

Figtree Anglican Church | Vision 2021

MAKE YOUR LIFE COUNT



STUDY ONE

MAKE THE MOST OF WHO YOU ARE

MATTHEW 18:1-14

INTRODUCTION

Here is a great place to start for this final series on Matthew's gospel. What a question to set the scene for all that will follow and to ensure that we make our lives count, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" I feel that this question, with all that has been said so far in the first 18 chapters sums up brilliantly the start of this last leg. Here in the first nine verses we see Jesus celebrate the inherent humility in a child's defencelessness and vulnerability. He uses this as a visual aid that no one can forget, in the contrast between how the world sees greatness and how the kingdom of God sees greatness. This alone should impact the way we live. (See 5:3-10).

Of course, he goes even further by saying that our responses to God will be measured in part by how we respond and treat children. (See also Matthew 20:20-28).

In this day and age we need help for us see the importance of the one, especially children. In fact, even in the midst of crowds (vs10-14) Jesus stresses the importance of the individual, the vulnerable, the lost and the neglected. The key for us seems to be that we are called to reach out to all and not be focused on self, remembering the Father has compassion on all.

QUESTIONS

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who IS the greatest disciple? Why did they even ask the question? What led them to ask? See verses 16:16, 16:18 and 17:1-2. Could these incidents have contributed to the disciples asking the question? 2. What is it about being great, or being recognised? Why is it important to us? 3. A literal translation of verse 3 is "... unless you convert, and become as the little children, not at all can you enter into the kingdom of Heaven". What do you think that means? It certainly sounds like more than just behaving childlike - every now and again. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. What is the difference between having a childlike faith and being immature in your faith? 5. What does it mean (for our everyday living) to humble oneself like a child? Why is it important for Jesus' kingdom? What child-like qualities do you need to recapture? 6. What steps are you taking "to make the most of who you are"? |
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PRAYER

Dear Father, enable us to embrace humility, cut sin out of our lives and help the spiritually lost to be found. Amen.

STUDY TWO

MAKE THE MOST OF GOD'S GRACE

MATTHEW 20:1-16

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: It is quite possible that verse 15 is the pivot on which this parable hangs and on which this series is propelled forward. "Are you envious because I am generous" (verse 15). The sense is this... is your eye evil? In the ancient world, the evil eye coveted that which belonged to another. The labourer could not be thankful because he was blinded by self-centred envy. Not much has changed I hear you say. If a disciple's eye is fixed on what others have, or on earthly possessions as the basis for personal value, significance or earthly security, his or her service will be compromised. If we want to make our lives count, then we have to have a different set of values and perspectives.

If we think we deserve a gold medal or some profound recognition for our service, then we have lost the value of what we have done. Jesus has made it clear in this parable that all of us are saved by God's grace. Therefore, all who respond to the offer of grace are equal as disciples. We cannot think that we should measure our worth by what we have done or the sacrifices we have made. Our calling is one of grace and a grateful heart will serve with no thought of reward or comparison with others.

An unthankful heart will question God's wisdom and fairness and become envious.

QUESTIONS

1. Skim over chapter 19. How does verse 30 serve as a summary of the chapter (see particularly verses 13-15)? How does it serve as an introduction to Chapter 20 (see verse 20:16)?
2. What does the parable of the workers in the vineyard teach us about God's grace?
3. In our society it is hard not to be effected by "the evil eye". As a Christian person, how do you handle coveting?
4. What do you think about that statement above, "an unthankful heart will question God's wisdom

and fairness and become envious"? Is an unthankful heart the only source of envy?

5. How conscious are you (as a disciple of Jesus) of having a different set of values from those shown in the passage?
6. What sort of difference does the grace of God make in your life?

PRAYER

Loving Father, may we who trust and follow Jesus be always grateful for your generous grace and always delight in others receiving it. Amen.

