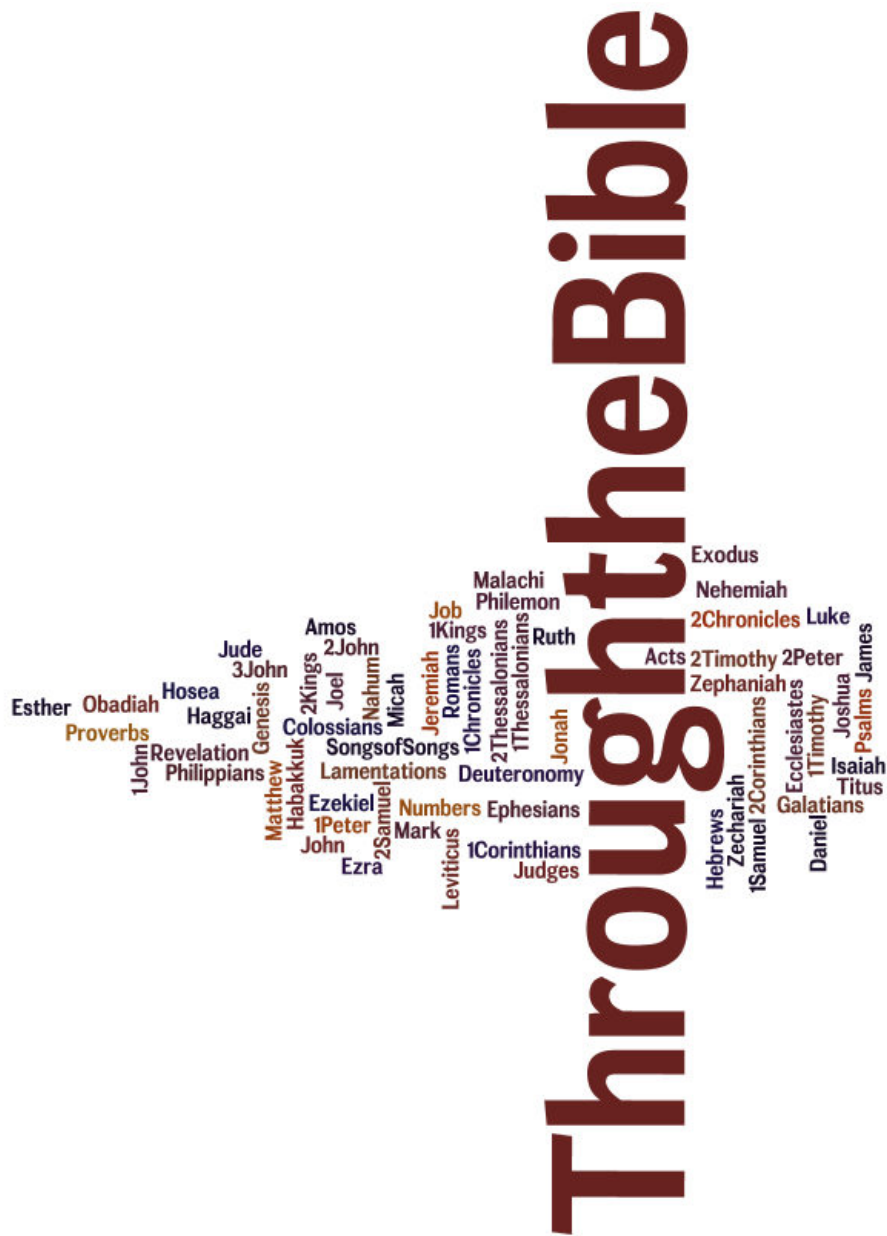




# Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action  
in the community of Cornton



July 2013

*Here is the man whose name is the Branch...he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. (v.12-13)*

In the legends of King Arthur, retold many times in literature and music, one of the main themes is the establishment of a just and righteous kingdom. Against a society of warring states, King Arthur tried to establish a united England. His knights of the Round Table lived by the code of chivalry that obligated them to defend the weak, to show mercy to their enemies, and to use their strength in the cause of goodness.

Those who are familiar with the legends know that King Arthur ultimately failed in his quest. But the legends also say that one day the King will return!

This vision of a just and righteous kingdom is shared by the biblical prophets. One day, God will send a perfect King whose kingdom will never fail. That's the central theme we find in today's reading. We come to the last of Zechariah's eight night visions (v.1-8), which reveals God's judgment that will come on the nations that have afflicted Israel and on all the nations of the earth. Then (v.9-15), God directs Zechariah to make a crown out of the silver and gold donated by some exiles. He is to set it on the head of Joshua the high priest and then put in the rebuilt temple as a memorial to Israel. This prophetic drama said to those rebuilding the temple, "Messiah, the King-Priest, is coming. He will build His temple and reign over all the earth."

What did this action illustrate and foretell? It heralded the future Advent of Messiah, the Branch, in whom the offices of king and priest would be united (v.13; Hebrews 7:1-3). We have been promised that Jesus will return in glory to rule and to reign forever. Do we believe that and are we actively living in light of that truth?

**Pray:** thanking God for his promise that Jesus will return for us one day and will reign and rule forever.

**Reflect:** do I live in light of Christ's expected return?

**Tuesday 2 July 2013**

**Zechariah 7:1-14**

*When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen, says the LORD Almighty. (v.13)*

This story is told by a man who walked into the toilet at a motorway service station: ‘I had barely sat down when I heard a voice from the other cubicle saying, “Hi, how are you?” Now, I’m not the type to start a conversation in toilets, at a service station no less. But I answered, somewhat embarrassed, “Doing just fine.” And the other guy says, “So what are you up to?” What kind of question is that?! I’m thinking this is too bizarre, so I say, “Oh, I’m like you, just travelling.” At this point I’m just trying to get out of there as fast as I can when I hear another question: “Can I come over to your place for a while?” Okay, this question is just plain wacky, but I figured I should be polite, answer him, and end the conversation. So I say, “Well, I have company, so today is a bad day for me.” Then...I hear the guy say nervously: “Listen, I’ll have to call you back, there’s an idiot in the next cubicle who keeps answering my questions. Bye!”’

I wonder how many times we listen to the wrong people and the wrong conversations. Instead of focusing on God and listening to him, we take on board the advice of others or the words of the world around us. This is not a new problem. The people of Israel had been doing that for years. And here in Zechariah 7 we see God bringing judgement on them for they have not listened to him. The people had not paid attention to what God had said to them time and time again - so they came under judgment. It’s not like God only gives you one chance at things. Keep in mind that from the time God began to warn the people about falling away from Him (around 1400 BC) until the time of the captivity (586 BC), it was over 800 years.

