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INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 25 - 28

With this series, we come to the end of our four years of looking at Matthew's gospel.

Matthew's majestic account of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus slows down and concentrates on the last few days of Jesus' ministry towards the end. In these chapters, we pick up the action 3 days before Jesus' execution.

In this section of Matthew, we are warned to expect a delay in the return of Jesus, and we see the New Passover instituted, the agony of Jesus at what he knows must soon take place. We see his betrayal, arrest and trial. And we read of Jesus death and resurrection and his Great Commission to his followers.

THE FIVE PURPOSES OF CHURCH

God has saved us for a purpose - he is a purposeful God! What therefore does he purpose for us as a community of believers?

For the sake of simplicity we have identified five areas. As you and your small group fellowship together over the scriptures this term, consider these five and how they bear on our lives together!

God has called us to:

MATURITY growth in our knowledge of him and in our godliness of life

MAGNIFICATION growth in our love and adoration of Christ expressed in all of life.

MEMBERSHIP growth in the joy of living as a community of renewed people

MINISTRY growth in our service of others – especially of our Christian family

MISSION growth in our desire and ability to bring the gospel to others

We want to encourage each other to pray for our non-Christian friends and family

3-1-1 is a guide to help remind us to pray.

Pray for 3 friends, 1 a week, for 1 minute.

List the name of your family/friends here.

How to use these notes

Bible reading requires effort and concentration for the task is to understand clearly what God himself has given us. We must not however, approach Bible reading with a merely 'academic' attitude. In the text we are confronted with God himself. As we read the scriptures we will experience the overwhelming wonder of being prompted by the Spirit to conform our lives to be more like Christ. These notes are not designed as a self-contained group Bible study but as a stimulus for daily reading and for Growth Group preparation. Don't feel restricted by the questions; they are simply designed to get you thinking.

Here is a guide for how to spend your time.

Before you begin reading pray! Ask that God would enable you to sit humbly under his Word, that he might graciously speak to you, and that he would mould you to his character.

Read the section for the day. Use the questions to aid your reflection on each passage, taking notes if it is helpful.

Finally spend some time considering the impact of your reading and then pray again about those things.

Disclaimer!

These studies are an aid to your Bible reading. They are by no means definitive. There are many more issues and implications for reflection than those highlighted in the daily questions.

The Growth Group Preparation questions are just that. They are not designed to form the basis of a small group Bible study, but rather the aim is to prepare you personally for participation in a group.

Week 1

Be Ready!

Matthew 25

This passage is the last part of Jesus' teaching section (which contained the 'little apocalypse' of Chapter 24). This section begins by pronouncing judgement on Israel for rejecting their messiah and ends with warnings for the faithful.

Here we see a chain of parables which make different but interlocking points.

As we interpret parables, a well established principle for interpretation is to look primarily at the main point of the parable, and applying that, rather than looking to apply all of the details of the parable.

For example, trying to work out exactly what the meaning of the lamps is in the parable of the Ten Virgins is to miss the point.

In the studies for this week, we are focussing on distilling the main point of each passage.

Day 1 Read Matthew 24:36-51

1. What command does Jesus issue in this passage?

2. What do you think is the single main point of this section?

PONDER: Why do you think at this point in Jesus' ministry he is teaching about being watchful for his return?

PRAY that you will keep watch for the return of the King.

Day 2 Read Matthew 25:1-13

Watching out for the return of the King is the basic point heading into Chapter 25.

1. What do the wise virgins do, and what did the foolish fail to do?

2. Why did the foolish ones fail to take extra oil?

3. What is the main point being made here?

PONDER any action that you need to take to get ready for the return of Jesus. Do you need to do anything today?

PRAY for action today.

Day 3 Read Matthew 25:14-30

God has poured out material and spiritual blessings upon us. This passage raises the question of what we are doing with those resources as we await the return of the Lord.

