

Bible Reading Notes

August 2019 – Matthew 14-16

These notes are easy to install on most phones or tablets.

Install the 'PrayerMate' App and you'll find it under 'subscribe to online feeds' and 'Devotional'. It's called St Philemon's Bible Notes. If you have any problems, email alicecornes@gmail.com

How to use these Bible reading notes

These Bible reading notes are a resource to help you dig into God's word and allow it to change your life. 'A little and often' is a good motto. If you miss a day (or several!), don't feel guilty or try to catch up; just pick up wherever the notes have got to. Here's a guide to get the most out of these notes:

1. Find a time and place where you can be quiet but awake.
2. Ask God to help you understand.
3. Use the notes to help you think about the passage:
 - *'Read' sections get you thinking for yourself about the verses.*
 - *'Apply' sections suggest how they make a difference to you and how to pray in response.*
4. Pray about what you have read.
5. Look for an opportunity to share with someone what God has told you.

Thursday 1st August

Matthew shows that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. He calls us to become Jesus' followers: disciples, who in turn make disciples. The gospel is has 5 big blocks of Jesus' teaching, which all end "When Jesus finished these sayings". Each teaching block sets up the themes for the narrative block that follows it.

This month we're looking at Matthew 14-16, which follows the teaching block in chapter 13. So first we'll recap the main ideas from chapter 13.

Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The seed stand for the good news of Jesus, and the soils are people who hear about him.

- What are the 4 responses to Jesus in these verses?
- What do they represent in real life?

Apply

- Think of examples from your own life when you've responded to something Jesus says in one of the first 3 ways? Ask him to help you respond consistently like the fourth soil for the long-haul.
- Can you think of examples of friends who have heard about Jesus and the word has not gone in, or who started well but gave up because of opposition or distraction? Pray for those friends.
- How does this parable encourage you to keep sharing the good news and make disciples?

Friday 2nd August

Matthew 14-16 is part of a narrative block that begins at 13:53. This block will develop the theme of how different people respond to Jesus (like the 4 soils).

Read Matthew 13:53-58

Jesus goes back home.

- What impressed the crowds about Jesus?
- What was it about Jesus that put them off receiving his message, according to v54+55?
- Where is Jesus not honoured (v57)? So where will Jesus receive honour?

Apply

Do any of the following make you less inclined to treat Jesus and his teaching with appropriate respect?

- Even though he is God, he's also human like you.
- We in the 21st Century are better educated and know lots more than he did in the 1st Century.
- Those who teach you about Jesus (church leaders, friends, family) are humans like you, and you know their flaws. Why should you let them tell you how to think or behave?

Have you ever been discouraged when you've talked to friends about Jesus and they did not want to know? This happened to Jesus too, so the problem was not the messenger. Be encouraged, and keep going.

Saturday 3rd August

Matthew continues looking at how people respond to Jesus by reporting a flashback Herod had about how he treated John the Baptist.

Read Matthew 14:1-12

Let's look at how Herod came to order John's death.

- Which area of Herod's life was John not welcome to address, according to verse 4?
- What stopped him killing John immediately (v5)?
- What got Herod into the state of mind where he'd promise everything to a young girl (v6-7)?
- What stopped him saying no to her demand (v9)?

Apply

- Jesus calls his followers to repent. This means he claims his right to transform our behaviour in any area of life. Are there any areas of your life that you don't want to bring under his control? Are there any areas of your life where fear of his control holds you back from becoming a Christian? Talk to Jesus about those.
- We all like to be popular. Are there parts of Jesus' teaching that you hesitate to live out, for fear of how you might be seen by others? Do you care more about what any particular friends think of you than you care what Jesus thinks? Pray about these pressures.

Sunday 4th August

Yesterday we read that Herod killed John the Baptist. This is not an isolated story in Matthew's gospel. In 13:53-58, Jesus was rejected at Nazareth. Let's pause to look at some other rejections.

Read Matthew 2:1-2, 16-17

This Herod is the father of the one who killed John; when Matthew records John's death, he reminds us of this earlier story with the other "Herod".

Herod wants to be the only one in charge, so attempts to kill Jesus and kills every male baby and toddler in Bethlehem.