When God is constantly reminding you over and over and over and over again that you need to turn around in an area of your life, pay attention. Even when God allows His chastisement to come on our lives, it’s only to get us to turn around. His desire is not to punish us; His desire is for us to repent, to turn around.

**Pray:** asking God to give you ears to hear.

**Reflect:** do I listen to God or to the words of the world around me?

*These are the things you are to do: speak the truth to each other. (v.16)*

It was Hans Christian Andersen that told the story of the Emperor and his new clothes. The great emperor was a man who liked to impress people with his clothes. He wanted to have a new suit, the finest in the world. A pair of swindlers told him they would make a suit out of a rare, invisible cloth and only those lacking wisdom could not see the cloth. The emperor commissioned the new wardrobe.

Finally the day came for the emperor to show off his new clothes, and he began to parade himself around the streets, naked. The people of the city didn't have the courage to tell the emperor the truth. It was a small child who was brave enough to remark, "The emperor's naked!"

Sometimes we want to be "nice" to people and we don't tell them something they need to hear. Sometimes we aren't real excited when someone tells us something we don't want to hear. But we all need truth. It's how we grow. It's how we become more like Jesus. Zechariah speaks of that here in chapter 8. The Lord has said he will return to Jerusalem and it will be a city of truth (v.3). He speaks a lot of holiness and the need to speak the truth in verse 16.

As verses 16 and 17 make clear, holiness is a practical sort of thing. It demands that we speak truth to one another, that we judge with truth, that we not devise evil in our hearts against one another, and that we do not love perjury. God says that He hates these things. As His people, we must not only love what God loves; we also need to hate what He hates. Since He is the God of truth, we need to hate false doctrine, deception, lies, hypocrisy, and vague moral standards that drift with our godless culture.

One thing to bear in mind when we speak the truth – let's do it in love (Ephesians 4:15) and not out of some malicious intent to cause hurt to a brother or sister. Let's do it in order to build them up in Christ.

**Pray:** asking God to help us love the truth.

**Reflect:** do I like listening to others speak truth into my life? Is it needed?

*The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. (v.16)*

On October 13, 2010, millions of television viewers on five continents literally stopped everything to watch the amazing rescue of thirty three men trapped underground in the mine of San Jose de Copiapo in northern Chile. For seventeen excruciating days, no one knew whether any of the miners had survived the collapse of the mine shaft. The surviving miners were unaware of any rescue attempts. They spent a total of sixty nine days trapped underground. One of those men had great faith and his story is told in a book 'Miracle in the Mine'. Just before they started taking the men back up the rescue shaft Jose Henriquez led them all in prayer. He said to them 'God has answered our prayer, so no one is leaving this place until we first pray and give thanks to the Lord for blessing this work.'

Rescue and life are what the Messiah's Advent signify as well. In the mid section of this chapter we see God promise the coming of the Messiah riding on a donkey bringing salvation. These are verses we see fulfilled at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the gospels. Jesus was heading into Jerusalem for the last time. He knew what lay in front of him. He was about to complete God's rescue plan for us. He was about to die on the cross paying the price for our sin. The perfect Lamb of God was come to take away the sin of the world.

Zechariah speaks of God coming to save his people. Verse 16 uses figurative language to summarise God's salvation and love for His people. In one picture, they were a flock, implying that He was their Shepherd, a familiar and comforting metaphor of care, guidance, and provision (Psalm 100:3). In a second picture, they were sparkling jewels, that is, God's special treasure, living trophies of His glory (Isaiah 62:3). God is still in the business of saving his people through Jesus' sacrifice.

**Pray:** thanking God for rescuing us from sin.

**Reflect:** do I live in light of God's rescue, thanking and praising him, and do I gratefully proclaim that to others as well?

*From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler. (v.4)*

Its summer time and people up and down the land are camping. Anyone who's ever been on a family camping trip knows the importance of a single tent peg. If even one stake or length of rope is out of place or not set securely, the tent will sag lopsidedly, rip, or even collapse. 'Tent peg' is one of the less familiar metaphors for the Messiah mentioned in today's reading, but it's a good one. The peg helps hold the tent in place. This chapter continues the themes of previous chapters: Messiah's coming, His mission of rescue and restoration, and the blessings resulting from His work. First, we see images of spring showers, focusing on the fact that it's the Lord who sends rain, not idols (v.1–2). God was angry with false prophets and deceiving leaders - the people needed to listen to their true Shepherd, not to be led astray by empty lies.

There are also many pictures of strength and victory here. God planned to make Judah *'like a proud horse in battle'* (v.3). The nation will overthrow their enemies (v.5). When the Lord brings His people home, they will *'pass through the sea of trouble,'* a clear allusion to the Red Sea Crossing and His miraculous rescue of them from bondage in Egypt (v.10–11).

This homecoming will bring back Jews to the Promised Land from every corner of the earth (v.8–12). When God says He will *'signal'* for them (v.8), the Hebrew word literally means "whistle." That is, the Lord is going to whistle for His sheep!

The most powerful images in this chapter refer to the Messiah, Jesus Christ (v.4). He's the cornerstone, the first and most important brick in God's building as we've seen recently in our series from 1 Peter. As we've mentioned, He's the tent peg. He's also the battle bow, or the Divine Warrior we've already seen fight to save His people. And He's the ruler, or King, whose righteous reign will bring peace to the nations.

**Pray:** thanking God for the Messiah.

**Reflect:** do I align my life with the cornerstone?

*And the LORD said to me “Throw it to the potter” – the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter. (v.13)*

Nobody likes tragedies. Wars, famines, epidemics, earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, terrible accidents - all result in tragic loss of human life and in difficult consequences for the survivors. Nobody likes to study tragedies. I suppose that we all have a morbid curiosity that attracts us to read the papers and watch the evening news when great tragedies occur, but it would be unbearably depressing to dwell on these things constantly. And yet the study of tragedies can yield positive results if we learn to avoid the factors that led to the tragedy and to prepare ourselves for the time when we may face similar circumstances.

Zechariah 11 details history's greatest tragedy. It outlines with amazing detail the tragedy of the nation Israel rejecting Jesus as their Messiah and the awful consequences that would follow. By the Spirit, Zechariah and other prophets foretold the rejection and suffering of the Messiah. This first of two oracles now concludes on a negative note: Messiah would come, but incredibly, He would be despised. The people would reject him, go their own way and do their own thing. And we see that all around us as well today. People still reject Jesus and go their own way.

