

Clifton Bible project – read the Bible in a year

Readings and reflections for 22nd- 28th January

Week 4

Sunday 22	Genesis 23	Nehemiah12	Matthew 22
Monday 23	Genesis 24	Nehemiah13	Matthew 23
Tuesday 24	Genesis 25	Esther 1	Matthew 24
Wednesday 25	Genesis 26	Esther 2	Matthew 25
Thursday 26	Genesis 27	Esther 3	Matthew 26
Friday 27	Genesis 28	Esther 4	Matthew 27
Saturday 28	Genesis 29	Esther 5	Matthew 28

Reflections for this week are written by members of a homegroup

22/01/12

Genesis 23

Themes throughout- Respect by both parties throughout; Doing the right thing and doing what is fair; Common decency.

In a land due to Abraham and which had been promised to him by the Lord, he acts with complete respect towards the Hittite people. He had every right to assume, in light of God's promise, that he could simply bury his wife where he wanted. Conversely Ephraim reacts to Abraham with great respect and insists that Abraham buries his wife where he wants, to ensure the dignity of Abraham and his offspring is continued.

Notice how both parties try to treat each other fairly and with respect. Abraham says he is 'an alien and stranger among you.' whilst the Hittites call Abram a 'great prince'.

How would you act if you were an 'alien' in a **strange** land? Or how would you treat an 'alien' in **your** land?

Your 'land' could be your church, your home, your work. How would you show your faith in God with the person you have the least in common with?

Prayer

Dear Lord, teach us to have the love, the grace and respect for the 'alien' they deserve as your child. i.e. those who don't know you.

(Member of a Homegroup)

23/01/12

Matthew 23

Jesus is talking to the teachers of the law who are testing him

What does it teach us about God?

It teaches us God can see into our hearts and He truly understands what it is that motivates our actions

What does it teach us about Jesus?

Jesus is clearly moved and angered by the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and He clearly wants us / them to focus on justice, mercy and faithfulness (v23).

Response

The word 'hypocrite' comes from Ancient Greece meaning actor. The word describes actors in Greek plays who wore different masks for different roles. We need to drop the mask and be who God made us to be.

Our number one priority and motivation should come from loving God and seeking to glorify Him. If we lead humble lives God will exalt us; we don't need to waste time worrying about anything else.

(Member of a Homegroup)

24/01/12

Matthew 24

Jesus is teaching prior to Gethsemane

What does it teach us about God?

Omnipotence; He does what He says; The big picture; There is an end.

What does it teach us about Jesus?

He is God

Our response

v12 - v13, v44

The disciples are keen to know exactly when the end of the age will be and what it will look like.

Jesus' response is to give some specifics but also to remind them it is remaining faithful to God each day which is important.

We should draw encouragement there is a bigger picture: God's big picture: He is in control, even in the bad times and promises these bad times **will** come to an end.

These times, we must remember, point to Jesus and as his children, we are called to live each day in joyful expectations of his return.

Because of the increase of wickedness the love of most will grow cold - what does this mean for us? What wickedness do we see around us? As we watch our nation gradually turn away from God, how do we stand firm and remain faithful. In what ways do we remain faithful?

v6 See to it you are not alarmed.....

Let's not be surprised when, what God says, does happen and takes place. Instead be strengthened in the knowledge that, as sure as persecution will come, so will our rescue come in Christ's return.

(Member of a Homegroup)

25/01/12

Esther 2

‘.....and Esther won the favour of anyone who saw her’ v 15

Esther was a Jew in exile in Persia. The Jews were hated by some including a very powerful man, the second ranked man in the empire. He intended and was planning genocide of the Jews.

Nothing but divine intervention could prevent this. Esther was the agent chosen by God. Her inner beauty won the love and respect of all she met.

She has faith in God’s hand in her life, shown by her not fighting a very difficult and worrying experience.

By her presence and who she is wins over the people enabling God’s work to be done through her. They are changed from despised subject people to triumphant people.

We do not read a detailed analysis of Esther’s character. However there are clues or indications. She is told she can have anything and yet asks for nothing. This tells us she has no greed. Esther is chosen above all other women; possibly thousands who are all beautiful. There was something unique about her. We know she was of God’s people, the Jews, and has indications of less sin.

Pray

Lord we pray you would use us as you did with Esther, to be agents of your will.

(Member of a Homegroup)

26/01/12

Genesis 27

Isaac is on his death bed and asks to see his elder son Esau. Esau and his younger brother Jacob have had a turbulent relationship since before birth (25 v 22). Whilst Isaac favours Esau, his wife Rebekah favours Jacob.

The Lord predicts to Rebekah that Jacob will serve Esau (25 v23) the reverse of the usual family order in OT times. This prophecy is partly fulfilled when Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew.(25 v33) As Rebekah favours Jacob, she takes advantage of Isaac's diminished sight and disguising Jacob as Esau, Isaac blesses Jacob before Esau (27v 29) - a blessing that takes full legal weight.

Although this situation may seem unfair to us, as Jacob tricked Esau out of his inheritance, it happened to fulfil the Lord's prophecy. God had chosen Jacob over Esau to continue the line of inheritance and he used Rebekah's favouritism to enable this.

Response

Are there any situations in your life at the moment where you are struggling to understand God's purpose? Pray God will reveal his will in these situations. Alternatively, do you believe that God has a particular mission for you but you are finding it hard to work out how it will be fulfilled? Pray that God will guide you there.

(Member of a Homegroup)

27/01/12

Genesis 28 *'Staircase to Heaven'*

"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." V15

Jacob cheated Esau out of his birthright and deceived Jacob his father and yet God makes this amazing promise to him. He promises to be with Jacob and to 'watch over him'

This promise extends to you, despite your shortcomings. Accept God's love for you. Although He says he will never leave you he does not promise a life without difficulty. It's a staircase not an escalator!

God's promises are eternal; evident in both the Old and New Testament. The ultimate promise was fulfilled when Christ died on the cross for our sins.

Memory verse

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5 v8

(Member of a Homegroup)

28/01/11

Matthew 28

‘And surely I am with you always.....’

The author of this gospel was, at one time, a despised tax collector. As I read this it struck me the journey Matthew must have taken and the challenges he had to face. His final challenge was to ‘make disciples of all nations’. What must he have thought?

What do we think, when we read the final part of this gospel? How do we react to Jesus’ great commission? Daunted? Frightened? Lacking in confidence? Wouldn’t it be better if the vicar did it?

There is no option. We have to obey Jesus, to witness to others in whatever way we can, using whatever skills or talents we have (hospitality, friendship, teaching, organising events etc.)

Bottom line: We need to communicate the Good News to our friends, family, work colleagues and neighbours. We need to be able answer questions such as who is Jesus, why do you go to church or what does being a Christian mean to you?

The final chapter tells of Jesus rising from the dead, the final act of his life on earth. The revelation for his disciples and for us is Christ is Lord and we can do **anything** in His name.

The final words in v 20 ‘And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’ should replace our doubt with belief, fear with confidence and apathy with energy. Why don’t you make this your prayer today?

(Member of a Homegroup)