1. What does the man who ends up cast out do wrong?

2. What error does the man have about the master, and how does this affect what he does? Are you open to a similar error leading to similar results?

PONDER: Are you using the resources that God has given you in his service? What action do you need to take?

PRAY: That God will help you to take whatever action is necessary.

Day 4 Read Matthew 25:31-46

In this passage Christ identifies with each Christian (v40 the least of these is a Greek word connected with the idea of little ones from 18:5-6), so that the way that a person treats a brother is deemed to be the way that he treats Christ. This parallels John’s point in 1 John, that brotherly love is the watermark of Christian faith. Brotherly love cannot be counterfeit. And brotherly love is the evidence of true faith.

- 1. What aspects of brotherly love are on view here?

- 2. All who are faithful Christians love our brothers and sisters in Christ. But as fallen people, we fall short of our own goals in this area. Focussing on the areas in Question 1, what action can you take to better show love to your brothers and sisters?

PRAY that God will help you to put your plan into practice!

Day 5 Read Matthew 25

Chapter 25 has been very challenging. In view of the coming of the Lord, we are called to action.

- 1. Write down again your resolutions to act from the last 4 days.

2. Think and pray about how you can make these things a priority on a longer term basis

PREPARE FOR YOUR GROWTH GROUP

What sorts of things would you expect to see in the life of a child of God?

What aspect of Christian living is on view in each of the three passages in Chapter 25?

- Virgins?

- Talents?

- Sheep and Goats?

SERMON NOTES

Week 2

The New Passover

Matthew 26:1-35

The Passover Feast was instituted in Israel while they were still in Egypt. They were to commemorate the events of the Exodus and re-enact the night that the LORD passed through Egypt killing the firstborn, but passing over the Israelite families who had the blood of a lamb on their doorposts.

Day 1 Read Exodus 12:1-14

1. What was involved in celebrating the Passover?

PONDER: Why do you think God set up this celebration in Israel?

PRAY: Thank God for his loving nature and for his constant faithfulness to his people.

Day 2 Read Matthew 26:1-16

Matthew's account of Jesus' life is now 2 days away from the Passover - and Jesus was killed the morning after the Passover feast. We are reading about the last days of Jesus' life.

Verses 1 and 2 show that Jesus knows what is to happen - but evil men plot away regardless.

1. What two evil parties conspire to arrange the arrest of Jesus?

2. What does Mary (John identifies this woman as Mary) see that the others do not?

PONDER: Does Jesus' answer absolve us from care for the poor? Why not?

PRAY that we will hearts like Mary. This passage recalls to mind David's wild dancing as the ark is installed in Jerusalem (2 Sam 6). Pray that we will throw caution to the wind as we follow Jesus.

Day 3 Read Matthew 26:16-30

Events begin to accelerate with the beginning of the preparations for the Passover meal.

The timeline is:

- | | |
|---------|---------------------------------|
| Morning | Prepare the Passover |
| Evening | Eat the Passover |
| | Judas slips out to betray Jesus |

Later Evening	Prayer in the Garden Jesus is arrested
Midnight	Tried before the Sanhedrin
Dawn	Peter Disowns Jesus Judas hangs himself Jesus before Pilate
Morning	Mocked and carries cross
Midday	Crucified
Midafternoon	Jesus dies
Sunset	Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus' body.

1. What does Jesus say about Judas' actions?

2. What does this show about Jesus' understanding of his death?

PONDER: Did you realise the speed at which all of these events takes place? Why do you think Matthew devotes so much time to these last 24 hours of Jesus' life?

PRAY that in the coming weeks, you will understand the death of Jesus more fully.

Day 4 Read Matthew 26:26-30

The purpose of the Passover was to remember God’s great act of deliverance at the Exodus. It was the supreme act of God’s deliverance of Israel in the Old Testament.

1. Given that the Passover meal was to remember God’s greatest act of salvation in the past, what is odd about how Jesus celebrates the Passover?