This prophecy was indeed fulfilled when Jesus came and was rejected by the religious leaders. They had him crucified because they could not deal with his teaching. And the thirty pieces of silver was the amount given to Judas to betray Jesus which in remorse Judas then threw back at the leaders in the temple before he hung himself. The religious leaders then bought the potters field as a burial field for foreigners. (Matthew 27:1-10).

Thankfully, we have the benefit of hindsight and the New Testament to help us make sense of why this happened and how this fits into God's plan. With this lesson understood, may we never reject the Saviour.

**Pray:** thanking God for his amazing plan of salvation.

**Reflect:** have I learned from the past and am I truly following Jesus?

*They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child. (v.10)*

Have you ever had this feeling? You're driving along the road, thinking of a thousand different things that need to be done, when you happen to glance into your rear view mirror. Back in the distance, you see a red traffic light. Between you and the traffic light is another light, this one flashing on top of a police car headed your way. That sinking feeling that you've blown it - we've all had it at one time or another. Magnify that feeling about a billion times, and you'll know how Israel will feel when they look on the '*one they have pierced,*' and realise their colossal error in rejecting Him.

Zechariah's second oracle starts here and continues to the end of the book. Through it all, we see one basic scene: Messiah's Second Advent, when He'll return to complete His work of redemption and establish His rule on earth. No one can resist His sovereign power (v.1).

The oracle first shows Messiah's physical deliverance of Israel. The nation is pictured as the cup of God's wrath, which will send the nations reeling (v.2). Just as drunken men are overcome by alcohol, so the wicked will be overcome by divine judgment. Israel will also be an '*immovable rock,*' strong and secure (v.3-5). God's people will be a fire in dry grass, defeating their enemies as quickly as such a fire spreads (v.6).

Israel was condemned, but now the nation is redeemed when the Shepherd returns. '*On that day*' the Lord will save, shield, fight, win, and pour out His Spirit. '*On that day*' God plus the weakest person will be a mighty warrior. By God's grace, Israel will receive spiritual deliverance as well. They'll see the Crucified One and grieve. To '*look on*' Him carries the idea of responding in faith (v.10). With their eyes opened to the truth, they will repent with sincere and godly sorrow.

**Pray:** asking God's forgiveness for the times you have sinned against him even today.

**Reflect:** is Jesus the rock of my salvation?



*On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. (v.1)*

You've been working out in the garden on a hot summer day. Your sweaty body has attracted the dirt like a magnet. You're caked with grime. You need to attend a wedding that afternoon, so you go inside, put on your best clean clothes, and head out the door. Wait a minute! What's missing? A shower! Nobody would just change clothes without first washing off the dirt and sweat. When you're hot and dirty, nothing feels better than a shower.

This physical picture has a spiritual analogy, but there's a difference. The entire human race reeks of sin in the presence of the holy God. But because we all smell the same, we tend not to notice how foul we really smell. Many go their entire lives without sensing their need for cleansing from sin. Others may think that their good works cover the foul odour of their sin, and so they put on their clean clothes without showering. But the Bible has great news: God has graciously provided a fountain for sinners to be cleansed so that they may become His holy people.

Zechariah 13 begins with that great picture of God cleansing his people from sin. Everyone who is dirty and defiled by sin may come to God's fountain for cleansing. And the truth is we are all dirty. The bible teaches us in Romans 3:23 that '*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*' Therefore, we all need cleansed.

As well as needing cleansed we also need to be separated from our sin. If we truly seek to crown Jesus Lord of our lives, then all the sin needs to go. We can no longer go to some of the places we once went. We can no longer read some of the books and magazines we once read. We can no longer view some of the films and web pages we once did. We can no longer do some of the things we once did. Zechariah points out that separation in verse 2-6. God needs to have first place.

**Pray:** thanking God for the cleansing blood of Christ.

**Reflect:** have I turned my back on all my sin?

*The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. (v.9)*

We have seen some amazing comebacks over the years on the sports field. Last year we saw Andy Murray race into a 2 set lead against Djokovic in the US Open final before Novak pegged him back to 2 all. Andy came out and won the final set and his first major. In football we remember back to the Liverpool Champions League final of 2005 when they were 3-0 down at half time to AC Milan and came back to beat them on penalties.

While we can't really say that Christ's victory will be "come-from-behind," it certainly appears that way at the beginning of today's reading. During the battle of Armageddon, the nations will fight against Jerusalem, and at first will be winning. But then the Lord will arrive, fight, conquer, and make the city safe forever (v.2-5, 10-11). He'll stand on the Mount of Olives, which is one reason why some scholars think Christ will return to this specific place. In the passage, though, the focus is on the fact that He'll powerfully make a way of escape for His people. '*On that day,*' nature itself will obey God's sovereignty, reminiscent of the day the sun stopped in the sky for Joshua (v.6-7; Joshua 10:12-14).

The nations who attacked Israel will be struck with a plague, and will give up their wealth. Best of all, the entire world will come to worship the one true God at the Feast of Tabernacles (v.16-19).

Why the Feast of Tabernacles? This feast celebrated the harvest, suggesting the completion of God's plan for history and the gathering of all believers. It also commemorated the journey of the Exodus, reminding us of God's special dealings with Israel. It was the last and greatest festival on the Jewish calendar, a time of joy and thankfulness. In all these ways, the Feast of Tabernacles is a fitting symbol for history's climax.

The day of the Lord's return is yet to come. Let's get ready.

**Pray:** thanking God for his promise of Christ's return.

**Reflect:** am I looking forward for the Lord's return?

*'How have you loved us?' (v.2)*

When a little boy's mother refused to buy him the toy he had seen as they passed the toy shop in the shopping centre, he began to wail. "You don't love me!" he accused. "Of course I do," his mother replied. The child was not convinced. "If you loved me, you would buy me what I want!"

This seems to have been the attitude of God's people in the time of the prophet Malachi. His ministry took place some time after the Babylonian exile, and the mention of sacrifices being offered indicates that the work of rebuilding the temple was also complete. By this time the initial thrill of returning to the land after decades of exile had worn thin. During the time of Nehemiah, Eliashib the High Priest had allowed Judah's enemy Tobiah to store his personal belongings in the temple (Nehemiah 13:7). The people intermarried with their pagan neighbours and grew weary of worship (Nehemiah 13:23-28; Malachi 1:6-8).