Read Matthew 27:22-24

A different Roman governor, Pilate, orders the death of Jesus. Luke 23 tells us that Herod was involved.

- What stopped him acquitting the innocent Jesus?

Apply

There's a consistent thread running through Matthew: Jesus, John who came before, and the disciples who came afterwards, all suffered for their part in bringing about the good news of Jesus the Messiah.

- Thank God that Jesus suffered to bring you into his kingdom.
- Think about those who have been influential in our own day telling you of Jesus. Can you see sacrifices they made in order to do that? Thank God for them, too.

Monday 5th August

Let's take one last look at John the Baptist and Herod.

Read Matthew 14:12

- Do you think it was an easy thing for John's disciples to ask for John's body? Why?

We've seen that John's fate stands in the flow of the opposition we've already seen Jesus face, and casts a shadow over Jesus as his story continues to unfold.

Read Matthew 10:24-25

- What does the story of John the Baptist tell you about what following Jesus could mean for you?

Apply

- Thank God again for the price paid by Jesus himself to secure a place in your kingdom. Whatever price he may ask you to pay is dwarfed by what he has already paid for you.
- Think as specifically as you can of some of the things that following Jesus could cost you. Pray for loyalty to Jesus, like that of John's disciples in this passage, if those moments come.

Tuesday 6th August

Read Matthew 14:13-21

In verse 14, Jesus saw the crowd's need (sickness), and had compassion on them. He healed them.

In verse 15, the disciples saw the crowd's need (hunger) and wanted it met. Jesus told them they had the means to meet the need.

- Clearly, the disciples did not have the power to multiply 5 loaves and 2 fish, so how did they have the means to feed the crowd? What did they actually do in verses 18-19 to feed them?

Apply

This story is not directly about Jesus ending physical hunger in the world in our own day. We'll think later about the ultimate hope for this. For now, it shows Jesus' power to meet all our needs, including our need to be right with God.

- As Jesus looked out on the crowds, he saw their need of him in a way we often don't. Ask God to fill your own heart with compassion.
- As Jesus wants to meet people's needs, he uses those who are already his people to do so. We can help, but only because we can take the Jesus we already know to others.

Wednesday 7th August

It's easy to gloss over the details of a story. Matthew has carefully recorded it to show Jesus' complete power in this amazing miracle

Read Matthew 14:13-21

Note: The "loaves" were similar to pitta – one person's lunch would be 1-2 such loaves. The 12 disciples hadn't even brought enough for their own meal.

Note: The "baskets" were probably about the size of a modern laundry basket.

- Where exactly did this miracle take place (v15)?
What other sources of food were there?
- What food did the whole crowd have between them before Jesus intervened? (v17)
- How many people were fed (v21)? Look carefully.
What's the rough population of your village / town / district? Try to picture this crowd.
- What state were the people in after the meal (on a scale of starving to stuffed)?
- How many leftovers were there?

Apply

Plenty of people have tried to explain this miracle away with natural causes. Matthew deliberately closes that off, and there were lots of eyewitnesses. Allow what Jesus did to soak in, and to build your confidence that he's able to look after you and keep all his promises.

Thursday 8th August

After feeding the great crowd, Jesus withdraws to pray, leaving the disciples to cross the lake alone. Presumably he'd made arrangements to join them later. But then things get tricky for the disciples.

Read Matthew 14:22-27, 32-33

This is a very human story. After feeding 20,000 people, the tired disciples row into the wind all night until 3am. But, as always with the gospels, the focus is on Jesus.

- How do we know the disciples weren't expecting what happened?
- **Look at Job 9:6-8.** What does this story tell us about who Jesus is?

Apply

Frequently in the Old Testament, the sea is used as a symbol for chaos and evil. We're seeing Jesus' power to tame these, and to look after us at those moments when we feel most vulnerable.

- Can you think of times in your life when Jesus felt far away in a time of crisis? (Or are you in a situation that feels that way at the moment?) How does this story reassure you? Turn those thoughts into prayer.

Friday 9th August

Matthew's account of this story includes a detail that is not in Mark 6 or John 6.

Read Matthew 14:27-31

There are two ways to read this story.

