? Why is this important?

2. In v9, Jesus tells us to address God as our Father, yet at the same time God the Father is holy. How can we think about God so we will not feel He is distant or unapproachable?

3. From the passage, make a list of everything Jesus says we are to pray for. Next to each, explain why you think Jesus includes these as a priority?

What to pray for

Why this is important

4. How could your life be changed by praying such a prayer?

summary

It appears that one of the principles of the kingdom of Heaven is that God works according to our prayers. So if we don't pray, we will miss out on what God longs to give us. Prayer is not for show. While certain prayers may take place at church, Jesus describes an important type of prayer that is done when we are alone with God. Jesus says not to repeat ourselves because God knows what is on our minds. This shows that prayer is designed to bring us into fellowship with God. God in Heaven is holy, but the fact that Jesus describes Him as a father reveals the intimate type of relationship God longs to have with us. In prayer, Jesus teaches us to 1) recognise the close relationship God has as our Father, 2) that God's name or reputation is to be honoured, 3) that we long for the ways of God's kingdom to spread out across the whole earth so people everywhere will obey God's will, 4) that God will provide all our needs, 5) that we will forgive others in just the same way that God has forgiven our sins, 6) that we will not be overwhelmed by the temptations of Satan.

questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

***Every Christian needs
a half hour of prayer
each day, except
when he is busy, then
he needs an hour.***

***Francis of Sales
(1567-1622)***

think about it

1. How would you define prayer?

2. Francis of Sales wrote that "every Christian needs a half hour of prayer each day, except when he is busy, then he needs an hour." Why do you think this would be true for you?



application



1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?



*He prayed for strength that he might achieve;
He was made weak that he might obey.*

*He prayed for health that he might do greater things;
He was given infirmity that he might do better things.*

*He prayed for riches that he might be happy;
He was given poverty that he might be wise.*

*He prayed for power that he might have the praise of men;
He was given weakness that he might feel the need of God.*

*He prayed for all things that he might enjoy life;
He was given life that he might enjoy all things.*

*He received nothing that he asked for
—but all that he hoped for.*



fresh start

help for the journey **12** 2—the Holy Spirit

introduction

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is one of the members of what is often called the Godhead or Trinity. There is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained to the disciples that He would eventually leave them, but they would not be alone because He would send them the Holy Spirit:

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate [Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7)

In the book of Matthew, the Holy Spirit is seen working in a number of ways. It is the Holy Spirit who enabled Mary to be conceived with Jesus (1:18-20). When Jesus sends His disciples out to preach, He teaches them that the Holy Spirit will speak through them (10:20). Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah where God declares that the Holy Spirit will be placed on Jesus, “the one I love” (12:18). Jesus also teaches that it is through the Holy Spirit that people are freed from the power of Satan (12:28), He warns people not to reject the Spirit (12:31-32), says that the Spirit inspired David to write Psalm 110 (22:44), and states that we are to be baptised in the name of the “Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (28:19). From these texts, the Holy Spirit has incredible power and influence in shaping the Kingdom of God.

But there is one more remarkable work of the Holy Spirit that Matthew and every other Gospel writer describes. This amazing work of the Spirit is focused on us, for the purpose of expanding God’s Kingdom.

And according to John the Baptist, this work of the Holy Spirit for us is the reason Jesus came to earth.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

James 1:5

reading matthew

You have already read this passage in the first lesson but go back and re-read Matthew 3. Then answer the following questions which focus on the work of Holy Spirit.