The people of Judah had taken the blessings they had received for granted to such an extent that they questioned whether God had ever loved them. When the Lord declared His love through the prophet, the people responded with a kind of adolescent petulance, asking, "How have you loved us?" (v.2). God proved His love in both the nature and the content of His response to this ungracious challenge. With the kind of patience a loving parent might show a stubborn and unreasonable child, the Lord gently outlined the many ways He had proved His love to Israel in the past. In particular, He reminded them that the descendants of Jacob had been blessed in a way that the descendants of Esau had not (v.2-3).

A human parent might have lost patience with a child who behaved as ungratefully as God's people did. Instead of berating Judah, the Lord gently reasons with them, promising to change their attitude while showing them the disgracefulness of their current behaviour. His message is clear. The love God has shown to His people merits their love, which would be demonstrated by their obedience, in return.

**Pray:** thanking God for his amazing grace, mercy and love.

**Reflect:** am I obedient in response to the Lord's love for me?

*For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction – because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty. (v.7)*

I always smile when kids come and say “What a great job you have – you only work one day a week!” Perhaps you’ve heard that said before or seen the humorous poem describing that common perception of pastors. After spending the week visiting with the sick, counselling the troubled, comforting the bereaved, overseeing meetings, and preparing sermons, the pastor is greeted on Sunday by a churchgoer who exclaims, “What a job you have – you only work one day a week!”

Almost every pastor – and hopefully every churchgoer! – recognizes that the role of the pastor takes far more than just a couple of hours on Sunday. In the New Testament, James writes warning pastors and those in church leadership roles to take their responsibility and their lives before God seriously. Here in Malachi 2 we see God’s warning to the priests of Israel after the nation had returned from the Exile. Here God threatens to judge them for their lack of listening to him or honouring His name. And how is this demonstrated? Through the way they minister and live.

First of all, God rebukes the priests for their false teaching (v.8). Such teaching not only puts them in danger, but also causes the people listening to them to stumble. Those who teach God’s people are responsible to proclaim truth, and the stakes for the people of God are tremendous.

Second, note in Malachi how these priests are living. Their false teaching is manifested in a lifestyle that shows favouritism (v.9). God clearly says that this is not His way of dealing with people, and yet the priests have persisted to act in a way that shows partiality. God is concerned with our correct doctrine, but He is equally concerned with our correct conduct. Although aimed at those in leadership this is something all believers should take to heart – may we understand and practice what we learn in Scripture.

**Pray:** for your pastor.

**Reflect:** do I live out what I learn from Scripture?

*“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings.” (v.8)*

It was Monday morning in the bank, and a fifty pound note and a pound coin happened to get into conversation. ‘Had a good weekend?’ asked the pound. ‘Oh, yes,’ the bank note answered. ‘I had a wonderful time. I had a lie-in in the wallet on Saturday morning, went to a designer dress shop in the afternoon, an expensive restaurant on Saturday evening, and then a health club on Sunday. What about you?’ ‘Oh, the usual,’ said the pound coin. ‘Round a load of shops on Saturday, then church on Sunday morning. Don’t you ever go to church?’ ‘You must be joking!’ sniffed the fifty pound note. ‘No one would ever put me in a church collection!’

We laugh a little at that, but deep down I think we all know it is true. People think tithing seems to be such an outdated system and why would you bring a good offering to church. Yet tithing and offerings are integral to living as God’s people in the world. All that we have has been given to us by God so nothing should ever be too much for him. Instead of asking how much we are giving in the offering we should be asking how much am I keeping for myself. The commands in Scripture always speak of bringing the first ten percent as a tithe into the storehouse of the Lord and then giving more as we are able.

Here in Malachi we find the people being charged with robbing God in their tithes and offerings. They have already been charged with not bringing their best sacrifices in chapter 1. It seems they have no regard for God in their giving either. God says he will curse them. And yet God also suggests they test him by bringing the full amount of their tithe to his storehouse and watch how he blesses them in return for their faithfulness. Someone once said that we cannot out-give God.

How is your giving to God? Do you tithe regularly?

**Pray:** thanking God for all His good gifts to you.

**Reflect:** when did I last check my tithe to the Lord and re-adjust it in line with my income?

**Saturday 13 July 2013**

**Malachi 4:1-6**

*But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. (v.2)*

I wonder when you last saw the sun rise. Sunrises are remarkable sights and no two are ever the same. I remember driving to college one morning and leaving the house in darkness. As it began to brighten the fog came down and I could see very little. But gradually the fog began to burn away and the sun began to shine through. I then saw one of the best sunrises I have ever seen. As I stopped the car in a lay-by for a moment, I beheld the beauty of the scenery around. The trees dripped with moisture, and a thousand dewdrops on the grass and shrubbery sparkled like so many diamonds as they reflected the sun.

I sat transfixed for some moments and then as I sat thinking I realised there had once been a sunrise in my own experience. Once I too was in a fog, lost and confused until the Sun of Righteousness arose in my heart. First a glimmer of hope, and then one day in a moment the light burst through and I saw the One who scattered all my doubts and fears.

Malachi speaks of that here in the final chapter of the Old Testament. He is warning of the coming day of the Lord. Now that day may have tarried somewhat but we are certain it will come. God has told us it will. On that day the arrogant and evil will be consumed. God will judge justly. But the righteous do not need to fear. Those who have put their trust and faith in Jesus will be saved.

And the picture here is of Jesus, the Son of Righteousness, coming to comfort God's people. It says in verse 2 that *'the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.'* The sun of righteousness will right every wrong and give you eternal peace and joy. He shines light into our dark world of sin, he heals us from the disease and brokenness of sin, and he brings comfort in his wings. What a day to look forward to. Next time you see a sunrise, remember the sun of righteousness will rise one day in our world.

**Pray:** thanking God the gift of life in Jesus.

**Reflect:** am I watching for the Lord's return?

**Sunday 14 July 2013**

**Matthew 1:1-25**

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham. (v.1)*

Tracing family histories is a growing hobby. Today people spend money on special computer software, research books, and even trips to the place of their ancestors. There's often a strong tug to feel connected to where we come from. Some years ago we bought my dad family tree software so he could begin the process. He eventually got back 200 years or so. I'm intrigued because when I was in St Andrews recently I stopped at the plague of George Wishart who was an early reformed and was burned at the stake for his faith. Was he an ancestor of mine?