- Peter showed extraordinary faith, enough to climb out of the boat. He only began to sink when he wavered and focused on the wind.
- Peter was reckless; Jesus' miracles were always to help people, and he was helping the disciples, but Peter helps nobody when he wants to copy Jesus.

Look again at the passage. Is Matthew commending Peter to us as an example, or using him as a warning. Which approach do you find more persuasive?

Apply

Whichever way Peter functions here, there are valuable lessons for us.

- Look at your own trust (faith) in the Lord Jesus. Can you think of situations where that trust has been tested and stretched? Pray for a deep trust in him that holds on even when "the wind and the waves" seem overwhelming.
- Sometimes, knowing Jesus will look after us enables us to take risks doing things for his glory. Other times, we should avoid foolish and unnecessary risk. Pray for the ability to trust Jesus totally, and for wisdom to know the difference.

Saturday 10th August

After they're all safely back in the boat, they finish their journey.

Read Matthew 14:34-36

- What proportion of those who came to Jesus for healing were healed?

Consider the trust that the people had in Jesus.

- In what ways did they have amazingly strong trust in Jesus?
- In what ways was their faith defective?

Apply

In verse 31, Jesus told Peter off for only having “little faith”. That might give us the impression that Jesus is only for those who have the required amount of faith. The people of Gennesaret reassure us this is not so.

Their limited and faulty faith did not stop Jesus healing every person who came to him; what mattered was his power to heal, not the strength or quality of their faith.

- Ask God to strengthen your faith.
- Be encouraged that it's not your strong faith that counts, but the strength of the Jesus you trust in.

Sunday 11th August

Some Pharisees (really keen practising Jews) travel 70 miles from Jerusalem to find out why Jesus' disciples don't keep hand-washing rituals.

Read Matthew 15:1-9

The Old Testament contains many laws about ceremonial cleanness, which were about purity before God rather than hygiene, but (nearly) no laws about washing hands. Jesus goes on the counter attack.

- Which command of God does Jesus quote? (v4)
- Which human command does he describe? (v5-6)

This tradition allowed you to put into your will that some of your money would go to the temple when you died, so you weren't allowed to give it away before then.

- If they've got elderly parents needing care home fees paying, and their money is given to God, which command do they say trumps the other?
- So whose opinion matters more? (v3)

Apply

- Many families / churches / people have deeply held customs. Are you open to God challenging these with his word?
- Had you realised that God wants you to care for your parents? Is there time or money that you are holding back from giving them? Might you use your service of God as an excuse for this?

Monday 12th August

As Jesus responds to the question about ritual hand-washing, he offends people.

Read Matthew 15:12-14

- What does Jesus say God will do with the offended Pharisees?
- What does Jesus say the disciples should do with the offended Pharisees?
- Why should the disciples do this?

Apply

There are a few warnings here for us.

- Sometimes we read the Bible, or hear it taught, and are offended by what we hear. It clashes with values we hold dear. Jesus warns us that we are in great danger with God if we let this become our habitual response.
- All Christians influence others at times, whether sharing your faith, discussing a talk you've heard after a service, or a more public teaching role. Before we guide others, we must make sure that we are ourselves being taught and led by Jesus.
- We need to be careful who we allow to lead us. It's easy to have set ideas about who is respectable and who we should trust. If their influence doesn't come from listening humbly to Jesus themselves, they will lead us astray.

Pray about whichever of these warnings resonates.

Tuesday 13th August

Having launched his counter-attack in verses 1-9, Jesus answers the question about hand-washing.

Read Matthew 15:10-11, 15-20.

The question is all about what defiles us in God's sight.

- In verse 11, what does Jesus say defiles us, and what does not?

More tomorrow. For today, look at Jesus' attitude to the Old Testament (OT). Is Jesus guilty of setting aside the OT in the way he's just criticised the Pharisees for?

Read Matthew 5:17-20.

- Does Jesus say that we can ignore any of the OT?
- Does Jesus say that any of the OT sounds the same after he came as it did before he came?

So Jesus fulfilled laws like no stealing or adultery by requiring and giving hearts that love what God requires, not just external obedience. The food laws taught about our uncleanness before God. The cross cleanses us, so all foods are clean.