2. Whose body was broken at the Old Testament Passover? What role does Jesus now play in the ‘New Passover’?

PONDER: What ‘passes over’ you because of the death of Jesus? What status do you have before God because of that?

PRAY: Thank God for your status in Christ.

Day 5 Read Matthew 26:31-35

1. What does Jesus say will happen to his disciples that very night?

2. What hope does Jesus offer them in the account of the new
Passover?

PONDER the hopelessness of men without Christ.

PRAY: Thank God that he will never leave us. Pray that by the Holy
Spirit given to us, we will not ever desert Jesus.

PREPARE FOR YOUR GROWTH GROUP

Read Exod 12, Num 9:10-12, and 1 Cor 11:23-26

What was the Passover feast for?

What has Jesus done with the Passover feast?

What does that tell you about Jesus' place in God's plans?

SERMON NOTES

Week 3 Responses to a Crisis

Matthew 26:36-75

Day 1 Read Matthew 26:36-46

1. What is Jesus' mental state at this point? Does this surprise you?

2. From his prayer and comments to the disciples, what does Jesus understand is about to happen?

PONDER: It is often said that bravery is not fearlessness, but rather acting in spite of fear. Ponder the amazing, self-revealed courage of Jesus as he approaches his crucifixion.

PRAY: Thank God for what Jesus was willing to do.

Day 2 Read Matthew 26:36-46

1. What does the manner of Jesus' prayer reveal about his attitude to the Father?

2. What does the behaviour of the disciples reveal about them?

PONDER: Do you relate to the father in prayer the way that Jesus does - how do you differ?

PRAY: That you will be humble in all your requests to God in prayer.

Day 3 Read Matthew 26:47-56

Judas is needed by the religious authorities to identify Jesus. In a pre-TV age, they would have been unlikely to have been successful in arresting the right guy without someone to finger him in person.

1. What are the two ways Jesus rejects the use of force to prevent his arrest?

2. How do the disciples respond to the arrest of Jesus?

PONDER: What this passage says to those who would like to use force – including legislative force to extend the kingdom of God.

PRAY thank God for the wisdom and self control that Christ demonstrated for us.

Day 4 Read Matthew 26:57-68

1. The religious authorities are struggling to build a case against Jesus – even though they are happy to entertain false evidence. How in the end do they get their conviction?

2. What is ironic about this treatment of Jesus?

PONDER: The perversity of human nature that they reject the saviour of the world, because he claims to be the saviour of the world!

PRAY: For those in your life who are hard to the gospel, pray that God will do his miracle of softening their hearts to the gospel.

Day 5 Read Matthew 26:57-58 and 69-75

1. What is Peter up to in following Jesus?

2. What is in Peter's heart as he denies Christ three times - what evidence is there?

PONDER: Thank God that he uses people to achieve great things even though we are thoroughly sinful, and ultimately untrustworthy.

PRAY thanking God that he has called you into his service, despite your faults!

PREPARE FOR YOUR GROWTH GROUP

List the crisis points for the various characters in this passage - and make some assessment about how each deals with the crisis.

- Judas

- Jesus

- Peter

- James and John

- Caiaphas

SERMON NOTES

Week 4 The Crucifixion

Matthew 27:1 - 46

Day 1 Read Matthew 27:1 - 10

1. Judas and Peter share many parallels and some striking differences.

Can you list them?

- Similarities

- Differences

2. What key thing does Judas fail to do once he realises he has done wrong?

PONDER and PRAY: The fact that there is no sin that places you beyond redemption. Jesus died for all of our sins - even the really bad ones. If you have a deep dark secret that still bothers you - bring it to God now in prayer. Repent of it and ask for forgiveness. Consider speaking to someone about it ask to speak with someone via the yellow cards in church for example. Judas is a case study of guilt handled badly.