As we get into the New Testament we discover a family tree right at the start. This is the genealogy of Jesus. Our reading today of a genealogy may seem unexciting, but it has much to tell us. In this passage, Matthew traced Jesus back to Abraham and emphasised His ancestry through Joseph. (In contrast, Luke traces Jesus' physical ancestors through His mother, Mary. See Luke 3:23–37.) Matthew had in mind a mainly Jewish audience, and he wanted to assert Jesus' credentials as the Messiah. Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term, Messiah. To introduce Jesus as '*the son of David, the son of Abraham*' called to mind the whole tradition of messianic prophecy (v.1). God had told Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed, and had promised David that his throne would endure forever (Genesis 12:3; 2 Samuel 7:16).

In these verses then we see all of that come true. We are tied in to God's rescue plan that began way back in Genesis and is coming to fulfilment in one sense here in the gospels and will one day come to fruition fully when we go to be with our Lord in glory forever.

The bible is not some random collection of books and stories. It is one big book with one big story – the story of God saving the world.

**Pray:** thanking God for his rescue plan.

**Reflect:** on some of the names in the genealogy and their individual stories.

**Monday 15 July 2013**

**Matthew 2:1-23**

*On coming to the house they saw the saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. (v.11)*

Franz Gruber was distraught. It was Christmas Eve, 1818, when Gruber, the church organist in the little town of Oberndorf, Bavaria, discovered that his organ was broken. The town was snowbound, and no one in Oberndorf could fix the organ.

So Gruber asked church vicar Joseph Mohr to compose a song the congregation could sing without the organ. Early on Christmas Day, Mohr handed his new poem to Gruber, who quickly composed a melody. The people sang the song, and loved it. What Mohr gave Gruber, and what the two of them gave the world, has become a treasured Christmas gift around the world: Silent Night.

The Magi travelled a rigorous journey to give treasured gifts to Jesus when they arrived in Bethlehem sometime after His birth. These were lavish gifts, given as an act of worship by these prominent visitors from the east. The Magi's gifts gave testimony to their understanding of Christ's uniqueness. Gold was a gift fit for a king. Frankincense was a perfume used in worship in the temple, and it was a gift fit for God himself. Myrrh was a sweet-smelling ointment used when people were terribly ill, and it was a gift fit for someone whose death would be remembered for ever.

The indifference of the nation is stunning in contrast. The chief priests and teachers of the law knew exactly what the Magi were talking about, but apparently made no effort to search out the truth for themselves. Even the wicked King Herod was more curious than those who should have been at the head of the line in Bethlehem, worshiping their Messiah. But the Magi got to share in the birth of the Saviour. They were the first to offer Jesus gifts that represented the best they had - the same gift He wants from us today! He longs for us to bow down and worship him with all of our heart.

**Pray:** thanking God for the miracle of Christmas and the gift of Jesus.

**Reflect:** what do I bring to Jesus?



*Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.'* (v.15)

Dewey Vander Velde refused to be baptised. He steadfastly resisted, even when his wife and daughters were baptised one Sunday afternoon. Years later, his pastor preached on the baptism of Jesus. He pointed out that John the Baptist initially refused to baptise Jesus, but Jesus said, *'it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.'* (v.15). The pastor then added this comment: "If Jesus obeyed the will of the Father, so should we." After the message, Dewey asked to be baptised. He said that he should have obeyed the Lord's command much sooner, and he regretted having been so stubborn.

The issue, of course, was more than just baptism; it was obedience. The same may be true for us. We nod our heads Sunday by Sunday as we hear the word preached but do nothing with it. We read our bibles day by day and see God teaching us how to follow him but then we carry on doing as we have always done. We may be stubbornly disobeying the Lord in a certain area of our life - lying, cheating, stealing at work, not giving to the Lord - the list is endless. The cause of it all is the same - disobedience to God.

Here's what we must face: Jesus obeyed the Father in everything. It began with baptism and even when John the Baptist tried to put him off, Jesus insisted it must be done *'to fulfil all righteousness.'* As he was baptised the Father looked down and said *'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'* Jesus' submission took Him from the height of popularity to abandonment. It took Him from public adoration to solitary suffering. It took Him to Pilate's judgment hall, the terrible road to Calvary, the cross, and the tomb.

The call of God is for us to be obedient to him in everything. When we are we too will hear those words *'This is my son/my daughter, whom I love, with them I am well pleased.'*

**Pray:** asking God for the strength and courage to obey him always.

**Reflect:** am I obedient to God's word? Do I need to be baptised?

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the LORD your God, and serve him only.'"* (v.10)

A little boy always went next door to play even though his mum had warned him against doing so. This worried the mum so badly that she asked him why he was so disobedient. He replied that Satan tempted him so bad and he did not know what to do. The mum then advised him to say 'get thee behind me Satan' whenever he was tempted. She then built a fence around the house. This worked for a week, then one sunny afternoon the mum looked over the window and there was her son playing on the neighbour's lawn having cut a hole in the fence. "John", she yelled, "Come here!" She then said "did I not tell you to say 'get thee behind me Satan' whenever he tempted you?" "Yes", the boy replied, "I said, 'get thee behind me Satan', then he went behind me and pushed me through the hole in the fence."

We laugh and smile but for some of us we know the truth of that. We are tempted so often in life and so often no matter how hard we try we somehow give in.

Jesus knew what it was to face all that we face in life. He faced temptation as well. As we read the first part of today's reading we see Jesus being led into the desert and being tempted by the devil. As we read this encounter we see Jesus stand up to Satan and not give in to temptation. He resisted. How did he manage? Well he used Scripture to help him. Jesus knew Scripture inside out. And so whenever Satan tempted him, Jesus replied with words of Scripture he had tucked away for just such a day.

How can we resist temptation? By praying for strength and courage to overcome; but also by reading and memorising the Bible so that when temptation does come we can bring to mind those verses we have learned. We are tempted with the similar temptations by the same tempter. We have the same tools to overcome. Keep strong.

**Pray:** asking God for the strength to resist temptation.

**Reflect:** do I memorise God's Word and use it to overcome temptation?

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (v.8)*

An otherwise unknown Confederate soldier wrote this prayer during the American civil war:

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve,  
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.  
I asked for health, that I might do greater things,  
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.  
I asked for riches, that I might be happy,  
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.  
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,  
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.  
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,  
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.  
I got nothing that I asked for,  
But everything I hoped for.  
Almost, despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.  
I among all men am most richly blessed.

What a wonderful prayer. And if we are honest the first part of each of those requests is how many in our society, perhaps even some in the church, come to God. We want more. We crave more. We seem to think that if we have strength, health, riches, power and all things then we will be happy and we will be able to enjoy life. Yet that rarely happens.

Jesus speaks of a different way here in Matthew 5 at the start of his Sermon on the Mount. He speaks of right attitudes that we as believers should have. He gives a list of qualities that are commended and then shares the blessings that are promised for those who seek after these qualities.