Apply

We've had to think quite hard about how Jesus uses the OT to make sure we don't misunderstand.

- Is your danger that you treat the Old Testament as "pre-Christian", and so don't listen to it?
- Or is your danger that you treat the 10 commandments as external laws that are easy to keep, and don't let Jesus affect your heart?

Wednesday 14th August

Jesus has been saying that our uncleanness comes from our hearts not how we eat or wash.

Read Matthew 15:17-20

In the Bible, the “heart” is the “real me” when you strip away all the layers, not the organ that pumps blood. Jesus says you can tell what’s in your heart by what comes out.

- “... out of a person’s mouth”. Which of the qualities in 18-19 are things we say and which are things we do?

The problem with those things is not what we say or do, but what they reveal about the state of our hearts.

Apply

- Do you recognise yourself anywhere in the list of verse 19? If so, be as specific as you can, and ask God’s forgiveness and his transformation within.

Because our deepest problem is inward, diet and ritual cannot fix it.

Neither can morality – we can’t solve our heart symptoms with good behaviour. It’s tempting to turn to good behaviour or religious rituals, because they feel “doable”, but we need a full heart transplant.

- If you’ve never become a follower of Jesus and asked him for a new heart, why not do so today?
- If you have, ask him to continue his work transforming you.

Thursday 15th August

Matthew's shown us how the Jewish food laws no longer apply, which means non-Jews (Gentiles) can be in his kingdom. Jesus now moves to Gentile territory, where he helps a woman in great distress.

Read Matthew 15:21-24

Jesus shows the woman how she's not entitled to his help.

- How does Matthew describe the woman when he first introduces her (v22)?
- What title does she use to address Jesus (v23)?
- When the disciples ask Jesus to help her, so she leaves them alone, why does he say he can't?

Apply

On first reading, Jesus sounds harsh, calling her a dog and refusing to help. In fact, we see his kindness.

- The "Canaanites" were the ancient enemies of the Jews.
- The "Son of David" is the Jewish Messiah. She's not one of those he came for.

The woman is not entitled to his help. But rather than "sending her away" empty handed, he brings her to the point where she can ask rightly and so receive help.

- Thank Jesus for bringing you to the point where you can receive his kindness.

Friday 16th August

Let's look at the second half of this story about the Canaanite woman, and see how Jesus' kindness continues to unfold.

Read Matthew 15:25-28

- After the disciples failed to get help for the woman (v23-24), the woman asks again (v25). Why does Jesus say he can't help (v26)?

(The "children" are the Jews, and "dogs" are the Gentiles. This was not Jesus' label for Gentiles, but that used by some Jews of Jesus' day.)

- How does the woman argue she could still get help (v27)?
- What quality does Jesus praise her for, which means she then does get help (v28)?

Apply

The conclusion of this story would be totally unexpected for any Jewish reader in the first century. Everybody knew this woman was not entitled to Jesus' help. He engineered things so that she ended up with her daughter healed.

- Thank God that he's brought his kindness to you, which is just as surprising, since we are just as undeserving.

Saturday 17th August

So far, we've looked at the story of the Canaanite woman with a focus on the kindness of Jesus. Let's take one last look, and this time look at the woman's response. Matthew holds her up as a model.

Re-read Matthew 15:21-28

- What does she recognise she needs from Jesus? (v22)
- What does she say she needs from Jesus? (v25)
- What does she recognise about where she fits in to God's purposes for his people, the Jews? (v27)
- Why is Jesus able to grant her request? (v28)

Apply

The way Jesus' kindness works is to bring her to the point where she can see that he will help her, not because she's entitled to it, but because he is merciful.

- Can you think of things in your life that might make you feel entitled to the kindness of God? Think about your family background, the church you go to, your behaviour, and maybe the fact you were brought up as a Christian.
- Ask Jesus to do for you what he did for this woman, which is to help you see that those things do not give you a right to anything from him.
- Ask him to help you come to him only on the basis of his mercy.

Sunday 18th August

Tomorrow we're looking at Matthew's account of Jesus feeding 4,000+ people. The background to that event is in the Old Testament. We'll look today at one of a number of passages with a similar theme.