STUDY THREE

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR CHOICES

MATTHEW 21:28-46

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 21 is known as the commencement of the passion week of Jesus, which culminates in His death and resurrection, captured so powerfully by Matthew in chapters 26 to 27. Here in these two parables, we are once again confronted by choice in the Kingdom of God. If we desire to make our lives count, then we are always going to be confronted by choice. In the first parable, the son initially refuses to comply with the father's directive, but then obeyed, like those in Israel who were disobedient to the law, like tax collectors and prostitutes. They repented, unlike the religious leaders, who verbally consented but did nothing.

The point is that you can be externally obedient to the law but ignore the call to repent. This issue is picked up in the second parable (The Parable of the Tenants), where Jesus knew the hearts of the religious leaders and foretold their line of attack, by laying out before them the modus operandi they would employ in the days to come.

Changes are occurring as choices are being made. For the religious leaders, their role in caring for God's vineyard was being taken away. Not only that but the establishment of God's kingdom is being handed over to all believers. **The church is the outworking of God's kingdom.**

QUESTIONS

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect on these two parables. How are they a picture of what is happening in our world? What have they to do with us making our lives count? 2. Why does each son behave as they do? How do you think the religious leaders responded to this parable? 3. Which of these son's stories reminds you of your own? Why? Was it hard for you to repent and turn back to God? 4. Who do you think this parable was directed to? Why don't they arrest Jesus? Why don't they repent and follow him? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Is what stopped them from repenting, the same thing that stops people that we know? How might we address that? 6. Jesus is described as "the stone... which became the head of the corner" (verse 42), yet He appears to many to be more like a millstone (someone who weighs them down). How might we find and maintain joy in our Christian lives (and make our lives count)? Where do our "choices" come into this? |
| | <h3>PRAYER</h3> |
| | <p>Gracious Father, each day, empowered by your Spirit, may we be quick to serve you and slow to complain. Amen.</p> |

STUDY FOUR

MAKE THE MOST OF THE INVITATION

MATTHEW 22:1-14

INTRODUCTION

Even in His last week Jesus maintained the focus on the kingdom of heaven. *“Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.”* (verses 22:1-3). This is simply a wonderful passage and parable. It highlights three important points. Firstly, God’s judgment on those who reject Jesus’ invitation to repent and enter the kingdom of heaven. Secondly, a description of those who would be invited to replace them and finally the requirement for kingdom participation. If we are truly serious about making our lives count, then we need to take to heart these

words of Jesus. I hope you are sitting down at this moment.

We need to understand that the almost frightening point of the parable (and the previous ones) is that those most severely condemned were ‘insiders’. The religious leaders did receive Jesus’ invitation along with the rest of the people of Israel, but they were blinded from seeing the truth. We need to be reminded that many who identify themselves as Christians (verses 11-14) don’t live as true members of the kingdom. Once again, we need to make sure that our lives count for the kingdom. God will pursue ‘outsiders’ to come in. Those who are ‘in’ could be shocked to find they are ‘out’.

QUESTIONS	PRAYER
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you summarise the warning embedded in this parable? 2. As an ‘insider’ how seriously do you take the warning to ‘insiders’? 3. What is the problem with the guest in verses 11-13? What does it mean to be without ‘wedding clothes’? Why is he banished? 4. This appears to be a very significant parable (note the Pharisees response to it in verse 15). Why is this? 5. How are you making the most of your invitation to be a part of the Kingdom of God? 	<p>Almighty God and Father, thank you for calling us into your kingdom and allowing us to participate in the eternal heavenly banquet in the presence of your Son. We did not deserve the invitation, but we rejoice that you graciously called us in anyway.</p> <p>As we await your return and our entry into the joys of eternity with you, we ask that in the power of your Spirit, we would always demonstrate Christlike virtues. It is to you, that we will ultimately give an account of our lives, so may our every word and work be in alignment with your person and purpose.</p> <p>We ask this in the name of your Son and our Saviour, the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.</p>

STUDY FIVE

MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY

MATTHEW 23:1-39

INTRODUCTION

There is a lot here, but I have always felt that it is such a significant part of Matthew's gospel that we should reflect on it in its entirety. The questions today are hard hitting because what Jesus is saying to the Scribes and Pharisees is hard hitting. Could I ask you to think about each question - don't answer too quickly. Please don't just think, "This doesn't describe me". We all have hidden sin in our heart - answer the questions honestly and approach today in a spirit of repentance.

"Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples", indeed this sets the scene for some heavy words to be spoken. Jesus right up rejects external conformity to a whole range of relative petty rules and the

pre-occupation with appearing pious before others. COVID-19 will certainly show us much that is being reflected on in this part of Matthew's gospel. Most important were inner desires and attitudes, while fulfilling the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faith. As I have said before, let us not kid ourselves, **following Christ is costly.**

Each of us can fall prey to demands of legalistic performance of Christian duty, pretentious displays of piety and the exploitation of titles and positions. If we are going to make our lives count then we should be a doorway to the kingdom, assisting people to come to Christ while maintaining personal accountability.

QUESTIONS

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read verses 1-4
Do we practice what we preach? 2. Read verses 5-7
Are we content with the approval of God (or do we desire the applause of others)? 3. Read verse 7 again
Do we like to assert our superiority over others? (This has to do with the pride that we build up in our hearts) 4. Read verses 11-12
Do we humbly serve others or are we just focussed on ourselves? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Read verse 15
Are we helping or hindering people's salvation? How might our actions be doing that? 6. Read verses 16-24
Are we more concerned with the small, precise details of Scripture rather than practical ministry? (There is nothing unimportant in the Bible - but Jesus warned the Jewish leaders not to neglect the 'more important matters' (verse 23) 7. Read verses 25-28
Are we focussed on inner holiness? |
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Questions continue on next page...

QUESTIONS

8. **Read verses 29-36**

What do you see as the basic problem of the Jewish leaders?

9. **Read verses 37-39**

What insight into Jesus do these verses give us? What might have been going on in his heart and mind?

10. **Summary Question**

How are you making the most of every opportunity?

Some questions for personal reflection (not necessarily for group discussion)

- Is there life inside you?
- Ongoing inner transformation?
- Do you desire Christ more than the things of this world?
- Is your love for Christ the motivator for your obedience?
- Do you serve out of duty or delight?
Are you growing in holiness?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, it is clear from this passage of Scripture that you observe all that people do. Nothing is hidden from you. So like David we ask you to *"...search us and know our hearts; test us and know our anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in us and lead us in the way everlasting."* (Psalm 139:23-24).

We are thankful that you are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Your patience

and perseverance with the people of God is a mark of your great grace and compassion. Forgive us when we fall short and help us to never take your love and grace for granted. Strengthen us by your Spirit so that our outward deeds of service always flow from a genuine inner humility of heart.

We ask all this in the strong name of Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

STUDY SIX

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME

MATTHEW 24:36-51

INTRODUCTION

I wonder as I write this in August of 2020, what it will be like in November 2020? Who knows, but one thing this passage highlights is the importance of making the most of our time. Remember, Jesus promised to return. In light of the unknown day or hour for His return, Jesus used a series of parables to warn His disciples to be prepared. He showed the contrast between true and false believers and addressed the consequences for those who choose not to follow Him. Considering our

belief in the return of Jesus, our lives should be energised by a vigorous involvement in missions and evangelism. When we are gripped with the reality of our eternal destiny and the destiny of others, we will ensure that our lives count for all eternity by reaching out to a lost and broken world.

How important is it for us to keep watch in anticipation of the Lord's return?

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the parallels between Christ's second coming and the account of the flood in the days of Noah (Genesis 6-9).
2. What are some practical ways that we can be ready for the coming of Christ?
3. What does the 'faithful and wise servant' (verse 45) teach us about

being ready? About steward-ship? About judgment? About serving and witnessing?

4. Do you think about making the most of your time? Do you have any suggestions to share with others in your group? What are the great 'time wasters' for you?

PRAYER

Sovereign Father of all, we thank you that you know the end from the beginning of all things and especially the date of the return of your Son. Help us to trust you each day and not be distracted by fears about the future.

