

Clifton Bible Project – read the Bible in a year

Readings and reflections for 15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> January 2012

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Gen 16</b>	<b>Matt 15</b>	<b>Neh 4</b>
<b>Monday</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Gen 17</b>	<b>Matt 16</b>	<b>Neh 5</b>
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Gen 18</b>	<b>Matt 17</b>	<b>Neh 6</b>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Gen 19</b>	<b>Matt 18</b>	<b>Neh 7</b>
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Gen 20</b>	<b>Matt 19</b>	<b>Neh 8</b>
<b>Friday</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Gen 21</b>	<b>Matt 20</b>	<b>Neh 9</b>
<b>Saturday</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>Gen 22</b>	<b>Matt 21</b>	<b>Neh 10</b>

January 15<sup>th</sup>  
Mathew 15

Genesis 16 Nehemiah 5

“Live at peace with everyone” is a frequent command in the bible (Rom 12v18, 1 Tim 2v2, Heb 12v14). We might translate this in our own minds as ‘do your best not to give offence’. Does that sound reasonable? In today’s passage we see Jesus being really offensive to the Canaanite woman – likening her to a dog (v26) and offending the Pharisees so much that the disciples speak up for them (v12)!

What of you and me? How quick are we to take offence? Are there home truths we need to hear? The Pharisees worked very hard at being holy; doing what they believed to be the right things. They took offence when Jesus challenged their traditions and rules about external behaviour. Jesus knew these were powerless to change the human heart. Are we in danger of trying to do things in our own strength; following a faith of ‘rules taught by men’?

The Canaanite woman didn’t take offence at being likened to a dog but used the blunt truth (that she was not an Israelite) to recognise her status before Jesus and nonetheless ask for “crumbs from the table”. In engaging with Jesus she was commended for showing “great faith” (v28).

How good are we at telling or receiving difficult truths? Are we quick to duck the issue and opt out of challenging others or when confronted argue our corner, self justify or just go off in a huff! Perhaps we should be more like Nehemiah, when giving rebuke, he did not act in anger (Neh 5v6) but rather “pondered [the charges] in [his] mind” (v7) before acting. Or the Canaanite woman: looking for the truth in what might offend, engaging with Jesus and responding with humility.

January 16<sup>th</sup>  
Mathew 16

Genesis 17

Nehemiah 6

Last weekend we were at a wonderful wedding in a beautiful country church. We parked the car some distance away and walked along the lane to the service. Just as the bride and groom made their way back down the aisle the heavens opened. Unprepared for the downpour our entire family sought shelter under one rather small Cath Kidston umbrella. The umbrella provided wonderful protection for those of us underneath it – but no benefit at all for those outside of its protection who arrived back at the car in a somewhat bedraggled state!

Genesis 17 reminds us of the protection and blessing that is available to those who choose to place themselves under the protection of the covenant.

The concept of covenant is fundamental to both Old and New Testament, in describing God's relationship with his people. In the ancient world covenant described the terms of a treaty between two neighbouring states. The more powerful King (the 'Suzerain') would offer protection and blessing to the less powerful King (the 'Vassal') who in return would pledge faithfulness, loyalty and exclusive reliance on his protection not only for himself but on behalf of his descendants.

In v1 God appears to Abraham and initiates the covenant. He makes it clear that in return Abraham needs to pledge obedience, 'the obedience that comes from faith' (Romans 1 v5). Circumcision is given as the outward sign of the covenant, not just for Abraham as an individual believer but for his descendants and future generations.

The glorious truth is that we are inheritors of this promise under the New Covenant.

Today let us choose to be obedient and wholehearted in our commitment to him, placing ourselves under the umbrella of His protection provision and blessing.

Gen 17 v1 *'I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless.'*

January 17<sup>th</sup>  
Mathew 17

Genesis 18    Nehemiah 7

At this very split second in time, God is much closer to you than you think. In two of our passages today the line between earth and heaven becomes wafer thin.

When Abraham meets his three visitors he knows, as it seems everyone who meets angels knows, they speak the very words of God. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" God promises Abraham a son despite the odds. In his very next conversation with the angels, Abraham stops bartering below ten, as perhaps he's beginning to understand the greatness of God's mercy and that God would save just even one righteous man - and as we'll see, He does -Abraham's nephew Lot.

Exactly a week after Peter's 'mustard-seed' confession of "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" he is given the 'mountain-moving' revelation of Jesus transfigured in all His glory fulfilling the Law, Moses, and the prophets, Elijah. (An extraordinary moment not just for the disciples but for Moses too, who finally saw the face he had previously hidden from.) And the disciples inability to heal the epileptic boy shows how much they needed this 'mustard seed' faith, a faith that Jesus still demands from all his disciples - a faith that can move mountains. "Nothing will be impossible for you" And we know this applies even more to us, because God is not just close, but by His Holy Spirit, He lives in us. And what of the curious story of the coin and the fish? Jesus knew they were both exempt from the temple tax but to have argued would have just wasted time. Maybe Jesus was just trying to buy time with his friend Peter. He wants to spend as much time as he can with us too. He wants us to be in the place where the line between earth and heaven is wafer thin.