**Pray:** asking God to help us have the right attitudes in life and to live life his way.

**Reflect:** do I seek after these qualities listed in Matthew 5?

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (v.9)*

A shepherd boy tending his sheep one Sunday morning heard church bells ringing in the village. Thinking he would like to talk with God, the boy began repeating the alphabet. A man passing by overheard the shepherd reciting his “prayer” and asked what he was doing. “Well, sir,” explained the boy, “I don't know any prayers. But I figured if I said all the letters I knew, God could put them together and know what I need and want.”

What an unusual approach! And what faith was shown by that untutored shepherd in his heavenly Father. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He wanted them to come to God with the same attitude of love and trust. We call His model prayer “The Lord’s Prayer,” but perhaps we should call it “The Disciples’ Prayer.”

This classic prayer covers a lot of ground in only a few words. Two important things to notice about the prayer are that it is God-centred and God-dependent. And that is where the love and trust come in. Our love for God encourages us to talk to him in prayer. The prayer begins with a focus on who God is and where he is. He is our father and he is in heaven. There is a concern for God’s name to be “hallowed,” that is, to be treated with respect. And there is also the request that his kingdom would come and his will be done. When we pray our focus should be on God – praising him for who he is and for all he has done, and asking that he rule and reign supreme in our lives and in our world.

The prayer then shows our trust in God and dependency on him for our daily provision. The prayer covers food, forgiveness and our frailty. There is nothing wrong in asking for and then thanking God for the provision of our daily needs. Importantly asking for forgiveness of our own sin day by day is crucial too. And in our frailty we are tempted daily and give in to sin, so the prayer is for deliverance from evil and the strength to avoid and resist temptation.

**Pray:** the Lord’s prayer today.

**Reflect:** are my prayers usually God-centred and God-dependent?

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (v.7)*

Margaret Koster took prayer seriously. When she was younger, Margaret would pray each day for missionaries she knew about. She also kept a journal of her prayers - complete with answers.

One time when one of “her” missionaries was home from his overseas ministry, Margaret approached him, showed him her journal, and said, “I have recorded every prayer request you made as a missionary. And I have put down every answer that I know of. But I also have some prayers for which I don’t know the answers. You need to sit down with me and tell me how God answered those prayers so I can write them down.”

Now that’s taking prayer seriously! We learn from Margaret not only the importance of prayer but also the reality of God’s answers. This lady knew what it was to take everything to the Lord in prayer and to ask. The encouragement to us today is to have that same serious prayer life.

We are called to ask, seek and knock. And the tense of those words is actually a tense that implies keep on asking, seeking and knocking until you get an answer. We are very good at praying for specific need and then forgetting all about it. It’s almost as if we think praying it once is enough. And it is sometimes, but other times God expects us to ask and ask again. Why? Well, perhaps it is not time for the answer just then.

And note the encouragement that comes in verses 9-11 – just as earthly fathers give to their children, so God, who is better than our sinful earthly fathers, will provide for his children when we ask. He wouldn’t give us what we want but he will give us what we need. He meets our needs not our greeds.

**Pray:** thanking God for answered prayer.

**Reflect:** do I keep a record of answered prayer? Does this lead me to thank and praise God?

*He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves and it was completely calm. (v.26)*

The story is told of a small town in which there were no off-licenses. Eventually, however, a nightclub was built right on Main Street. Members of one of the churches in the area were so disturbed that they conducted several all night prayer meetings, and asked the Lord to burn down that den of iniquity. Lightning struck the club a short time later, and it was completely destroyed by fire. The owner, knowing how the church people had prayed, sued them for the damages. His lawyer claimed that their prayers had caused the loss. The congregation, on the other hand, hired a lawyer and fought the charges. After much deliberation the judge declared, "It's the opinion of the court that wherever the guilt may lie, the club owner is the one who really believes in prayer while the church members do not!"

Here in Matthew 8:23-27 we come to a trip Jesus took with his disciples on the boat. Jesus had fallen asleep and a storm rose up. Matthew tells us it was a furious storm. And the disciples were afraid. They went and woke Jesus up asking him to save them. Jesus asked why they had so little faith, and then he calmed the storm.

The problem wasn't that the disciples asked Jesus for help. The problem was in their attitude when they asked him. They were afraid and in their amazement at what Jesus did we see something of their lack of faith.

I wonder how many times we show the same lack of faith. A problem faces us, perhaps a storm in our life, and we pray but we don't actually pray believing Jesus can help. It's almost lip service. Then we try and resolve the situation ourselves. Jesus is Lord of the universe. We can ask anything of him and he has the power to deal with it. He calmed the wind and waves instantly. Is Jesus big enough to handle your storm? Of course he is!

**Pray:** asking the Lord to increase your faith.

**Reflect:** do I trust that Jesus can deal with every storm in my life?

*It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. (v.12)*

Not everyone understands a passion for souls. The early ministry of the great evangelist Dwight L. Moody is a good example. It is generally agreed that Moody could have used his boundless energy and people skills to make a fortune in the business world of his day. That was once his goal, before the Lord completely gained control of his heart.

Moody gave up a promising career in sales to work with the poorest of the poor, the inhabitants of Chicago's tenements and the urchins who ran the city's streets and alleys. At one point, Moody's Sunday school class contained some of the toughest street kids in Chicago. Moody's critics scoffed at his motives and called him "Crazy Moody," but he pressed on.

Jesus had his critics as well and we see them pop up at various points during Jesus' earthly ministry. Here in Matthew 9 we see them come out of the woodwork at a dinner at Matthew's house. Matthew was a tax collector and as such was despised by many in his day. Jesus passed his booth one day and called Matthew to follow him. And Matthew did just that. So excited by all of this was Matthew, that he held a dinner in his home which he invited all his old friends to. Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners we read. And the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, could not understand this.

The Pharisees valued sacrifice and strict observance to the Law. They could not understand mercy and helping the needy. Jesus went to where people most needed help. He came to call sinners to repentance.

Sometimes we need to leave behind our comfort and go and help those in need. We are called to go and share the Saviour with sinners. That may mean going places we would not normally go and speaking with people we would not normally speak with.

**Pray:** asking God for courage to leave our comfort zones to help those in need.

**Reflect:** how can I meet the needs of those around me?

*These are the names of the twelve apostles... (v.2)*

Here's a mock up for Jesus choosing disciples first produced in a Reader's Digest magazine in 1990. "It is our opinion that the twelve men you have picked to manage your new organisation lack the background, educational and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has no qualities of leadership. The two brothers James and John place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus have racial leanings and both registered high on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, has a keen business mind and contacts in high places. He is highly motivated and ambitious. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. We wish you every success in your new venture."