Instead we ask that you guide us by your Holy Spirit to focus on being faithful stewards of

your grace. Give us a godly urgency to love both the lost and the found so that we build Christ's church as your Son called us to do.

May all those who claim the name Christian persevere in following Jesus and not grow weary of well doing. Amen.

STUDY SEVEN

MAKE THE MOST OF OUR ACTIONS

MATTHEW 25:31-46

INTRODUCTION

Let me be direct. As I am another step closer to both the end of my ministry and the end of Matthew’s gospel I continue to be challenged. Jesus delivered a staggering, if not incriminating, critique for final judgement. How His people care for the hungry, thirsty, strangers, the naked, the sick and imprisoned was a true indication of one’s actual discipleship. Matthew has stressed all throughout his gospel that if we love God we will, as an inevitable consequence, also love others. In other words, if we are going to **make our lives count**, then it will be seen

and felt in how we deal with others. In fact, if we do not love others then it is legitimate to question our love for God. This type of love is not only to be expressed outwards to our family and friends but also to the marginalised and oppressed. When we care for them... we care for Jesus, it is the mark of following Jesus. Deeds of compassion and mercy are not the means by which we enter the kingdom but are the confirmation of our citizenship. The Apostle Paul reminds us, *“let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the household of God.”* (Galatians 6:10)

QUESTIONS

1. What is all this about? Is it parable or prophecy?
2. What are the six actions Jesus will use as the basis of judgment? What kinds of acts are these? Who are they done for? (verse 40)
3. Is the judgment evident in this section consistent with your view of Jesus? Why or why not?
4. What does this section teach us about Christian responsibility? Who (besides those mentioned here) might be considered “the least of these”?
5. When it comes to serving others (and ultimately serving Christ) how exhaustive is this list?

6. Where does grace come into this? Do you serve in any of these areas?
7. Are you concerned about making the most of what you do?

PRAYER

Sovereign Lord Jesus,
 We are grateful that you, our Saviour, will also be the Judge of all people. Therefore, we are assured that true justice will be revealed on the great day of accounting.
 Give us open eyes and hearts to see and act compassionately toward all people in need, but especially toward our sisters and brothers in Christ. Amen.

STUDY EIGHT

MAKE OUR LIVES COUNT

MATTHEW 28:11-20

INTRODUCTION

The end. We have arrived. I wonder what is going on right now for us all. Of course, at the moment I cannot tell. But this I know, in the great commission Jesus has summed up His purposes for His followers. The placement of such a summary at the end of the gospel of Matthew also serves as an indication as to why it was written. Jesus' commission is comprehensive. "All authority", "All nations", "All things", "All the days". It is indeed a **WOW statement**. It is Jesus' expectation that if we

are serious about making our lives count, then we will obey all aspects of His teachings. Jesus' arrival began the greatest transformation the world has ever known, the transformation of human hearts and every aspect of human society. As disciples of Jesus we are to live with bold confidence and humble conviction. Jesus does have total authority in everything we do. We do not need to be anxious as He has promised unconditionally to be with us.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Jesus' commission here compare with His earlier one in Matthew 10:5-7?
2. Of the four actions commanded of the disciples in verses 19-20, are any more important than another?
3. How does Jesus say they are to make disciples? Where are the new disciples to come from? What resources do the disciples have to draw upon? What is the desired outcome?
4. What does your life look like as you go about fulfilling the great commission? What steps are you actively taking to do that? With family? Work? Community?
5. What do you think Jesus' advice to you would be about making your life count? Is your life counting?

6. How has this study of Matthew added to your views of Jesus as the Messiah? Of the Kingdom of God? Of Jesus' ministry? Of your ministry?

PRAYER

Sovereign Lord Jesus,
 You died and rose to life providing the possibility of salvation for all the nations of the world. Even now you desire to act in us, in order that people might become disciples and follow you.

We ask, that despite our doubts and failings, you will empower us by your Holy Spirit. Enable us to be bold in both words and works that faithfully testify to the Good News of salvation. Please be kind and save people through our witness, growing your church to the glory of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.



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