Day 2 Read Matthew 27:11-26

Pilate is the one with the power to put a person to death, and so the Jews lead Jesus to him. He has arguably the worst job in the Roman Empire - running the Roman province of Judea. And he has to keep a lid on the Jews, who were a particularly difficult group to rule.

1. What is Pilate's assessment of Jesus? (vv 18,19,23)

2. What do the Jews reveal about themselves here?

PONDER: Why do you think Jesus says nothing at his trial other than confirming his identity?

PRAY: Thank God for Jesus' amazing humility in accepting the treatment he did in the process of saving us.

Day 3 Read Matthew 27:27-31 & Isa 50:5-9

The Roman soldiers who humiliate Jesus in this way are ignorant, and in some sense are having a joke at the expense of the Jews as much as at the expense of Jesus.

1. Why do the guards put the robe, reed and the crown of thorns on Jesus?

2. What perspective does the Isaiah passage put on Jesus' sufferings?

PONDER: Does your answer to question 2 help to put the sufferings of Christ (as opposed to his actual death, into perspective)?

PRAY: Thank God that Jesus knew human suffering as much as any of us, and that he is able to sympathise with our predicament. (Heb 4:15)

Day 4 Read Matthew 27:32-40

Jesus is lead battered and bruised to his execution. So battered and bruised that the Roman soldiers were forced to conscript a passing Libyan to carry the cross beam. The wine vinegar and gall may be a pain reliever or a poison, either one a concession from the Romans to the horrors of this slow method of execution. (Alternatively some argue that it was just a nasty thing to do - give a dying man a bitter drink). Note also that the casting of lots for his clothing fulfils part of Psalm 22 - the same Psalm that Jesus quotes from with his dying breath (v46).

1. What words describe Jesus at this point?

2. What is ironic about the mocking voices of verse 40?

PONDER: Do people still think about Jesus in those terms now?

PRAY that we will be able to bring clear good news to the people around us that the death of Jesus was anything but a defeat.

Day 5 Read Matthew 27:41-44

Note again the irony of the comments.

1. Why can't Jesus save himself?

2. Do you think that Jesus could have come down off the cross? Why / Why not?

PONDER with amazement the fact that Jesus was obedient to death.

PRAY: Thank God for Jesus' faithfulness.

PREPARE FOR YOUR GROWTH GROUP

Matthew takes his readers through the events of this terrible day through the eyes of other characters.

List the characters and summarise their responses to the events leading up to Jesus' death.

Why do you think Matthew chose to view the events by looking at all of these other characters?

SERMON NOTES

Week 5

The Death of Jesus

Matthew 27:45 - 66

When Jesus utters his so called ‘cry of dereliction’ - “Eloi Eloi, Lama Sabachthani - My God my God why have you forsaken me?” - he is quoting from Psalm 22. When Jews quoted the heading of a Psalm it was commonly understood to be referring to the whole Psalm and not just one part of it.

Day 1 Read Psalm 22

1. What do you notice about the structure of Psalm 22?

2. In quoting this Psalm, the whole Psalm, what is Jesus saying about his death?

PONDER: Why is it that Jesus death represents an end point? Why is the death of Jesus the turning point of all history?

PRAY: Thank God that in Jesus he sent the remedy for sin and death.

Day 2 Read Matthew 27:45-50

The death of Jesus is one of the two greatest events in the history of the creation (the other being the resurrection!)

1. How long is Jesus on the Cross?

2. What is the darkness of v45, and what does it signify?

PONDER: What is the nature of the victory of evil here?

PRAY: Thank God that evil appears to have won, but that this was revealed to be false!

Day 3 Read Matthew 27:51-53

The temple curtain, which is torn in two here is a very heavy thing. The curtain is probably the one at the entrance to the Holy of Holies. It was designed to stop all access to the heart of the temple, where God was said to have his throne among Israel. Access to God, because of sin, was severely impaired.

