

Group (or individual) Bible Study

*What does Matthew tell us  
of Jesus Teaching?*

Seven Sessions on Matthew's

Five blocks of Jesus' Teaching:

1. Discipleship A. A New motivation Mt 5
2. Discipleship B. Being Religious Mt 6 + 7
3. Discipleship C. Attitudes Mt 7
4. Mission. Mt 10
5. The Kingdom. Mt 13
6. Relationships among Disciples. Mt 18
7. The Future. Mt 24+25

While many religions have detailed instructions and codes of behaviour for their faithful, Christianity is distinctive. Unlike the religious leaders he debated with, Jesus spent less time on detailed instruction and argument. But what did he teach? Matthew's gospel gathers five collections of Jesus' teaching (some compare them to the 5 books of the Old Testament "Law"), and I suggest we look at these in the coming weeks.

Reference	Theme	for comparison.
Mt 5 – 7	Discipleship	cp Lk 6:20-49
Mt 10	Mission	Mk 6:7-11
Mt 13	Parables – the Kingdom of heaven	Mk 4:1-34
Mt 18	Relationships among disciples	Mk 9:35-48
Mt 24, 25	The Future	Mk 13

As a "Warm up", you might like to think about what headings you would have chosen for basic Christian instruction. Would the first, and longest, have been "Discipleship"?

Week 1                      Matthew 5.  
Discipleship – part 1. A New motivation.

1. Read Matthew 5:1-2. Who is Jesus talking to? Jesus has already called disciples (Matthew 4:18-22), and as the chapter goes on (eg v 10,11,13) it becomes clear these are not "general" instructions.
2. Read v 3-10 ("Blessed" might be happy, or fortunate are those who). These attitudes are not obviously desirable. What do they mean? What do they have in common?
3. Read v 11-16. Are disciples meant to be recognisable? What is distinctive about them? What effect do they have on the rest of society?
4. Read v 17-20. Does this mean that all the Old Testament regulations remain fully in force?
5. The alternative, which takes seriously Jesus' authority and redirection of Old Testament regulation (eg v 22,28,32) is that much of the

Old Testament is "accomplished" or "fulfilled" in Jesus. Christians do not reject the Old Testament, but see it as a God-given preparation for a new situation – Jesus, the New Covenant, and a new order.

6. The chapter continues with 6 examples of Jesus teaching, with varying developments of the Old Testament. Read v21-26 on murder. You can be innocent of murder, but Jesus deals with motives – anger and hatred. The disciple cannot easily claim to be free of them, but the aim is clear. Is Jesus teaching easier or harder than the alternative?
7. Read v27-30. Again, Jesus looks not at "offence" but motivation. His concern is not for attraction, but the cultivation of a wrong relationship. How popular is this teaching, do you think?
8. Read v31-32. There will be more on divorce in chapter 19. The Old Testament (Dt 24:1-4) did not *approve* divorce, but recognised it and regulated the fact with documentation. Jesus talks instead about God's intention. Christians disagree about what form forgiveness in failed marriage should take. What do you think? (Divorce is never good, but can it be less bad than other alternatives?)
9. Read v33-37. Being "economical with the truth" - or simply crossing your fingers, is always fashionable. Jesus simply requires disciples to be truthful. Is that always possible?
10. Read v38-41. The Old Testament limited retaliation. Does Jesus improve on this by wanting disciples to be willing to forgo legitimate retribution?
11. Read v43-48. Jesus sums up the standard expected as "Be perfect" - not implying we shall achieve this, but putting God's holiness and purposes as the target, rather than the following of rules. How do we set about "being perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect"?

Week 2. Matthew 6  
Discipleship – part 2. **Being Religious.**

1. Many religions have rules about giving away money, praying and fasting. How important do you think these activities are? How do you organise them yourself? What does Christianity require, and what does it advise?
2. Read Mt 6:1-4. What is the emphasis here? What is assumed?
3. What do these verses say about the display of religious practice?
4. Read Mt 6:5-15. Is the stress on a prayer formula, or a relationship? In vv9-13, who and what comes first?
5. What do these verses say about the display of religious practice?
6. Read Mt 6:16-18. What is the emphasis here? What is assumed?
7. What do these verses say about the display of religious practice?
8. Several repeated questions suggest these 3 sections have all had something similar to say – do you agree? What are they saying?
9. Read Mt 6:19-24. How do these verses relate to what went before?
10. What does it mean to “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven”? Do vv22-23 and v24 help to explain?
11. Read Mt 6:25-34. What reasons are given for not worrying? How does this link to the rest of the chapter?