Read Isaiah 25:6-9

This passage looks forward to the day when God has restored his people, and all of God's good purposes have come true.

- What will life be like (v6)?
- There are at least 4 vivid descriptions of the food and drink here. List them, and picture what is described?
- In verses 7 and 8, God will remove the three obstacles that gets in the way of a future like that. What are they?

Apply

Verse 9 pictures God's people looking back from that future to life here and now.

- When we get to glory, what response to God will we be glad we made in this life?
- Have you responded God in this way? If not, turn to him and trust him now. If you have, ask him to strengthen your trust.
- What response will we make to God then, in the future? Look forward to the celebration!

Monday 19th August

Matthew 15 is all about the inclusion of those outside the Jewish race. The food laws were abolished in (v1-20), and a Canaanite woman helped (v21-28).

Read Matthew 15:29-39

This story is very similar to the feeding of the 5000, but the differences are significant.

- Where does this miracle take place (v21, 29)?
- How many people were fed?
- How many loaves did they start with?
- How many baskets of leftovers were there?

Apply

The feeding of the 5,000 took place in Jewish territory, and the numbers remind you of God's dealings with the Jews in Old Testament times (e.g. 12 baskets). This story is in Gentile territory. The numbers symbolise the whole world (4 thousand, 7 loaves, 7 baskets).

Re-read v27. We're seeing this come true. The food God has for the Jews is also for non-Jews to eat. So, whether you're Jewish or not, Isaiah 25:6-9 (yesterday's passage) is for you!

- Thank God for including you in his purposes.
- Thank God that he's done everything necessary for anyone in the world to be at that future.
- Pray for 3 friends of yours who don't yet know Jesus, that they would come to him, and so be at the great feast in the future.

Tuesday 20th August

Read Matthew 16:1

- Why do the Pharisees and Sadducees ask for a sign from heaven?
- Would you describe them as nearly convinced about Jesus, but just needing one further piece of evidence? If not, how would you describe their view of Jesus?

Read Matthew 16:2-3 and 11:1-6

The miracles Jesus lists in 11:4-5 are precisely those Matthew recorded in chapters 8-9, and precisely those Isaiah said the Messiah would do in Isaiah 35, 61.

Consider two questions the Pharisees might ask: (i) Does the colour of the sky mean I should get the washing in? (ii) Should I follow Jesus?

For each of those questions, ask:

- Do the Pharisees have enough evidence to decide what to do?
- Are they acting in line with the evidence?

Apply

- It is not just those outside the kingdom who don't act in line with the evidence they have; Christians do this too. Are there any parts of Christ's teaching that you find hard to put into practice. Pray you'd follow Jesus in the ways you already know you should.

Wednesday 21st August

We continue Jesus' conversation with the Jewish leaders who asked him for a sign to prove himself.

Read Matthew 16:1-4

- There is one further sign that will be given them. What does Jesus call it?

You can read the story of Jonah in the book of Jonah. Matthew has already told us what Jesus meant by this:

Read Matthew 12:38-41

- What does Jesus say he will do that will be like Jonah's stay inside the fish?
- What did the people of Nineveh do when they heard Jonah preach to them?

Apply

Jesus will rise from the dead, and is the Son of God. That means he has a more amazing miracle to convince us who he is, and is a better preacher than Jonah ever was. The Pharisees weren't convinced even though they had the resurrection for evidence.

- If you're struggling to believe Jesus' claims, look at the evidence for the resurrection. Jesus says this is the best miracle to focus on.
- Pray for your friends who struggle to believe. The problem in Jesus' day was not the poor quality of the person speaking, but their blindness to the evidence. Ask God to open your friends' eyes.

Thursday 22nd August

In 16:1-4, the Pharisees failed to interpret the evidence for Jesus that was right in front of them. Now, Jesus and his disciples cross the lake. They get talking.

Read Matthew 16:5-12

- Jesus warns his disciples against repeating the mistakes of the Pharisees and Sadducees. How does the conversation in verses 7-11 show them making exactly the mistake the Pharisees have just made?

Apply

Jesus calls this cynical teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees “yeast”, which means it spreads. When others don’t follow Jesus, in spite of the strong evidence prompting us to trust him, we can pick up these attitudes.