1. John the Baptist was the person who was called to prepared the way for Jesus' arrival. He did this by teaching the people about repentance. Every Gospel also records one particular piece of information that John taught the crowd about Jesus. What does John say Jesus is going to do for them in v11? (See also Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-16; John 1:32-33)
2. Jesus had no sin, so why did Jesus tell John the Baptist that He should be baptised (v13-15)?
3. Consider two steps in Jesus' own baptism that is an example for us:
 - a. What does Jesus do first in v16 (first part of the verse). What do you think is the symbolism of this?
 - b. What does Luke's account of this story say that Jesus did next, before the Holy Spirit descended on Him (Luke 3:21)?
4. What does Luke describe as the consequence of Jesus being baptised by the Holy Spirit?
 - a. Luke 4:1
 - b. Luke 4:14-19

A church in the land without the Spirit is rather a curse than a blessing. If you have not the Spirit of God, Christian worker, remember that you stand in somebody else's way; you are a fruitless tree standing where a fruitful tree might grow.

Charles Spurgeon

summary

Every Gospel writer describes John the Baptist as teaching the crowd that Jesus will baptise them with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is also described as being baptised by water and the Holy Spirit. First, Jesus was baptised in water as He was fully immersed in the Jordan river by John, symbolising the death of the old life in a watery grave. Jesus did not have sin like we do, but He was baptised as an example to us, for we all have old lives that we need to leave behind. When Jesus came out of the water, Luke writes that He prayed. Immediately afterwards, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus. Luke then describes the consequences. Being filled with the Holy Spirit Jesus was tempted by Satan—and overcame him by quoting Scripture (Luke 4:1-13). Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit where He taught the people. In Nazareth, Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit had anointed Him to 1) proclaim good news to the poor, 2) proclaim freedom for those in prison, 3) proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, 4) set the oppressed free, 5) proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. From Jesus' example, we see that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for the purpose of sharing the good news of the Kingdom of God with others in practical ways that bring spiritual and physical wholeness.



questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

Spirit filled souls are ablaze for God. They love with a love that glows. They serve with a faith that kindles. They serve with a devotion that consumes. They hate sin with fierceness that burns. They rejoice with a joy that radiates. Love is perfected in the fire of God.

Samuel Chadwick

think about it

1. If you went out onto the streets and asked people what the Holy Spirit is, and what the Holy Spirit does, what do you think they would say? Where do you think people get these ideas from?
2. What do you think about the fact that Jesus wants to baptise you with the Holy Spirit?

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?

2. What are the implications for what you have learned?

3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?

Do you want to be filled with a Spirit who, though he is like Jesus in his gentleness and love, will nevertheless demand to be Lord of your life? Are you willing to let your personality be taken over by another, even if that other be the Spirit of God himself? If the Spirit takes charge of your life he will expect unquestioning obedience in everything. He will not tolerate in you the self-sins even though they are permitted and excused by most Christians You will find the Spirit to be in sharp opposition to the easy ways of the world and of the mixed multitude within the precincts of religion. He will be jealous over you for good. He will not allow you to boast or swagger or show off. He will take the direction of your life away from you. He will reserve the right to test you, to discipline you, to chasten you for your soul's sake. He may strip you of many of those borderline pleasures which other Christians enjoy but which are to you a source of refined evil. Through it all he will enfold you in a love so vast, so mighty, so all-embracing, so wondrous that your very losses will seem like gains and your small pains like pleasure.

A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)



fresh start

help for the journey **13** 3—the church family

introduction

The Christian life is not a life that was designed to be lived alone. When people put their trust in Christ, and decide to become followers of God, they become part of a church family.

The Church is not meant to be a building. Some churches do not even have buildings. Rather, the Church is a community of people who share a common trust in Christ, and are committed to supporting and encouraging each other in their spiritual journey. This is the way God has designed us to live.

Christ is the head of this community. He is the one who supplies everything we need to grow together, and to reach out to others with the good news that God is with us, offering us a fresh start that can begin today.

This offer of a new beginning is what makes the Church an attractive place to be, as it becomes a witness to something better. At the same time, we do not choose who becomes part of this community. It is not just a group of people who are already friends, but a community of people who may have previously shared nothing in common, and may have even have found each other annoying. But because of what God has done in each of their lives they become friends, and together search for others who need Jesus. They want to find others who can share their desire to reflect the character of God and His kingdom.