Week 3. Matthew 7  
Discipleship – part 3. **Attitudes**

1. After 2 weeks on Jesus teaching, what have you learnt? How would you compare it to the Old Testament?
2. Read Mt 7 :1-6. Is this about being tolerant? If not, how does it differ? What does v 6 require, and what difference does it make?
3. Read v7-12. Do we get whatever we want? If not, what does this mean? Is the comparison of v 11 helpful?
4. Read Mt 7:13-14. What does this make you think about? What does it imply?
5. Read Mt 7:15-20. What is the test to discover false prophets? Who might fall into this class today? What is the danger they represent?
6. Read Mt 7:21-23. If there are false prophets, what do you think about false disciples? Have you ever been one? What is the danger they represent?
7. Read Mt 7:24-29. We sometimes say that all you need to do is to “believe” or to “receive God’s grace”. Does this fit with these verses – and if so, in what way? How does salvation depend on grace? How can it be compared to housebuilding?
8. Much of this chapter is about attitudes – to One another, God, to Church, and to life. Had you thought your attitudes were important to faith?

## Week 4

## Matthew 10

### Mission

1. We have spent a good deal of time – 3 chapters of Matthew, 3 weeks of study – on “discipleship”. Next Matthew 10 takes us to Mission. Read Matthew 10:1-8. What strikes you about this? Why these 12, and these destinations?
2. Read Mt 10:9-15. Why no supplies for the journey? (Was this the case later – Luke 22:35,36 ?)
3. Read Mt 10:16-20. What sort of protection can the missionaries expect? Is this encouraging or threatening?
4. Read Mt 10:21-31. What are they to expect? Why should this not be frightening? Has this changed in our time?
5. Read Mt 10:32-42. What does this say about priorities? Is this what you would have expected? Is this what churchgoers now expect?
6. This chapter seems much more about Jesus time and ministry. How does the story teach us? Do you think mission is still of basic importance – and a basic part of faith?
7. What do we learn from this chapter about: God’s provision for his people? The dangers, and protection available to them? The priorities of mission in Christian life today?

## Week 5

## Matthew 13:1-53

### The Kingdom

1. If Jesus is God’s chosen Messiah, why doesn’t everyone believe and obey? What answers came from the gospel account, and what would we say now?
2. If some choose to believe and live as disciples, and others do not, what does that mean for our relations with both groups? What happened in Jesus’ time, since then, and now?
3. Matthew 13 again comes as a collection of teaching after a couple of chapters of “action”. These chapters record increasing division and argument. Read Mt 13:1-9 + 18-23. Who hears the parable? Who hears the explanation? What are the important parts of the story: sower, seed, ground, crop?
4. Read Mt 13:10-17. Who hears this? Are the crowd prevented from understanding? Does v15 give a clue as to why perception is poor?
5. Read Mt 13:24-30 + 36-43. Who hears the explanation? What is being said about the Kingdom of heaven?
6. Read Mt 13:31-34. Why is the Kingdom like a mustard seed, and like yeast?
7. Read Mt 13:44-53. What do we learn here from the treasure and the pearl? Does the net repeat the idea of the wheat and weeds?
8. v53 brings the “closing formula”. What was this collection of teaching about? What has been most surprising?

Week 6                    Matthew 18  
Relationships among disciples.

1. This chapter is sometimes seen as a manual of church discipline, but is more about helping disciples get their relationships right. Interestingly, it assumes a Christian community separate from the wider community. Read Mt 18:1-5. So, who is the greatest? What does this say about power structures and control?
2. Read Mt 18:6-9. What causes “stumbling” in today’s church? What does this passage advise?
3. Read Mt 18:10-14. Compare this with Luke 15:3-7. What is the point in Luke? What point does Matthew make? Are they the same / related?
4. Read Mt 18:15-20. This seems very practical – does it work today? Is the intention to punish the offender, or restore the lost sheep?
5. Read Mt 18:21-35. Why are the amounts of money so different? Why do the forgiven find it hard to forgive? Why do we so easily forget our status as forgiven sinners?
6. What effect would practising the teaching of this chapter have on a Christian community?
7. Notice Mt 19:1 the ending formula of the fourth collection of Jesus’ teaching.

Week 7                    Matthew 24,25  
The Future.

1. Four collections of teaching have dealt with discipleship, mission, the kingdom of heaven, and relationships among disciples. What subject would you expect for the fifth and last collection?
2. Read Mt 24:1-35 (1-14, 15- 29, 30-35) Jesus warns of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple v2, and a wider crisis. Disciples must not be misled v4-14. What do you think is referred to in v15-21?
3. It was hard for the disciples to separate the destruction of the temple (and much Jewish life) from the end of all things. Can you see how warnings of the siege of Jerusalem (within a generation) move on to the last section of the chapter?
4. Read Mt 24:36-51. What is significant about v36? What are disciples to do (v42 adds to v4).
5. Read Mt 25:1-13. Jesus continues his teaching about the future with this parable. What is the main point? What might be represented by the oil which cannot be shared or lent?
6. Read Mt 25:14-30. What do we learn about the kingdom of heaven from the story of the bags of gold?
7. Read Mt 25:31-46. Often used to suggest that acts of kindness form the basis of God’s judgement, note that it is not general kindness spoken of here. Who are “these brothers and sisters of mine” v40? What is the major point here?
8. When Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple, what else do you think would be destroyed with it? When he speaks of final judgement, why do you think he warns disciples of many who are unprepared?
9. As we get ready for Lent, are there issues you want to examine in your faith and practical Christian living? (Make a note, not to forget!)