The twelve Jesus chose to be his close friends and disciples were not the kind of people you would regularly choose for such a task as taking the gospel to the world. Yet I take great encouragement that he chose ordinary people who all had character flaws. I too have character flaws, yet he chooses me to be his disciple as well. More than that he chooses me and you to keep sharing the good news with the world.

Jesus not only chose disciples, he then sent them out to spread the gospel and help the needy. His call is still the same today. What are you doing about it?

**Pray:** thanking God for saving you and calling you to be his disciple.

**Reflect:** am I sharing the gospel and helping the needy?



*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. (v.29)*

One day a father was watching his young son try to move a rock they found in a field. The little guy strained with every muscle he had, but he couldn't budge the rock. At one point his father said to him, "Son, you're not using all the strength you have to move that rock."

"Yes, I am, daddy," the boy said. Dad watched for a few more minutes as his son wrestled with the rock. Then he said, "Son, you're not using all the strength you have to move that rock." Once again the frustrated boy protested that he was using all his strength. "No, son, you aren't, because you haven't asked me to help you."

That's what we often do in our relationship with God. We know we can pray to him and ask him anything we want, but for some reason in our own self-sufficient way we try and struggle on. We think we can do it all on our own. We even do that with our sin. We think we can deal with it on our own. We try so many things to make us balance out the scales but the truth is we will never be able to do that. We need to stop struggling. Jesus' invitation is for those struggling with the burdens of sin to exchange those tiring loads for His yoke of salvation and discipleship.

Of course there is more – we are called to serve Jesus and carry on his work within the world. Again we try so often to do that in our own strength, instead of relying on his. We can go to him and he will give us rest. We are partners with him in reaching out to a lost world. It's clear that following Jesus does involve a partnership in which we are yoked together with Him, like the oxen of biblical times. To stay with the analogy, it doesn't make sense for us to try and pull the load by ourselves when we are joined with the Son of God who offers to take our load. It's foolish, in fact, because we'll wind up overburdened and worn out. Let's ask Jesus to walk with us and help us. Let's go to him and he will give us rest.

**Pray:** asking God to help us as we serve him in the world.

**Reflect:** am I trying to do it all by myself?

*For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. (v.8)*

Pastor Gardner Taylor was preaching one Sunday evening when the lights in his small, Depression-era church in Louisiana suddenly flickered and went out. Taylor stood quietly in the darkness, not knowing what to do or say. Finally, an older deacon in the congregation called out, "Preach on, preacher, we can still see Jesus in the dark." Gardner Taylor has been doing just that ever since: proclaiming the light of the Word of God amid the darkness.

Today's text reminds us that things haven't changed since the days of Jesus Himself. Those who want to see Him - that is, believe in and follow Him - will not be blinded by the darkness. But those who refuse to trust in God's chosen Servant will continue to stumble in the dark.

This latter condition describes the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Because Jesus exposed their hypocrisy and lack of concern for God's people (v.1-13), these men went into a murderous rage, plotting the Lord's death.

But Jesus continued healing those in need, warning them not to reveal who He was. To explain Jesus' compassion, and His public silence, Matthew quoted Isaiah 42:1-4, the opening verses of Isaiah's first Servant Song. There is no question here that Jesus is the direct fulfilment of God's prophetic words.

Notice the contrast between the Pharisees' attitude toward Jesus and that of God the Father's. Though these earthly leaders rejected Jesus, He was the chosen Servant of God. Ultimately, God's vote was the only one that counted.

There are still people today wandering in darkness. Our call is to shine the light of the gospel into their situation. Some will respond but others will prefer their darkness. Pray for those you share with that they might come into the light and know the truth.

**Pray:** for those with whom you will share the gospel this week.

**Reflect:** do I share the gospel with others?

*But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. (v.23)*

If you visit the campus of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and enter the main lobby in Crowell Hall, behind the receptionist you'll see a beautiful stained glass window. The window depicts a sower going out to sow, reflecting both Jesus' parable and the core purpose of a Moody education. We are all called to be sowers of the seed – and the seed is the Word of God. You will be fed up of me sharing that my grandfather always encouraged me to simply sow the seed but there is a remarkable truth in that. Our purpose is to glorify God and make Him known among the nations. We do that as we sow the seed of the gospel in people's hearts and lives.

Of course as we sow the seed we recognise that there are various responses to the gospel depending on where the seed falls. This parable speaks of the various responses to the gospel. As the word is sown it falls into various types of soil and these are represented by our hearts and minds. The hard heart or closed mind which simply refuses to hear the word and act on it. The shallow heart and confused mind hears the word and takes it on board but only for a short time – they soon get caught by the trappings of the world. The thorny heart or cluttered mind hears the word and responds but before long the cares of the world grow up around it and drag it away again. And lastly we have the open heart and cultivated mind that is ready and able to hear the word, and the word grows from within and produces fruit.

The first thing to ensure is that we are those with open hearts and cultivated minds, that we might keep receiving the word of God and that we would grow in Christ and be fruitful. Then we want to be praying for those in whom we sow the seed of the gospel – praying that their minds would be ready to receive and understand the gospel. Regardless of the initial response, our call is to keep sowing the seed.

**Pray:** giving thanks for those who sowed the seed of the gospel in your life.

**Reflect:** am I happy to keep sowing the seed?

*Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. (v.27)*

If you have ever tried to tread water, you know how much effort it takes to stay in one place. Now scientists have confirmed this fact by testing not swimmers, but birds. Special gauges implanted in the wings of black-billed magpies revealed that it took twice as much energy for the birds to hover than for them to fly normally. It's hard for people to hover spiritually, too. We want to keep flying, but sometimes God wants us to pause long enough to learn a lesson. High-flying disciples aren't much good if they never stop to look and listen to the Lord.

Jesus wanted the Twelve to 'hover' occasionally, but it wasn't easy to get their full attention. So one memorable night, He put them in a situation where they had no choice but to stop, look, and finally listen to what He was teaching them. In fact, the disciples were not only hovering in that boat on the stormy Sea of Galilee, they were losing ground as the waves battered them.