1. What does the tearing of the temple curtain reveal about the temple, now that Christ has died?

2. What does this say about the nature of our access to God in Christ?

PONDER: Do you make use of the access to God that he has created for you through the victory of Christ's death?

PRAY that you will pray!

Day 4 Read Matthew 27:54-61

1. List the reactions of the different characters to the death of Jesus;

- The Soldier

- Joseph of Arimathea

- The Women

PONDER: Are you like any of them?

PRAY that the wonder of these events will not leave you unmoved.

Day 5 Read Matthew 27:62-66 and 28:11-15

1. What are the leaders of the Jews so concerned about here?

2. What action do the leaders of Israel take when they get the reports of angels at the tomb from the guards? What does this show you of their hearts?

PONDER why did Matthew place these two accounts in his Gospel?

PRAY: For those who still persist in writing off the death and resurrection of Jesus as some kind of con - pray that they will be able to read the gospels - and that the scales will drop from their eyes.

PREPARE FOR YOUR GROWTH GROUP

Read Psalm 22

Why does Jesus quote this Psalm as his last (or next to last) words?

What consequences follow from the death of Jesus (mentioned in the passage)

SERMON NOTES

Week 6 The Resurrection

Matthew 28

Day 1 Read Matthew 28:1-10

1. According to the angel, what has happened to Jesus?

2. What do both the angel and the risen Jesus tell the women to do?

PONDER: How does the resurrection of Jesus make sense of Jesus' quoting Psalm 22?

PRAY: Rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus - his vindication - his victory over sin and death.

Day 2 Read Matthew 28:1-10

1. How do the guards respond to the angel and his rolling back the stone?

2. How do the women respond?

PONDER even in his death and resurrection, as in life, Jesus divides people into those who respond rightly and those who reject Jesus.

PRAY that you will be involved in taking the message out to the world – for encouragement as people respond positively, and that you will be prepared when people reject Jesus.

Day 3 Read Matthew 28:16-20

These verses give the final verdict on the ministry of Jesus and the implications which flow from it.

1. What is Jesus' status now that he has risen again?

2. Is there anything that is not subject to him?

PONDER: How should the Lordship of Jesus affect the way that you think about sharing the gospel?

PRAY: That the Lordship of Christ, as much as compassion for the lost will drive you to tell others about Jesus.

Day 4 Read Matthew 28:16-20

1. What exactly are the disciples commanded to do?

2. How do you make disciples?

PONDER: Do you think of yourself as a disciple maker?

PRAY: That you will become more and more, a disciple maker.

Day 5 Read Matthew 28:16-20

1. What does Jesus promise his disciples here?

2. Does this give you licence to push the application of this passage directly out to us?

PONDER: What does it mean that Jesus is with us? (Think about Revelation 1 and our Word and Spirit series.)

PRAY: Thank God that we can be assured of the presence of Jesus at all times, by the Spirit.

PREPARE FOR YOUR GROWTH GROUP

Who is Jesus now revealed to be?

What does he command his followers to devote their lives to?

What does he promise?

SERMON NOTES

CCEC Missionary Contacts

Ecuador 
Colin & Jill Bacon
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Colin is the Ecuador Associate Director and is also involved in outreach through teaching English and small groups. Jill is the book keeper for SAM Ecuador and is involved in strengthening the SAM Ecuador team and home schooling.

France 
Paul & Sandra King
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Paul is working with students in universities in the Strasbourg area of France with GBU, the French equivalent of the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES). The family moved from Brisbane in early 2004, after many years doing similar work among students there.

Tanzania 
Jono & Amy Vire
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Jono and Amy are based in Mwanza. Their main work is to develop, teach and train, mostly specifically with and for youth leaders. They also work in schools and in Bible colleges.

Botswana 
Peter & Jacomo Shaw
Andrew, Ellen & Daniel

The Shaws are preparing to go to Botswana in Africa with SAM to do Christian discipleship work in churches, schools and colleges. They are planning to leave in July 2008.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matt 28:18-20