There should be nothing more attractive in the world than a community of people who are part of God's family.

***The church is God's
appointed agency for
the salvation of men.
It was organised for
service, and its mission
is to carry the gospel
to the world.***

Ellen White

reading matthew

Read Matthew 12:46-50, then answer the following questions.

You can be committed to church but not committed to Christ, but you cannot be committed to Christ and not committed to church.

Joel Osteen

1. Does anything surprise you in this passage?
2. Why do you think Jesus risks appearing hard and uncaring towards His mother and brothers waiting outside?
3. Why do you think Jesus is redefining the family around doing "the will of my Father in heaven"? What does He mean by this?
4. How would Jesus' definition of the Church family clash with the way we might consider who is part of God's Church? Who might Jesus consider part of the Church that we might not, or, who might Jesus consider not part of the family of God, that we might?



summary

Jesus may have appeared harsh in His reply to the message that His family were outside waiting to speak with him. However, Jesus was teaching people who longed to hear about the kingdom of God. It appears that His family were trying to pull Him away from doing this important work. Jesus responds in a similar way to His parents when He was just twelve years old. Having lost him, Mary and Joseph find Him talking with the religious teachers in the temple, and complain that He has not treated them fairly. But Jesus replied, "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:41-52) Both times, Jesus places the priority on doing God's work. Consequently, the true family of God is not simply those tied together by blood relationships, but by the commitment to place God and His Kingdom first. This is why Jesus deliberately emphasises the importance of remaining focused and faithful to God's will. In this life, the Church is not a perfect place, but it is in the place where the subjects of God's kingdom meet together to encourage each other in loving God and loving each other in practical ways. What matters to Jesus is not simply having our name on a register of membership, or of returning tithes and offerings, but about whether we are actually living out the laws, principles and values of the Kingdom of God.



questions?

After studying this lesson's passage in Matthew, what questions do you still have?

think about it

1. How have you thought about church membership in the past? What challenges do you face when applying Jesus' teaching about being part of God's family?

The church is not a club of saints, but a hospital for sinners.

Anon

application

1. What is the most important thing you have learned from this lesson?
2. What are the implications for what you have learned?
3. Is there anything you would like to pray about?

Can I be a Christian without joining the church?

Answer: Yes, it is possible. It is something like being:

- A student who will not go to school.**
- A soldier who will not join an army.**
- A citizen who does not pay taxes or vote.**
- A salesman with no customers.**
- An explorer with no base camp.**
- A seaman on a ship without a crew.**
- A businessman on a deserted island.**
- An author without readers.**
- A tuba player without an orchestra.**
- A parent without a family.**
- A football player without a team.**
- A politician who is a hermit.**
- A scientist who does not share his findings.**
- A bee without a hive.**

Wesleyan Christian Advocate



fresh start

summary

It will be helpful for you to summarise what you have learned throughout the course. This will serve as a review and will also help you to keep in mind the key elements of Matthew's understanding of Jesus and His kingdom.

For each section, write a sentence that crystallises the most important thing you have learned.

1. Introducing Jesus (Matthew 1-4, p5)

2. What is the gospel? (Matthew 5-7, p9)

3. A power to transform (Matthew 8-10, p13)

4. How are we changed? (Matthew 13 & 18, p17)

5. "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 14-17, p21)





6. Why people didn't like Jesus (*Matthew 19-23, p25*)

7. Living for the future (*Matthew 24-25, p29*)

8. "Why did Jesus have to die?" (*Matthew 26-27, p33*)

9. An unstoppable kingdom (*Matthew 27-28, p37*)

10. So what do we do now? (*Matthew 28:16-20, p41*)

11. Help for the journey 1: prayer (*Matthew 6:5-15, p45*)

12. Help for the journey 2: the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 3, p49*)

13. Help for the journey 3: the church family (*Matthew 12:46-50, p53*)





citySeminary
UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED IN YOU