*(homegroup member)*

January 18<sup>th</sup>  
Mathew 18

Genesis 19    Nehemiah 8

'I just can't forgive her for doing that'. Have you ever said or thought that?

Jesus is saying that those who have understood, who celebrate and remember daily God's forgiveness CAN and will want to forgive others. He wants us to be tools of that kind of love and forgiveness. But it is only when we have really grasped the bigness of what God has done in forgiving us that we are able to begin on that road. Have you been overwhelmed by God's forgiveness?

This is a dramatic story, the baddy is very bad. The person who was harmed by his lack of forgiveness was HIM. Not forgiving harms us not the person we need to forgive.

But what does forgiving someone mean? What is forgiveness? What if the person shows no sign of remorse?

Forgiveness means you stop holding something against someone, you relinquish the right for revenge, for repayment .You trust that person to God's justice. Forgiveness is not easy. It is a daily choice. It is hard work. Perhaps it means you relinquish even thinking about it, stop chewing it over. But it will be your choice, sometimes holding onto thoughts and feelings feels safer than change.

Forgiveness doesn't mean the trust is restored. That can take time and may never happen.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
Matt 6.13

But he who has been forgiven little loves little. Luke 7.47

*(homegroup member)*

January 19<sup>th</sup>  
Mathew 19

Genesis 21    Nehemiah 10

"For me Christianity is very simple", announced my first headmaster in assembly. "Actually, I find it really difficult", whispered a Catholic colleague. Both were correct. In many ways Jesus described following Him as simple. His description of marriage in vv4-6, His encouragement of a childlike faith vv14,15 and His affirmation of Peter in vv28-30 all suggest that a straightforward trust in Him and a simple willingness to obey result in a rich relationship with God leading to fulfilment in this life and incredible rewards in the next. The difficulties come as a result of being fallen creatures in a fallen world. We mess up on relationships. We fear the commitment of a childlike faith, as did Abraham in today's Genesis reading, and, like the rich young ruler, we allow, sometimes unwittingly, something else to be more important than knowing and loving God. The glorious news is the God is in the business of finding ways round our difficulties, and however much we may have messed up, He does not give up on us. So being divorced, far from blocking us out of God's presence, only reveals more of his provision and loving acceptance of us. Our fear of simple faith and obedience, leading to sin, and possibly disastrous consequences, as with Abraham, or even as serious as Israel's collective sin, that led to the exile, can be forgiven through repentance and faith in the Sacrifice that Abraham, the Israelites and even those hearers of Jesus, could hardly imagine, but that we can accept and know. Yet even with all our privileges as Christians, we can fall for the same trap as the rich young ruler and put something else before God. The solution for this does not only come from Him, but requires action from us too, and here's the difficulty we've got ourselves into - are we really prepared to give up whatever we're putting before Him? Of course, it may not be money - but it might be!

*(homegroup member)*

January 20<sup>th</sup>  
Mathew 20

Genesis 21    Nehemiah 10

The parable of the labourers: Each one is hired at a different time of day but all receive a denarius which was a fair day's pay. When they complain the owner protests that he is doing no wrong. It is his privilege to extend generosity to all who have worked for him. This is God's generosity to each of us – the last will be first and the first will be last – all who love Jesus will receive the full blessings of heaven – this is the grace of God to us. There is no extra advantage we can gain by the things we do.

In the second part of the passage Jesus foretells his death and resurrection and following James and John's request for greatness for themselves, Jesus teaches that for believers true greatness and leadership is different from that which is valued in the world. Believers are to lead by being servants and giving themselves away for others, just as Jesus had come to serve and give his life for our sins.

In these passages we see how the kingdom values are the opposite of the world's values. God reaches down to us and becomes our servant even to giving his life and he wants us to be generous, giving servants in response.

*(homegroup member)*

January 21<sup>st</sup>  
Mathew 21

Genesis 22    Nehemiah 11

First, this story shows us the character of the man of faith, Abraham. 'God tested Abraham', who showed his willingness to give up that which he had longed for, prayed for and treasured to the God he trusted. Knowing so much more of God how much more should we trust him?

Secondly, this story shows us the character of God. Dallas Willard, a theologian I deeply respect and rarely understand, recently made a thought-provoking comment in a conversation on suffering; 'God does not need to test you to find about you. He already knows you fully – what you will think, what you will say and what you will do.'

Yet God tests Abraham, why?

1. Abraham is shown his own character that God already knew. It is in times of testing and stress that who we really are is revealed to us and others. God tests you to show you you.
2. God reveals his character to Abraham. We know God more fully than Abraham did, we know that he is unrelentingly good and loving and that he despises human sacrifice (Deuteronomy 12:31) but Abraham was learning about God for the first time as he walked with him. God tests you to show you himself.
3. Through this story God reveals a glorious foreshadow of the lamb to come.

Thousands of years later a city called Jerusalem would be built in the region of Moriah, and another beloved son would approach, also travelling on a donkey (Gen 22:3). Like Isaac he too would climb a mountain with the wood for his sacrifice laid upon his shoulders and Abraham's prophetic words would finally be fulfilled – 'on the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'

How unthinkable to Abraham that Genesis 22:16 would one day be said in praise of God.

*(homegroup member)*