This famous incident followed immediately after the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus went to a mountain to pray while the Twelve started rowing for the far shore of Galilee. The storm hit, and it hit hard. Matthew doesn't say the disciples were afraid because of the storm. They must have been edgy, though, because the sight of Jesus walking toward them filled them with terror. It would make a nice, neat story if it ended with Jesus' words of comfort. But then we would miss the great lesson Peter learned. When he took his eyes off Jesus, Peter's faith blew away with the wind and his fear returned. But we should credit the apostle for knowing where to get help. '*Lord, save me!*' (v.30) has to be the shortest prayer in the Bible - and the most effective!

Jesus' rebuke of Peter, and the miracle of the sea becoming calm, reinforced the lesson the Twelve should have learned from the miraculous feeding just hours earlier. Jesus is firmly in control of every circumstance. Therefore, His disciples have no reason to doubt or to be afraid.

**Pray:** asking God to help you trust more in him.

**Reflect:** do I trust fully in Jesus?

*Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted. (v.28)*

D L Moody the famous American evangelist was in England. He was a young man and his great work hadn't yet begun. He was invited to preach in a large London church. In the morning service he sensed nothing memorable despite large numbers. In the evening the whole atmosphere was different. The church was alive in the Spirit! Scores of people answered his call for commitment. The response was so great that he had to minister for several nights. This, humanly speaking, led to the salvation of thousands. Intrigued he tried to find out what was the difference between the morning and the evening congregations.

Eventually he tracked down a bedridden woman whose sister came to the church. Every Sunday she would ask her sister about the services. Inevitably she would be given a monotonous and uneventful account. One Sunday the sister mentioned to the bedridden woman that a Mr Moody from America had preached that morning. 'Ah!' said the bedridden woman, 'I will have no lunch. I must pray.' She had once read an article by Mr Moody and had prayed for several years for God to bring him to England to her church. Now her prayer had been answered and things were going to happen. The results of that prayer were far reaching for her church, and even more so for the worldwide church – a new spiritual giant was born.

Here in Matthew 15:21-28 we come across a woman who persistently asked Jesus for help. She came with her petition that Jesus would have mercy on her daughter and heal her. She persistently kept at Jesus despite the fact she was a Gentile. And in the end Jesus healed her daughter on account of her faith.

Often we pray for something and then give up on it as unanswered prayer. The call of Jesus is to be persistent in our prayer. Don't just pray once – use another of those wristband acronyms – PUSH pray until something happens.

**Pray:** asking God to hear a prayer request you have prayed many times.

**Reflect:** am I persistent in prayer?

*Who do you say I am? (v.15)*

Quiz shows have always been popular on television. One of the most successful programs of recent years is “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?” Contestants on this show are asked a series of questions, each one worth more money than the previous one. If the contestant successfully answers all the questions, he or she wins one million pounds. Before each question is answered, the host of the show, Chris Tarrant, asks the contestant, “Is that your final answer?” The implication being, there is no turning back. Once that answer is given, the fate of the contestant is sealed.

And there is a sense to which the question Jesus asks his disciples here in Matthew 16 is like that. There will be no turning back for them. Jesus begins by asking them who the people say he is. Jesus isn’t asking this because he does not know; he is asking the question to get his disciples thinking of their own answer. He wants to see what they have learned and how committed they are.

They come up with a host of answers that they have heard. In our world today many people would come up with a variety of answers as well: everything from a prophet to a good man. Then Jesus asks the searching question – forget about them and their answers, what about you and your answer – ‘*who do you say I am?*’

And in that moment Peter does is usual and jumps right in. This time he has the answer. He has come to know who Jesus is. He has spent time with him. He has heard his teaching and witnessed the miracles. He knows who Jesus is. ‘*You are the Christ, the son of the living God.*’

Jesus seeks to ask us all the same question: ‘*who do you say I am?*’ Be careful with your answer for it has a lot riding on it. Not one million pounds, but eternity.

**Pray:** thanking God for the gift of His Son, our Saviour.

**Reflect:** do I seek to help others know who Jesus is?

*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.*  
(v.5)

The legendary missionary-explorer David Livingstone was the first European to see Africa's great Victoria Falls, the world's largest waterfalls. Christian History magazine quoted from Livingstone's description of the awesome sight: "Five columns of smoke [i.e. mist] arose....The whole scene was extremely beautiful...scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight."

It's hard for us to imagine the scene Livingstone witnessed when he first came upon the mighty waterfalls. He had to borrow heavenly imagery in his attempt to convey the effect the experience had made on him.

In much the same way, the Gospel writers drew on the loftiest language they could think of to describe a scene so dazzling that no earthly experience can compare. Jesus was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James, and John. Something of His eternal nature was revealed as these three disciples saw a preview of Jesus' future glory.

Mark said that Jesus' clothes became dazzling, '*whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them*' (Mark 9:3). Add to this the appearance of Moses and Elijah and the voice of God speaking from heaven, and the disciples were so overwhelmed they fell on their faces. They received an important message that day – this man they were with was indeed God's Son and they were to listen to him. God the Father spoke of his delight in His Son doing all he had called him to do.

For the disciples, the Transfiguration was an unforgettable testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ and the truth of His claims. God knew these men would need this heavenly witness in future days. When Jesus was gone, they would be called to bear witness for Him in the face of suffering and persecution. We are privileged to have the truth written down for us.

**Pray:** thanking God for His Word and the truth contained within it.

**Reflect:** do I trust in the truth revealed in Scripture?

*And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.  
(v.5)*

A number of years ago, a Scottish pastor stood before his congregation and resigned, saying, “In the past two years, I have seen only one conversion in this congregation: wee Bobby Moffatt. With such little fruit, I can no longer serve in this ministry.” And he walked away from the pulpit a broken man. Little did he know that wee Bobby Moffatt grew up to be Robert Moffatt, the missionary who opened the entire continent of Africa to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I wonder if we don’t have our eyes on the wrong things sometimes. We look for great numbers of people to fill our church. We look for distinguished people to join our church. Jesus is looking for one child.

Children may be overlooked when the conversation turns to the “heavy” issues of theology and spiritual matters. But in Matthew 18 Jesus punctuated a question from an adult, ‘*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*’, by placing a child in the middle of the circle of disciples. The Saviour then insisted that child-like humility and faith are prerequisites for salvation.

Although this scene can easily be sentimentalised, this was not just a touch of emotion on Jesus’ part. He identified Himself with the children in terms of how they were treated. Clearly, His kingdom is wide open to believing children. Jesus also issued a dire warning to anyone who causes a child to fall away spiritually.

And so with a children’s holiday club on this week, let’s be praying for the children of the church and the community. Who knows that one of them might not be the next great missionary or evangelist...

**Pray:** for the children who will attend the holiday club this week.

**Reflect:** do I welcome children in Jesus’ name?