- Pray for those you know (friends, or prominent figures in public life) who are cynical about Jesus, and ask God to help them see the Jesus you see.
- What first convinced you to follow Jesus? Thank God for leading you to that point.
- What reasons to trust Jesus have we seen in this section of Matthew’s gospel? Chew on them in your mind, and thank God for giving us so many reasons to trust him.

Friday 23rd August

Jesus is still in Gentile territory, but he now spends some time specifically with his disciples.

Read Matthew 16:13-16

- Jesus asks who the crowds say he is. What 3 answers were in circulation?

All 3 of those answers are a variation on the theme that Jesus is someone preparing the way for the Messiah, but not the Messiah they were all waiting for.

- Who does Simon Peter say Jesus is? There are two parts to his answer.

Apply

Simon Peter is unique here. He is the first person to see clearly who Jesus is (although he still had much to learn, as we'll see in verses 21-23). At the same time, he's acting as spokesman for the whole group of disciples, and he represents the conclusion that Matthew wants every reader of his gospel to reach.

- What about you? Who do you say Jesus is?
- If you have friends who are not yet Christians, their answers may well be different from the crowds of Jesus' own day. Who would they say Jesus is? Remember Matthew wants to make us into disciples who make disciples. Continue to pray for them.

Saturday 24th August

Read Matthew 16:16-17

Jesus tells Simon Peter how he came to see the truth about Jesus that he has just spoken in verse 16

- Where did this insight not come from? What does Jesus mean when he says “flesh and blood”?
- Where did this insight come from?

This picks up something Jesus said earlier

Read Matthew 11:25-27

- What type of person is able to grasp “these things” according to verse 25?
- Who truly knows who Jesus is according to verse 27? (There is one person who knows, and then a larger group of people who also know.)

Apply

When you became a Christian, it may have involved hearing talks, conversations with a friend, and your own investigation into Jesus’ claims. As important as those were, God used them to reveal Jesus to you. Other people cannot convince someone about Jesus.

- The fact you are a Christian is all down to God. Thank him for his kindness in bringing you to where you are today.
- It’s important to share our faith with our friends, but we easily forget to pray for them too. Without God’s work in them, they’ll never see who Jesus is. Pray for 3 friends today to know Jesus.

Sunday 25th August

Peter has just rightly announced who Jesus is.

Read Matthew 16:18

“Peter” means “rock”. “The church” is all the people of God throughout the ages.

- What foundation is the church built on?

Some have used this passage to say lots of things it doesn't about a unique role for Peter and those he appoints as his successors. Others have reacted against that and tried to argue that this isn't about Peter at all. It's clear that Peter is the rock here. Jesus foretold the leading role he'd have in the early church. He represents not his successors but his fellow apostles, the first disciples.

- Who does the church belong to?
- How secure is the church?

Apply

- The church is built on the foundation of apostolic teaching, which is why we have their writings today in the New Testament. Sometimes what we read is uncomfortable, but it's Jesus' church, so we don't get to lay our own foundations.
- The teachings of Jesus is often attacked around the world and in secular western media. “The gates of Hades” either symbolise death or evil – the church will not be destroyed and die. Be reassured that the global church is totally secure.

Monday 26th August

Jesus continues talking to Peter and the other disciples on the back of his confession that Jesus is the Messiah.

Read Matthew 16:19-20

The picture changes from a building's foundation to the keys to the door that lets people in.

Keys can let people in, or lock people out. Peter now has the keys to do this with Jesus' kingdom on earth.

- If someone is let into Jesus' kingdom on earth, what does Jesus say has happened to them in heaven (in God's eyes)?
- If someone is shut out of Jesus' kingdom on earth, what has happened to them in heaven?

Apply

Peter has realised who Jesus is, which means he will be able to tell others about Jesus. We see him doing this in the book of Acts. Some respond well and join the church, and others reject what they hear. As this happens, the door opens to some and closes to others.

- Why does our response to Jesus in this life matter so much?
- Peter used the keys to tell others of Jesus; in a secondary way, we have those same keys if we know Jesus. How does this passage encourage you to keep going telling others.

Tuesday 27th August

Jesus is still talking with his disciples immediately following Peter's realisation who Jesus is.

Read Matthew 16:21

- What 4 events does Jesus predict?
- Some of these events are predicted with very specific details. What additional details does Jesus give about his suffering and resurrection?

Apply

Jesus knew precisely what would happen to him. Partly, he knew this from his own knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures, but we see also his unique knowledge of God and his purposes. (This takes us back to Matthew 11:27 again).

- Jesus set out on a path that he knew would lead to his suffering and death, and he did so with his eyes wide open as to what he was doing. He did it anyway, and he did it to save each and every Christian. Think how this adds detail to his love for you, and thank him for doing what he did.

Wednesday 28th August

Simon Peter was on fine form in verse 16. Now, he's not doing quite so well. Jesus has just predicted his death in verse 21.

Read Matthew 16:22-23

- What does Peter think of what Jesus has just said (v22)?
- What does Jesus think of what Peter has just said (v23)?
- How does Peter's way of seeing what Jesus has predicted fit with the way that (a) Satan, (b) human priorities and (c) God see things?

Remember: After Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan we were told that "the devil left him". Satan hasn't given up trying to derail Jesus' mission.

Apply

We don't know why Peter thought Jesus' prediction was so inappropriate; it may have been related to ideas the Messiah would end Roman military occupation. Many today also play down Jesus' suffering and death.

- We need to have a right view of Jesus. His death was not a tragedy that cut short a productive life of teaching and healing. Nor was it necessary only so that the resurrection could happen. His suffering and death were right at the heart of his purpose in coming to this world – so he could die for our sins.

Thursday 29th August

Peter has realised Jesus is the Messiah. He thinks Jesus is wrong to say he must suffer and die. Jesus now explains what everyone who follows him must do.

Read Matthew 16:24

- What are the 3 things that every follower of Jesus must do?

Apply

- Jesus does not say we are to deny ourselves things we enjoy. We are to deny our selves. Jesus calls us to lay down our right to determine our priorities and ambitions, how we will live. What do you find hard about doing this / hard about the thought of this?
- To “take up your cross” is to go to your death (criminals carried their own cross to the place of execution). Jesus calls us to give everything we have, even our own life, to him. Some Christians go on to become actual martyrs, if Jesus claims what we give him. All Christians have to give up everything in principle. What of yours do you find hard to surrender to Jesus?
- To follow Jesus is the positive side of the coin; we go where he leads, taking on his values and his approach to life.

Talk to God about the aspects of this you find hard, and ask his help to live this way.

Friday 30th August

Read Matthew 16:25-26

- Jesus says that the person who tries to save his life ends up losing it. Have a look at verse 24 (which we thought about yesterday). What does Jesus mean by trying to save your life?

Apply

- Sometimes following Jesus feels really costly. If we lose something very precious because of our loyalty to Jesus, how do these words of Jesus reassure us that we won't lose out?
- People today live for all kinds of ambitions (dream house / job / family / car / holiday / etc.). Jesus says it's no good to achieve all of those if you lose life itself, because you don't know and follow him. Are any of your ambitions more important to you than the fact you follow Jesus?

Saturday 31st August

Today, we finish looking at the conversation Jesus had with his disciples. Peter has recognised who Jesus is, and Jesus has spelt out the cost for him and for those who follow him.

Read Matthew 16:27-28

- What does Jesus say will happen in the future?
- How will Jesus come (v27)?
- What will Jesus do when he comes?

Verse 28 is trickier to understand, and probably means that whilst Jesus' final return is in the distant future there will be evidence of Jesus' growing kingdom even within the lifetimes of these first disciples.

Apply

The real reason why a life without Jesus is a waste (however many ambitions are fulfilled) comes here: Jesus will return as judge. His assessment of us matters more than anything we achieve in this life.

- Do you really believe Jesus is coming back as judge? Do you see your life, achievements and ambitions through this grid?
- As far back as Matthew 5:3, we've seen that rewarding us according to what we've done does not mean we need to be perfect, but we need to receive Jesus' forgiveness and new life as a gift. Are you ready for judgement day? Have you done this yourself?